

***The Paradise Table***  
**A Q&A with Novelist Maryann Ridini Spencer**

**What gave you the idea for *The Paradise Table*?**

As I was writing *Lady in the Window*, the first book in the *Kate Grace Mystery Series*, the title and general concept for *The Paradise Table* just came to me. I wanted to write about friends helping friends, the necessity of living one's authentic life and truth, how something positive can come out of a negative, how we can learn to have more joy in our lives by being connected to God and following his Word, and "doing unto others..." Incidentally, as I wrote *The Paradise Table*, the title and concept for the third book, *Secrets of Grace Manor*, came to me. I hope I continue to get ideas for future books as I'm writing in the present.

**Why did you decide to set *The Paradise Table* in Hawaii?**

I've been traveling to the Hawaii Islands for many years now. My first visit took place in Maui, and when I boarded the plane for home, I wept. I resonate with living aloha, and the stunning, magical, and abundant beauty of the islands fills my soul. In Hawaii, I am at home.

**Is the *Kate Grace Mystery series* 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 the *Kate Grace Mystery novels*. Explain why.**

I believe that a writer draws from his or her life experiences and perceptions, so yes, some of Kate's hobbies are mine because they work for the character and the types of stories I'm writing. For example, cooking for family and friend gatherings have always been important in my life, and I believe that tremendous joy and a feeling of

“connectedness” 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 in *The Paradise Table*. Do you believe in life after death?**

A definite "YES." I believe in God, the Bible, and have always known in my soul that we live on after death. I also believe, that under God's direction and by His will (and without us seeking it out!), that we are sometimes blessed with divine messages and inspiration. 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 both *Lady in the Window* and *The Paradise Table*.

**When did you know you wanted to become a writer?**

I've known for as long as I can remember. However, although I always knew I wanted to write novels, it wasn't until recently that I began to pursue writing fiction. In 2014, I opened a box filled with my childhood memorabilia. Reading through those stories, which I had long forgotten, inspired me to "get my show on the road" and start writing novels. 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. Previously up until that point, I was writing for newspapers and magazines as well as producing and writing projects for television. However, around 2002, as a TV/Film producer I began to feel the need to write movie screenplays 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?**

Art, nature, music — everything I see, hear, watch, and read. 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?**

When I read, I enjoy mysteries, romances, historical novels, contemporary fiction, so I'm compelled to write the same. I'm also committed to writing stories that exalt family values, uplift and offer hope, healing, understanding, and faith.

### **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 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 style (in approximately 126 pages vs. 350 or more pages in a novel!).

**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 do you plan to write in the future?**

I plan to write more *Kate Grace Mysteries* as well as other novels. As mentioned previously, 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 from 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, to pursue my writing and producing passions while making a living at my PR and marketing “day” job.

### **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.

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