

# A BSB Interview With Andrews & Austin

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Publicist/Author Liaison

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**Andrews:** First let me say that I'm a little shy about interviews...even with you, Connie! Because I read it later and think it sounded phony or cold or...I don't know. Austin, of course, is just the opposite. She views the sun coming up as her own personal klieg light, and from the moment she opens her eyes every morning, it's showtime.

**Austin:** You see how well she does fiction...she's making this up!

**What made you decide to become a fiction writer?**

**Andrews:** If you have the right publisher (and of course we believe we do <g>), published works have a greater chance of achieving strong storyline, interesting characters, and of making you laugh or cry or, better still, of changing the way you think about things.

**Austin:** Writing fiction really just involves the author(s), the editor, and the publisher, while screenwriting involves the studio head, the department head, the development executive, the producer, the director, high-priced stars, the stars' agents, and sometimes a band of additional writers they've brought in for rewrites, and the secretary's dog. You and I go to a movie and say, "It wasn't as good as the book"; the original screenwriter goes to the premiere and says, "It wasn't as good as my story!"

**Andrews:** In our Hollywood days we developed, wrote, pitched, and optioned a lot of movies of the week. True stories were the rage at the time, and of course true crime. We would spend countless hours tracking down a story and then obtaining the story rights. Inevitably, the twists and turns that would have made the story truly fascinating were lacking; and we would have to embellish the story in order to sell it. Fiction carries none of that baggage and allows total freedom of creativity. We're far happier and more creative in the fiction arena. Fiction can be more fascinating than fact.

**Austin:** The tabloids figured that one out!

**What type of stories do you write? And why?**

**Austin:** We want to write stories that entertain the reader. Life is short and way too serious. A book that makes you want to go home and read the rest of it...tonight!

**Andrews:** We love to write about powerful women who allow little glimpses into their hidden frailties, because we're all like that—hiding our frailties, putting on a good show. We love any story that allows the characters to have an intelligent sense of humor, a story with a fast-paced mission, quest, journey. I guess that's because, as readers, we're impatient, and so we think of ourselves and start saying, we need to pick up the pace, or it needs to have more complexity or be more real or something.

**Austin:** We love to open people's minds, help them blend and/or delete the oppressiveness of much of traditional thought, and be open to the universe.

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**What do your family/friends think about your writing?**

**Andrews:** None of our family members have read it.

**Austin:** My mom will probably read it, and she'll love it.

**Andrews:** My brother and sister would probably feel a little more comfortable if we'd written a nice cookbook.

**Where do you get your ideas?**

**Andrews:** The underpinnings are always life experience. We've touched it, felt it, seen it, heard it. That said, we do love complete fantasy worlds and would like to create something in that arena.

**How do you write; do you plan everything out or just write?**

**Andrews:** We heard some excellent authors address this question at the GCLS in Atlanta this year. I believe it was Ellen Hart who told a story about a famous writer who made the outline match the story—post-outlining. I actually did that, so it made me laugh at myself. I tediously outlined the entire freaking book. Austin wouldn't outline anything for any reason—too much structure!

**Austin:** That's true.

**Andrews:** Then we started writing and we deserted the outline, and I, too, actually went back and redid the outline to match what we'd written. Austin was laughing at my inability to just let it flow.

**Austin:** Let it go; let it flow!

**Andrews:** I think it works best for us when we decide upfront, as we're discussing the story, what key moments in the book we're driving toward. And in fact, in a television pitch you're often asked to cut to those four or five moments, because if you know and can describe those moments, you have the story.

**What makes *Combust the Sun* special to you?**

**Andrews:** It's a cliché, but true, it's our first book so we're like proud parents. It's also the beginning of a relationship with BSB and Rad and her staff, which has been wonderful. It was all entirely new to us, so it was interesting and nerve-wracking. (Ironically, the hardest part for us was the tech edit, because it's an element encountered in a different context in screenwriting.) *Combust the Sun* is special because we were able to preserve our own particular style, which we think is a bit unique. We are dialogue freaks. We love it, and we think it has to be well done to be effective. One of the things we noticed about Ann Bannon's writing was her nice use of dialogue. There are several BSB authors who do a very good job with dialogue. For me, it's the one element that either hooks me in or puts me off when I read a book.

**Austin:** We get a chance to blend one of my passions—cosmic, astrological, metaphysical stuff—with fun characters. My mom, my sister, and many members of my family are spiritualists and psychics, so when I first went to school as a young girl and heard about how men were in charge of the world and all the traditional religious beliefs, I thought everybody was nuts!

**Andrews:** My grandmother was Roman Catholic, my mother Baptist, my aunt Christian Scientist, my friends were Methodist, and I dated a Jewish boy. Almost everyone I knew thought the other guy was going to hell. I was studying to be a priest when I met Austin, who pretty much upended my world and told me she was going to set me free from my self-induced oppression. I think we all want to be set free. So while we want *Combust the Sun* to be a great read, make you laugh, be a little sexy and all that, we also hope, in some tiny way, it gives people new things to think about, allows them to question everything, and ask, does what I'm choosing to believe make my life better.

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**How much of yourself and the people you know are in your characters?**

**Austin:** Lots. We admit it. We're shameless people watchers. And we have jam-packed lives, and we think we have unique experiences that we can draw on for good material.

**Which lesbian authors inspired you the most? Do you have a favorite of this author(s)?**

**Andrews:** As adults, we never read lesbian literature of any kind. We had no idea of the caliber of lesbian literature that's available today. The first three books we read were Rad's *Shield of Justice* and *Innocent Hearts*. Then we read Jane Fletcher's *Temple at Landfall*, and we realized, Wow, things have changed!

We tend to have favorite books, but we love all the authors because they risk putting themselves out there. I would list our favorite books, but it wouldn't be fair to the authors we haven't yet read; and we've still read so few of them, just because of our work schedule. But we will read every one! Unless Rad keeps signing authors at her current rate—then we'll never catch up. <g>

**Do you have any suggestions for new writers?**

**Andrews:** To know what you write, write what you know, particularly if you're starting out.

**Austin:** That's why Rad's medical scenes are riveting. She obviously knows her subject. You can research that, of course...

**Andrews:** ...but the emotional piece comes with living. That's why it's hard for a twenty-year-old kid from a white-bread family to write about the struggles of a forty-year-old black woman living in Harlem in a way that makes the character breathe.

**When you're not writing what do you do for fun?**

**Andrews:** We both have full-time jobs. I work ten- to twelve-hour days, and Austin does the same running our ranch. So writing is our fun.

**Austin:** The other thing we love to do is work with our Icelandic horses. In fact our next series is a contemporary romantic quest involving two strong women and the Icelandic horse. It's entitled *Mistress of the Runes*; we're very excited about it. We haven't submitted it yet...so we'll see.



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