

Lady in the Window
A Q&A with Novelist Maryann Ridini Spencer

When did you know you wanted to become a writer?

I've known for as long as I can remember. However, it wasn't until recently that I began to pursue writing fiction. In 2014, I was handed a box filled with my childhood memorabilia when my parents moved to a new home. Reading through those stories, which I had long forgotten, inspired me to "get my show on the road" and start writing novels. As a matter of fact, I used this incident in *Lady in the Window* when Catherine gives Kate her box. In fact, like Kate, I put myself on a schedule to write *Lady in the Window*. Previously up until that point, I was writing for newspapers and magazines as well as producing and writing projects for television. However, around 2002, I began to feel the need to write movie screenplays to produce as a way to tell the stories I felt were meaningful. In fact, at the time, I made a conscious decision to concentrate exclusively on writing and producing my own projects. Then, as soon as I began to write screenplays based on an outline, I eventually realized that I could also plot out a novel in a similar fashion. That was a breakthrough moment for me because I finally had a roadmap of how to start. The rest was discipline and hard work, but realizing I could break it down was what made something I always said I wanted to do become a reality.

Describe your typical workday?

I work out at the gym the first thing in the morning. Exercising makes me feel great and gets my engine going. I'm usually in front of my computer by 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. and remain there until about 6:30 p.m. I take short breaks to grab a tea or to fix lunch (which I then eat in front of my computer as I work).

The first few hours at my desk, I either work on the novel (or script) I'm writing. My schedule is usually pre-planned, and I always know how many pages a week I need to deliver to keep on track. The rest of the day is spent working on other projects or client assignments with immediate delivery dates.

What inspires your stories?

Everything I see, hear, watch, read, and art, nature, and music also inspire me. I also get my best ideas when I'm driving, relaxing, on vacation, or doing other activities other than writing!

What types of stories are you attracted to and that you feel you need to write?

I am compelled to write stories that uplift and give hope. I believe that with our thoughts and beliefs we all create our world. Therefore, we have to be mindful of what we think, create, read, and watch.

What is your process?

I always craft a detailed chapter-by-chapter and then a scene-by-scene outline. I work on this process for quite some time until I feel it's how I want the story to unfold. At the same time, I'll develop my characters. Then, when I start to write, other ideas may come to me (little nuances and actions), but I very rarely deviate from my outline. I also always commit a schedule that I'll mark on my calendar as to how many pages a week I'll write. That's how I stay on track.

You've written original screenplays, adaptations, and novels. How different is writing a book vs. a screenplay?

First, as mentioned above, I always have a detailed outline, so I know exactly how the plot and scenes or chapters will unfold. I also visualize everything I write as I'm writing — whether it is a novel or screenplay. However, there is so much more freedom, exposition and thought examination (on the part of the characters) that goes into writing a novel. Writing screenplays, you have to have the scenes unfold in a way that tells the story in a very concise, visual way (in approximately 126 pages vs. 450 or more pages in a novel!).

What gave you the idea for *Lady in the Window*?

It was about 2014, and I was visiting my family out on the North Fork of Long Island in Cutchogue — a beautiful, quaint, picturesque town that is home to many vineyards, farms and storybook views. I knew that I wanted it to be somewhat of a mystery, as well as a story about a family and friends helping one another. I toyed around with various plots and then put it aside until 2015. When my husband and I took a trip to Kauai in 2014, an outline took hold, and I knew I had my story.

Is *Lady in the Window* somewhat autobiographical?

I believe that a writer draws from his or her life experiences and perceptions, so yes, bit and pieces are my story, but not entirely. In particular, I drew from my experiences when it came to Kate's relationship and experiences with her parents, her career, and much of the “mystical” elements experienced by Kate.

You share similar hobbies to Kate — cooking, and photography — and you chose to incorporate them into *Lady in the Window*. Explain why.

Cooking for family and friend gatherings have always been important in my life, and I believe that tremendous joy ensues when you bring people together in this fashion. Of course, these events always include a meal (at least in my family!). I grew up watching my mother and grandmothers cook and enjoyed helping them in the kitchen. Today, I still find cooking and creating my recipes so relaxing and creative (and a break from writing), and I felt these hobbies would translate well into Kate's life. Photography is also another activity that gives me great pleasure and satisfaction. When I capture an image that inspires me, I love sharing that beauty with others. Because Hawaii is “my heart and my soul place,” and so amazingly beautiful, I felt that Kate's enthusiasm and desire to capture what she was seeing would emphasize her complete enthrallment with the land.

There are many mystical elements to *Lady in the Window*. Do you believe in life after death? That our loved ones that have passed help to guide us and are around us always?

An unequivocal "YES." I have always believed that our loved ones live on after death and that they surround and guide us in spirit. When I was a young girl, I even wrote about these themes — and I used that fact in my novel. I've also had many experiences, which I won't go into here, but served as research and content for *Lady in the Window*.

Who was your inspiration for Catherine and the other characters in "*Lady in the Window*?"

My parents were the inspiration for Catherine and Glen. Kate's brother Derek is a combination of my four wonderful brothers, and my sister was the inspiration for Carla. My nine nieces and nephews inspire the characters of Kate's nieces and nephew.

When you first had the idea for *Lady in the Window*, did you intend to draw from your experiences?

No. I first had the idea to write about a family mystery, and I knew I wanted to incorporate some aspect of spiritual healing. Initially, I was thinking of placing my story during World War II. (I've had a lot of experience writing about that period!). However, when I visited Kauai in 2014 with my family, I was so inspired that I changed the main location backdrop from Europe to Kauai. Then, after my own dear mother's passing at the close of 2014, the story just seem to come together for me the way it unfolds in *Lady in the Window*. I guess you could say that I wanted to share my experience, and what I believe... that your loved ones live on and surround guide you...and that if we're open to it, we can also communicate with our deceased ohana (family), we just need to take note of the signs and listen to our heart and intuition. I could go on and on about this topic!

When you begin writing a novel, do you know the ending?

Yes. Because I follow a detailed outline, I always know how my story will end. Sometimes I change or add to elements of the story as I write, but not so significantly that the ending changes. I guess the best way to put it is, that even though I know what will transpire, sometimes I get a thrill out of what suddenly pops into my consciousness. All I can tell you is that I thoroughly enjoy the process. It's like going on a journey that transports me into another world.

What types of stories to you plan to write in the future?

I gravitate to a bit of mystery, themes having to do with family relationships, romance, and stories that inspire and give hope for the human condition. What determines my immediate focus and pursuit, is how much a particular plot, theme or character pulls at me.

In addition to screenplay and novel writing, you are a journalist and television host. Describe how you blend these careers.

Immediately after I graduated college, I landed a job in commercial production in New York City. I worked at that job for a year before I got my nerve up to move to California. My first job in Los Angeles was working as a writer/producer for entertainment news at Cable News Network (CNN). During that time, I also began working as a freelance newspaper and magazine journalist. After my stint at CNN, I wrote and produced for other networks, and when I got burnt out working 24/7 in production, I was eventually offered a lucrative job in publicity. As a PR and marketing executive, I helmed campaigns for most of the major networks and Hollywood studios, as well as serving as senior vice president of Stephen J. Cannell Productions/The Cannell Studios during its heyday. Eventually, I founded Ridini Entertainment Corporation, a PR/Marketing, Content Creation and TV/Film Production company.

What can tips you impart to new writers?

Once you have a theme, plot out how your story unfolds to use as a guideline when writing. Knowing where you're going is invaluable and will save you time when it gets to reviewing and editing the book. Another bit of advice, write every day even if for just an hour. If you're working on a project, give yourself a certain number of pages a week. Then, if you finish your count in four or five days, you get two free days. If you feel like it, you can always write more, but I like to know that I've achieved my goal and only then will I allow myself a present of a leisurely day.

##

"Lady in the Window" a Novel by Maryann Ridini Spencer in bookstores May 9, 2017, from SelectBooks

Contact Maryann for media inquiries, interviews and speaking engagements:

Ridini Entertainment Corporation (818) 884-0104

Email: recprinfo@gmail.com indicating your request in the email subject line.

Visit: MaryannRidiniSpencer.com