

FAIRY TALE BLUES

Conversation Guide

*** What gave you the idea to write about a marriage sabbatical?**

Marriage can be absorbing and isolating. There are just the two of you tussling over a range of issues from the most intimate to the most mundane. Marriage partners can lose perspective after many years of closeness. Privacy within the relationship can become insulating and we can get locked into certain views.

I've been invited to attend writers' residencies that have taken me away from my everyday life for extended periods. The solitude and the absence of responsibilities that identified me at home offered new perspectives.

That's when I thought: what if a woman decided to leave temporarily to deepen a relationship with herself? In my case, there was a legitimate work reason for leaving home, but I wondered what it would take for a woman to go against the cultural grain and spend time on her own away from her marriage.

*** You suggest in the novel that marriage is currently evolving as each generation finds new ways to address its rewards and limitations. Do you think we'll ever get it right?**

I think we've always got it right. My grandmother Margaret's marriage was perfect for her and her times, so was my mother Alice's and so is mine and my children's. Marriage presents challenges that are mirrors of our society. Yet typically each generation evolves the concept of partnering to a new level.

I like watching how emotional and physical intimacy that once was considered the wife's domain has become the responsibility also of the husband - don't you love seeing those men with diaper bags over their shoulders? And how a strong sense of self, which was once the husband's domain - remember dens, those special rooms designed for a man to get away from the family and pursue his own interests? - is now an honored pursuit also of a wife.

I've witnessed among my friends the imbalances that can occur with such growth and one of them is men holding back on the provider end, as I suggest Jess does in the sports business he and Annie share, and the women taking charge of everything inside the home and out, as Annie did. Confusion can slip in when we share life and authority. There are few guides for evolving partnerships.

So there is no right way or wrong way. Many of us come into our marriages hoping to acquire all the love and acceptance and understanding we felt we didn't receive from our parents, plus add the sizzle of sex and romance, please. A set-up for all kinds of challenges.

*** In the Conversation Guide of your previous novel, CRYBABY RANCH, you describe how that grew out of the exciting intersection of your own experience and your creative imagination. Was that true for FAIRY TALE BLUES as well?**

Definitely. For me, that's how the creative process works. The two - reality and imagination (which is to say the range of possibility I can conjure) - join and produce stories. Yet the end result is always fiction. There is nothing of the memoir in my novels. For example, the longtime love my husband and I share opens my vision to the many possibilities partnering can take and aids me in expressing the experience of deep intimacy and caring, while not in any way resembling my personal actions or those of anyone I know.

It's a creative process that is a microcosm of the natural world of birthing - how could it be otherwise? - in that male and female mate and the result is a whole new being. Not one or the other, but an original creation unto itself. So it is with story. Reality and imagination (or possibility) mate and the result is a unique story.

*** Many writers say that their final work never quite lives up to their intention never quite says all that they meant to say. What did you want to say in FAIRY TALE BLUES that might not have gotten said?**

I wanted to say so much that I had difficulty in choosing my issues. Many issues I touched on, but wished to say more. For example, I wanted to say, "Look what else you can do besides divorce." There are a dozen steps of separation that couples can take in response to unresolved issues, while saving the valuable parts of the relationship. I wanted to say, "Create your own form of partnering."

*** How did the experience of writing this novel differ from your experience writing CRYBABY RANCH?**

I wrote CRYBABY RANCH over a long period of time while I also owned a resort business in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. It's hard to write seriously while working in the business world, and I have a lot of sympathy for those who face this struggle. I've since let go of my shop. With FAIRY TALE BLUES I was able to write full time, which was wonderful. It seemed an entirely different process. More concentrated. I loved it. The lifestyle that writing a novel demands matches me perfectly. It's easy for me to be self-disciplined. In fact, I don't even call it that. It feels more like freedom - oh good, I get to wake up and write all day again tomorrow.

*** Do you continue to read avidly, even when you're deeply engaged in writing? Are there writers you've particularly enjoyed who have influenced your work?**

I love to read and wouldn't stop for anything. Some writers say they can't read while writing because they find themselves aping another writer's style. I don't have that experience. Yet in another way, everything I read influences or inspires my work. I especially love beautiful language. I become entranced by it and find that even though I am reading in bed with only the pleasure of the story in mind, I am still studying where the author placed the commas, pondering

the sentence structure and word choices. I admire Barbara Kingsolver very much, her wisdom and humor. I don't know that I am particularly influenced by her, but I aspire to her vision and her skill in relating that to her readers. I am especially interested in reading poets that write novels, because of the careful language and the deep awareness for which poets are noted. I read both fiction and non-fiction. And though I will have several non-fiction books going at once, I will usually read only one novel at a time.

*** What do you hope to accomplish during the rest of your writing life. Do you have a long view with several projects in mind, or do you take it project by project?**

What I love best about reading a novel is when the characters' realizations within the story clarify personal issues for me. To have a writer put words to a troublesome concern of mine is a wonderful experience that grounds me and allows me to move forward. A similar thing occurs when a writer finds the language to express beauty and insight. I glow with the celebration of it. I hope to give that to readers myself.

So perhaps a little of both: a long view of continuing to write and offer readers the gifts I love to receive, yet the subjects are still to be discovered.

*** You came to writing novels later in life, having accumulated much experience from which to draw inspiration. How crucial was that timing in contributing to your success? And what advice would you give other writers, both older and younger?**

Timing is mysterious. For years I felt that my true self was a writer, yet few people acknowledged me as one, so I felt as though I lived a secret life. Perhaps the most comforting thing about being published is that my inner life and outer life have been united.

Yet I know that if publication had happened to me earlier I would have given it more weight in my life than would have been well-balanced for me. By the time my first novel was published my work had been rejected by publishers for many years. I had to learn not to take that personally or I wouldn't have been strong enough to continue to write and to live with the immense joy I get from that.

Now I have found that I don't take the success or acceptance I receive personally either. I enjoy it very much. I love the opportunities that are available to me now and the wider acquaintanceship of people with whom I interact. But being published doesn't have much to do with how I see myself, just as I had learned not to let being unpublished affect my self image.

I think writing is like every other creative pursuit: we must do it for itself and not for any result we imagine it may bring us. Writing is our concern; what happens to it after it leaves our hands is no longer our business. For me writing is an act of unconditional love, I do it for reasons that have nothing to do with the conditions it may bring - money, acceptance, self image. As soon as I stepped onto that path of thought something released in me. I continued to send my work out, but I wasn't attached to it as I had been before.

I would give the advice to writers that the poet William Stafford offers in his book Crossing Unmarked Snow, “Make writing a way of life, a practice that can lead to self-realization, to a fuller involvement in one’s own experience.” What could be better?

For

John Buhler

who gave me the best line in this book.
And now I give it back to him.

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It adds a special pleasure to the creative process for a writer to have readers in mind as they work. I had very special readers in mind when I wrote this novel - my sister and brother and their mates. Both in-laws and outlaws take open-hearted pleasure in my work. It's only fair that they take something, because I take so much from them: their stories, funny lines, and unique perspectives and experiences. Thank you Gayle Caston, Tom Welling, Debbie Welling and Bob Caston.

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BIO

Tina Welling lives and writes in Jackson Hole, Wyoming with her husband John and four-legged family members, Zoe and Miko. Fairy Tale Blues is her second novel. Her first novel is Crybaby Ranch.

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