



Keys author Leah Benner pens second 'tween book

Writer progresses from college poetry to travel book to fiction

Leah Benner says writing is fun and rewarding. Her new book, "A Place Inside my Head," was her first book in her Kate Brown Journal series and "The Secrets They Hold," the second in the series will be published shortly by Key West publishing company Absolutely Amazing eBooks. Let Leah tell about her writing and books in her own words:



Leah Benner

By Michael Haskins

Q: Can you tell us a little about how the idea for your book came about?

A: I got an idea for the first line of the book and the rest spilled out of me over a two-week period. It was as if the book was inside of me waiting to come out. Unfortunately, the sequels have not been so easy.

Q: If you had to make an elevator pitch for your book, what would it be?

A: Twelve-year-old Kate Brown daydreams to avoid thinking about what she did. It's a secret that nobody knows about—not her parents and not Natalie, her best friend since the first grade. Once she stops daydreaming she must listen to the guilty voices inside her head. If the truth comes out, will her parents ever forgive her and can she forgive herself?

Q: You've written travel books, how does fiction compare?

A: Writing fiction is just plain fun. It is so rewarding to wind your story around an idea and figure out how to get from point A to B while remaining true to your characters and plot. I can be pondering an aspect of the plot for days, but while brushing my teeth or driving to work, the solution can suddenly pop into my head. It makes me want to do a happy dance and hurry up to write it down before I forget.

Q: Are you writing something new and can you give us that pitch for it?

A: It is inspirational to be surrounded by so many talented people and if I had never left Maryland, I would never have written "Diary of a Mad First Mate," and if I hadn't written that, I would not have joined a critique group, and if not in the group, I would not have written the 'tween novels. So, I think the answer is that if I stayed in Maryland, I would not be sitting here talking with you about my books.

Q: Many writers are packing rats when it comes to their product. Any chance your old poetry might meet some new poetry and find itself in a book?

A: I'm working on the third in the Kate Brown series. The process for this book is entirely different from the first and second. I'm writing scenes, not necessarily in order, and frankly it is too soon to tell exactly what it's about. I hope I figure it out soon.

Q: Will your fiction writing become a series or stand-alones, or are travel books in your future?

A: "A Place Inside my Head" is the first in a series called Kate Brown Journals. The second, "What Secrets They Hold," will be released soon on www.absolutelyamazingebooks.com, and I am working on a third. As far as travel books, I've only written one, "Diary of a Mad First Mate" which has just come out. It's the story of my misadventures as a first time cruiser in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos. Unless I am fortunate enough to travel again, there is little chance we'll see another travel book.

Q: You lived on a boat with your husband and have reported, in your words, misadventures. It sounds like good background for a novel. Is it?

A: So far, it served as a setting for "What Secrets They Hold," but who knows what will come in the future. I do believe in writing what you know and I like the idea of a bedraggled cruiser island hopping to solve a mystery—running aground, bumping into docks, and getting caught in storms as she goes. Maybe every misadventure could lead her to an unexpected clue. Hmmmmm.

Q: How hard a road was it to get your fiction published and what advice do you have for struggling writers?

A: It already has. In "A Place Inside My Head," Kate struggles to write the poem that begins "There's a place inside my head." The original poem is one that I wrote several years ago. I adapted to it for 12-year-old Kate.

Q: In college you wrote poetry, then travel books and now fiction. Do they overlap in your fiction writing?

A: Yes. All three do. Writing poetry helps Kate emerge from a dream world and listen to the "blah blah blah" inside her head. "What Secrets They Hold," is set in the Bahamas. Some of the scenes are right out of my travel book and I was picturing the Bahamas I know as I wrote.

Q: How important is it to find a critique group? Is it something all writers should look into?

A: I would not have completed any of my books without my writing groups. I learned to be a better writer and editor and have been inspired to try writing in new genres.

Q: What should a novice writer look for in choosing a critique group?

A: You'll want a group with some experienced writers. Most important, the members should welcome critique of their work without getting defensive. It doesn't do you any good to go to group every week and pat each other on the backs. You have to get down and dirty. Sometimes the discussions are quite animated.