

Q & A
with Elizabeth Adair

Q: Here's a question that always gets asked, but readers are always curious: how did you get started writing?

EA: As far back as I can remember I've made up stories. Soon as I learned how to write I scrawled long sagas about horses. I didn't switch to people until my teens. I published my first poems at 17, by my twenties was publishing literary fiction, and in my thirties traveled on TV movie earnings from one of my stories. I credit my success to the family, friends and teachers who took time to read my work and talk to me about it. If my kid-scribblings had been brushed aside with a "that's nice," I might have never tried to get published.

Q: What has been the most important influence on your writing?

EA: Books made me want to write. Actually, maybe one particular book, the edition of *Wuthering Heights* with Fritz Eichenberg's woodcuts. They were so terrifying and beautiful that before I was old enough to read I already knew that to write words that could create such a strange, passionate energy as filled those pictures must be a wonderful achievement. (That's still an unfulfilled ambition.) In college I was lucky to have some magnificent teachers and am just as lucky to have exacting friends who keep me going when I think my creative energy is spent. I've learned from them, maybe the hard way, that where there's life, there's creative energy.

Q: Do you have a favorite author?

EA: Too many to name! Emily Brontë didn't disappoint me. I came under J. R. R. Tolkien's spell early. W. B. Yeats was dissatisfying when I was young but it's strange how he keeps improving with age (mine). My favorite mystery writers are Michael Connelly and James Lee Burke. Some writers I love for one story, like "The Room in the Tower" by E. F. Benson, others for style like Eudora Welty. Since *The Sun and Stars* is a mystery with a historical setting, I shouldn't leave out my teenage adoration for Anya Seton's *Katherine*, about Katherine Swynford and John of Gaunt.

Q: What spurred your Tudor fascination?

EA: My mother's stories. I learned about the wives of Henry VIII from her, and Elizabeth I, and Joan the Fair Maid of Kent, and Charles I—chop-chop! I suppose there was a lot of chop-chop in her stories, but to dare all as Anne Boleyn did seemed to make losing romantic. Later I realized about the lice, lack of plumbing, high risk of death in childbed and social injustice. Yet there's something about the colors of the period, and the music...

Q: It's rumored that you may have a Boleyn ancestor. Do tell.

EA: I can't yet. An eminent genealogist thinks a woman who *seems* to be my ancestor *may* have descended from an aunt of Anne's, but that research is very much in progress. All I know is that my Virginia ancestors had cousins and

neighbors with names like Wyatt, Brereton, Norris...whether these turn out to be close kin or distant ones, one thing that sticks out is that in framing Anne Boleyn, Cromwell didn't randomly choose the men he implicated. He took care to destroy key people in her kinship network because that was your support system in those days. To a big degree, Anne's party and her circle of extended kin were one and the same. That was true for everyone back then, rich or poor. When Virginia was colonized, that kinship group still existed and members of it—mostly junior members with no land to inherit and everything to prove and gain—were among the first Europeans to take on the adventure of the New World.

Q: Do you stay historically accurate when you write or do you like to play with history?

EA: I deserve that question! I know that in giving Henry VIII a fictional daughter and mixing real and imaginary international incidents, I'm playing faster and looser with history than some readers may like. I wouldn't if I were writing straight historical fiction. If you're Philippa Gregory, I believe you should be as accurate as you can and center your drama in what might have driven real people and events. But if you're writing a mystery, you need a detective with access to all levels of the court. She needs more freedom to investigate than most women had. An illegitimate royal brat, a bit spoiled but clever, orphaned by one parent and neglected by the other, might enjoy Isabel's access and freedom. But the politics in the story are based in those of 1527 and 1528, and I hope the characters seem like inhabitants of that world, not mall rats in doublets and codpieces. Whenever historical characters step into the story I hope they're plausible.

Q: Will we see more of Isabel in future books, and if so, any hints as to the trouble in which she'll find herself?

EA: Oh yes. *The Sun and Stars* is a cozy mystery, but I'd like to do something cozier. People trapped at a house party, among them a murderer. Bodies falling right and left. Sort of Agatha Christie meets "The Masque of the Red Death." And then, there's Adam's stepmother. She's bound to be a little upset at him now, and she's not the only skeleton in his closet. And what about a maturing Isabel? Would she just sit by and watch Anne Boleyn get framed for adulteries she didn't commit? Cromwell might decide it's about time he got Isabel out of the way. If readers think more would be fun, I think Isabel would be glad to oblige.

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