

# Q & A

with Sandra A. Miller,  
moderated by Sandra's publisher,  
Zibby Owens of Zibby Books!



Pictured left to right; Zibby Owens, Sandra A. Miller





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with Sandra A. Miller



Your book is referred to as a “psychological thriller”—literally! Your main character is a psychologist. What psychological thrillers have you read and enjoyed?

I’ve devoured some good ones recently, including *SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX* by Lisa Unger, *THE HOLDOUT* by Graham Moore, and Julie Clark’s *THE LIES I TELL*, which kept my head spinning, until I didn’t know who was who and what was what. But the very first psychological thriller I ever read was Daphne du Maurier’s classic, *REBECCA*. I was in 7th grade and had never experienced such a twisty, suspenseful book, one that made me feel like I was uncovering secrets—as a good thriller should. I had to find out what was going on with those characters whose realities kept shifting in dark, unexpected ways. I recently reread *Rebecca* and realized it had influenced me even more than I knew.



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Where did the idea for **WEDNESDAYS AT ONE** come from?

In the summer of 2020, I experienced a three-month bout of vertigo and wasn't able to write anything, or even look at the computer without getting dizzy. Every morning, I shut my eyes and did morning pages from Julia Cameron's book, *THE ARTIST'S WAY*. If you aren't familiar with her book, the task entails writing three longhand, uncensored pages in a notebook first thing after waking. It's a stream-of-consciousness dump meant to clear the mind and lay the groundwork for creativity. It worked. When the vertigo lifted, this story about a psychologist who was quietly atoning for a horrific mistake in his youth just came to me—fully formed. When the characters showed up, I knew I had to tell their story.



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What was your writing process like?

Remember the summer of 2020 when there was nothing to do and nowhere to go? We were taking walks with friends six feet apart and wiping our take-out boxes with Clorox. Well, every day, I woke up early and wrote 1000 words. Then —because I have summers off from teaching—I had the rest of the day to do whatever else needed my attention. If you write 1000 words a day for three months, you'll have 90,000 words, about the length of a novel.

So, while many people didn't like that long quarantine, it was in some unexpected way a dream for writers like me who love to socialize but also crave alone time. With the socializing gone from the equation, there was nothing to do but write.



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How is writing from the perspective of Gregory, a male character, different from other things you've written? What was it like to write from the perspective of a character whose gender is different from your own?

I don't think it's a stretch for a writer to be able to create characters whose lives are completely different from theirs. That said, I've often thought about reincarnation and believe we've all lived as people of different ethnicities, religions, socio-economic classes, and genders. And maybe our souls remember some of those experiences. Whether or not that's true, it's my privilege as a writer to imagine characters of every type, and to do what it takes to make them real on the page. It's funny you ask about Gregory. When this story first came to me, I tried writing it from the perspective of the woman client who visits the psychologist, but that didn't work. Her voice was wrong and sounded accusatory. I knew this needed to be from Gregory's quiet, guilt-ridden perspective. He is the opposite of me, but I thoroughly enjoyed inhabiting his character.





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What books or authors provided inspiration while you were writing **WEDNESDAYS AT ONE**?

When I sit down to write, I feel as though every influential book I've ever read is with me, and that knowledge is there to draw on, if only subconsciously. I didn't draw inspiration from any specific texts while writing **WEDNESDAYS AT ONE**, but I often thought about thrillers that have gripped me, and how the authors achieved that magic mix of literary and propulsive writing. There are two couldn't-put-down psychological thrillers that I know have made it into my subconscious: **GONE GIRL** by Gillian Flynn and **THE SECRET HISTORY** by Donna Tartt.



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Why was Gregory's profession important to his character? What was it like to write about a psychologist who was dealing with some psychologically difficult experiences?

When I created Gregory, that was the only thing I was sure about: he was a psychologist. That was at the center of this story. The fact that my husband of twenty-five years is a psychologist gave me loads of material to work with. Although Mark is—thankfully—absolutely nothing like my protagonist, I have learned so much from him about the profession, about session dynamics, and what it's like to have to set aside your own emotional pain sometimes in order to focus on the client. This is something my character Gregory does very well, until someone comes in and starts poking at his deepest wound. I loved imagining those scenes in which Gregory tries to take control of a session, but Mira keeps undermining his authority by seeing through his cover and calling him out on it.



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Your first book was a memoir. How was writing *WEDNESDAYS AT ONE* different? Was it more challenging to write a memoir or a novel?

When you write a memoir, you have to retraumatize yourself over and over in order to remember the story accurately and capture the most important and revealing details on the page. You have to sit at your desk and put yourself through some of the worst experiences of your life, until every scene is as emotionally alive and true as you can make it. Doing that is harder for me than writing fiction.

The hard part about writing a novel is making something out of absolutely nothing, but that's also the joyful part. I like creating characters and letting them get in all kinds of trouble—the worst kinds. It's not necessarily easy for me to sit down and write fiction, but it's more fun than the internal work of mining my trauma for stories. Final answer: writing *WEDNESDAYS AT ONE* in three months was a romp in the park compared to the seven years I worked on *TROVE*.





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What advice would you give someone who wants to write their own novel?

There's a difference between wanting to do something and having to do something. I have friends who have spent years writing books that have never sold, but they still have to do it. In fact, they might want to quit, but they can't. That was me for a long time when I was trying to get my memoir published. The pain of rejection was devastating—but not as unbearable as giving up the thing I loved to do: write. So my advice would be this: if you want to try writing a novel, then go for it. Set a goal. Arrange your life so there is built-in writing time. Connect with writers, take classes, go to workshops, and work your craft tirelessly. If it catches, you will soon know the addiction—what it feels like to have to do it.



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What are some of the books you've been reading recently? Any books you're looking forward to?

I listen to audiobooks when I take walks, and bestselling upmarket fiction keeps my feet moving on a cold winter day. **BLACK CAKE** by Charmaine Wilkerson was a wonderful listen, as was **DEMON COPPERHEAD** by Barbara Kingsolver. On my nightstand, I have **THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES** and a pile of Agatha Christie novels from the library. I first read **AND THEN THERE WERE NONE** in high school and it stayed with me for years. Who doesn't love a book that keeps you guessing until the very last page?



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Are you doing more writing?  
What other projects are coming up for you?

I am working on a complicated, psychological novel called **THE OTHER CHOICE**. It's about a woman, Ruby Link, who reluctantly gives up her chance to have a baby when she marries her musician boyfriend, Cab. But then Ruby learns that her reckless younger sister is pregnant and her choice is thrown into question. As the story progresses, Ruby discovers that—just like a pregnancy—life doesn't always go according to plan.

