

A Conversation with Sherri Sand

How did you come up with the characters in your book?

They came to me. When I saw Sierra, I knew she was a mom who deeply loved her kids and wanted the best for them. Elise was so fun to write with her over-the-top ways. When she drove up to Sierra's and pushed her ooga horn, I knew I was going to love her. And Sid is such a dear and reminds me so much of my father-in-law, Art. And Ross, how could you not love him?

Do you have a horse?

No, but I love horses and desperately wanted one as a child. I did end up with a little Shetland pony named Sundance that I would gallop through the mint fields around our house. I spent countless hours sprawled across him backwards reading books. One time he'd apparently had enough of the dead weight on his back and he lay down. It was a shocking end to my reading time.

What do you do when you're not writing?

I love spending time with my family. We go camping as many weekends as we can in the summer. I also love to run. My husband recently got into running and we were asked to be on a team that participates in a race from Mt. Hood to the coast of Oregon. It generally takes about twenty-two hours, so our idea of fun may be a little warped.

What would you suggest to someone who wants to become an author?

Start attending writers' conferences. And if cost is an issue, order tapes or CDs of the various workshops. Also join a critique group and really listen

to the feedback. When I get input from my critiquing partners, I make a point to set aside any defensiveness and adopt a thicker skin. It's not fun to find out that every word you write isn't brilliant, but if you take the comments constructively you'll become a stronger writer.

How do you find time to write? Any tips for someone who is working full time?

Set a word count goal. I try to write 1,000 words a day, five days a week. If finding the extra time is difficult, start with 300 words a day. At that pace, you'd complete a full-length novel (80,000 words) in one year. But the most important factor in writing is to turn the editor in your head off. Writer's block comes from trying to create and edit at the same time. Don't wait for the perfect idea to come floating along. Start writing now. Write anything. You want to create the habit so the ideas will come. The fear of failure keeps us from giving feet to our dreams—true failure comes from not trying at all.

Did the theme of forgiveness/unforgiveness that Sierra deals with come from your own life?

In a way it did, though I didn't consciously implement it into the novel. Like most of us living in this fallen world, there were a couple significant events in my life that I had difficulty forgiving. I finally realized that if I waited until I felt like forgiving, it would never happen. And I desperately needed to forgive. The bitterness was choking the life out of me. So with God's help and through His grace I made the choice to forgive and forgive and forgive. I wish I could say that there was instant peace and joy. Though I think that can happen for people, I'd lived in unforgiveness for so long that I had to continually make a choice to forgive until the freedom came. And when that freedom came, it was a wow moment for me!

In the story, Sierra has three young kids. You have four children. How successful are you at trusting God with their lives?

It's been an ongoing process for me. Maybe because I'm a writer and have such a vivid imagination, I can always come up with the most gut-wrenching conclusions to the most innocuous circumstances involving my kids. That makes it hard to let go and trust. But how much control do we actually have over everyday life? I had to learn that before we can trust God with ourselves or our children, we have to truly know Him. It's only in knowing God and His character that trust can develop. And when we truly know the God of the universe, we can trust Him with everything.

Ross worked hard in his landscaping business in an attempt to prove his value. Do you struggle with that?

It's difficult not to get caught up in that. Our world is performance driven. Our praise of others is usually tied to something they've accomplished. Even with our children, we praise how well they unload the dishwasher or draw a picture or mind us. It's difficult to find the words to value people for who they are, apart from anything they do. For most of my life, performance colored my relationship with God. I could not wrap my mind around the concept that He loved me despite less-than-perfect behaviors. Recently I glimpsed His grace from a new angle. Sin does create a righteous anger, but God's anger was satisfied at the cross. So rather than His anger at our sinfulness, we have His pleasure in us. That has done wonders with my ability to be myself with Him, to honestly let His light shine on all parts of me—the good and the unsightly. When you bring your faults to God and discover He isn't displeased, you can fully experience His compassion and love.