

Q&A with DONITA K. PAUL

How old are you?

Old enough to be a Grandma.

What city and state do you live in?

Colorado Springs, Colorado

What is your passion as a writer?

To make readers think and choose good over evil.

When did you first decide that you wanted to be a author?

I've written since I was 13, but didn't get published in book form until I was 49.

What was your favorite subject in school?

English Literature

What's your favorite sport?

Knitting, that's about as athletic as I get.

What's your favorite color?

Usually yellow, but sometimes red. I don't get along with green. In my opinion, green belongs on trees and grass.

What's your favorite animal?

Domesticated--dog, hands down. Or maybe, paws down. Wild--penguins, dolphins, rabbits, and hedgehogs.

Where did you get the idea for these books? I know it is kind of based on God, but where did you get the idea of dragons and Doneels and all of the other creatures in these books?

I can't really say where I get the ideas. I suspect God helps me a lot. I try to write a good, interesting story, and leave Him to put in the extra important stuff.

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

Persevere. Read. Deliberately hone your skills. Read. Go to writing conferences. Read. Don't try to write what you think the market is buying. Read. Write the story of your heart. (Yes, dragons represent the story of my heart.)

What are a few of your favorite books (not written by you)?

Robert Elmer has written two related romances, *The Duet* and *The Recital*. Those well-crafted tales touched me deeply since they are about older "lovers." Max Lucado is my favorite non-fiction



writer. The secular writer I admire most for her characterization and plotting is Patricia Veryan. I love Linda Windsor (Christian Romantic Comedy) for the way she loves God.

Can you give us a view into a typical day of your writing life?

Chaos, pure chaos. Lots of good intentions; lots of interruptions. Moments of sheer delight while words pour through my fingertips. Gnashing of teeth, pulling of hair, tears of frustration. All in all, it's a pretty humdrum way to make a living.

Your fantasies point out Christian concepts. How do you weave those into the storyline?

I don't try. I've been a Christian a long time, and I think like a Christian. I have by no means perfected my Christian walk, but my view of life is pervaded by the faith I have in God. So it comes out in my writing. If I fell into a conversation with a man who is a football fanatic, you would soon hear his passion for football in the way he talks. He would use phrases like "touchdown," "stuck on the bench," and "passing the ball" as descriptors. A hunting enthusiast would have a different underlying reference point.

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

A blank page combined with a headache is the least favorite part of writing. Meeting readers is my favorite.

Tell us some tidbits about Donita, the person. What is your favorite color, food, and animal and why?

I am basically a grandma. It is my favorite role in life. I know if Grandma was a paid profession, I would be making big bucks, because I really put my heart into it. My favorite color is yellow. My favorite dinner is steak, rare, no side potato except on my birthday and then loaded with butter, sour cream, bacon bits, chives, and one black olive. My favorite animal is dog. There is an old saying that God made dogs in order to illustrate what absolute adoration is. And to show that discipline must be learned. My dogs through the years have demonstrated many spiritual lessons I've needed to understand.

What ideas are brimming for future books? Do you plan to continue to write fantasy?

The Chronicles of Chiril explores Amara in a different time period. There is also a back story that is revealed in *DragonKnight* of how dragons and another race got to the land of Amara. And there are folk tales to uncover.

Yes, I plan to continue to write fantasy, but it is the harder of the two genres I've tried. I think I might dabble in romance once and awhile to give myself a break. You know, instead of having toast for breakfast every day, occasionally having oatmeal.

Your wizards have taken a more and more prominent role in the series. Have you experienced any "wizard backlash" from people who think wizards don't belong in Christian books, and how do you explain your decision to incorporate magic into your stories?



Yikes! I hate this question. And yes, I have experienced wizard backlash. But I love this term you have used, and it is the first time I have heard it. It makes me chuckle, and humor is a good leveler, helping restore perspective.

First, I don't think of my books as delving into the magical arts. The word "wizard" comes from "wizened," and in its original use, way back in the days when people spoke Anglo-Saxon, it was a respectful term for an older person who had great knowledge gained by experience and study. My wizards command the elements of nature that God has created. They do without equipment what a scientist would do with lasers and electromagnetic generators, or even what a housewife might do with a washing machine or a microwave. The reason they are wizards is that they understand, down to the molecular structure, God's creation.

Secondly, this is fiction, and I don't expect people to take my fiction literally. Talking bears, such as Paddington and Pooh, don't bring down scathing rebukes of magic. If a parent is concerned about the child's perception of what is real and what is not, then that parent ought to seize the opportunity to teach. Parents, read books with your child and discuss the points on which your child needs clarification.

What would you say to a reader who doesn't typically read fantasy in order to hook him or her into picking up the Dragon Keeper books?

Interest is high now in fantasy as literature. Some people find Tolkien too literary, and some people find the Christianity in the Narnia books by Lewis to be too blatant. The DragonKeeper Chronicles offer a great tale of adventure with the time-honored battle between good and evil playing out in a way that gives adults meat to chew on and children sips of nourishing milk.

What kind of degrees do you hold?

BS in elementary education with an emphasis on early childhood. Some graduate work in education, several certificates for things like teaching Bible and counseling.

What is the most exciting thing to occur in your career as an author?

I would have to say the letters from readers who say that my stories have positively affected their life.

In becoming an author, what was your most helpful experience?

I belong to several critique groups. Two are face-to-face groups that meet weekly. The other is an online group. Learning with these other writers, actively analyzing what is working in our manuscripts, and seeking solution to problems of character development as well as plotting has been invaluable.

How many times did you submit your manuscript before it was published?

I am actually the exception to the rule. My first Christian romance was accepted by the first publisher I sent it to, and *DragonSpell* was accepted by the first publisher my agent took it to. I've had other manuscripts in between that have bounced around the industry, and a few have never found a home.

What was the process you went through to develop the story of *DragonSpell*?

My mother, actually, urged me to try something new. I had three novels and four novellas published in the Christian Romance genre. So I took a chapter of fantasy to my crit group. They gave me a thumbs-down and shook their heads woefully. I rewrote that chapter and brought it back the next week. They still didn't like it. The third try was a winner, and that was the beginning of *The Dragon Keeper Chronicles*. *DragonSpell* was easy to write. Each subsequent novel in the series was harder. I hope they have also gotten better.

Who influenced you the most as a writer and how did they influence you?

Definitely anyone who read to me as I grew up. Anyone who told me about a specific book or author or gave me a good book to read. And any author who wrote something that moved me.

How exactly did you go about getting published, and how long did it take for an editor to accept you?

I got published by polishing, polishing, polishing the manuscript I worked on. I read every book I could find on the craft of writing. I went to conferences and learned more techniques and honed my skill. When I felt my ms. was ready, I submitted it to the publishing house I thought would most likely take it. Eighteen months later, the editor contacted me and sent me a contract for the book. It was published a few days before the two year mark after I had first sent it out.

What are some of the influences on your writing?

I like humor and truth. I think some truth is too hard to take with out an element of humor. I think all "truth" should be given the test of whether it lines up with Scripture. I think all humor should be pleasing to God. If He wouldn't laugh at my joke, I'm not going to tell it. Writers who have influenced me are Max Lucado (a master storyteller), CS Lewis (not afraid to include his beliefs in his writing of fiction), and Patricia Veryan (a secular author who has characterization/plotting down pat.)

Who were some of the important people in your life?

Believe it or not, my mother. She was the one who told me to write a book, and later, she told me to try something different. She always loved words as in crossword puzzles and unusual words that she used everyday in ordinary conversations. And when we moved, which was often, she acquired a library card as soon as she got a new driver's license.

What are some of your awards or accomplishments?

- Heartsong's *To See His Way* won second place in the 2001 national Readers' Choice awarded by Romance Writers of America/Faith, Hope, and Love Chapter.
- "The Arrow" in Barbour's *City Dreams* novella collection tied for third place in the 2002 national Readers' Choice awarded by Romance Writers of America/Faith, Hope, and Love Chapter.
- "Engagement of the Heart" in *Christmas Letters* novella collection won first place in the 2002 national Readers' Choice awarded by Romance Writers of America/Faith, Hope, and Love Chapter.



- *DragonSpell* was nominated for a Christy Award in 2004.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

I had no sisters but I did have three older brothers. Two of them are now deceased. The oldest brother lives in Georgia and is in good health.

Did you enjoy English when you were in school?

English was my favorite subject. I wrote my first poem about a frog in fifth grade. Later on, I even enjoyed diagramming sentences. Do students still diagram sentences these days?

When did you start writing romance? And why?

I suppose as most writers, I could say I started writing as a child. I wrote stories and read them to my friends at the weekend slumber party. But as an adult, I was more interested in writing children's books and took the Institute of Children's Literature course. When my daughter was thirteen, she announced she wanted to read a grown-up love story. ACK! There was no way I was going to let her read one of those bodice rippers. She and her brother went away for ten days to the Christian Youth in Action camp to train for summer ministry. When she returned I handed her my first complete novel which had been written in her absence. During the next six weeks while they went on five day mission trips, I wrote the second. That is the one that sold and was published the year she got married.

What's the biggest risk you ever took as a writer?

Ha! Letting my extended family know what I was doing!

What has been a high moment of your writing career?

The arrival of the first books. I took the box back to my mother's room and put them on her bed. I sat in the rocker next to her and opened the box. I literally scooped some up in my arms and rocked them.

What's the nicest thing anyone ever said about your writing?

People have been very generous with their encouragement. But the one that tickled me most - my daughter's mother-in-law was going to save my last two books to read on an airplane trip. She just started one to see what it would be about and finished it. So she was going to save the other one. Well, she decided to read the first page and couldn't put it down. Before she knew it, she had nothing left to read!