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#TitleTrakk & Relz Reviewz ~ Interview with Melody Carlson

Writing

How long have you been writing and how did you get started in your career as an author?

I've been writing for as long as I can remember. And, although people told me I had writing talent, I never took it seriously. I journaled, wrote poetry, letters, and work-related writing. But because writing came easily to me, I didn't think it was special. I didn't see it as a "gift." Now I realize that lots of people take gifts and talents for granted—like something comes easily to us and we dismiss it as "just the way we are." But once we realize we have a "gift" we might do more to develop it.

Writing is obviously in your blood - was there a particular person who encouraged you to nurture your gift??

When I decided to take writing seriously, I joined an excellent critique group. And those fellow writers were very supportive—plus they were good teachers. But I honestly have to say my husband encouraged me the most. Getting started in writing is difficult and discouraging. Rejection is the rule of the game and many writers give up before they get started. My husband had sneaked peeks into my journals and believed in my writing long before I did. So when I was bummed and feeling hopeless, he told me not to give up. He knew that I was going to "break through." And he was right.

What writing project are you working on now?

Right now I'm writing the fifteenth book in the Diary of a Teenage Girl series. It's the fourth character—a very interesting girl named Maya. She's had a rough life so far, but is finally trying to be a "normal" teenage girl (not that it's going to happen). But she's very environmentally conscious

and “green” and yet she’s also very beautiful (and has rich but dysfunctional parents) so there’s lots to play with in her story.

You write children’s, young adult and adult fiction ~ which came first for you and do you have a preference?

The very first book I wrote was for pre-teens. And, interestingly, it’s the only book I haven’t published. It was BC (before computer) and I only have one hardcopy of it. But after that, I wrote a semi-historical teen series, which is just being re-released (The Allison O’Brien Chronicles). And next I wrote a women’s novel (which at the time I thought was my favourite). Then, for fun, I wrote a children’s book. I have to admit that I love writing for all ages and usually enjoy my current project “the most.” Although, I have to admit, it’s been very fulfilling to write for teens because the response I get from readers usually blows me away. And I know they’re at a precarious place in life and anything I can do to make that “passage” easier is great.

How long does it take you to write a book from first ideas to finished product?

I write extremely fast. While an idea might hit me months before I write the book (that’s how contracting works) I don’t usually “think” about it until I’m actually writing. Then the story usually comes at me like a freight train and I write as quickly as I can to keep up. When I try to slow it down, it doesn’t work. I get bored and restless and I tend to drop threads of the story. I think everyone is wired differently and for some reason I like to do things quickly.

Your Books

I Heart Bloomberg releases in April and A Mile in My Flip-Flops in June ~ please tell us the inspiration behind each novel and a sneak peek

I Heart Bloomberg (the first book in 86 Bloomberg Place) is about four very unique young women sharing a home, problems, and fashion advice. I wanted to create some 20-something characters that would appeal to my “teen” readers

who have grown up—something relevant yet fun and hopefully encouraging. I wrote *A Mile in My Flip-flops* (as well as *These Boots Weren't Made for Walking*) for comic relief. Okay, the truth is that I need a break from some of the more serious writing that I do. I've written books about drugs, suicide, cutting, mental illnesses...and sometimes (like readers) I need to "escape" or laugh or just be encouraged. Hopefully my "chick lit" titles will do that for my readers. I know that my sister loves them.

Finding Alice would be my favourite of all your novels, what inspired you to write about Schizophrenia?

My older son was treated for schizophrenia when he turned twenty. It was a difficult time, but thanks to early diagnosis and treatment, his prognosis is better than the tales we heard about in past decades. Still, I had well-meaning friends who assumed that "schizophrenia" was like a death sentence. So I decided (several years beyond the treatment time) to write a story that dealt honestly with this particular mental illness. Naturally, I had learned a lot by then, and I believe that God wastes nothing, so I wanted to put it to use. I love being able to use fiction to teach truth. And sometimes it's easier to hear about hard stuff by way of a story. By the way, this book may eventually make it to TV. It's been optioned by Lifetime. I also did an adult novel about meth addiction (*Crystal Lies*) and have another one about obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) releasing this fall (*The Other Side of Darkness*). So, maybe you see why I need a dose of chick lit now and then. 😊

Your books address many of the difficult or confronting issues we face in society today ~ how do you choose your topics?

Sometimes it seems the topics choose me. For instance, the reason for *Finding Alice* (above). I feel there are reasons I live through difficult situations, whether it's in my immediate family or another close friend or relative. But I think that real life is a great place to draw from when creating fiction. Not only is it relevant, it's realistic. In my teen books, I try to pick hot topics that today's adolescents are challenged by. I realize that not every teen will face every issue, but they might

know someone who does. According to my fan mail, this is the case.

You are well known for your True Colors and Diary of a Teenage Girl series ~ Why did you choose to write young adult fiction and tackle such diverse issues?

Like I said, I think teens have it tough these days. With all the media slamming them with questionable values, combined with some rough family issues, I want to use my fiction to give teens tools and answers and to hopefully equip them to make better choices in their lives.

Do you have any new young adult series coming out soon?

Thanks to The Gossip Girls (a teen series that seems to endorse bad behaviour) I've developed a new series (The Carter House Girls) which combines similar elements, like high fashion, big money, questionable boyfriends...and mixed up values. But in my books, when characters make bad choices they will suffer appropriate consequences. And hopefully, they will learn some life changing lessons along the way. This series is being considered for TV.

Personal

As a child what did you want to be when you grew up?

As much as I loved to write (I used to make my own little books) it never occurred to me to think I could really be an "author." That was for someone else...someone much smarter and more accomplished. But I did toy with the idea of being a lawyer (I liked to argue) or some art or design related career (I've always been into art).

My favourite novel of all time is 'Pride and Prejudice', if you had to pick one novel as your favourite what would it be?

It's hard to choose. I love To Kill a Mockingbird. But I also love anything by Jane Austin. And there are some contemporary writers that I enjoy too (Elizabeth Berg, Rosamund Pilcher, Maeve Binchy, Anne Tyler). It sort of depends on my mood. I suppose that diversity shows up in

my writing too.

What are you reading at the moment?

An Ocean Apart by Robin Pilcher (Rosamunde's son) and I'm thoroughly enjoying it.

Favourite movie and favourite line from a movie?

The Sound of Music. I can't think of a favourite line.

Who inspires you?

Besides God...and nature.... Good musicians and artists inspire me. I find creativity and beauty—God-made and man made both to be inspiring.

Please tell us a little about your family

My husband and I will celebrate 30 years of marriage this summer. We have two grown sons and a granddaughter (who is going on four and adorable!). Also a beloved chocolate Labrador retriever.

Please share how you came to faith

I grew up in a non-churched home. I proclaimed myself an atheist as a pre-teen. At fifteen (rebellious and confused) I realized I needed real answers, and through a ministry called Young Life, I found God in a big and life changing way. This is probably one reason I like writing for teens.

Some essential Aussie questions

When/if you make the trip Down Under what do you want to see first:~

I've already been Down Under, mate. And now you've got me writing with an accent in my head. Although I wasn't there for long, I did enjoy seeing Sydney. I was on my way to Papua New Guinea, where I lived for a year (serving as Wycliffe short term assistant) along with a lot of Aussies. My roommate was an Aussie (Melbourne).

A platypus or a koala?

I've already seen koalas, so I'd have to say platypus.

Barrier Reef or Uluru (Ayers Rock)?

Although I love to snorkel, Ayers Rock interests me—isn't it the largest monolith in the world? I taught third grade geography in PNG for a few weeks and it seems that was a "fact." I'd love to see that big red rock. I didn't know it changed its name. 😊

A cricket match or a game of Aussie Rules Footy?

Definitely Aussie Rules Footy. Much more active.

Any last words?

Yes, now you're making me want to go Down Under again. Hmm...not a bad idea. I could research a book down there. Thanks for the interview, mate!