

Lara Zielinsky Interview by Moondancer Drake & DK Ward



Lara Zielinsky is a 38 year old mother of a 14- "I'm going to be 15 soon and get my license!"-year old boy. She is overworked and underpaid as a secretary in the "very interesting" world of independent insurance adjusting. None of this is to say that she has no passions in her life. She reserves that expression for her writing, and her spouse, not always in that order.

A lifetime of handwriting on scraps grew to internet postings, and finally someone with a little money to offer made her hobby literally pay off when [P.D. Publishing](#) signed her novel, [Turning Point](#), which was released in April 2007.

She loves meeting new people, and even a few become fiction fodder, but her major conflict now is... getting the sequel written!

Spy on her writing and life mis-adventures on [her blog](#), and join her [email list](#) for tastes of all her coming dishes, sometimes a little spicy, but filling, and with substance.

Who is Lara Zielinsky?

Lara: What surprises some (not all) of my new readers is that I am not a lesbian. I'm married, yes, to a man. I'm bisexual. I played ALL of the field growing up, having quite long relationships with several men and several women. I'm the mother of a teenage boy. I'm only slightly left of center politically. I'm Jewish. I even teach Sunday School. I am nearly deaf.

Moon: What can you tell the readers about your books and the genre you write in?

Lara: I've had two short stories published; only the one novel, "Turning Point". It's listed genre is lesbian romance, although the story certainly came out bigger (in length) and deeper (in scope) than that suggests. All the stories that I really enjoy writing are inner journeys, character pieces. Even if they contain adventurous action-packed plots, the real changes are going on inside the character. I've observed that many people have private selves and public selves, and often they aren't the same, for a variety of reasons. I love exploring that dichotomy and the journey of a character trying to reconcile her (or his) two sides.

Moon: Rumor has it you started in fanfic, how accurate is this statement and what can you tell us about that?

Lara: More like indisputable fact. While I have been writing forever, it was mostly directionless until into the 1990s when I became interested in posting online to share with others. I had belonged to a couple writing groups, writing these short little fantasy pieces, but I really started gaining fans when I got a little bugaboo idea and started writing in the Xenaverse beginning back in 1996-1997. My first few stories were always lighter character explorations, but the more I'd write, the deeper I'd go into the characters. My favorite XWP story of mine is "Xena's Choice", where Xena goes slightly -- well make that really bonkers after the events in "Sacrifice II". Exploring the world of the mind like a set of rooms with locked or blocked doors was a really neat writing challenge. After a troubled parting of the ways with the Xena series, I found my way to Voyager with a song-fic challenge.

What I got from writing fanfic was a lot of challenges, an already structured universe and way to work on the building blocks of better fiction. Fanfic gave me character frames to work with, and I really developed my storytelling style by being able to write nearly constantly. As I began to unlock the nuances of character building, and writing something that would mean I'd have to think about what happened to Xena or Janeway or Seven, as a child, or in some off-screen, un-canon event, I started working more with the archetypes -- moving to uber. When I got to my second Jan/Mel novel -- "Home Front" -- I had created the settings and done research far beyond the scope of two erstwhile Xena-descendant adventurers. I was building a university community in the 1940s, with all the attendant array of unique characters. I realized I was writing original characters in all but name. So I started working on completely original ideas, making the final transition, to original fiction in 2001. I still write fanfic from time to time, for the change-up, like a writing exercise to get muscles doing reps again.

DK: What was it about Voyager and Xena Warrior Princess that got your attention?

Lara: I loved the idea of independent women in ancient Greece. I loved the heart in X:WP, that two women could learn, grow, and change their lives. I loved that the series played with history, and culture. I was a fan more of the "altered history" episodes, like the one where Xena stops Abraham slaying his son Isaac, or helps the Israelites defeat Goliath, or helps the King return home to Ithaca after the Trojan War. My stories were set in the Greek lands, with the familiars from the show. I was really trying my writing wings again after a drought of 10 years, so I stuck as close to canon as I could, something of a crutch.

The Britannia arcs weren't bad, but a little tougher to work with for me, so I stopped writing Xena stories, switching to Jan/Mel (the uber X/G from "The Xena Scrolls") in order to keep writing. I

was able to focus on women in atypical roles again, and writing the American scene pre-WWII and in WWII is still a desire. I started a story that would have ended with the Pearl Harbor attack, but had trouble finishing it due to life situation, then I lost the thread of energy from the initial idea. It's still on my hard drive waiting to be finished though. Someday, maybe.

When the Xena show went farther afield, Chin, Asia, it was a little harder for me to find enjoyment. Don't get me wrong, I like Eastern philosophy, but the storylines stretched my understanding of the characters to the breaking point, and I left the fandom. I still hang on one or two lists, and some of the best original fiction can be found at the [Royal Academy of Bards](#), but my Xena writing days stopped.

Right about then, I was catching the Voyager series here and there, and growing into it, probably as a replacement for what I missed with the Xena fandom: a source of inspiration/obsession to write about and share with others. I remember watching "Scorpion" (end of 3rd season, beginning of 4th) and already seeing the potential for Seven/Janeway fic as early as that walk Janeway made around Seven when they were on the Borg cube ("You're Human, aren't you?" Yum. Janeway hadn't sounded this interested in anything or anyone in years!) By "Hope and Fear", end of that 4th season, I *knew* J/7 was THE couple to write.

I learned a lot about the building of relationships on the page while writing both Xena and Voyager stories. I learned about plotting, characterization development, rising and falling tension, and scene setting. I learned my writing style, and became comfortable with it, not trying to be anyone else other than the writer *I* was. I developed back story for supporting characters, learned how to weave their stories among the main characters.

When I finally came up with story ideas that couldn't fit in the universe(s) I was working in, I began to realize I probably had the tools to "strike out on my own", to write original stories. In a way I'd come full circle from 20 years ago... I'd been writing original fiction as a teen and college student, but lost my confidence, my nervy-ness, my audience. Through fanfic I was able to find each aspect again, beginning with probably the most giving audience of readers, online fans.

There's probably half a dozen half-written Xena, Jan/Mel, and Voyager stories still on my hard drive. I would love to finish them eventually.

Moon: What do you do when you are not writing?

Lara: When I am not writing, I'm a 40-hour per week office grunt probably like most people. Since I started writing though I've learned to accept that I want to write. I need to write. So I've dropped some really hefty time-consuming jobs to cut back to find more substantial and regular time to write, but I still have to bring in some sort of income to my family.

DK: I did notice there were lots of scenes with children in Turning Point. Are those especially fun to write or do you find covering so many characters difficult?

Lara: Simple answer is Cassidy and Brenna were both moms, and I was just going to have to live with it. "Killing off" their kids was never an option. Diminishing their roles would have been disingenuous too.

I do find writing children in scenes *challenging* and in that regard, a great deal of fun. As for juggling lots of characters, I assume you mean full-fleshed characters. I could populate a room with two dozen people and only focus in on one couple and it would be easy, like the other people faded to the woodwork, but it would be unrealistic. Life is full of LOTS of people; so writing lots of full-bodied characters is part of the fun of being a writer. A little world-creating goddess-like power is never anathema to this Leo. *laugh*

Also, I feel that writing children into scenes provides a lot of character development for the adults in the scene. Adults who are comfortable around children act differently versus those who aren't. It also says something about their perspective on their own childhood, and thus, on their own life. There are those adults who treat children like little adults, versus babies, or find children catalysts for personal memory/reflection. Each interaction reveals something about that adult, almost moreso than the child.

That said, keeping children internally consist as characters is EXTREMELY difficult, the least reason of which is that children, by their very nature, are trying "on" everything, exploring, finding new experiences, and having new reactions constantly incorporating them into themselves. Keeping up with that is a psychological bounce-house, exhausting.

Writing a scene from a child's point of view to reveal a key moment in the adults' story is a very tricky thing. You don't want to shift the reader entirely into the child's mind, but also like a magician's sleight of hand, you do want to draw the reader's attention outside the main characters for a moment, to essentially replant the main characters in the universe, reveal the development, the triumph, hint at the dangers that lie ahead.. To see them from outside -- that a child noticing his mother is more scattered or more satisfied, for example -- gives us a different perspective than the one she has of herself.

Adults play roles with each other. Most adults do not play roles around children. Unless they are up to no good. All of these observations are useful writer's tools for choosing point of view, or choosing to include children in a scene.

I try not to go for the "surprise" too much with child dialogue. Yes, "out of the mouths of babes" and all that, but also children can easily talk circles, or focus on things that don't move the story forward. Occasionally that's useful for a breather for the adult character(s), or reader, but too much can stall the forward motion irretrievably.

Moon: How does being a mother affect your work as a writer?

Lara: How doesn't it would be a shorter list. However, parenting affects everything from issues like finding time to write while my son was younger, to having a head swimming with parenting problems, to having to learn to divorce myself from reality in short bursts in order to successfully write now that I have more access to time (with my son now 14, there's still issues, but they have changed in tenor and scope).

Topic-wise, I also think a lot about mothers and children, and personal, professional, and role model fulfillment. Issues that I *know* creep into my fiction. I used to write lots of "loner" characters when I was younger. Now I write characters surrounded by people, children, dozens of relationships and interactions, and try to sort out priorities. While the problems my characters face aren't ones I often have, the discombobulation caused by the struggle is a favorite character trait I like to help characters iron out. Probably because I sense I haven't figured them all out myself. Writing it into characters is a real cheap form of self-help therapy, I suppose.

DK: You're nearly deaf, would you talk a little about that?

Lara: The biggest thing that my hearing problem has led to is an innate awareness of words, silence, and the body language that fills the gaps. As my hearing waxes and wanes, my attention is drawn to the visuals a person is giving off to determine their mood, or what my response might be expected to be. Are they agitated? upset? happy? mad? pensive? some mixture of emotions? I've done this "reading" of people all my life and, as a result, I find I write vivid physicality to my characters. I don't write a lot of verbatim inner thoughts. I write a lot of nervous ticks: rubbing the

moisture from damp or shaking hands on a pantleg unobtrusively; or darting the eyes away when they're hedging, or outright lying, for example.

Because I don't outright say "Marie was nervous", my readers end up actively interpreting the body language themselves -- everyone has this skill to some degree -- and it makes the reading, as many of my readers have told me, a very active and engaging experience. It can be interesting sometimes when different readers come to me with slightly different "reads" on a particular scene.

My romantic arcs also seem to advance with progressively more significant moments of eye contact or touch, and how each person reacts to it shows something about how they think and feel about the other person, but also, themselves.

DK: The detailing of Turning Point is very well done. I also felt like I was on the set. How do you know so much about what goes on, on "the set."

Lara: It's interesting how different readers can see the story differently. "Turning Point" just had a less-than-enthusiastic review in a Phoenix GLBT mag, by a male reviewer, who felt that it went the "long way 'round to a pre-determined ending." (paraphrased) Then I get notes like yours, or the ones on Amazon, or a personal email I got the other day, where I'm told the story has such reality and fullness, rather than the length being a detractor, it's lauded as a plus.

Regarding the set knowledge question: I could lie and say, "but of course, I am a jilted actress, completely aware of the dynamics of set-politics from first hand experience". However, to be honest, my set knowledge is from a brief stint in Community Theater, and some research by way of those behind-the-scenes interview shows, and a good healthy dose of imagination.

DK: I'd have thought you worked in television for years. Good job. As for that guy, *shrug*, but it does beg another question: Critics, love 'em or hate 'em?

Lara: I love criticism and reviews. That's not to say that a criticism or review can't sting. But I was a professional journalist long before I was a professional writer. I'm pretty thick-skinned as long as the discussion is the work and not me personally.

DK: Do you bother to read all the reviews?

Lara: I read every review. There's always something to be gleaned to improve myself, or to assure myself that something I tried went right. I've been very lucky. I have not been publicly lambasted for my work so far, but I have not been universally lauded to become full of myself. Writing is hard work, and I take it seriously. There is always room for improvement.

Moon: What do you like to read and who are your favorite authors?

Lara: My most recent acquisitions are eclectic to say the least: Hours of Devotion: Fanny Neuda's Book of Prayers for Jewish Women, translated by Dinah Berland; Come Be My Light, the letters of Mother Theresa; Miss McGhee, by Bett Norris; 18th & Castro, by Karin Kallmaker; and On Writing Well, by William Zinsser. I don't know that I can discern a pattern of likes from that.

I like stories where the characters are drawn such that they feel like they lived before the opening page of the book, and live on after the last page. I prefer character pieces to action. I'm not much of a mystery fan, probably because I'm not much of a fan of first person, which mysteries have a high tendency to be. I don't like substituting acerbic wit for substance in characterization. I was never a fan of the smartass growing up, and don't like them much in what I choose to read. I adored Anne Azel's Gold Mountain, and I want to see more of some characters from 18th & Castro.

I tend to read romance now, since that's what I also enjoy writing presently. I like reading about established couples too. KG MacGregor's Mulligan series is enjoyable for that reason.

Moon: What books influenced you most while growing up?

Lara: I read a lot of horse stories, having been more than a little horse-mad. Black Beauty, The Black Stallion (every series book), Misty of Chincoteague. I also loved Count of Monte Cristo, Three Musketeers, Twain's writings, the stories of Washington Irving, Austen and Tolstoy. I read Trixie Belden, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys. Wasn't as much a fan of the Bobsey Twins. I also read Science Fiction and Fantasy authors: Tolkien, McCaffrey, Clarke, Duane, Terry Brooks, best of collections.

My tastes have never really been predictable, even to me. I'm one of the few people I know who loved Jude the Obscure, and Silas Marner, but hated Wuthering Heights. Go figure.

DK: If you were to co-author a story, with who and what genre?

Lara: Collaboration has a lot more than just creating the same idea with another author, I think. You have to have similar writing approaches and styles. I don't know that I've read a writer I felt I could collaborate with. And I suspect the fault lies with me, rather than with them.

If someone were willing to collaborate with me, it probably would be alternating chapters, and definitely working from a summary outline. Probably not a mystery. Maybe a romance where I'd write one protagonist's POV chapter or scene, and the other author would write the next in the other protagonist's POV. An adventure or thriller might work well too.

Honestly though I don't know. I've never even been successful participating in a round-robin story informally.

Moon: What sorts of things inspire you?

Lara: Small things inspire and affect me. My mother rates movies to me in "tissues"; how many will I need to have to stem the flow of tears and sniffles. (I'm one of those people who cry at both sad and revelatory happy moments.) I do think a lot of life's real meaning comes in the small moments. Why do any of us do the things we do, the way we do them? Because of hundreds of little moments, little things that over time have built neuron responses that no matter if we're 60, we're still going to react that way, even if it's only for the first seconds before we bite our tongue and the maturity kicks in to cover the base reaction.

I also believe revelation comes in these same small moments. There's no waking up one morning and it's all perfectly understood, but growth comes from 'lucid living' (a new personal phrase), which means careful focusing on an experience moment by moment, as you are in it, in order to capture the meaning and essence of it. The process called 'lucid dreaming' helps a person recall dreams for later examination and self-revelation with sharp detail.

DK: Does your sexuality factor in your writing?

Lara: Yes, definitely. But all of me factors into my writing. For example, I picked boys for Cassidy and Brenna to raise because that's what I have experience raising myself. In another example, I wrote a Xena/Gabrielle story based entirely on first-hand knowledge of how a really bad snorer can disrupt a relationship, raising irritability, etc.

I haven't shared a story with a specifically bisexual character yet because I'm still writing it, one of

the projects I'm still researching (not the sexuality part, but her career and details needed for the story plot). Once I have her fully fleshed out, I'll be bringing her to readers.

DK: If you were the very first fruit, what would it be and who would eat you, Adam or Eve?

Lara: What an interesting question! LOL! Ha ha! It would be a bunch of grapes and I would be shared, from the first bite to the last. *wink* One, I really, really like grapes, so many textures in a single fruit, a really sensual experience. Two, I really like the idea of sharing knowledge, which for me is the interpretation of the Adam/Eve/apple thing.

DK: I like that answer. So, what are you working on now?

Lara: Right now I am elbow-deep in trying to finish up "Turn for Home" the sequel to "Turning Point". I actually have most of the material I need. I'm piecing it together with some new material and new angles caused by changes made in "Turning Point."

It's a very different process than the one I went through with writing "Turning Point". I now have a really set outline, where the initial TP was as fluid as the characters seemed to demand. I went off my initial plan by the end of TP, and I can't really do that with TFH.

I'm rather severely hampered by the immobility of my laptop (non-working monitor), and major home renovations. Not to mention that I've been leaving town so frequently lately on family business as well as promotional work for "Turning Point", but it will get done. I'd like to give a definite date for "Turn for Home". Linda and Barb (P.D. Publishing) would probably like to have a look-see sooner rather than later, though I have no contract regarding it. I need the headroom to work, rather than having legal obligations hanging over my rather unpredictable life.

We're looking forward to more releases from you, and we thank you so much for sitting down with us today, Lara. Is there anything you'd like to leave us with? Quotes of inspiration or some advice on writing?

Lara: Thank you both, Deven and Moon, for the conversation, and such interesting questions!

For writing inspiration I offer only: "If it's only inside you, it's nowhere. If it's on the page, you have something to share." (I just made that up, as far as I know, so it's not a 'famous' quote).

I can't go away without expressing thanks to my readers, and my publisher, P.D. Publishing, for their belief and support.

[Book Info & Excerpt](#)

Blurb

It's Hollywood. Actresses hate getting passed over. Cold shoulders are common. Petty sniping is part of the fabric of the place, but it takes two to fight.

Cassidy Hyland's birthday party for her son is about to spark much more than a truce with Brenna Lanigan, her cold costar on the television sci-fi series Time Trails.

It becomes the first step in a journey neither woman ever imagined her heart could take: to love

another woman.

Turning Point explores the journey of these two women surrounded by a mix of supportive and unsupportive cast, from colleagues, to children, parents and spouses, both current and former.