

Q&A with Kristen Heitzmann, author of *Indivisible*
Interview done with BookReporter.com

Q: Your new novel INDIVISIBLE not only has a strong spiritual component, but also a psychological foundation. There are those who say that Christian belief and psychology are at odds with each other, but one of the strengths of INDIVISIBLE is the tacit demonstration that one can complement the other, that both are part of a whole. A number of your other books have explored this theme as well, although in very different ways. How did you initially come to a decision to explore this interaction through your novels?

A: Pretty much everything I do comes out of the characters. Through her faith, Tia is realizing her intrinsic worth as a daughter of God, but her need to understand why she was treated so badly made her look for ways to help others think through that process. God works through the heart, and psychology that is based on God's truth works through the mind. I didn't really decide at any point to use this interaction, it flowed organically from Tia's desire to heal and restore.

Q: The plot of INDIVISIBLE also is based in part upon a chilling mystery that involves animal mutilation. Rather than having to pick among a group of likely suspects, the reader is given a passel of unlikely characters to guess the identity and the motive of the doer. I enjoyed the manner in which your narrative explored the darkness beneath still waters. Was the idea behind this plot line based on a real world occurrence, or something that you created yourself?

A: There was a real world occurrence but I can't reveal it without giving too much away! I will say the incidents with the animals seem like mutilation or ritualistic cruelty, but that is not the intention behind it.

Q: INDIVISIBLE has a strong romantic element that runs through it. It is obvious almost from the beginning of the book that Jonah Westfall, the police chief of Redford, Colorado, is attractive to women. Yet Tia Manning, the one woman with whom he is deeply in love, wants nothing to do with him. It is a past act that keeps them apart, one that they must move beyond, but neither of them seems capable of doing so. The narrative is particularly strong when dealing with Westfall and Manning, yet INDIVISIBLE works just as well as a mystery, a thriller, and to some extent, a horror story. How did you balance these genre elements while you were writing the book? Did you find that one or more of them threatened to take over the book, or did you have things plotted out entirely from the beginning?

A: No, I never plot! My books are character driven so the relationship flows from their interaction, naturally feeding the love story and all the conflicts therein. The mystery and suspense elements are the devices that keep driving them into self-discovery and growth. Often side characters are more affected by these plot elements, as with Piper and the veterinarian Liz Rainer.

Q: Westfall's alcoholism, from which he is in recovery, is also a haunting element of *INDIVISIBLE*, as is Westfall's complicated past. Of all of the interesting characters here, Westfall is perhaps the most riveting. How did you go about constructing him?

A: Well, broken characters come easily to me. I think some of the greatest heroes in fiction and in life are those who overcome damage and hardship to shine with grace and redemption. The refining fire of God's love creates gentle warriors who are never completely free of the struggle, but use it every day to know their weakness and dependence on grace. These people love deeper and serve more purely than those who have not been tested by fire.

Q: For me, the one element of *INDIVISIBLE* that unifies all of the major plots of the story is that of forgiveness, not only in the sense of forgiving others for trespasses but also in the sense of forgiving oneself. Westfall's sobriety, his relationship with Tia, and Tia's relationship with her family in general and her sister in particular all turn on forgiveness. How is forgiveness important to you and your spirituality? How did it become the dominating element of *INDIVISIBLE*?

A: Forgiveness is central in many of my books, because I think it is a pivotal point of faith. It is so easy to rejoice when everything is wonderful. It requires faith to rejoice when wounded. The avenue is forgiveness. So often when people refuse to forgive someone else, it is really themselves they won't forgive. Finding that restoration requires surrender and humility which both Tia and Jonah, true believers, still struggle to receive.

Q: In addition to Westfall, one of the most impressive elements of *INDIVISIBLE* is its strong and memorable characters. Some are quirky, some are mainstream, some are stock, and all are believable. This has been true with your other books as well. What process do you use in your character development to keep your characters new and different?

A: I guess the process would be utter spontaneity. I have no idea who they are when they appear! Like a drop of watercolor paint on wet rag paper, they run and spread and go their own ways, revealing flaws and quirks and beauty. To me the texture of a story is as much in the side characters as the leads. Often readers have to know what happens next for the most obscure people in the book. This is because I firmly believe everyone has a story.

Q: Each chapter of *INDIVISIBLE* begins with a quotation, each from one of a wide range of sources --- from the Bible to Mahatma Gandhi to John Muir to Aesop. Their common theme is that of solitude vs. unity, a theme that also runs through the book as well as some of your other novels. How did you go about gathering these different quotations? Do you work alone, recruit friends, or use some other method?

A: I have some neat books of quotes and of course online resources. I sometimes wish I had someone researching for me, but a lot of times finding the right quote or nugget of information drives the next plot point or an insight into the characters. I'm very much a sponge, drawing words, ideas and emotions in, then squeezing them out.

Q: You have written two series, as well as a number of stand-alone works. Which do you prefer writing? And what are the advantages and disadvantages of writing either?

A: I'm not sure if there are advantages either way. Some people prefer to read series; others firmly want stand-alone. If the writing is strong enough, readers will pass into either camp because they trust the storyteller. I almost never intend to write series, except for the historicals that were planned that way. The connectivity of my other books happens when there is more story to tell, when the characters haven't finished with me—or my readers!

Q: You have spoken elsewhere of having acquired a love of reading at a very early age. Who initially led you to books and to reading? Did you have any favorite books or authors? And were there any authors who ultimately inspired you to become an author yourself?

A: My parents were all about literature, art, and music—classical. As a child I loved books like Heidi that you could reach into and touch. To this day I feel a craving for that hunk of cheese melting on the stick over the fire. I read a lot of classics and really no contemporaries, such as Nancy Drew and whatever else was out there. I read a lot of historical and fantasy works, anything Arthurian, especially Mary Stewart's saga, and I *lived* J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings—every elven word of every song.

Q: What have you read in the past six months that you would recommend to our readers?

A: Lately the authors I've enjoyed are Dean Koontz, John Lescroart, and Dale Cramer's BAD GROUND, but one of my very favorites is still THE SPARROW by Mary Doria Russell.

Q: Your biographical material states that you wrote your first novel while you were homeschooling your four children. This will be of interest to those of our readers who aspire to write but have difficulty making the time. What type of schedule did you work out with yourself and your family to give yourself the time needed to write? Has your schedule changed at all since your children have grown to adulthood? And if your schedule got off track, what did you do to get back on schedule?

A: I am schedule-averse by nature. I became the ultimate multi-tasker and wrapped the writing around and through everything else. As they did their work, I did mine. Now that

my youngest is seventeen, and in school, I have as much time as I need—in spite of a married son and his wife still getting through college but moving out next week, and a 96-yr-old father-in-law living with us, and a college age son coming back for the summer, a dog and three cats and my precious grandbaby and another on the way . . .

Q: If you weren't writing, what do you think you would be doing as a career?

A: My other love is art, especially creating clay miniatures of woodland animals in Victorian garb that I sell at a shop in town. I'd also like to be a surgeon. Or an architect—no, I'd rather build the stuff. And landscaping. I'd love to design and create cool stuff like water features. Or maybe . . .

Q: Reflecting back on your writing career, is there anything in particular you wished you had done differently? And is there anything you did for which you feel blessed?

A: I think my career has progressed as it should. I've worked with wonderful people who believed in me. From the start I told God I'm not a professional person and don't have the time or energy to become one, so He'd have to handle all the business stuff. I think He's doing a great job!

Q: What are you working on now? I should note that many of the characters from *INDIVISIBLE* are too good to vanish into the ether. Do you have any plans for a sequel, or even a series, based around the people of Redford, Colorado?

A: As it happens, I'm writing *INDELIBLE* that connects to *INDIVISIBLE*. It's set in Redford and Jonah Westfall is a point-of-view character with the others interwoven, but the leads are a search and rescue guy named Trevor MacDaniel and an eidetic-savant artist, Natalie Reeve. It ratchets up the suspense but still has plenty of relational elements and of course the romantic developments between the leads.