

Extended Fact Sheet & Interview Q & A

Christine McMahon

Born & Raised: Kaukauna, WI

Daughter of: Harold and RoseAnn Welhouse

Attended: Nicolet, St. Mary's, and St. Aloysius Grade School
Kaukauna High School
Fox Valley Technical College

Married: Joe McMahon

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After reading the manuscript for *Choices Made: The Street Years*, her father, Harry, said, "I'm an old man. I want to see your book in print. Do something about it."

With that impetus, Christine chose to self-publish, and through research, decided on Trafford Publishing, Canada. After much work, the reality of her first book in print happened in March, 2005. Of course, her father has copy #1.

Her father also read the manuscript for *Choices Made: Father and Sons*, the second in the series, which was published in November, 2006. Quoting Christine, "Dad got copy #1." She has recently completed the third novel in the series, *Choices Made: Missouri or Misery*, but has now changed publishers, and will be working with Publishers Express Press in Ladysmith, WI.

Christine, her husband, Joe, and their champion Rhodesian Ridgeback, Moy, live in rural Wisconsin.

"Thank you for your interest in *Choices Made: The Street Years* and *Choices Made: Fathers and Sons*. I hope you will continue to join Jamy in *Choices Made: Missouri or Misery*, December 2011. Be watching for the next installment of his story and the final book in the series, *Choices Made: Always*, expected Spring, 2012.

Interview Q & A

Why did you choose to write?

ANS: I have always enjoyed reading, and often thought up my own situations for story endings. I can't say I chose to write, rather that I picked up a pen and started writing down some of those thoughts.

I like trying many things, and when I find something I like, I immerse myself in it. If the joy remains, so does my interest. Writing about Jamy in the Choices Made books has been a joy to me.

How did you choose the genre you write in?

Genre has been a hard one. I don't write to a specific genre. I write the story for the sake of the story. The Choices Made Series would be classified mainstream. They are Coming of Age stories with elements of drama, mystery, thriller, and suspense and are written in a *Stream of Consciousness* style.

Do you use personal experiences in your writing?

ANS: For me that's too difficult. It actually limits me, but they say there is a grain of each person or their experiences in every story they write. Sometimes a brief conversation will change your viewpoint in your story and take you along on a new path. I know my beginning and where I need to end, but the conflicts and resolutions change as my experiences in life change.

What do you like about your writing and what don't you like?

ANS: I get a real high when I finish a particular conflict-resolution section. The joy of the creation, and the control I have over every part of it, keeps me energized. What I don't like is not having enough time for it.

How did you get published?

ANS: The stats on getting picked up by an agent or publisher is something like ½ of 1%. I tried that a few times, but often they are looking to fill a particular market niche. Knowing my first book was mainstream, that market niche is not easily defined, so I decided to self-publish.

To accomplish that economically, I had to format the book, proof it, create the cover artwork and the website. It is a very personal effort, but there is a great sense of accomplishment in handling those aspects and a great deal of learning involved. I took up oil painting to know my character better and painted the art work for each of the covers. I have had help in proofing and grammar checking for three of the four books. That assistance as well as input from a few patient friends have helped me achieve my goals.

Since you self-published, how do you sell your books?

I have to market my book and ask stores to carry it. It is exciting when they do. The books are currently on the book's website, www.ChoicesMade.com, the publishers' website, Amazon.com, and other online stores.

In reality, word-of-mouth and book reviews are what sell a book.

What is it like when you see your book in stores or make a sale?

It's surreal - I ask myself - is that really *my* book? They want *my* book!

Each time I sell a copy, I open myself up to criticism, which can be tough, but you have to accept that in order to get your story out there. And, when someone finishes the book and comes to you and says – 'when can I get your next book' – it is worth it.

Do you see yourself writing in the future?

ANS: Yes. I have too many stories in my head to stop. A few years ago, I decided I wouldn't get old so I started recounting my birthdays from 1. I am now 11. With this new method, I plan to retire as a teenager. I should have plenty of years to write then!

Other questions that may interest:

What influenced you when you were young?

ANS: I had what my family referred to as TV-itis. I constantly watched television and always thought up my own endings to the stories. That, along with reading, westerns were always a favorite, kept my imagination in high gear. (PS - I wouldn't recommend that much TV to anyone, reading is much better for you.)

What steps in education did you take to get to this point?

ANS: I took some workshops, but found that working through the UW-Madison Creative Writing Staff was a great help. It was like taking a semester class with a personal instructor. I was lucky because at the time it was a cost-effective way to do it. Though the costs have increased, it is still a very viable method to work through specific issues.

What are some things someone should know to be an author? What skills and abilities should they have?

ANS: Know your writing skills, nouns, pronouns, sentence structure – you name it. If you have difficulty with spelling, use a dictionary. A thesaurus is an excellent tool to minimize redundancy. You need to know the rules before you can creatively break them to enhance your story. Creative license is not an excuse for bad skill sets. Keep in mind that your characters' spoken language won't follow many grammatical rules so as you develop them, work on their voice, know your character.

Realize that every word you write is not golden. I had completed *The Street Years* (Book 1) and *Juxton* (Book 2) and then made changes in Book 1 that affected Book 2 to such an extent that I tossed it, all 160,000 words - even though I liked the story. I started over; the focus changed and now Book 2 is called *Fathers and Sons*. Sometimes you have to cut wonderful scenes – or toss an entire novel - to keep the story flowing.

How did you get started in your career? What other jobs have you had that led you to this path?

ANS: I worked in various office positions in a manufacturing environment for 38 years. It isn't a career path associated with my writing and breaking the habit of business writing was difficult as I developed my creative writing skills. Their focus is different as is the style of writing.

As I began to show my writing to others, they encouraged me and I kept going. Just because you do one thing for a long time doesn't mean you can't change. I supposed I'll stop changing when I am dead. (laugh)

How do you balance the parts of your life?

ANS: Sometimes you can't. Sometimes the housework doesn't get done – does it matter if I don't dust? – probably not. You just have to remember not to ignore the people in your life, but they need to understand your creative needs also. As to dusting and other chores, etc. – they don't define you. Besides, I just cleaned everything! so I should be good for a few years. (laugh.)

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