

A BSB Interview With C.P. Rowlands

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Consulting Publicist

December 1, 2008

What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

I have been, like so many others have said, a writer in my mind forever. When really, really young (a very dim memory but I'm sure I was young...once) I used to see pictures in my mind, draw them, flip the page over, and write the story. Thus began an uneasy alliance. Drawing and writing but, eventually, it all translated into art. However, I would find myself writing ungodly long descriptions, explanations, etc., of the paintings, or whatever medium I was working in at that moment. My friends would complain of letters that were novel length. I got into radio, and my news stories were so long that it took everyone more time to edit them than to read them. Hint, hint. Finally, I just threw in the towel and said it's time to write. My first book, *Lake Effect Snow*, was the result.

What type of stories do you write? And why?

I love stories about people in trouble and how they overcome their situation. I seem to be drawn to family problems in particular. The individual who is failing repeatedly at something, for example. Their talent, their relationships, goals, or whatever. This also includes politics and social groups. Anytime I can write about personal success and growth, it's fun. I also love good humor in a story and I think that's very hard to write. Romance is still a slippery slope for me, even though I love to read it.

What do your family/friends think about your writing?

We have five adult children and they are very supportive. That includes everything from computer help (I am notoriously poor at computer skills) to talking out plots, characters, and challenges a younger person faces in today's environment. (It also includes "singing" my book to me as I walk in the house). My extended family, which is enormous, views me with quirky humor and helpful criticism. They grew up with me, after all, and have seen me go through a number of different lives, with the exception of one cousin, who is appalled by my life style. They bring a wide range of views to my writing and often bury me with information. After *Lake Effect Snow* I had comments from the political side of my family that ranged from, "I think you're turning into Stalin" to "Have you been meeting with DHS and are part of the plot?" Actually, the worst was, "Ah, grasshopper, you've finally turned into a crow."

Where do you get your ideas?

You wouldn't want to live in my imagination. You don't even want to know.

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

I am at the very beginning of this so I'm not certain I can answer that accurately. I did about a year's worth of research on *Lake Effect Snow* and am certain that will change. I have listened to many more experienced authors carefully and that has helped, as well as wonderful editors. I am working on a story right now and actually outlined it. The outline looked so bad that I threw it away and tried again. The second one was somewhat better but I'm still not very happy with it.

What makes *Lake Effect Snow* special to you?

Besides the fact that it is my first book...and I do mean the FIRST book. First of all, that Rad took a chance on this book and you will never know how proud I am to be a BSB author. Secondly, that it came from the moment my youngest son thought he was going to Iraq on the day that Colin Powell apologized to the American public for being "misled" about the WOMDs in Iraq. I wrote my first words that day. Finally, there is a very special moment when you're all alone for the very first time with *your book*. And it's a first book. That moment will stay with me the rest of my life.

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Page 2

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

Anyone that even so much as speaks to me is in danger of being in one of my stories. I will suck them right in with no guilt whatsoever. People who know me say I'm in there "a lot" but it is my first book. I do know that "Annie" in LES speaks for me often, especially politically, her humor, and the art. I did put one other character in there, Annie's best friend, who is suspiciously like my best friend but you can't tell anyone.

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

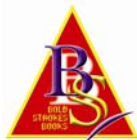
Oh, this is tough because I read so much and love poetry as well as prose. Virginia Woolf would be a good place to begin, along with Mary Renault, May Sarton, and run all the way up to my fellow BSB authors, led by Rad. If you take that long trek, you have to include Ann Bannon, Jane Rule, Lee Lynch, Cate Culpepper, Lillian Faderman, and Katherine V. Forrest. It's my opinion that they all began something important in lesbian literature and Rad has just taken it another important step. For some reason, I tend also to read Brit writers, a lot, particularly Manda Scott and Helen Humphries. I don't have a favorite because I will read anything...except instructions.

Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

I certainly do. Try to learn some craft before you put words to paper. Cindy Cresap had her hands full with me, trying to teach me simple basics. Get a book, take a class, join a writers' group, talk to other authors, anything that will help you understand that yes, you have talent and imagination but you also need craft.

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

Reading or painting tops my list. And then come art and the teaching of art, which I truly love. Next are traveling, sports, our families, and hanging out at our place on a lake in northern Wisconsin. We both love to fish and walk, anything outdoors. I am totally a political person and will talk about the world situation anywhere, anytime, often to my partner's embarrassment. When we travel she often pretends she doesn't know me. Actually, we don't even have to travel and she often pretends she doesn't know me.



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