

1. When/how did you begin writing paranormal novels? And why paranormal? What does the genre, in particular, open up for the writer/reader?

I started writing novels in 2008, but my first pass was about as far afield from paranormal as one could get. Believe it or not, I was modeling the plot and setting for my first fiction attempt on Hardy's *Return of the Native*. I was struck by how he evidently hates his sexually selfish heroine, as do many readers. It occurred to me, several drafts/years into the process, that a destructive sex drive is part of the siren mythology. Perhaps modern readers would be more accepting of an over-sexed heroine if she was partly paranormal? When I published *Home Schooling: The Fire Night Ball* in 2012, I expect Hardy was spinning in his grave. Nonetheless, I have stuck by my hybrids, and the gifted, strongly sexed sirens in my novels are very human and endure tortuous human problems, particularly around the issue of reproduction. My next novel, *Birdwoman 2 (Quest for the Stone)*, is in the publisher's hands; it reaches into the fourth generation.

As I've honed my craft over the past eight years, I've become increasingly interested in the cosmology aspect. The idea that hybrids may live among us, that we may have been engineered by ancient aliens, is the closest that I personally come to having a religion. Perhaps a door to the universe is what this speculative brand of fiction opens for me, and hopefully for the reader.

2. Your scholarly field is nineteenth-century literature. Is there a connection between the works of the nineteenth-century and contemporary paranormal novels?

Well, those hypocritical, wildly over-sexed Victorians, both in reality and in novels, were very intrigued by the supernatural and the pseudo-scientific. When they weren't hiding syphilis with face patches or covering up the legs on the pianoforte, they were holding séances in the parlor.

3. There's a pleasurable sense of mash-up in *Birdwoman*: mythological creatures (sirens), extra-terrestrials, advice columns, blogs. Is there a kind of energy in this recombining?

There is, at least to me. To a tiny extent, the mish-mash is autobiographical. I have written columns of various sorts – sendups of campus politics for my college newspaper, theater reviews for a Key West magazine. For the most part, the variety in *Birdwoman* stems from the multi-dimensional talents of the main character, Destiny Dragoman. The word “dragoman” means a guide. Destiny has a compelling urge to give advice. As a gifted person with both intellect and compassion, she is on a mission to rescue/improve on humanity in whatever way she can.

4. Who are your favorite authors? Favorite paranormal authors?

Aside from Edgar Allen Poe, Mary Shelley, and Anne Rice, paranormal isn't a genre I normally read! I continue to stuff my Kindle with the classic Brits. Dickens, Thackeray, Austen, and Henry James are read repeatedly, also James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Muriel Spark. (She is the novelist I would most like to write like.) I'm not a huge fan of American writers, the big exceptions being Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Tennessee Williams. Also, oddly, I find myself soothed by Booth Tarkington and Louis Bromfield. Not literary greats, but tastes that were literally formed in childhood, like comfort food. My early years were spent looking through books in a massive, Carnegie funded library in my small hometown of Ashtabula, Ohio, 90 miles from

Case. I took home so many classics and adult novels— often ten at a time -- the sour old librarian began to give me the evil eye. I won her over by helping her shelve the children's books.

5. Is there something about your time at Case that made this book possible?

Everything, actually.

As a graduate student specializing in Victorian Literature, I became fascinated with an obscure novelist, George Meredith. His obsession with his runaway wife led him to write psychological novels to figure out why she did it. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on Meredith's triadic symbolism, how "blood, brain, and spirit" need to be harmonized in human relationships. The artifice of his style contrasted dramatically with his personal anguish. His main theme was the drama of conflicted modern love, and that is my focus in my fictional writing.

But the influence of Case on my life's work goes much deeper than a dissertation topic.

I married early (I was Anne Rowley then) and had my first child at age 21 in Lake County, but that didn't stop me from pursuing my Masters and Ph. D. at Case. I took my cues from literary people who were both teachers and writers. In the early seventies, there was Bob Wallace, the poet, running his own printing press in the basement of Clark Hall. Lou Giannetti wrote a newspaper column. As for me, I was working on my graduate studies as an English Department teaching fellow, meanwhile helping my husband's family publish the Painesville *Telegraph*.

In 1973, at age 26, I received my doctorate from the English Department. The rapidity with which I had advanced happened to coincide with a lucky set of circumstances. That summer, my friend and mentor, Dr. Michael Sundell, took a position at George Mason University. His departure left Dr. Florence Marsh, interim chair, casting about for someone who could handle Victorian Lit and supervise the teaching fellows who did the heavy lifting with Freshman English. As I fit that prospectus, I came back as a new Assistant Professor alongside Gary Stonum, who eventually became department chair. We both felt the specialness of our positions. My basement office was next door to Robert Ornstein's, the Shakespearean scholar.

As Director of Freshman English, I invented and administered a new curriculum. Each instructor offered a seminar-like course. Some (like mine) were writing workshops; others offered literature, from science fiction to poetry, as a base for student writing. Over the ten years I was at Case, the duality of my academic responsibilities and creative interests became the main feature of my career. It led to four decades of work involving deanships, association executive posts, public relations jobs, and online teaching, in homes from the Bay Area of California and the Pacific Northwest to Key West, Florida. And always, on the side, was my writing.

It has been a wild ride, like my novels are. And I owe it all to Case.