



Interview

with author

Erin Wiley Sands

What books did you love growing up?

I loved the Beverly Cleary “Ramona the Brave” book series. I loved all of the ‘Ramona’ books. They were an escape for me. As a child, I could relate to Ramona’s curiosity about life and her adventurous spirit.

What writing are you most proud of?

I am proud of all of the writing I have done because each topic required an earnest amount of soul searching. Whether it was political or social commentary or even theatrically based, it came from an authentic place. That said, *The Dunes* is by far my most cherished work to date and not primarily because of the writing, but because of the **affect** the writing has had in peoples lives. I share my journey in a very personal way in *The Dunes* and it seems to have resonated with readers. God used it to help bring about positive changes in other peoples lives and I will always be very humbled by that.

How did you come up with the title, “The Dunes”?

I came up with the title for The Dunes because in southern California in the city of Manhattan Beach there is a 100-foot sand dune that people come from miles around to use as a form of exercise. It is incredibly steep and the sand gives such a loose traction that it is extremely challenging to climb to the very top. Years ago I was one of the many who would go there in the blazing sun and attempt to make it to the top. The journey and the pay off were so intense that it made an impression on me. So when it came time to write the allegorical part of my book I instantly gravitated to that memory in terms of a character overcoming a hurdle in their life and the feeling of victory that comes from being able to conquer your “mountain” so to speak.

How much of the book is realistic?

The Dunes consists of 7 chapters that are referred to throughout the book as “Revelations”. Each revelation sheds wisdom and advances the journey, which is composed of an allegory, a personal testimony from me, journal questions and a challenge for the reader. Although the first part of each revelation is an allegory, I think the story is very realistic in terms of its relatability to human nature. The rest of the book is really about the reader and their journey and as honest as the reader wants to be will define how “real” their transformation is.

What was the hardest part about writing this book?

The two most difficult parts of writing The Dunes were the allegory sections in the first and second revelations and the Commentary section. The allegory section of The Dunes tells the story of two characters: The One and The Other. Although, as the story unfolds the reader quickly learns that The One and The Other represent a man and a woman, I chose not to reveal which was which until the very end of the second revelation. I did this because I did not want the reader to identify with the character simply because they shared the same gender identity. I wanted the reader to identify with the character in which they shared the same fear paradigm. So for the first two chapters you do not know which character is the woman and which character is the man. You just know each of the characters challenges and fears. Still...it is incredibly hard to write without pronouns. I was relieved when I got to the third revelation and I could write more freely. Writing the commentary section of The Dunes was challenging because I had to be very transparent and share some very personal experiences from my life. But I knew that there was no way that I could ask readers to take this very introspective journey if I wasn't willing to do the same in return.

What's your greatest character strength?

My greatest character strength is my honesty. Not only am I honest with those I love (friends & family) but I am also honest with myself. I believe being honest with your self is probably the greatest gift you can give yourself and your life journey. I am very retrospective and self searching. I am honest with myself about what I feel and if I do not know why I feel the way I do, I take the time needed to quiet myself and my world so that I can figure it out. Being self-delusional serves no one. When you can be honest with yourself about your greatness as well as your weakness, it enables you to move forward and not waste time on things that are not apart of your calling or purpose.

Are there any books you really don't enjoy?

I really do not enjoy romance novels, which is hilarious because I am a hopeless romantic. I enjoy a romantic story line that is the sub plot in a mystery or thriller but I do not enjoy books where the primary plot is a love story.

Is there a message in your novel that you want readers to grasp?

I would like readers of *The Dunes* to walk away knowing that change and growth is a choice. Although it may sometimes be hard and even uncomfortable, the outcome is worth it. When you let go of fears that have held you back for years, when you learn to forgive and trust and commit, your life changes for the better and it is worth doing what it takes to have that level of freedom. *The Dunes* will ask something of you but it will give you far more in return. The courage and fullness of life that is only possible when you reach for it by any means necessary.

Did you learn anything from writing this book and what was it?

I learned many things in writing *The Dunes* from the practical to the soulful. Practically I learned that the essence of good writing is re-writing. There is no way around that. To produce excellence as a writer you must be open to re-writing and re-writing again and then re-writing some more after that. A first draft is merely that, a "first" draft. As writers we need to be open to re-examining the way we expose a story or a point of view to the reader. We are not our audience so if you are the only one who understands your writing, that's a problem. A great editor usually comes in and helps you recognize different ways to express ideas or plot points but that is also something we need to be doing as writers before we submit our work to an editor. *The Dunes* is really a journey for the soul, a journey, that as the author, I couldn't ask readers to take if I wasn't prepared to take it myself. As I was writing *The Dunes* I was taking that journey and learning about

my own fears and my own path to forgiveness. However, the most profound lesson I learned from writing *The Dunes* came after I invited people to read it. Hearing from strangers what an impact *The Dunes* had on their lives humbled and blessed me. It confirmed a truth that I have carried with me for years. We affect each other for the better when we are transparent with our struggles and our challenges. When we can see someone's struggles but also see that person overcome, we are inspired to believe that we can do the same.

What kinds of movies do you love to watch?

I love thrillers, dramas and comedies. I love good writing. When you have a phenomenal script with excellent actors, magic happens. There have been so many really good movies in the history of cinema and with the advancements in technology things are becoming so much more thrilling in terms of what can be done with special effects. It would be hard for me to just choose one favorite. I love the movie *Steel Magnolias* with Sally Fields; she is one of my favorite actors. I love every Marvel Studios movie. Anytime the political thriller *JFK* is on television I stop what I am doing to watch it. My taste is pretty diverse but like most people I love excellent scripts paired with great talent.

What do you hope your obituary will say about you?

I hope that my obituary will say that I did something to benefit humanity. That I used all of my talents and gifts to the best of my ability and that I loved the people God placed in my life with a joy and a tenacity that made Him smile.

What is your favorite quote, by whom, and why?

As I embarked on my self-publishing journey I also embarked on a journey of inspired quotes. Before I published my book, I would literally just take the time to meditate about life and write down my thoughts in the form of quotes. I put my quotes on top of a picturesque background and began posting them on Facebook and Twitter. The response has been out of this world! So as of today, although I enjoy many quotes by the likes of Maya Angelou and others, my favorite quotes are my own. One that really struck a cord with people was: **What has procrastination ever done for you that makes you remain so loyal to it?**

What are you most proud of in your personal life?

In my personal life I am most proud of my relationships. I have been blessed to exist in a community of family and friends that truly cherish and appreciate each other. We celebrate life, God and each other. This is by design. You have to seek people out of like mind and like interests, who enjoy life, value peace and will challenge you to be better. I have made an active choice to surround myself with those types of people. My life is low on drama and high on fun, love, laughter and enlightenment.

What motivates you to write?

I am motivated by passion. If there is a topic that I feel passionate about politically or socially I write about it. If a story pops into my mind, I turn it into a script, a play or a short story. I am very motivated by the “moment”. I initially wrote *The Dunes* because I was journaling. I was going through a very tough time emotionally and I decided to turn what I was feeling into an allegory. I had no idea if what I wrote would resonate with readers or have any affect outside of my personal life. I did know, however, that I was willing to put it to the test. I put an ad on Craigslist asking for strangers to read my book, answer the journal questions and do the challenges while I chronicled their journey on film. The results amazed me! I witnessed peoples lives literally transform. I knew that I had something very real on my hands and I knew that I needed to get it published. That’s the beauty of writing. To be able to share an experience or make someone smile or laugh just because they can identify with what you have written is motivating in and of itself.

How do you work through self-doubts and fear?

Writing a book offering insight about overcoming self-doubt and fear in no way exempts you from moments of self-doubt and fear in your own life. I think it is something that on one level or another, as long as you are growing and challenging yourself, you will inevitably encounter. The more you grow the difference will be in how you deal with it; hopefully with grace, class and a very introspective insight into your triggers. Nowadays when those feelings come up for me I face them head on. I take a minute to truly examine what it is that is making me feel that way. Is it irrational? Is it motivated by an experience from my past? Is it blocking me from fully experiencing life? When I locate the source of my feelings, I pray about it and do it anyway. I do “it” whatever “it” is in spite of any fear or trepidation. If I am feeling insecure, I do it anyway. If I am feeling scared about the outcome, I do it anyway. I determined long ago that although I may not be able to control my feelings, I do however, have control over my actions and I do “it” afraid.

How much of the book is realistic?

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How do you feel about self-publishing?

I love that self-publishing is consistently growing and providing more opportunities for indie authors like myself. It is definitely a lot of hard work because you do not have the resources that I imagine comes with being backed by a big publishing house. What you do have, however, is independence, freedom of expression and the opportunity to execute the vision you have for your book uninterrupted.

What do you hope people will take away from your writing? How will your words make them feel? 1

Maya Angelou wrote: “Courage is the most important of all of the virtues, because without courage you can not practice any of the other virtues consistently”.

It is my sincere hope after reading The Dunes that people would walk away feeling a bit more brave. I bared my soul in The Dunes and I did so because it is important for people to know that they are not alone. Others of us have been afraid and let it block us in one way or another. Others of us have needed to truly release the pain of the past and forgive, to learn to trust on a new level and to move forward and appreciate life in its fullness. When you know that you are not alone and that others have felt what you have felt, yet were able to summon the courage to move forward. It lets you know that if they did it, you can too. I hope The Dunes reminds the reader of their innate courage and their God given ability to overcome.

When you wish to end your career, stop writing, and look back on your life, what thoughts would you like to have?

I don't know that I will ever truly retire, when you are a creative...you continue to create, period. But when I am much older and things have slowed down dramatically; I would love to be able to look back on all my creative endeavors and say that I approached them boldly in spite of any fears or inhibitions that I may have had and that I did so with excellence.