

Author Spotlight

Jen Lowry



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SWEET POTATO JONES

Dreams are a luxury and love an indulgence for a seventeen-year-old girl forced to care for her three siblings.

Kids daydream about things they don't have and places they've never been. But seventeen-year-old Sweet Potato Jones doesn't have the luxury of such indulgences. For the past ten years, she's been focused on raising her three younger siblings. Sweet Potato never wanted anything for herself. Just a roof over their heads, someplace safe to live, food, and clothing. She never dared dream of anything more.

The family finally catches a break when they meet Mrs. Sunshine Patterson, the Bible-quoting, gospel-singing owner of the Soul Food Restaurant. But Sweet Potato has never accepted charity from anyone, and she isn't about to start now. And that sweet, Southern boy making eyes at her? He can keep that, even if he is Mrs. Sunshine's son.

Family, faith, and loyalty will be tested in this spirited contemporary Young Adult fiction title from Dr. Jen Lowry.

Q: What inspired you to write Sweet Potato Jones?

A: Scenes often come to me in dreams, and that is exactly what happened with the characters in this novel. I dreamed of Sweet Potato thinking about her current situation. I could see her and her siblings running through the forest playing Peter Pan. It started from there. I sat in front of the blank page and let her be.

Q: Family and perseverance are key topics in your novel. Where did you draw the fighting spirit from that your characters portray?

A: As a teacher for the past twenty years, I have had the opportunity to teach many students. During the time Sweet Potato Jones was written, I was teaching young adults who were struggling with poverty and challenging family dynamics, yet still had the extreme tenacity and optimism to smile with joy each day, laughing, singing, and carrying on regardless of their circumstance. The protective nature of Sweet Potato over her brothers and sisters probably comes from my fierce love for my boys, and how they also stand up for each other.

Q: Why all of the focus on music in the book?

A: I see the power of music in my own life, and between us, I love to sing. I wrote Sweet Potato Jones before I would have ever thought of standing in front of an audience and singing. Maybe it was my way of processing a secret desire of my own by allowing my characters to be gifted singers. Choosing the songs they were to sing was as easy as breathing. My uncle, Danny Boy, would sing How Great Thou Art in church and not many would have a dry eye. My son's baby song or what we will call his forever song is Amazing Grace. I am an old hymnal in my hand standing beside my grandma in our small hometown church singing Leaning on the Everlasting Arms singer. It just fit that the Jones family would represent the traditional hymns, since their values are old school as well. Bell Pepper is the true star of the family, and her character is bold and strong as they come. She might just one day make it out there and tour the world ... maybe that is another story for another day.

Q: Which character do you secretly love the most?

A: This is such a difficult question. I love them all. When I say Sweet Potato is my girl, I mean that. Bell is a special kind of beauty. Mrs. Sunshine Patterson is a character that really resonates with me because I strive to be like her. I do love Brock Lee's sense of humor, and Ray's heart for the Lord. I could keep going with this if you let me. What I'm looking forward to is hearing what the readers think about the characters. Who do they connect with? Why do they love them?

Q: What inspired the poetry in the novel?

A: I added the poetry later while I was in the editing stage with my publishing company. I needed to find the perfect poem. and I knew that I would have to use an original poem that mattered to me. Of course, I wrote that it was by an anonymous poet because that worked well at the time when she was battling her own thoughts about her name and identity. I searched back through hundreds of poems written since 2014 and decided that The Kissing Trees was the perfect poem for Sweet Potato Jones for multiple reasons. The bird imagery, the forests, the connection with the land instead of concrete had something to do with it. Also, the idea that everything around her kissed but her let the reader know she had a longing for that first kiss experience. You don't just see trees close together and think of them as kissing unless you might be sneaking a kiss or two under them or long to do so, which was exactly what inspired me to write the poem after a date (with my husband now).

Q: You characters deal with some tough experiences like drug abuse, homelessness, and gang violence in the novel. What do you hope your readers will take away from reading Sweet Potato Jones?

A: That is up to the reader to decide. I know that each person will take away something unique. As cliché as this may sound, after writing Sweet Potato Jones, it made me view students in a different light. You never know what someone might be going through in their lives, so treat everyone with a gentle kindness, respect, and love. Help when you can. Pray without ceasing, and know that together is all we will ever need. Maybe it will open some eyes. Maybe a few hearts. We shall see. I can't wait to find out.

Q: What's next for you?

A: I'm busy scheduling my author tour for the fall/winter and can't wait to launch Sweet Potato Jones. Even though I am busy preparing for her release, I still have other novels waiting in the wings! If you like YA paranormal romance, I have a Scottish trilogy in the editing phase now, along with a YA series of teenage exorcists. My newest novel that I'm currently researching, *Speak for the Dead*, will test my strengths at the POV switch. Besides YA, I am always at the whim of the poetry that comes to me throughout the day, or I might write a song or two. I'm excited for my next. Stick around to see!

Q: How can readers connect with you?

A: By searching me at Jen Lowry Writes, you should see I'm on every social media platform where readers hang out! I also host a daily podcast where I talk about my author journey. I blog, IG, and tweet out the latest. My website is www.jenlowrywrites.com where you can follow where I will be on tour, link to all of my sites, check out my Sweet Potato & Co jewelry line and more. If you would like to schedule me for a speaking engagement or author event, email me at jenlowrywrites@gmail.com today! I can't wait to meet you, and more importantly, for you to meet Sweet Potato Jones.

About the Author:

Jen Lowry is North Carolina born and raised, still holding on to that country slang that is unique to the small town of Maxton she loves so much in Robeson County. She is an avid enthusiast of all things horror, UFC, and binge watches old episodes of *Quantum Leap*. She finds herself comfier in a pair of pajamas and would make all public appearances in them if she could get away with it. When she isn't literacy coaching, life coaching, or homeschooling her two fabulous boys, she can be found napping or singing loudly, probably napping. Jen has her doctorate degree in Christian Ministry and is a member of Raleigh First Assembly. Check out Jen's official author sites all over the net from podcasts, YouTube, Instagram, and more by searching up Jen Lowry Writes or follow her on @jenlowrywrites. Contact Jen for special author appearances and teaching opportunities or stay up to date with her journey at www.jenlowrywrites.com.

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