

INTERVIEW WITH CORLISS CORAZZA

- Tell us a little bit about yourself and about the book *Geode*.

I'm a second generation native of Martinez, CA, and my home is in Pleasant Hill. I am a retired teacher and also worked as a homeschool teacher/advisor. My family is my pride and joy. Anything with fur and four feet or hooves is what I can't get enough of.

- What was your writing journey like? When did you start writing? Did you do an MFA or other professional writing program?

I have always been interested in communication and words. By the time I was three years old, my mother said I would sit on the floor with her huge dictionary and look for words I recognized. I took creative writing courses as part of my English major and loved it.

I earned a BA degree in English and went on to complete a multi-subject teaching credential. My best non-formal education for writing has always been reading. This is where I learned genre, style, and voice. My first book, *Cut Open the Sky* arose from a conversation with Connie Castro Jackson, and was her as-told-to memoir, written as much as I could in her own voice.

When I mentioned that she had a led fascinating life and that she should write about it, she replied "You will."

Without even thinking, I said, "You bet." I was semi-retired from a teaching career and when this gate opened, I walked through.

- What inspired the writing of this new story?

Geodes are fascinating to me and one day I was holding one, looking it over, and saw that it was the perfect metaphor for deeper understanding. See what's inside, which is the tagline for the book. We can't see the whole story when we only look at the crust. People react and act differently in different situations, animals do, too. Fear, survival, longing, need, and desire color our personalities and reactions. I began to gather ideas of ways that I might portray this as a metaphor for life and not just rocks, and the novel began to unfold.

- *Geode* is a fiction, whereas your previous book, *Cut Open the Sky*, was a non-fiction. How was the experience of writing different? Do you now prefer one genre over the other when it comes to the writing process?

I felt as though I had more license to be myself when writing *Geode*. I loved writing Connie Castro Jackson's story in *Cut Open the Sky*, but it was hard work to make sure I rendered her voice, her personality, and her feelings. I read every chapter and section aloud to her and

discussed it with her to make sure we were on target. With *Geode*, it is all my imagination, my thoughts. A bit more freedom in the creation process.

- What to you is the most unusual thing about *Geode*? What might make the book stand out to readers?

I think the mix of humor, horror, human frailty, and deep friendship is more often the experience of humanity. *Geode* weaves a story while teaching history. Readers can connect with the dissimilar personalities and experiences of the characters, or at least I hope.

- What do you like best about the story?

I love the characters. Their individuality was fun. They became real to me. I still catch myself thinking, “What would Olivia be doing now.” And there is Walter—wait until you meet Walter! He materialized for me while I was in a doctor’s office waiting room in the form of a man who was sitting a few seats down from me. His “DayGlo pink high-top sneakers. Then floppy, loose, knee-length shorts with embroidered stars around the hem”—well, he became a perfect metaphor for the theme of the book. There had to be more to him than what he projected if he made such stand-out choices in his clothing.

- What was your journey to publication like? Can you talk about this and share your insights with anyone looking to have a book published?

For me, it was important to find a good agent. I don’t know how to tell a new author how to find one, but my story is fun. My daughter is a fisherwoman, and she went on a fishing trip with a woman’s group she was part of. In that group was a woman who Gina felt instantly I would love to connect with. She is an author, retired teacher, and has owned a bookstore. I reached out to her, and we began an email friendship that has lasted five years. She then suggested I reach out to her writing coach who was also her agent and a sort of total-author-support person who pitched first *Cut Open the Sky* and then *Geode*, which were nabbed by

- What are your favorite books and why? How did they influence the writing of *Geode*?

There are so many, it’s hard to bring them up. But just on top, Jean Grainger’s series are fabulous> Louise Penney’s stories of Inspector Gamache are so good. Shirley Miller Kamada’s book *No Quiet Water* about the internment of the Japanese is a great history lesson for all ages. Anything written by Dr. Seuss, E.B White, Shel Silverstein—which aren’t just for kids, but are also fun for parents and teachers to read aloud. The influence these had on me is the fact that good stories teach.

- Talk to us about the writing process. If you were speaking to someone who wanted to know how to write a book, what would you tell them?

Keep a notebook with you always and jot down thoughts and images as they occur to you. You would be surprised how a trip to a pizza place can hand you the description of a character. Also, look around and see sights you never noticed before. Writing leads to writing. Sit at your keyboard or notebook with a pencil and start. Let your mind wander and see what happens. Don't try to make it perfect, perfection comes with editing. The polishing of your ideas is satisfying. Keep track of your characters, their description and personality. You might forget that Georgia had a blond streak in her hair and a fondness for reptiles. Find an author support person to work with who will read and respond to your work. It is too difficult to work in isolation and such fun to have a team.

- Talk about the writing life in general. What advice do you have for writers setting out on the path to writing a book. What are your best strategies for starting and keeping going?

Having support. Having a quiet place to work where you can leave your work and come back to it whenever you want. Learn about imposter syndrome. I have never met a writer who hasn't caused themselves suffering by thinking they have nothing to offer. Love your characters and love the research you do to make it real.

- What else would you like the world to know about *Geode*?

There just might be a sequel!