ANIL AGGRAWAL'S

Internet Journal of Book Reviews

A sister journal of AAIJFMT · Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

VOL. 4, NO. 2 · JULY – DECEMBER 2005

Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-9674 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/br/vol_004_no_002/interview/1_nancy.html

Interview with Nancy Glass West

THE INTERVIEW

Nancy Glass West

HOW TO CITE

Interview with Nancy Glass West. *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*. 2005;4(2).

Author Nancy Glass West writes mysteries. Her suspense novel, ***Nine Days to Evil,*** *received excellent reviews and won The Blether Gold Award. The story features winsome heroine Meredith Laughlin, who discovers, from studying Shakespeare's tragedies, a potential escape route from the sociopathic villains who want her dead.*

According to Blether, the Book Review Site, " Nine Days to Evil is a truly exceptional read, the finest example of a genre, a book with which the reviewer can find no fault, and which will usually have universal appeal." Featured on this site, the novel is available through BookSense.com, Barnes&Noble.com, and Amazon.com.

When the author was seven years old, she and her mother wrote poems to each other on special occasions. In high school, the library journal Pegasus published one of her poems. In college, she learned that journalists were unpaid and English majors had trouble finding jobs in writing and publishing, so she studied General Business at the University of Texas and University of Houston and earned a BBA.

Married, with two young daughters, West realized that her real desire was to write. She earned an MA/English Literature at the University of Incarnate Word and attended the Rice University Publishing Program. After reading numerous books on writing, she published magazine articles and poetry and wrote the biography, ***Jose Vives-Atsara: His Life and His Art*** *(Shoal Creek Publishers). Vives-Atsara was a nationally acclaimed artist who immigrated to the United States from Spain during the Spanish Civil War and garnered praise for his artistic ability as well as his patriotism for his adopted country.*

West founded Book Publishers of Texas and edited their trade journal for seven years. Her poem, ***Time to Lie,*** *featured by "Theme and Variations," was recently broadcast on America 's National Public Radio.*

Nancy Glass West recently completed an aging-can-be-murder mystery romp, ***Forever Fatal,*** *featuring thirty-nine-year-old amateur sleuth Aggie Mundeen, who fears nothing but middle age. The novel, laced with humor and romance, should be published in 2007. West plans to write a series of books featuring the inimitable Aggie Mundeen.*

When asked why she writes mystery fiction, West replied: "In mysteries evil invades someone's ordinary world and hurls everyone into chaos; but as the story progresses, evil is gradually revealed and, at least partially, explained. Unlike what can happen in the real world, evil in mystery fiction is exposed to the light and overcome, so that order prevails again. Since we seek order in our own lives, mystery fiction appeals to us."

When asked to discuss the role of luck, talent, and perseverance in a writer's success, West said: "Luck is essential in getting the right piece of work to the right agent or editor, but perseverance is key. If a writer constantly works to improve her writing, she will succeed when she develops sufficient skill to draw readers into her fictional world and hold them to the end of the story. Talent probably boils down to a person's fascination with stories and language-fascination strong enough to keep a writer happily spending hours reworking plots, deepening characters, and re-crafting sentences. Perhaps talent can be reduced to having a sensitive inner ear that tells the writer when something works."

To read reviews of West's novels, more of her thoughts about writing, her annotated list of excellent books for writers, or to contact the author, visit her website: www.nancygwest.com

Her book Nine Days to Evil (Booklocker, 2004) won rave reviews in our journal. Naturally we couldn't contain our desire to know more about her. We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached him for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month by the Editor-in-Chief Dr. Anil Aggrawal. Some excerpts....)

Nancy Glass West



Nancy Glass West writes mysteries. Her suspense novel, Nine Days to Evil, received excellent reviews and won The Blether Gold Award. The story features winsome heroine Meredith Laughlin, who discovers, from studying Shakespeare's tragedies, a potential escape route from the sociopathic villains who want her dead. According to Blether, The Book Review Site, Nine Days to Evil is a truly exceptional read, the finest example of a genre, a book with which the reviewer can find no fault, and which will usually have universal appeal." Featured on this site, the novel is available through BookSense.com, Barnes&Noble.com, and Amazon.com.

To read reviews of West's novels, more of her thoughts about writing, her annotated list of excellent books for writers, or to contact the author, visit her website: www.nancygwest.com

We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached her for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month by the Editor-in-Chief Dr. Anil Aggrawal. Some excerpts.. ..

Qu.1. Why do you write mysteries?

Ans. I like to write mysteries for the same reason people enjoy reading them. In mystery stories, evil invades someone's ordinary world and hurls everyone into chaos. As the story progresses, evil is revealed and, at least partially, explained. Unlike what can happen in the real world, evil in mystery fiction is exposed to the light, overcome, and order prevails. We seek order in our lives, so we like stories with conflict, but where order and justice triumph.

I love creating the suspense in mysteries. I enjoy thinking about ordinary people thrust into extraordinary situations. How will they deal with it? In ***Nine Days to Evil*** , Meredith Laughlin is propelled into an untenable situation that worsens until she is trapped in an evil snare. To save her life, she is forced to dredge up courage she doesn't know she possesses.

Nine Days to Evil begins as graduate student Meredith Laughlin awakens to a call from her physician husband who is driving to clinics in the Texas Hill Country when an August storm erupts. The characters are:

Dr. Conrad Laughlin: The handsome obstetrician whose charm could elevate him to department chairman at the San Antonio hospital.

Meredith Laughlin: Th e elegant graduate student, married two years to Dr. Conrad Laughlin.

Page 8:

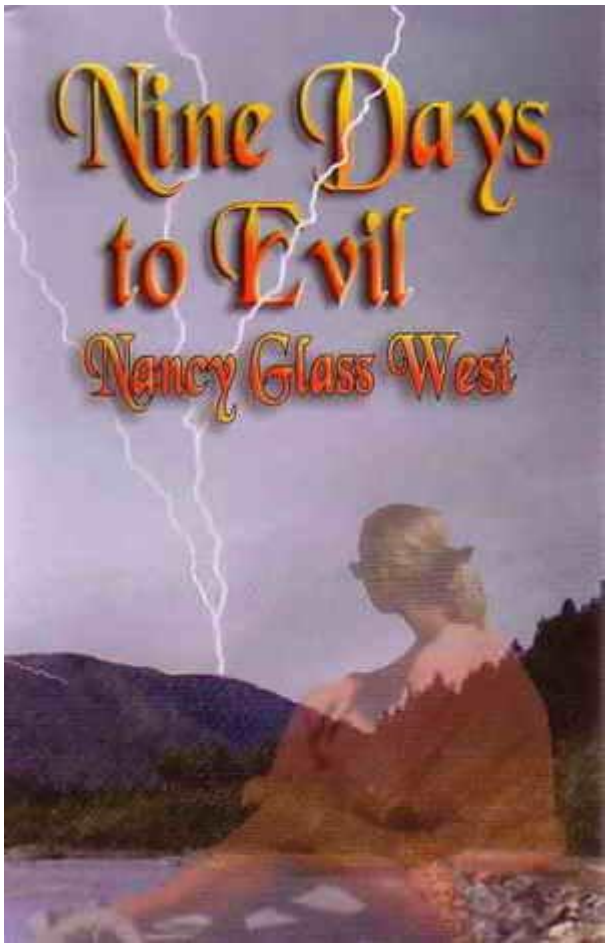
Meredith heard brakes screech and gripped the phone, straining to hear over thundering detonating on the roof.

"Conrad! What is it? What's happening? Can you hear me?" The sky exploded with thunder and lightning. The crash of glass and metal bombarded her like a slap. She dropped the phone. Recapturing the receiver, she drew it to her ear with a quivering hand, afraid of the clatter that would assault her.

"Conrad," she shouted, say something. Are you all right? Conrad!" She held her breath, straining to hear over the storm.

Nothing. The line was dead, their link severed.

Cover jacket of Nancy Glass West's Best selling book. Click cover to buy from Amazon



Q 2. Which comes first, character or plot?

Ans. Either can generate a story. My husband mused about possible occurrences at the San Antonio medical center. I subsequently read a newspaper account of a bizarre incident in California . I combined the two events to create the plot for ***Nine Days to Evil*** .

Another mystery writer, Marilyn Wallace, describes it this way: "Something gnaws at you and refuses to go away. It's like a grain that serves as an irritant..As a writer, you are compelled to probe it, consider it, and expand it."

If you begin with plot, your main characters evolve from the story. What type of person, I thought, would be most affected by this series of events? An intelligent, trusting girl, perhaps, one accustomed to the support of her family? Meredith Laughlin, age twenty-four, elegant, and blonde, took shape in my mind as the protagonist.

Page 16:

Meredith had slipped into depending on Conrad's schedule, his patterns, and his preferences. Her uncharacteristic acquiescence had made her restless, then desperate to seek new direction. Graduate school.

But Conrad's call obliterated her self-absorption. She was his chance for survival.. Darkness oozed in from the sides of her mind. She would doze a few minutes. The phone would wake her. It would be Conrad.

Q 3. How do you create the other characters?

Ans. I try to create people who contrast with Meredith and who, because of their backgrounds and problems, have varied responses to her dilemma.

Dr. Key Walker, colleague and friend of Dr. Conrad and Meredith Laughlin-and Conrad's competitor for department chair.

Page 48:

"Dr. Walker, this is Katharine in the OR. Our 7 a.m. case ran fast, but we have a slew of cases to follow you. Can you come to OR 3 and start a little early?"

"I'll be there in five minutes." He locked Conrad's files in the lower left drawer. Conrad's patients shared emotional instability and an affinity for drugs. Then there was the 'Clinica'. Were the facts he discovered related to Conrad's crash? Key had a lot of digging to do and no time to do it. Jaw set, he strode toward the elevators.

Click here to read reviews of this book.

Detective Sam Vanderhoven, the San Antonio Police Department detective who searches for Dr. Conrad Laughlin, despite the pain it causes him.

Page 55:

Sam Vanderhoven couldn't believe he was accompanying the blonde beauty [Meredith], even on business..He hadn't been so drawn to a woman since before he lost Katy. He could be twenty years older than Meredith Laughlin, but she was a knockout..He was especially vulnerable to Southern women. Their soft exteriors hid remarkable resilience.

Agatha (Aggie) Mundeen, Meredith's middle-aged classmate at University of the Holy Trinity, whose wry humor belies her tragic past.

Page 116:

The woman who sat in Meredith's row near the window did not match the other students. Meredith guessed she was in her early forties. Her blackish hair, parted in the middle, puffed downward and covered her ears, immobile, like a Brillo pad. Her turquoise, crocodile eyes, heavy-lidded and puffy underneath, darted stealthily around the room..She wore a nylon turquoise warm-up, trimmed with a shade of wine that screamed at her lips and nails. She sat with one sneaker-clad foot crossed over the opposite knee, evaluating the professor.

"Okay," said her body language, "show me something."

Later, Aggie tries to study, but her thoughts return to Meredith.

Page *160:*

I met her only four days after Conrad disappeared, but here she is, going to graduate school, of all things..Maybe what happened just hasn't sunk in.

Is it possible Meredith doesn't want Conrad to show up? Maybe she knows he won't show up. Maybe the phone call story is a lie. Isn't Meredith the only one who knows anything about it? The phone company has a record of the call, but nobody really knows why Conrad called or what they said..

Q 4. What about the villain(s)? You seem to have a fascination with sociopaths?

Ans. I do. I'm fascinated by these charming, smart, believable, people who appear to have it all, but who suffer from bizarre personality disorders. Although ***Nine Days to Evil*** was written primarily to entertain, it has the underlying bonus that readers learn to recognize people with sociopathic personalities. The movie actress, Mary Astor, accomplished this result in the only novel she wrote, *The Incredible Charlie Carewe.*

Q 5. How do you distinguish between sociopaths and psychopaths? Aren't serial killers and rapists psychopaths?

Ans. Usually, yes. Let's eavesdrop as Meredith and Aggie listen to Professor Sammis's lecture.

Page 123:

We are going to start our study of abnormal psychology by looking at people who exhibit the most enigmatic of psychiatric disorders. They are referred to as psychopaths, sociopaths, or as having antisocial personalities.

As Dr. Hervey Cleckley points out in The Mask of Sanity , sociopaths vary in type and severity of their disorder.. While the large majority of sociopaths suffer from a disability greater than many institutionalized psychotic patients, many are able to stay outside legal and institutional systems.. The most severely disabled patients, frequently referred to as psychopaths, frequently exhibit violent behavior..

So it's a matter of degree. Sociopaths, psychopaths, frequently lumped together as having Antisocial Personality Disorder, exhibit similar behavior patterns. The most severely disabled can be more prone to violence. However, there is no sharp delineation between these classifications, and violence always looms as a possibility. Dr. Cleckley's revealing book was published in 1982. Currently, patients exhibiting a recognizable set of behavior patterns are collectively designated sociopaths or described as having Antisocial Personality Disorder.

Q. 6 How did you learn about psychopaths and sociopaths?

Ans. I studied Dr. Hervey Cleckley's classic book on sociopathic personalities, *The Mask of Sanity,* and researched the topic online. As of October 17, 2005 , Google listed 12,300 references for "Sociopath Classification."

Another great source was Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello.* Shakespeare was incredibly perceptive about the human psyche. The way he reveals evil in his characters is instructive, especially in his depiction of the villain Iago in *Othello* . Meredith is studying *Othello* in graduate school when her life is interrupted by evil. When she sees her dilemma mirrored in Shakespeare's play, her understanding helps her devise a plan to save her life.

Q 7. Was *Nine Days to Evil* your first book or have you written others?

Ans. I have written nonfiction: *Jose Vives-Atsara: His Life and His Art, Book Publishing in Texas,* and magazine articles for *Texas Libraries, Texas Business, Southwest Art, Resident Physician, San Antonio Magazine,* and *SA Scene.* My poem, "Time to Lie," was read for Theme and Variations and broadcast on USA 's National Public Radio. If you count poems I wrote to my mother from age seven and my poem published in high school, I've been writing forever. When I decided that I really wanted to write fiction (after earning a degree in General Business Administration), I returned to school, earned an MA in English, and read every book I could find on the craft of fiction writing. The books I found the most helpful are listed on my website. Every time I read another one of those books, I went back to revise my novel.

Q 8. Are you pleased with the response to *Nine Days to Evil* ?

Ans. In addition to the reviews posted here on Dr. Anil Aggrawal's fascinating site, I've been blessed with other great reviews (links on my website). I was thrilled when the novel won The Blether Gold Award: "A truly exceptional read, the finest example of a genre, a book with which the reviewer can find no fault, and which will usually have universal appeal."

Q 9. Do you have more mystery novels planned?

Ans. Definitely. When I was writing ***Nine Days to Evil*** , Meredith's forty-two-year-old graduate school friend, Aggie Mundeen, kept popping up in my head until she convinced me that I also had to tell her story. This is an example of writing a story that begins with being fascinated with a character's personality and devising a plot to highlight her foibles.

The result is ***Forever Fatal*** . Meredith, Aggie, and Detective Sam appear in both novels, contributing their viewpoints, quirks, and distinctive personalities to problems of murder and mayhem. But because Aggie is a combination of "Miss Congeniality" and Jessica Fletcher, her story is lighter and more humorous.

In a future book, I see Aggie coercing Meredith and Sam into going to a Texas dude ranch where "home on the range" means murder.

I foresee that Meredith and Aggie will also entice Detective Sam to accompany them on a cruise during their Spring Break from graduate school. Unfortunately, the ship's celebrity will be "man overboard."

Eventually, I think Detective Sam will have to deal with an old villain, while Meredith and Aggie continuously make their disruptive presence known. I like these people; it will be a long time before I let them go.

Q 10. How much writing success is due to luck, perseverance, or talent?

Ans. Luck is essential in getting the right piece of work to the right agent or editor.

Perseverance is key. If a writer constantly works to improve his or her writing, she will succeed when she develops sufficient skill to draw readers into her fictional world and hold them to the end of the story.

Talent is probably a fascination with stories and language-fascination strong enough to keep a writer happily spending hours reworking plots, deepening characters, and re-crafting sentences. Maybe talent is simply a sensitive inner ear that tells a writer when something works.

Q 11. What is your favorite dish, book, movie star, or person?

Ans. My favorite book is *To Kill a Mockingbird* , which was made into a film starring Gregory Peck. On of my favorite contemporary books is Michael Connelly's *Blood Work*, a mystery that was made into a film starring Clint Eastwood.

Q 12. What do you dislike most?

Ans. People who fail to realize that their talents, wealth, family background, even their ability to succeed, are gifts from God, not circumstances of their own making.

Q 13. What do you consider your biggest achievement in life? What has been your biggest failure/disappointment?

Ans. My biggest achievements are knowing that my husband is glad he married me, and raising independent children. My biggest failure/disappointment is that I didn't begin writing fiction earlier.

Q 14. If you were marooned on a desert island, who/what would you like to be marooned with and why?

Ans. My husband. Together we could figure a way out. If not, we could spend our last time together.

Q 15. If you were allowed a choice to live in one era of time (past, present or future), which one will you chose and why?

Ans. . The near future, hopefully after peace comes to the Middle East . There are so many daily discoveries to marvel over.

Q 16. What do you do in your spare time? Your hobbies, interests?

Ans. Family, friends, reading, enjoying music, playing piano and guitar, tiling table tops. I also exercise regularly, but I can't say I enjoy it.

Q 17. If a youngster of about 12-13 years wanted to take up writing novels as a career, how should he proceed?

Ans. I would say this: Read one book after the other-classic, contemporary, whatever interests you. If you love a story, reread it looking for the way the writer constructs the story, creates suspense, writes dialogue, and makes the characters change as the book develops.

Keep a weekly journal on events, people and sites that INTRIGUE you.

Try to find a career that fascinates you and pursue it diligently. What you learn in other fields will inform your writing. Writing, by itself, doesn't usually pay the rent. Write because you love it more than anything else you do. Write because you have to.

Nine Days to Evil is available at Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com (Click cover above to buy directly from Amazon at a discount through this journal). Readers can check the author's website for the publication date of **Forever Fatal, www.nancygwest.com .**

Nancy loves hearing from readers. You can email her at ***intrigue101@sbcglobal.net .***

Nancy Glass West can be approached via E-mail at intrigue101@sbcglobal.net.

Interviews - Collective Index (Appearing in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*)

Interviews - Collective Index (Appearing in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology*)

-Editor-in-Chief

of Volume 4, No. 2 (July - December 2005)