

Meet Jane Ward

What's your story? Why did you become a writer?

I was the kid who read early (age 4) and from then on proceeded to lose myself in books and make-believe. I have a still vivid memory from kindergarten of the teacher sending someone to the rest room to bring me back to class. She was so upset with me and I couldn't understand why. I thought I'd been gone for about a minute; come to find out it was more like 20. I had started daydreaming and completely lost track of time! Library visits were my favorite activity. I was a shy child, a true introvert, and I could hide in the stacks with books and not have to talk to anyone. One day it occurred to me that I could write books like the ones I loved to read, and so I began writing stories—not very good ones at first!—primarily to entertain myself. Fiction writing as my calling was confirmed about 15 years later when I read a story excerpt aloud in a creative writing class in college. There was a long pause when I finished and then my classmates erupted in applause.

What make you want to do it again and again?

A character appears in my imagination. Clothes, hair, scars, everything. Then he or she does something that is odd or bad or desperate and I become eager to understand why. Then I write to understand why. I don't finish until I do, or at least have a better understanding. There's nothing like the absolute absorption into a make-believe world. To me it's the most compelling place ever. I'm the kindergartner daydreaming in the bathroom again, only now, no one interrupts me. I have the power! When I finish a story, I realize it's all been about helping a reader understand why someone would do something odd or bad or desperate, and not about me escaping real life at all. That's always a surprise.

What do you want people to know about you and what you write?

- I'm an optimist!
- I'm funnier in real life than my books with their sometimes heavy themes would suggest!
- I am fascinated by people. The food stories I enjoyed writing the most were the profiles of the chef or the jam maker or the baker. Their food was great but their journeys into the business and who they were when they left work behind were more interesting.
- I am a visual person, which may seem an odd way to describe a person who uses words. But I think I use words the way other artists use paint: to create a picture. Only in my work the picture is appearing in a reader's mind from the words I've used.