

Interview - Jennifer L. Jordan

Conducted by Lynne Jamneck, July 2006, for the L-Word.com website.

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**How have you been juggling the responsibilities of entrepreneur with that of writer?**

With an incredible amount of self-discipline.

I have to will myself to stay with certain tasks for periods of time; otherwise, I have a tendency to flit from one task to another, accomplishing very little.

In twenty-three years of juggling, during the first twenty, I would have defined myself as an entrepreneur who wrote as a hobby. Today, I view myself as a writer who runs a business as a hobby.

During the transition, I carried around a polished stone, with the word "create" die-cut into it, to remind me of my priorities.

**Is writing something that's always been there, in the back of your mind?**

Since the age of twenty-one, I've made a full-time living as a writer, of marketing and promotional copy. When I need to cheer myself up, which seems to be more often lately, I tell myself that I've already sold more than \$1.5 million worth of my writing.

My next goal is to reach that kind of number with my fiction sales.

**Who do you consider to be your biggest literary influences?**

Three writers, not because they changed how I wrote, but because they gave me permission to write like myself.

Armistead Maupin. Until I read his Tale series, I never realized it was possible to write books with very little description and lots of dialogue and get them published.

Sue Grafton. I'd found my style before I discovered hers, but reading her alphabet mystery series gave me hope that humor and likeable characters could help ensure a successful series.

Natalie Goldberg. Every time I become afraid of what I've written, her books on writing give me the courage to leave the words on the page.

**What was the major inspiration that led to the creation of the Kristin Ashe series?**

I wanted to tell stories that I'd never seen in lesbian fiction.

**What about the mystery/crime genre do you find so attractive in terms of writing it?**

Revelation.

Before I write a book, I create an elaborate plot chart on a spreadsheet, all designed around revelations. I call them "whams," and the more, the better.

That said, the further the Kristin Ashe series is released into the world, the more I realize how little the books resemble traditional mysteries.

I write mystery novels based on why people do what they do and how those actions ripple out to affect others.

The "why" of it always has interested me more than the "who" or "how." The "why" carries me forward, as a reader and writer, much more so than planted clues, police procedures, legal maneuvers, or forensics.

**Do you set yourself a strict routine when you're writing? What's your atmosphere like?**

I'm writing for a living now.

I run my marketing business on a part-time basis (5-10 hours per week) and write fiction full-time (20-30 hours per week).

The only routine I have is that I set a stopwatch to track my time and try to hit a minimum of four hours of writing per day. Any less, and I feel like a slacker. Much more, and it fries my brain.

As far as the atmosphere, my partner Georgine and I own a duplex in Denver. We live in one side, and I work in the other. I go to work from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., but it's harder than it sounds to squeeze in four hours of writing between my latest distractions: business/marketing duties, Pilates, jogging, naps, dog walks, phone conversations, Sudoku, trampoline jumping, Frappucino runs, etc.

In the winter, I spend a lot of time at our second home, which is in Winter Park, a Colorado ski resort. There, I actually write more, despite my addictions to snowboarding and Nordic skiing.

**What are you working on right now?**

*Selective Memory*, the sixth book in the Kristin Ashe series.

The story revolves around a woman who's been in a car accident and has experienced profound memory loss. She hires Kris to recreate the life she had in the months leading up to the wreck. She doesn't trust anyone around her and asks Kris to interview her partner, friends, and family. She aims to reclaim her own identity through others' perceptions of her.

As Kris diligently goes about the assignment, the woman's memory returns in fits and flashes, few of which she shares with Kris. At the core, *Selective Memory* is a story about two women's twenty-year obsession with each other.

These are the first lines of the book, which come from the client's private thoughts:

*"They think I can't remember, but I can. Every afternoon, I vowed never to come again. I sensed I had reached a point beyond all reason, but I couldn't stop watching her. Wanting her. In the waning light of winter, I would stay for hours, often until long past the moment of darkness. I felt helpless to do anything but stare. Stare at her silhouette. These*

*are the images burned into my corneas... the last ones I saw before millions of my brain cells died."*

**Did you face any early challenges in respect to finding success in writing?**

Yes and no.

In 1992, with my first book, *A Safe Place To Sleep*, I only queried two publishers. Ironically, one of them was Spinsters Ink, three owners ago. In response to my query letter, Spinsters requested the manuscript, but I became frustrated after a couple of months of not hearing from them. Today, I understand sixty days is a breath of time in the publishing industry, but back then, it felt excruciating.

I moved on to Rising Tide Press, and they told me their audience didn't want to read books about serious subjects. I later ran into the publisher at a book conference, and she told me she regretted she hadn't bought the book, because it was selling so well.

By then, I was on my self-publishing path.

Fortunately, *A Safe Place To Sleep* and the next book, *Existing Solutions*, did sell well. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that the more time I spent on publishing, the less I had for writing. A one-author, two-book company is a terrible size for a business, and I didn't have any interest in editing or publishing other authors.

Still, I think I could have proceeded happily, except the largest gay/lesbian distributor, which accounted for 80% of my sales, went bankrupt in 1994. That brought an abrupt halt to my career, and I didn't become serious about writing again until 2002.

In the interim, I buried my grandmother and father and built up a mini empire in real estate.

**Has there been a particular book amongst those you have written that was particularly easy (or difficult) to write?**

*Unbearable Losses* was the easiest to write, because a large segment of it is set in the Colorado Rockies, in winter. My favorite place, favorite time of year.

*A Safe Place To Sleep*, *Existing Solutions*, and *Commitment To Die* were all difficult books in that I fabricated them, to some measure, from fragments of my life.

I've never been able to reread them.

**Have you ever felt pressure from a publisher because of something you wrote, or didn't want to write?**

Never.

Initially, I self-published *A Safe Place To Sleep* and *Existing Solutions*, so no problem there. *Commitment To Die* was picked up, as is, by four different lesbian publishers. With the first one, I couldn't come to an agreement financially. The second pushed the book to the front of the production line, but then went out of business before touching the manuscript. The third, Beanpole Books, released the book, exactly as I wrote it, with very minor editing changes. Six months later, Spinsters Ink acquired Beanpole, and I've been working with Linda Hill ever since. She's extremely supportive and has never questioned or altered anything I've created.

**Are there any other specific genres you'd like to take a tackle at?**

Not until the Kristin Ashe series is well on its way. I'd rather be exceptionally good at one thing than average at a lot of things.

**What are your top five books so far from 2006?**

I'm not sure I've read five. The more serious I become about my writing, the less I read. I'm dead serious right now.

**Tell us something about Jennifer L. Jordan no-one knows...**

Starting in the summer of 1993, I watched almost the entire Menendez trial on Court TV. This was the California case in which two brothers murdered their parents, after having allegedly suffered from years of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse at the hands of their father.

During the trial, I could barely function at work or in my relationship. Only after the jury returned with a hung verdict in January 1994, did I begin to regain pieces of my life and sanity.

It could have been worse, I guess.

Another trial junkie married Erik Menendez, who received life in prison without the chance for parole, after a second trial.

**What is your perception of how lesbians have most recently been portrayed in the media?**

Across all of time, the average lesbian in average America hasn't been portrayed at all, which is what motivates me to write lesbian fiction.

I want to leave a record of our existence, of who we were and how we lived.

Instead of relying on a handful of viewpoints, I hope millions of other lesbians will join me in leaving records, whether they be through the arts, blogs, or conversations with neighbors and co-workers.

**What do you consider your best and worst attributes?**

My best attributes are self-reliance, sense of humor, and generosity, (of time and self).

My worst attributes are self-reliance, impatience, and an absolute refusal to commit to anything, even though I'm the most committed person I know.

**Do people have a misconception of 'the writer's life'?**

Probably, but I'm used to the delusions after years of self-employment, (the other fantasy life).

With both lifestyles, most people underestimate the work and isolation involved and overestimate the riches and positive life changes.

**In what ways are you still bettering yourself as a writer?**

By writing every day.

That's the only way I know how to do it.

In terms of building novels, I compare my first to a bungalow, the second to a ranch house, and the third to a mansion. Four and five became mid-rises, and I'm trying to construct a highrise in six.

By this, I'm referring to the complexity of every phase of writing: plot and subplot, characters, description, pacing, editing, research, tension and resolution, darkness and light, misdirection and red herrings, everything!

**What's the best advice anyone has ever given you about the publishing industry?**

Natalie Goldberg dedicates one of her books to her students: "May we all meet in heaven café, writing for eternity."

I come back to that quote constantly.

Notice how there's not a word in it about publishing, and yet, for me, it's the best advice about the industry.

Begin and end with the writing.

**A happy writer is...**

...content with this day's work.