

Interview with Patricia Marie Budd **Author of *A New Dawn Rising***

Reader Views speaks with Patricia Marie Budd, author of “A New Dawn Rising.” Patricia is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

Juanita: Hi Patricia, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. You have written a very unique novel, “A New Dawn Rising,” and we are excited to hear more about your story. Would you start off by telling readers the storyline?

Patricia: A New Dawn Rising is about a white man born into slavery and the struggle he goes through to obtain his freedom.

It is set in the early 1800s in the fictional town of Laurel Creek, Georgia, just north of the burgeoning Savannah. John Connolley, nearing thirty, yearns to own some land of his own...but John, though white, was born into slavery. Raised like a son by his owner, Jacob Barlow, John soon learns what it means to be property when Barlow thought he tried to run.

Now, fifteen years later, John faces the impossible task of raising enough money to live freely. Struggling with the humiliation of being rented out by Barlow to rich ladies for their amusement, losing the women he loves in the process, he hopes to be freed of the stigma of slavery and indeed hold the truths of the Declaration of Independence to be self-evident; that all men were created equal.

Juanita: Now I understand that you live in a small town in Northern Alberta, Canada. What drew you to the idea of writing a slavery story based in Georgia?

Patricia: The cold Northern Alberta winters often cause one to dream about the warm southern sun. My love of history drew me into the past. My cynical mind wouldn't allow me to stick to the pastoral fantasies and next thing I knew I was writing A New Dawn Rising.

Once I decided the ideas floating around in my head were worthy of a novel I started to do research. In fact, prior to writing A New Dawn Rising I had no connection to the state of Georgia at all. I did research into the slave states to determine where I would set my novel. While reading up about Georgia I learned that General James Oglethorpe, the founder of the thirteenth colony, outlawed slavery. The paradox was too much for me to ignore.

Once I decided to set my book in Georgia I knew I would have to visit the state. I saved for almost two years so I could afford a research tour. I spent a glorious week in the historic city of Savannah, Georgia where I learned a great deal about life in the early 1800s, slavery, and plantation life. Much of what I learned on that trip filtered its way into my novel.

The issue of slavery has been with me since I was little. My sister gave me the book *Roots* by Alex Haley to read when I was in grade 8. I read the book and as soon as I got to the final page I instantly went back to page one and started all over again. The novel was so compelling and horrific that many of its images have never left me. Deep down inside that seed has been waiting for the right moment to grow and formulate itself into my own novel. *A New Dawn Rising* is the fruit.

Why the fictional town of Laurel Creek, “just north of the burgeoning Savannah”? I wanted a rural town where plantation owners and small farmers converged. I chose a location near Savannah, as Savannah was a shipping port, thus a centre for slave trade.

Juanita: Who are your main characters, and would you give us some insights in their personality and significance to the story?

Patricia: John Connolley is the central character. He is a white man born into slavery. I created a fictional scenario to allow for, what by this time was an anomaly. I based John’s circumstances on the slave law that the child takes on the status of the mother. John’s mother was sold into slavery after her father caught her in a lustful act with a British officer (during the American Revolution). John’s father was killed and John’s mother eventually purchased as a slave by Jacob Barlow. She died when John was in his teen years. John’s owner, having no son of his own, raised John like a son. John used to refer to his master as ‘uncle’ Jacob. That changed, though, and now the two men have a very precarious father/son relationship. John wishes only to be rid of the stigma of slavery and be free of the man who owns him whilst Jacob wants desperately to rekindle the father/son feelings they once shared.

Juanita: What age is John when the father/son relationship with Jacob turns to a slave/master relationship? How does he eventually come to the decision to break free?

Patricia: The father/son relationship turns into a master/slave relationship on John’s fourteenth birthday. John gets lost and Barlow assumes he had tried to run. In order to maintain control over his slave population Barlow determined he had to punish the boy harshly. This experience creates a festering wound between them.

Juanita: I understand that your story takes some surprising twists in that John eventually has to depend on Jacob while attempting to conceal his past from the community. Would you elaborate?

Patricia: : John was brutally attacked by highwaymen. This beating left John hovering in a state between life and death. As a result he requires the aid of his master in order to make due for a time.

Juanita: What did the Declaration of Independence stand for in the hearts of slaves, and then their slave owners, in the 1800’s?

Patricia: I never read any slave reactions to the Declaration of Independence in my research, however, one can easily imagine how a slave might feel. To have a document state that all men are created equal, to live in that very land where all are said to be free and yet be enslaved, well, how could you believe in the honesty of your own nation? It would be a farce. The slave owners, on the other hand, did not view the Africans as equal. Thomas Jefferson, made that abundantly clear in his treatise on the Negro Slave. In that he stated that the Negro lacked intelligence and imagination. This only led credence to the idea that the African slave was sub-human. As for the white men who were slaves the majority were Irish Catholic and held in disdain. When the British were selling them in the 1600s they actually believed they were giving them better lives.

Juanita: How would you describe the tone/atmosphere of “A New Dawn Rising”?

Patricia: Tense, violent, extremely romantic.

Juanita: That is a very interesting mix Patricia. We haven’t yet addressed the romantic side of your book. Would you tell us about this aspect of the story?

Patricia: John falls in love with a beautiful young woman, Katherine MacPhearson. She is the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner. He does not approve of John as a suitor for his daughter as he is unsure of John’s past. Regardless of her father’s chagrin Katherine and John still form a very strong bond. At one point in the novel Katherine learns John’s history and the two are torn apart.

Juanita: What type of research did you do in preparation for the writing process?

Patricia: The research process extended over a three-year period. I did Internet searches about slavery, the politics of the era, slave law, life in Georgia, life in the 1800s, and early 1800s fashion. I spent countless hours in libraries and I even took a research tour to Savannah, Georgia.

Juanita: How did you compile your research into a cohesive fictional story that captures the essence of the era, and how long was the writing process?

Patricia: Well, for starters, I meet and fell in love with Thomas Paine. This man was truly the father of America. His pamphlet Common Sense inspired the revolution. I used a great deal about Thomas Paine in my novel. He was a man whom John Connolley admired and respected.

I also learned a great deal about the treatment of slaves and incorporated a lot of that into my book. One brutal example would be the R brand. I read about a slave who had run away. Upon capture his master branded him on the face with the letter R to identify him as a runaway. I was so shocked by this story that I had to have this happen to one of my characters.

The writing process lasted four years. The first three years were spent in research, writing and revising. The last year was spent hiring professional editors. I self-published through iUniverse and took advantage of all the editing services they have to offer: two editorial evaluations, a line-by-line content editing and proofreading. This stage was crucial to the final product. No one should publish without at least one good solid editing process.

Juanita: You have presented a largely unknown aspect of history to your novel regarding white slavery. Would you tell us more about this?

Patricia: I knew very little about white slavery while I was writing this book. I went to great lengths to create a plausible fictional scenario for a white man to be born into slavery. Without giving too much of the story line away I used the slave law that the child takes on the status of the mother if the mother is a slave. After having finished my novel I later learned that white slavery was a lot more common than we realize. In fact, all I really had to do was make John Connolley the son of an Irish slave from Virginia. It turns out that during the 16th century more Irish were sold into slavery than Africans. Even still, I am happy with the fictional scenario I created. Even though this is not a true story it is 100% plausible and the novel is historically accurate.

Juanita: How in depth do you take your story in terms of the extremely negative side of slavery?

Patricia: There are a few brutal scenes. I had no plans of covering up the brutality that existed. Slaves were considered property, chattel. Some people treated their slaves decently while others were abusive. When one is given a legal hand to be abusive it's frightening what people will do. Those who were abusive were cruel.

Juanita: What statements does your book make towards the possibility for a slave to overcome the social stigma of the time, and become an equal citizen?

Patricia: Well, I would think it was near to impossible to overcome the social stigma. Even still, there were very liberal minded thinkers in those days – Thomas Paine, the Quakers – these people would have been accepting – others would never let go of their prejudices. I think the same holds true for today.

Juanita: What is your book saying about impendence and freedom?

Patricia: I think my book goes back to the very foundation of American Country – the central ideal that all men are created equal – all men have the right to freedom and independence. The paradox is that we have yet to live in an America that truly offers that declaration. People surround us daily who are prejudice. The KKK exists, Muslims are hated and seen as terrorists, and White people are automatically considered racist. It's truly scary how man has yet to live up to the ideals this country was founded on.

Juanita: Patricia, what do you hope readers learn from John Connolley and Mister Jacob Barlow? What is the underlying message of your book?

Patricia: I hope people will come away seeing that forgiveness is essential to healing. Even if the person you chose to forgive is not worthy you must forgive for your own sake. We cannot live in hatred. Like I had John say, hatred is a cancer that kills the man. I also hope that people will see that trying to hide from the world will not solve your problems. A man has to stand up and face who he is whether the rest of the world accepts him or not. The fact is, there are many people out there who know how to love, who know how to accept differences – and there are those who want to learn.

The people who remain forever mired in their hatred cannot be used as an excuse to hold you back. There are so many things I hope people will take from this book – enjoyment, a better understanding of empathy and respect, and most importantly that an ideal like the one stated in the American Declaration of Independence is only as valid as the men and women who chose to live it.

Juanita: I understand that writing hasn't always come easy for you. Would you comment on your writing journey, and your inspiration for writing your first novel?

Patricia: Hmm. I was always poor in English. In grade school and high school I never earned a grade higher than 55%. In grade 11 I did earn one 70% on a personal essay. This is when I learned that the best writing comes when you write about what you know and love. In grade 12 I earned 80% in English and I'm still not sure how I did that, except maybe the time I spent after school cleaning out my English teacher's filing cabinet for him. I barely passed English 100 at university and I dropped out of English 200. It wasn't until after I wrote my first play that the language really opened up for me. Spelling and grammar are a serious handicap, though, so I never do anything without someone to proof read for me.

Juanita: How do your talents as a teacher and artist contribute to your writing?

Patricia: Teaching English is my life. I love working with kids and find the challenge of teenagers invigorating. With teenagers I get to see humanity at its extreme and I get to see every type of person out there. I also help inspire them to write – I have no qualms about sharing my struggles with writing and the English language with my students. I also share my writing with them. Often, when I give a writing assignment to my students I will complete the same task and share my work with them.

Juanita: Patricia, you have past and present writing pursuits in addition to your teaching career. Would you comment on the path you've been on since high school, and your thoughts on writing today?

Patricia: Tough question. My past writing pursuits have been theatrical in nature. I've written a few plays, I even managed to get some recognition for my last play *The Aging Philosopher*. It received honorable mention at the 2002 Alberta Playwriting Network playwriting competition. The shift into writing the novel came suddenly, quite unexpectedly and so naturally that I never questioned it.

Juanita: Do you have any plans for a second novel?

Patricia: I do. I am working on two novels at the moment. One is historical the other, well – quite frankly I don't want to give anything about either project away.

Juanita: Patricia, how can readers find out more about you and your endeavors?

Patricia: Please go to my website: www.patriciamariebudd.ca. I also have a profile on www.roaringwomen.com. *A New Dawn Rising* is available on line at the iUniverse bookstore, amazon.com (ca), barnesandnoble.com or can be ordered from your nearest bookstore.

Juanita: Thanks for taking the time to talk with us today Patricia. We have enjoyed getting an inside look into your new book “A New Dawn Rising,” and encourage to keep an eye out for your new novels in the future. Do you have any last thoughts you’d like to share today?

Patricia: I have confidence in my novel. I’ve received enough positive reaction to know that *A New Dawn Rising* will please lovers of historical fiction, human justice issues and anybody who just wants a good read.