

Interview Questions

A Tender Reed

- 1. What is your book about?** Over her lifetime, Michelle Hurley has realized that loving people doesn't automatically mean they'll love you in return. Everyone she ever loved has either hurt her or abandoned her. So rather than subject herself to more heartache, she gets a dog, immerses herself in her work, and tells the world to go fly a kite. She's reasonably satisfied with the way her life is going until her sister abandons her two kids in Michelle's front yard. Michelle doesn't want to be someone's mommy. She wants her life back. She wants to be left alone. But sometimes what we see as a curse can turn out to be the biggest blessing we've ever experienced.
- 2. What inspired you to write A Tender Reed?** Believe it or not, it was my dog. He was outside on the front porch one night barking at something only he could hear, so I couldn't sleep. Out of boredom or frustration or whatever, I grabbed a notebook and started writing about a woman who can't sleep because her barking dog is keeping her awake. I wrote about ten pages without having any idea why my dog or my heroine's dog was barking. The moment my character saw what her dog was barking at was the moment I saw what the dog was barking at. And that was the jumping point for the book.
- 3. Your first book, Streams of Mercy, was part of a series while A Tender Reed is a stand-alone book. What are the unique challenges in writing a series and a stand-alone?** In a stand-alone book, like a Tender Reed, I have to leave the characters behind at the end of the story. I'm one of those readers who always wants to know what happens next. The trickiest part about writing a series is making each book stand on its own. Often, readers won't read Book One before they stumble across Book Three. You don't want to bore that reader to death by giving too much back story from the previous books. Keeping a series fresh is a major factor. I've read series that by the time I'm to Book 3, I'm sick to death of these people and their problems. While each book in the series has its own story to tell, it must also contribute to the book before and after it.
- 4. When did you decide to become a writer?** I can't remember ever not wanting to write, but I didn't think I'd become a writer. I knew enough about the business to know very few people make a living at it. Thank heavens for a husband with a job and a retirement plan.
- 5. What inspired you to write professionally? Can you tell us anything about your path to publication?** I had this story floating around in my head for years. While my son was growing up and I was working at various unskilled labor jobs, this story wouldn't let me rest. Finally I reached a point where I could afford to quit working and stay home to devote myself to my craft full time. Of course, the story in my head evolved into much more than it had been originally. It only took a few months once I quit work to write that first book, Streams of Mercy. Getting in published took another three years. And I am so thankful for Pam Schwagerl at Tsaba House who saw a series hidden inside that first book.
- 6. What are your greatest challenges about being a writer?** It's hard. It's seldom fun. The office Christmas parties are really dull. And there's no one standing over you with a bullwhip ordering you to keep up production. It takes more than the romantic notion of writing the Great American Novel to keep your rear glued to the

chair. Most days, there are a hundred other things I'd rather do, but believe it or not, I can't imagine doing anything else.

- 7. What do you love about it?** I love the art of creating. I love the freedom of answering God's call on my life. On the days I get past the loneliness and the isolation and the natural resistance to get to work, it's a rewarding and exciting experience.
- 8. Have you received any encouragement along the way?** More than I ever dreamed of. I love it when people tell me they're praying for my writing. That means a lot to me. My family has been great. I lost count of how many copies of my book my Dad bought. Of course, my husband should be nominated for sainthood. He works third shift, so he loses sleep in order to drive me to my book signings. He knows that a bad writing day might mean waking up to a crying, inconsolable wife. And a good writing day means frozen pizza for dinner. Or no dinner at all.
- 9. What mistakes have you made in your writing career?** Downloading games onto my computer. Just kidding...a little. I am not as good a steward with my time as I could be. Every Monday morning, I vow to get more accomplished that week. Sometimes I actually do.
- 10. Do you have any advice for anyone dreaming of writing for publication?** Don't stop listening to those voices in your head. They have a story to tell. Don't wait for inspiration before you sit down to write. Like the Nike ads say; Just do it. Don't expect things to happen overnight. I keep reminding myself of that one. Write for love of the craft; not fame, fortune, or respect from your peers. Save yourself the disappointment.
- 11. What would you say is the key ingredient to a successful writing career?** An understanding and encouraging spouse who possesses a lot of patience and a job that pays regularly.
- 12. What projects are you working on now?** Besides marketing that takes up a lot of my time now that my books are getting onto the bookstore shelves, I am working on Book 3 of the Jenna's Creek novels. So far it is untitled, but I would really like to shake things up in Jenna's Creek with this installment.
- 13. Are you ever concerned that you will run out of ideas?** Sometimes, but then I have a dream or I hear a snippet of a conversation and the old creative juices start flowing again.
- 14. What do you hope readers will take away from A Tender Reed?** Two things. First, that we realize we mustn't let the past govern our lives today. My main character has a problem with Christianity. She was raised by a bitter, complaining old woman who never wanted her, and reminded her every day that the only reason she gave Michelle a home was out of Christian charity. I pray that all the people like Michelle who read the story will realize that true followers of Christ don't have to tell people they're Christians. Their actions are motivated by love, not some twisted sense of duty. Secondly, I want the book to remind Christian readers that people are watching our behavior. They listen to the words we speak. They watch our expressions when we're driving down the highway. Are we a joy to be around? Are we doing things out of a desire to please God, or begrudgingly because it's expected of us?

