

Q&A for Regina Doman

SPOILERS GALORE!
CONSIDER YOURSELF WARNED.



Questions about Me....

Q: Did you always want to be a writer?

A: Like a lot of writers, I started writing as a kid, making up stories before I knew how to write, then writing like mad once I learned how. I knew I wanted to be an author when I was a kid, and I have serious doubts as to whether I ever really wanted to be anything else.

Q: Are you related to the singer Martin Doman?

A: Yes. He's one of my five little brothers. I am also related to the [John Paul 2 High](#) writer John Doman, and to [podcasting](#) seminarian Joe Doman. The two remaining little brothers have normal lives as a sales executive and a surgeon. All my little brothers are much, much taller than me now, and they all like my books.

Q: Are any of your characters based on yourself?

A: Yes. The villains are all based on me, pretty much. I base all the good characters on my friends. I have had the good luck to meet a number of truly extraordinary and truly good people, and I'm honored to call them my friends. With very few exceptions, everyone I write is a composite, since I like to protect people's privacy, even if it's just privacy about their virtues.

Q: Where do you get ideas for your books?

A: Oh, from everywhere, but mostly from the stories I read (nonfiction and fiction) and the people I meet. And my Roman Catholic Faith, which is full of Deep Stuff that invariably gives me ideas.

Q: Can I interview you for my class project / newsletter?

A: Sure! But I'm going to require that you read this Q&A and then Google other interviews with me

first. I don't like answering the same questions over and over again, so things will be easier for both of us if you find out what you can on the web, and only email me if you have questions you still need answers to. But if you do still have questions, I will be happy to try to answer them.

Q: Why do you base your books on fairy tales?

A: Because fairy tales are stories that have been told for generations and each generation found something fascinating in them enough to pass them on down. There's very few stories that can boast that pedigree, and it tells me that there's something truly universal about them.

(This interview was published in "The Sword and the Pen," the newsletter of The Young Writer's Club. I am happy to republish it here with their permission.)

Q: Was writing always something you wanted to do?

A: Yes, definitely. Pretty much as soon as I learned how to write, I knew it was how I wanted to tell stories.

Q: What influenced you most as a writer?

A: "Other stories" would probably be the most honest answer. But oddly enough, reading philosophy, theology, and even literary criticism (which generally deals with how stories are constructed) can give me ideas. I got the germ of the story for *The Midnight Dancers* from a quote by the philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand.

Q: Do you have a favorite amongst your four novels?

A: That's a hard question! For a long time, *Waking Rose* was my favorite. But I really like *Midnight Dancers* too. It tends to be true of me that the book I'm writing is usually my favorite book at the time.

Q: Were parts of the books (such as Rose and Blanche's hilarious trips to the thrift store) ever based on real events in your own life?

A: Oh totally! But generally speaking I don't like to write about events in my own life: I'd rather pilfer other people's lives. For instance, some of the adventures that befall the friars in *Black as Night* actually happened to some friar friends of mine. And Rose's dream about the Styrofoam balls in the first book was an actual dream my best friend from high school had.

Q: Which character appeals to you most: Bear, Fish, Blanche, or Rose?

A: Fish is definitely my favorite character. I think it's because he has the most conflicts and the most assets: I feel like I could write more books about him. And although Rose was more fun to write, Blanche was more challenging and more interesting, because of her internal conflicts. But my favorite parts of *Black as Night* were Bear's parts. I still love that guy.

Q: When you wrote Shadow of the Bear had you already planned out its sequels?

A: By the time I finished the first book, yes, I had definitely planned out the other two books. It took me ten years to write the first book (if you measure from the time I had the initial idea to the time the

book was published) One day during that time – I remember that I was in a parking garage with my nine siblings, waiting for my parents to come back from something – I had the idea, and said out-loud to whichever sibling was next to me, “After I finish this book I’m writing, I’m going to write two more, based on “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty.” My sibling said, “Huh, that’s nice,” and went back to doing crossword puzzles or whatever it was that the rest were doing. But all I did was sketch out a few ideas until the first book was published. Then I started on the sequel, but it took me much longer than I had expected.

Q: You mentioned that Waking Rose was actually completed before Black as Night. Was it difficult to write the stories out of sequence?

A: Yes, but writing novels is hard enough anyhow. But keeping the books consistent wasn’t as difficult as it might have been, since I had several opportunities to revise all the books along the process.)

Q: Did the completion of your first novel make it easier to finish the others?

A: The publication of the first novel definitely made it easy to publish the others. As author Ronda Chervin told me, publishing your first book (with a traditional publisher) is the golden key that opens the rest of the publishing world to you, generally speaking.

Suddenly everyone takes you seriously when you’ve published a book, even if it’s only an obscure book by a tiny publishing company. (Self-publishing is generally looked down upon: it means you’re a vain upstart not good enough for real publishers.) And there’s nothing like a deadline and a waiting contract to make you want to write more.

But if you mean, psychologically, was it easier to finish the other two books when the first one was done? Somewhat: but *The Shadow of the Bear* was not my first book. My first book was an obscure and meandering allegory that I had written after college which I finished in 1992, *The Pilgrim’s Dilemma*. It was unpublishable, and still is, but the psychological lift that I received from finishing it was enormous. I had proved to myself that I could write a book, and I knew that it was only a matter of time before I did it again.

Fortunately, my second book was much better, and actually publishable!

Q: I understand you revised the first chapters of Shadow of the Bear. How significant are the changes?

A: Hopefully not too much! I had been bothered for years by how slow the opening chapter was: I’ve said before that was my least favorite part of the book. The main changes were to eliminate some of the slowness that mars the opening chapters. But hopefully everything that made readers love the first chapters is still there.

Q: Your novels do a fantastic job intertwining the fairytale elements with the reality of our modern day world. Was it difficult to fit your plots into the fairytale context?

A: Sometimes it is difficult. It’s a pretty complicated process that I go through to write the books. I start with the fairytale and ask myself, “What does this fairytale really mean? What is it really about?” For instance, “Snow White” is about temptation and sin, on a really basic level. Then I look at the core images in the fairytale: what are the elements that we really associate with that story? I mean, there had to be an apple in my version of “Snow White.” I don’t just look at traditional elements. I look at

modern elements, like movies, too, because these elements shape how readers think of the story.

For example, we've all been influenced by the Disney versions of the fairytales. In the original "Snow White" the prince doesn't waken Snow White with a kiss: that was an element Disney added. But I put the kiss in my book, because that's become an important expected element in the tale. And I put a symbolic dragon in my "Sleeping Beauty" as a nod to the dragon-villain in Disney's film. I give myself more liberty with plotlines so long as there are enough elements of the original fairytale so that the stories still "feel" like the old fairytales.

Like I said, complicated!

Questions about future books...

Q: Aren't you going to write another book about Blanche and Bear and/or Rose and Fish? I would really really love another book about those four!

I promise, if I have an idea for another book about the Famous Four, I promise to write it. Right now, I just don't have any good ideas. So if you want another book, you'll have to ask the Holy Spirit to send me a good idea. Until then, I'm going to be working on some other books. I dearly loved writing the "Snow White and Rose Red Trilogy," and I'll be content if those are the only three books I write about them. But if I have an idea that's truly a good one, I promise I'll do my best to write one.

Q: Are Bear/Blanche, Rose/Fish, Rachael/Paul's kids going to have any books??? That would be cool if their kids were all friends.....

A: Once for fun, I began writing a story where the main character was like a younger cousin (or some kind of relative) of Bear and Fish from the UK and he comes to work at Bear's stone-cutting school. Bear and Blanche have a few children by then and Fish and Rose have two children and are pregnant with a third. There's some interesting dynamics among them in the first two or three chapters and then this mysterious woman shows up one night in desperate need of help and Fish and the young cousin end-up going on an adventure to Europe to help her, but Fish isn't very pleased at first to have the cousin along. That's about as far as it's gotten. I haven't looked at the story for a while, but I enjoyed the beginning. Who knows if I'll ever finish it?

Q: Are you going to write a Fairy Tale Novel based on Cinderella?

A: Probably not. Two reasons: a) so many writers have done it already, and some versions (such as the movie *Ever After*) are quite good. And b) I don't really feel I have anything new to say about it. I just don't feel compelled to rewrite every single fairy tale.

Q: What about Beauty and the Beast? I love that fairy tale!

A: That's another one I'm going to have to nix, but for another reason: one of my writing students wrote a version of that story in one of my classes, and I am so enchanted with her version of it that I'm waiting for her to grow up and publish it. I've told her so, and that I won't be doing that particular tale. It's a good one!

Q: How about "The Little Mermaid?"

A: Unlike the other tales, "The Little Mermaid" actually has a known author: Hans Christian Andersen. I'm fascinated by fairy tales because to me, they represent so many unknown authors who for whatever reason, chose to preserve a particular story. My process of writing involves trying to discover what motivated those storytellers of different cultures and times to retell this story. I just don't feel the same way about a story written by one author who had a very clear idea of the story he wanted to tell. I'm not sure it needs retelling. After all, it is a fairly modern story. (It was written in the 1800s.)

Q: So what fairy tales ARE you going to do?

A: Currently, I have planned a version of "Rumplestilskin" which would be "the fourth book in the Trilogy." I'm calling it "Goldspinner," and it features Fish in the role of the servant who unearths Rumplestilskin. This adventure is obliquely referred to in the beginning of *Waking Rose*, and the "foreign girl" Rose thinks Fish loves in the heroine. I can say that parts of this book are written, and it looks to be a nicely scary tale! It is a bit more dark, as it takes place between *Black as Night* and *Waking Rose*, during a time when Fish was feeling isolated and struggling with his inner demons.

I also have plans for two more Paul-and-Rachel possible tales (as I mention in the *Midnight Dancers* Q&A), and I've toyed for a long time with doing *The Wild Swans*. This last book would deal with completely new characters and situation, much as *Rapunzel Let Down* does.

Q: Do you have any plans to do books with Leroy or Donna as characters?

A: Leroy has a huge fan base! But no, I don't. That could all change if I get a good idea.

Q: So when will we see this new Fish book based on Rumplestilskin, Goldspinner?

A: It's still in the works, but I haven't been able to work on it much, and the book on Rapunzel is already mostly finished. So we're going with *Rapunzel Let Down* first. In order to do *Goldspinner*, I need to do some research, and since I haven't done it methodically, I haven't found out the answers I need to find. Yet. At some point I may get more serious about research and finish it, but that time hasn't come yet. Plus, believe it or not, I have yet another series I want to find time to write. The first book in that series needs to be written soon. So, it may be a few years before another Fairy Tale Novel comes out after *Rapunzel Let Down*.

Q: Why is all this taking so long?

A: Actually, none of you have asked me this directly: you are much too polite to do so! But I guess there is an answer why there's been a delay in the release of the next Fairy Tale Novel. You know my editorial duties have taken up more of my time these past few years. I have loved being the editor of the *John Paul 2 High* series and I've enjoyed co-writing *Catholic Philosopher Chick* and the first book of the still-in-process *Ruah Chronicles* (see the Chesterton Press Facebook page for details). I also love my work editing for Manga Hero. But time spent editing is time not spent writing. I love to edit and I need to edit: it's a passion, plus it's a job that pays bills.

The other big reason I am slowing down on my writing is that my family is larger. I no longer only have little kids crawling over my computer keyboard: I have (three!) teens of my own who will come

up to me and say, "Mom! I need to talk to you about my life RIGHT NOW." I love them tons and they won't be under my roof forever, so I need to spend time with them. Also means less time to spend writing. Right now.

But what is really good news for you is that these teens love my books and want me to write more. So don't worry: I won't be giving up writing Fairy Tale Novels. It just might take me longer.

About where to get the Books...

Q: Why is it so hard to find your books at the library? I really really love your books and want to read more of them.

A: Libraries can and do stock the Fairy Tale Novels, and we hope more of them will carry them. What I truly need is for readers like yourself to ask your library to carry them. To get the book in your library, just go and request the title. My books are available through the database all libraries have access to (Ingrams). Some libraries have limited budgets and will only get the books if a certain number of people want them. I do know people who have coordinated with their friends to all ask their library and have succeeded in getting them.

We do know that the libraries that carry our books find they are very popular, but since we don't have fleets of salespeople or booths at the ALA convention (yet) we rely on our readers to let librarians know about the books. Thanks in advance for any help you can give us!

Q: And while I'm on this subject...how can I get my local bookstore to stock your books?

A: I'm glad you asked! With libraries and bookstores, all you really have to do is ask them to order it for you from Ingrams. They'll either say "Yes," "No," or "Maybe." If they know at least a handful of local people will buy or borrow the books if they carry them, they will tend to say, "Yes." Oh, and if you have an actual hard copy of the book to show them, it might influence them positively: it shows the books look nice and are fairly good quality.

Questions about writing and publishing ...

Q: Do you have any advice about writing and getting published? I would love to be a published author someday. What advice would you offer to young writers?

A: Be persistent! Try not to get discouraged: it is a very discouraging business to be in: you have to be prepared to be disappointed again...and again...and again...! But persistence can pay off in every area: in writing (starting a draft all over again, starting a new book when one has proved hopeless) and especially in publishing (finding a publisher, finding an agent, marketing...).

About getting published: try to be as good as you possibly can be, but recognize that part of the process depends on luck (or God). I only got published because I got a break. I got lucky: someone noticed me, and when they did, my story was good enough to deserve the notice. There is definitely an element of chance in the whole process. It might not work for you. But if it does work for you, hopefully you will

always recognize that you were lucky enough to get a break. It should keep you humble, and it should make you want to help others out as well.

And suppose you learn the writing process, you try to write, you try to publish and you fail...is it all for nothing? I wouldn't say that! If we're going to have a Christian revival of the arts, we need people at every level of the writing industry: we need Christian editors, Christian agents, Christian salespeople – and all those people have to understand the writing process and understand good storytelling. You might marry a writer: my husband did! you might have a child who becomes a writer. God can use anything. It's definitely something worth trying. Just commit your talent to Him and ask Him to use it as He wants. You might be surprised at what He will do.

Q: When writing the first draft of a novel, do you think it is better to focus on telling the story, or the more technical aspects, such as grammar, etc?

A: Focus on telling the story, absolutely. Grammar and all that is for later drafts.

Q: Is there any chance you could read my manuscript of this story I'm writing and tell me if it's any good?

A: I used to be able to do this for young writers, but sadly I have to say no. I just find I have no time, even to review manuscripts for close friends. I'm sorry.

Q: I hear you teach fiction-writing classes. How can I attend one?

A: Two ways: [join my email list](#) and find out if I'm teaching a week-long seminar or shorter course in your area.

B: I hope to have my writing course available on video sometime soon. Again, [join my email list](#) or contact me for more information about when it comes out.

Q: How do you get permission to use a song?

When you get around to publishing the book, the publisher usually is the one who asks for permissions (if they don't want to take the trouble, they might just ask you to drop the song unless they see it's really necessary). It's a matter of contacting the publisher of the song and buying a print license. It's trouble, but not impossible trouble, and usually it's not too expensive to get the rights.

Don't worry about it though until you have the entire book written, in final draft form, and you're sending it to a publisher. At that point, it will help them if you know the author and publisher of the song in question so their staff can investigate the cost.

Q: I was wondering, can you give me any advice on making good villains? As in scary and the kind that just make you NEVER want to run into someone like that. I need some help with that.

A: I hope you can take one of my writing classes sometime, because I do talk about that.

Basically there are three ways to make villains and I have done all three:

- (1) base them on people you have met or heard about or read about,
- (2) Take a trait in yourself or someone you know and multiply it exponentially until you have a villain,
or
- (3) honestly assess yourself and see if you could find a villain in yourself. This requires a certain

degree of maturity and balance, but you basically really probe yourself and say, "If I were in this villain's shoes, what would *I* do, if not for the grace of God?"

This last is, I think, the most compelling way to write a villain: it was recommended to me by G.K. Chesterton, who apparently used it himself to create his many villains and murderers. "No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be...till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal and kept him safe and sane under his own hat."

Updated 2014 : Even MORE questions about writing

The following interview appeared in [Tale Magazine December 2013](#) and is reprinted with permission. Check out the entire issue [here](#).

1). You state in the biography on your website that you have been working to become a writer for as long as you can remember: What do you consider to be your "big break", either in your writing or in your quest to become published, that confirmed for you that, yes, you WERE a writer?

My "big break" was definitely getting published by Bethlehem Books in 1997. Looking back, I really almost can't believe it happened! I remember what a hard time I had even explaining my manuscript, including the concept of a fairy tale retold in modern times to most people. That someone liked it enough to publish it still amazes me. Furthermore, Bethlehem Books wasn't doing any new books, let alone accepting outside submissions when they read my manuscript in 1994-95. And the only reason they read it was because they liked an article I had written for a little magazine about really good books for kids and thought I might share their vision.

Which to me underscores that publishing really is about relationships and shared visions – and that can be so frustrating to so many authors, since most of the footwork is done through the mail and email, and for most of it, you never get to talk to a real person! (Publishers WILL NOT accept phone calls or visits from submitting authors – don't even try!) Which is why I encourage new writers to get out and network face-to-face by attending conferences and meet-and-greets with agents and publishers and other writers. It can be encouraging, and to give you a window into what sort of people work in publishing. Even though your "break" might come eventually just through someone reading your manuscript, it helps to be able to imagine, somewhat, the people who are considering your work, even if you really have to imagine them because you've never met them!

2). You say in one of your interviews that the best advice you can give to young aspiring authors is to be persistent, because this is a job that reacquires lots of disappointment, and not to be discouraged by failure, because God has a plan for everything (very true, by the way!). But can you offer us some more specific advice, particularly on the writing itself? What do you suggest that young authors should be doing to improve their writing, before they even think about being published?

Wow, that is a big question! But let me highlight one thing that seems boring and obvious--but it's not. It's important to be technically good at writing, mastering things such as spelling and grammar rules and acquiring as large a vocabulary as possible.

Think of vocabulary as tools at your disposal. You want to master spelling and grammar rules because if you are able to spell things correctly and put together grammatically-correct sentences quickly and naturally, you won't have to spend time thinking about them, and that means more brain cells available to devote to creating your story. It will save you hours and hours of time later on, and perhaps money too, because you shouldn't dare to submit anything for publication with possible typos in it, and, after a while you will run out of friends and relatives willing to correct your errors, and will have to pay someone else to do it for you.

So, as much as possible, master grammar and spelling. You want it to be effortless. I say this only because one telltale sign of the novice or amateur writer is poor spelling and grammar: it really does make a huge difference in how potential buyers (editors and agents) perceive your story. When I worked as an acquisitions editor for Sophia Institute Press, the number of times I took a manuscript which was brilliant but which had typos in it was exactly zero. I suspect that finding typos is a good excuse for most manuscript readers to say, "Next!" and toss the submission onto the trash pile. Presentation counts!

Beyond that, make a lot of friends with a wide variety of people and learn to understand them. Fiction is the study of human nature and in order to do it well, you must know (and love!) many, many people. (Or a few people very deeply—take your pick!) Listen to people. Try to understand how people who are different from you think. Don't just study people from the outside. Learn about people from the inside—through sympathy, understanding, and love. This will help you better understand the human condition and help you to begin to grasp the struggles that most people have. Suffering is an important part of this, though not a pleasant part. Understanding the suffering that other people carry is sometimes easier than understanding your own suffering, and it can help you deal with your own (even just by giving you perspective!).

It will also help you avoid clichés in plots such as, "Happy Christian loses faith in God when a beloved spouse/child dies." Although that's a conventional trope in so much modern fiction, I haven't found that to be true in my life or in the lives of others. Write from reality, not from fictional perceptions of reality.

3). Can you give us a brief description of your writing process? When you get a raw idea, do you have a method for developing it and transcribing it into a story?

I do, and it's a method I outline in my writing course (which hopefully will be on sale in 2014!). It's a rather complex process that is tricky to summarize. Let me just recommend the book that I learned from, [The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri](#), and a companion volume by my friend Dr. Stan Williams, *The Moral Premise*. Egri's method is the one I use, though I have put my own spin on it. Every writer develops their own way of working a story out, and I'm no exception, but Egri's method helped me understand the deeper level of storytelling. If my stories seem deep, it's partly because of his method, which has the writer laying a metaphysical foundation before getting into the mechanics of the plot. It's a very organic process. But here's the summary, inspired by Egri, refined by me.

Regina's 5 point plot method

1. Figure out what the story is really about (premise)

2. Discover the character who will carry out the premise (protagonist)

3. What is the worst possible thing that can happen to the character as defined by the parameters of your plot? (plot and climax)

**4. Who is the person who will push your protagonist towards that Worst Possible Thing?
(villain/antagonist)**

5. Remember your contract with the audience. (What the specific and targeted audience you are trying to reach expects from the genre)

For more, read [Lajos Egri](#). And buy my writing class. (Write to me at regina@reginadoman.com for details).

4). What do you consider to be the biggest pitfall that young writers often tumble into (the temptation to be trite, didactic, cliché, etc.) and how should they work to avoid it?

I think it varies from writer to writer! I am not sure what the biggest problem is in terms of ultimate importance. But one problem which I know is endemic to young writers who watch movies and television more than they read books is that they never really master the concept of viewpoint. And that can make for sloppy and confusing first novels. As an editor, I believe I have spent more time trying to explain and correct viewpoint problems in manuscripts than anything else. It's interesting that you said "young" writers, because in my experience, older writers have other problems, but not this particular one, which leads me to suspect it's a problem that comes from technology.

So what is viewpoint? Viewpoint is something found mainly in novels (television and movie scripts do have viewpoint, but it's much more subtle). Typically, most YA novels are in the 1st or 3rd person limited, which means that we have access to only one person's thoughts and we see the story through their eyes. This person is usually the main character or the protagonist (But not always! Sherlock never gets a viewpoint in the Sherlock Holmes stories: Watson is both viewpoint character and narrator. The Great Gatsby and Wuthering Heights are told in a similar manner. But these stories all come from an era where that way of telling stories was more accepted.)

So, typically, the viewpoint character in a YA novel is also the main character. Sometimes the viewpoint will change to another character's between chapters or between section breaks. Occasionally you will have a more omniscient viewpoint (where "God" is telling the story and can see into everyone's head), but these tend to be stories about a group of people who are all important to the plot and who sometimes function as a single character (I'm thinking of *The Westing Game* by the masterful Ellen Raskin, where each of the sixteen heirs of Sam Westing get a viewpoint. But each of these characters is important, and figuring out the "real" main character is part of the mystery in the book).

But usually, a YA novel will have one or two viewpoints, maybe as many as four (a story about a small group of friends, for instance). Adult novels typically have larger casts of characters and hence more viewpoints.

So, the problem for young writers? Too many of them jump from one set of eyes to another set of eyes throughout their novel, without any rhyme or reason, so that the reader has a hard time figuring out who the main character is and what the story is actually about. As I said, I suspect this is because most young writers spend more time watching movies than reading books, and so they don't pick up the concept so easily. As far as I know, schools rarely teach viewpoint in any depth, so it's a concept that I suspect writers intuit rather than learn through reading many, many stories. If you aren't reading a lot, you might just miss the concept.

But it's a crucial one. Typically, the reader will bond the most with the viewpoint character, because the

reader is sharing in so many of their thoughts and feelings. But if the viewpoint keeps changing, the reader can't bond. Too many young writers seem to think that variety is more important than depth, and so they swap viewpoints so that the reader won't get bored. I think that's a mistake.

See, some viewpoints are just not very interesting. How many of us really care about the feelings and problems of, say, a prison guard who's only in half of one chapter? But many young writers will make us spend time with uninteresting minor characters by giving them viewpoints, when what the reader really wants is to get further into the head of the hero, or the love interest, or the person trying to escape from prison. Being stuck in a boring viewpoint can be frustrating to readers, and as I said, I don't think many young writers have a good instinct for what their readers want.

One reason I know that young writers often switch viewpoints is because they simply can't figure out how to get across plot information that the main viewpoint character doesn't know. For instance, because the viewpoint heroine becomes unconscious after a fight and a capture, the author decides that to write a scene from the viewpoint of the (boring) prison guard to let the reader know what's going on. But that's kind of an easy out. It also prevents a good sense of mystery from building up. Readers like to figure things out, and a certain amount of mystery builds suspense. Too many viewpoints can literally give the reader too much information, and the plot becomes flat and predictable. So I always encourage writers to pick the most interesting and likable character, make him or her the viewpoint character, and stick with them! As for the problems that will always arise regarding giving the readers information that the viewpoint character can't know, figure them out! The readers might not need to know as much as you think they need to know. Maybe you can alter your plot or introduce another character to get that information across.

Maybe the viewpoint character can regain consciousness in time to hear part of what the prison guards are saying. Maybe she can fashion a tool from something she finds in her cell, snag a security camera, break into the security system with some clever hidden gizmo she still has in her pocket, and replay the film of what happened when she was unconscious!

The possibilities of how to get reader access to hidden information are endless, and solving those problems can be among the most fun and rewarding parts of writing your story. I always encourage young writers to do this instead of switching viewpoints.

5). Do you have any advice for developing plots (and plot twists) ?

Ah, I could spend a lot of time on this, since plot is my favorite. Well, plot must come out of character (see **Lajos Egri** again) and character comes from the premise of your story. (I'll let Egri tell you more: get his book! It's cheap!). According to Aristotle, plot comes from what is necessary and what follows. You have to see all the possibilities in your story and account for them, at least in your own head. If a character could die and doesn't, there should be a reason why. If he should have gotten sued or imprisoned and doesn't, you as the author should know why. Sometimes we miss the obvious things inherent in a situation. That's where feedback from your family and friends can be helpful. You can ask them things like, "Did the story turn out as you expected? Why or why not? If not, what did you think was going to happen? What did you expect?"

For me, the best twists are created, not when the author has something really unexpected happen, but when the author deliberately and carefully hides a crucial component of the plot, and then suddenly reveals it and brings it into play when the reader isn't expecting it. Hiding information can change the reader's perception of everything. For instance, in my second book, *Black as Night*, the entire plot

turns on my hiding the actual relationship between two of the main characters, which makes everything confusing and mysterious until it's revealed.

Of course, sometimes you can have a lot of fun by having unexpected things occur, and most of the time when I've gone out on a limb and tried writing a twist that seemed really, really bizarre, it worked out. For instance, the moment when the heroine has a sudden prophetic experience in our comic novel, *Catholic Philosopher Chick*, which I wrote with Rebecca Bratten Weiss, leads to a hilarious Thomistic dialogue, and no one has ever complained about it being unrealistic, although it totally could be. Another plot twist that I helped engineer with my fellow writers was when the first All Saint's Day party at John Paul 2 High turns into an evangelistic outing to the public high school dance in *Catholic Reluctantly (John Paul 2 High Book 1)*. It turned out to be one of the strongest scenes in the novel.

But generally, the best plot twists come from hiding something that's been there all the time, as opposed to inserting something afterwards.

6). *How do you balance writing with your every-day life?*

Um, it's hard. It requires a lot of discipline, and it's usually sacrificial. For instance, I am not sewing a new dress right now because I am supposedly working on my new novel (although technically I am currently distracting myself from the novel by answering these questions!). I always tell young writers: you will not write during summer vacation or over Christmas break. You will not write during a three-day weekend or when you have two weeks off. If you are not writing now, in the midst of your hectic, everyday schedule, when you have projects due and household chores, and a long to-do list, you will never be a writer. So when do you write? When most normal people relax in front of the TV, or check Facebook, or spend time hanging out with their friends, or shopping at the mall. In other words, you have to sacrifice your leisure time to writing, because you don't want to be sacrificing your family time, your prayer time, or your duties.

The one exception to this is when you are a full-time student in college. Then you usually have so much other writing to do that I can understand if you don't write fiction in your spare time. When I was a college student, I couldn't! But I did jot down ideas and work on scraps on things from time to time, and I did write over the summers and on breaks. After college, I recommend that young writers get back into the habit of writing as soon as they possibly can. It's got to be part of your daily, weekly life if it's going to happen at all.

7). *You stated in a previous interview that most of your inspiration comes from the books, stories, and quotations that you have read. Which book (or story, or quotation) do you consider to have had the biggest impact on you and on your writing?*

Dietrich von Hildebrand's paraphrased quote which I use in my talks: "When you sever the connection between goodness and beauty, goodness is in danger of becoming abstract and merely moral, and evil will become fascinating." That quote, whose source I cannot find, changed my life when I read it back in 1993. It changed the way I saw good and evil, and it underscored for me the importance of beauty as the incarnation of goodness, as the thing that makes goodness attractive and enables the average person to love and desire goodness. It has everything to do with my art, and with why I'm a writer, and why I continue to do what I do.

Still have a question of your own for Regina or about the books? Email regina@reginadoman.com. But first check the Q&A for the other books.