

An Interview With Andrews & Austin

by Lynne Jamneck, from literature.l-word.com

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ANDREWS was a radio broadcaster in NYC in morning drive; she spent years as creative director for large ad agencies before joining one of the largest movie studio conglomerates in the world, where she managed network programming. She left the movie studio to form her own production company with Austin, developing and writing screenplays for studios and independents. After a decade in Hollywood, she joined an international entertainment and publishing powerhouse as a division president overseeing television production. Andrews is an accomplished writer, producer and public speaker.

AUSTIN is a talented writer/producer, a former on-air talent, and co-founder of a Hollywood production company. She has served as segment producer for network specials and animated sports programming; and she's developed and optioned movies of the week and theatricals for studios, networks and independents. Prior to owning her own production company, Austin was the co-producer, and on-air host, of a shopping network. Austin is also a gifted astrologer and psychic.

Andrews & Austin live on a ranch with horses, dogs, cats and assorted wildlife.

Where did both of your respective interest in writing develop from?

Andrews: Austin and I were both raised in families controlled by dominant males who worked in the oil business. Every phrase had color: "he's richer than three feet up a bull's butt" or "they were workin' so hard they were all assholes and elbows." I fell in love, early on, with phrasing and irony and humor and that led to my writing style.

Austin: Writing for me was just a means of communicating with people—to help them open their eyes and their minds and to think for themselves.

How did the two of you get together... and decide that you wanted to co-author a book?

Austin: How we got together is Andrews' mom picked me out for her! She wasn't too happy with Andrews' choice in women so she thought she'd give her a little help and frankly, I think she did a great job.

Andrews: My mom always thought I was "a little thick" when it came to women and Austin was her personal friend so one day she marched Austin right up to me, pushed her in front of me and said, "Doesn't she have the most gorgeous blue eyes you've ever seen in your life!" I was embarrassed that my mother was obviously setting me up BUT mom was right. Always listen to your mother.

Austin: But to answer the rest of the question about how we decided to co-author a book, we contacted BSB and Rad asked us to submit some of our work; and it was an instant match.

Andrews: Frankly, we loved the idea that "the suit" in this publishing company was also a creative—finally someone who understood art as well as business.

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Tell us a bit about the process of working together. How do you reconcile your different styles/viewpoints when you're working on a project?

Austin: The first few years were pretty rocky because she's stubborn and doesn't listen—

Andrews: Oh please, stop playing to the camera—

Austin: She flunked sharing in kindergarten.

Andrews: Okay, I did. They actually had a skill set called sharing on the report card and I flunked it because if someone came up and tried to use my crayons or pencils, I just got up and left. Deserted the project.

Austin: There you have it. Don't touch her crayons! She had to get over it which required quite a bit of shouting.

Andrews: Now I'm totally domesticated. I have my hands on the keyboard—

Austin: Control issue.

Andrews: And she interrupts just like she's doing here and tells me no, yes, add this, doesn't make sense and we banter back and forth and type. Now, when it gets to the tech edit, it's like trying to trap a flea—she runs—hates the detail. She likes the big strokes.

Austin: Boldstrokes.

Andrews: Cute.

Both of you have backgrounds in writing for film and television. How does that process differ from writing a book?

Andrews: I think writing for television and film makes us stronger mystery writers. We have a sense of timing, we understand what makes a scene move, we know how to write strong dialogue—just a hundred things about film that make us stronger writers in this genre.

Austin: We actually apply our movie structure with its hooks, breaks, and character driven plots to writing the novel because in the end we want strong lesbian novels to become films.

Your new book *Stellium in Scorpio* will be released in January 2007. How long did you work on the book, from first draft to finish?

Austin: Too damned long! Four months. A lot of other work and personal stuff got in our way.

Andrews: Yes, our dream is to do nothing but write lesbian novels and ride our horses into the sunset. Or maybe it's ride out lesbian horses and write our novels into the sunset. We're unclear.

Austin: We want to make lesbian theatricals. We're very clear on that.

What are you currently working on?

Andrews: We're finishing up a mystical romance, the first book in a new BSB series. It's entitled *Mistress of the Runes* and we're extremely excited about it. It will be out in Fall of 2007.

Austin: We also have a third book in our Richfield & Rivers Mystery series entitled *Venus Besieged* which will be out in 2007.

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What's your initial outlay like when you're starting a new book? Do you each approach the story from the same or different angles?

Austin: We don't fly because Andrews hates it. So we drive everywhere and many of our stories are conceived in the front seat of the car.

Andrews: Wow, that's an image. By the time we do a treatment or a synopsis and start writing we're on the same page on about eighty-five percent of the book.

What is the best and worst thing about being a writer?

Andrews: Best thing: The possibility that what we have to say could free people up, change their beliefs, remind them that who they are is more than okay, or maybe just make them laugh.

Worst thing: There's never enough time to write.

Austin: Best thing: You get to put forth thought provoking ideas.

Worst thing: It takes too long from the time you start until the book is on the shelf. BSB is very fast—it's the whole bookstore system of ordering, marketing and shelving that takes nine months. You can have a baby in nine months!

Well, somebody could—

Andrews: In the front seat of the car.

Who are some of the authors who serve as inspiration to you both?

Andrews: I grew up with straight authors. I was a Joan Didion fan.

Austin: I read a lot but I never had one author in particular that I liked.

Andrews: Until she met me. Now she gets to sleep with her favorite author and I get to sleep with mine. It doesn't get any better than that.

Have you ever had major conflicts with one another as writers because you disagreed on where a particular plot point/character should be taken?

Andrews: We argue all the time about characters and plots and dialogue and everything.

Austin: But the arguing doesn't carry over into our personal life. When we stop writing, we stop arguing about writing.

Andrews: Then we argue about other things.

Austin: We do not.

What happens when one of you gets struck by a case of writer's block?

Andrews: The biggest cure for writer's block is starvation. When we were writing and optioning stories in L.A., if we didn't write, we had nothing to sell and if we didn't sell, we didn't pay the bills. Cures writers block immediately.

Austin: We do write extraordinarily fast and we never seem to get jammed up. Not the way I've heard writers talk about. Maybe it's because there are two of us and we spur each other on.

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What do you consider to be your best and worst attributes?

Andrews: Worst Attribute: I angst over everything—self doubt.

Best attribute: I can find humor in almost any situation.

Austin: Worst Attribute: No patience—and it's never enough.

Best Attribute: I have a very positive attitude about life and I try to share that.

Do you ever use Beta readers for your work before handing it over to your publisher?

Andrews: No, we write fairly quickly and it just doesn't work for us. I guess we beta read for each other.

Tell us something about Andrews & Austin no one else knows.

Andrews: I studied to be a priest. I left those studies to be with Austin. It was a fabulous decision.

Austin: I'm a natural blond and petite but I'm very athletic. I'm physically very strong and I can drive anything from a Harley to an 18 wheeler.

Andrews: God, I love that.

Do you think 'lesbian fiction' pigeonholes itself by identifying as such?

Andrews: It is what it is. There's no shame in that. Mainstream has pigeonholed it.

Austin: I believe when it's the right book, it can cross over and that will happen sooner than you think.

Andrews: That's true. We know an awful lot of straight women who read lesbian fiction. So, perhaps it's a guilty pleasure.

What advice would you give to unpublished writers who want to become successful authors?

Andrews: Perfect your craft. There is no substitute for learning how to express yourself well. The time you spend in doing that isn't wasted; it prepares you to be published.

Austin: Live life! Experience many things so you'll have something to write about, something worth reading, and then believe it will happen.

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