

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Mary Stanton, author of
Beaufort & Company: Defending Angels

How did you get the idea for *Defending Angels*?

My agent challenged me to write a proposal for a ghost hunter series. I'm like a dog with a biscuit. If you offer me a treat, I'll jump. But it ended up with angels in it, instead of ghosts. I'm not sure why.

Start to finish, how long did it take you to write *Defending Angels*?

I'm normally pretty fast, once I have the story idea. This will be my thirty-eighth novel, I think, and I've only been writing professionally since 1994. It usually takes me anywhere from six weeks to three months to write a novel. But this book seemed to take forever. I'd gotten pretty lazy, writing cozies and I decided to stretch myself. So I took my time with the research, and I was pretty careful with my prose style. And I revised a lot. End to end, it took about a year.

What is your favorite part of the writing process?

At least once in every novel, I try to laugh, get scared, and get a little weepy. If I can do all three in the same book, I feel very good about that.

What is your least favorite part of the writing process?

All the rest of it. I hate to write. I'd rather eat a rat.

Did you encounter any unusual obstacles in writing *Defending Angels*?

I don't do much research when I write fiction. And I decided in an excess of hubris that I could remember enough Milton and Dante to create the celestial universe all on my own. Boy, was I wrong! I had to go back and re-read *Paradise Lost* and *The Inferno*. And then, since I'm so past by college days, it isn't funny, I had to Google cribs for the poetry because I didn't get it when I read the works all by myself. Thank goodness for online lesson plans!

What do you think is Bree Winston-Beaufort's most admirable quality? Least admirable?

Bree has a compulsive need to help the helpless. It's her greatest asset and her biggest failing.

Do any of the characters in *Defending Angels* have an autobiographical component? If so, who, and what is the similarity?

My very first novel was a beast fable, like *WATERSHIP DOWN*, except that I used horses as characters instead of rabbits. The main character, Duchess, was a lot like me. That was the first and last time I put myself in a book.

How do you get the ideas for the characters in *Defending Angels*? Are any of the characters based on people you know?

My middle sister is a terrific lawyer in Seattle. When she was a little kid, she had long, silvery blonde hair. On my last visit to her, I sat and watched her in court. She is a fierce defender of the innocent. The idea for an avenging angel sort of character came to me then. But Bree turned into someone very different—(my sister is quite thankful for that!)

Who is your favorite character in *Defending Angels*, and why?

Gosh—I like almost all of them. Antonia, Bree's sister, is fun to write. I love Ron Parchese. And I love Lavinia—there's a little bit of my ninety-four year old mother-in-law in Lavinia.

Who is your least favorite character in *Defending Angels*, and why?

Ooohh... that'd have to be Payton the Rat, Bree's crummy ex-boyfriend. And his horrible boss John Stubblefield is a turkey, too. I think sleazy lawyers are the pits, and both those guys are sleazy lawyers.

Why did you choose Savannah, Georgia as the setting for *Defending Angels*?

It was the one place in the United States where I thought I could get away with a supernatural theme. And it's physically gorgeous. Beautiful settings—country settings, in particular-- mean a great deal to me—both in real life and in fiction. If I had to live in an apartment in New York City I'd probably wither away and die.

What do you hope readers will take away from the book?

At one point in this novel, Petru says to Bree: "There are people who plunge into chaos to save the drowning, people who run away as fast as they can, and people who help victims drown faster." I want everyone to take the plunge to help the helpless.

What's next for Bree?

I'm in the middle of *Angel's Advocate*, the second in the series. Bree learns a lot more about Leah, her mother, and the secrets behind Uncle Franklin's law practice. The book itself is based on Dante's premise that the ninth—and most horrific—circle of Hell is reserved for betrayers.

What's next for Mary Stanton?

I have a new Claudia Bishop mystery series debuting next year called THE GROUCHY GOURMET. The first novel's due in the fall. After that is the third in the BEAUFORT&COMPANY angels series: *Winged Justice*.