

## **Interview with Lynda Fitzgerald** **Author of *If Truth Be Told***

Reader Views talks with Lynda Fitzgerald, author of the contemporary romance novel “If Truth Be Told.” Lynda is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

**Juanita:** Thanks for talking with us today Lynda. We are excited to hear about your new novel “If Truth Be Told.” Would you start by telling us what your book is about?

**Lynda:** If Truth Be Told is a love story that also has elements of mystery and suspense. I didn’t set out to write a love story, at least a romantic love story, but as the novel unfolded, the feelings that grew between Christie and Todd were so powerful that, well, I couldn’t ignore them. The story is theirs, but it also belongs to her uncle and the woman he married, Todd’s mother. Their life and love were the pattern Christie wanted hers and Todd’s to follow, so when things go horribly wrong for them, Christie is shaken to her core.

When the story begins, Christie is a precocious fourteen-year old who has nothing in common with her society-conscious mother and sisters. Then her uncle remarries, and his new wife, Carly, becomes the mother Christie always dreamed of having. Carly’s college-bound son, Todd, is part of the package. Before the ink is dry on her uncle’s marriage certificate, Christie is in love; but it isn’t until fourteen years later that things finally come to a head. During those fourteen years, Christie experiences the pain of losing her first love, but she also learns a number of lessons from her new aunt, like the importance of compassion and forgiveness. Those are the forces that finally allow Christie and Todd to come back together.

**Juanita:** What inspired you to write this story?

**Lynda:** Well, they say that all fiction has at its center a kernel of truth. That kernel in this story are the final plot events. This actually happened to a family I know, and I tried to understand what such an event would do to their lives. Everything else in the story—characters, relationships, events—those are all fictional. What inspired the location is my love for Melbourne Beach, its clean, deserted beaches, the natural beauty of the area. It’s my favorite place on earth.

**Juanita:** Lynda, “If Truth Be Told” is your debut novel. How does it feel to be releasing your first book?

**Lynda:** It feels wonderful. When I first got the news, I felt like I'd stuck my finger in a light socket. Electrified! My second thought was, "It's about time." I hope that doesn't sound ungracious, but I'd been writing and trying to get published for many, many years.

**Juanita:** Would you tell us more about your lead character Christie? What is her journey in "If Truth Be Told"?

**Lynda:** Christie's physical journey is from a gawky fourteen-year-old to a remarkable young woman of twenty-eight. At fourteen, Christie is bright and curious and funny. She's also a girl who thinks truth is the most important thing in the world, but she isn't particularly kind. She judges her mother and sisters as "lesser," and she lets them know it. After all, that's the truth, isn't it? As the years pass, she learns about love, not just her feelings for Todd, which grow with every year that passes, but about the love shared by her uncle and his new wife. Carly teaches Christie that love can have many faces, but none will be beautiful unless they are tempered by compassion and forgiveness. In the end, these are the virtues that rule Christie's actions. So her journey is that of a woman who learns that there are things in life that are more important than exposing the raw, unvarnished truth.

**Juanita:** What do you like most about her character?

**Lynda:** I love Christie's self-confidence, even as a child, and I love her tenacity and openness to change. She's not afraid to examine herself, especially as she grows older, and she isn't afraid to change if she doesn't like what she sees. I also love the way she looks at life, with a bit of a cynical eye tempered by humor.

**Juanita:** What does Todd represent for Christie?

**Lynda:** Todd represents Honor, with a capital H. He's also a hunk. Did I mention that? He's a cop, with all that sexy authority. Blonde hair, deep tan, lots of muscles, a badge. Sigh... But, seriously, in so many ways, Todd is Christie's polar opposite. He is steadfast, where Christie is a constant state of change; he's cautious, where she's spontaneous and impulsive. She admires those qualities in him.

**Juanita:** : How were you able to chart Christie's emotional growth as she went from being a teenager to an adult? How did it unfold in the writing process?

**Lynda:** I have to be honest here. Christie unfolded her own emotional growth to me. I've heard writers claim that a character never takes over a story, but I have to think it just hasn't happened to them. Yet. Christie grabbed the reins of this story on page one, and I just hung on for the ride. I never knew what she was going to do or say until she did or said it. She was a very strong-willed young lady from the very beginning. I don't know where she came from, and I don't care. I'm just glad I got to grow up with her.

**Juanita:** Relationships, family and friends are all important to your message. What are you trying to convey in regards to these issues?

**Lynda:** Christie's mother and sisters didn't much like her. It was only years later that Christie realized she hadn't been very likable back then. But it was through their disdain that Christie learned about a "family of choice." Her step-aunt became the mother she'd always wanted, and her uncle replaced the father she'd lost years before. She was able to find people who loved and approved of her just as she was, once she reached outside the circle she was born into. I think many of us have to do that.

**Juanita:** How does her uncle's untimely and somewhat controversial death change the course of events for Christie?

**Lynda:** Christie can accept that her uncle is ill. She can even accept the fact that he'll never get better. What she can't accept is that he died so suddenly when his condition had been stable for weeks. At first, she's too busy consoling her aunt for her to realize that something isn't right, but when it does, she knows that she has to find out the truth about his death, even if it costs her everything that matters to her. What she finds out turns her world upside down.

**Juanita:** Truth plays a significant role in "If Truth Be Told." Would you elaborate on this theme?

**Lynda:** That's tough to put into words. Truth can be a beautiful thing, but it can also be a weapon. In the story, truth, or honesty and sincerity, were what Christie valued most, but she had to learn that they weren't everything. Love is everything, and I'm not talking about romantic love here, although that is certainly important, too. I'm talking about love for other human beings, about loyalty and kindness. That love is everything, and that's what Christie ultimately discovered.

**Juanita:** What do you enjoy most about writing with a women's focus?

**Lynda:** Aside from the obvious, "Write about what you know," I love writing about the complexity of a woman's view of the world. I've always thought that a man's view is more linear. Women tend to look more closely at all aspects of an issue, the emotional and spiritual, as well as the physical. We don't limit our view of the world to "what is," but look beyond to what might have been and what can be, in all their ugliness and beauty. I think being, not only taught, but encouraged to express our emotions fully is responsible for that, but men are changing. They're becoming more comfortable with both sides of themselves. It's a wonderful thing to see.

**Juanita:** Lynda, who would enjoy reading "If Truth Be Told"?

**Lynda:** I think a pretty broad range of people will enjoy it because, as well as being a love story, it has a strong thread of both of mystery and suspense running through it. What has surprised me the most is that the two men who have reviewed the novel loved it! I never expected that, but like I said, they're changing. I know it will appeal to anyone who loves a love story, complete with all the twists and turns and ups and downs life can throw at two people struggling to find their way together. And it's funny. It will definitely appeal to people who like a dose of humor with their romance.

**Juanita:** What is the underlying message of “If Truth Be Told”?

**Lynda:** That truth isn’t all, that the value of truth must always be weighed against the virtues of kindness and compassion. Anyone can tell the truth, but how many people can look at another person and feel genuine compassion for what they’re going through, especially if what they’re doing goes against what we think they should do?

**Juanita:** You have had a long history with writing. What is your background, and why did you wait so long to publish your first novel?

**Lynda:** Ah. Why did I wait so long? I didn’t mean to. I wrote my first novel thirty years ago, and in the intervening years, I’ve written six more. If Truth Be Told was the third. After I finished each novel, I’d send it out to a few publishers, one at a time, of course. When it came back with the form rejection paper-clipped to its coversheet, I’d lick my wounds for a few months before sending it out again. Eventually, each one got put on the shelf. I took every rejection personally, as an educated analysis of my writing ability. I got really discouraged. Then, one day, I asked myself, “If you knew you’d never publish a word, would you keep writing?” The answer was a resounding, “Yes!” I would keep writing because I can’t not write. So I kept on writing and sending out manuscripts.

I took a number of additional writing courses through Emory University and Georgia Perimeter College’s Ed2Go. All of them helped, although one of the best I’ve ever taken anywhere was a writing course called “Write Like a Pro.” That’s where I really learned that outlining a story doesn’t kill spontaneity. It just gives you somewhere to go when you get lost, which happens a lot when you’re writing a 300+-page novel. I imagine I’ll continue taking courses as long as I continue writing, which will be, well, forever.

**Juanita:** Were there any surprises in the writing/publishing process? Would you do anything differently next time?

**Lynda:** It was all nothing but surprises. I thought once my novel was picked up, I’d be whisked away to New York and a whirl of parties and editorial meetings, but that’s not how it works these days. Maybe it never did. My biggest surprise, though, was with the editorial process itself. I’d had nightmares about huge sections of my novel being brutally cut, about entire chapters being lopped off, and verbally bloody battles with my editor. As it turned out, my editor only changed a word here, a phrase there. She was wonderful. And gentle.

As to doing things differently, I already am. One of the most valuable things about getting published is that doors of information suddenly opened to me. I’ve become a member of many on-line writers’ groups. First I joined my own publisher’s writers group, and from there I learned about other groups. I joined Mystery Writers of America, and they’re a phenomenal source of information. I signed my contract for If Truth Be Told last April, and this has been eleven months of the most intensive education I’ve ever experienced. It makes college look like nursery school. And I’ve loved every minute of it.

**Juanita:** Who are your literary influences?

**Lynda:** What a question! How many hours do you have? Maybe they're so numerous because they span so many years. My mother told me I was reading before I was four. She was prone to exaggeration, but I think that particular bit of history may be true. I cut my teeth on the usual Nancy Drew and Cherry Ames, Student Nurse, but then I discovered Jane Austen. She, more than anyone in the entire history of the written word, is my idol, closely followed by Mark Twain, but when I'd plowed through all the classics, my reading grew eclectic. Irving Wallace and Ernest Hemingway. Ray Bradbury and Nora Roberts. Louis L'Amour and Barbara Kingsolver. Leon Uris and Tammy Hoag and so many, many more. They all influenced my writing.

**Juanita:** Lynda, what are your future plans?

**Lynda:** I'm working on a mystery series right now. I had been thinking about the first novel for almost a decade. Finally, a couple of years ago, I sat down and outlined it. I raced through the first draft. When I finished it, I realized that, although I'd finished with the story, I hadn't finished with the characters. I was too attached to all of them, at least the ones still alive at the end of the first novel, to let them fade into oblivion. Now I'm halfway through the second novel in the series and have story ideas for at least three more. These are funny, fast-paced stories, and I'm having a ball writing them.

**Juanita:** How can readers find out about you and your endeavors?

**Lynda:** I hope they'll visit my website, [www.fitzgeraldwrites.com](http://www.fitzgeraldwrites.com). I have a lot of information on there about If Truth Be Told, as well as a bit about me and a blurb from the mystery series I'm currently writing. There's a "love story" there about my feelings for the Melbourne Beach area, and a few pages of pictures I took there. They can even contact me through the website.

**Juanita:** Lynda thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. We have enjoyed hearing about your book "If Truth Be Told," and encourage fans of contemporary women's romance to look for your fantastic book at local and online bookstores. Before we let you go, do you have any last thoughts for your readers today?

**Lynda:** I do, as a matter of fact. Read all kinds of fiction! When I was a girl, I was very proud of the fact that I read only the classics. Can you say "snob"? Then I branched out into other, less comfortable areas, such as westerns and historical romance and mystery, and I found that they had a lot to offer, too. I hope they try other authors, other types of fiction because most fiction has romance as part of its core, and I think that's because people are inherently idealistic and romantic. That's not something we have to learn as children. Instead, I think it's something we unlearn as we grow older. Fortunately, most of us don't unlearn it very well.

I also hope they'll write to me and tell me what they think of If Truth Be Told. I had a wonderful time writing it, and I hope they have an equally wonderful time reading it. I'd love to hear from them.