

Interview with Blanche F. Lord  
Author of *Chasing Cobwebs*

Reader Views is happy to be talking with Blanche F. Lord, author of the new novel “Chasing Cobwebs.” Blanche is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

Juanita: Thanks for talking with us today Blanche. We are very interested to hear more about your new novel “Chasing Cobwebs.” Please tell us the storyline.

Blanche: *Chasing Cobwebs* tells the story of Marianna Vecchi Marin, a suburban homemaker whose romantic dream of a perfect love and marriage is shattered by her philandering husband, Keith Matthew Marin. When Marianna’s mother and sister come to Marianna’s aid, the Vecchi family’s dark secrets begin to unravel. In the three months following Keith’s leaving his family, the three generations of Italian American women and the men in their lives struggle to unravel the web of lies they have harbored, to share their secrets and begin to change. Stronger family ties are forged and Marianna begins her journey towards becoming an independent woman and a loving mother.

Juanita: What inspired you to write “Chasing Cobwebs”?

Blanche: One day when I was in my aquatic exercise class, I noticed a beautiful woman in her forties slowly doing her exercises as though she were in a world of her own. What I was struck by was her smile of fulfillment and happiness. In the locker room, later, she came over to me...probably drawn to me because of my thoughts about her. I told her I was impressed by her smile and her seeming happiness. She replied, “I have every reason to be happy. I am the most well loved woman in the world.” Her words reverberated in my mind and my character, Marianna was born.

Juanita: Marianna lives in her own, self-created fantasy world. Where and how did this illusion start?

Blanche: Marianna was a lonely child living in Milan, Italy on a fairy-land estate with very few playmates and an opera diva sister, Annamaria, who is fifteen years older than Marianna. Jealous of the attention given to her sister, lonely and unable to gain the love of her paternal grandmother, her mother and father, Marianna most likely began to make up a world of her own where she occupied a central position. Compounding her need to escape reality was the accidental death of her father when Marianna was ten and her mother’s abruptly moving with her to New York City where Annamaria was beginning a career as a lead singer at the Metropolitan Opera. Marianna’s jealousy of her sister increased as their mother devoted hours to assisting Annamaria in her career. By the

time Marianna married Keith when she was twenty, her romantic fantasy which made her the star instead of Annamaria, was entrenched in her mind.

Juanita: What is the catalyst that begins to shatter Marianna's illusionary world?

Blanche: Marianna's childish make-belief combined with her convincing herself that her upper-middle class suburban life embodied "the happy ever after" of the romantic dream, left her unable to accept the reality of a cheating husband and two troubled teenagers. When Keith suddenly leaves home without any explanation, Marianna's ideal life comes crashing down and she regresses to infancy, unable to speak or do anything for herself.

Juanita: How have the choices of Marianna's and her husband Keith affected their children?

Blanche: Keith's preoccupation with his work as a senior vice president of a large financial institute and his mistress leaves him little time to devote to his son and daughter. He covers up his neglect of his children by assuring himself that Marianna is taking care of their needs. Marianna's fantasy world includes perfect children. She is, therefore, not available to her children when they need her for emotional support. Matthew, eighteen, who is about to graduate from high school resents his father and is protective of his mother, for whom he has long made up excuses for her neglect. He and his sister, Kaitlin, sixteen, have taken care of themselves since early childhood. When Keith leaves and Marianna collapses, Matthew tries to be more responsible and assume the role of the man of the house. Kaitlin, who has been drinking and taking drugs since she was fourteen, reacts by increasing her self-destructive ways

Juanita: What themes do you address this generational family drama?

Blanche: Conflicting cultures between the generations, is a major theme. We have: Sophia, the mother, in her seventies, who was a young girl in post-World War II Italy, where she lived with her poverty stricken family in the mountains overlooking Naples; her oldest daughter, Annamaria, whose success as an opera singer has made her into a sophisticated, wealthy cosmopolitan woman, who enjoys living her luxurious life. Highly temperamental and often imperious, she has little in common with her dreamy younger sister although the family bond is strong between them; Marianna, who gives up her Catholic faith to gain more social standing in her mostly protestant upper class community has seemingly adapted to the American culture she lives in.

Another theme is the conflict between the romantic dream and reality. Probably a purely American phenomenon many women still hope for the ideal husband, the beautiful children, a lovely home...unattainable for most. Although Marianna's fantasy takes romance to an extreme...many even modern women, brought up on glitzy women's magazines and romantic movies and novels, still cherish the thought of an ideal life and look forward to getting married (or now days having a relationship) that will fulfill their dream of "happily ever after."

A third major theme is family relationships: the complexity, the family bond, the need for independence; the relationship between mothers and daughters, grandmother and grandchildren, father and sons, sisters and sisters, sisters and brothers, fathers and daughters, mother and son. Every family member has some jealousy, competitiveness, resentment...even hatred and above all love, whether or not they may be consciously aware of their feelings. All of these feelings are revealed in the Vecchi and Marin families. .

Juanita: How does the significance of Italian culture play out in "Chasing Cobwebs"?

Blanche: The reader gets some insight from Sophia about life for a poor girl in southern Italy after World War II. When Sophia is forced into a marriage with her much older wealthy manufacturer cousin from Milan, we are thrust into a different, more cultured and complex culture of northern Italy's upper class. Although the characters in *Chasing Cobwebs* are "larger than life" and not typical of most Italians, they share some common threads...a gusto for life, a close family relationship, a pride in their ethnic identity, a loyalty to family and an ability to change. Perhaps the difference between Keith's New England polite, diffident and uncaring parents and the emotional response the Italian family members experience when Marianna is abandoned by her husband, demonstrates the results of different cultures and upbringings.

Juanita: What statements does "Chasing Cobwebs" make regarding deception?

Blanche: Perhaps the underlying statement is that family secrets can be destructive, cause alienation, resentment and anxiety...and possibly romantic fantasies to escape from reality.

Juanita: How can untold family secrets affect the lives of other generations?

Blanche:

Each character in the novel is affected in some way by the deceitful legacy left by Antonio, father of the sisters and husband of Sophia, even though only Annamaria knows the truth. Annamaria has guarded the secret about her father's real life in Milan from her mother and sister. It has been a heavy burden for Annamaria and perhaps hardened her against men. Sophia has many secrets...one that she will never reveal. That secret about how Marianna was conceived affected Sophia's ability to give Marianna her full love and attention when she was a child. Living with parents who seemingly did not love her had a part in making Marianna withdraw from the world and develop her own make-believe world of perfection. Matthew, eighteen and Kaitlin have suffered greatly by their mother's narcissism and her life in a dream. Each has been deprived of genuine motherly affection and understanding. It is only when most of the secrets are revealed and shared, that each of the family members can experience positive change.

Juanita: Does "Chasing Cobwebs" give hope to readers regarding changing patterns of dysfunction that may have been initiated by their families previous generations?

Blanche: Yes, definitely. Although initially disturbing when dark secrets are revealed, a closer and more genuine bond begins to form between family members.

Juanita: How did your history as a psychoanalyst contribute to the psychological aspects of "Chasing Cobwebs"?

Blanche: It was my first husband who was the psychoanalyst...I was just the adoring supportive wife. I did imbibe a great deal of psychology and largely because I wanted to fit in with our friends and his colleagues and their wives, who were all undergoing psychoanalysis, I also had psychoanalytic therapy. It helped me get rid of many phobias instilled in me by my mother and to become aware of myself as a woman who could be independent of her husband. My own experience, although not as dramatic as Marianna's, when my husband and I parted after a twenty-year marriage, provided some of the background of Marianna's therapy with Dr. Davison, a New York City psychoanalyst.

Juanita: Did your own true-life experiences give you any insights that played a part in "Chasing Cobwebs"?

Blanche: Yes. (Please see above) However, all of *Chasing Cobwebs* is fiction. I never experienced Marianna's fantasy life, nor did I break down totally after my husband left. A major difference is that my elderly parents and my siblings were unable to provide any comfort or aid...except for money I received from time to time from my mother and my younger brother. Both now deceased. Unlike Marianna, I have been very fortunate to have wonderful women friends who provided me with emotional support during the trying times when I raised my young children as a single mother.

Juanita: Who would enjoy reading "Chasing Cobwebs"? Who is your reading audience?

Blanche: Adult women of all ages who have ever experienced a broken heart will empathize with Marianna's plight. Even though she carried her romantic fantasy to an extreme, most women, including me, have wished for a happy and even perfect married life...and some, more than others may, like Marianna, create an illusion for themselves that their lives are perfect, even when deep down they know it is not. Marianna's struggle to rise out of her fantasy and dependency on her husband and her eventual realization that she can create a new life for herself and her children is an inspiring story for all women. *Chasing Cobwebs* will also appeal to men and women who enjoy a fast paced psychological mystery where dark secrets are revealed and relationships change.

Juanita: Blanche, what do you want readers to ultimately understand by reading "Chasing Cobwebs"?

Blanche: First, I hope they enjoy reading the story and getting into the heads of this colorful family. I also hope it gives women the realization that each of us must find our own reality, independent of mates or family. Marianna's ability to shed her fantasies, gives hope to every woman that in the long run, she is solely in charge of her own well being. Sophia is a woman of strength as is her eldest daughter, Annamaria. By the end of the novel, we can see that Marianna too is beginning a new road towards strength and independence. The teenagers too, have their own story to tell and there are many things we as parents might learn from Matthew's confrontation of his father and Kaitlin's ability to overcome extreme adversity.

Juanita: Blanche, I understand that you are beginning your life-long dream of writing. Tell us about your dream of being an author and do you have any other books in the works?

Blanche: Although, somewhere in my soul, I knew I was a writer from the time I was a child, my life took many different turns before I had the ability, the time and the encouragement I needed to write full time. My first novel, "*Cloud of Chaos Planet of Light*," available on my web site and in major book stores is a science fiction thriller. I am very fond of my characters, who left for a far-away planet at the furthest reaches of our galaxy...and I sometimes hear them asking me to bring them back to Earth in a sequel. Before I think about that, however, I have begun an historical fiction novel about my mother's youth in Russia (now the Ukraine) before the Russian revolution. She came over to this wonderful country in 1912, where she met and married my father. When she was seventy, she revealed her long-held secret to me: that she had been married briefly when she was in Russia...and their separation had broken her heart. I hope to write a fictionalized version of that romance and its dissolution.

Juanita: Well Blanche, we certainly look forward to hearing more about your future works. Where can readers find out more about you and your endeavors?

Blanche: They can go to my web site: <http://www.bflord.com> where they can read the first chapter of *Chasing Cobwebs*, free of charge. They can also see me working at my desk and read a little

more about me. By clicking on the covers of my novels, the reader can purchase the books directly from the publisher in a paper-back edition. My novels are available on demand at any of the large bookstores. Just give them my name or the title of the book.

Juanita: Thanks for talking with us today Blanche. We hope much success for “Chasing Cobwebs” and your future as a full-time writer. Do you have any other thoughts for your readers today?

Blanche: I hope they enjoy reading about Marianna and her colorful family and I thank them all for their support of a new (though a bit advanced in age) author.