



AN INTERVIEW WITH MARLO SCHALESKY

(provided courtesy of www.MarloSchalesky.com)

Q: Tell us about your journey to publication.

A: When I was thirteen years old, I wrote a poem on the bus on the way to school. It was about an old tree, forlorn and desolate, standing alone in a field. I read that poem at every recess, tweaked it, polished it, and for the first time, felt the thrill of how the written word can convey profound beauty. That day, I fell in love with writing.

Shortly after that, I told my mother (with all the angst of a newly-turned teenager), “I will just die if I don’t write!” So naturally when I grew up I decided to get my degree in Chemistry. And, oddly enough, I didn’t die. I enjoyed chemistry. But always that desire to write was with me, in the back of my mind, saying “Someday, someday.”

Someday finally came. I started writing articles for various magazines and putting out proposals for book projects. I thought it would be easy to get my first book published, but alas, it took years of writing and honing my craft (6 years, in fact). And more than that, it took giving up my dream entirely.

For me, I had to come to a place in my heart where I didn’t have to write to be content. I had to let go of that strong desire born at thirteen years old and embrace God’s will for me whether that will included writing or not. Only then, only when my dream had given way to God’s, was I offered a contract by Crossway Books for my first published book, *Cry Freedom*.

Q: Take us through your process of writing a novel —from conception to revision.

A: Usually, I start with one basic idea. For *Veil of Fire*, it was the great firestorm of 1894 and the mysterious figure who appeared in the hills afterward. After that I start in with writing chapter one. I am a “headlights” writer, which means I can see the chapter I’m writing and a few chapters ahead. I may also glimpse a few “signposts” in the distance.

The funny thing about *Veil of Fire* is that I wrote three quarters of the book thinking the hermit in the hills was one character, only to find out as I neared the end that I was wrong! And the impact of that discovery was both a shock and a delight. Suddenly, I understood what God was getting at through the theme and nuances of character in the book.

And truly, while I may complain that it would be easier to write a book if it were all mapped out (it certainly would be quicker!), this sense of surprise and delight is one of things that I love about the writing process. I love when the story and characters take on a life of their own. I love to discover what God has been planning for a story all along. And I love to be surprised by a sudden turn of events. And I know if I’m surprised and delighted, my readers will be too.

So, as it turns out, I write as I go, and revise as I discover more about the characters and plot. By the time I reach the end, there's typically only minor revisions to make, a couple more scenes I want to add, and a big once-over polish. Then, I send it off to my editor and hold my breath! (I'm in the holding-breath stage now for *Shades of Morning*, a novel that will come out May 2010, the third of my new Love Stories With a Twist!)

Q: Was there ever a time in your writing career you thought of quitting?

A: Oh, ugh, yes. Lots of times before I was published. Sometimes, the doubt and discouragement just got to be overwhelming. But in those times, there was always just that little something that kept me going. And then, after God broke me of my need to be published, and I started being published, my fourth book sold poorly.

Again, I faced awful doubt and discouragement. I'd been faithful, written the book God wanted me to write, done my best to do it well, and while the reviews were great, the sales weren't. It was then that I had to come to grips again with the idea that my job is just to be faithful. That's it. Success isn't getting contracts, or good sales numbers, or anything else. I just need to do what God asks. Write the stories he gives me to write.

It took three years for him to give me another story. That story was *Veil of Fire* (published by Cook). Since then, I've written three more novels with Waterbrook-Multnomah -- three more stories that God pressed on me so strongly I couldn't ignore them. So, I'm glad I didn't quit!

Q: What is your favorite and least favorite part of being a writer?

A: I love the last revision of a book. It's there that I see what God has been doing and shaping throughout the whole process of writing. I love to see how it all has come together to become more than I'd planned.

My least favorite part is writing the first few chapters, when all the doubts are raging and I'm not sure everything will come together, and I'm feeling just sure it won't.

Q: Have you received a particularly memorable reader response?

A: Perhaps my favorite encounter with a reader came via e-mail. A woman wrote to me who had grown up in a Christian home, going to church. Over the years, she had drifted away from her faith. She had come to think of Jesus as "old news," stuff that she'd heard a hundred times before. But someone had given her my *Only the Wind Remembers*. And after reading it, she found herself considering Jesus in a new way. He was no longer "old news" but "good news."

For her, a story of God's grace in Jesus reminded her of the faith that was missing in her life and encouraged her to start getting back in touch with what she had left behind.

Q: What's the best advice you've heard on writing/publication?

A: Don't write a story just to be a writer. Find the right story that resonates with what God's doing in you. Write what moves you and comes out of your seeking of God and his hand on your life. Then, write the story God gives you. Surrender. Follow God. Seek Him. And if He's called you to this writing thing, then write the best that you can. Study the craft. Hone your work. Remember that it's an offering to Him, so do your best. Find the story that's not only your passion, but His. And then, be faithful. Go to writers' conferences, listen to advice, be humble. Write. And make friends who will be there for you in the ups and downs of the business.

Q: Please share with us something God has been teaching you lately.

A: Through some recent tragedies and through writing *Veil of Fire*, God has shown me that I cannot measure his love by my successes and failures, or even by my happiness.

Who I am on the inside, how I am being shaped into the likeness of Christ, the character of my life – the color and beauty of it – are what are important to God. And to create that color and beauty, sorrow is necessary. Hurtful things happen.

So, I'm starting to understand that my life, too, is a story that God is writing. And since the best stories have conflict, disappointments, and plenty of action, I shouldn't be surprised when my life takes a turn and my faith is challenged once again.

And yet, my sorrow matters to God, my tears are counted by him as precious. He does not leave me alone in my hurt. He touches me, he heals me, he creates beauty from the ashes of my pain.

So I'm learning to walk through the fires in my own life. And to dig deeper – not to answer the question of why but the question of who – who is God really, who am I, and who is he making me to be? Those are the questions that matter. Those are the things that help me to face my own fires, accept my own scars.

Q: What do you love to read?

A: Why, the New Testament, of course . . . in Greek! Now, before you start thinking that loving Greek makes me too scholarly to write a decent novel, you should know that even though I just completed my Masters at Fuller (that's a Masters in Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary – so cool!), it wasn't my desire for an "A" that made me fall in love with New Testament Greek. After all, most students get through Greek class as fast as they can and then forget it. I might have, too.

But one day, as I was sitting there in class, learning forms and tenses, my professor happened to mention something interesting. "Did you realize," he said, "that the Greek word for truth and the word for unhidden share the same root."

Ah, in that moment an idea came to me, a little whisper from the heart of God. Truth. Unhidden. Truth. And I began to see the connection between truth and what it means for those who hide in their pain.

That idea became the basis for the theme in *Veil of Fire*. So you see, I can't help loving the

Greek. I can't help wanting to read the New Testament that way. After all, who knows what I might discover next.

Q: What are a few of your favorite books? (Not written by you.)

A: Some of my favorites are C.S. Lewis' Narnian Chronicles, *Lord of the Rings* (I was a *Lord of the Rings* fan even before it became popular), Francine Rivers' *Mark of the Lion* series, and Philip Yancey's *Disappointment with God*.

Q: What is your favorite quiet retreat from the hectic life of full-time mommy?

A: Four words: Starbucks. Venti. White. Mocha. Oops, doesn't sound very spiritual, does it? But really, it is. Because if I'm having a white mocha it means that I've gotten away for a little while to write and to focus on God. For me, writing is an act of worship.

It's about getting in tune with God and trying to see as He sees and understand the things He's trying to tell me.

So, getting some time away to write is also getting time away to rejuvenate, to take a few deep breaths, to stay sane. And, let me tell you, with four little girls, there's plenty of run, run, run around here! Between laundry, dishes, diapers, running two businesses (besides writing), and finishing the log home we just built, there's lots of opportunity for crazy.

But, a nice hot mocha, a few minutes of peace with no one hollering for "Mom," and my laptop computer make all the difference.

Q: Tell us a little more about life with young twins.

A: Mothering them is all about running around saying, "No no no, don't do that! Put that down. Don't put that in your sister's mouth. Get down from there. Don't hit sister in the head. Be nice to sister." And repeating every couple minutes. Because what one doesn't discover, the other will, and get her sister involved.

A couple months ago, it was the toilet paper – one unrolled while the other ran about the bathroom tp'ing everything. Then they tore it all into little bits and put it on their heads.

After that, it was the magazines. Nothing tastes better than a picture of a good chicken dinner, all torn up and shoved into sister's mouth. After that, it was the trash, with the dirty Q-tips. "Here, sister, have some earwax." Then someone thought it would be good to get them princess wands for a gift. Princess wands are excellent for pounding sister on the noggin until sister shrieks. And of course, no toy is as good as the one sister has.

So there's a lot of refereeing that goes on around here. And don't even get me started on how the one taught the other to throw her food on the floor while teaching her sister to first spit it out and smear in on her face. Ah, the joys of motherhood! But, I tell ya, after all my years of infertility, I ain't complainin'!

Q: Any parting words?

A: For writers, for mothers, for everyone who has read this far: I hope you'll remember that God has given you a unique life and unique gifts. Use them for the His glory and in obedience to Him, in whatever way He wants for you. Love Him first. Follow Him first. And be the person He wants you to be. His grace is sufficient. His love unimaginable. His vision for you beyond your own.

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