

Interview with Kate Dolan

Q. How long have you been writing fiction?

Kate: I started seriously working on fiction in 1999 when my daughter was about a year old. Before that, I was successful with legal writing and other forms of nonfiction, but whenever I started to write a story, I would start to hate my characters and give up. I guess I just wasn't ready.

Q: Are you consciously aware of the plot before you begin a novel, or do you discover it as you write?

Kate: I've written some where I had every scene outlined in advance and others where I had no idea how the story was going to end, much less how I was going to get there. That's probably my preferred method because I am naturally lazy and don't like to plan ahead. It's more fun when it works. But when it doesn't....ouch! I get stuck and have to rewrite A LOT!

Q: Do you tend to base your characters on real people or are they totally from your imagination?

Kate: To a certain extent, my characters have to be based on real people. That's what I know, that's what's in my head. I use bits and pieces of lots of different people, and a large part of myself in every character, even the villains. Maybe especially the villains. I think most evil comes not from a desire to do evil but pure selfishness- putting your own desires ahead of everyone else's welfare. Well I'm pretty good at that! So it's pretty easy for me to write bad behavior, even from my "good" characters.

Q: What are some other jobs you've had in your life? Have they influenced/inspired your writing?

Kate: I was a legal editor for a number of years and that inspired me to find something—*anything*—else to write about besides legal regulations. For a brief time, I served as corporate counsel for a pest control company and it taught me that there's always a lot going on out of sight, literally and figuratively. After I left that job, I worked for my daughter's preschool which reminded me how important it is to let yourself pretend for a substantial part of each day.

Q: Tell us briefly about your latest book.

Kate: It's the Wizard of Oz from Toto's point of view. Toto looks at things a little differently. For example, in the original version, Dorothy never spends any time wondering where to find pork chops in the Emerald City. Toto has some different priorities. He gets to know the flying monkeys better, and we introduce some new characters, too, like the witch's wolves and lickloes, the strange servants who work in the witch's castle.

Q: What are you working on at the moment?

Kate: Right now I'm editing a romantic comedy set in Regency England and I'm starting work on a contemporary book about college radio. And when we can find time to work together again, Meg and I are going to finish a book I started writing for her a few years ago about a Sunday school class who fight demons.

Q: When growing up, did you have a favorite author, book series, or book?

Kate: When I was in late elementary/early middle school, I read mysteries a lot - I remember scanning the book shelves for stories by Phyllis A Whitney. I couldn't tell you a thing about any of those books now, though. It's strange, but I remember some of the Nancy Drew books that I didn't like as much. Maybe I remember them because I found some aspects of the stories so annoying! I

also loved the *Anne of Green Gables* books and *The Saturdays* (and the sequels) by Elizabeth Enright.

Q: What about now: who is your favorite author and what is your favorite genre to read?

Kate: I really couldn't narrow it down to one (unless you mean one page full of names). I love Jane Austen and Frances Burney when I'm in a mood to escape to the past. Recently I've been reading a lot more "children's" books. They're fast paced, don't get bogged down in lot of internal angst, and usually have happy endings. I'm enjoying Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson books at the moment.

Q: What is your writing space like? Do you have a designated space? What does it look like? On the couch, laptop, desk? Music? Lighting? Typing? Handwriting?

Kate: My favorite writing space is my office, but it's really messy because I have a pet rabbit who pulls everything off the shelves and chews up my reference books. When I'm working on first drafts, I like to take my laptop and go sit someplace quiet away from the distractions of email, TV, etc. It's often hard to find that "someplace!"

Q: Is there any particular book that, when you read it, you thought, "I wish I had written that!"?

Kate: There are lots of those books. Actually, it's not so much wishing I had told that story as much as "I wish I could tell a story that well." I felt that way about the Harry Potter books. However, I was glad I hadn't written that series. Reader expectations were so high I could not imagine how much pressure J.K. Rowling must have been under with each successive book. Of course, she always seemed to meet or exceed those expectations, which is superhuman in my opinion.

Q: Have you ever had a character take over a story and move it in a different direction than you had originally intended? How did you handle it?

Kate: That happens to me most of the time, at least to a small degree. In fact, with the stories that I don't outline, I expect my characters to take over and make things happen. But even with my mysteries, which had been outlined scene by scene in advance, one of the characters got really mad at my private investigator heroine and fired her. So then I had to find a way for her to sneak back on the premises to solve the mystery and she had to do it before her brother, who owns the private investigation firm, learned that she'd been fired. I think it really increased the tension in the story, so I was really glad that character decided to take the plot into her own hands.

Most of my stories aren't that well planned in advance. I like to let the characters take over and I just write down what they say and do. (People usually start to look at me strangely when I admit this)

Q: Now that you're the published author of so many books, does it feel different than you had imagined?

Kate: I think before your first book is published you do expect to feel a bit different, like you've accomplished something. Then when it happens, you just realize there are still so many things you have to do for promotion and the regular responsibilities of life are still there, too, and that sense of accomplishment fades pretty quickly. But every once in a while you run into someone who's impressed, so that's a nice feeling. In a way it was a bigger accomplishment to finish my first book manuscript than to have my first book published. Finishing that story was a responsibility that rested solely on my shoulders. Getting a book published depends partly on luck - finding a publisher who's interested in that particular book at that particular time. And then the work of so many other people are involved in bringing that book to print. The author doesn't get to take all the credit!

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