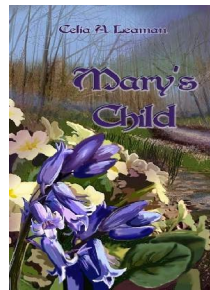
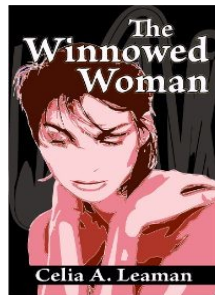
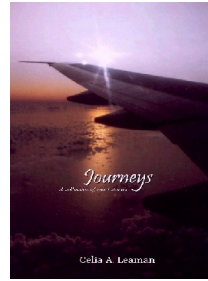
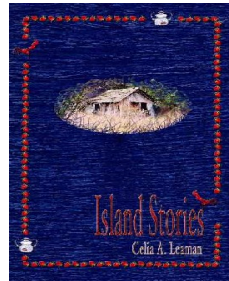
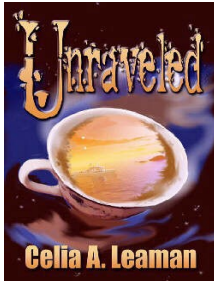


An Interview with Celia Leaman

By:

TANNIA E. ORTIZ-LOPES
(<http://timewithtannia.tripod.com>)



1) Tell us about yourself

I'm an ordinary person who likes to write. I was born in England on the edge of Dartmoor then immigrated to Canada twenty-eight years ago.

2) England was your writer's playground and Canada your blooming soil. Which life experiences played a pivotal role in your writing career?

Both do. My heart is sometimes torn between Dartmoor and where I live in Coastal British Columbia. Sometimes I feel as though I don't belong anywhere, except I am a part of the Universe, and I believe this feeling comes out in many of my stories. I draw from, and am nurtured by, the experiences I have undergone whether they be positive or negative.

3) Writing, gardening, and knitting are hobbies which requires concentration, manual and mental abilities, and long-term satisfaction. Do you consider your hobbies a venue to keep your mind fresh and alert and as a ideas' fertilizer for your stories?

Yes, all these things take a lot of energy, but I am generally blessed with good health, except last year when I had to deal with breast cancer. It was a nuisance as it interfered with my work, but, because I had to take time out, it gave me time for insight--which rest, in turn, refreshed my mind. I still managed to garden for part of the year, and I completed my book *The Winnowed Woman*. Being hurtled back into a situation of fear and the unknown, I found I could at last finish this book, which has been a work-in-progress for several years.

The garden always nurtures me, even though it's hard work. Last year, when I was so ill, the thought that I could still grow things comforted me and felt (to me) like a sign that I must persevere; that everything would turn out okay. I find great spiritual sustenance in my garden.

4) You are currently tutoring writers in three different topics at the Writers Online Workshops (www.writersonlineworkshops.com); "Focus on the Short Story," "Fiction Fundamentals," and the "Little Red Writing Workshop." Can you give us a brief description of them? How can our readers register? What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking online courses?

Writers Online Workshops offer terrific courses, and I enjoy meeting and working with the students. The "Fiction Fundamentals" title is fairly self-descriptive--it is about learning the fundamentals of writing fiction. There is a lot of reading with this course with some excellent examples and advice.

In "[Focus on the Short Story](#)" the students and I work with two of their short stories, one of which we focus on in-depth. Hopefully, that story will be fairly completed by the end of the course. Or at least the student will have a good idea of where to next take it.

The "[Little Red Writing Workshop](#)" is a course on structure, flow and style and how to make your writing readable.

Readers may enroll by checking out the courses at the WOW link. Once enrolled, there is a start date and the first lecture is posted. Students post their work on the WOW site, I collect it and then comment on it, working individually with each student in their private 'notebooks,' which is a page on the WOW server. They can also--and are encouraged to--participate in group discussion in another page, so it's a way for writers to meet one another.

I suppose the disadvantages to working online is that you aren't in a classroom

setting so it's sometimes hard to get the feeling of community. However, in some of the classes I have taught, the students have made a very strong online community and some have kept in touch with one another afterwards. I have made several friends from tutoring these courses, and sometimes had a hand in a student's publishing success. This is why I tutor. I love to help others. I love being a mentor. I know how hard it is to get going in writing and I enjoy imparting my experiences if they will help.

The advantages for me working online is that I can work from home, sitting by the fire on a cold winter's afternoon, or in the garden on a hot summer's day. I'm not curtailed by any dress code or have to be in the proximity of a city to participate. There is no driving in heavy traffic. And I'm sure the students feel this way, too, in their busy lives. They can log on at any time to check whether there are any postings.

Also, I think when you're learning to write, what better way to learn how to express yourself than by communicating 'in' the written word, rather than by classroom chat?

I think there are more advantages than disadvantages.

5) Now let us talk about your creativity and themes. The theme of older woman and young man love, ecos in several of your stories. Are these stories inspired by true life events? Or are they just a sign of the days we're living?

Well, I suppose you could say it's a sign of the times we're living in, but that theme is also a personal one. My husband is many years younger than myself. And some of my stories were written cathartically after an emotional/life upheaval some years ago. My book, *The Winnowed Woman* (www.devonshirebabe.com/winnowed.htm) deals with that time in particular.

I wrote about the May to December relationship quite a bit at one time because I think I was in a sort of shock when it happened to me. I never expected to have this sort of relationship and never invited it, and at first I found it difficult--meaning that I was afraid what people would say; that they would call me his mother. And then I prayed for help and asked for signs, because had I been given signs that this relationship was wrong for me, I wouldn't have carried on.

To the contrary, I was given every sign that it was right and we've just celebrated our fifteenth anniversary. This brings me to the conclusion that love, if it is good, if it is pure, cannot be wrong, regardless of age or sex. My experience has taught me to be more understanding and tolerant of many situations. I see this relationship as being part of my growth.

I also see it as my personal revolution. Why should it be acceptable only for an older man to partner a younger woman and not the other way around? Why shouldn't an older woman know some joy in her life if she finds a young man who would prefer to be with a more mature woman? I know several relationships that are this way and it seems to work well. Human age is irrelevant compared to ages of souls anyway. There is many an old soul in a young body, and vice-versa. Women shouldn't be afraid or ashamed of this choice. Too much emphasis is put on firm bodies and hair that hasn't gone grey yet. I think every woman should embrace her body, no matter what her age. And if someone else enjoys embracing it too, then more power to both of them.

6) You have published several of your books both as ebook and as paperback. Which method of publishing do you prefer and why?

I prefer being published in paper because that was my dream, to hold a book in my hand and know that I'd written it. However, I am grateful for epublising, otherwise I wouldn't be here now. And I do sell a lot of ebooks. I give talks on how I got published called "Taking the Scenic Route" mainly to help other writers get started. This is all about how a writer can take the 'e' route to get their foot in the publishing door. Their career growth can continue from there.

7) *Mary's Child*, the first book in the Dartmoor Series, family saga. This book is based on a 1860 legend. Share with us how you came to know about this legend and your decision to write this series.

I was raised near Jay's Grave on Dartmoor and used to pass it quite frequently. After I immigrated to Canada, I began a novel. It started out untitled and was written about a young girl called Kitty who lived at a farm called Forde. However, lacking focus, I put it aside.

On a visit to England in 1993, when someone gave me a newspaper article, I was reminded of Mary Jay and the legend of Jay's Grave. Being a native of Dartmoor, I had always been aware of the speculation surrounding the workhouse girl who took her own life after being crossed in love--meaning some romantic unhappiness befell her. In that article I read that Mary was sometimes known as Kitty Jay and it was thought that she had lived at a farm called Forde.

Inspired by the coincidences in my unfinished manuscript, I went to Jay's grave. Apart from a wild rabbit, no one was there. With the scent of heather and bracken in the air, surrounded by the wildness of the moors, I began to wonder whatever had possessed that young girl to take her life. What dreadful thing had come to pass that had made her give up her newfound freedom?

I suddenly felt compelled to write her story. I couldn't get her out of my mind. When I returned to Canada I dug out my old manuscript and, taking what I had already written, developed the story of *Mary's Child*.

Part of my research revealed that a well-respected author, Lois Deacon, also wrote a novel about Mary Jay. Although it was years out of print, I nonetheless managed to get hold of a copy, *An Angel From Your Door*. And it was that title that inspired me to include the lovely poem at the beginning of my book.

Although our stories differed, Lois saw Mary just as I did: a gentle, humble girl, who suffered through no fault of her own. Some years after I finished the book, Mary Jay wouldn't leave me alone and I was suddenly inspired to write more about her descendents.

This has led to two more books, which can be read independently but which will carry on the *Mary's Child* theme.

PastPresent I: web of lies is about to be released soon by Twilight Times Books. Readers can visit http://twilighttimesbooks.com/PastPresentI_ch1.html for more information. *PastPresent II: time returned*, will be released at a later date and is presently a work-in-progress.

8) Your book, *Unraveled*, comes with the following message: “Warning: this somewhat politically-incorrect book is not for those who have no sense of humour.” Do you think the readers might be astrologically affected by the narrative of the stories? If so, how can they prepare themselves for such a shock?

That's funny.

Writing the Gale Island novels are like a comic relief valve for me because I seem to get into a certain happy-go-lucky mode, watching my characters romp and cavort around. I have no control over them.

I visualize Gale Island as a place where little people can become big. You see this happening in small communities all the time, where peoples' eccentricities can be given rein, or their talents and abilities given freedom to develop. This can lead to some pretty strong personalities developing, too. As it's impossible to muzzle my Gale Islanders--they all want a voice! and might sometimes say something that isn't politically correct--hence my warning.

9) *The Winnowed Woman* is an inspirational-motivational type of book in which you share with your readers your darkest hours and your lift-up recovery. Who is your target audience for this soul-searching book?

My target audience is for anyone who has struggled through a devastating personal event from which they feel they might never recover. An event which kills a part of them that will never live again.

It was my darkest time, it is true--although I have gone through many in my life.

Some self-inflicted, some not.

Although what I went through last year was difficult and extremely physically painful--and for many reasons is ongoing, because once you have cancer you always worry that you might have to deal with it again--emotionally, it didn't even touch on the inner turmoil I write about in *Winnowed*.

What I experienced all those years ago, helped me enormously to survive last year. It was different though. Whereas anger carried me through that former time, last year I never felt angry; I hardly cried--except for the pain. I was only grateful that it wasn't worse, because it could have been.

I refused to buy into the 'victim' role, or the attitude that 'we must fight the enemy.' Calling yourself a victim is *not* healing.

Fighting the enemy means literally fighting your own body--as cancer happens when the body doesn't for some reason recognize rogue cells. Isn't your body suffering enough? Why berate it further? When something or someone is suffering, isn't it better to give it love rather than call it horrid names?

Rather, I asked myself why. Why has this happened? What is it going to teach me? What can I do to be well and help my body to behave in a better way?

I've noticed a pattern in my life that when I'm not writing, I become sick. And so I took a leap of faith. I retired from my library job a year early; I cut out a lot of stresses from my life. I began to love and soothe my body, to treat it with more respect, to eat better food and take more exercise. I began to encourage it to be *well* and healthy. I keep telling it, we need to keep going because we have a lot to do yet. Although I am taking Tamoxifen, I refused the radiation and chemotherapy, believing we (my psyche and my poor body) had suffered enough.

It was a difficult decision to make and I prayed and prayed about it. I still have doubts about my decision, but I have greater doubts about the treatments.

If I have made a good decision and if (because I'm a bit of a fatalist and believe I will only be here for as long as God wills), I survive for many years, I will be writing more about this. I am, meanwhile, keeping a journal about the thoughts, events and feelings while going through this. I am living each day as though it were my last. Every day is a blessing. Every day is a gift. Whenever I feel sad or anxious, I say a prayer of gratitude for the things I have and those frightening feelings dissolve.

I hope that, like in the *Winnowed* book, the experiences I will be writing about will help others be strong in their lives.

10) All your novels both in ebooks and paperback were published by Twilight Times Books in Tennessee (USA) while your other short stories books were published by Devonshirebabe Publications (Canada). Are these publishers affiliated with each other? If not, why the change? Please share with us your experience with both publishers.

This is confusing perhaps, but it is this way: Twilight Times Books (TTB) has published all my books so far, both in ebook form and paper--except for my short story books. For *Journeys*, *Who is Margaret? What is She?* and *Island Stories*, TTB only holds the media rights. I retained the paper rights.

I did this for practical purposes. It often takes a long time to get a book into print and I wanted some little books to sell locally where I promote. These books are available only from me and can be ordered from my website. The ebooks are available from TTB.

11) *Who is Margaret? What is She?* is a collection of science fiction short stories. Most of them underline a message of hope and strange new beginnings. How did you choose the four stories for this book? What inspired them?

It's funny what inspires a story. *Duplicated!* was first written so many years ago when I was taking a creative writing course in Ontario--this has to be at least twenty years ago. *The Man at the Side of the Road*, a little bit of a dark tale, was written when I was feeling depressed and family-deprived. *The Suit*, well, I can't remember what inspired that story, except I saw the name Meta on a package of slug-pellets at the local store. As for *Who is Margaret?* I think that story emerged from being taught how to fold laundry properly when I was a child.

As for the hope and strange new beginnings in my stories; I guess it is a general theme in all my work because I believe I exist on this earth to encourage people to keep faith. I like to write about hope because, to me, hope is just as important as love

Humans can find love in the beauty of this world; birdsong, flowers, the scents of flowers, and thus be nurtured this way. However, where is the nurturing in a life without hope?

12) *Island Stories* is a collection of humorous fantasy stories that reflect over our human nature in all sort of circumstances. Life is seriously funny and challenging at times. Are they the result of some town gossip? Or just mind play?

You would laugh if I told you how *She Drove a BMW* came about. But I wrote it after a meeting with a very snobby writer. She actually drove a Mercedes I think,

and the circumstances were entirely different to the story in the book. But that's how I got that idea. Nell is a completely fictitious character.

The story, *Being Like Annie Fairfax*, holds some truths in that the sheep really did follow the horse on that little walk; and the horse really did believe it was the half-parent of the lambs. But although I wrote it at the time of a divorce, there is no truth in the rest of it. Although yes, I do paint sometimes, in oils. But that story is fiction--as are the Oliver and Doll stories. Although, there again, Oliver and Doll are typical of many people who move to smaller communities, seeking a simpler life. I just exaggerate things a bit, that's all.

These stories were written years ago around the time I wrote my first Gale Island novel, *Unraveled*. And, as Oliver and Doll move to Gale Island, some of the same characters who appear in the short stories also appear in the Gale Island novels.

13) *Journeys* is the naked you wrapped in a cotton blanket as you see your reflection in the mirror. Do you agreed with this analogy? Please share with our readers the insight of these stories.

I can agree with that analogy to a certain extent. But again, although I experienced some of those things in some of the stories, they are an extension or twisting of the facts to create fiction. When I have experiences I write down my feelings. When my characters fall into similar situations, I draw on this and it helps me to portray realistic feelings.

14) Are you working on new projects?

I have just begun a book on writing, not on 'how' to write exactly, but harvesting some of the notes I've made while tutoring for Writers Online Workshops, which is for several years now.

As I don't wish to wait for the lengthy process of being published, *Writing Creatively*, is a book I shall self-publish this book after practicing the book on a couple of friends who like to write, to see if it helps them. I'm *not* a publisher but I self-publish my books under the name of Devonshirebabe Publications and have them printed locally. This will be advertised on my webpage when it is completed.

I am re-writing the second Gale Island book, *Weeds That Work and Pots of Goodness*, which is a bit of a mystery as well as lots of fun. Another humorous book to be published by TTB.

I also have the third book in the *Mary's Child* trilogy to complete, *PastPresent II: Time Returned* to be published by TTB. It's a complicated book and I have to rest it between sessions. I have been working on that book for three years now.

15) How can your readers contact you?

Readers can contact me at my Yahoo address: avery201@yahoo.co.uk

16) A word of advice for new writers

Nobody, unless they are particularly gifted, writes to perfection immediately. It would be like asking a baby to perform a teenager's tasks. Writing is a craft and has to be practiced to become perfect.

Persistence and determination is necessary for success. Also, one of the most important things a writer needs to learn is to rest their work. A great percentage of manuscripts are rejected because they are submitted too soon.

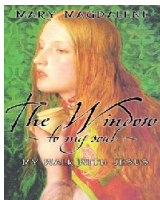
It's hard to put your writing aside, I know; you want to 'get it out there as soon as possible.' But when you think you may have finished it, I would suggest you put it away for as long as you can in between edits. Some writers suggest even a year, and that can't do any harm if you are writing a novel.

When you look at it again, if it's finished you won't want to change a word. If there is more work to be done on it, you will find it easier to review it with a fresh eye. It will be easier to discover superfluous words and passages. And conversations that have previously eluded you will flow better.

I tell all my students this: Pin this in front of you. A mantra: I must rest my work, I must rest my work.

I also say, Happy Writing.

Thank you for your time, for this interview. Thank you to all my readers. Blessings to you all.



Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *The Window to My Soul; My Walk with Jesus* (ISBN 0975393359; 2004 Tate Publishing; www.tatepublishing.com). Author's websites: <http://www.myspace.com/tanniaortizlopes> and <http://timewithtannia.tripod.com>. The author also has a blog at www.amazon.com

READER'S COMMENTS

Date: May 7, 2008

Name: Robina Williams

Email: robinawilliams@hotmail.com

Comment: A fascinating and very informative interview. Thanks, Celia and Tannia