

Men's Review, Malaysia

Tracy Boyce interviews Meg Gardiner

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- 1. When you were younger, did you have the inkling that you were going to be a writer, and a scary one at that?**

From the time I could talk I loved telling stories. I was about thirteen when I realised I could scare readers. I wrote a story featuring a tornado and a school bus, and it turned my mother pale.

- 2. So how does a relatively normal, sane mom of 2 and Law-Econs graduate get ideas to write a book on mad cult members trying to kidnap children?**

Mom of three, actually, and still sane. To get ideas, I plumb the depths of my own fears and loathings. We all try to keep a border of normality around our day-to-day existence, so I imagine what would happen if darkness and craziness crashed through that border into our lives.

- 3. While practising Law in Los Angeles, did you meet some serious nutters that provided fodder for your seriously twisted characters?**

Yes. Other lawyers.

- 4. Do you ever get really drawn into the process of writing, so much so you start wondering how it would feel to, I don't know, stab someone?**

All the time. That's why I'm only allowed to eat with plastic spoons. But to be serious, I do try to put myself inside the heads of all my characters – from good guys to losers, creeps, and betrayers. And after spending time with a particularly dank and twisted heart, I can emerge feeling queasy.

- 5. Who inspires your characters? Real life people, or just persons you come up with?**

I invent my characters. That way I'm less likely to be sued for libel.

- 6. But do people in your personal life ever worry about themselves ending up as a character in one of your books?**

They fret, or they hope, and they ask me who characters 'really' are. It's fun for everyone but my husband, who tires of being asked if we engage in the same antics as my heroine and her boyfriend.

- 7. Do you ever frighten yourself when you write late at night? Do you make your husband nervous when you get mad?**

The idea is to maintain control over the story, so that I scare other people, not myself. And my husband is a black belt in karate. He only gets nervous if I start acting out a scene when I'm driving.

8. Ruth Sebold said once that when her husband is in the midst of writing, she understands if he takes the washing out of the machine and dumps it on the garage floor. Is there a particular mode, an auto-pilot that you slip into when you start writing? Ever do anything odd while you were intensely writing?

Tried to rip the wires out of the engine of the car. Staged a fake rib-kicking, knee-breaking fight with my husband. Held an argument between characters – in my head – that got so raucous, I fell off a machine at the gym.

9. What do you like to do in your free time, when you're not exploring the macabre side of the human psyche?

Travel. Spend time with my family. Watch bad disaster movies with my kids, inventing alternate dialogue and laughing our heads off.

10. Do you have any phobias? Do you challenge them in order to keep yourself on your toes as a horror/thriller writer?

No phobias, just fears. Dying a horrible flaming death, getting spinach stuck in my teeth, that sort of thing. But I love meeting phobic people, and finding out exactly why snakes, or flying, or clowns, make their skin crawl. It's great inspiration.

11. Lots of guys like to say they read heaps of books and usually just end up reading the synopsis and bluffing their way through. Does the synopsis of your book really reflect what the book's about? Did you write yours?

The synopsis just gives a taste of the plot. The publisher wrote it. Guys need to know that the book is full of so much more great stuff: fighter jets, missiles, fast cars, and a heroine who kicks butt and is good to her man. Plus an ex-hooker with a whipped cream fetish, and bad cheerleaders.

12. What do you do to get out of writer's block?

Write. Then disengage my brain, listen to loud rock and roll, work out. Then write some more.

13. Your main character is the ever-capable Evan Delaney. Does she in some part, reflect you, or maybe the strong, capable yet slightly faulted woman that many women aspire towards?

Right on both counts. She's an aspirational version of me, and of many gals. Feisty, quick on her feet, and willing to go all the way to protect the people she loves.

- 14. The photograph of yourself on the book's jacket is pretty attractive - did you ever consider how that may positively or negatively influence what people thought about you as the author? Was there pressure from the publishing house to stick on a photo cause you're good looking?**

Thanks for the compliment. You're welcome at my house any time. I was just hoping to look presentable in the photo – there wasn't any pressure. All Hodder & Stoughton's authors get their photos on their book jackets.

- 15. Which authors do you personally enjoy? Why?**

Carl Hiaasen for his lunatic comedy; Elmore Leonard for his gritty dialogue; Wallace Stegner for his ability to write about pain and passion so truthfully.

- 16. Do you ever research say, a particular kind of lifestyle when you're writing a book? Like the last book, did you attempt to hang out with cultists, or talk to them?**

Cultists don't want to hang out – they want to preach at you, or suck you into their bizarre reality. I've had run ins with nasty sects on the street, and that was enough face-to-face time. Online research was helpful, but creepy. Cult websites left me wanting to scrub myself clean with steel wool. But I did talk to fighter pilots, and spent time in China Lake, where the Naval Air Warfare Center is located.

- 17. Have you treaded on any toes by portraying certain segments of society a certain way in your book? Ever get any angry hate mail?**

Not so far. I try to portray people authentically, without twisting their message or grinding any personal axes. If sensitive toes get stepped on, that's life.

- 18. Do you get emotionally entwined with your characters? Is there any one character in your book that you really personally like?**

The characters become real people to me, and to readers, so how could I not care about them? I like Evan, naturally. And her boyfriend Jesse, who has taken some hard knocks in his life but always comes up fighting.

- 19. If you had to choose the book that has a profound effect on you, what would it be?**

The U.S. Tax Code? Oh, very well. How about two: *The Stand* by Stephen King, and Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*. Thrilling and poignant books about striving, nobility, self sacrifice, and the zest for life.

20. If you had to pick the animal that best personifies you, what would it be?

My Blue Burmese cat. Friendly, laid-back, though occasionally demanding. And always walking across my keyboard. He's actually writing the answers to these questions.