

# A BSB Interview With Meghan O'Brien

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Publicist/Author Liaison

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## What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

I'm not sure there was ever a conscious "decision" about being a writer... I remember making "books" out of construction paper and crayons from the time I learned how to write. I collaborated on short (usually humorous) stories with my sister when we were children. In high school I really stepped up my creative writing with short stories that were mostly social commentary dressed up as fiction. College is when I discovered writing about lesbians—I wrote out sexual fantasies for a girl I was flirting with. At that point I realized how much I really enjoyed a) writing erotica, and b) writing about lesbians in general. I started writing short lesbian fiction stories and posting them online, and the rest is history.

## What type of stories do you write? And why?

I write all kinds of stories, really. I've written romance, erotica, drama, and speculative fiction. I think there are some common threads and themes in my stories, but the characters and scenarios tend to run the gamut. In general I'm very focused on telling stories that are character-driven rather than plot-driven. I love a book with a killer plot, but I find myself gravitating towards stories that allow me to explore the inner lives of characters. With a healthy dose of hot sex in most cases (of course).

## What do your family/friends think about your writing?

Everyone is incredibly supportive. My sister is a high school English teacher who loves books and reading, so the fact that her big sister is now a published author is extremely cool for her. She just wishes I'd write something she could assign her students, I think. Telling my parents about my writing was a slightly dicey proposition, given the many explicit scenes in my novels and short stories. But I knew they'd be proud and supportive, so I couldn't *not* tell them. We just have a deal that I'll ask them not to actually read my books (even though I give them copies of them), and if they do, they not talk to me about them. I'm proud of my work and proud of my parents for being so supportive and accepting, but there are some places I just don't want to go.

My friends get a big kick out of my writing, and they're all very encouraging. And it goes without saying that my partner is wonderful. She's always willing to give me alone time to work, even if it means dealing with a grumpy toddler on her own for a bit. (Not a bad deal, I must say).

## Where do you get your ideas?

That's a good question. A lot of what I write about is grounded in real life. *Infinite Loop* is about a character who has a lot in common with me, and involves a road trip very similar to one I went on with my ex-girlfriend. *The Three* came to me as a crazy challenging idea that I couldn't help but want to tackle. Honestly, that story just poured out of me. I'm still not sure where it came from. And *Thirteen Hours* occurred to me as a fun story with a lot of hot possibilities.

In general, ideas can come from all different sources. Sometimes I'll have an errant thought that turns into a seed for a story. Or a fantasy that spins into something so much more. The novel I'm working on now came mostly from two different news stories I read online, which sparked the general concept for a contemporary romance novel.

## How do you write; do you plan everything out or just write?

I don't have any hard and fast rules for this one. I don't prefer to outline everything in advance. That method makes me feel a bit constricted and I like to let the story evolve on its own to some extent. I usually have a general idea of the beginning and the end in the broadest terms, and zero in on the details as I go. I do tend to put together simple outlines of events at least a little in advance of where I'm at currently. I may outline a third to one half of the novel, write for a bit, then do some more outlining. I don't like leaving things totally up to chance (too much potential for rambling and lack of focus there), but don't want to feel like I'm locking myself into too stringent a blueprint either.

My current novel is the first one for which I've attempted to write a general synopsis of the entire story before writing the first word. I found it very challenging. I'm interested to see how the writing process feels, having done that.

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### What makes *Thirteen Hours* special to you?

One thing that makes *Thirteen Hours* special to me is the fact that I wrote the elevator portion of the story as a (short) novel for National Novel Writing Month a few years back. That was a crazy experience. But it was also a whole lot of fun.

The published version of *Thirteen Hours* is actually two shorter stories that were combined and reworked into one cohesive novel. The simplest answer is that *Thirteen Hours* is very special to me because it's my first book at Bold Strokes. Whoo-hoo!

### How much of yourself and the people you know are in your characters?

While it varies, I think all of my characters have aspects of myself or people I know, but each of them has enough fictional elements that keep them firmly in the realm of make-believe. Regan from *Infinite Loop* is probably the character who has the most in common with me, but there are elements of myself in nearly every character I write. I'll draw on people I know for certain personality traits or other details, but I've never really based a character on any one person. They tend to be amalgams of many real people, which I hope makes them seem pretty real themselves.

### Which lesbian authors inspired you the most? Do you have a favorite of this author(s)?

It may sound like I'm sucking up to the boss, but the answer to this one is Radclyffe. And not just because I'm at Bold Strokes now!

Back in college, I first discovered lesbian fiction online through a mailing list I joined, which focused on X-Files fan fiction stories written about Scully, featuring lesbian storylines. I was hooked. The hands-down best writer on that list was a woman who went by the name of Radclyffe. I was in awe of her skills. Through the years I watched Rad get better and better, start publishing, and finally start her own publishing company. And she has always been extremely gracious to me along the way, answering questions, dispensing advice, and offering words of encouragement. Is there anything she can't do?

My favorite Radclyffe novel is probably *Passion's Bright Fury*. I haven't read it in a long time (I'm due, I suppose), but that one really stands out. And *Safe Harbor*, probably.

Recently I've really been enjoying work by Gabrielle Goldsby (*Such a Pretty Face* is next in my to-read pile), Gun Brooke, and Ronica Black (*Deeper* would be next in my pile, except my partner has dibs on reading it first). Other lesbian authors who have impressed and inspired me include Lori Lake, Blayne Cooper, and my very good friend K.E. Lane

### Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

Practice makes better (there's no such thing as perfect, after all). And if you want to be a serious writer, be prepared to take criticism, and learn how to listen to suggestions. There's nothing more difficult than pouring your soul into a story and sending it off to an editor only to find it littered with "red pen" notes and favorite lines or even whole sections cut altogether. But it's a valuable learning experience, and if you open yourself to it, you'll be amazed at what you can get from it. And this goes not only for criticism from bona fide editors, but also from beta readers, partners, and friends. At the same time, be true to yourself and your art. Learn what criticism to accept and what to reject. A lot of this stuff is subjective.

My only other suggestion is to try and set up a writing routine. Make time to write. That's the biggest challenge sometimes, but nothing is going to get accomplished unless you're willing to put in the long hours and hard work. Oh, and also make sure to read. A lot.

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## When you're not writing what do you do for fun?

This is the question that leads to the debate "Do I disclose all my geeky hobbies or not?"

First and foremost, I'm kept quite busy by my three-year-old. We share custody with my partner's ex, but being even a half-time mommy is quite exhausting. As an aside, this weekend we celebrated his third birthday and he asked if we could go to the bookstore to pick out a new book. How could we refuse that? As we pulled up to the bookstore, Ryan said, "I love books," and I seriously shed tears of happiness. Now to keep that going into the teenage years!

As far as my actual free time, I'm a big video-game geek. My current obsessions are Halo 3 (the Halo franchise is always an obsession for me) and World of Warcraft. I also love to read, naturally, and am currently enjoying the hell out of *Duma Key* by Stephen King. Last but definitely not least, I'm very much into my dog, Jack, whom we rescued from the shelter last year. My partner and I have started doing "dog weekends," where we'll concentrate on finding and enjoying dog-friendly activities (hotels, restaurants, beaches, dog parks, etc.) We're trying to pull together a review Web site based on those trips, but are a bit behind at the moment.

## Which is your favorite among the books/stories you've written? Why?

That's a tough question. My books/stories are all kind of like my children, in a sense, and so it's hard to pick a favorite. I look at a lot of my older work and cringe, but I think that's a natural reaction when I've grown as a writer so much over the past few years. If I had to choose, I'd say that *The Three* and *Thirteen Hours* are kind of tied. They're both very different stories, so I love them for different reasons.

*The Three* was a real challenge -- writing a book where there are three main characters who have interrelated yet distinct relationships with each other was a lesson in character development. *The Three* is most likely the least-read of my novels, but that makes me no less proud of it. The comments I have gotten have been extremely positive, and it has been gratifying to hear more than one person tell me that they picked up the book with a lot of trepidation over how the premise might play out, only to end up really loving it. That makes me feel like I've really done my job as a storyteller. *The Three* poured out of me like no other story ever has. I felt inspired/possessed while writing it. And I've always loved post-apocalyptic stories, so having the chance to write one was absolutely thrilling.

And I love *Thirteen Hours* because it's kind of a funny, feel-good story. Feel-very-good, at times. I think *Thirteen Hours* contains some of the most fun sex scenes I've ever written. And I've written a lot of sex!



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