

AN INTERVIEW WITH
MELANIE R. SPRINGER
AUTHOR OF **BIMSY WHIMSODY &**
PEARL - A CARIBBEAN STORY



Q: What inspires you to write?

A: Stories come to me, wanting to be told. Their characters approach me fully dressed, knowing who they are, where they're from, their dreams, desires, and where they wish to go. My job is to take them there, so that we can celebrate the joy of adventure together.

Q: Where do Ideas come from?

A: Ideas come from everywhere, at any time of night or day. I could be in the garden, washing dishes, or driving the car. Sometimes characters emerge from interesting cracks in the walls. I might be staring into space, and suddenly a pair of earnest eyes appears; a determined nose, the subtle tilt of a head accompanies a surprised gasp of breath and the story starts from there. In Pearl, Omar was the first character who approached me. He came while I was riding a packed "Camello" on my way through Havana City, I saw him picking mangoes from a tree.

Q: Who does the book "Pearl" appeal to and why?

A: Social-Cultural Anthropologists - Anyone curious about family and societal dynamics. The book explores what it means to be alive in the post-colonial Caribbean, describing life in Barbados more specifically. Historically, we understand that our Caribbean communities are all interconnected through a history of slavery of African Peoples, alongside the massacre and displacement of indigenous peoples; in "Pearl", Chicken's grandmother takes a circuitous route from Mexico to Belize before finally arriving in Barbados. Rather than being fictional, this idea of the cross fertilisation of Caribbean peoples is our living reality.

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While growing up, I knew that the great grandmother of one of my friends was Colombian. Conversely, my Barbadian grandmother told of her older siblings having emigrated to Panama. Our connection with relatives in Cuba remains strong to this day. The migration of peoples across the Americas and the Caribbean has created many interesting intercultural blends. All are stories just waiting for the right moment to be unravelled. A sight that remains firmly embedded in my memory, is that of a dingy full of Brazilians crossing from their rainforest border into Guyana. They did so quietly and effortlessly with nothing but a line of trees along a river's edge to demarcate any boundaries.

Q: What scenes from your stories do you find to be the most satisfying?

A: For *Pearl - A Caribbean Story*; in the first scene of chapter five, the siblings fight. I needed a scene that would be tension-filled enough that it could act as a catalyst for the main characters' actions (Omar would be angry enough to follow through with the obeah, and Pearl, frustrated enough to follow through with her threat).

A: With *Bimsy Whimsody*; Since I functioned as an illustrator of both words and images, the segues from one character's telling of tail loss to another's has to be my pick. The process of writing and rewriting, drawing and redrawing, was extremely lengthy and oftentimes tedious. How do I summarise the essence of Black Belly's plight? How do I capture his expression with just a few lines? My goal was to find a way to make reading and learning about poetry fun - to see it all come together has been extremely gratifying.

Advice for young writers: -

Q: It's all well and good to have a story, but how do you get it onto paper?

A: Even with the creative process, discipline is necessary. Choose a time of day, and at the very least, one day in the week that you can dedicate to writing consistently. Routine builds muscles that help develop story plot, structure, rhythm and pace. It can be hard to know where to start when all the ideas come jumbling in at once. Some writers create character back-stories and relationship charts, others use Venn diagrams that show relationships between characters. My mother taught me a useful trick for getting straight into that writerly headspace. I simply first ask myself, "What is it that I want to say?" and then go from there.