AUTHOR Q&A

10 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT C.A. GRAY:

1. I once performed in a musical in England. The show? “Return to the Forbidden Planet.” It’s kind of Shakespeare’s “The Tempest” meets a bad Sci-Fi B movie, with a bunch of rock ’n roll songs thrown in for good measure.
2. I was fluent in Spanish… in 2004. I thought I wanted to be a missionary doctor in Mexico, so I moved there and learned by immersion. But sadly, at this point I’m barely conversational.
3. I have a 16-degree kink in my spine. I fractured L2 while sledding and fell off a 10-foot cliff. Everyone else fell off the cliff too, in fact that was the idea because the bottom was covered in powder… but *I* landed wrong.
4. Shortest length of time I’ve ever been overseas: 40 hours. I flew from AZ to Ireland… for ONE WEEKEND. I also had a biochem exam the morning after I got back.
5. I’ve gotten lost in a country where I didn’t speak the language… twice. In Cyprus and in Mexico. I’ve gotten lost in many, many places where I did speak the language, but it’s so much less interesting when you can ask for directions.
6. While in my first semester of med school, I had the female lead role in a music video which I don’t think ever saw the light of day. The group was called “Ever Stays Red” and the song was “Can’t Explain.” I had to get an antique wedding dress all caked in mud.

"10 THINGS" CONTINUED...

7. I once bought a red convertible from a slimy used car salesman... and promptly sold it one week later. It was a lemon.
8. In 2016, I fulfilled my lifelong dream of getting married barefoot on a beach to a wonderful man... in Costa Rica, no less!
9. For the longest time I refused to read Harry Potter, because I was "too cool" and I only read "real literature." Then I picked up the first one and ripped through the whole series in like two months.
10. I used to play piano, and I was good, too, if I do say so myself... I was even a pianist for a wedding my senior year in high school (although it was only a tiny destination wedding in Maui). Unfortunately I'm so out of practice now that it's painful to listen to me struggle through a song. I'll pick it up again one day!

FAQs

Where are you from? Where do you live now?

Originally I was born in Baton Rouge, LA, but I've been in Tucson, AZ for more or less my whole life.

How long have you been writing? How did you start writing?

I've been writing since I was in elementary school... although back then all my main characters were cats (go figure). I've got about 12 shelves' worth of journals throughout my life, and have always felt that words are incredibly powerful. I minored in Creative Writing in college. I guess I always knew I'd end up writing eventually.

What is your writing process?

I brainstorm a world and a general gist of the story, and then I outline the story in broad strokes. Next I outline the nitty gritty, down to what happens in each chapter. Then I write from the outline, in roughly 20 page chunks, editing as I go. I send each set of 20 to my primary editor (my mom, whose maiden name I borrowed as my pen name) and make whatever edits she recommends as I go. Then when I finish the story, I reread the whole thing and edit it to the best of my ability before shipping it off to her and to my other editors!

What do you find to be the most difficult part of the writing process?

Most difficult are those days when I have to make myself write, but I'm really distracted by something else. It's super hard to focus, and I don't feel like I'm writing anything worth saying, but I do it anyway. My favorite part is also the easiest—that feeling of 'flow,' when I'm really identifying with my characters and I feel immersed in my world. Problem is, when my writing time is up on those days and I have to switch to something else, it's really hard to do!

Where are your books set? Why?

Piercing the Veil is set in Norwich, England, because that's where I studied abroad when I was a junior in college. That experience changed my life, and in many ways I left my heart there. Of course much of it is also set in Carlion, the fantasy world of the former Camelot, too. That was more incidental: they're British and Arthur is a story everyone is familiar with, so it was easy to borrow!

The Liberty Box trilogy is set in what used to be the United States of America, but in a future where the U.S. has fallen. I chose that because I was fascinated by dystopian stories, but I wanted it to feel a little closer to home than if I'd set it in a fictionalized universe… and I also wanted to briefly touch on the economics of how and why the U.S. collapsed in the first place. I like to take the opportunity to educate the reader here and there when possible, if it doesn't take away from the story… physics in *Piercing the Veil*, and a little economics in *The Liberty Box*.

Are your characters based on real people?

Not intentionally. :) I think all of my main characters (Peter and Lily, Jackson and Kate) have aspects of me in them, because I imagine how I would react in a given situation or how I might say something, and I put that in their heads or their mouths. But I suspect I'm pulling all of my characters from experience, whether it be myself, others, or fictional archetypes. You write what you know.

Where do the ideas for your books come from?

The germ of the idea comes from other stories I love, always. The rest comes from very intentional brainstorming sessions, usually over a period of days or weeks… they definitely don't fall into my head complete.

Who is your favorite author?

I'd have to go with the proverbial JK Rowling. LOOOVE the *Harry Potter* series. But C.S. Lewis would probably be a close second... *The Chronicles of Narnia* is fantastic, and I also love his non-fiction.

When you aren't writing, what do you like to do for fun?

I love spending time with friends and family, working out (yoga and running), watching movies (my husband and I have an occasionally contentious movie blog: westsidehecklers.wordpress.com), reading fiction or non-fiction, having coffee or a glass of wine after a long day... and I don't get to do this nearly as often as I'd like, but I love to travel!

Do you do school visits?

I haven't yet, but I'd definitely be open to that! Shoot me an email if you'd like to discuss...

What's next?

At the moment, I'm working on "The Potentate", the third book in *The Liberty Box* trilogy. But my sister-in-law had a really interesting idea for another story with a similar theme—what life do you want to live, the real one, or a far more glamorous fantasy that only feels real in your mind? Seems appropriate for our society with budding Virtual Reality technology. I'll flesh that one out and see where it goes next!

Lightning Round!!!

- **Favorite Dessert:** Flourless chocolate cake or chocolate ganache cake from Trader Joe's. Basically anything dark chocolate, though.
- **Favorite Color:** Depends on when you ask me… at the moment, probably pastel lavender, but hot pink is a consistent favorite.
- **Cats or Dogs?** CATS (mostly because I am allergic to dogs, though).
- **If you couldn't be an author, you'd be…** An actress, assuming I could be that instead! Should I say doctor? I'm guessing in this question I can't be that either.
- **Favorite Food:** Fried shrimp. Unless I haven't had veggies in awhile, because then I literally crave them.
- **Coffee or Tea?** COFFEE! (Is this even a question???)