



AN INTERVIEW WITH LEA SCHIZAS
by Donna M. McDine

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Lea Schizas is a multi-published author and award-winning editor of two Writer's Digest 101 Top Web Sites. Between her writing projects, editing services, mentoring (or as many of us whom have had the privilege of connecting with Lea our "mother-hen") writers', networking, etc., her vast array of projects would exhaust anyone looking in from the outside. That said, I am elated and honored to share with you the perceptive and captivating interview with Lea.

Donna McDine: What or whom inspires you to write?

Lea Schizas: I've joked on several interviews that I mistook my umbilical cord as a cool writing implement and that's how my writing career began. In all honesty, it was my dad's love for the penned word that set me on my path. As a young girl I remember hearing dad's speeches at weddings, meetings, get-togethers, and how he captivated the audience with his words.

Along with dad's talent, it was my collection of comic books that really moved me to write. I loved the cliff-hanging endings, pushing me to buy the next comic book to find out what was going to happen. And that is exactly how I set up each of my chapter endings, thanks to comic books.

DMc: Where do you work? What is your ideal writing environment?

LS: I've worked wherever I can get peace and quiet, alone time with my laptop. Right now I'm in a corner in my living room. The ideal writing environment would be my own office, where I can close the door to the yapping of my five kids and friends, to have my own shelves in front of me with my stack of writing books instead of having them spread

throughout the house. But, this is one lesson writers need to adapt to – writing whenever and wherever you can, regardless of your surroundings. So, I've adapted quite nicely.

DMc: How many hours do you devote to writing and how long does it take you to write a book?

LS: Donna, I am involved with many writing commitments so I work looonng hours on my laptop. My day usually starts at 6:30am and doesn't finish until midnight strikes. Now, I do clean, cook, and all the other motherly things so my time isn't spent leaning over my laptop constantly.

Each day I devote to moving my own writing and editing forward, and then give one or two other writing aspects (updating sites/blogs, preparing zines/newsletters/reviews) my devotion as well. This slows down the time to complete my own work but I can safely say that I can finish three books in a year.

DMc: What do you most enjoy about the creative process? Are your characters based on people in your life?

LS: I enjoy the freedom of no fear. What do I mean by that? I don't fear being locked up in a nuthouse for stepping into my characters shoes while penning their stories. I become a teen with visions of past murders; an alien who finds himself tried for treason; a girl who discovers she is a princess to this whole new world she never knew existed. Writing allows you an escape, along with your reader, to leave your own safe domain and live another person's life. This exhilaration can't be felt in another profession as it is felt by those who write.

My characters are not based per say on anyone in my life but each do possess characteristics of family members. By keeping it 'in the family' it's easier for me to flesh out their personalities, reactions and actions, to their fullest potential. And it doesn't matter if my characters are human or animals; characters need to 'feel' real.

DMc: Do your characters crowd your conscious and sub-conscious thoughts? If yes, does it become difficult to keep them quiet?

LS: In my previous answer, I wrote that I step into my character's shoes so my answer would be yes, they do crowd my conscious and sub-conscious thoughts. How can they not? Until their story is finished, they are my buddies, telling me where they want to go, what they want to do. Some who are in a series have started their own blog, and quite popular as a matter of fact. They've now jumped out of my head and communicating with readers. And this is what it's all about- leaving a memorable impression on your reader, connecting them to your characters.

DMc: Please provide us with a glimpse into your current project.

LS: I have one big project that needs thought to successfully pull it off.

It is my upcoming re-release, “Rock Kingdom” with Tiger Publications. It is the first in a series of books based within the land of Rock Kingdom. This is an unusual piece of work for me in the sense the villain is given as much attention as the main character, Alexandra Stone, a young teenager who discovers she is the princess to this whole new world her parents kept from her for a reason. The villain has a dilemma, and in each book not only will I offer glimpses into his past life to discover this ‘dilemma’ but also offer the panoramic portrait of Rock Kingdom, each book hosted in a different part within this world. So I am mapping out each book, each area holding a purpose and revealed secret to the ‘villain’, and introducing new citizens of Rock Kingdom along with the regular cast of characters in the whole series.

But this isn’t the only book I’m fleshing out. I have eight books in the works right now and each one is given equal time for me to complete. Every book needs to stamp its mark into a reader so I try not to rush anything.

DMc: What do you find to be more challenging: editing other writers’ manuscripts or developing your own?

LS: I don’t have a hard time developing my ideas into penned words, nor the editing stage. I do have a hard time figuring out if I’m objective enough and deleted inconsequential passages to the fullest extent. That is why a critique partner or an editor comes in handy. We need another pair of eyes to catch things we are too involved with to see.

I have absolutely no difficulty editing other manuscripts because I am totally objective to this work and can spot plot holes, passive writing, weak dialogue easier than its creator.

DMc: Do you maintain your numerous websites on your own? Or do you have assistance?

LS: I’ve been accused of being twins, possessing a magical wand, or totally nuts. I agree with their last sentiment. I have no assistance. I do them all as I wrote earlier, devoting/splitting my time each day to one or two projects besides my writing and editing. I always say determination and perseverance are two qualities a writer must possess in order for them to complete their projects. Passion has to be, however, within you, as well, and I do possess passion for the written word.

DMc: What do you do when you’re not writing?

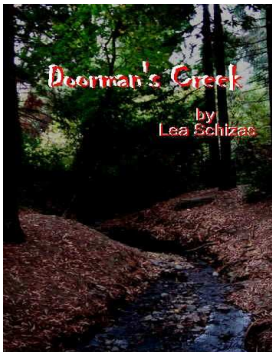
LS: Editing, reading...oh, you mean ‘out of the writing sense’. Hmm...play with my three-year-old dog, Daisy. She’s in one of my books, naturally. Go to the movies, visit Chapters for a good book (they must think I’m the owner with the amount of times I visit), garden, or sit outside and do absolutely nothing. Rare but it happens.

DMc: What has been the most memorable experience in your writing career?

LS: Besides being published, there are many memorable experiences in my career but two stand out for me. Kathe Gogolewski, a MuseItUp member and dear cyber friend, surprised me for the Muse's second year anniversary. She went behind my back and contacted several writers I know and they made a tribute to me, each writing a small thank you as to how I touched their writing life in her site, www.tri-studio.com It wasn't the tribute nor the thank yous that touched me than the fact they went to the trouble of doing something special for *me*. This meant the world to me.

The other total surprise was when I met with another Muser, Shelagh McNally, at a café here in Montreal and she presented me with a plant and a very special card that I treasure to this day. It was from all the writers in the first anthology project I set up, co-authored, edited and had published by Double Dragon Publishing, "The Muse On Writing"- <http://www.freewebs.com/themuseonwriting> These writers live all over the world but each one signed, wrote a special note to me, then sent it off to the next person to sign until it came to me. We're talking this card went around the world until it finally came into my possession. And I had no clue. Again, this gesture, I can't tell you what it meant and continues to mean to me.

My parents taught me that you never do something if you are expecting thanks. You do what you can for others within your means and time constraint. And that's what I do so whenever an email of thanks comes my way, or the above two gestures, these are my favorite toppings to add with my ice cream. They move me to pay it forward to the next writer.



Thank you, Donna, for the wonderful questions and opportunity to meet your readers.

Visit Lea Schizas at: <http://leaschizeditor.tripod.com>

Donna's publishing credits include Stories for Children Magazine, Stories for Children Newsletter, Kid Magazine Writers, Long Story Short, Institute of Children's Literature Rx for Writers, SCBWI Metro NY Newsletter, and Once Upon A Time Magazine and a pending non-fiction article for Boys' Quest Magazine. She's also a children's book reviewer for Musing Our Children Group, The National Writing for Children Center, and Stories for Children.

Learn more about Donna at: <http://www.donnamcdine.com>, sign her guest book and receive a FREE copy of "Assaulting A Writer's Thinking," by Lea Schizas.