

## ***Anything Boys Can Do* – Book Club Information**

Angie enjoys participating in book clubs and welcomes all invitations. For those of you who are too far away to have Angie attend your book club, here are the most commonly asked questions.

### **1. Where do you get your ideas?**

Writing might be easier (though less interesting) if there were one set answer to this question. In *Anything Boys Can Do*, the unifying theme is dysfunctional relationships. The stories focus on the nasty things people do to each other in the name of love or sex or a reasonable facsimile of either. This topic took up a lot of my emotional energy during my late twenties and early thirties when I was writing these stories. In that way, one might say that a writer's ideas come from his or her obsessions. In a more specific sense, though, the idea for each story comes from a different source or inspiration. "Flannel Nightmares" came from a single sentence. I woke from a deep sleep hanging onto one line from a dream—"marriage is a flannel nightmare holding out its hand." "Bruised Apples," on the other hand, began with a metaphor—the fragility of apples and the care one must take with them standing for a similar quality in humans. "Anything Boys Can Do" began as a non-fiction piece about women's wrestling. That piece was accepted at one stage by *Impact Magazine* in Calgary, but I pulled it when I realized it was overly simplistic and potentially offensive. I then reworked it into fiction. The short story version is, I hope, more multilayered. "Five Ways to Make a Barren Woman Cry" originated with my editor's suggestion that I try something more stylistically experimental. "Shady Valley" began with a description of the prairie landscape. So really, ideas are everywhere. The most important thing is to write daily so you can grab hold of those ideas before they evaporate.

### **2. Which is your favourite story from *Anything Boys Can Do*?**

I suspect this question is a little like "which of your teenage children is your favourite?" – impossible to answer! I'm attached to each story while also being all too aware of the individual faults of every one. "East/West" is the first story I ever published (in *Other Voices* magazine) and in that way it'll always have a special spot in my heart. I'm quite proud of the landscape descriptions in "Shady Valley" because I know my strength is generally in dialogue, not description. When I'm reading in public, I often read the final passage from "Flannel Nightmares" where Joyce and Murray stand in the rain outside of the wedding ceremony. This scene is a microcosm of the collection as a whole in its focus on the sometimes-gaping distance between marriage as an ideal and marriage as it is actually lived. I feel most confident about "Anything Boys Can Do" in its entirety – but that probably has to do more with extrinsic reinforcement than intrinsic knowledge. Other writers most often tell me that "Anything Boys Can Do" is the best of the collection. Lynn Coady once told me that it is "a perfect short story" – I was so flattered that I was struck dumb and unable to ask her what she meant. I also had a great experience with "No Strings Attached" when it was first published in *Grain Magazine* and I had the opportunity to work with David Carpenter – a first class editor who pulled out the true essence of the story. So, back to the question, what's my favourite story? I might pick any one of the twelve depending on my mood and the day you ask. I'm more interested to ask readers what *their* favourite story is and why. Again, I get a surprisingly wide range of responses.

### **3. Who are your influences?**

I'm fortunate to have had the opportunity to take workshops and mentorship programs with some of the country's best writers – Elisabeth Harvor, Bonnie Burnard, and Lynn Coady. One can also learn a lot from a good editor and in this way I'm lucky to have been influenced by Joanne Gerber, David Carpenter, and Suzette Mayr. They all have great books and are well worth looking up at your local bookstore.

#### **4. Is your work autobiographical?**

No. I think anyone who has published fiction knows that even if a story has some autobiographical material in a first draft, the end product has been so thoroughly revised that next to nothing of that first draft remains. Of course, writers write about what they know and what fascinates them, but that's where the autobiographical influence ends. Probably one of the most annoying things as a writer is having readers make assumptions about one's life based on one's work. I suspect this problem will be more acute with the publication of my novel, since I chose to focus on two sports that have played a large role in my life – swimming and wrestling. I actually considered using other sports to avoid people making this connection, but it didn't make sense to go and thoroughly research two new sports when I already know two so well. When I'm speaking about my short story collection, I often say, "If my life were really like this, I would have no time to write. I'd be too busy misbehaving!" It's true. A writer's life does not make for very interesting fiction – there's a lot of sitting in pyjamas and cursing the blank computer screen.

#### **5. Do you prefer writing short stories or novels? Is one easier than the other?**

A common misconception is that short stories are easier to write than novels (and that poetry is easier yet). In this view, one begins with poetry, graduates to short stories, and eventually moves on to novels. Wrong. In my mind, poetry (*good* poetry) is the most difficult thing to write. I began with short stories not because they're easier than novels, but simply because as a novice writer I could commit to finishing a twenty page project more readily than a two hundred page project. Because I'm goal oriented, right from that first story, my plan was to put together a collection, so I kept pumping out stories until I had ten or so. During that time, I was attending workshops and working with mentors to learn the craft. Being able to complete a piece and receive feedback helped me keep the momentum required to get through a book-length project. Such momentum is key during those first years that are so filled with rejection (and they always are). I had my idea for *The Bone Cage* (my novel) before finishing a collection worth of short stories, but made myself finish one book before beginning the next. In some ways, I think my style is better suited to novels, but that's not for me to say. I like to leave commenting upon the contents (and success) of my books to others. My current project, though, is also a novel.