

An Interview with CJ West

September 2009 Featured Author

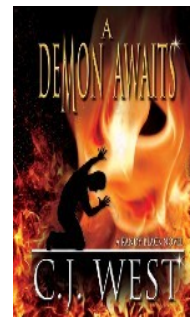
at

Time with Tannia

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

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés



1. Tell us about yourself.

I'm a full time thriller writer and I live in a suburb of Boston with my wife and two children. You can find me at <http://www.22wb.com>. I'm online when I'm working so you can usually find me on one of the social networking sites.

2. On 1979 paper and pen became your best ally to combat the eerie effect of Boredom while trying to stay alert at school. What was the theme and final destination of that first story?

That was a very long time ago. It was sixth grade and I was quite bored with school work. The school petitioned my parents to move me ahead a grade, but my parents refused because I was already one of the smallest kids in my class. (You wouldn't know that by looking at me now.)

The book started as a knee-jerk reaction. I was angry about something and started writing about it. Looking back, I think this sort of passion is what makes novels work. When I finished the book it was tucked away at home and forgotten until my mother resurfaced it years later after I published Sin & Vengeance. My youngest daughter held onto it for a while, but it was written in pencil and the words have faded away now.

3. Golf is a challenging sport. It requires discipline, concentration, precision, determination, and an excellent physical and mental condition. Do you believe that a successful writer

shares those same qualities? If yes, how do you incorporate them into your writing career?

First and foremost, I fell irrevocably in love with golf. When I started all I wanted to do was to play and to improve. I didn't have visions of playing professionally until I got much older. I never took lessons, but I read everything I could find on the sport, and practiced as hard as the professionals did. In the end I fell short because I developed some bad habits that I couldn't detect by watching myself play. If I had had a professional instructor and still worked as hard as I did, I might have made the PGA tour.

I think being a commercial writer requires the same dedication and some good coaching. When I began writing I worked on my first novel every day for about five years. I worked hard at it because I loved what I was doing and I wanted to create something superb. My advice to new writers is to do the same. Find a mentor or a critique group that will help you perfect your craft. I have this do-it-yourself attitude that tends to make things more difficult than they need to be. Seek good advice and write great books.

4. Do you consider that your degree in Business Management and knowledge of computer technology an asset to better market your books in a cost-effective manner? How?

Computer skills are certainly an asset. Writers need to connect with people online. My computer background has helped me navigate the many social networking sites and the other basics writers must have these days. I create and maintain my own website including the Javascript that drives the photo gallery. I think up-and-coming young writers will have learned these technologies in school and as they connect with friends. The challenge is for the many career changers who enter this field later in life.

The selling of books is a business and it does require a fair amount of decision making on the part of new authors, especially self-published authors. The field is very competitive and decisions about who to hire, how many books to market and where, are all very important. Authors who are working with an agent have a partner in this process. If you are going it alone, find someone you trust to advise you.

5. What events in your life had a pivoted effect to plunge you back into writing 20 yrs after you wrote that first book?

Writing was a fling I started one Christmas. I picked up some books on writing and from there I have never looked back. Since 1999 there have only been a dozen days that I have not worked on one of my books in some way. I slowly drifted away from the computer industry until I was writing full time. I even write in the mornings on family vacations, which drives my wife nuts.

6. You described your books as action-packed thrillers theme oriented about the guy next door. Do you attribute this CJ's book seal to your upbringing? Or are they based on the daily news? Share with us how did you develop your voice.

When I started writing I wanted to captivate people. One of my early goals was to create stories that moved incredibly fast and kept readers riveted. I think "Sin & Vengeance" really accomplished that. The reason I write about the guy next door is because I've never worked in law enforcement and honestly I think the whole field is overexposed in books and on television. I strive for realism in my work and I think that is just part of who I am. Everything in my books is something that I could do with some practice. The villains in my stories aren't aliens or vampires, they're just like the people you pass on the street every day. This makes my work haunting sometimes.

7. *Sin and Vengeance*, the first in your Randy Black series, seems to be so far your most accomplished book. It was published in 2005 and three years later it was optioned for film by a screenwriting firm. How does this awesome opportunity for a newly published author change your perspective, vision, and respect for your main character Randy Black? Please

share with us the encounter story and its implications for your career.

Many writers ask me how I got *Sin & Vengeance* optioned for film. The only answer I can give them is to write a great book and pray. I did try marketing my book to movie studios and producers after readers kept telling me what a fantastic movie it would make. In the end, the owner of a small screenwriting firm bought the book on her own. She fell in love with it. The rest happened pretty fast.

The film option really changed my career. I started getting invitations to sign books and to be interviewed on radio and television. My book sales climbed and when I talked to people in the industry, they started to listen. Before *Sin & Vengeance* was optioned, I was primarily focused on writing. Since then, my books started selling and I've expanded my focus on the business side of writing.

8. *A Demon Awaits* is the second book in your series. How do the twists and turns on the main storyline emanate feelings of sympathy from the reader toward Randy Black?

A Demon Awaits was a challenge to myself that came out of several book group meetings I attended. Everywhere I went people were telling me they thought Randy was insane and that he should be killed (or at least locked up.) I thought of Randy differently. I understood what he had been through and I wanted to show readers the world through Randy's eyes. When I finished the book I was awed at the change of heart people had when they talked about Randy. I can tell when I meet someone whether they've read *A Demon Awaits* by what they say about him.

9. Your book titles are faith based. Do they reflect the book theme? Or are they just a reflection of Randy Black's conscience about the situations surrounding him?

The books didn't start out to be faith based, but I think the work is just a reflection of who I am. The first book wouldn't be characterized as a religious book, but themes of faith and forgiveness do run through it. *A Demon Awaits* is a more direct approach to religion and the theme has been compared to *The Shack*. Both books examine mending one's relationship with God, but mine does this in the context of a fast-moving thriller.

10. Most authors distribute their own signed books. You, however, partnered with Bev Loves Books. Would you recommend this business partnership to other authors? Have this proven profitable for both of you? How can our readers contact Bev to order a signed copy of your books? Where can our readers buy the non-signed copies?

Bev was one of the first store owners to invite me in for a book signing and the partnership was mutual. She is located in a very small town and I wanted to help her sell more books. Selling books directly would be far more profitable for me, but Bev certainly makes selling books easy. Today massive retailers are crushing independent stores and I wish more authors would have this sort of relationship with local stores.

Readers can contact Bev at (508) 763-5503. She ships books anywhere for the retail price plus shipping. Books are also available at Amazon or at any retailer by ISBN.

Sin & Vengeance ISBN 0-9767788-0-7.

A Demon Awaits ISBN 0-9767788-2-3.

Readers can also read *Sin & Vengeance* free on their computer by visiting www.22wb.com

11. Social networks, blog tours, and video clips are the latest hip for authors to get exposure, develop readership, and increase their sales. Which one of these mediums have proven more effective in terms of sales and marketing for you? What are some of the

advantages and disadvantages of them?

MySpace and Facebook have allowed me to connect with hundreds of readers. The sites allow me to tell readers about my work and to hear what people think of my books. Readers can drop in and ask me a question anytime and I think that really will change the way readers relate to authors. These two sites have been most helpful to me of any Web 2.0 sites. I have created videos of my books and the real winery where *Sin & Vengeance* is located. These have been fun for me, but haven't led to sales that I am aware of.

I have recently been spending a lot of time in the Amazon forum for *Sin & Vengeance*, answering reader comments. The great thing about this is that the comments are all collected in one place where anyone who is interested in the book can find them.

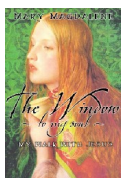
I must say that this is the most insightful web interview I have done. You've clearly researched me and my work and this is greatly appreciated. Online interviews are great to let readers know about the guy behind the books and I'm always glad to take part.

12. Are you working on new projects?

Always. I never stop. Right now I am editing the sequel to *A Demon Awaits*. Like all my books, the feel is different than my previous work, but I think people who have been following Randy Black will love where his character is headed.

13. A word of advice for new writers.

Writing is a joy. Soak it in, get good advice, and pay attention to the business aspects when you must.



Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *The Window To My Soul; My Walk With Jesus* (2004 Tate Publishing;), *El Espejo de mi Alma* (2009 Pleasant Word) .

Author's websites: timewithtannia.tripod.com., www.shoutlife.com/tanniaortizlopes, and www.myspace.com/tanniaortizlopes The author also has a blog at www.amazon.com

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INTERVIEW COMMENTS:

Date Received: August 31, 2009
Name: CJ West
Email Address: (optional) cj@22wb.com
Web site URL: (optional) www.22wb.com

Comments: Thanks for putting so much into this interview. It was a joy spending time with you and I hope many of my author friends will seek you out.

Where did you hear about this interview? Tannia

Date Received: September 10, 2009
Name: John Desjarlais
Email Address: (optional) desjarlais12@comcast.net
Web site URL: (optional) www.johndesjarlais.com

Comments: Good interview, Tannia and Mr. West. I'm currently the coordinator for monthly guest chats with the Catholic Writers Guild, and I'm wondering, Mr. West, if you'd consider being a guest some Sunday evening? Please email me at desjarlais12@comcast.net and let me know if this interests you. You can visit the Guild at www.catholicwritersguild.com to see what we're about. Thanks! John Desjarlais

Where did you hear about this interview? from Tannia

Date Received: September 25, 2009
Name: Tannia
Email Address: timewithtannia@yahoo.com
Web site URL: timewithtannia.tripod.com

Comments: CJ: I want to thank you for accepting my invitation and allowed me to share your talent with my readers. Keep up the good work!