

Joyce Sparrow's Interview Questions

1. St. Augustine is the perfect setting for a paranormal romance. Explain the research you did to place Cesca "a vampire telling ghost stories" in America's oldest city. In other words, what made you place a vampire in Florida?

Placing my vampire character Cesca in Florida was a natural ... in spite of sunshine and vampires not seeming to mix.

You see, I fell in love with St. Augustine in 1989 and vowed to make it my home someday. For the next 13 years, I visited every chance I got, sometimes twice a year. During those trips, I explored and re-explored local sites, took numerous historic and ghost tours by train, trolley and on foot, devoured books about the city, collected pamphlets, etc. I took "side trips" with a friend to other Florida locations, but my heart was in St. Augustine.

The long-awaited move in 2002 changed me in ways I couldn't have predicted. The sheer creative energy of St. Augustine charged my story ideas and writing. And, okay, living a block from the beach was a huge added inspiration. So, when the idea for a vampire series hit me, it simply had to be set in the town I love. Plus, with the long, rich history, the tourism and ghost tourism, and the many festivals, I knew St. Augustine would become another character in the series. The clincher to my choice of setting was that I had already done a great deal of research both before I moved and since I'd lived here, doing more research as needed would be easy to do.

Almost seven years after coming to Florida, I still love "touring" and researching in my adopted hometown!

2. In both novels you have pegged two prominent Florida groups: senior citizens and tourists. You created Millie and her silver-haired, gun toting friends and Kevin, the odd ball tourist laden with at least eight cameras. Tell me more about the creation of these characters.

Since St. Augustine and so much of Florida thrives on tourism, tourists were givens as additional characters in my work. Kevin is a tourist, but also a paranormal investigator, no matter that he might seem inept. He filled a specific role in the story, as all characters must do, and it was fun to make him a one-man paranormal research band.

Millie and the Jag Queens popped into the first book full blown. I didn't think, "Gee, I need some senior characters." They simply appeared. However, making Millie and her friends the Jag Queens was intentional. I'm a football fan, and thought it would be fun to have the senior women be even bigger, more visible fans of the Jacksonville Jaguar professional football team. That inspiration came in part from one of my dear neighbors.

The odd thing was that, after I'd finished the first book, I learned that my mother wears Shalimar perfume. Since I always buy her a different kind, I didn't realize she'd ever worn Shalimar. I

hustled to assure my mother that Millie's overuse of the perfume was a fluke. At any rate, my mother gave me two gorgeous bottles of Shalimar that she still had. I treasure them!

3. Explain how your own interest in surfing worked its way into the novels. (I also liked the scene when Saber observes Cesca arguing with Triton, the dolphin.)

My interest in surfing began when my dad used to do his active duty at Camp Pendleton and we stayed in Oceanside, CA. Active duty didn't last but two weeks at a stretch, so I only board surfed a few times, but loved body surfing, too. (My dad taught me to body surf.)

When I moved to Florida, I thought about learning to surf again, but I was busy first getting the house in order, then with a family wedding, then with writing. Then my character Cesca insisted on being a part day-walker, and also insisted on learning to surf. Since she had always been something of an athlete (a very physically active young woman for her time), and since she had loved the ocean and had played in the waves with Triton as a teen, I figured that surfing would be a logical sport for her to embrace. In that instance, our interests meshed nicely, and surfing also gave her a way to relate to Maggie's boyfriend and gain his acceptance ... however reluctant he might be to give it.

I have surfed since I moved to Florida, though it would be more accurate to say I fall off my board. A lot. It was magical to be on my board one day and see a dolphin swimming not far away. That's one of the reasons why both a real dolphin and Triton as his shape-shifted self showed up in the second book.

And thank you for your compliment on that scene. I had a blast writing it!

4. Are you able to give me more biographical details? I am looking for standard details: childhood, education, career, and relocating to Florida. In the profiles I am connecting each author's personal history to what brought that writer to set a book in Florida.

I was born in Tulsa, OK, and raised in both Tulsa and in a small town southwest of there – Sapulpa. We also lived in Oceanside for a while when I was a small child, and I remember tiny pieces of that time.

Sapulpa was magical for me as a child. We lived near the woods and I spent lots of time there – both with neighborhood friends and alone. I made up stories in my head, talked to the “spirits” of the woods, and generally had a very rich fantasy life! My mother says I started writing about age 3, asking her to write the words. She doesn't remember any stories, but I do recall always wanted to write.

I treasured our vacations connected to my father's active duty. Oceanside still holds wonderful memories, and I might have moved there if I could have afforded to live within sight of the ocean. I visit there when I can manage, particularly when I go see my daughter in L.A.

I attended high school in Tulsa, then attended the University of Tulsa to major in Speech and Language Pathology. After earning my Bachelor's degree, I worked at Children's Medical Center for 6 months, before accepting the Speech Pathologist position in the Sapulpa Public Schools. I began work on my Master's degree during my six years in the Sapulpa school system, and later quit working to complete my advanced degree. After earning my Master's, I worked at the University of Tulsa Speech and Hearing clinic for about 5 months.

During this time, I had married, divorced and remarried. Blending families was a wonderful challenge, and I'm pleased that my four children are close to one another. (I now have three sons, one daughter, two daughters-in-law and four grandsons.)

We were transferred to Dallas in the early 1980s, and lived in Richardson, TX until moving to St. Augustine. I didn't work outside the home in my early years in Texas, but went back to teaching in the 1990s. I took a part time position as a Speech and Language Pathologist in the Dallas school system for a year, and also work part and full time teaching in a small private high school in Dallas. (I taught US History, US Government, America Sign Language and Creative Writing. I was also the Learning Disabilities coordinator for a time, seeing that referrals were handled, testing completed, and results discussed with both parents and students.)

I had written all through elementary and high school and college, and as I had my family. However, I'd written mostly poetry, short stories, comedy sketches, children's picture books and teleplays. In Texas I began writing novels – romance in particular but with comedy twists. I joined Romance Writers of America® and a number of chapters, and helped several chapters get established over the years. I've served on the RWA® National Board three times, and on chapter Boards. I'm currently chairman of an RWA committee. I also belong to the Florida Writers Association.

I mentioned my attachment to Oceanside, CA. My daughter asked me if I'd "settled" for St. Augustine. I didn't. The Oceanside area and all of California have a fascinating history, and I do love it there. St. Augustine offers me even more. The beaches remind me of the essence of Oceanside, but the history in St. Augustine is deeper and more immediate. Touchable.

I'd always felt like a landlocked ocean person. Now, I'm home.