

Nancy, I have to lead off with this question just because I'm curious – how's the learning to surf again coming along? Any mishaps? Or has it been smooth sailing, like riding a bike?

Oh, Sandy, if only it was smooth sailing ... or riding! I fell off my bike when I relearned to ride (the hand brakes threw me off), and I fall off my surfboard all the time. Even when I'm just sitting on the board! However, I love being in the water and making an effort – and sometimes I'm in the water when dolphins swim by not far away. That makes the wipeouts easier to, uh, swallow. Plus salt water can really clean out the sinuses! ☺

Your *Oldest City Vampire* books are a hit with readers. What was that first spark when you realized you had a story to tell about Cesca?

The very first spark was a Jif peanut butter commercial in which I misheard a line of dialogue. I heard, "... play Crazy Eights or watch this Princess Vampire video." Even though I knew I misheard, the idea of a Princess Vampire struck me as funny. As I developed the concept and the story world, Cesca grew so real to me, I often felt as if I were channeling her. I still do, and she always brings surprises along!

If you could retire any question and never, ever have it asked again, what would it be? Feel free to answer it.

Hmmm. I think it's too early in my published life to want to retire any kind of question.

You've got two books out in the series so far, *La Vida Vampire* and *Last Vampire Standing*. Would give us a quick look at the series as a whole and then tell us about each book?

The series features Cesca Marinelli, a vampire still adjusting to the 21st century. She wants to have a normal, semi-human afterlife but is forced to embrace her vampire self and skills in order to solve murders – and ultimately, to defeat a bigger enemy that is controlling vampires: the Void.

In *La Vida Vampire*, Cesca's just begun her job as a ghost tour guide in the Nation's Oldest City (St. Augustine) when a tourist is murdered. As the prime suspect, Cesca is thrown together with former vampire slayer, now special investigator, Deke Saber. Saber challenges Cesca's notions of normal and, as they draw closer to finding the killer, their attraction sparks a romance neither can resist.

In *Last Vampire Standing*, Jo-Jo the Jester is a wannabe stand-up comic from Atlanta who begs Cesca for sanctuary so he can follow his dream. But bad bumps-in-the-night follow Jo-Jo to town Jester, and Cesca must help Saber solve another murder. She must also confront painful pieces of her past so she can take the final steps to find and destroy the Void.

I've heard writers often say their stories take them in surprising directions, or dialogue flows from some unknown place. Is it the same with you? Do your characters surprise you sometimes?

Oh, yes! My characters surprise me all the time! Two surprises in *Last Vampire Standing* were Cesca's relationship with her family and Saber's secret. As I mentioned, I often feel that I'm channeling Cesca and the gang – acting as a “recording secretary” first, then as the story editor. The arrangement is fine by me! Better flow than no-go!

Do you ever argue with your characters while you're writing? Who usually wins?

I do occasionally argue, and so far Cesca and the gang have won. For instance, in *La Vida Vampire* I hadn't intended for Cesca and Saber to do more than exchange some hearted kisses. They had other ideas, and I tried to write around what they wanted. After three days, I was whining about my lack of progress. Cesca pointedly told me to get out of their way, write the love scene they wanted, and then we'd carry on. When I gave up control to the characters, the scene worked, and we forged on.

You went from Oklahoma/Texas to the shores of Florida. What was that move like for you? Anything that really surprised you about either Florida or living near the ocean that you didn't expect?

I visited Florida regularly for 13 years before moving here. Since much of that time was spent in St. Augustine, I was very familiar with the town in general. The biggest surprise was the effect that living here had on my writing. I truly feel that the change in scene – and the energy and rhythm of my new home – fed my creativity and freed my voice. I'm constantly inspired living by the ocean!

What is sure to distract you from sitting down and working/writing?

ARGH! E-mail and doing promo things like newsletters and updating my web site. I'm a punctual person overall, but I seem to be consistently late in getting those kinds of tasks done.

Of course, the gorgeous beach day here and there may distract me, too. ☺

I have to admit when I started reading *La Vida Vampire*, I wasn't expecting the humor you've written into the books. Was that an idea from the beginning or did it evolve once you began to really know your characters?

I adore romantic comedies and cozy mysteries, so I initially conceived *La Vida Vampire* as a cozy mystery with a vampire amateur sleuth. And, since the idea of a part day-walking vampire who gives ghost tours and surfs struck me as lighthearted, the humor was always an element. I didn't anticipate the level of humor – for instance with the Jag Queens – and didn't realize the story would involve as much romance as it did. Those aspects evolved as Cesca and the cast of characters did.

How many books are planned in the series?

I'm not sure at this point. Longevity of a series is very much up to the readers who buy and the publishers who look at those "buy" numbers. Writing might be an art, but publishing is a business!

Is there a genre you haven't tackled but would like to try?

Ohhh, yes! Regency romance, possibly western romance, and YA paranormal.

Are you working on the next book now? Can you tell us a little about it?

Book 3 will see Cesca confronting Triton to work out their relationship – a must before they can unite their powers to defeat the Void. That's about all I can say at this point.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Write more, volunteer less.

What are you reading right now? And what was the last book you finished?

Right now I'm reading nonfiction back to back. I just finished *Bloody Sunset in St. Augustine* by Nancy Powell and Jim Mast, the story an infamous murder in the 1970s. The book I'm now reading is *Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida* by St. Augustine historian David Nolan. Of course, by the time this interview runs, I'll have read at least two historical romances and a couple paranormals and/ or mysteries. I'm always reading at least one book, sometimes two.

What's the best fan letter you've gotten so far?

They're all such a kick, it's hard to pick one. I do love those that say reading my book made them laugh and helped shift them out of the doldrums.

If you had never become an author, what do you think you would be doing right now?

I'd likely have continued to teach. I adored teaching, and still do!

Lightning Round:

- dark or milk chocolate? **Dark!**

- smooth or chunky peanut butter? **Smooth**
- heels or flats? **Barefoot! If I must be shod, it's usually in flats.**
- coffee or tea? **Both, but I drink enough Starbucks to raise their stock.**
- summer or winter? **Summer**
- mountains or beach? **Beach, but I love the mountains, too.**
- mustard or mayonnaise? **Mayo with cold food, mustard with hot. I know it's weird. ☺**
- flowers or candy? **Candy**
- pockets or purse? **Purse**
- Pepsi or Coke? **Pepsi**
- ebook or print? **Since I don't have an e-reader, print**

And because we just like to know:

1. What is your favorite word? **Plethora**
2. What is your least favorite word? **Let's just say it's unprintable.**
3. What turns you on creatively, spiritually or emotionally? **Connecting with nature**
4. What turns you off creatively, spiritually or emotionally? **Chaos of all kinds**
5. What sound or noise do you love? **The sounds of the ocean**
6. What sound or noise do you hate? **Loud, aggressive voices**
7. What is your favorite curse word? **It's also (preferably) unprintable ☺**
8. What profession other than your own would you like to attempt? **Does being George Clooney's perpetual leading lady count? No? Well, you're no fun. Okay, I'd want to give fulltime paranormal investigating a shot.**
9. What profession would you not like to do? **Anything on a submarine. I'm not super claustrophobic, but I need sunlight and fresh air.**
10. If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates? **High time! I thought I'd never get you off the beach!**