

An Interview with Colleen Spiro

January 2009 Featured Author
at

Time with Tannia

(<http://timewithtannia.tripod.com>)

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés



1. Tell us about yourself.

I am a wife, a mother, a stepmother and a grandmother! I am a Catholic writer and speaker, a parish secretary and a spiritual director. I love to read and write and my favorite place is the beach.

2. You are a Benedictine Oblate. Briefly explain to our readers the process of formation and your motivation to become one. How do you incorporate that knowledge into your daily life?

I attended the Spiritual Direction School at a Benedictine monastery in Pecos, New Mexico. I felt drawn almost immediately to Benedictine spirituality and applied to become an oblate with the Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey in Pecos. I was required to read assigned books and to write book reports about them. I had to study about St. Benedict, Benedictine spirituality and the Rule of St. Benedict.

As oblates, we pledge to try to live by the spirit of the Rule and live a life of Benedictine values and spirituality in our own lives and witness to the gospel. I pray Morning Prayer, continue to study the Rule and to live by Benedictine values the best that I can.

3. You traveled to Pecos, New Mexico to obtain Certification as Spiritual Director. Why did you choose the School for Charismatic Spiritual Director of Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey? How long does it take to obtain that certification?

My spiritual director had attended the school and spoke highly of it. I had looked into a few different schools, but this is the one that I was drawn to. There were many obstacles to going there however – the distance, the length of the school, etc. However, as I prayed about it, the many obstacles just fell away and it became clear that this was the one I was supposed to attend.

This school takes 6 weeks.

4. What life circumstances influenced your decision to obtain also a certificate as Contemplative Spiritual Companion at the Blessed Edmund Rice School for Pastoral Ministry?

Spiritual directors need to continue to study and learn about spirituality and prayer life in order to help guide others on their spiritual journey. Contemplative Spiritual Companioning is another “way” of guiding, or befriending others on the spiritual journey and gave me more insights into other ways of spiritual direction.

I really do not like labeling myself or others. But if I had to, I would describe myself spiritually as feeling drawn to both charismatic and contemplative prayer. By being certified in both “types” of spiritual direction, I feel like I am “well rounded.”

5. Who is your favorite mystic writer and why?

St John of the Cross is right up there, maybe number 2!!! After all, he was a spiritual director!

However, my favorite mystic writer is St. Therese of Lisieux. I have read the Story of a Soul about 3 or 4 times and I still refer often to different passages. I love her spirituality of the Little Way and try to follow it. I also wish and pray to have her total confidence and trust in God’s loving mercy. Therese was also a spiritual director of sorts. She was a novice mistress and also wrote letters of encouragement to a couple of seminarians whom she called her spiritual brothers.

6. How does the knowledge acquired during your spiritual formation equip you with the necessary tools to lead church retreats?

Learning to be a spiritual director means learning about spirituality and the spiritual journey. The courses I have taken, the books I have read (I am a voracious reader) and certainly my own “real life” experiences, have certainly helped me in leading retreats. Mostly, however, I believe that the ability to give retreats, to inspire others and help people to grow closer to God, are gifts from God.

Spiritual Direction is a charism. The real spiritual director is the Holy Spirit. To be a spiritual director, I need to always be open to the Holy Spirit.

7. Now let us talk about your childhood sexual abuse memoir book, *The Third Floor Window*. Did you keep a journal to help you cope with the pain? Do you believe that getting to know Jesus on an intimate-personal level helped you to answer the question, Where was God? Were you able to forgive the perpetrator? If yes, how? and when?

Yes, I did keep a journal during the clergy abuse crisis in order to cope with my pain. I didn’t know what to do with it and how to talk about it, so I wrote about it. Writing can be very cathartic and it often helps me sort things out as well.

Yes, I do believe that getting to know Jesus on an intimate level helped me to answer the question, Where was God? We can better recognize those with whom we spend a lot of time. I spent a lot of time in prayer and it was through prayer, through active imagination, that I experienced Jesus’ weeping for me. And as I looked back over my life, I believe that God gave me the grace to see how he had carried me and strengthened me through the dark times.

To be able to forgive something like sexual abuse is also a gift from God. How can I forgive my father without God’s grace? I have forgiven him but it has been a process. I don’t think this kind of forgiveness happens all at once. I do believe that I have forgiven him totally now. I even feel

compassion for him sometimes. He has lost a lot because of what he has done.

8. Where can our readers buy your book?

At my publisher's website – www.booklocker.com or major online bookstores like www.barnesandnoble.com or go to my book website and follow the links directly to the publisher – www.thethirdfloorwindow.com

9. What types of "tidbits of inspiration and information can our readers gather by reading your newsletter? How can they subscribe?

My newsletter is called Prayerful Morsels. I find that a lot of people, myself included, do not really like to read any long articles when we are online. My "ezine" is made up of short little articles on spiritual direction, the diaconate (written by my husband who is a deacon), prayer, a gratitude journal and some reflections of my own about finding God in everyday life.

Readers can subscribe through my Catholic website – <http://www.colleenspiro.com>

10. How can our readers contact you?

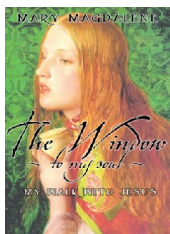
Through my website - www.thethirdfloorwindow.com. OR just email me at colleen@colleenspiro.com

11. A word of advice to victims, survivors of child abuse, their friends, families, and counselors.

To survivors of child abuse – The abuse was not your fault. You did nothing wrong and you did not deserve to be abused. You did not have the power to stop it or prevent it. Surround yourself with people who love you unconditionally.

To families and friends and counselors - Accept the survivor unconditionally. Do not judge them and do not push them. Learn about the long term effects of sexual abuse so you can understand them better and please, do not ever say – it happened a long time ago, just get over it!

And please – remember to sit with the survivors in the dark.



Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *The Window To My Soul; My Walk With Jesus* (ISBN 0975393359; 2004 Tate Publishing; www.tatepublishing.com).

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The author also has a blog at www.amazon.com

READERS' COMMENTS

Date Received: February 22, 2009

Name: Deacon John Giglio

Where did you hear about this interview? Twitter

Comments: What a powerful and honest interview! I'm sure that the sufferings that Coleen went through in her life was the seed for her spirituality and compassion towards all those who have or are suffering from abuse. There are many forms of abuse, not all sexual, and sometimes the very one we had hoped to love and serve have abused us. The wounds are hard to heal, but it is through grace, love, forgiveness and perseverance that we can move on and be united with our Lord and God, Jesus Christ! United with and Blessings to all sufferers+ Deacon John Giglio

Date Received: February 22, 2009

Name: Jo Linsdell

Email Address: (optional) writersandauthors@yahoo.it

Web site URL: (optional) <http://writersandauthors.blogspot.com>

Where did you hear about this interview? Tannia

Comments: Please contact me by email and I'd be happy to interview you for my site <http://writersandauthors.blogspot.com> It's important that we support each other as writers, but also that we spread important messages and information like that covered in your book.

Date Received: February 12, 2009 3:56

Name: Steve

Where did you hear about this interview? Colleen Spiro

Comments: This book is an extremely powerful book. It's a "must read" for those that have survived any type of abuse, and even a must read for those who have not. It's a great tool to help one find God's Grace and gifts and wisdom. Fantastic book, and fantastic article. Thank you for sharing!