

Q & A with Author Brian Kindall about PEARL

Q – Pearl is a statue – an inanimate object. What was the biggest challenge in writing a book about such an unusual character?

A – Every good character has limitations. Those are the personal barriers they have to overcome to get what they want by story's end. Sometimes it's a physical problem, like a lack of strength. At other times it might be some obstacle that's in the character's mind, like fear or doubt. Usually it's a little of both. Although Pearl certainly suffers from fear and doubt, her biggest problem is that she can't move. She can only want her way through the story. She can only desire. Such a limitation can pose problems for a writer who needs to make his story exciting. The character can't leap and karate-chop from one page to the next like some action figure. Instead, she has to be moved from scene to scene by the other characters around her. The excitement is limited not by what she is doing, but by what is happening to her, around her, or in her thoughts and dreams. But Pearl comes to realize that wanting is a force unto itself. She learns how to direct her destiny through her desires. As the writer, the biggest challenge I faced was in showing that Pearl was actually moving through the story, from one interesting situation to the next, not passively, but by the force of her own will.

Q – When someone asks you what PEARL is about, what do you say?

A – People who ask that question generally want to know the situation of the story – who is the character, and what is her problem? So with PEARL I might reply with something like – it's the story of a statue who is alive but can't move and who must endure a series of difficult adventures in order to reach the thing in life that she most wants. That's vague, but it gives someone enough of an idea to decide if it's a book they might want to check out. But in my mind I'm really thinking less about the action of the story, and more about the theme. For me, PEARL is a story about learning to have faith in the Cosmos. For me, her story is about trusting yourself and the world into which you were born.

Q – What inspired you to write PEARL?

A – Years ago, I was in Greece with my wife. We traveled all through the islands and then up into the mountains. At one end of the trip we were diving into the deep blue sea, at the other end we were climbing to the top of Mount Olympus. When you are actually in a place, it is filled with the myriad details of that place –

the clutter. But after you are back home, and some time passes, your mind starts to sift through the chaos. When I recall that trip to Greece, I don't remember the clutter so much as the few special details that made it such a great trip. When I look back, I remember swimming in the sea with the little yellow fish. I remember a Greek boy rowing a boat out to go fishing. I remember a marble statue of a girl in a junk shop, and the moon on the waves, and a pink stucco hotel I saw in the mountains. The entire experience is reduced to just a handful of very exact, pure images. It seems almost like a postcard – a simple note, almost a poem. It feels very quiet, but deeply powerful, too. I decided I would like to try to capture that feeling in a thin novel that was simple, but had a meaning that was much larger than itself. The result of that effort, however humble, was PEARL.

Q – PEARL is a kid's book, aimed primarily at middle-graders, but it also appeals to older kids and adults. What makes a book a "kid's book" in your opinion?

A – Good writing is good writing. It doesn't matter if it's meant for kids, adults, or anyone in between. I've had people say to me – so now that you've written a kid's book, are you going to write a real book? How do you answer such a ridiculous question? Some of the greatest classics in the world are for kids. The best books for young readers – the ones that really stick with you over time – are those that take kids seriously. Kids aren't stupid. They know a lot. They understand stuff about life. In fact, in many ways kids are more savvy than the adults who have become jaded and blind to the magic and mystery of life. But as much as anything else, I would say that kid's books have hope. Sometimes adult books are just too burdened with cynicism and self-importance. Adults sometimes forget that life is about hope and faith and mystery. If an adult is at all enamored of a book for kids, it's probably because they are trying to get back a little bit of that mystery and hope.

Q – What is your favorite scene in PEARL?

A – The last one. A pink hotel shrouded in snowflakes is a surreal image that really sticks in my mind. Throughout the entire book there has been this tension, this claustrophobic inability to move, along with an undying hope for the future. And then, at last, that future arrives. Pearl has reached her greatest desire. What a relief! What an incredible feeling! I feel it, and hopefully the reader does, too. That final scene always brings a lump to my throat.