



Janette Rallison

INTERVIEWED BY AMY BAUGHER

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How did you get started with your writing?

My mother wanted to be a writer. Some of my earliest (and only — she died when I was six years old) memories of her were of her sitting in front of a typewriter typing. So I grew up thinking writing was a normal job, as opposed to a really time-consuming way to torment yourself. Very often it is the latter.

Describe a typical day for you.

I get up earlier than I'd like to, swear I will start going to bed before midnight, and get several children off to school. I tell myself I'll spend half an hour going over e-mails before I devote the rest of the school day to writing. Three hours later, I realize the time and wonder where it all went and why I still have 127 unread e-mails in my inbox. I turn on my laptop and reread what I wrote the day before. Then I go get something to eat. I type a page and then go get something else to eat. Repeat until the children get home from school.

What's the easiest part of being a writer? The most difficult?

The easiest is reading other authors' books — it's all research! Writers are supposed to read in their genre. That makes reading *work*, not goofing off. The most difficult is getting revision letters. On my current manuscript, the first draft came back with 435 comments from my editor. Basic message: "Change everything!" The second draft came back with 407 comments. Basic message: "Change everything again!"

What do you enjoy most about writing?

The moments when the writing flows and my characters are doing and saying things that I think are funny. It's also pretty neat when you get the book in its published form. It's sort of like having a baby, but without the morning sickness or stretch marks.

How has your writing evolved since you started?

I think I'm getting away from stories that are about everyday kids doing everyday things and writing more about things kids wish could happen in their lives — whether that's having a fairy godmother or having a celebrity fall in love with them.

How do you research your projects?

Each book is different and so needs a different kind of research. For *My Fair Godmother*, part of the book takes place in the Middle Ages, so I read books on the subject. I talked to a professor at BYU about what sort of explosives would be available to my characters and had another professor read it for any blatant inaccuracies.

For *Just One Wish*, the main character has a little brother with a brain tumor. I called the Phoenix Children's Hospital and talked to an oncology nurse for that. It was hard to do because I just cried through the whole interview. Part of the story takes place on a TV set in Hollywood. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to research, because you can't just call up producers or actors and ask them about that sort of thing. Luckily, I finally did talk to a couple of insiders — one who happened to be my teenage crush/idol, Richard Hatch, who played Apollo in the original *Battlestar Galactica*. I have a picture of him with his arm draped over my shoulder. This is why it so pays to be an author.

What do you do when you get stuck?

I eat chocolate. It helps with writer's block. (At least that's my story, and I'm sticking to it.) I will also take a break and read something or write in my journal.

How has the gospel influenced your writing?

Young adult novels have become really sexual in the last few years, and many authors don't skimp on the details, either. Every time I see an author out promoting one of these books, I want to say, "Hello, you're writing this book for kids who aren't responsible enough to turn in their library books on time. Should you really be encouraging them to have sex?"

My main characters don't even date until they're sixteen. They also don't smoke or drink

coffee or tea. There are no swear words in my books. This is another rarity in teen books lately. I've actually had several readers e-mail me and ask me if I was LDS. My editors don't want me to have any of my characters be LDS, so I get a kick out of it when people pick up on these clues anyway.

On another level, and perhaps a more important one, my characters have hope. They triumph over trials. They find meaning in them.



Tell us about getting your first book published.

My first book ever published was *Deep Blue Eyes and Other Lies* with Deseret Book. Deseret Book had my manuscript for *nine months* before they decided to give me a contract. But I didn't get an acceptance letter or a call from an editor or anything. It was actually the accounting department who called me because they needed my social security number and that sort of miscellaneous information. I gave it to them and then asked if this meant I was going to have a contract. The woman on the other end of the phone was surprised I didn't know. She said, "Your editor didn't call you and tell you the news? Oh, in that case let me be the first to congratulate you." After I hung up with her, my editor did try to call, but the line was busy because I was calling all my friends and relatives to tell them the news.

What part does your audience play in creating your story?

I have two daughters who love to read and who started reading novels at an early age. It's been a hard task to find them appropriate books. So I've always written with them in mind. I want to give them engaging stories that are also G-rated. I mean, how could I tell them with any authority that they shouldn't swear if I do it in my books?

What's it like balancing your writing and your family?

When my kids were little, I only wrote during naptime, and then during their favorite TV show time, which then progressed to preschool time. I didn't get a lot done, but I found that if I could still write one or two pages a day, I could have a novel written in a year. Now the kids are all in school, so I try to have my writing/marketing/networking done by the time they walk in the door. I'm not always perfect at this, I admit, but I still try. I feel very strongly that my first job is being a mom (with an emphasis on nagging kids about doing their jobs). That's my real career.

What other writers have influenced your desire to write?

Growing up I loved to read Ellen Conford books. They always made me laugh, and it was such a treat to read them. I wanted to write for people and give them the same experience.

You teach writing to children in schools—what advice do you give them?

1. Go to college and get a degree in something else, because being a writer is a very unsure career and it can take you a long time to make any money in it. Most writers I know have another income to support themselves.
2. Read, read, read!
3. Learn everything you can about the craft of writing. You'll save yourself a lot of time and grief when it comes to revisions.

What's your favorite of all the books you've written?

I used to tell people I couldn't choose a favorite because I loved them all—which is still true. I think they're all great books. But I have to say that writing *My Fair Godmother* was the most fun I've ever had with a book. That one turned out really well and was optioned for a movie pretty quickly.

What's next for you?

Lots of revisions, I'm afraid, for a novel I'm working on right now. Revisions are like juggling cobras while walking over live coals. You may get through it, but you know you're going to get burned and bitten along the way. Hopefully it will be worth it in the end. ■

