

JD Glass Interview by DK Ward



JD Glass, lead singer of "Life Underwater" and inveterate doodler of eye-candy, is the author of Lambda Literary Award finalist A.L.A. nominated Punk Like Me, its follow up Punk And Zen, Red Light, the forthcoming American Goth, and has had short stories published in Erotic Interludes 4 and 5 (all published by Bold Strokes Books).

She lives in the city of her choice and birth, New York, with her beloved partner. While waiting for the release of American Goth, JD's currently writing her next novel, X, and penning reviews for Prism Comics (titles include Love & Rockets, the final story-arc for SiP, Small Favors, Jane's World, Yuri Monogatari, and Max & Lilly. Oh, and a little X-Men because, hey, why not).

Bold Strokes Books, an avant-garde publishing company that releases a wide range of "queer" titles with broad appeal across age ranges and socio-cultural audiences, provides JD the opportunity to explore issues of ethics, self, and sexuality within a variety of contexts.

Who is JD Glass?

JD: Oh, it's really, really, simple. Just a person trying to figure it out like anyone else, trying to be happy, and make the world around me at least a little better than the way I originally found it.

I love the simplicity of that answer. And I must say, if only every author took the time out to talk with their readers like you have, this [literary] world would be a better place.

JD: Um, well, thank you. Honestly, if that sort of thing helps anyone at all, then I'm glad, seriously.

What would you say to the Swedish Proverb: "Love me when I least deserve it, because that's when I really need it"?

JD: Everyone needs forgiveness and understanding, and I'd say that within whatever a person's range of tolerance is, then it is something that bears remembering in every relationship: friend to friend, parent to child and child to parent, spouse to spouse, etc. We are, none of us, perfect, and generally speaking, the person "acting out" or having that rough time really does need that support (again, I'm not including obviously abusive situations - that's something else entirely) to either learn new ways, or to climb out of their "slough of despond."

Your short story *Identity* for Radclyffe's Author Challenge was a wonderful piece. What inspired you to write it?

JD: Funny how I can answer this so much more quickly than the first question <g>.

When topics were suggested, I found myself writing to Radclyffe and letting her know that if, and only if, the topic were uniforms (as opposed to whatever the other options were) then I'd play - towards the end.

I've spent time in uniforms, in high school, in clubs, in EMS, and have friends who've lived in yet others.

I originally thought I'd write something...different...a sexy little story and then...this is the honest truth: I thought about it - about what is a uniform, what is universal, what is unique, what binds us, frees us, sets us apart and makes us the same, and I thought about love, and my life, about how wonderful and crazy and the entire universe of experience, the completeness of it, since I fell in love with my wife almost 17 years ago. I look at her, I think of her, and I am in the moment, the moment I knew what all those words I'd ever read were truly about, how love IS Universal, how it brings us face to face with the Divine and makes us so.

And so I wrote that - because I'm crazy, crazy in love, with my wife, with the world, with people who are in love, and I wanted to celebrate that.

You were recently in the "Hot Seat" on the BSB Author's Connect board. I asked you this question there and I'd love to share it with our readers here: If you made a time capsule, what would you put in it?

JD: That's a great question...

At first I thought, maybe an instrument, but it would be a shame to hide its voice. Then I thought maybe a toy, or something along those lines, but then, it occurred to me that would mark something so finite, so limited...This of course led me to think, well, what would I want someone to find, to know - and would that item reflect about me: my childhood, my adolescence, young adulthood, or some new phase of becoming? Then, I wondered when the capsule would be opened and since most of them wait a few decades, I wondered...what should be remembered?

And the answer came: I would put a picture, a picture of all the wonderful people I've had the honor of meeting in the last few years, virtually and in real-time, so that someone could open up the capsule, pick that photo up and see all those faces and say, "Oh look, there's Radclyffe," and "oh wow, that's Mercedes, and Deven, and oh - is that Jo? And I think that's Gun, and Lee Lynch - look! Did you know Jane had such a great smile?" And on, and on, through the faces and the names, every single one of them...Cheri, Kathi, Georgia, Kl, Erin, Smitty, Shelley, Jennifer, Connie, Linda, Gabe, Jacqui, Sam...All of them, all the rest...

Then, maybe, someone else would look over their shoulder and say, "who are all these people? What did they do?"

There would be a few who would hasten to find out, but someone would already know. They'd turn around and say, "They changed the world - they made it a better place."

Looking back at your first published novel, Punk Like Me, do you think you've learned from the writing? Had any revelations since then?

JD: lol! I've learned a lot - and revelations are around every corner, every day - really.

What did you learn about "Freedom" from your Punk and Zen?

JD: I hate to say this, but I think I may need you to expand a bit upon this one, if you don't mind.

Did your perception of the word change from before to after you wrote the book? We all have our hang-ups with, and definitions of, freedom. Even though sometimes it would appear we are free, we come to find out, we're not really. In a past interview I had with Lori L Lake, she brought up some interesting things I had never thought about. Like History suppressing us, our history, as lesbians and gays. We feel free, but are we really in the grand scheme of things?

JD: Despite all my rage, I am still just a rat in a cage - one of my favorite quotes from Smashing Pumpkins (Bullet With Butterfly Wings) <g>. Seriously though, there's a saying that no philosopher can really get too past the constructs of their time, and my observations of life pretty much show that to be true. We can only evolve to a certain point beyond that, and hope the next people can take that a step further.

As for freedom, everyone's limited, by body, by mortality, by location, a myriad of things large and small. We can only choose what we accept, what we will fight, what we are willing and not willing to live with - all context dependent. We can decide to grow -- or to die, anyway. But, given the opportunities, we are free to choose how we will live, what we keep in our hearts and minds, what we will dare, and strive for, and become in those moments until that day.

Did you retain that "Overarching theme" you had first envisioned for your short stories (that have now turned into novels)?

JD: That was my original intent with Punk Like Me - a series of short stories that would hang together to form one complete story, only now I write novels to do that <g>. To use the metaphor of painting, you can paint a tree, and get a great idea of what that tree is, but unless it's been painted when it's a seedling, it's middle stages, it's growth stages, in every season, under the sun, under the rain, covered by snow, bereft of leaves, housing birds and squirrels, shrouded by fog, ringed by dirt or grass or flowers, its surrounds, and those surrounds in their every aspect, you can't fully know the tree. In a way, I think I'm trying to create that entire experience - the complete understanding.

That's beautiful. And very poetic. Are you a self-taught writer?

JD: I'm not certain what you mean by that - in the sense that I write what I want to, yes, but in all other ways, I'd say no - I've had and continue to have great teachers, both literally and in literature - that I still learn so very much from all the time...

Has writing your novels been therapeutic for you?

JD: I'm more than likely to think it may be the cause of needing therapy <g>! Just kidding - I can't really say, because I'm so immersed in the characters that when I'm done, I still don't have the "big" picture that say, a reader, or an observer, has - I have the participant point of view, the "what just happened here?" thing. I think it takes about a year or so after the book for me to understand and process what's gone on within it - gosh, I hope that makes sense <g>.

Okay, that first comment made me laugh out loud. On a more serious note: Since your book Red Light touches upon this topic, and I have my own reservations about it, I feel inclined to bring it up now. Would you share your thoughts with us on why you chose to use certain male identified words in lesbian fiction?

JD: There's a scene in "A Tree Grows In Brooklyn" where the parents explain the facts of life to their children. I'm paraphrasing badly, but the author said the children were taught and told, not in the official clinical words of science, but in the words the parents knew, and how they knew them -- the words of the street.

If you've never been exposed to certain schools of thought, to certain approaches, what other words would you use? And if, in that world, those are the words of choice, the words that make "sense," and have the power the surrounding culture imbues them with symbolically and erotically, then what other words would be used?

Not every gay/queer/lesbian/bi/homosexual woman moves into and becomes familiar with the underground society that exists in gay culture, or is exposed to it

And...there are women who love women exclusively that would rather rip out their own eyes than be called a lesbian, but are fine with the words "gay" or "homosexual."

These things are largely contextual, cultural, before they become personal. There are those that would argue that using certain words is empowering to women, while others say those very same words are offensive.

There are hundreds (if not thousands) of words used to describe a limited number of body parts, toys, accessories, etc., etc.

Pick the one that works for you - or pick none, if that works for you. I'm not judging anyone. All I will say is this: a spade is a spade is a shovel, is a tool for moving dirt, no matter what its shape or construction. That's what it does. And a rose by any other name...

I had never looked at it that way, so thank you, for giving me another point of view in which to think about. I guess I'm still wondering where the words came from that this generation uses. Would you say that that's the antithesis of what Lesbian fiction is supposedly all about-women loving women?

JD: There are some that say the same things about S/M and B/D - that those are the antithesis of anyone loving anyone, regardless of gender. Whether I personally agree or not is moot -- the point is that this is an aspect of reality for some women who love women, and I see no reason to make anyone, any woman, feel ashamed of herself for what she likes or doesn't.

Oh, I don't think they should feel shame. No one should, regardless of gender or sexual orientation/taste in sexual activity. I was just curious because I've noticed those words a lot in current lesbian fiction. Thank you for your brilliant answer, it gave me much to think about :o) I'm now curious how you feel about Labels, and the roles some of us play in relationships in regards to "Butch" and "Femme"?

JD: If that's something that works for you, is true to who you are and who you want to be, then who am I to judge that? Are you happy? Are you hurting anyone? Is this "you" actualized? Then enjoy it to the fullest - change, grow, flow, in whatever way is authentic to you. Ethics, authenticity, that's what matter to me. Are you a good person? Are you honest? Are you caring? Beyond those points...labels are just that - labels - and are (again) contextual, used as a device for us to socially navigate, prescribe, describe, and proscribe certain sets of behaviors. What's "butch" in our little corner of the world is "femme" in another, and vice versa.

There's a danger to relying solely on those labels, though, the danger of stereotyping. That...I do my best to avoid.

I think we've established one thing at least, 'whatever floats your boat' as they say. So, let's get into other areas of the writing process. What was it about Bold Strokes Books that convinced you to send your manuscript to them?

JD: At the time I'd submitted to Bold Strokes, I'd already come out of a defunct publishing house

and a professor of mine had sent my manuscript along to yet another place. There were other possibilities that came on-line, so to speak, and after it narrowed down to a choice of two, I then spoke with a friend (who's a publicist for a well-known comedian in the gay community).

She said both were good, although BSB was (then) smaller, but felt they had promise, she'd "heard good things."

Additionally, a friend of mine, Cate Culpepper of "The Clinic," and at the time "Battle For Tristaine" fame had just signed with them, and that, in addition to her kind introduction, carried weight.

Of course, Len Barot herself quietly impressed me. She didn't make outrageous claims or promises, and she seemed genuine in her concerns for authors, for craft, and she was open about her approach to business. I liked that.

But once burned, twice shy, and it wasn't until we actually met (we happened to be in Provincetown at the same time and that's when we did the "official" contract thing) that I knew for certain I'd made the right choice - and that was because the woman I met looked me straight in the eye, carried her shoulders with pride for the work she'd done and intended to continue, and gave me a solid handshake that spoke volumes.

That...cemented everything.

Take us through the whole publishing process. Did you have much influence in the editing, book cover design, publication date, et cetera?

JD: That's a hard question to answer, because it covers lots of different issues. The editors I've been privileged to work with have really worked with me, in the sense that they've helped me refine the story I'm attempting to tell, and given me greater tools, each and every time, to do it better.

BSB is very generous with allowing authors to submit ideas, photos, etc, for cover design, but honestly, the graphic artists we work with are incredible, and Sheri comes up with work that's certainly much better than anything I could do.

Publication date...well, there's factors outside of everyone's control there, in terms of what's already on roster, the time it takes to write and edit, etc., etc. However, once that date has been set, there's never been an issue of timing or anything like that (if that's what you're asking).

I've been lucky enough that from the time I submit a proposal until the time I hold a finished copy in my hand, to have been given the complete freedom to write what I want to write - Radclyffe (Ed: Len Barot] is not only the head of the company, but she's an amazing author and mentor - she makes herself very available on multiple levels for us, so the process, at least from my point of view, looks like this: proposal, time-line to finish, to edit, time line to print. It's structured, but there's flexibility, and to my perception, it seems like each author structures this to their abilities and requirements.

Gosh, I hope that made sense!

Perfect sense! Bold Strokes is a great example of the type of publishing company the GLBT community needs more of. On the same line of thought...Past or present, who do you believe is the most influential representative of the genre (lesbian fiction)?

JD: Wow. I don't know how to answer that - but I haven't read "everything" yet. I guess I can safely say for now that every woman who is or has been brave enough to put a reflection of women's lives, of lesbian lives, out there into the world, influences everyone else, both literally

and figuratively, and those that work in those presses and distributions, the readers, the dedicated fans and promoters, every single one of them is influential in this genre, and is indispensable.

You've been creating Book Trailers lately. How'd you get into that? Fill us in on the "making of"?

JD: It started because I'm into multi-media and Shane's a photographer. I've done some animated cartoons (hand drawn, computer completed - what a process!!!) over the last few years, and have been playing with movie ideas. Shane, who thought that was pretty cool, then bought me a camcorder and then...I saw a book trailer and thought, "hey, we could do that - and do it better. If we make them mini-movies..."

Shane's an amazing visual story teller, I do the "words" thing, and we both do music so...it just seemed a natural progression, the marriage of story-telling and photography with music.

The making of...well, it depends on the trailer. The first thing is to know the story, from there the fun starts. Footage and images come from a variety of sources, the music kinda fills itself in and then, well, it's...magic. And hair pulling. And no sleeping. And moments of absolute "ohmygod--that's amazing!"

And then, finally, they're done and we hope everyone enjoys them, too.

I see you've been to a number of Author Readings. How is that experience? Were you nervous at first, or are you a natural?

JD: To be honest, while they all have their nervous moments, I'm lucky enough to spend lots of time on stages with a mic and a guitar, and have done quite a bit of presenting, corporately and publicly, so the pressure is off in that sense - musical performance must always be perfect - there's a lot more flexibility in doing readings or in public speaking.

I've read you like to listen to music as you write, is that to set the scene in your story, or put you in a certain mood to write it?

JD: I do listen to music - a lot. It's not so much to set the scene, but to match the mood I've got going on, to maintain it as I work through a section, keep me in the "right head."

How much influence has music been in your life?

JD: How much of an influence has music been? Music...is my life. I live it and breathe it, walk it and sing it, my heart beats in rhythm, and my mind flows with time. I hope that kinda answers the question <g>!

You're lead vocalist and guitarist of Life Underwater. How do you establish equilibrium between "rock star" and "published author"?

JD: The last year, with the release of Punk Like Me, was hectic. This year, we've been working on a new album and we'll see as time goes by how everything balances. So far, so fun, and I'll have a better answer in about 18 months <G>.

With all of the projects you have going on, do you get much sleep?

JD: lol! No. Not really, not ever <g>. I don't have time for that!

If you were a fruit what would you be, and who would eat you, Adam or Eve?

JD: lol! I thought I was a little fruity already <g> or maybe a lot. Let's stick with tradition - apples and Eve - I don't think Adam ever really did know what was good for him :-)

Oh, good answer. I'd never peg you as a traditional gal lol

JD: lol - everyone has their moments <g>.

NYC is a Mecca of cultural differences. Is some of that what makes "JD Glass"?

JD: Oh absolutely - the availability of everything, the constant exposure...NYC is a place where you learn to adjust very quickly, because the changes and differences come upon the heels of the other. It's one of the few places in the world where you can do "traditional American" for breakfast, Indian for lunch, Italian for dessert, Chinese for dinner, and then pick any nationality cafe for dessert again. If you're still hungry, there's a million Greek diners - with international menus <g>.

But that's just an illustration. Truth is that the rich, the poor, and the middle class ride cheek-by-jowl on public transportation with cops, students, graphic designers, accountants (you get the picture) and visitors from all over the world.

And then there's the architecture...and the museums...I do love my city <g>

It sounds like it! Is it safe to say, NYC is home forever? Have you ever had the urge to live elsewhere? Have you visited much of the state outside of the city part?

JD: I don't know if NYC is home forever in the sense that I'll live here forever - I've always wanted to live in these places: London, Madrid, anywhere on Costa Del Sol, and San Francisco <g>.

And yes, I've visited much more of the state besides the city - I have several different fave fishing spots scattered across upstate NY, some nice mountain spots for sitting and thinking and...<g>, and a couple 'o few faves for pick up things like apple butter and such. Interestingly enough, quite a bit of upstate New York looks a heck of a lot like Scotland.

If it's not too close or personal, still, would you tell us a little how 9/11 affected you?

JD: It is both those things. I can't begin to say what the World Trade Center was to NYer's - the beacon we looked up at to make certain we were headed in the right direction, the place so many of my friends and family (myself included) have worked in, visited, lunched at and passed through traveling, etc...

That day, the world as we knew it ended. Not just mine, not just for NYC, but for Americans. That sort of thing is NOT SUPPOSED to happen HERE. One of the reasons people flee their countries is terrorism - and this is the place they came to, to be safe from that. Not anymore - and it will be years before many may start to think ever again.

It changed everything, for everyone, and I think we're still feeling its ramifications, not just locally, but as a nation, and perhaps even as a world.

I'm from NY, and I have family there. That day, being in KY watching it unfold on television was the hardest thing I've had to endure, so, thank you for sharing. Speaking of family, you and Shane have been together 17 years? How do both keep it going, especially in times of difficulty like during 9/11?

JD: I can certainly empathize with what you felt.

How do we keep it going, especially during times like 9/11? We love each other, then love each other some more. We're both very fallible, very human, and what do you do when someone hurts? You hold them. When you both hurt, you hold each other, look for the things to celebrate, laugh as much as you can at yourself, and when worse comes to worst, there's rule #1: only one crazy person allowed at a time. Your turn is next <G>.

LOL great advice! If Shane were to direct a movie about the life of JD Glass, what would the title be, who would star as the leads, what would the soundtrack consist of, and what would be its central theme?

JD: lol! I asked her that (and hoped she didn't think it meant my head had finally gotten too big to fit in the door). We've no idea what we'd call it or who'd be in it, but we'd probably write the soundtrack <g>.

From what I've read so far about you, I get the impression you carry Punk's lead Nina around with you?

JD: That's really, really hard to say, I mean, I kinda carry all of the characters around in my head - some of them have lived there a very long time <g>

Do you ever find yourself in situations and think, "What would this or that character do?"

JD: lol - not as much as I find myself thinking, "right now, so and so is doing..." and then the scene plays out in my head and then...I'm writing a new book. However, when a situation does happen, I think, "Oh man, so and so would do/say this!"

Have your characters ever taken on a life of their own and decided to write the story? Like in their own "voice" rather than you, as the author, determining where their tale will go?

JD: All the time! And I have to go with it, because the characters know their lives better than I do. But having said that, at no time does the story I envisioned - the beginning, the end, the overall message, change.

I understand that, but some may wonder how that is possible when you "create" them?

JD: I have no idea. It simply is what it is. I suggest a story line, and for the most part, I'm right, but every now and again, the character corrects me and tells me this is what really went down and the character is always right in the end. What that really means is that as the story develops, there are concepts that may have been there that as author you discover don't really work the way you thought they might, or that other concepts occur that are simply more suitable, making the story better.

What is the most surprising feedback you've received about your books?

JD: Believe it or not, every time someone says "thank you - you wrote that for me/about me" that sort of thing, I'm always humbly taken aback. I always meant and mean it when I've said that if one person felt better, about their lives, about themselves because of something I wrote, then I've done what I wanted to do. I guess it surprises me that I've succeeded to whatever degree in that.

Will we see a collection of poems from you one day? Or are those keepsakes just for you?

JD: IF the opportunity comes up, I certainly wouldn't say no. I started out writing poetry before I

wrote lyrics, and I still write it - in every way I can <g>. I probably drive my editor's nuts, because I'm very focused on poetry as opposed to grammar or usage. But, they're still nice to me, anyway <g>.

If you can, tell us about your current work in progress, American Goth?

JD: Actually, American Goth is in its final proof-reading stage and will come out in January. My current work in progress is X., and I'm currently developing two other story lines.

Hmmm...what can I say about American Goth? It's Samantha's story, one I've always wanted to tell, and I hope I've been true to her and her voice. And...there's every chance that a small snippet of part of what's not in the book will be told - in comic book format (the place this character originated) - in the next Yuri Monogatari (ALC Publishing - for women who like their women...animated <g>) compilation/anthology that will come out either late 2008 or early 2009

If you were to ever co-author a book, with who and what would it be about?

JD: I've no idea, for either of those questions! Certainly, I'm open to the potentials and possibilities and if the opportunity ever comes my way, I'd explore it.

I'd stomp my feet and whine that this was over, but that wouldn't be very mature of me, so I'll just say, this has been a fantastic interview and I encourage those lurkers out there to jot you a note now and then to remind you of what a terrific person you are. And maybe when American Goth is finally released, we can sit down and I can pick your brain again :o)

JD: Thanks, Deven (and the terrific person thing has made me blush). These questions have been great, I only hope that my answers have done them justice. And I'd be happy to sit down with you again after American Goth - you're fun to talk with! Oh...and just to add, not just for me, but for all the authors - as a reader, if you like something, say so. The only way authors have of knowing if you've enjoyed something is when you tell them <g>.

For those folks who haven't read JD's books, what are you waiting for? Get on over to [Bold Strokes Books](#) and order your copies today!