

Andra Watkins
New York Times Best Selling Author
Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ'S TO LIVE FOREVER

Your fiction is really unique. I've never read anything quite like it. What was the inspiration for the world you created in To Live Forever?

I couldn't stop wondering what Meriwether Lewis might do if he were given another adventure. He died mysteriously at the young age of 35. But as America's first scientist, he could've done so much more had he lived.

The only way to give a dead person another adventure is to create it. I didn't want to write historical fiction, because I would be constrained by the limits of fact. By putting him in an alternative afterlife, I could use historical conflict to create a NEW adventure for Lewis. It was so much fun to imagine what he might do.

Do you know if his family approves?

I've heard from several of his siblings' descendants. So far, they all approve of how I portrayed Lewis. I also have a fan base within the Lewis and Clark community.

There's really no genre for your fiction. How do you describe it to people?

I call it paranormal/historical/action/adventure, though it really fits within the realm of speculative fiction.

I always tell groups I prefer my fiction and write novels I've always wanted to read. My enthusiasm usually convinces more people to buy.

Online, it's trickier. Readers are buried by choices. Convincing them to try an unconventional novel is tough. Plenty of people have read and reviewed my fiction, enough to convince skeptics that reviews aren't from a bunch of my friends. Readers also find their way to my fiction through my memoir. They figure I can weave a story, so they may as well give another title a try.

FAQ'S NOT WITHOUT MY FATHER

How did your parents feel about your honesty in Not Without My Father? Did they ask you to change anything? Did they get angry over anything you revealed?

My parents are very proud of NWMF now, but that wasn't always the case. I didn't want to write a book by committee, and I figured my parents wouldn't sue me. They read the book when everyone else did.

My mother stopped speaking to me for a couple of weeks over something I revealed in the memoir. It took multiple people thanking her for allowing me to share that vulnerability before she realized it was okay.

Dad never disputed anything I wrote about him, but he asks me to take out the word *goddammit* every time I see him.

How's your father these days? Is he still alive?

As of this writing (September 2016), Dad is very much alive and well. He calls NWMF "The Dad Book" or "The Book About Me." Because he loves talking to strangers, he now has the perfect entree to strike up a conversation. He goes out every day and sells books. NWMF made his whole life in its twilight. It isn't often that a child is able to do that for a parent. I'm convinced the book is prolonging his life.

How did you take the photos on your Natchez Trace walk?

I took every picture with my iPhone 5 camera. I worked the images in the Camera+ app for iPhone. Whether the photos reside online or in one of my books, that's how they came to be.

The pictures were entertainment for me. I had long stretches of time where I was completely alone. Taking photos gave me something to do besides listening to my own loud thoughts. I never intended to include them in NWMF, and I certainly never imagined creating a book of photography!

FAQ'S HARD TO DIE

Did you decide to write about Theodosia Burr Alston to capitalize on the success of Hamilton: An American Musical?

I started working on *Hard to Die* before *Hamilton* previewed at the Public Theater ahead of its move to Broadway. I was writing a different sequel for *To Live Forever*, but she whooshed in and took over the story. She was very loud and insistent. I wrote several short stories to try to get her out of my system, but she wasn't satisfied.

After several months of grappling with her, I put my intended sequel aside and started working on what became *Hard to Die*. I'm so glad she was insistent, because it's the right story at (hopefully) the right time.

Is it also an afterlife adventure?

Yes. Theodosia disappeared at sea at age twenty-nine. For two centuries, stories have swirled about what happened to her. Alas, we'll probably never know. But her unresolved death gave me the perfect means to create a new adventure.

Hard to Die is quite different from To Live Forever. Why did you change the formula?

I've never wanted to craft formulaic stories. I'm not saying they don't make great reads. It's more a ME problem: I get bored. I want the challenge of bending my original formula and trying to find new ways to freshen it each time.

Hard to Die took longer to write because of my obstinance about formula. I don't regret it. Still, it's scary to give readers something they don't expect. Some people don't like surprises. But I'm determined to write what interests me. As a result, I'm passionate about my work, and I hope that passion will flame in others.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

What's next for you writing-wise?

I have several projects in the works. *I Am Number 13* is the sequel to *Hard to Die*. I hope it will be available by June 2017.

Two other historical figures with unresolved deaths are pretty insistent that I craft their afterlife adventures. Whether they join my ongoing afterlife series or become separate stories, I'm looking forward to getting to know these new characters.

I'm also working on a feminist travelogue about Eleanor of Aquitaine. I'll do the on-site research during the summer of 2017, and I hope for the book to be available by 2018.

What's your writing process?

I'm a pantsier not a planner. My characters have distinct voices in my head, and they write the early drafts of my novels. I never know what they're going to do. If I went into it with an outline, I'd miss some of my best twists and turns.

My books always go to dedicated beta readers. I don't have many betas, but I value their feedback and almost always make the changes they suggest. Once a book comes back from betas, I approach it more methodically. I'm in control. It's my job to take the characters' ideas and shape a readable story.

I'm also a streaky writer, meaning I don't write every day. I wish I could, but my appearance schedule is intense. When I'm on the road, I focus on being in the moment, meeting new readers, and giving the best presentations possible. It's a very extroverted mode. But when I'm writing, I tend to avoid people and hermit. I want to be alone with as few distractions as possible, an introverted mode. I can't flip a switch and go from one mode to the other, so I schedule time on the road and time to write in exclusive chunks.

You've done a lot of book signings. How do you get people to show up?

First of all, I DON'T DO BOOK SIGNINGS. My events aren't the usual author event. I never sit down. I refuse to read selections from my books for groups. I don't hide behind a table or lectern. My appearances are dynamic motivational talks. I entertain, educate, and inspire my audiences. It's still a challenge to get venues to understand what I do, but I have a growing list of librarians, business associations, civic clubs, conferences, and reading groups who attest to the power of my approach. I'm very grateful for progressive, forward-thinking people who are willing to showcase me and my work. In markets where I'm known, people show up because they've heard about my program and want to experience it for themselves.