

Interview with Kellie Jameson **Author of *Cantaloupe Dance***

Reader Views welcomes Kellie Jameson, author of the romantic fiction novel, "Cantaloupe Dance." Kellie is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

Juanita: Hi Kellie, we are so happy to have the chance to talk with you today. You've recently released your first novel, "Cantaloupe Dance." Would you start by telling us the storyline of your book?

Kellie: I would be happy to. Noella Parker is a young woman trying to understand herself. The book takes place in the past but we listen to Noella, at the age of thirty, describe her past, her loves, her sadness, her joy, her decisions and her dreams with Jeanette, her therapist. Near the end of the story, Noella finishes her therapy sessions and finds a way to cope with her past and acceptance of her future.

Juanita: What inspired you to write your book?

Kellie: I was going through a divorce in 2001 and needed some way to cope with it all. Writing has always been my way of dealing with pain and the story just evolved from a lot of real life scenarios that needed to be written as a way of possibly understanding myself. I was uncomfortable with the "too close to home" similarity between myself and Noella so I stopped writing the book. I decided to write a book for children for charity, instead. "The Night Light" became a non-published soft bound book meant for terminally ill children. With the help of Lockheed-Martin in Dallas, I distributed copies with crayons to the Ronald McDonald houses in Texas and to St. Judes Hospital in Memphis. My desire and need to write for "therapy" was not fulfilled so, needless to say, I went back to my original "grown up" book. I managed to write a few pages a week, but that was about it. From time to time, I would reread what I wrote but I was sure no one would enjoy it so I stopped. In 2002, I started writing it again and finished the book. I entitled it "A Stones Throw Away" and took it to the local printer to bind it. I let a friend read it and he really enjoyed it. That was about it. I carried the bound book around for about a year with a red pen making changes when I felt like it. I finally got tired of it and put it away at the top of my closet. In May of 2006 (FOUR years later), I stuck the book in a friends mailbox and asked her to read it. Two days later, she asked me to finish the book and to follow my passion. I spent nearly 8 hours on Saturdays and 8 hours on Sundays for a month at Starbucks and the result was the officially finished version of "Cantaloupe Dance."

Juanita: Would you give us some deeper insights into your lead character, Noella Parker?

Kellie: Noella's young life was spent struggling to understand why her father left her family when she was a baby. She spent years battling Anorexia but successfully beat it. Her relationships seemed to lack a sense of confidence or a true sense of love. With each love she found, she seemed to take more than she could give and that, inevitably, ended a lot of them. It wasn't until later in her life that she realized just what it meant to love someone. She is a woman of great strength, ambition, desire, but also a woman of self-doubt which leads her into many relationships where she seeks affirmation about who she is.

Juanita: How did you come up with her character?

Kellie: Noella began as a sort of self-disclosing character. I needed to write about something close and personal to deal with my own life. Noella started out as me but evolved into someone completely different than she started out being. I made her into someone I think I wanted to be, not the woman I was. I personally dealt with my own father leaving and with a severe eating disorder at a young age. I needed to create a character with a happy ending and with different hopes and dreams than what I had for myself. Noella touched on a few of my own personal stories but I created her stories into something just for her that had nothing to do with me, thank goodness.

Juanita: Why is she struggling to understand love?

Kellie: I think losing her father so early in life left her wondering if she just wasn't enough. Understanding how someone could leave wasn't something she understood until much later in her life so she misspent most of her life wondering about love and how to not only find it, but keep it. She couldn't understand how she could love so many men, so differently, yet so quickly.

Juanita: Would you tell us about the men that come into Noella's life? They seem to be a cross section of different types of men in varied situations. Would you also comment on this diversity?

Kellie: Yes, they are very different, aren't they? Noella seemed open to just about any type of men that loved her. If she knew they cared for her, she assumed she needed to care for them back. All of the men in her life brought something wonderful to her. The first man the readers will meet is her first love, Jansen Stevens. Jansen and Noella bring each other so many gifts of love and innocence but they also have to encounter many trials that test what they thought was love. Jansen stays with Noella throughout each love she has, especially in her dreams. Next, the reader will meet Ben Walker. Ben and Noella quickly fall in love and quickly deal with things they were too young to have to learn. Ben becomes someone Noella thinks she understands and he reveals to her things she doesn't necessarily like about herself. Next, Josh Taylor sweeps Noella off her feet. I won't give away too much of the story here but she makes some decisions she later has to think twice about. Finally, the reader will meet James Garrett, whom Noella believes is her "real" true love. Their love is forbidden but true, nonetheless. James brings a type of love to Noella that she had not experienced before. I believe the diversity in these four men plays a big part in Noella's process of self-discovery. She was not only discovering differences in these men and the types of love they shared but she was discovering new things about herself.

Juanita: What are their unique contributions to Noella's self discovery process?

Kellie: Jansen's contributions to Noella's self-discovery mainly involved her "growing up" and leaving home when she was afraid to. He stays with her throughout the story and I think she realized, through him, that she was "worthy" of love. Ben contributed a more mature love but also a love that could survive a tragedy, at least for a while. Noella had to make some decisions about herself with Ben and face things she didn't really want to about herself. He not only "allowed" her to do that, but encouraged her to. Josh came in to Noella's life and contributed a life she finally thought she knew she wanted. He offered her stability, love and safety but her inability to accept it for what it was or to understand it, catapulted her into decisions she knew she must make. James contributed the "fairy tale" factor that Noella always seemed to seek. After a brief high-school romance, he still cared for her after all the years that had passed, allowing her to discover again, that maybe she was worthy of love.

Juanita: Kellie, would you elaborate on your theme of dreaming?

Kellie: Sure. As I mentioned above, the book was first entitled, "A Stone Thrown Away" because the men Noella loved seemed to her, to be so close. "Cantaloupe Dance" literally came out of nowhere but it wouldn't leave my mind so I knew I had to inject a dream about a cantaloupe and a dance into the story line. I really enjoyed the dreams as a way of "story telling" so I decided to use the dreams as a setting for the discussions with her therapist. The dreams act as a catalyst for discussion and for transition from one love to the next but they also become a key part of who Noella is and how she learns to live with the past through her dreams. The dreams are discussed in part near the end of the book as well so the reader has an understanding of what Noella finally believes them to mean.

Juanita: You've set your story in the context of unfolding therapy sessions. Would you comment on this aspect of the story, and your decision to set up the storyline in this manner?

Kellie: I initially wrote the book in the third person format. It seems I had to use a lot of "he said" and "she said" and I got really tired of that. I enjoy story telling more than dialogue and I found the therapy sessions to be a nice way to utilize that concept. I had to use some dialogue but I don't feel I had to overdo it.

Juanita: How does talking to a therapist help Noella?

Kellie: Other than her best friend, Caroline, Noella doesn't really know who else to talk to about the dreams or about her life in general. She feels certain she has certain qualities of a crazy person so she needs to talk to Jeannette in hopes of finding reassurance that she's not.

Juanita: What is the underlying message of "Cantaloupe Dance"?

Kellie: I thought it was simply a sweet love story (4 of them) about a woman learning to love and accept who she was despite the results of the relationships.. Later, though, after a lot of feedback, I realized that the message is that of letting go, of moving forward, of trusting the process. I always wanted to write a type of self-help or self-discovery book but because I am no expert on any such thing, I knew that wasn't a good idea. I did want to get across, though, the process of healing, the

process of moving on, letting go, loving yourself. I wanted to get across the meaning and importance of self-love and that without it, no other love could possibly exist.

Juanita: Kellie, do you think that Noella's journey of self discovery is common for women?

Kellie: I definitely think Noella's journey is common. Although her stories are unique, there are situations in each of her relationships that many women have encountered and learned to cope with on many levels. I believe many women, much like Noella, struggle to find who they are in a relationship instead of knowing who they are and what they have to offer going into a relationship. Many women, also like Noella, tend to look in the wrong places for love; outside of themselves. I also believe that when each relationship begins or ends, women as well as men, find out certain things about ourselves that we would either like to hide or like to offer and it is in how those things are received that we discover a little something extra about ourselves.

Juanita: Kellie, this is your first novel, can we expect to see more books from you in the future?

Kellie: Definitely. I am currently keeping my mind open for inspiration but I know it will come when it needs to. I will keep the readers updated on my website (listed below) for any future developments.

Juanita: Would you comment on your personal interest in romance novels? Is romance fiction going to be your preferred genre for writing?

Kellie: I am such a romantic, love-sick fool at heart. I have tried to read non-romance novels but without the happy ending, I get too disappointed. I've learned I need to stick with the mushy stuff.

Juanita: Who have been your literary influences, and what books have you been reading lately?

Kellie: I am a big fan of Nicholas Sparks (my favorite), Barbara Delinsky and Jude Deveraux. I would love my writing style to be right up there with Sparks. I have been reading Nicholas Sparks latest, "Dear John."

Juanita: How can readers find out more about you and "Cantaloupe Dance"?

Kellie: They can visit my site: www.cantaloupedance.com

Juanita: Kellie, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. We have enjoyed hearing about "Cantaloupe Dance," and hope for much success with your future endeavors. Do you have any last thoughts for your readers today?

Kellie: Thank you, Juanita. For the readers out there, LIVE, LOVE and LAUGH...often.