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so believable. (That’s what I like about your novels too!) How do you manage to “keep it real,” and bring characters and a suspenseful story together so fluidly?

As a writer of realistic fiction, I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your comment, Evelynne. I wish I could say that my characters and situations seem real because I’m such a good writer but, in fact, whatever realism I’m able to achieve is a direct result of my years as a teacher. Hundreds of teenagers have spent time in my classroom, and I’m indebted to each of them for having given me details that I use when developing my characters and stories.

Do you approach your young adult novels with social issues in mind?

Social issues invariably draw me to conduct research, but my novels always begin first and foremost with a character. I spend a very long time getting to know my character before I can write that first sentence. Specifically, I have to figure out what my character wants more than anything. Once I know that, my job is to keep him (or her) from getting it – at least for a little while.

I recently read that more and more adults are reading young adult novels. What are your thoughts about that?

I don’t find it at all surprising because young adult fiction addresses such interesting themes, and some of the most compelling characters emerging in literature today are teenagers. I believe that adults are attracted to the YA genre because all of us have been profoundly shaped by the events we experienced as teens. There is no period in one’s life that is more challenging, and that’s why I can’t stop writing (and reading) about it.

Do you ever face writers block? How do you deal with it?

I don’t mean to sound flippant, but I simply don’t have time for it. That doesn’t mean that I never struggle with a manuscript. I write a lot of garbage that eventually ends up in the recycle bin on my laptop, but I have so many projects on the go that staring at a blank screen is a luxury I can’t afford. The important thing to remember is to keep writing.

As I often told my students, if you can’t think of anything to write, copy the last part of what you’ve already written. This can often trick the brain into thinking it’s writing, and more will follow. Another trick that works for me is never finishing the last sentence during a writing session. During my next session, the first thing I do is complete that final sentence, and this act of completion is often the jump-start I need to keep going. The more that people write, the more tricks they’ll discover that work for them.

What can you tell us about your interest and involvement in script writing?

Early in my writing career, I received Telefilm Canada’s \$10,000 Cross-Over Writer’s Grant to write a feature-length screen adaptation of my short story “The Invitation,” money that gave me the opportunity to work with industry people in Halifax and Toronto. That whet my appetite for the medium so, during my Masters Degree studies, I took a screenwriting course at the International Film and Television Workshops in the United States. One of the things I learned about myself during that course was that my experience as an author was of no value to me – writing for film is entirely different than writing a novel, and I struggled with making scenes work in a script the way I had learned to make them work in a story. I later had the very good fortune to win the Atlantic Film Festival’s Script Development Competition twice, which gave