

Meet Award-winning Author Kai Strand



*Kai Strand writes fiction for middle grade and young adult readers. Her debut novel, *The Weaver*, was a finalist in the 2012 EPIC eBook Awards. *The Wishing Well: Another Weaver Tale* is set in the same storytelling village as *The Weaver*. She is a (very lucky) wife and the mother of four amazing kids. The most common sound in her household is laughter. The second most common is, "Do your dishes!" She and her family hike, geocache, and canoe in beautiful Central Oregon, where they call home.*

What are some jobs you've had in your life? Have they influenced/inspired your writing?

As the night manager of a four star hotel, I saw a lot of crazy things; a lady had to be put in a straightjacket and wheeled out of the hotel on a gurney after she went crazy from some drugs she took, dozens of CHP officers showed up all gussied up with electric blue bow ties to escort the King and Princess of Tonga to church and a man tried to pick up on me by giving me an expensive bottle of moisturizer. When I asked why he replied it was because he thought I was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen and he wanted to help me stay that way.

As the Operations Manager at a non-profit I witnessed strength and resilience in people to overcome their current situation in life as well as apathy and a sense of entitlement with no intention on changing anything.

I think all of our experiences shape us as writers. We may borrow a crazy situation from our past or an acquaintance's personality quirk, but we write a lot of our lives into our stories to make them real.

Tell us briefly about your book and what you feel is the most important topic/sub-message you share.

The Wishing Well: Another Weaver Tale; Molly

Minstrel is treated worse than Cinderella by her mom and sisters. When Molly meets the magical creature, Unwanted, she wishes her problems away. However, you must first understand what you need before knowing what to ask for. Molly will have to look within for the solution to her troubles.

Molly is a character with a lot of grace and dignity even under difficult circumstances. She holds tightly to the beauty in her life until she is able to figure out how to erase the ugly.

Save the Lemmings; When Natalie's Texty-Talky invention makes her an overnight sensation, the media digs until they find a way to smear her goody-goody image. When her best friends start believing what they read, Natalie's sunny spirit is pushed to its limits. How will Natalie stop the lies and win her friends back? And who will *SAVE THE LEMMINGS*?

Natalie has a perpetually sunny attitude, evidenced by the inspirational phrases she shares with everyone. When the media turns on her and her lifelong friends aren't there to back her up, she is in a prime position to lose that positive outlook, but she holds fast to who she is, even when it won't win her any popularity contests.

Like all authors, you have had your fair share of rejection letters. You obviously did not let the letters deter you. How did you keep your determination without getting discouraged?

I did let the letters deter me, actually. I quit writing a couple of years ago out of frustration. It wasn't an easy thing to do, but I was no longer handling the rejection well and it was impacting my ability to parent and be a good wife, friend, employee. So I stopped. BUT, I'd promised to attend a local event of children's book authors and illustrators prior to quitting and I wasn't going to back out. I live in a small community in the middle of

nowhere, so I'd never met a lot of children's book people before. That evening I met the owner of Guardian Angel Publishing. She's very charming and fun to talk to. She shared her very forward vision for her company and my respect for her increased when I learned how cutting edge she was, not apologizing for publishing electronic children's books (which weren't the norm then) and developing an online, interactive children's magazine. Since I had nothing to pitch, I was relaxed and really enjoyed my evening.

About two months later a thought struck me out of the blue. *The Weaver would be a great fit for GAP – crap!* So I dusted off the manuscript and unquit. However, that break – and it was a complete break from writing – let my psyche heal. I submitted to GAP and while I waited for the response, I wrote and submitted elsewhere as well.

It has been my experience, some things come quite easily (like creating the setting) and other things aren't so easy (like deciding on a title). What comes easily to you and what do you find more difficult?

Reading is easy, everything else is hard? Seriously though, usually I consider the first draft easy, but *The Weaver* sat in my hard drive for I don't know how long because I couldn't figure out how to bridge to the resolution and the WIP I'm working on now is giving me the exact same problem. So first drafts are easy as long as that one spot doesn't trip me up.

Other than that one spot, editing is my bane. I've moved beyond that story and want to be creating the next one and having to slog through revision after revision is my personal torture. Though, I love working with my critique partners and super love working edits with an editor, because I feel I can see the story grow again.

Please describe to us your relationship between you and your editor. What makes an author/editor relationship a success?

Mutual respect and an understanding of the roles we play in the process. An author has to understand that the editor wants to make the story better. That said, they aren't perfect beings and not all of their visions are visionary. When an author respectfully declines a suggested edit with a simple explanation, it keeps the relationship professional and the editor is more likely to hear what the author is saying.

That said, I've enjoyed my relationships with both my editors for those reasons. I'm such an insecure writer so it's even hard for me to open the editorial document. But so far my work and I have been treated with the utmost respect and it really helps me to be able to remain professional and not take the suggestions personally.

What inspired you to write?

I think it is kind of cliché, but my kids inspired me to start writing; my oldest daughter's love for the written word and my oldest son's reluctance to love it. I wanted to create magic for both of them. I'm happy to say, my son did come around, though I don't know that it is because his mom started to write.

Do you consider yourself a born writer?

I always thought writing was easy. Teachers often used my work as samples for the class, but I assumed that was happening to everyone. Or maybe I just didn't think much of it. When I was an adult, people started saying things like, "I can't put two words together and make sense, I admire your ability to write." I heard the same thing about my ability to speak in front of large groups. Since I get major butterflies before I speak, I understood when people said, "I can't...I admire that you can." Eventually I compared the statements and realized, "Huh, not everybody can write and it is something that comes naturally to me." Sometimes I need to be hit over the head with things before I get it.

Who is your favorite author and what is your favorite genre to read?

I don't like 'favorites' questions because they make me feel so penned in. I don't have favorites, because I love so many things and it changes from day to day, mood to mood which I love more. So, if you promise not read this as a hard and fast rule and know that on another day, I'd answer this differently, I'll tell you.

Fantasy – specifically in the children's and YA genres, is my favorite read. Fantasy for grown ups has too many words and highfalutin ideas and they tend to get unnecessarily sexy. Fantasy for kids and teens focuses on the journey, the relationships, the feelings, the PATH.

Favorite author (today) is probably J.K. Rowling. I truly love her characters and her ability to express them so clearly. I'm in awe of how quickly she reveals quirks, mannerisms and insecurities upon introducing a new character.

Is there any particular book that, when you read it, you thought, "I wish I had written that!"?

Anything with lush language, like *Matched* by Ally Condie, *Ashes, Ashes* by Jo Treggiari, or *Shiver* by Maggie Stiefvater.

Have you ever suffered from writer's block? If yes, how did you 'cure' it?

When I'm having a difficult time creating, I pick up a book on the craft of writing. Never fails, while I'm reading about how to write well, I'm always inspired to sit down and write. Truth be told, it feels more like an itch that grows as I read about sentence structure and character building until finally I have to put the book down and open the computer.

Have you had any training to become a writer?

I've taken English and creative writing classes at the local college. I attend workshops at conferences and online whenever I can. And I read books on the craft.

What type of books do you mostly write?

So far everything I've written is fiction. Most of my novels are fantasy, but most of my short stories are contemporary fiction.

Does your family and friends inspire any of your books, characters, or plots?

One of my short stories, [Ben's World](#), I wrote for my son. It's how he played when he was little, complete with a Ben-Mom and Ben-Dad. That's the most directly I've used a person's personality or mannerisms in a character though. I have a WIP that is based very loosely on my two best friends and I. But these girls were my best friends through high school and this WIP is a middle grade. Each girl has some of the characteristics of my friends or me, but the rest of the character is developed to work best in the story. I think that is how most writers work, by cobbling together bits and pieces of people they know and people they've observed and people they just want to make up.

What do you like most about writing?

I love word play. I could (and have) spend days mining for the right words to evoke a specific emotion or feeling in the reader. It's amazing how one descriptive word can cause a scene to shift in a direction you hadn't intended. I've gone so far as to rewrite a scene because the perfect word can't be found from the original approach. It's like a jumbo jet requesting permission to land on a private landing strip. Sometimes you have to find a more appropriate runway – you just have to hope you have enough fuel.

Tell us about your writing space.

I've just begun the process of creating a new space. So there isn't too much to tell. I've moved to the loft, which is fun because now I get to hear what's going on in the house without sitting in the middle of it all. I have a window over my desk that looks across the street, mostly pine trees, occasionally deer, less frequently the actual neighbors. My rolling suitcase of books that I take to events with me is propped against the wall. A kalanchoe plant that a friend gave me for my birthday sits on the windowsill. A beautiful wind chime made out of a wine bottle that another friend made splays green beams around the room. Family pictures fill a long picture frame that looks like gargantuan movie film. It lies on the floor in front of the suitcase of books, waiting to be hung. The walls wait for me to decide their fate. The empty floor space is whispering, "Chaise. Chaise. Chaise." My desk is suddenly too small. I need more surfaces. But I feel blessed to have a space to call my own.

Is there anything you'd go back and do differently now that you have been published, in regards to your writing career?

Nothing yet.

Do you do first drafts on a computer or by hand?

First drafts are on my computer. Ever once in a blue moon, I'll write a first draft to a blog post or a short story on paper, but it is more rare today than even three years ago.

What is your creative process like? What happens before sitting down to write?

Most of the time I have to put my nugget into the rock tumbler. Did you ever have a rock tumbler? You put your dull rocks (ideas) in with some solution, let them churn and roll for a while. Change the solution, put them back into the tumbler. The mechanism grinds, the rocks fall and tumble at varying speeds. The sounds are jarring and lulling at the same time. Eventually pretty, polished rocks come out (your story). You could just set your pretty polished rock on the windowsill, but if you add a chain to make a necklace or a band to make a ring (revise and revise) you'll get an even prettier polished rock that others will admire.

Do you do a lot of research for your books?

I write fiction so there isn't a lot of research, but I do fact checking as I write to make sure that a place I'm writing is feasible or a convention I'm using is believable.

What voice do you find most to your liking: first person or third person?

I can't make that choice. They are both good and serve their purposes. I have a harder time writing first person, but I enjoy reading it. I also like alternating voices when it is done well.

How do you see the future of book publishing, both traditional, electronic, and print on demand?

I would love to see the big six publishers go to print on demand. It seems so odd in this electronic age to have warehouses full of books. I know there will always be extra stock laying around, but let's cut it down!

I think electronic book publishing, apps for books, etc, will continue to grow, but I don't think print will go away. Vinyl albums haven't completely left music yet. The life of the print book will be similar. There will always be purists and that's okay! But my philosophy is, a book is a book – no matter how it's printed.

Do you participate in competitions? Have you received any awards?

My first book, *The Weaver*, was a finalist in both the Global eBook Awards and the 2012 EPIC eBook Awards. When I think of all the books the judges read and they decided to put *The Weaver* through to the finals, I'm humbled.

What advice would you give to a new writer?

So much advice to share! Here is one I had a hard time doing for a long time. Treat writing like a career. Even if you squeeze it in on your lunch hour and after the kids go to bed, if you aren't a professional, then it will never be your business.

Use this space to tell us more about who you are. Anything you want your readers to know. Include information on where to find your books, any blogs you may have, or how a reader can learn more about you and writing.

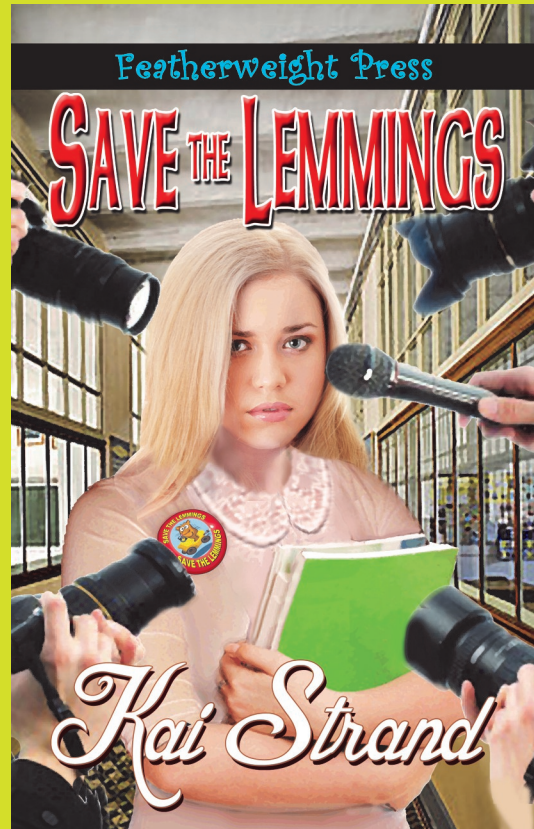
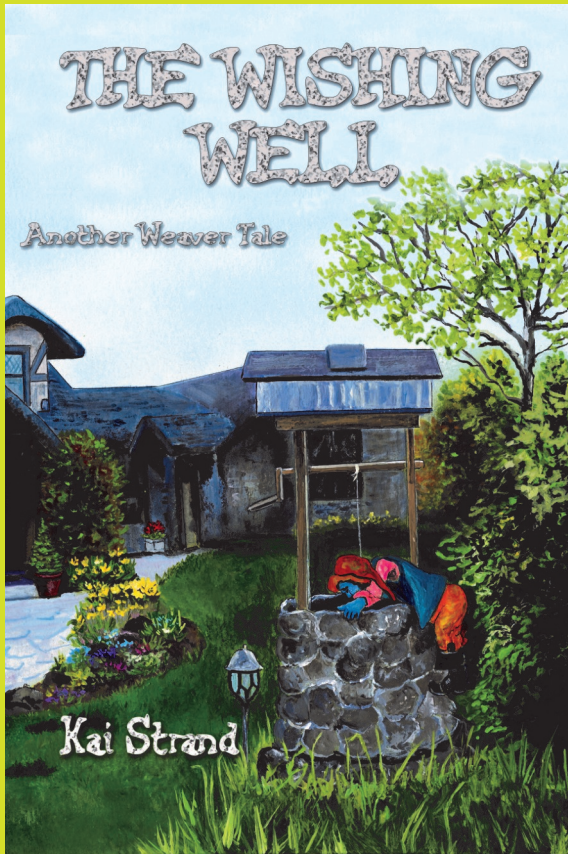
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