



# Jack Weyland

INTERVIEWED BY HARRIS LUNT

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**You have a PhD in physics. After spending so many years in that field, how did you start writing short stories and novels?**

The *New Era* came out as a magazine and they said they were accepting fiction. It was a youth magazine, so I thought, “Well, I’ll write a story.” I don’t think I would’ve written any more, but then the editor said, “Just keep writing stories.” So I did. Some years I wrote maybe eight stories; some they would publish, and some not.

**Who has influenced your writing?**

First of all, Brian Kelly. He was the editor of the *New Era*. When I was a young single adult, they had a goal-setting program for young adults and one of the goals I wrote down on this piece of paper was to write something for a Church magazine. By the time I wrote the story, I was already married, but I’d set the goal, so I sent in the story and they accepted it. And then Brian Kelly encouraged me to write some more. He said that he would help me. He critiqued my writing. He told me what was good and what was bad, always in a very positive way. So for him I would sometimes do maybe three or four drafts of the same story until it was in good shape. That was a great help to me. Because I was

coming from a physics background, it’s not something I would’ve picked up.

The second person who had a great effect on me was Eleanor Knowles. She was the editor of *Deseret Book* when I sent *Charly* in, and she worked with me through the various versions of the book. She would shield me from the other people who were critiquing the book. She once sent me what they had said about what I’d written and it was cruel, but she would say things like, “Well, I think maybe you should work on this.” She shielded me from their very critical comments. Those people were a big influence.

**When you start writing a novel, what are the first steps you take?**

There are two different paths. The first path is like dialogue surfing. It’s two characters talking, every line. There’s no description; it’s just bang bang bang bang bang, until I find out if I care about writing something more than that. Sometimes if I have no ideas, I just write like that for a couple days until something clicks with me, and I think, “Oh, this would be good.” In other words, I’m generating a novel based on what these two characters are saying to each other in my mind.

The second path is if I decide to do a book about a particular issue. I’ve done a book about date rape. I’ve done a book about eating disorders. In those instances, it’s usually motivated by someone who has written me and said, “I think you should write about his topic.” Then, if I choose to do so, I contact the person and do an interview, and then they act as a consultant for the book. Those are mainly the two ways I’ve done my books.

### **Your book *Brittany* deals with rape. How do you maintain a sensitive attitude as you write about these very serious topics?**

A young woman was here for EFY. She came with a friend to my office and said, “I’ve read every one of your books,” and about ten minutes later she said, “I was a victim of date rape.” I thought, if she’s read every one of my books, why didn’t I write about that so that she would know that when she was in a house alone with a guy she didn’t know very well, that probably was not a good situation to be in? Whether he tried anything or not, it’s still not a good situation.

I’m not saying you can always prevent those things, but there are some situations which you can immediately see would not be wise. I talked to this young woman. I talked to her family. I talked to her counselor. She told me what an awful experience it was, and how difficult it was, and how relying on the Savior helped her. I mean, that’s our only salvation, and it’s everyone’s only salvation. I think that’s the motivating thing.

### **What keeps you going? What keeps motivating you to write stories and complete novels?**

It’s fun. It’s really fun. And the stories I write always turn out the way I want it. Whereas if I read something, it doesn’t always turn out the way I want it. And I like the process of discovery. When I start a novel, I don’t know much about it. Occasionally I’ll have a writeout of what’s going to happen, but sometimes not.

### **What else excites you about writing?**

Getting letters or e-mails from people who say that one of my books has helped them. Now that I’m on Facebook, it happens more often, and I appreciate that. I probably get three or four Facebook messages every few weeks, so I guess that’s a good thing.

### **How do you feel when you finish a novel?**

When it comes out, I’m very happy. And then I worry. There are a few weeks where I worry because I think that nobody is going to like it or nobody is going to read it. Then when somebody says they liked it, I’m okay.

### **How did your new book, *Brianna*, come about?**

It had been a short story. Of course, I’ve written a lot of stories for the *New Era*. They’re not taking short stories much these days, so I have had three or four books which are collections of short stories, and for a while I had a short story of the month club on my website.

It’s good for me to write short stories because then I can become acquainted with characters that I’m interested in. This may sound crazy, but I was once in a Sunday School class where I raised my hand and said, “I knew this guy once,” and then I stopped and said, “Never mind.” It was a character I had created in my head.

### **How do you see your books helping to build the kingdom?**

That’s a tough question and I’m not sure I know the answer to it. I wouldn’t claim that it would do much to build the kingdom of God, because generally the things that build the kingdom of God are involved with repentance, baptism, temple work—things like that. I would say that it doesn’t do any harm. And it hopefully might make some readers more aware of the way they communicate with people they care about.

### **How does the gospel influence your writing?**

First of all, having the knowledge that every person is important and worth consideration; and second, that the Savior can help us with whatever our problems are. His Atonement can help us. I’ve written some things about hard topics and interviewed people who have gone through those hard experiences.

My book *Emily* is about a girl who got third-degree burns all over her, so she had to have skin grafts. She was in the hospital for a long time, and afterward she was wearing a compression suit while still going to college and she was ignored by her classmates. They would look and then they would look away. I said to her, “If you could go back to that Sunday when you were cooking some soup and your shirt caught on fire, and instead make yourself a tuna sandwich, would you go back?” She said, “No.” I said, “Why not?” She said, “Because of what I’ve learned about the Savior.” And that surprised me. ■

BRIANNA, MY BROTHER, AND THE BLOG  
*a novel*



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