

Frequently Asked Questions

Why did you select Persuasion to modernize? Why not another Austen Story?

Persuasion is my personal favorite of all the novels Austen wrote. This actually wasn't the first one I wrote. The novel I am finishing this year is a modernization of Pride and Prejudice. This is also one of 4 modernized Austen novels that I am working on. They are my four favorites of her novels. The reason I focused on Modern Persuasion first was because I realized a lot of people wrote variations and modernizations of Pride and Prejudice. Far fewer wrote them about Persuasion. I wanted to pay homage to the story I loved as the first book I published.

You grew up in Miami, a very diverse city, did that influence you as you sat down to write novels?

I love living in diverse locations and Miami was one of the most diverse places I've lived. It gives me a chance to learn about new cultures and see the world through different eyes. I think seeing so much diversity helped me be more empathetic as a writer. It makes it a little easier for me to see things through the eyes of different characters.

What would you be if you weren't an author?

For a long time I wanted a job where I could sit on the couch all day and watch TV shows, but that got boring the summer between graduating and getting my first librarian job. My parents think I can do anything I put my mind too. There was my childhood dreams of being Princess Leia or a unicorn, mermaid princess. In High School I was positive I was going to be a television editor or producer until I realized I didn't really enjoy it. My mother still thinks that I should do this, 20 years later. I am already thinking about what comes next! I want to be a professional Wikipedian. Not paid by people to edit for them, but paid to do whatever I want to do on Wikipedia.

If your characters met you in real life, what would they say or do to you?

I am pretty sure, out of all the characters in the book, I am more like Mary in personality than the others. I suspect the other characters would probably treat me the way they treat Mary: tolerate because they love her. Elizabeth, I am pretty sure, would forget I even exist. I imagine she would meet me multiple times and forget that she has met me before.

When you are writing a modern version of an old book, how much do you feel obliged to stick with the original plot line? Modern individuals might make totally different decisions than the characters in the original story make. If these decisions are crucial to the plot, how do you get around that?

I think Austen's themes are universal and timeless, especially in Persuasion. People often make choices they regret. People sometimes get a second chance to correct

those mistakes. When I decided to tell Persuasion in a modern context, I looked to the themes, the plot, and the characters. I suspect there will be people who will be unhappy that I wasn't more true to the original, but I had my own story to tell. I took out characters that didn't serve a purpose anymore. I looked at plot points and tried to decide if they would happen and if they were critical to the plot. I even made a few changes, but over all Persuasion was a dream to modernize.

What were you like at school?

I was actually invisible at school. I wasn't popular, but I wasn't bullied either. After elementary school I attended middle and high school out of my normal area. I didn't grow up with the people in my schools and I didn't spend time with them outside of school. The friends I had in the area only spent time with me outside of school. It made school a very different experience for me than for others. I don't value high school the way others do, especially because it wasn't the end of my education.

Give us an insight into your main character. What does he/she do that is so special?

I think what makes Emma so special is that she is like most other women in a way we rarely talk about. She struggles with her choices, takes on burdens that might not be hers to bear, and gets stuck in ruts without realizing it. She makes choices with the tools she has available and sometimes they turn out to be the wrong ones. I think a lot of people will relate to her.

How much research do you do?

Answer: It depends on the story and how outside my experience it is. For Modern Persuasion, I did a lot of research about what book tours are like for authors. I knew what I wanted to happen, so I had to know if it was common or would be out of the ordinary.

Why do you write?

Answer: For years I constructed stories in my head and played them out over and over in different ways. I realized I had to write the stories down to be able to move on. I would just obsess about the characters and plots in intricate detail if I didn't. Once I wrote them down I could move on to the next story. When I discovered National Novel Writing Month I found my place to focus on the writing. I spent years writing the one big story that had been in my head for most of my life. Once that was done I was finally ready to move on to other projects.

How do you think you've evolved creatively?

When I first started writing, it was primarily this weird universe of inter connected fan fiction for the tv shows, movies, and even books I loved. For years I mostly borrowed

characters from other universes. It started with the ideas of what I would do in that universe. What if I was Buffy the Vampire Slayer? What if I was an elf in Middle Earth? What I have been writing recently is more using the plot structure of another author, Jane Austen in this case, and seeing what they would be like in modern situations. Austen was both a creature of her time and ahead of her time. So many of her plots can be applied to modern situations.

What is the hardest thing about writing?

For me, it's finding the right story to tell. I often sit with an idea in my head for years. I live with the characters and get to know them. I can tell you the day to day things in their lives, but that isn't a story. I have to find the problem they need to resolve and that can take time. While I do that, I have an inclination to tell you all the details of their lives. I always struggle to cut out the details that aren't important.

What is the easiest thing about writing?

For me, it's the flip side of the hardest thing. I find it really easy to develop the characters. I spend a lot of time thinking of my characters. It often seems like I am living with them and talking to them. I know so many rich details about their lives. I know their motivations and the choices they make.

How long on average does it take you to write a book?

I always do my first draft during National Novel Writing Month. They have three events a year. *Modern Persuasion* was a first draft in July 2014. I wrote the entire book in that month. Then I let it sit for a while until I am ready to revise it. I like to see it with fresh eyes. That can take a few months, depending on what else is going on. From starting *Modern Persuasion* to the day I submitted it to publishers, it took 2 years to complete.

Do you ever get writer's Block?

Answer: I use to get it until I discovered what I need to do with it. I realized that I get blocked when I think I have to write something I don't want to really write. I am the only one accountable to my writing plans and when I remembered I could change anything I want, I started getting good at recognizing when I was hitting that wall. I stop forcing myself to write something and start writing whatever is in my head that's easier to work on. Eventually I come back to the block, but I do it when I am excited about that project again.

Do you read much and if so who are your favorite authors.

I read a lot. I generally read over 100 books a year. I think Jane Austen is my favorite and clearly she has a strong influence on what I am writing right now.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Answer: As tempted as I am to advise my younger self, I wouldn't give me any. I am who I am now because of the choices I made, the advise I listened to, and the advise I ignored. I wouldn't want to risk changing who I became because of my ego thinking I am smarter now than I was then.