

YA – Young Adult Stories for a New Generation - Part II

By Dianna Love Snell

If you haven't read Part 1 of this series, please go to the archived Galleys and read the May 2007 issue. I've interviewed the following YA authors with recent sales and agents who actively acquire to find out more about this growing market:

AUTHORS:

Kelly Parra– GRAFFITI GIRL (MTV/Pocket Books) May 2007

Jennifer Echols– THE BOYS NEXT DOOR (Simon Pulse) June 2007

Caridad Ferrer - IT'S NOT ABOUT THE ACCENT (MTV Books/Pocket) August 2007

Berta Platas and Michelle Roper writing as **Gillian Summers**– THE TREE

SHEPHERD'S DAUGHTER (Flux) September, 2007

Tina Ferraro - TOP TEN USES FOR AN UNWORN PROM DRESS, Delacorte Press, March, 2007.

AGENTS:

Caren Johnson, Caren Johnson Literary Agency - www.cjla.squarespace.com

Kristin Nelson, Nelson Literary Agency- www.nelsonagency.com

Author interviews:

What drew you to the YA market?

Kelly - V.C. Andrews when I was a young teen reader, but to be honest as a writer, the market drew me in. Editors are seeking young adult stories and I thought I'd be able to write one. Over the years I'd lost touch with the genre and during my research have discovered wonderful authors such as Sarah Dessen, Ann Brashares, Laurie Halse Anderson, and several new and talented new voices. I am truly addicted to the YA of today.

Jennifer - I finished my first novel when I was 20, and at that point I was still reading YA along with the adult literature for my English degree. So I never got *out* of YA.

Caridad - My agent told me to? Seriously—she kept insisting I had a great voice for YA and after I scoffed one time too many, she finally said, "Look, there's an editor who's looking for a YA with Latina flavor—give it a shot." Not really a request, if you know what I mean. And once I started, I really enjoyed it—it's a different vibe and mindset altogether from the women's fiction I write, but at the same time, remarkably familiar. But don't mistake familiar for easy. All in all, it's been a wonderful learning experience, from a lot of different standpoints and easily one of the most frightening things I've ever taken on. Because who's a harsher critic than your average teen? If you don't get it right, they have no bones about telling you so and telling all their friends and everyone on the Internet, and then you're in some seriously hot water. There are too many fantastic books out there for them to give you a second chance if you've blown the first one.

Berta: I adore YA books and have never stopped reading them. Michelle and I are critique partners, two of four in our group, and when we had this cool idea about a fish

out of water story, we decided it would be best written for a younger audience.

Michelle: Like Berta, I love YA books, especially fantasy. Young adult is that stage in life where you're bordering on the sunset of childhood and the dawn of adulthood. You're discovering who you are, the world is ripe with possibility--you can be what you dream, yet there can be a dark side to life as a young adult. If you can create a character that resonates with your readers and give them hope, lets them escape in your book, or just makes them think about their choices, then as an author you've made a difference.

Tina - I am a shameless optimist, and what I love most about writing YA is the feeling that my whole life is still in front of me, and anything is possible if I work hard enough! Do you write a series and, if so, how are the books connected (one character or related characters from different books)?

What is your story about and does it target a specific teen group (which one)?

Kelly - *Graffiti Girl* – being released May 15, 2007 – is about a high school Mexican-American artist drawn into the underground world of graffiti art, feeling this is the only method her artwork will be accepted and still allow her to stay true to her cultural identity. It's a story of finding where you belong and believing in your talent enough to be different. *Graffiti Girl* is targeted for Latino readers as well as high school artists (13+).

Jennifer - Working the summer at a marina near her lakeside home, a high school junior pretends to date the boy next door to catch his older brother, her childhood crush. It's a romantic comedy for ages 14 and up.

Caridad - Both of my MTV Books are coming of age stories but with different approaches. ADIÓS (2006 release) is set against the backdrop of an American Idol-style show with a Latin flavor and follows my protagonist as she navigates a world of new fame and all the issues that come along with that. ACCENT, on the other hand, is entirely a journey of self-discovery, set to the theme of reinvention – the type that we all go through, to a certain extent when we go off to college. Trying on a new persona, figuring out who we are or who we want to be. Both of my protagonists are older; in ADIÓS, Ali is seventeen and turns eighteen by the end of the book, in ACCENT, Caro is an eighteen year-old college freshman. As far as targeting specific groups, superficially, one could say I'm targeting a Latina audience, but in all honesty, I wanted to make my books universally appealing with my own Cuban American/Miami-raised background giving more a flavor and distinction, as it were. The books were definitely not written with any kind of intent to alienate potential readers, but rather to hopefully give people a glimpse into a culture they might not be as familiar with. Knowing that kids like to read up, in terms of the ages of the protagonists of the stories they choose, I always say that my books are pretty much appropriate for ages 14 and up.

Berta: Our story is about a privileged fifteen year old girl from Los Angeles whose life is turned upside down when her mom dies and she's sent to live with her absentee father. He's an itinerant furniture craftsman on the Renaissance Faire circuit, and if that isn't world-shaking enough, she finds out the Faire is filled with magical secrets, and her father's a major part of them.

Michelle: We're not really targeting any specific teen market, although our book would fall under the urban fantasy category; however, our heroine, Keelie, is a girl who readers will immediately be able to identify with because of the emotional journey she

takes as she overcomes the obstacles within her own self in accepting her new life with her father.

Tina - My book is TOP TEN USES FOR AN UNWORN PROM DRESS, and its pink cover pretty much promises a “sweet” read. My target audience is females over the age of 12, and I think of it as a “companion” to bring on trips--or maybe a way to “veg” after mid-terms or finals. In any case, it’s not heavy literature, just a fun way to escape. I’ve been thrilled to find that guys like the book, too. In fact, one teen book clerk told me I got the guy head “just right”.

Agent interviews:

Which houses are actively acquiring YA and is there a difference between what they want?

Caren - Almost all major publishing houses have a YA line actively acquiring.

Kristen - All of them that have YA imprints are acquiring. As for what they want, it’s really more about the individual editors at each imprint and their likes and dislikes for what they want to see.

Do the publishers want series based on one character or series that are connected by secondary characters that become the protagonist at some point?

Caren - Publishers will acquire both kinds of series, ones that have direct sequels where characters are recurring (think Meg Cabot’s Mediator series) and series based in the same world, though not necessarily a follow up to the previous book published. In general, I find that anything primarily focused on the romance between characters is usually series based in the same world (since the focus is on the romance, it’s hard to have a sequel because the guy and girl usually end up together by the end of the book) while more literary or commercial YA have direct sequels.

Kristen - Both can work. I have a YA author that has just started a new series where the unique setting is the common denominator (Jenny O’Connell’s new series with MTV/Pocket Books). I have another YA author whose main protagonist carries the story (Ally Carter’s Gallagher Girl Academy series with Hyperion). My author Kelly Parra (who writes for MTV/Pocket) is working on a new possible series where all the characters introduced will get there own story.

© breakintofiction.com All rights reserved

Breakintofiction.com