



Anna Furtado is the author of The Briarcrest Chronicles series, which follows the lives of the strong, brave women who all have ties to Briarcrest. The Heart's Desire-Book One of The Briarcrest Series, was a Golden Crown Literary Society Award finalist. Anna is also a featured columnist at the Just About Write Web site, a resource for lesbian writers and readers. She contributes book reviews on that same site, as well as at the L-Word fan site in the literature section. Anna is a member of the Golden Crown Literary Society and has participated on conference panels on various writing and book promotion topics. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her partner of more than 20 years. They have two fur-kids of Scottish Terrier descent, Randolph Scott and Molly Brown, who entertain them with their antics.

by Moondancer Drake:(with some questions from DK Ward)

**DK: Hi there, Anna. So, here's the obligatory first question... Who is Anna Furtado?**

**Anna:** First of all, I am a writer. It's taken me quite a while to feel comfortable saying that without feeling as if I were putting one over on people. In fact, I've always been a writer -- that is, I've always loved to write. My writing has taken many forms over the years -- from journal writing to technical writing to fiction and non-fiction. I've written everything from pet care articles for a pet Internet site to the two books in the Briarcrest series, published by Regal Crest. Currently, I also write book reviews and a writing column at the Just About Write site. My book reviews are also on the L-Word fan site in the literature section. The Heart's Desire was the first of the series that came out in late 2004, and The Heart's Strength is the second (November 2007). I'm currently working on Book Three in the series.

In addition to writing, I'm also a Quality Systems geek working in the medical device field. I'm one of the people who makes sure that those devices and instruments are made safely and effectively, according to procedures, and any issues with manufacturing are resolved in a timely manner. In my position, I get to write lots of reports, so essentially, I'm still a writer at my day-job, too.

At home, my partner and I recently celebrated our 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary. We live a pretty quiet life. We both like to read, mainly lesbian fiction, and listen to classical music -- and, of course, we spend a lot of time catering to our two fur-kids, the Scotties. We get together with friends to have dinner and occasionally go to plays. When we get really wild, we get together to play cards with some friends and have to ante up a whole five bucks apiece to get in the game! That's really letting our hair down!

**Moon: 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary, wow. You know, your life sounds pretty interesting. What things in your day to day impact your writing?**

**Anna:** Actually, I think my life is pretty dull. I'm pretty much a homebody. My partner and I lead quiet lives, just ask the Scotties. They think it's a big deal just to be able to go for a ride in the car around the block!

But seriously, I get ideas from all kinds of things around me. I like to read the morning paper (although sometimes I don't get around to it until the evening), and, occasionally, I'll find a story that sparks that "what if..." question from an article in the paper. I've got a stack of clippings from newspapers and magazines that set off a thousand little synapse firing in my brain -- either for my current work or future story ideas--stuffed into a little notebook I keep for writing.

I also love archaeological and historical specials. I don't watch much TV, but when I do, it's usually The History Channel or Discovery or PBS. I'm interested in a wide variety of topics -- from ancient Egypt to space travel. When something

I'm watching on TV sparks that "what if..." question, I grab my little notebook and start taking notes.

On the negative side, things that affect my writing are laundry, dirty dishes, grocery shopping, and meal preparation. I often ask my partner why she wasn't born rich instead of beautiful so we could afford to hire a maid. That's a little joke between us, because she is the most supportive and encouraging person in my life--about everything--but especially about my writing. She picks up a lot of the slack regarding those little things in life that take time and have to be done, so that I can have the time to write. Without her doing that, *The Heart's Desire* and *The Heart's Strength* (and now, the beginnings of Book Three in the series) would never have become a reality.

**Moon: A supportive partner, that might explain how you made it to the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary. :)**

**You mention you like to do dinner and plays where you are out with your gal. What does a night on the town typically look like? Fancy or more down to earth and casual?**

**Anna:** We'd prefer never to dress up again ::laughs:: However, we occasionally like to go to a nice restaurant and we feel that we should dress up a little to blend into the environment. One thing neither of us would ever do is wear a dress/skirt. Neither of us own one. If wearing a dress/skirt is mandatory, we'll be writing *please excuse [Anna or Earlene]-she doesn't have the proper attire to attend this function* excuses for each other. ::more laughing::

We try to schedule a "date" every-so-often when our schedules allow, where we can do something fun for a day or half-day together. This might include going to a museum, or just driving over to the coast for a meal at the restaurant on the water (where we don't have to dress up!). In the fall, we love to drive out of the Bay Area to take in the fall colors in the foothills of the Sierras. There's a town called Columbia outside Sonora. The whole town is a historical monument to gold rush days. The main street still looks like 1849. We drive out there with the dogs and walk along the street and visit the shops (taking turns). There's one shop that always tells us to bring the dogs in, so the Scotties get to go in and shop in that one, too. Anyway, for us, our ideal day is a quiet, leisurely, low-key kind of activity.

**Moon: Why Scotties rather than any other kind of dog? What drew you to them in particular?**

**Anna:** I've had a love affair with terriers ever since I became an adult and could have my own dogs. They are intelligent and independent and I love their fiery spirit. Of course, that personality also makes them very hard-headed and not as

easy to train as some of the more docile breeds. They are a lot of work to bring them into the family, but they're worth it.

I've had Airedales and one Cairn Terrier (think Toto). When we lost our last Airedale and Cairn, our vet, who is the vet for the local Scottish Terrier rescue group, said, "Let me know when you're ready for another dog and we'll get you a Scottie." My partner has always loved the breed -- ever since she was a little girl -- so we decided to give two rescue Scotties a home. They are a challenge. We have one that is an escape artist. He's always looking for a way out so he can hit the road and explore. Our yard is like Fort Knox. These dogs were bred to be very independent and go off and hunt on their own (to keep the vermin off of the Laird's property). When one of these guys gets something into their head that they do or don't want to do, there's no reasoning with them sometimes. It can be a battle of the wills! Yet because of their personalities, they are also unique and charismatic.

I don't want to give anyone the impression Scottish Terriers are impossible to live with or to handle, because that's not true. They just need personalities that are strong enough to set boundaries for them. They respect that (except maybe in the case of our "Houdini"). ::chuckles:: If you take the time to teach them the rules of the house, they are very obedient--and they are very loving dogs. We love our fur-kids! By the way, Book Three of the Briarcrest Chronicles has a character in it who is a Scottish Terrier. It's an old breed, so it fit well into the story.

**DK: When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer?**

**Anna:** As I said, I've always loved to write and have written since I learned how. No writing assignment in school was difficult for me. When I was in high school, I remember writing a commercial for a fictitious snack called "Snick-Snackies TV Snacks" of all things! I cracked myself up every time I read it. I thought it was hilarious. I have no recollection of the content -- and I'm sure if I were to read it today, I would probably only groan and whimper in response!

I spent a lot of time alone during my early childhood making up stories and playing alone. I think this was probably the foundation for gravitating toward the writing life. I was very creative. I didn't just have an imaginary playmate, I had a whole community of them -- and I also had an imaginary horse (we lived in the city) and an imaginary dog (my parents wouldn't let me have a real one).

Before I got serious about the craft and started to write what would become the first of The Briarcrest Chronicles series, I did make several attempts at writing short stories and a sci-fi novel. I never finished any of them. Now I suspect it was because the romantic relationships in these stories were heterosexual and I couldn't really relate and became bored with them. Once I discovered lesbian

literature, it opened up a whole new realm of possibilities for me and sent me on a different, much more rewarding, writing journey.

**DK: Will you re-write those old stories with lesbian leads?**

**Anna:** The short stories, I didn't even keep -- and I don't even think I remember what they were about. I do remember the sci-fi and what I was trying to do with it. I may do something with it yet because I have an associated idea that I can fold into the story and make it much better.

**Moon: What the biggest difference between your style when you write fiction and when you write non-fiction? Is it hard to switch between the two?**

**Anna:** Actually, I don't find it that difficult to switch from one type of writing to another. I usually just need to take a few minutes to get in touch with the kind of writing that I'm going to be doing before I begin. I do that by re-reading some of what I've written during a previous writing session or by spending time going over notes if it's a new project. That's usually enough to allow me to get into the proper writing "gear."

My non-fiction writing on Nann Dunne's Just About Write web site is usually done with a rather "professional" voice, since the articles are usually "how-to" in nature (except for those few times when I've written humorous pieces). In my day-job, when I write reports and procedures, sometimes I have to remind myself that I'm not writing for JAW--or writing fiction. That usually stops me from theorizing and embellishing! (I think that my technical writing has actually improved since I started writing fiction.)

My voice for *The Heart's Desire* and *The Heart's Strength* is a little more formal than in contemporary lesbian romances because it just seemed right for the time period, which is the Renaissance. I made a conscious decision have the characters speak in patterns that were closer to today's speech, rather than trying to have them talk in patterns nearer to their time to keep the story readable, but the characters do speak a little more formally, at times. My hope is that the nature of the story transports the reader to the time period without the speech becoming too cumbersome.

**Moon: What are some of the favorite articles you've written?**

**Anna:** I always get a kick out of sharing my knowledge about pets, especially dogs. My first publications were at the Pet Food Express Web site. They're still available, by the way. I learned a lot from writing those articles and from interacting with the editor there. It gave me confidence to continue writing.

Presently, I love doing the writer's column, Gallimaufry, for Just About Write. I wish I had time to do a monthly one, but I found that every-other month was a much better fit, so I switched to that schedule and I don't feel so much pressure. Actually, it was Nann Dunne, the site owner, who suggested I might want to get to every-other. She's a very perceptive lady.

Particular articles I've enjoyed writing for Just About Write are Flesh On Bones - Creating Characters with Character and Keeping a Writing Journal. I felt very passionate about those two pieces, and I think it shows in the content. Of course, I also enjoyed Obituaries as Character Inspiration, too. I try to find new ways to present the same old themes on writing or innovative sources and inspiration for writing to suggest to others and I hope my readers find them both interesting and helpful.

**Moon: For someone new to writing articles, what advice would you give them?**

**Anna:** Write and pitch something that you know. For me, my area was pet care, especially dogs. Many moons ago, I had my own dog grooming shop and showed dogs in both conformation and obedience. I had some expertise that I could put into how-to articles. That gave me something to say in a cover letter besides I really, really want to be a writer some day! I already was one!

And try your darndest to give your editor what they ask for--on time. Because I met my deadlines and pitched interesting ideas, the editor of the pet care site started coming to me with ideas. Once, he asked me to do a series of about 3 articles on guinea pigs. I told him (several times) I knew nothing about guinea pigs and didn't know where to begin. In the end, he ended up giving me a general outline of what topics he wanted and I researched them and gave him 6 articles -- because I had gleaned so much information that lent itself to more articles. He was happy to pay me for every single one of them. This because he knew I would deliver (apparently better than I knew <smile>).

**Moon: How did you discover Lesbian Lit? Who are your favorite authors or books?**

**Anna:** I was one of those late bloomers. Didn't come out until I was almost 40. It was around 1985 when I somehow stumbled onto the fact that women's bookstores existed and they had novels that were about people to whom I could actually relate. I'm not even sure how I made that discovery, but I remember being thrilled to find the books. Since I was pretty poor at the time, I would buy a few books, take them home and read them, then sell them back to buy a few more.

Like a lot of people, I was really impacted by Katherine V Forrest's Curious Wine. I liked that story so much I never sold that book back--and I was thrilled to

be able to get her to sign my copy a few years ago. During that time I also discovered Sarah Dreher's Stoner MacTavish novels, which I loved. My current favorite authors are Radclyffe, especially Love's Melody Lost, Love's Masquerade, When Dreams Tremble, and her western series, Innocent Hearts and Promising Hearts, Jennifer Fulton's Moon Island series, Blayne Cooper's Madam President and First Lady, Nann Dunne's War Between the Hearts, and almost anything by Gerri Hill. I have a lot of favorites, don't I? Ah, well, so many books, so little time....<sigh>

**Moon: Tell us a bit about The Heart's Desire was and The Heart's Strength. What was the inspiration for these two novels? Willing to give us any hints about what to expect in the third book in the series?**

I'd like to be able to tell you some wonderfully inspiring story about how I decided to write The Briarcrest Series, but in fact, it went like this: I love the Renaissance. I attend our local Ren Fair whenever I can. I loved doing research into the time, especially the early Renaissance. I also looked at lesbian literature and realized that there wasn't that much historical fiction at the time I started writing The Heart's Desire. Most lesbian fiction was set in contemporary times. (That's changed quite a bit these days.) I thought I'd like to write something different.

My research inspired me to start thinking about a spice vendor / herbalist as a protagonist. The setting that seemed ideal for her to meet another woman to whom she could be attracted was a harvest fair, which many market towns held each autumn to sell their wares. Since some of these fairs had a reputation for drawing people from long distances, the whole setting seemed perfect for Catherine and Lydia to meet. My initial concept for The Heart's Desire was that the story would take place over a period of a week during the fair. Once I started writing and the story evolved, however, it ended up taking place over a period of a year, with an epilogue many years later. In that epilogue, there is one sentence that talks about Catherine's assistant, Sarah, having a daughter who was named Catherine Lydia after the two protagonists of The Heart's Desire. By the time I finished Book One, I knew that Catherine Lydia (nicknamed Cate in Book Two) would be the next one to carry on the story.

For Book Three, the story will carry forward into contemporary times. That was always my concept of what would happen within the three books. A young woman will discover that she has a connection to back to Briarcrest, which sets her on an adventure that begins when she meets a woman, a young London solicitor, who will have key information and her own Briarcrest connection to allow both of them to embark on a fantastic journey. The story in Book Three will be much more complex, because it will actually be two stories in parallel. The contemporary one, and the continuation of the story after Book Two, which was about Cate and Fiona. I'm very excited about the development of the third story, which I am in the process of writing now.

**Moon: We had a great time with you today. Before we go I'd like to discuss lesbian fiction as a genre. What are some of the advantages or/and disadvantages for a writer working within the lesfic or LGBT genre as a whole? Do you think this type of fiction can go mainstream, and if so, what do you think needs to be done to make that happen?**

**Anne:** A big advantage is that I get to write stories that I love and can relate to in a really positive way. Likewise, readers also respond to the characters and the stories positively because, even though they have no experience living in the time period in which the Briarcrest stories are set, they can relate to strong, independent women who love each other. To me, there is no downside to that at all. It gives me a chance to write tales that excite me and make me happy--and that I hope others will get pleasure from reading.

I'm not so sure that going mainstream is something we should all hope for or campaign for. A chain used bookstore in our area used to have a gay / lesbian fiction section. My partner and I would wander in there every now and again to see if they had any older out-of-print or hard-to-find books that we were interested in. Occasionally we'd find something. It was always fun to go there because we knew exactly where to go to find the books we wanted to browse. Then the store moved to bigger, better digs and when we went to check out their new home, we couldn't find the gay / lesbian section. When we asked about it, they told us that the G/L books were now filed among all the other [thousands] of books in the store by author. That meant that if we weren't looking for a particular author, it would be very difficult to find any "treasures."

I feel that if there was no G/L genre and we all went mainstream our stories would be lost just as they are in that bookstore. It would no longer be easy to find stories that we enjoy in our genre. Even though we could all look up our particular favorite authors, it would really be a hardship on new authors who would get folded into all the other books on those brick-and-mortar or on-line shelves.

Of course, there is also the advantage of being a part of the bigger publishing, benefiting from their promotional budgets, but in the end, I think we'd still get buried among the bigger names and the benefits would not be nearly as good as they might seem. Besides, as authors of lesbian fiction, we are a pretty small community and we have the advantage of congregating at places like the Golden Crown Literary Society, where we get to meet one another and learn from one another. I'm not sure we'd have that if we were out in the great, wide world mainstreaming.

So, give me my lesbian fiction genre any day. I'm happy to be a part of this community, writing what stimulates and energizes me and what, I'm happy to hear from my readers, does the same for them.

**Thank you so much, Anna, for joining us here at Queer Girl Talk. We wish you continued success in everything you do.**

## Anna on Beta Readers

First of all, I have a few beta readers that read my work right from the first-words- to-page. I give them chunks of the book at a time, so they read in installments. At different times, I want different things from them and I try to make that perfectly clear -- right down to: when this character does such-and-such, what do you think of this scene both by itself and in the context of the whole story? Sometimes I want more general: please read for general context and flow and tell me if there's something you have questions about (maybe I need more detail -- or maybe it just makes no sense at all and I need to delete or fix it). At first, I'm not so worried about spelling and punctuation, but my betas are pretty detail oriented and they'll usually tell me those things, too. (But for me, that kind of scrutiny comes later, when I'm only making small changes because if I'm still changing sentences and paragraphs, it doesn't make sense to use all that energy on commas and spelling errors.)

My initial readers usually continue reading as I refine and edit the story, but I also like to add a couple of new readers once I feel that the mss is getting close to "finished" because by then, my initial readers are getting to know the story pretty well and "fresh eyes" are always good. So I start out with three stalwarts and add a couple more before submission.

When we do the proofing of the typeset version, though, I muster everyone I know that's willing and have a group of about 12 people that I contact (usually, I end up with about 6-8 people who actually proofread, but I contact those 12 because some people may have other commitments and can't meet the deadline--so the larger pool to draw from helps. I've found that when 6-8 people do that final read-through, hardly anybody finds the same mistakes (I know, that's hard to believe, but it's happened with both of my books now), so I'm too chicken to go with just a couple of people reading at that point because I'm afraid we'll miss too much! Some of the people in this pool also are first-time readers -- again for fresh eyes -- even though we can't do wholesale editing at this point, they still will pick up on inconsistencies that those who have been reading for a while won't see because their brains fill in the blanks from familiarity with the story.

Regarding honest opinions, I do want them, but there are some things that have come up over the course of my writing, that I will not change even though someone tells me they think I should - if I feel strongly that to follow their suggestion would not be true to the characters or the story (or, rarely, it's either not an important detail or completely off-base). However, even if I do feel strongly about not changing something, if I get similar comments from more than one person, that sends up a red flag for me and I know I need to take a long hard look at it (and try to get objective). Sometimes those opinions are hard for an author to digest because it means changing something we really, really like about a character or a story, but I know my beta readers have my best interest at heart and want to help me as much as they possibly can. No one is out to get me or belittle me -- just the opposite -- so I usually try to take the comments to heart and not let them bother me (I don't say I do it perfectly, though. Sometimes I find myself getting defensive, but then I have to remind myself that these people are giving of time they could use to do something else -- perhaps something more fun than reading my work -- sometimes multiple times -- to try to help me, so I take a deep breath -- and when all else fails, I sleep on it -- then go with my gut.)