

An Interview with T.J. Smith

September, 2010 Featured Author

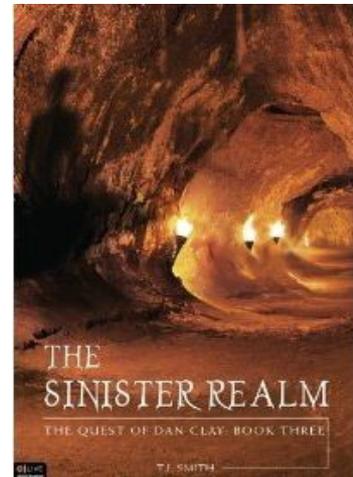
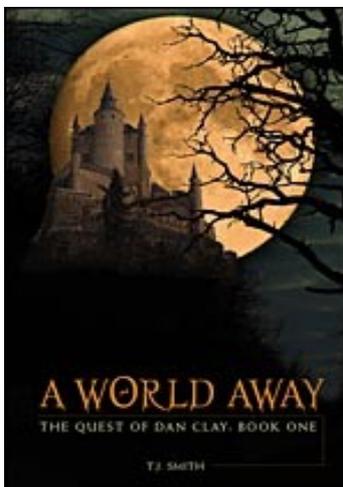
at

Time with Tannia

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

By:

Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés



1. Tell us about yourself.

I was born in southern Illinois where I attended a Catholic elementary school and high school. In 1985, I graduated from a Saint Louis college where I received a B.A in English. Shortly after graduation, I accepted a full-time employment position in the fundraising office of a religious organization in Virginia which I held for eleven years. In 1996, I accepted a similar position in the Rocky Mountain region. Intrigued with fantasy fiction, I set out to compose a fantasy/adventure novel in 2005. Within a year, the intended one-book novel had mushroomed into the “Dan Clay” Christian adventure trilogy.

2. You have a BA in English, work as a fundraiser for a religious organization, and write fast-pace young adult adventures stories part-time. Do you consider that your fundraising skills are an asset in the successful marketing of your books? If yes, how? If no, what is the difference?

Like many comparisons in life, oftentimes, there are as many similarities as there are dissimilarities. When comparing my fundraising skills to marketing my novels, the similarities outweigh the dissimilarities. One of the key components to any successful

marketing strategy is constant reinforcement...keeping the product in front of the consumer. I've attempted to keep the books in front of the reading public by regular radio interviews, book reviews, author interviews, and advertising. As one who frequents bookstores, I realize there are literally thousands of authors to choose from. My objective is to narrow the field by constant reminders.

3. Before talking about your excellent trilogy, "The Quest of Dan Clay," let me thank you for trusting me with the review of the entire series. My youngest son and I enjoyed them very much. Now let us talk about the trilogy without spoilers.

Who inspired the character of Dan Clay? Did you foreseen him to be so mature and grown up, toward the end of series, when you started to write the saga? Or did he take a personality of his own as the story unfolded in your mind?

It's not so much a specific individual who inspired the character of Dan Clay as much as any teenager who is rejected and shunned by his classmates for his or her attempt to do the right thing and to choose the greater good. When the novel opens, Dan is ridiculed by his classmates—and to a certain degree, his friends—simply because he is well-mannered, respectful of people in authority, and trying to live an honorable life. As the story unfolds, the reader discovers that Dan's self-sacrificing spirit and his love of family and friends propel him to maturity. I wanted the reader to witness and experience Dan's gradual change from an inhibited and snubbed teenager to the resourceful and realistic hero of the story.

4. Sam is an interesting character. From homeless, labeled by society as a crazy old man and misunderstood to a great leader and father figure. What do you want to accomplish with this character?

Midway through the first novel, "A World Away," the reader discovers that Sam's career nose-dived soon after discovering a portal to a parallel world. He refuses to be silent about his bizarre story. As a result, he is labeled deranged and mentally unstable by his friends and the townspeople. But Sam embraces the truth, even to the point of becoming homeless and being rejected by his friends. As the story line develops, Sam nurtures a friendship with the three teenagers who—unlike the local citizens—are not as quick to judge him. The point I wanted to emphasize in Sam's character is his persistence in embracing and proclaiming the truth. Sam's father figure and mentor role are paramount to the group's survival and in reaching their sole objective of finding the demonic castle in the parallel world.

5. I enjoyed very much the interaction between Jimmy, Cindy, and Dan during the trilogy and how their personalities complimented each others strength and weaknesses. Did you intended for these characters to be role models to teens? Or were they inspired by ordinary teens?

Dan, Jimmy, and Cindy have distinctive qualities. Dan is levelheaded, Jimmy is impulsive, and Cindy is a balance between the two. Each character complements the other; each quality is essential to the survival of the explorers and their mission. The lesson I'd like the reader to take with him or her is the importance of working together to achieve the desired end. We are social beings, and as such, we require interaction with one another.

6. “A World Away, the Quest of Dan Clay” is the first book in the series. I will dare to say that you were just getting your feet wet as an author and storyteller. Do you agree with this statement?

For nearly twenty-five years, I’ve written professional articles for two major religious organizations. While writing the novels, I discovered that narrative writing is very different from letter writing. Like most authors who pick up their previously published work, I find myself thinking, “*Why did I use that word?*” Or, “*I should have used a different sequence of events.*” Having said that, however, I’m pleased to see how the ideas and the story line evolve with greater ease as the trilogy progresses.

7. In your second book, “The Harrowing Escape”, it appears to me that the situations and characters grew as you felt more confident with your writing skills. Was the development of this sequel influenced by your reader’s feedback and/or reviews of the first book?

As “*The Harrowing Escape*” unfolds, the reader learns that the characters and the situations have matured. Given the unearthly predicaments that Dan, Jimmy, Cindy, and Sam had to confront and overcome—both internally and externally—in the first novel, the natural progression of their collective talents and qualities led to their development. Perhaps even more important is the fact that the characters are now in direct conflict with sinister men which demanded a more mature theme. The personal development of the characters and the circumstances were a natural outcome of the situations in the first book.

8. “The Sinister Realm” was for me, as a book reviewer and reader, the crown jewel of the trilogy. This book stands out from the others. What events in Dan’s life triggered the sequence of events leading to his quest climax?

Dan is a complex character. His emotions of loyalty, devotion, and love of God and family are deep-rooted. It is the unknown whereabouts of his older brother, William, which opens the first scene of “*A World Away*” and propels Dan and his co-travelers on a fantastic journey. In “*The Sinister Realm*,” it is Dan’s devotion to his family and friends—together with his desire to save humanity from the essence of pure evil—which compels him to explore the dark and mysterious world.

9. Faith, unconditional trust in God, and perseverance are three of the qualities of the good servant weaved into the storyline. What message do you want to convey to your readers?

In the first book, the characters are continually tempted. Some are tempted to abandon the journey, others to selfishness, and still others to lose their faith in God and one another. However, as the story progresses, the characters realize that in order to defeat the evil powers of the parallel world and complete their quest, they must rely on each other’s talents, deepen their faith in God and prayer, and persevere even in the midst of adversities. I’d like the reader to come away with an understanding of the importance of self-sacrifice, prayer, complete reliance on God, and courage.

10. Where can our readers purchase your books? What about signed copies?

The complete trilogy can be purchased online at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, booksamillion.com, borders.com, or from the publisher at tatepublishing.com. On occasion, amazon.com offers signed copies.

11. How can our readers contact you?

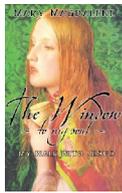
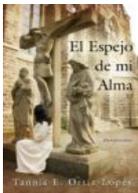
Readers can contact me through Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/profile.php?id=1149640358&ref=search>

12. Are you working on new projects?

Presently, I'm taking a respite from creative writing and focusing my energies on promoting the "Dan Clay" trilogy.

13. A word of advice to youth going through their own quest and saga.

My advice is to remain unwavering in your faith and in your personal ambitions. If your ambitions are wholesome and in the light of truth, there's a good chance that you will be tempted to abandon them; all truth and beauty are tested. Perseverance is paramount.



Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés, author of *The Window To My Soul; My Walk With Jesus* (2004 Tate Publishing;). *El Espejo de mi Alma* (2010 Pleasant Word) .

Author's websites: timewithtannia.tripod.com., www.shoutlife.com/tanniaortizlopes, and www.myspace.com/tanniaortizlopes **Stock photography website:**

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Other photography website: <http://www.zazzle.com/teolpuertorico>

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