Rita Lee Chapman

Author

NAVIGATION

https://www.amazon.com/ebook/dp/B07711F

This week it is my pleasure to interview J.L. Willow. Would you please introduce yourself to my readers and share something about your life.

Hello! My name is Julia, and I write under the pen name J. L. Willow. I'm a senior in high school from central New Jersey gearing up to study mechanical engineering. Writing has been a passion of mine for many years and I plan on continuing it in addition to my engineering coursework.

When did you write your first book and how did it come about?

I began my debut novel, *The Scavenger*, during my sophomore year of high school. The idea came from a play I had just finished performing in where I portrayed a detective from Boston. I was inspired by the way that a single event or investigation can affect people in different ways. Soon after, I began to write a story revolving around a single investigation from four different points of view. The ideas clicked into place almost effortlessly and the rest is history!

Do you always write in the same genre or do you mix it up?

The Scavenger is a contemporary coming-of-age, but my newest book that will be released this spring, *Missing Her*, is a paranormal thriller. I don't like playing myself in a box genre-wise and I try to let the ideas flow naturally, wherever they take me.

When you write, do you start with an idea and sit down and let it evolve, or do you make notes and collect ideas on paper beforehand?

I usually start with a general concept and do what I call a "blue-sky session." Basically when the topic is sit down for a set period of time and write down every idea I get for whatever project I'm working on. No matter how good or bad, I put them all down and don't stop for second-guess myself. That's why it's nicknamed "blue sky," based on the phrase "the sky's the limit." This helps flesh out a lot of concepts I have for the story and make sure I see it from every angle. I usually start the writing process with a "blue sky session," but I'll also do a few more throughout the drafting process if I get stuck on a scene or with a character.

Would you like to give us a short excerpt from one of your books?

Absolutely! My upcoming release, *Missing Her*, follows a teenage girl named Vanessa as she grapples with the disappearance of her best friend, Elisa. This scene occurs when Vanessa is reminiscing about how she and Elisa first met:

> Elisa and I had one of those friendships you see in the movies but never actually think could happen in real life. For all intents and purposes, we sat across each other at one of those large round tables with funny enough legroom. Some best friends have that immediate connection, but it took us a little longer to find each other. We were nice to each other but not super close until I failed my spelling test one day.
>
> I, seven years old, was sitting at recess, gripping the paper in both hands as tears streamed down my face. I vividly remember my eyes staring at the big red "F" at the top corner of the page and the words "FIX AND RETURN TO ME" written right at the bottom.
>
> When I heard someone approaching, I crumpled up the paper and wiped at my face with my sleeve before shoving it into my bag. "What?" I sniffled at Elisa.
>
> She was holding a paper in her hands too. She pointed to it and it could see the red marks. "Did you fail too?" she asked.
>
> My eyes flicked from her to the paper, then sighed. Yeah. My mom's gonna be so mad.
>
> Elisa walked to sit beside me. "I don't think so," she replied. "The test was way too hard. Who needs to know how to spell 'Wednesday,' anyway?"
>
> "I know!" I pulled the test out of my bag, pointing at the word answer. "She told us to sound it out, so I did! W-E-D-N-E-S-D-A-Y. How was I supposed to know the 'Z' was an 'S'?"
>
> "And there's an 'E' in the middle! For no reason!"
>
> We talked and laughed together for the rest of recess, bonding over our shared hatred of the English language. And from that moment, we were inseparable. We went everywhere together, did everything together. Whether it was auditioning for the school production of Cinderella or shopping at the mall, it was always the two of us. You would've thought we could be sick of each other by the time high school rolled around. Even all those years later, though, I couldn't imagine life without Elisa.
>
> But now I didn't have to imagine. I had lived it every day for nearly five months.

Which of your books gave you the most pleasure to write?

Out of *Missing Her* and *The Scavenger*, I would definitely say *The Scavenger*. I love both of the books I wrote, but there was something about my debut that just made it a pleasure to write. *Missing Her* was much more complex and required a lot more work to get it to where I wanted it to be. They were both extremely rewarding, but the story for *The Scavenger* came a lot more quickly than that of *Missing Her*.

What is the best marketing tip you have received?

The best tip I've received is to keep your platforms consistent. When someone compares your Instagram to your website to your YouTube channel, the theme and style should be the same. It's a bit of work to keep up with, but it shows the time and care that you put into your work and your image.

How would you describe yourself?

I consider myself a big-picture thinker. In order to get through the day-to-day difficulties, it helps me to think of the overall outcome. When I think about what all of these little things are going to lead me to, it helps me to push through and keep working.

What do you do when you are not writing or reading?

When I'm not working on my book, I'm most likely doing school work. I'm currently studying to be a mechanical engineer, and the coursework is pretty intense. So if I'm not at my computer, I'm probably in front of a computer or blueprints.

If you could holiday anywhere in the world, where would you choose and why?

I've always wanted to go to New Zealand. The pictures I've seen look beautiful and I would love to see the Hobbit holes!

If you have owned pets, do you have a funny story you would like to share with us?

I used to have a German Shepard named Aster (can you tell my family is a fan of the Yankees?). One time he followed my neighbor home and the neighbor accidently shut him into his garage. A few minutes later, we were out looking for him, calling his name, and Aster couldn't get out, so he started barking. My neighbor heard him and then realized what had happened, so he let him out. It was scary when we couldn't find him, but it was funny to look back on later.

What is the biggest factor for you when selecting a book to read?

If I'm going to spend the time to read something, it has to be original. It drives me crazy when I pick up a book that looks interesting, but when I read the back, I realize it's exactly like another book I already read in that genre. I understand that there are some tropes that are common in certain genres, but there needs to be an interesting twist or unique quality to it. I'm willing to read something that takes a risk, but I try my best to avoid books that play it safe.

Do you have your own website?

I do! It has everything you need to know about me and my work. You can check it out here: https://jlwillow.com/

Are you working on a new book at the moment?

At the moment, I'm working on releasing *Missing Her*, but I have quite a few other projects in the works. I guess you'll just have to wait and see what I do next!

Do you have any events or book promotions coming up that you would like to tell us about?

I will be at Bookcon in New York City this coming June, so you'll be able to find me there! I'm sure I'll be at various signings in the months leading up to that, so be sure that you're following me on all my social media platforms (Instagram and Twitter @jlwillowbooks and YouTube @J. L. Willow).

Thank you so much for this opportunity, Rita! I had a ton of fun answering your questions.

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