



Brenda Adcock interview by DK Ward

A product of the Appalachian region of Eastern Tennessee, Brenda now lives in Central Texas, near Austin. She began writing in junior high school where she wrote an admittedly hokey western serial to entertain her friends. Completing her graduate studies in Eastern European history in 1971 with the intention of teaching at the college level, she worked as a graphic artist, a public relations specialist for the military and a display advertising specialist until she finally had to admit that her mother might have been right and earned her public school teaching certification. For the last twenty-plus years she has taught world history and political science. Brenda and her partner of ten years, Cheryl, are the parents of four grown children and grandparents of two. Rounding out their home are four temperamental cats. When she is not writing, Brenda creates stained glass and shoots pool at her favorite bar. She is the recipient of the 2007 Alice B. Lavender Award for new author and a finalist for a 2007 Golden Crown Literary Award for Debut Author.

And now, I'm delighted to present Brenda's first interview. Enjoy!

Who is Brenda Adcock?

Brenda Adcock: I am one of the 32 million babies born in the late 1940s after our fathers returned from World War II. The only child in a military family, I was born to parents who were advised not to have children because of my mother's health and named after a comic strip character of the time, Brenda Starr - Girl Reporter. My family is from an Amish-like enclave in eastern Tennessee and as a result my parents were my third cousins. The area was settled by German immigrants who came to the colonies before the American Revolution, fought in it, and then resettled from Pennsylvania to Tennessee in 1800. From that point on they primarily made their living as farmers, with tobacco eventually becoming their cash crop.

We were transferred to Texas in the mid-1950s and it has been my home since then. My father traveled all over the world while we stayed at home due to my mother's physical handicap. I was raised primarily by my mother and grandmother, two incredibly strong women, and didn't have the opportunity to get to know my father until I was eighteen years old. We didn't exactly hit it off, but reconciled when I was in my twenties.

As the only child of a working mother and grandmother, I learned at a very early age to entertain myself. One of the games I played was making up stories and when I learned to write I began writing them down to amuse myself. Later in high school I wrote a ridiculous serial western to entertain a few friends and that was good enough for me, although the pressure to produce a new chapter every couple of days was horrendous.

After college and graduate school, I taught history at the college level before returning home to help out my parents and then went back to school to get a certificate that allowed me to teach public school which I enjoyed more than I thought I would. I plan to retire in a few more years and haven't decided what I will do to occupy my time after that. Perhaps just write. I wrote for years

and just filed the manuscripts away until my partner convinced me to submit them. I was shocked when the first one was accepted and continue to be shocked that anyone is interested in reading what I've written. I write stories that interest me and hope they will interest others as well. Older women fascinate me as main characters because they have lived such rich, full lives. Although now I am one of those older women, I still enjoy talking to my friends' mothers and hearing what their lives were like. Many of my characters are older women because I think they have been fairly well neglected as main characters in lesbian literature.

Other than that I am a pretty ordinary woman. I lost myself for a few years during which time I married, had two children and was relatively miserable pretending to be someone I knew I wasn't. I found myself again at fifty. I met my partner eleven years ago online and it was like being reborn, or at least rediscovered. Between us we raised four children and have two grandchildren, plus the requisite assortment of animals. I look forward to reaching our twenty-fifth anniversary, but our fiftieth might be a stretch.

I've noticed your characters are older than we'd normally see. Do you prefer sticking to an older age group? And why?

BA: I don't know that I "prefer" to write about older characters and there are some stories that don't lend themselves easily to older characters. I write about what I know and enjoy characters I can identify with. I find it very easy to relate to older women and draw my own experiences into a story. Thus far, I believe forty-five is the youngest any of my main characters have been and I consider that to be a very young age.

I believe readers are ready for older characters. I have been extremely gratified by email from readers who want to read about characters their own age rather than very young women in their twenties. There should be a message in there somewhere that just because I'm sixty, or whatever age I happen to be, I'm not quite dead yet. My emotions and desires are just as strong now as they were twenty or thirty years ago. I recently read that sixty is the new forty and I like that mindset.

That's great to hear! I agree totally and enjoy reading books with older characters just as much as I do ones with younger. I guess it all boils down to personal taste. Which makes me wonder, what types of stories do you read?

BA: I've always had fairly eclectic tastes in literature, but my personal preference for leisure reading is mystery, thriller, or adventure novels. That's a pretty broad range. In the last few months I read and enjoyed Jane Vollbrecht's *Close Enough*, Rick Reed's *In The Blood*, and Lori Lake's *Snow Moon Rising*. They were all great stories in their own way. I didn't think I would enjoy Rick's book as much as I did because I'm not a horror fan. Despite that, I thought his story was amazing. I recently caught up on the Kathy Reichs' series and just finished Tess Gerritsen's *Mephisto Club*. My other favorites are James Patterson and Jonathan Kellerman. It's pop literature, but fun to read.

That's an impressive list of names. Were any of those writer's an influence in your own writing?

BA: They all impressed me in one way or another, but I can't say they influenced me as far as my own writing is concerned except they told good stories and that is my most important goal. I like to read authors who allow me to enjoy their story without the writing getting in the way. Does that make sense? I can look at a magnificent painting and enjoy it without examining the brush strokes to make sure they were all done correctly. Good writers make their story telling look easy, effortless. I'll always work on improving my ability to tell a story because, in the end, that's what it's all about...telling a good story.

What made you decide on Regal Crest as your publisher?

BA: Actually Regal Crest chose to take a chance on me and I will be eternally grateful to Cathy Lenoir for accepting my work. I was originally with another publisher, but we had a few creative differences and eventually decided it would be best for the both of us if we parted company amicably. They're a great publisher and I respect them, but I didn't feel comfortable. I'm much happier now and have never regretted my decision to approach Regal Crest. They are willing to publish manuscripts that might not fit the mold of the other publishers and although the final decisions belong to the publisher, I am able to give personal input at each stage. I like that.

You mentioned in your bio that you create stained glass. Would you go into more detail for us?

BA: My father was a master carpenter and drew detailed pictures of what he was building. He had apprenticed as a furniture maker before World War II and built a lot of the furniture in our home over the years. I loved to work with him in his workshop and I guess I inherited his creative gene. I have always done something artistic and once earned spending money by painting portraits.

When I met my partner, Cheryl, we were looking for something artsy-craftsy we could do together. She had already had some training in stained glass and taught me the basics of creating objects and pictures in glass. At first I worried about cutting my fingers off, but found that after a while my fingers toughened up, rather like when you play the guitar. We started out, literally, in an area behind my garage about three by ten feet. Within a month or so, we had converted my larger workshop into a glass workshop and worked there every day. I love shaping the glass into something aesthetically pleasing. For several years we had booths at the Fort Worth, Austin, and San Antonio Pride festivals and sold our work. But, like everything else, what once had been a hobby became real work and we enjoyed it less. I hated making the same pieces over and over and it became boring.

Although we have taken it back to the hobby level, we still create pieces for friends or our own enjoyment. Cheryl created a large prairie design we are putting into a shadow box that can be backlit and hung on a wall. Before I retire and we move to some place smaller we hope to create other pieces we like and can hang in our new home. Working with the glass is relaxing and I still use that time to think about storylines or segments of dialogue. We won't have room for our equipment when we move and I will miss the glass, but I'm sure I'll find another hobby to occupy my spare time. I always have.

So, how did it come about that you wanted to write?

BA: I've always written and enjoyed it. As I mentioned earlier, I was an only child and had to entertain myself. One of the ways I did that was by writing, but I never considered that I had any particular talent for writing. However, I was fortunate to have had some of the finest English teachers imaginable in high school. They really pushed me to write correctly as far as grammar and spelling were concerned. My English teacher in junior high school somehow read a part of the western serial I wrote for my friends and encouraged me to keep writing.

I got a real taste of writing fame when I was a senior in high school. There was an incident involving some extremely popular girls at my school which resulted in their arrest, a pretty racy thing in the early 1960s. The charges were dropped with the police saying it had all been a mistake. But we all knew the truth. So I wrote a poem rather like the Night Before Christmas which poked fun at the girls involved. I wrote it anonymously, but everyone knew I was the author. The result was that I was nearly expelled in my senior year for what one parent called defamation of character and libel. My mother was called to school and read the poem, but just laughed. In fact, I was shocked to find a copy of the poem in her personal papers after she passed away just

a few years ago. In the end I wasn't expelled because what I wrote in the poem wasn't a lie and the principal said I did have the right to free speech. I think that was the first time I really saw the power words can have. Since then I've always written, but never took it very seriously until I was much older.

I went through a terrible time while I was in my forties and dealt with untreated clinical depression for over two years. It was during that time I began to write seriously again. By being able to transfer my thoughts to paper I was able to work myself out of my depression. It not only gave me something to occupy my time, but allowed me to talk my thoughts out, even if it was only to myself. There are times when I believe writing saved my life back then. I know now that I will always write. Even if it's just for myself, it will be worth the effort.

When did you know you had something publishable?

BA: No one was more surprised than I was when a publisher accepted my first manuscript for publication. I simply couldn't believe anyone would be interested in reading something I had written. My partner had been pestering me to submit something and I only did it to shut her up. LOL I'm a fairly insecure person and every time I submit another manuscript I'm sure it's going to come back to me with a note saying it's the worst piece of garbage they have ever read. I'm still surprised when anyone tells me they have read one of my books and enjoyed it. I'm a beginner and have been extremely fortunate thus far. I hope my writing gets better with each manuscript, but only time will tell.

Do you set aside much time to write? Take us through what your process is like.

BA: When I first started writing as part of my own self-therapy I would come home from work and retire to my office after dinner and write for five or six hours every night, usually not going to bed until one or two in the morning. That went on for about seven years until I met my partner. Then with the blush of new love and everything associated with blending two families together, I completely stopped writing for about four years. Since it was my therapy and I was obliviously happy, I no longer needed the therapy. Then one day I found my old manuscripts and started writing again for pleasure.

I don't do anything very scientific when I write. I usually think of an idea for something I think might make an interesting story. Generally this happens when I am stuck in traffic and everything around me is so mindless. Then I just think about it and jot down a few notes to myself so I won't forget the original idea. Sometimes I read an article in a magazine or newspaper that might be an interesting story. The idea for Pipeline came from a very small article I read about illegals working in the meat-packing industry. I had already begun mentally developing the main character. I'm one of those writers who talks to their characters and eventually the story began to take shape around what I knew about her. I'm a linear writer. I start at the beginning and make my way to the end. Once I finish writing a story I go back through and add or delete things. I'm terrible about putting much description into the first draft of a story. I just want to get the story down, then I fill in the descriptive portions. I spend quite a bit of time doing research and this is the point where most of that comes into the story.

For the last three years I have devoted nearly every waking minute to writing. However, my partner finally said enough was enough and I now only spend a couple of evenings a week writing. But I think about the stories I'm working on the rest of the time. With more limited time I can produce much more at a sitting. When I'm on a roll I can easily write twenty or thirty pages. Sometimes it just hits me in a flash and at other times not a single coherent thought runs through my head.

I never outline. I hated it in school and still do. I type out the basics of a story, describing what I know about each character and what will happen to them. Sometimes my narrative notes turn out

to be thirty or more pages and serves the same purpose as an outline without the Roman numerals. As I write the story I refer back to my initial story notes occasionally to make sure I am on track. Once I've started a story I usually re-read the previous chapter to get my mind in the right place and move on. Pushing through to the end is the hardest part of writing a first draft, I think.

Two of your novels deal with crime and mystery (and I'm enjoying them immensely btw). Did you have to research much?

BA: I love to do research! As a graduate assistant I did all the research for a doctoral dissertation by one of my instructors and was hooked. The research itself is like uncovering the clues to a mystery. As I mentioned, Pipeline sprang from a small back page article I saw in a newspaper. Bringing illegals into the country to work in the meat-packing industry wasn't big news when I first read about it, although I suspect everyone knew it was going on. I had to dig a little to find statistics about the population increases in Midwestern towns or states that were home to the big meat-packers. Most of the research I did was on locale. It wasn't until the manuscript was completed that the big lawsuits were brought against Tyson and a couple of other packers. I was able to add some material based on the lawsuit against Tyson near the end of the story during the editing process. I thought the story had become a timely one when it was released.

I did much more research for Redress of Grievances. It's probably the most heavily researched story I've written. I didn't want to be attacked by attorneys or the medical profession and wanted it to be as accurate as possible. I was extremely fortunate to have a colleague whose son was a county prosecutor and he helped me get information concerning the insanity plea in criminal cases. I've always been fascinated with the way the mind works and borrowed books from psychologist friends to learn more about Dissociative Identity Disorder as well as the online research I did. I probably had a thousand pages of medical and legal research to comb through to get the information I needed. It took me nearly eight years to gather and absorb the information to write the story and I was very happy with the way it turned out. It's by no means perfect, but I did the best I could with it. Parts of Redress were extremely simple to write because they are autobiographical and needed no research. It made for an interesting balance between truth and fiction.

Tell us a little more about each book. What inspired them, how long did it take from concept to published piece, et cetera?

BA: For those who haven't read my books, I don't want to give too much away, but I'll give it a shot. Pipeline was inspired by a newspaper article I read about twelve years ago. It's no great secret that Texas has its fair share of illegal immigrants. When I first began the story I had no idea how far-reaching the immigration problem was. The title refers to the pipeline which funnels illegal workers into the United States. The gist of the pipeline operation is that large corporations, in this case meat-packers, actually pay coyotes to smuggler workers into the country. In Mexico the coyotes recruit workers for the corporations and charge the illegals a large sum of money to get them across the border and provide counterfeit documentation to allow them to remain. The coyote is collecting from both ends of the pipeline and it's a scheme worth millions of dollars each year. The illegals are taken to a packing plant where they displace organized labor groups and are paid a fraction of what legal workers would earn and have no benefits. The company saves money in benefits and pension plans and there is a continuous flow of workers.

With this idea in mind as the basis for a story, I came up with the main character, Joanna Carlisle, a retired photojournalist living near Kerrville, Texas which is not far from San Antonio, a hub for illegals moving further north out of Texas. Jo is a single woman in her mid-fifties when the story begins. Despite using the illegal pipeline as a background for the story, the theme, as I saw it, was regret. Like many of us Jo had made decisions many years before for what seemed to be

valid reasons at the time. It is her regret over losing the woman she loved and their son which provides the tension in the story. Her struggle to rebuild her relationship with Cate as well as their son meets opposition from her own independent nature. Pipeline went through about fifteen major revisions before I could get a handle on the story. I'm not much of a romance writer and personally envisioned the story as a mystery, although others disagree. Once the story was accepted it took two years to get it to final publication. The writing time was probably about five years of starting and stopping and rewriting. Along the way I came to know Jo very well and I think she is still my favorite character. I never saw it as anything other than a stand-alone story, but it is rather left open to a sequel and I'm still thinking about it.

Reiko's Garden was written for my father. Essentially, I had heard so many great stories about our family in Appalachia most of my life. I loved to visit the old family farms and used to dream about owning the old house my grandfather and great-grandfather had built in our valley. The house is still standing, but in pretty bad shape after a hundred plus years. My father told me about a Japanese war bride who returned to the valley with her soldier husband after World War II and the not-so-warm reception given them. The whole area is still quite xenophobic and I can only imagine what it was like in the late 1940s. After her husband died in an accident, the Japanese war bride stayed on their farm. Today her house is listed on the National Register of Historic Homes. I have been to the home once and enjoyed the gardens around it. It seemed like a great story. The biggest change to most of the story is that my father, of course, is not a lesbian. The main character, Callie Owen, her father, brothers and sisters are stolen by me from my own relatives. They had a difficult, but eventful life and I wanted to tell their story. When I first began writing it I was already working on Pipeline. Reiko's Garden, Pipeline, and Redress of Grievances were all begun about the same time. I am easily bored with my own writing and sort of floated from one manuscript to another to keep my interest alive. I still do that and work on three or four stories at once. It's a great solution to writer's block. I just go to another story where I'm not stuck until a solution comes to me. I like my books to have a theme and tolerance and forgiveness is the theme of Reiko's Garden.

I wrote Redress of Grievances primarily due to my lifelong fascination with the legal process. In college I once toyed with the idea of going to law school, but decided I was not outgoing enough to actually practice law. It's interesting to read about and study, but that's as far as my interests really went. I had a character tumbling around in my brain and wanted to develop a story around her. So Harriett Markham was born. A single woman raising her niece alone while maintaining a career, Harriett found herself representing a client whose personality also interested me. Why people do the things they do and how they react to events in their past intrigue me. When I began writing Redress I was going through a dark period of my own and out of the events in my own life I created Harriett's client, Sharon Taggart. Sharon allowed me to write my darkest thoughts. As I've already said, Redress was part of a trio of manuscripts that all appeared about the same time. All were accepted for publication around the same time.

It sounds like the writing was therapeutic?

BA: It was for me. In a way, I think almost any kind of writing is therapeutic. If I write a scene involving an argument between characters I will often recall an argument I've had and try to recreate how I felt inside and then project those feelings on the page. The argument might not have ended well in reality, but by re-writing it, I can see it for what it was and see what I should have done or said. I think by projecting my own feelings and emotions into a scene I make them seem more real. Of course, I could be wrong. I only know what works for me.

Any time I'm upset by something, I slap my headphones on and start typing. It helps me work my way out of problems I'm having. Later, if I find a suitable place to interject the scene, it saves me from trying to recreate it. Writing is an almost anonymous way to saying things you might never be able to say otherwise. At my school we used to have the students keep a journal where everyday they could write anything they wanted to. If they wanted me to read what they had

written they marked the page. If they wanted it to remain private, they folded the page over in their journal. I was always shocked and amazed at some of the things they wrote and that they wanted me to read it. They felt better because they had told someone else what was bothering them without having to verbalize it. In a way their writing was therapeutic for them, just as mine is to me.

Do you usually base your characters on real people, at least initially?

BA: Not usually. So far only Reiko's Garden is based on people I know personally. But that was an exception. My characters are based more on types of people I've met rather than an actual person. Personalities interest me and I enjoy seeing how people relate to one another or perceive a stranger based only on what they see.

Are you working on a new novel?

BA: I'm usually working on several projects at one time depending on my mood. My fourth manuscript, *The Sea Hawk*, has been accepted for publication and will be released sometime in 2008. It was written sort of on a lark and as a favor for a friend. It's an historical romance set primarily in the period near the end of the War of 1812. I had to do quite a lot of research to keep the events as accurate as possible, but I think it was the most fun to write of anything I've done so far. It came together much more easily than I thought it would. I have completed a fifth manuscript, *Tunnel Vision*, a police procedural loosely based on an event which occurred while I was an undergraduate. And I am about halfway through the sequel to *Redress of Grievances*. The working title is *Personal Foul* and I hope to complete it in the next couple of months.

Congratulation on winning the Alice B. Lavender Award. How was that experience?

BA: Thank you. I was completely shocked to win such an award, but it was gratifying nonetheless. Actually I was taking a nap one afternoon when I was awakened by my cell phone ringing. That made me a little grumpy and I'm sure I sounded like an idiot when I answered. The call was from my publisher telling me I had won the award. Notification was sent to her and she forwarded the information to me a few days later. The committee said some very complimentary things about *Pipeline* and I appreciated it more than I could say. I'm one of those people who have never won anything in their lives and it took a while for it to settle in. It's always wonderful to know someone has read your book and enjoyed it.

What's your one guilty pleasure?

BA: Ah, guilty pleasures. I don't feel guilty about most of the things I do, but the one thing I love more than anything else is being alone. Since I was an only child and left alone to my own devices much of the time, I came to appreciate the time I had away from others. It allows me time to reflect on life around me and let my mind wander wherever it wants without interruption or explanation. Whether I am in my office or outdoors doesn't really matter to me as long as I am alone with my thoughts. I cherish that time.

You did the [book trailer](#) for Anna Furtado's "The Heart's Strength". How did that come into being?

BA: Anna's book trailer was fun to make. I had been reading about trailers for a while and a friend had made a couple for a writer friend of his. He showed me how he made them, but he used iMovie. I don't have a Mac and looked around for a program to use on my PC. Quite by accident I discovered that my computer had Windows Movie Maker and I started playing around with it. There are some subtle differences in the two programs, but they basically work the same way. I made a trailer for *Reiko's Garden* first. I think the second trailer I made was for *Lori Lake's Snow Moon Rising*. The trailers just sort of snowballed from that point on. I've made trailers for Rick R Reed, Jane Vollbrecht, Vicki Stevenson, Jude Morgan, Renee Bess, my own *Redress of*

Grievances, and, of course, Anna Furtado. They are all on YouTube or the individual author's websites. Once I figured out how to make them, I just ask the authors if they wanted one for their new book. I had a blast making them and they offer a different kind of creative outlet for me. My publisher and I are hoping to have trailers for all her new releases in the future. I think they're a great way to promote our books.

What do you wish that the reader takes from your books?

BA: My biggest hope is always that the reader enjoy the story and care about what happens to the characters. I think they are people worth knowing. I want my main characters to be strong yet flawed in a way readers can identify with. If readers like the stories, then I have done my job as I perceive it.

Thank you so much so much for sharing with us Brenda. It was a pleasure chatting with you. I wish you good luck in everything you do in the future. Is there anything you'd like to leave us with today? Final thoughts?

BA: Looking for a few final pearls of wisdom, eh? I'm not sure what I could say, but if anyone is still laboring at writing a publishable manuscript, just don't give up. I didn't get too serious about it until I was over fifty years old. Continue writing no matter what anyone tells you, but listen to honest comments about what you write and don't take anything personally. You can't please everyone so don't even try. Write what makes you happy the best way you can and you'll be okay.

I want to thank you, Deven, for giving me the opportunity to do this interview. I've already said this, but it's much easier to write an answer than to verbalize one. So many writers are introverts and this give us a chance to "speak" in a way we're most comfortable with. I've had a great time and enjoyed answering your questions very much. I'll look forward to chatting with you again some time