



## Author Q&A

Frequently asked questions for Kristi Collier, author of *Jericho Walls* and *Throwing Stones*

### Where do you get your ideas?

Everywhere. My best ideas usually come at two in the morning, which makes it difficult to get a good night sleep. I also get ideas at the grocery store, from eavesdropping on the crazy couple at the restaurant, (you've seen them too?!) from watching my friends, and from reading. Since I can't always stop what I'm doing and run to the computer to write down these great ideas right away, I keep an idea journal where I jot down thoughts, dialogue, character descriptions, quotes, etc.

### Where did you get the idea for *Throwing Stones*?

I grew up in Richmond, Indiana, where everyone LOVES basketball. My high school team – the Richmond Red Devils – went to the state tournament THREE TIMES, and each time it was the most exciting weekend of the year. But our team never WON the state tournament, so that got me thinking about creating a character whose one goal in life is to win the Indiana state basketball tournament.

### Do you play basketball?

There's a difference between playing basketball and being good at basketball. I PLAY basketball, but unfortunately, I'm not very good at it. In sixth grade I tried out for the elementary school team. Only two kids got cut – me and a kid who was only four feet, two inches tall. I haven't gotten much better with age. My eight-year-old (who loves to play) can hoop on me with ease.

### Who's your favorite basketball player?

Bobby Plump, from the 1954 Milan (IN) basketball team. The movie, *Hoosiers*, is based on this team. Much of the movie was filmed in Indiana, and for two days I played an extra. I got to meet Gene Hackman and Barbara Hershey. (Hi, Gene! Hi, Barbara! Love to your families!) If you look closely during the scene when Hickory plays Oolitic, you can see my arm. At least, I think it's my arm.

### Who's your favorite basketball team?

Major League Team: Indiana Pacers

College Team: Indiana Hoosiers

Youth League: The *Elevate* 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> grade Timberwolves. Go Wolves!

*Throwing Stones* ■ Henry Holt and Company ■ ISBN 0-8050-7614-X ■ \$16.95

*Jericho Walls* ■ Henry Holt and Company ■ ISBN 0-8050-8184-4 ■ \$7.95

[www.collierbooks.com](http://www.collierbooks.com)

### **Where did you get the idea for *Jericho Walls*?**

The idea for *Jericho Walls* had been percolating in my head since high school. My mom didn't talk much about her childhood, but sometimes when she and my aunt got together they'd tell stories about what it was like growing up in the south as preacher's kids. The idea of being a preacher's kid – with everybody watching and judging your every move – intrigued me. And my mom certainly wasn't a model child, so she occasionally got into trouble. They'd also talk about integration, and the friendship my mom developed with a black woman at the newly-integrated nursing school. I feel so fortunate to have grown up in a time that values diversity more and more, but I wondered what it would have been like to be told a friendship with someone of a different race was not allowed.

### **How did you learn about what life was like in the south in the 1950's if you didn't grow up then?**

I did a lot of research! I read a lot of books about that time – books about the 1950's, about the Civil Rights Movement, and about the South. And then I spent lots of time in South Carolina. I read newspapers from 1957, but more important, I started talking to people. I got to know a lot of people – both black and white – who lived during that time. I'm so grateful to them because they told me stories about what their life was like. *Jericho Walls* is fiction, but there are several things that happen to Jo in the book that really happened to several of the people I met.

### **In *Jericho Walls*, some of the characters use the words “colored” and “Negro.” Aren't you afraid the readers will think the book is racist?**

It was difficult to use these racist words to describe the characters of color in *Jericho Walls*. The scene where Lucas takes Jo home and they are stopped by Mr. Snyder was especially tough to write. But I wanted *Jericho Walls* to be historically accurate, and these were the words nearly everyone used to indicate people of color in the 1950's. The terms “African-American” and “black” didn't come into play until much later in our history. It's also important to remember that there were, and still are, many people who judge others based solely on the color of their skin. I wanted *Jericho Walls* to show that getting to know someone who is different is the best way to overcome prejudice.

### **Characters in both *Throwing Stones* and *Jericho Walls* quote the Bible. Why?**

I'm a preacher's granddaughter, and I grew up hearing the Bible and learning Scripture. Since Jo is the daughter of a preacher, it just makes sense that she would know the Bible inside and out, and that she would use Scripture as a defense against people that she is coming to realize have wrong ideas and beliefs. But just as the Bible can be used to present truth, it can also be taken out of context and distorted, as is the case with the Felix Mortimer in *Throwing Stones*.

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### **Why did you decide to become a writer?**

I wrote a puppet play in 5<sup>th</sup> grade as part of an extra credit assignment with my best friend. We had a blast! Our teacher was so impressed with our “work” that he let us perform the play for the younger students. I decided then that writing was a lot more fun than sitting in math class.

### **Did you ever want to be anything besides a writer?**

Yes. I desperately wanted to become the Queen of Narnia (after all, the Pevensies had returned to England, and there was a vacancy). When it didn’t look like that was going to happen, I considered becoming a hobbit. I decided to become a writer as a last resort.

### **How long does it take you to write a book?**

That depends on how much time I spend in front of the computer every day. An idea usually percolates in my head for six months or more (I started thinking about writing *Jericho Walls* in college, but I didn’t start the writing process until four years later). Once I work out a rough story idea, I hit the library for major historical research. This takes a couple of months. Then I write a detailed outline, which also takes a couple of months. Then more research. After about six months, I’m ready to start writing. If I have a good outline, and if I make myself sit at the computer (writing, not surfing the internet!) for three or four hours a day, I can have a first draft completed in four to six months. But then begins the long editing phase and another round of research. All told, *Jericho Walls* took me about two years to write, *Throwing Stones* about one year. But then the books go to my editor, which begins another year to two years of more research and revision.

### **That’s a lot of time! Do you make a lot of money?**

I make about \$1.25 for every book I sell. If I sell two books, I can buy myself a cup of coffee from Starbucks.

### **Do you like to read?**

I love to read. That’s really the reason I wanted to become a writer – so I can read as much as I want and people think I’m working. (Katherine Paterson first said that.) I have too many favorite books to list them all, but some of my favorite “classic” writers are: JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis & LM Montgomery.