

BEING A FRESHMAN, BEING AN AUTHOR: AN INTERVIEW WITH TEEN AUTHOR ZOE TROPE

by Gregg Nowling



While most fourteen year old girls are hanging out at the mall spending their hard-earned allowance on new clothes and quarters for an all-day marathon of Dance Dance Revolution at the video arcade, Portland-based author Zoe Trope was muddling through her freshman year of high school and composing a diary, which would later be turned into a much praised work of young adult literature, *Please Don't Kill the Freshman: A Memoir*. In the opening pages of the book, Trope displays her rare and witty teenage insight into the world of librarianship, insisting of the school media specialist, "You're the one got stuck working in a high school library. No one chooses that profession, I'm sure."

Today at the age of 18, the irony of that statement is not lost on Trope as she begins her college career and considers the possibility of becoming a librarian in the future, even asking for a pin with the word "librarian" as a Valentine's Day present via her online journal. At the beginning of her second semester at a small Midwestern liberal arts college, Trope talked about her life, young adult books, and of course, libraries.

ZOE: THEN AND NOW

For most kids going into college, the biggest claim to fame they might have is that they were on a state championship team or that they scored high on the SAT's. For Trope it was that she was a published author even before she graduated a year early from high school. Still, most students she goes to school with don't know her as the girl that wrote a book; they only know her as Zoe, the girl in their French class, the girl in the dorm room down the hall, or maybe the girl with the great fashion sense. Until recently, not even her college roommate knew that she had written a book. It may sound like she is avoiding the spotlight, but Trope sees it as being true to herself, and that's not drawing attention. She doesn't take creative writing courses, and she is strongly considering majoring in art history. When it comes to her day-to-day academic life, she says that "I want to write papers and work get good grades

and make cookies for my friends and just...get away." By all accounts on her journal, Trope has managed to maintain an excellent grade point average and make some phenomenal baked goods.

At the age of fourteen, Trope began writing her incredibly insightful memoir of what it's like not only to be a freshman in high school, but the journal offers more than that. It also shows how she deals with the ideas of love and friendship, addressing the issue of her bisexuality and spooning with her gay male friend on her bed at home. Most parents would flip out if they read the diary they found hidden under their child's mattress dealing with these issues, but Trope's was published for the world to see. The one condition that Trope placed on her parents before letting them read the book was that they weren't allowed to comment on it. Her father yet has to read the book, and by all indications, her mother has yet to comment on it. When asked about where her parents were in all this, Trope explained that her "parents always respected my sexuality and privacy, but were more concerned with my safety." She also explained that her mother was very liberal yet had typical expectations of Trope like the fact that she wasn't allowed to have piercings or to dye her hair until she was 18.

To this day, the author still uses the name Zoe Trope as a pseudonym. Originally it was taken so that people wouldn't be able to trace her to the high school she writes about so candidly. As she explained in choosing the name, "Zoe Trope seemed like a good idea because both of those words are Greek roots, and 'Zoe' means life and 'Trope' means turning or turning to, and a zoetrope is an animation device, buuuuuut now everyone asks me if I was [in] *Lost In Translation*, because it was produced by Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope company, and there's Zoetrope magazine....People just get easily confused I think." By retaining the use of the pseudonym, Trope finds that she is able to keep her real life separate from that of the life she put down in words some four years ago, also allowing herself to be a typical college student.

WRITING RATHER THAN READING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

No one was more surprised than Trope when Harper Collins developed the diary she started at 14 into a full-fledged young adult paperback, with a \$100,000 advance. What seemed most surprising to the author was that it would be classified a Young Adult book; it “seems odd that it’s a YA novel” she comments “because I don’t read those books.” The book however has been published in English, Swedish, Japanese, Dutch and Italian to the delight of readers all over the world.

For many, reading *Freshman* the writing style at times is reminiscent of random poetry with no order to its finely tuned chaos. Trope explains that “(the) book should have been written linear, but being a young adult is not linear” which could lead to the widespread appeal to young adult readers from one side of the globe to another. Trope also explains that she doesn’t consider herself a writer, but cannot argue that she is an author.

Trope offers some fairly direct criticism of the young adult authors who write for teens, commenting, “A lot of YA novels center on trivial conflicts.” Adding “the majority of YA lit is written by adults.... (and) adults tend to write overly bleak or overly happy.”

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND....

As Trope works through round two of her freshman year, she looks back at the young girl who wrote a diary that changed her world forever and at the same time forward to finishing her bachelor’s degree in Art History and the possibility of beginning an MLS program.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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