

INTERVIEW WITH TRACEE LYDIA GARNER

Dara Girard

National bestselling author Tracee Lydia Garner hit the publishing scene with a bang. She was the Grand Prize Winner of the BET First Time Writers Contest and lead author in the anthology *All That & Then Some* with her novella “Family Affair”. She is the author of three novels and teaches “How to Write the Romance Novel” at Northern Virginia Community College in Loudoun County.



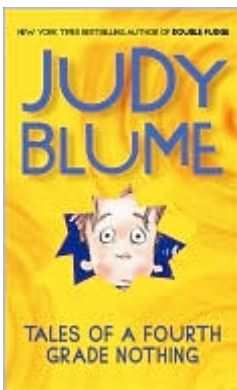
1. What is the number one reason most aspiring authors don't make it?

- a) Lack of persistence, and determination.
- b) Constant researching and rewriting and never (due to fear) just sending it off.

c) I honestly do believe that writing can be like marriage and that sometimes no matter how badly you want it, it's just not meant to be. Now people can take control of their destiny (unfortunately you can't drag a man to the altar) but through self publishing, if you're (item A above) you can do it and make publishers then stand up and take notice.

2. What nonfiction book(s) has helped you most as a writer?

I'm ashamed to admit I haven't read many nonfiction books as a writer. I have a few on my shelf and while I read a passage here and there, fiction is my one true love. What made me want to be a writer, was at first, just a way of coping with disability issues and loneliness. What made me interested in storytelling as a child was an elementary school teacher that made Judy Blume books come alive.



Mr. Brennan was awesome. Between his narration and Judy Blume's description, he read *Tales of a Fourth-Grade Nothing* and *Superfudge* like no one else. I was mesmerized and loved story time because of him and Judy Blume. People often tell me of all the things they could possibly say that my descriptiveness is one my strongest abilities.

3. How do you stay motivated between projects?

I don't think that I do stay motivated between projects, hence a long three year hiatus. I think that the end of a book really gets me (as in it's difficult and I put it off time and again) and I also end up putting it away completely sometimes. Motivation may lie in the fact that sometimes, before a project is finished, I will go ahead and send it off and it's the thought that any moment, (well we all know it can take forever to hear back from a publisher) but still, I certainly hope (or tell myself) that at any moment an editor will call and request the rest. That's a motivator itself and so sending it off is a kind of trick to pushing myself ahead and getting it done. Having to say, "Well it's not ready yet," can cause a great amount of fear and I avoid that scenario at all costs.

4. What techniques do you use when you hit a rough patch in your writing?

When I hit a rough patch, I believe that the issues are about fear of failure or success and they are more about personal issues rather than the story itself. I once feared characters would not do well when I was taking a new direction with my writing and so I wrote a letter from the characters point of view to myself and they kind of allayed my fears or just confirmed them. Confirming them isn't terrible, but it lets you know that these are the issues and you have to try to move on. Put all those cards on the table, both good and bad when you hit a rough patch.

I also hate rewriting but I have done it before. Sometimes you've got to open a new, blank document and just start over again. I'm always surprised about how similar what I wrote, reflects in the new stuff but it's still a rewrite even if there are similarities. You can't write the exact same thing and that's a plus, but you can write, new, fresher stuff.



5. What is a common misconception people have about writing or the writing life?

That it's glamorous. For a hot minute it is and then the work sets in. I admit writing is glamorous to others who think our brains are somehow different. I try to tell them it's not, especially my novel writing students. Once they respect the ideas (limited self sabotage) and open their mind to an innate creativity, they are like wow, I'm a writer and that's a lot of fun to hear about.

Second misconception is that books are born in hours or days and that one or two books somehow set's you up for life. One, it can take me almost two years to write a book (yes I have a full time job, family, etc., a little bit of a life) and so it does take me A LOT of time. And books do not pay all of your bills. They go out of print, sales can go down, expenses go up.

6. What do you tell people who have excuses as to why they haven't started (or can't finish) a writing project?

That they do not want it badly enough. SO MANY people tell me at book signings, and just about everywhere I go that they want to write a book. It's very hard to finish a project but it can be done, and if they really, REALLY wanted to, nothing would hold them back. And let me stress the difference between finishing a project and getting it published. I can understand the challenge in publishing, that is often reliant on some outside force (big editor at large house) but in ultimately finishing and completing the work is on you.

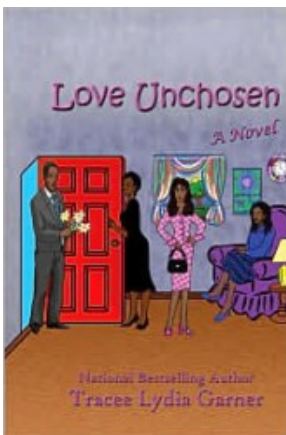
7. As a writing teacher you meet many writers. What advice could you give aspiring writers on how to select an instructor or class?

Look for teachers that have some publishing credits. I think that it is difficult, because there are many GOOD instructors teaching that aren't published. I think that they can still tell you how to do it, provide valuable instruction, but I believe they can be that much more helpful and forthcoming if they have had their work published a time or two.

It's not just about story formatting and having great characters, it's about the publishing game and how have you fared in it and that is so valuable to students, it goes beyond teaching skill and gets to the meat of how have you fared in the world of publishing. As a budding writer, I found people who went through the entire journey, that were much more helpful than someone who just told me about the story structure and format. I would and wanted to know, about the entire experience.

8. What are some of the reasons why talented writers don't succeed in publishing?

I think that there is saturation. I hate to say that because that's like saying if it's so saturated why don't you stop writing and of course I won't. But it's hard to see one small fish when the area is full of fish. This is going to probably cause some controversy and maybe I can say this cause I write slow but I would be willing to have a limit on books.



Isn't that kind of sad? Let's say at book 30 every writer has to take a 5 year hiatus. Almost like seats in an public office. But this would give editors time to discover new talent, and you better believe I'd be (and any other writer) writing my butt off in that five year "vacation". But that will never happen, that's too restricting and I digress.

So saturation in the markets, they sometimes may lack development of the skill and notice the difference between skill and talent. I believe that EVERYONE has talent and that it really can be cultivated. I really and truly prayed for my writing when I thought I would flunk out of college and God supplied. Yes, I loved writing articles, commentaries, loved talking but that didn't mean it could translate into good writing and story-telling. If you really want something, talent or not, you can LEARN to do it and master it. Just go ask Tiger Woods.

9. Anything you want to add?

Thank you so much for the opportunity and Happy Writing to All!

You can find out more about Tracee on her website:teegarner.com And find out more about her books [here](#).

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