

Interview with Children's Freelance Writer Donna McDine

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Donna McDine is a freelance children's fiction writer with a first book in the works. Balancing her family life, day job, and writing career isn't easy, but as she herself stresses, setting boundaries and having a private writing space helps. In this interview, she talks about her writing environment, habits, and she offers aspiring writers some useful advice.

Why don't you begin by telling us a little about yourself? I'm a native of Rockland County, New York and live with my husband and two daughters. I write, moms, and I'm a personal assistant from my home in Tappan. I'm a 2007 graduate of the Institute of Children's Literature, Writing for Children and Teenagers program. I'm also a member of the SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators), The Children's Writers Coaching Club at The National Writing for Children Center, and Musing Our Children Group. I have been published in *Stories for Children Magazine*, *Kid Magazine Writers*, *Long Story Short*, *Institute of Children's Literature Rx for Writers*, *SCBWI Metro NY Newsletter*, and *Once Upon A Time*. And a forthcoming non-fiction article with Boys' Quest to be published in December 2012. I'm also a children's book reviewer for Musing Our Children Group, The National Writing for Children Center, and Stories for Children Newsletter.

When did you decide you wanted to become an author? Do you have another job besides writing?

I married 18 years ago and with the strong desire to be home (after contending with the rat race of sending Nicole to daycare and running off to my corporate job) I found myself pregnant with Hayley 10 years ago and armed with a Bachelor's Degree in Office Management and 11 years as an Administrative Assistant in the corporate world I successfully landed a job working for a Fundraising Consultant working primarily from my home. This position has been a Godsend, since worrying about the endless responsibilities of what to do with the children at the end of the school day, illnesses, etc. I was now home to deal with them. And the gentleman I work for is a doll - he respects the fact that family comes first. However, over the years I have yearned for something more challenging and rewarding. Then suddenly

one day in the mail, info on the Institute of Children's Literature found its way to me. I haven't looked back since - even though I still hold my "day job" (it helps pay the bills). I continue to make progress in achieving my writing goals (even if they are baby steps).

Were you an avid reader as a child? What type of books did you enjoy reading? I always enjoyed reading from a young age and you could always find me immersed in a Nancy Drew mystery. I still have my collection (that my mom saved, in hopes of passing them down to her future granddaughters) that my daughters have been enjoying. To this day I still love a great mystery. In the past year I have read *The Garden of Eve* by K.L. Going, *The Haunting of Frances Rain* by Margaret Buffie, and *Victory* by Susan Cooper, plus many others.

Describe your working environment.

It has finally been confirmed that I'm a writer! The room that I had my computer in for years did not have a fourth wall - not until the day my husband surprised me that he had contracted a friend to put in a wall with a pocket door as a Christmas present to me. Having him acknowledge the fact that it is very important for me to be able to shut out the world when need be when I'm writing is a tremendous support. When the door is shut it tells my husband and daughters that a creative writing session is in progress and I shouldn't be interrupted at this time. I feel validated! My computer desk is adorned with a picture of my daughters in a Precious Moments frame that reads "There's Always a Place in My Heart for You!" This helps me stay focused on the greater picture of life and family. I have writing and spiritual affirmations posted around my computer screen to help me to stay on track in my writing career. Morning is definitely my best creative time. I face a paneled wall and above that there are three 10"x10" quilts framed in oak frames (from Amish Country, PA) with a metal cut out sign that reads: "Write" (picked that up at an antique shop in Hunter Mountain, NY). I feel that it is very important that you designate some area in your home that is your space alone where you can let the creative juice flow. Go ahead... create your own oasis!

As a writer, what scares you the most?

Everyone says rejection, but I'd have to say acceptance of my manuscript and then having to come up with another idea for another manuscript. I've spent so much time with my current characters it probably would be odd not to have them rambling around my head anymore. It's scary for me at times to have my words out there for all to judge, but I know publication and acceptance is the golden reward

for our fruits of labor.

When it comes to writing, are you an early bird, or a night owl?

I rise about 5:30 am, read through my spiritual affirmations, check email and get a Pilates session in before the girls and hubby rise. Once the girls are off to school I make sure that I'm organized for my "day job" and then hit the ground running with my writing. This way when my boss calls late morning/early afternoon it's not difficult to switch gears. Morning is definitely my best creative time.

What is the best writing advice you've ever received?

So many people that I've met over the last two years have given me very sound advice. The one that stands out from early on is from Gayle Jacobson-Huset, Assistant Editor, *Stories for Children Magazine*: "Don't worry about your writing so much ... your girls are young yet and need you ... your time for writing more and more will come sooner than you think ... just try to write something -- even if it's an email or a letter to somebody, or even a journal entry -- every day to keep your skills up, and also read, read, read children's books in the genre you hope to specialize in ... the rest will come in due time. I think you're doing great!"

Do you have another book on the works? Would you like to tell readers about your current or future projects?I am working on my first book through the Institute of Children's Literature Advanced Book Course. Tentatively entitled, "Images of the Past," includes historical events of General George Washington and Major John Andre. However, the long ago occupants, Nicole, and company are purely fictional.

The town I live in Tappan, NY is listed on the New York State Historical roster and I live down the street from the DeWint House, which was once occupied by General George Washington. Major John Andre attempted to deliver the secrets of West Point to the British, but was later tried, convicted and hung as a traitor.

SYNOPSIS: Nicole Sloan has moved to the east coast of the United States with her mother and sister and finds herself immersed in discovering the identity of the long ago occupants of their new home and proving their innocence of treason. While the move is difficult for Nicole, especially since her parents recently divorced (because of wife abuse), she is intrigued to solve the mystery from over 200 years ago. With the help of her sister, Hayley, and her two new friends, they are working against forces beyond their control. Yet their determination leads them down a road they never thought possible.

Do you have a website/blog where readers may learn more about you and your work? I have developed a [blog](#) and a [website](#) in conjunction with my writing and use them as a tool to provide information and maintain relationships with fellow writers. I blog at least 2-3 times per week and update my website on a monthly basis, or sooner if necessary.

Thanks for being my guest, Donna! Good luck with your writing career. [Mayra Calvani](#) is a multi-genre author and book reviewer. She's the author of *The Slippery Art of Book Reviewing*, *Dark Lullaby*, and *Embraced by the Shadows*. Her children's titles include *The Magic Violin* and *CRASH!* Check out her blogs: [Mayra's Secret Bookcase](#), [The Dark Phantom Review](#), and [Violin and Books](#). Subscribe to her free monthly newsletter, [The Fountain Pen](#).