

A Chat with author Lina Holloway

I recently had the chance to sit down with Lina Holloway and talk about her debut novel, *I Know This of Myself*, and found out more about her during the interview. After reading her book, I developed an image in my mind about Lina, but I quickly realized I was way off. The characters in her book are all financially well off and I was expecting someone who had come from privilege and carried that air about them. What I discovered was a woman who tends to be on the shy side and has an infectious nervous laugh. She was wearing a worn pair of jeans, sandals and a non-descript black t-shirt. There were no airs in the way she dressed, it seemed more like a uniform for comfort. I instantly felt relaxed in her presence.

ME: I assume that is coffee you are drinking.

LINA: Yes, a cup of coffee is kind of a security blanket for me. I always want it when I am in unfamiliar territory.

ME: I must ask, do you take your coffee the same way Nia does in the book?

LINA: No, I use regular sugar and I must have creamer. Nia's coffee was dark and she used raw sugar. Dark and raw was how I saw her in my head.

ME: Now that you say that, I can see how her coffee was fitting. Is there any part of you that made it into Nia's character or any of the other characters?

LINA: That is always the hardest question to answer.

ME: Why is that?

LINA: Much of this book was part of a very personal journey for me. Having struggled with depression for most of my life, there was no way to write a book on the topic without some of my experiences or behaviors seeping into the story and characters. The reason the question is so hard, is because it feels too personal to tell everyone which parts reflect me. Does that make sense?

ME: I understand completely. How about we move on to what made you want to become an author?

LINA: I have always used writing as a way to express myself. Mostly childish poems, but I loved it. It was during college that I put writing a novel on a mental bucket list. After graduation, I was floundering. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life at that point. I decided to start working towards writing a book. I worked on it for about six months, but life, work, bills all took over and I put it down. Periodically, over the year, I have started a few more novels, but never finished. Finally I got to a point in my life where everything around me felt out of my control. I needed something to hold on to. This book became a sort of life raft. The moment I wrote the final words of the book, I knew, there was nothing else I wanted to do more than to continue writing.

ME: Are you writing fulltime now?

LINA: Yes and no. I have a fulltime job to pay the bills, but I spend every free minute working on things related to my book or writing the next book.

ME: Yes, the next book. I hear it is a prequel to *I Know This of Myself*. Can you tell me about it and why you chose to do a prequel?

LINA: I never intended to do a sequel or prequel to *I Know This of Myself*, but I decided to do a prequel based on feedback I was getting from readers. A lot of people didn't like Ian. There were many negative things said about him. I realized I did not do him justice in this book. Many people will still have negative feelings about Ian, I am sure, but I want them to at least understand him more. The prequel, *Turn Off the Light*, focuses on Ian's high school years. I think it will help people understand some of his actions, even if they do not agree with them.

ME: I don't want to give away too much of the book, so let's move on to some of the other characters in the book. The sister relationship between Nia and Noie is present throughout the book. Do you have that type of relationship with your siblings?

LINA: Well, I do not have a sister. I have two brothers, who I love dearly. I feel we have been close most of our lives and I know they would be there for me if I ever needed them, but not the way Noie is. I think it is more in a female's nature to be nurturing in the way she was. Noie's character is the product of all of the close friends I have had in my life.

ME: One of my favorite characters was Hadley. She was fun to read.

LINA: She was the most fun to write. I always found myself smiling when I was writing scenes with her in them. I don't know that I have ever had a friend like her, but she would be a fun friend to have. I have actually toyed with the idea of writing her story. I don't know if I ever will, but I keep it in the back of my mind. Maybe if there is support for a novel about her, I will write it.

ME: You have support from me. I could see her story as a fun beach read.

LINA: Absolutely.

ME: I want to ask about the book cover. Who designed it and were you involved in that process?

LINA: I was very involved because I designed it. Sometimes I regret that decision.

ME: Why?

LINA: It was a selfish design. I am drawn to very simple covers. I designed something I would like and I should have thought more about what other people want to see. I know most covers are done with the reader in mind, but it was my first novel, so I guess I just didn't think it through. The cover for the prequel needed to mesh well, so we were forced to design it to complement the first book. I will probably be more adventurous with future covers and get more input.

ME: Personally, I like it. I feel like it complemented the story well.

LINA: Thank you.

ME: Ok, I want to ask a few questions about you. I have seen your Goodreads profile and it seems you read a lot. How do you manage to read that much with your writing schedule and fulltime career?

LINA: I love to read. I need to read. I take breaks from writing to read. During that time, I try to get in as many physical books in, but when I am writing, I mostly listen to audiobooks. I have a long drive and audiobooks help me to pass the time.

ME: What are some of your favorite books?

LINA: Ohh, another hard question. There are so many good books out there and my interest spans most genres. Always, the first book that comes to mind is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* because it was such a life changing book. It took me on a journey of understanding about myself as much as it did about Malcolm X. I think everyone should read it. *The Amateur Marriage* by Anne Tyler, is another one. I want to reread this book and see it through older eyes. It was over a decade ago when I read it. *The Scarlet Letter* is a book I have multiple copies of. I always pick up a new copy when I see one with a different cover than I already have. I read this book in high school and didn't think much of it, but I read it again as an adult and thought about what "A" I wear and how it has shaped who I am. Everyone should reread it as an adult. I could go on forever with this question, so I will just list a few more. *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* by Bebe Moore Campbell, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* by Anne Moody, the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer, the *Broken World* series by Kate L. Mary, *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant. I need to stop, don't I? I just feel like there are so many I need to put on this list. I will wrap it up with *Flowers in the Attic* by VC Andrews because it was the first book I ever read for fun and started my whole obsession with reading.

ME: The look on your face tells me you are bursting with more titles, but how about you tell me what you are reading now.

LINA: I am reading *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer. I love movies and books that retell the Cinderella story. *The Lunar Chronicles* has a completely new take on that story, as well as other fairy tales. I am on the third book and am loving the series. On that same topic, I just got done listening to *Cinder and Ella* by Kelly Oram. It was a very fun read.

ME: It was nice talking to you and I hope to sit down again after the release of your next book.

LINA: Likewise, I can't wait.