

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Young Adults

Author: Linda Maria Frank

A UNIQUE JOURNEY

A surprising outcome of being an author was my entrée into the world of local access television. I produce and host a show called “The Writer’s Dream”. I interview authors. The two questions that evoke some of the most intriguing answers are these. “Authors take a journey when they write a book. What is unique about your journey?” The second question is, “Bottom line, what do you want out of this writer’s journey?”

It got me thinking about my own journey, and this year I published “Making a Mystery with Annie Tillery”. The new book takes my first Annie Tillery Mystery, “The Madonna Ghost”, and fleshes out the story behind the story, the why, when, where, how and who of that story. It encourages the reader to try the writing process with lots of tips.

The authors I interview on “The Writers Dream” provided questions about plot, character and setting. In discussing those questions, I learned more about my writing than I would have imagined.

Here are the questions, and what I learned.

- Where do you get your ideas from? This is a hard question. The unsatisfactory answer was, “They just come.” This is a very important question, so I changed the focus of the question to, “What inspired your story?” I focused on my teaching forensic science. Inspiration comes from forensic topics (that CSI stuff) that most fascinated me. Next, a specific setting captures me. And then, some historical incident that sets a plot in motion in my story-teller’s brain. The inspiration for “The Madonna Ghost” was a wall-sized photograph in the Fire Island lighthouse of the rescue of passengers from a large ship run aground in a storm on Fire Island.

Following the inspiration came the research into ship wrecks off Long Island. That research created the character of the ghost, a grieving mother who survived the ship wreck but lost her child.

The next part of the idea was how to weave a mystery and a crime around the ghost. Again, Fire Island history came to my rescue; smuggling, a vulnerable sea coast, and proximity to New York City.

Sorry, you'll have to read the book to find out more.

- Are your characters based on real people? Of course, they are! We are surrounded by people who exhibit lots of characteristics to choose from, to either copy in their entirety, or to mix and match into new people. More of a challenge for me was that I needed to make my main character, Annie Tillery, lovable, a young woman you would cheer for, whom you could envision as your friend. I knew from my own voracious reading that a character you can love or relate to can make your book a success. The next challenge was to create the "perfect boyfriend". I noticed that many of my female students made poor choices for their boyfriends. Tyler Egan was my attempt at a much better alternative. Here is an example of the relationship between Ty and Annie.

Annie has let Ty in on her mom's alcoholism. Ty has told her that his father is in a state hospital because of his alcoholism, and that his father was responsible for a fire in their home that killed his mother. He takes her to the hospital to visit his dad, a weekly occurrence. Here is the exchange following the visit.

Ty came away from the nurses' station, looking me over, trying to appraise my mood. He looked older to me, shoulders hunched, hands jammed into pockets. What an awful responsibility he had taken on. I only wanted to run away from a similar one.

"Could we go home now?" I asked. It sounded like a big baby even to me. I tried to overcome my embarrassment.

"Okay. I guess this wasn't such a great idea," Ty consented, nodding toward the door.

"You're wrong, Ty. You are a saint. I couldn't do this. I'm too angry," I said, trying to smooth over things. "This confuses me terribly. How can you be so good to him after all the grief he's caused? Help me out here. I don't understand."

“Pretend you’re watching a TV show and you don’t know your mother. Look at her as if she is character in a drama. Do you envy her life? Would you want to be her?”

I ran the scene Ty described in my brain’s DVD player. I could sort of see what he meant. “But she has caused so much unhappiness!” I shot back.

“How does she change your day-to-day life, Annie?” he asked quietly. “I see my dad as pitiful. Anyone who has no control over their lives is pitiful. I walk in and out of this hospital as I please. I’m not sure he even knows where the door is.”

The bus came. We retreated into silence. Ty said, “Think about it, Annie. I had to think about it for a long time. I still do have to think about it.”

Suddenly, he put his arm around me. “And I owe you a sail. Will you settle for a frozen yogurt in Bay Shore?”

- Why do you write? The short answer is that it’s one way to tell a story to a mass audience. One of the precious things that came out of my marital experiences was being told that I was a good story-teller. It was sincere, and it got me thinking about putting pen to paper.

Sure, I’d love to have a best-seller. A movie contract would be better, or a TV series. Every writer would like to see their book make a best-seller list. But to tell you the truth, if you keep in the game, and I mean actively keep in the game, things happen. I spoke about some of them, book talks and my TV show. Both have exposed me to readers and writers who have pushed me to think about my writing and clarify what I wanted to say in my books. Writing the books inspired me to take my favorite topics in forensic science and create a lecture series. I’ve become involved in planning book events, especially book and author fairs at schools. Meeting my young readers, talking about the books, giving advice to young writers, and seeing some readers come back for a second Annie Tillery because they loved the first one, are some of the perks.

One Annie Tillery fan berated me for keeping her up until 4am. Why? She couldn’t put “The Secrets in the Fairy Chimneys” down until she finished it.