

From Inspiration to Mainstream

January Write Brain

Presenters: Donita K. Paul and Kacy Barnett-Gramckow

By Cathy Dilts

There is Christian fiction, and then there is fiction with a Christian worldview. Donita K. Paul and Kacy Barnett-Gramckow defined the difference between the two at the January Write Brain.

“Writers of inspirational fiction may not know where they fall at first,” Kacy said. “Are you a CBA (Christian Booksellers Association) writer, or a secular writer? Does your fiction belong in a Christian bookstore, a secular bookstore, or both?”

Kacy used Jan Karon’s *Mitford* series as an example. Karon could not find a Christian publisher because the inspirational message is submerged in the story. Yet Karon’s series about a small-town Episcopal priest became a bestseller in the secular market, which has fewer constraints on subject matter and language.

Both Kacy and Donita write for the CBA market, which follows specific guidelines for content and language. “Still, inspirational fiction should never be preachy,” Kacy said. “The message should be a natural part of the story.”

Kacy’s first publication came in a breakout devotional, *A Moment a Day*, followed by her historical fiction series, *The Genesis Trilogy*. Donita is the award-winning author of *The DragonKeeper Chronicles*, a five-book Christian fantasy series, as well as multiple Christian romance novels and novellas.

Donita shared some of her trials and tribulations on the road to publication. “If anyone ever tells you your first book will never sell, they’re right!” She thanks God that her initial foray into the world of fiction writing—a romance novel—was never published.

Donita’s advice is to write what you enjoy reading. She began writing fantasy after her son gave her several novels by Robert Jordan. It was the first fantasy literature she’d read, and she was hooked. She said, “My first book, *Dragonspell*, was easy. It just poured out. The next four were harder and harder.” Donita also spoke about the author-reader relationship. “The reader may be on a spiritual journey, and your book has an impact.”

Kacy began her writing career in nonfiction when her sister-in-law asked her to write a devotional. Her first published book paid her three copies, with the option to buy extra copies at a discount. Even though *A Moment a Day* sold 250,000 copies, which was phenomenal for a devotional, Kacy’s first fiction didn’t sell for several years.

Donita and Kacy were encouraging, in spite of the global economic downturn affecting the publishing industry. After detailing the horror stories of authors having their series cut, and contracts being canceled, Donita and Kacy offered advice for writers looking to break in.

Kacy suggested that publishers are still looking for stories that present hope to the reader. Don’t write stories with downer endings. In hard times, people want upbeat, uplifting stories that leave the reader feeling good. Donita told the audience to “take advantage of the lull.” Finish your book. Polish your work. Both agreed that you need to be ready when the market picks up again, because publishers “will want stuff fast.”

Whether you’re a secular writer with a Christian worldview, or a Christian writer

fitting into the CBA mold, Donita and Kacy urged the audience to seek the rewards unique to inspirational writing. Kacy stated that knowing your book touches someone's life "is more important than a royalty check."

Donita and Kacy agree with C. S. Lewis who said, "We don't need more Christian writers. We need more great writers who are Christian."

Sidebar

Recommended books:

- *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing Christian Fiction* by Ron Benrey
- *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Christian Mysteries* by Ron Benrey
- *The Little Handbook to Perfecting the Art of Christian Writing: Getting Your Foot in the Publisher's Door* by Leonard G. Goss and Don M. Aycok
- *The Key: How to Write Damn Good Fiction Using the Power of Myth* by James N. Frey

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