

Interview with Judy Azar LeBlanc **Author of *Many Faces to Many Places***

Reader Views is pleased to welcome Judy Azar LeBlanc, award-winning author of “Many Faces to Many Places.” Judy is talking with Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

Juanita: Judy thanks for the opportunity to talk with you today. We are excited to hear about your book “Many Faces to Many Places.” Would you start by telling us what your book is about?

Judy: Thank you for your warm welcome, Juanita. I would like to begin by saying thank you for the opportunity of talking with you. It is a great honor.

Many Faces to Many Places is a three-part magical adventure story about the journey of a soul’s quest for truth. The protagonist, Many Faces is guided by a pair of "floating eyes", which represents her faith, and through those eyes, allows the reader to witness the transitions she makes as she travels through a world of timeless knowledge.

How many of us at one time or another haven’t thought about the meaning of love or the meaning of happiness? Or how many of us at one time or another have wondered about “why am I here”? What is the purpose of life? In this story, Many Faces discovers the answers to these types of questions in an entertaining 92 page powerful story that seems to transcend age, religion, sex and culture simply because timeless wisdom breaks all barriers.

Juanita: Judy, what makes this book so important and timely?

Judy: That is a good question, Juanita. Quite frankly, I have been wondering about that myself. Perhaps it is because of the condition that the world seems to be in today. Right now we are witnessing significant global weather changes that are having a tremendous impact on the lives of people. We are witnessing an unprecedented rise in violence and drug use in our younger generation, and intense international conflicts only to mention a few. In my opinion, good leaders and role models have disappeared from our society. History reflects the condition of society in both the music and the movies that become popular at that point in time. I think that we are all looking for a way to understand and cope with the conditions as they are today, and what better way than to look for the answers that have always been there.

Juanita: What inspired you to write “Many Faces to Many Places”?

Judy: Juanita, the inspiration came when I was living in this map-less little town that is about 750 miles south of the California border. It is right in the middle of Baja South and sits right on the edge of the Sea of Cortez. Its population was less than 7,000, and no one spoke English. The town offered absolutely no entertainment or shopping. In fact, shopping for everyday items was rather difficult.

What the town did offer, however, was complete peace, privacy, and freedom to walk the isolated beach that surrounded the pristine Sea of Cortez accompanied only by the indigenous wildlife. When I wasn't walking on the beach, I was sitting at the edge of the water watching seagulls, pelicans, osprey, large pods of dolphins and whales play and enjoy the same peace, privacy and freedom that I did. Now I ask, "who wouldn't be inspired to write"?

Juanita: Would you tell us about your main character Many Faces? Who is she, what/who does she represent, and please give us your thoughts on the underlying meaning of her name – many faces?

Judy: I'd be happy to Juanita. The main character, Many Faces represents the different expressions that are on our faces when we are at different places in our life. I am sure that you have noticed that when we become introspective, our facial expressions change. The same holds true when we are really happy, or when we are in pain; and when we fall in love, our faces just radiate. Thus, the character is a name for the reflections on our faces when we are at different places in our journey through life.

Juanita: Your book takes readers on a three-part journey. Would you explain?

Judy: Yes, Juanita. The reason I wanted to take the readers on a three part journey is because it drew a more realistic picture of our own walk through life. I like to think realistically. As we all know, life is not always a "bowl of cherries." There are times when it is, and there are times when it isn't. We all go through ups and downs and some of us even get lost along the way. Part I of the story reflects a portion of the "up" stages while part II reflects a portion of the "down" stages.

Part III is a picture of what I like to call a time of reflection. Not everyone makes the kind of choices that Many Faces made in Part II, but there are many who do and I wanted to show the reader the good that can come out of it.

Juanita: Part II sounds like a very important aspect of the journey. What is the significance of the "down stage"?

Judy: The "down stage" in Part II, Juanita, is written to illustrate what can happen when one chooses a path that offers only the "glitter" and not the "Gold," and to give a glimpse of how "a wolf in sheep's clothing" operates.

The villain, "King Ekaf", is meant to illustrate the existence of some of these "real" personality traits. Page 54 describes him as being one who was angry, arrogant, cunning, rude, and a control freak who worshipped money. He manipulated Many Faces by seeing through her weakness, and

using her vulnerability to gain control over her. How many of us haven't met someone like this at one time or another? Or how many of us haven't witnessed a vulnerable person being taken advantage of? I hate to say this, but there are real people out there whose lifestyle is that of preying on the weak and vulnerable. As we all know, there is both good and bad in this world, and Part II is included to illustrate part of that balance.

Juanita: Who are some of the other pertinent characters and places that Many Faces encounters on her journey?

Judy: Gosh Juanita, that's a good question because they are all pertinent characters. However, besides the protagonist, Many Faces, some of the other pertinent, and also "my favorite" characters, are Elusive, the Golden Butterfly of Happiness, and "Eyes of Faith", the pair of talking floating eyes that represent faith as seen through the eyes of Many Faces. Of course, these are the good guys. As you know, all stories have to have a villain and in this story, the villain is the horrible "king Ekaf" who rules the Lost Kingdom. Some of the other pertinent characters are "Stingy and Greedy", two of the cave dwellers who Many Faces meets while she journeys through the "allegory of the cave."

Juanita: What reading audience did you have in mind when you wrote this book? It seems that it would appeal to both the young and/or mature reader. What are your thoughts on the universality of this story?

Judy: Juanita, when I wrote all four of my books, I didn't have a particular audience in mind. I know that there are some schools of thought that teach that you must pick an audience to write to before you write, but I don't believe that. I think that thought comes from a commercial point of view. I mainly chose the style because of the content of the book. For myself, I find reading this kind of material is much more fun and effective if it is written allegorically. There is something about animated adventure stories that seems to appeal to all age groups. Books and movies such as "The Chronicles of Narnia", "Pilgrims Progress", and "The Lion King" attract all age groups.

The story of Many Faces to Many Places was meant to attract all age groups and was specifically based on universal truths. I once had a long discussion with someone over the topic of "romance" and why it was not included in the story. My answer was simply that romance is not a universal truth. The term romance was originally used to distinguish the French language from the Latin, and then later was extended to cover works written in French. Today, it is used to classify a specific genre, and to express an emotion.

Juanita: Judy, would you comment on your relationship with nature, and your use of nature to impart wisdom throughout Many Faces' journey?

Judy: I'd love to Juanita. I love nature. I have learned a lot about life by just by watching it. I believe it has a lot to say if we listen and pay attention to the signs. For example, watching the ants can teach us a lot about society and the order of it. Ants are very social, well organized and work together. I was also amazed by watching the relationships of birds. They too have an order in their relationship to each other and to home and family. For example, both the male and female construct

their nest together. Then after the female lays her eggs, the male brings food to the nest. The female stays in her nest until the young are ready to learn how to fly. Then it is the female that teaches them how to fly while the male stays close by to protect them. I think one can learn a lot about relationships just by watching that. If you think about it, today, both man and woman are away from home and the children are either alone, or are indulged with “things” to keep them entertained. In some cases, it is the woman who goes to work and the man who stays home to take care of the family. And in other cases, both parents are of the same sex. Hmmm --- That does make me wonder about the order of things in our society today.

Juanita: What does your book teach readers about the trials and tribulations of life?

Judy: Juanita, I think my book illustrates that although life does have its trials and tribulations, there is always something good that come out of them, and that is what we need to focus on.

Juanita: What about freedom and choice?

Judy: You sure do ask some tough questions! (Laugh) ... My thoughts on freedom and choice are that freedom is a state of mind, and because everyone has a free will, everyone has the freedom to choose how to exercise it. This is illustrated in Part II when Many Faces deliberately chooses to compromise her character for the riches and glory that the ruler of The Lost Kingdom offered to her.

Juanita: Judy, do you think the path of spiritual growth is the same for everyone, and that it just looks different from the outside?

Judy: Hmmm. I have not thought about that before. However, because I do believe that many paths lead to the same place, I think that many people do travel the same path together. It may look different from the outside, but I think it is the same from the inside. This is another one of the reasons I chose the name of Many Faces for the main character. In my mind, she does represent many who are on the same path.

Juanita: What are your thoughts on storytelling, and how would you describe your own personal style of telling a story, and in particular, this one?

Judy: Another writer by the name of Peter Henke expressed my thoughts exactly when he said “If a nation loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood,” and I truly believe that.

Juanita: I understand that “Many Faces to Many Places” won an award in 2006. Which one? How did it feel to win your first award?

Judy: Actually, Juanita, “Many Faces to Many Places” has won two awards in 2006. The first was awarded by USA Book News for the best inspirational Audio Book of the year, and the second was awarded by New Book Reviews for the best inspirational book of the year. What was so exciting for me about this year’s USA’s Best Books National Book Awards was that there were over 1,200 entries including some from Simon Schuster, Warner Books, New American Library

which is a division of the Penguin Group, New World Library, and hundreds of independent press titles. When I was contacted about winning, I think it took me two days to actually internalize the news. (Laugh) ...

In addition to the audio book winning best inspirational audio book of the year, it was also a runner up in the 2006 DIY Book Festival and received honorable mention at the ceremony that took place in Los Angeles, California on October 21, 2006. So, it greatly pleases me that both the paperback and the audio version have won best inspirational book of the year awards.

Juanita: This is actually your fourth published book. How was the writing process for “Many Faces to Many Places” different from the other books you’ve written?

Judy: Gosh Juanita, I don’t know how to answer that because for me, the writing process was the same for all four. When I wrote “Things My Father Never Taught Me”, “The Compromise”, and “The Unveiling”, I did the same things as I did when I wrote “Many Faces to Many Places”. Each one took me a year to complete and a year to publish. I have heard other authors say that they wrote their book in three months, or wrote two in one year. I don’t know how they do that. Perhaps it can be attributed to the genre. It took me awhile to write the ending for Many Faces to Many Places because I wasn’t sure if I wanted it to be final, or if I wanted to leave an opening for a sequel. Now I am very happy about the way it ended because I have started another project that is completely different than any of my previous works.

Juanita: What are your thoughts on the spiritual nature of “Many Faces to Many Places?” Is the spiritual wisdom you impart universal? Is your message Christian based?

Judy: I believe that the spiritual wisdom in the book is universal. Most of this wisdom has been written in different words by many other writers outside of the spiritual world. For example, we have all heard terms and expressions like “karma”, “what goes around, comes around”, and “the only thing you have to fear is fear itself”. In Many Faces to Many Places these universal truths are expressed in spiritual terms.

One example is on page 42 when the Angel of Justice visits Many Faces, she says: “Be not dismayed, for all that man projects from within does not come back empty. All that is purposed for harm will come back as harm, and those sought after in revenge will be the avenged. The sole purpose of Justice is to keep the nature of man in balance as it is a law unto itself”.

Also, the feedback that was received from the book reviewers in India was that the messages in Many Faces to Many Places are very much the same as those of their own eastern philosophy. I am sure that is one of the reasons that everyone who reads this book can personally relate to some of the faces and some of the places because most of these issues come up at one time or another in everyone’s life. We may not all travel the same road, but we all eventually end up at the same place.

Juanita: Judy, what would you say is the underlying message of “Many Faces to Many Places”?

Judy: The underlying message of *Many Faces to Many Places* is learning that loving yourself and others is the most important thing that we can do while we are still alive. After all, we are all just passing through. I have also discovered that many people want answers to timeless questions like “what is the meaning of life?” “Why am I here? What is love? What is happiness? To only mention a few. And if most come to the same conclusions, then the answers that apply to us must be universal. Rick Warren is only one among several writers who have used different words to address the same issues because they are age old questions.

What makes *Many Faces to Many Places* so unique is that it is written in an animated style which makes the story magical and very easy to understand. This is one of the reasons why I believe that it appeals to all age groups.

Juanita: How is the animated style presented?

Judy: *Many Faces* has a special gift of communicating with nature, and it is through the eyes of this kind of relationship that the animation is presented.

In Part I, for example, *Many Faces* is very introspective and learns the meaning of “time” by having a conversation with the legendary slow running “River of Time” whose ability to speak kept itself informed by visiting with all who came to swim and refresh themselves. Excerpt from page 13.

Later, *Many Faces* befriends the “Great Elusive Golden Butterfly of Happiness” who accompanies her throughout her journey, but only from afar. Then, of course, there is my favorite character who is the pair of talking “floating” eyes who teaches *Many Faces* how to follow her faith.

There are others like the talking “White Dove of Peace” who *Many Faces* meets before she enters the Land of Many Trees, and of course, there is the Great Mr. Willow whose heart was broken to see that *Many Faces* had pushed herself to such a dangerous point and talks her into resting under its long protective long branches.

What I love about this magical style is that while you are reading, the characters become so visual in your mind that you almost feel as though you become the character like Dorothy in the “Wizard of Oz.”

Juanita: What was the writing process like for this book? Did you have to do any research? How long from start to finish?

Judy: This was somewhat difficult for me, Juanita, because not only was I was living in a foreign country, but I was living in a map-less town in a foreign country! As far as the world was concerned, both the town and the inhabitants were non-existent. I felt as though I had just stepped back about 50 years in time. I was very happy that I had taken all of my journals, favorite books and previous writings with me. This is basically where all of my material came from. When I started writing *Many Faces to Many Places*, I had to put it aside for about a year because I took on a teaching job at the local university, and I couldn’t do both. After a year of teaching, I declined another contract so that I could finish the book. It probably took me about 8 more months or so to

finish it, and then another year to get it edited and published. By this time, I had moved back to the United States, so it was a lot easier for me to accomplish these things.

Juanita: What authors inspire you?

Judy: To be perfectly frank, Juanita, my style is uniquely my own. There have been a few other books written in a similar style containing different messages, but I can't say that any particular author inspired me. What I can say is that I learned persistence by reading Richard Bach's story of how difficult it was for him to get his little 7,000 word book published because of the low word count. This encouraged me tremendously because *Many Faces to Many Places* is less than 30,000 words and I got the same story. Most publishers refused it because it was below their standard word count which averages 50,000 words. What remains a mystery to me is why publishers put more emphasis on "the quantity of words" rather than "the quality of them".

Juanita: How can readers find out more about you and your endeavors?

Judy: Ahhhh, I finally got an easy question! (Laugh) ... Anything you want to know about me and my endeavors can be found on my web page at www.manyfacestomanyplaces.com. Please feel free to visit it at any time. There is also a contact page for those who would like to contact me personally. I would love to hear from you.

Juanita: Judy, it has been a pleasure talking with you today. We appreciate your candid thoughts and encourage readers to look for your unique book "*Many Faces to Many Places*" at local and online bookstores. Lastly, do you have any final words for your readers today?

Judy: The pleasure was all mine, Juanita. As a final note, I would like to say that I always feel happy when readers want to know more about *Many Faces to Many Places*, and I always feel honored when they take the time to find out more about both the book and about me. I wish to say thank you for that. I would also like to say please don't hesitate to email me your comments. I love hearing from my readers.