**KELLEY ON BEING A TEACHER . . .**

How long did you teach English?

My first teaching job was in South Lake Tahoe, California from 1992-1994. Then I had that awful MS diagnosis in 1994, so I moved back home. I then taught English and drama at my old high school (!!) from 1994 until we moved to California in 2011. So…nineteen years? The *Chalkboard Outlines*® cozy mystery series was written in a fictional Colorado mountain town called Pinewood, which is a combination of both schools and towns in which I’ve taught.

Being a teacher is probably its own special kind of torture. What’s the worst thing that’s happened to you as a teacher?

My first year, I taught Summer School. I was twenty-two years old, nowhere near the pillar of strength and intimidation you see before you now. I had to leave the class for a minute to make some copies, and I returned to find one guy trying to light another guy’s T-shirt on fire.

That was the last year I taught Summer School.

After about five or six years of intense Trial by Fire in a more figurative sense, I’d morphed into someone I KNOW students would (did) think twice before pulling shenanigans like that.

What did you learn about writing from all those years of grading high school essays?

I think more than what I learned about *writing* from all my years of grading essays is what I learned about *people* from those years in the classroom. Teaching is a study in human dynamics, and teaching English even more so—because analyzing literature helps students recognize themselves and think about their place in the community and the world at large. My almost-twenty years of teaching gave me countless experiences to draw from in my future fifty or

more years as a writer, and I’m ridiculously grateful for those, too.

What has been your biggest adjustment going from teaching to writing?

Going from teaching to writing has been an unbelievable adjustment in a couple of ways, both wonderful and difficult ways. I didn’t get to write too much when I first moved to San Diego, but that’s because I was gifted with this amazing opportunity to be a stay-at-home mom for a few years here, which I NEVER thought would happen in a two-teacher family. My sons were going on three and five when we arrived, and while my oldest got to start in a transitional half-day kindergarten right away, my youngest and I got to explore San Diego. We went to the library and local parks and activities, and I am immeasurably grateful. But what I noticed then, and

continue to adjust to now that I’m at home writing while the boys are at school, is how difficult it is to not interact with other adults in a meaningful way. I took adult conversations for granted, for sure, even conversations with my teenaged students had a different ambience than time with a three-year-old, or now, time with just me. Well. I do converse with myself, but my answers are never as interesting as the ones I hear from others. My schedule is really busy, but I still plan a once-a-month coffee and a once-a-month lunch date with two of my friends here, just to keep myself sane.

And on that note, here’s the second biggest adjustment—scheduling. As a teacher, my life was laid out for me minute-by-minute and keeping my organization productive was tricky, but a writing schedule is tricky in a whole ‘nother way. I have all these stories in my head, and I know I have to work on marketing and spotlighting and looking for reviews and all of the minutiae which is mostly the responsibility of the writer in the 21st century, and still I want to have huge chunks of time devoted to the writing itself. It’s easy to get sucked down the rabbit hole of social media, even though I’m doing it for the purpose of my job.

I have a schedule on the wall of my

“office” AKA a chair in the corner of my bedroom, laying out sections of time every day to write articles (I work for a local community magazine here in San Diego), check Twitter, Facebook, GoodReads, Linkedin, Instagram, post on all of those sites and interact with people on all of those sites, and write a blog for my website. I also interact with other authors from my publishing house, RedAdept Publishing, and they provide a lot of knowledge and support.

Which is great, because I’m so new to this and I really know nothing.

Then, of course, the rest of the day (well, until 3:00 when I pick up the boys) I am working on a novel or nonfiction project. Right now I’m trying to find an agent for a nonfiction self-help memoir (yes, you’re right, a nonexistent genre. For now.) called *The A or B Principle*.

I get to apply the knowledge I’ve gained from having editors for *Death by Diploma/Poison by Punctuation* and *Down in the Belly of the Whale* to existing books I’ve written and books I’m writing now. I have a lot of stuff to do! So it’s amazing to be able to schedule myself in whatever way I want, but also overwhelming to have so much to do and only myself to make it happen. Maybe someone in my house should start handing out detention.

**KELLEY ON LIFE AWAY FROM THE LAPTOP . . .**

Are you originally from Southern California?

I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah (and in answer to your next question, no, I am not), but raised in a Western Colorado town called Grand Junction. Because I have MS and my body responds poorly to extremes in temperature (GJ gets really hot AND really cold), we moved to San Diego, The Finest City in America (it’s really called that!) and very temperate, in 2011.

What do you do with your time when you aren't writing?

I read, whenever it is humanly possible—before bed, at the beach, in the car. When someone else is driving. Unlike my dad who spent the 1970s and eighties driving back and forth from his bookstore in Salt Lake City to our home in Grand Junction: he would drive with his knees and read his book splayed out on the steering wheel the whole way!

I love watching plays and concerts when I can—San Diego has an amazing Old Globe Theater for anything Shakespeare (TOTALLY pertinent to my cozy mystery series) and my husband and I went to Metallica in August (which is a band I think Shakespeare woulda loved, by the way. Metallica and Frank Sinatra). I volunteer at the boys’ elementary school, and for our local Friends of the Library, and I do a hotline for four hours a week. A helpline, I guess it’s more appropriate to call it a helpline: It’s called MS Friends. I have MS, was diagnosed in

1994, and this line is staffed by people with MS, and people with MS or who have questions about MS are the ones who call in. I’ve always been involved with the National MS Society, but because I now have more limitations on my ability to travel and work, the Friends line is the perfect opportunity to stay involved. I feel like I am contributing, especially when someone calls who is newly diagnosed or having a terrible exacerbation.

Because I’ve been living with MS for so long, it feels great when my experience and optimism help someone who’s scared or sad.

You've said your life revolves around baseball. What are some baseball-related things you've done recently?

Haha, it’s so weird to think about that! I am the epitome of the non-sports person—I didn’t play sports, I’m not that competitive, at the end of the day I’d rather read a book. Then I went and married me a baseball player and had two sons! He (my husband) coaches all their teams plus he’s a coach at the high school, so I don’t see him much from January-May, and when I do, SOMEONE’S playing baseball! Now they’re old enough to do All-Stars and club ball, so it’s literally all baseball all the time. I know a lot about baseball now—more than I ever

planned to. I appreciate it more than I used to; it is intricate and strategic. I love watching the boys play, which is good because like I said—it never stops. I still don’t watch it on TV, although because I’m married to the ultimate fan(atic), I’ve had the privilege of seeing the Padres, Angels, Dodgers, Yankees, Red Sox, Cardinals, Diamondbacks, Rangers, Giants, A’s , Rockies and Mariners play live in their stadiums in the course of our fifteen years together! Live sports, like live music or live theater, is way more interesting than anything on a screen, in

my opinion. Thank goodness.

Have you ever purchased something from a late-night infomercial? If so, what?

Ugh. I have a schedule that starts at either 4:40 a.m., 6 a.m. or 6:45 a.m., depending on the day of the week. So I don’t really do anything late at night—but of course I’ve gotten sucked into the infomercial world at other times of day, usually for beauty products that I hope will make me look younger. Ha.