

Melody Carlson

These Boots Weren't Made for Walking

How did you come up with the concept for *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking*?

Because I've written a fair amount of serious fiction, I occasionally find myself in need of a break and what's better than a little comic relief? And since I enjoy reading chick lit sometimes, I thought why not take a stab at this genre myself? So I created an interesting character who, after spending way too much money for a pair of yummy Valentino boots, finds her world falling totally apart. In a few short days she loses her job, her boyfriend...and her neighbor "borrows" and maxes out her credit card. It seemed a good place to start a story. 😊

Is any part of *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking* factual?

It's factual in the sense that all my characters have little pieces of myself or family or friends in them. I think it's impossible to write fiction without reflecting snippets of reality. The other part that might be considered factual has to do with the setting. While the town Black Bear is fictional, it's not terribly unlike the town where I live—which is also a resort town with a ski area nearby. I suppose it makes my research that much easier.

How closely is this *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking* based on your life?

It's not really too much like my life. By the time I was Cassie's age, I had two school-aged sons and was probably serving on PTA. But I can relate to Cassie on many levels. Like most American women, I too battle with my weight and body image. And I've taken on jobs that were challenging. And, now that I think about it, I remember what it felt like when we moved to this mountain resort town and I was working hard at a new job and trying to find my place in the community. Maybe there's more "based on my life" than I realized!

How long did *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking* take you to complete?

It's no secret that I'm a fast and prolific writer. As I recall "Boots" was written within a month. That's as specific as I'll be since I don't want other writers coming after me with clubs and torches. 😊

What is the symbolism for the title *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking*?

Cassie was trying to be someone that she really wasn't. Living in the city, trying to climb the corporate ladder, playing the game, but not really enjoying life, not being fulfilled. In other words, she was trying to force her foot into a boot that didn't fit. But it wasn't until life kicked her in the teeth that she paused to figure it out. After limping back to her hometown roots, things began to fall into place and she finally found the boots that fit—and were made for walking.

Do you have a favorite character? Why?

I think I related to all three sisters on some level. And the mother was fun since she'd sort of reinvented herself, pulling her own life out of the ashes after her husband of many years left her for a younger woman. She had spunk. And, of course, I liked watching Cassie struggling along, getting stronger, more confident...and finally coming to terms with who she really was and wanted to become.

How much research did *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking* take?

Not much. I guess this is part of the beauty of chick lit. The most research I did was probably in regard to fashion and designer names. Since I don't really live that haute couture lifestyle and could never dream of laying down the kind of bucks that Cassie did on those overpriced boots, it required a lot of perusing the online fashion links. And I must admit they make those designer shoes and bags and clothes look pretty good and I was probably drooling a few times.

Usually your books are intense contemporary topics; what made you decide to switch to Chick Lit? Will you be writing chick-lit for teens as well?

I wrote a couple of "lighter" books in my TrueColors series (Fools Gold and Denim Blue) about topics like materialism and body image, and I thought, hey, this is fun. And, like I said, I am occasionally in need of a mental health break—and laughter is good medicine. So I scheduled some lighter books in between the heavies and have immensely enjoyed the departure. I think it was a smart move. I just finished my second chick lit book for women (releases next year) which I totally enjoyed. And I'm also doing a teen series called *The Carter House Girls*, about a wild group of girls who are being tamed by a retired fashion magazine editor who thinks she can turn these girls into lovely models. Get real.

What are some of the challenges you face as an author?

Finding enough time to write all the stories that are bursting to be written is a challenge. But I schedule myself to "regular" office hours and try not to write on weekends. Another challenge is that people don't always understand what I do. I think there are some who think writing is "play" work and not to be taken seriously. And then there are others who take it too seriously, acting like you're "really special" to have published a book. It can be a balancing act...consequently I don't usually bring up the fact that I'm a writer.

What new projects are on the horizon?

As usual, I have all sorts of new things coming. The teen chick lit series (*Carter House Girls*). Also a new series for 20-somethings called *86 Bloomberg Place*. My next Christmas novella (*An Irish Christmas*) and a new juvenile series called *The Girls of 622 Ocean View*.

Who was the person who influenced you the most with your writing?

I had a reading teacher for grades 4th through 6th who taught me to love literature, poetry, and writing. Mr. Lamb encouraged me to read books that challenged my thinking. At a young age, he taught me to appreciate Jack London, Robert Frost, Rudyard Kipling, and numerous other literary legends.

What advice would you give to a person trying to become a fiction writer?

First of all, read a lot. Study the sort of fiction that you aspire to write. Then write, write, write. Even if no one reads it but you, it's time well spent. You can only improve by doing it. Then get into a good critique group and attend a good writers' conference. Then write some more. I wrote several books before I published any. But I contracted those books eventually too.

What message would you like your readers to take away from *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking*?

One of the main messages I try to include in all my books has to do with love and forgiveness. Jesus talked more about those attributes than anything and I don't think we can hear it enough. I also try to tell stories that show characters misjudging others to remind us that it's easy to do. Also, I hope the book leaves the reader feeling hopeful about her own life—that God can redeem anything...if we let him.

What is your goal or mission as a writer?

I'd like to create the kind of stories where God is writing between the lines. I want readers to feel encouraged and hopeful and accepted. And I'd like them to get a new glimpse at the loving and gracious nature of God.