After years, of publishing, I've realized to focus on me. I do lose myself in the world of competition even now. However, I focus back on the fact I'm releasing my story and sharing the love of words with many and that is everything. ~HJ Bellus

This could very well be the most honest author interview you will have read to date. HJ Bellus has afforded us the gift of her insight and humor in this candid conversation. We are ever so grateful that she has allowed us to peek inside her bedroom (where her office is) and glean wisdom and encouragement from her published success as an author of Contemporary Romance.

HJ Bellus is a small town girl who loves the art of storytelling. When not making readers laugh or cry, she's a part-time livestock wrangler that can be found in the middle of Idaho, shotgunning a beer while listening to some Miranda Lambert on her Beats and rocking out in her boots. **(Source: Amazon.com)**

Now for our exclusive interview with successful author, HJ Bellus.

Q: What is your writing space like? What do you like to have nearby and what about your work space inspires you?

My writing space is in my bedroom. I've turned the corner of my room into a writing cave. I have a corner desk with tons of inspiration pinned to the walls above it. My desk is always filled with pens (I'm obsessed), notebooks, and energy drinks! The thing is I don't use my desk for my MacBook. Nope, I kick my feet up on the edge of my bed and let the words flow. It's honestly my favorite place in the world.

Q: What is the number one thing in your life that motivates and/or inspires you as an author?

Life. The answer is simple! Life inspires me every single day. It may be a flock of blackbirds that swoop low in the sky or a tender, genuine giggle from one of my kids. I've always been awed by the fact a book holds an entire world between the covers. Developing and writing a story is the best form of adrenaline for me. It's something that will never get old.

Q: What tips can you offer for new authors to help them balance their writing career and their personal life?

Is there really an answer for this? If so, I'm still searching for it! Honestly, balancing the two is extremely difficult. I've tried about everything from planning time to write, market, and even vowing to take the weekends off. But the truth is none of it works for me. I've found that setting daily word count goals, taking a lengthy break between books, and having a strong marketing team has really helped me.

For example, I took off the month of December to spend time with my family, but when January came around I was once again getting my daily word count. I like to aim for between three thousand and five thousand a day. I also do my best to market books daily and that can range from making teasers, interacting in my reader group, planning newsletters, and or scheduling posts.

Q: Is there an area of writing and being an author that you would like to improve upon?

Always! I think if there ever comes a time where I don't ask myself this then I need to regroup as a whole. Currently, my struggle is which story to write. I have two amazing storylines bouncing around in my head. One day one will hold me tight and demand to be let out and then its the other one taking over my life.

I've never stuck to a specific genre because Lord knows my mind will not allow that. I bounce around like no other making it extremely hard to focus on one certain storyline. As I'm typing this I'm remembering all of the manuscripts just waiting to be finished right now!

Q: What does your daily writing schedule look like? How much time to you give to writing, promoting, and business management?

I've recently gone back to working full-time at a day job that I absolutely adore! So, this is a bit tricky since by the time I get dinner cooked and help the kiddos with their homework I am beat!

Not going to lie, I failed at writing every day for a while. I knew I needed a plan to stay on track.

I started writing in Google Docs so that no matter where I'm at I can pick up on a story. By doing this I'm able to get in one to two thousand words before even getting home from work.

After the house and family are settled I'm at my desk with my feet propped up. I market first spending a maximum of thirty minutes and then it's time to write. Now, I'm a person that feels if you don't meet your goal that you failed. This is a terrible mindset, so I've had to train myself to ignore the word count some days and celebrate in the fact of what I did get accomplished. Thinking in terms of plot development versus word count also helps me feel better about daily accomplishments.

THE REAL STORY

Q: Tell us how you honed in on who your reader would be.

I published my first book, Cree, not knowing a damn thing about the book world. I had to get my words out and it never stopped. Gaining friends and readers happened naturally as they bonded over my words and it all went from there. It's never stopped and it's the best blessing in my world. It's a gift readers give me that they'll never know precious it is.

I have so many friends from all over the world who were introduced to me through my words and others because I am and always will be a reader at heart. These connections are priceless.

I could spend thousands and thousands of dollars on ads, but they'd never garner what I reached organically.

Q: As you begin a new book, what comes first? The characters, the storyline, the cover image, the title, something else?

It's just like cooking a good sauce. The story simmers in my head for a long time until I can't handle it anymore. Then it's game time. I have to have a blurb and cover after knowing what the story is and then the words flow.

Q: How much of your real life is on the pages of your books?

This question makes me smile. I have a very witty husband and kids, so you can bet damn sure I use their material all the time. In my latest book, I put Richard Noggin in it. My son and husband were telling me to call someone who was annoying me Richard Noggin. I had NO idea what they were talking about. They pointed out the nickname for Richard and I got that part but putting the two together left me clueless. I'll just say they had to explain in detail and then I laughed my ass off.

Also, I love writing about what I know and that's small towns, hard-working men, loving women, and some damn good jokes.

Q: Your books are set in small towns and include realistic heroes. What type of research do you do before a new book?

How do you ensure your locations and characters are credible?

I write what I know. This may sound like a very boring answer. The raw truth is I love my life and the area I live in. I tend to name a state, but make a fictitious town up so that I'm able to embellish every aspect of it.

The great thing about writing what I know is that I get to create it any way I want to. I can make it as crazy or as realistic as I want. I know the kindness and love of a sweet community, the relationships formed, and yes, the drama. I get to live in what I know and also create amazing, beautiful stories.

Q: Do you enjoy writing anything outside of your published genre?

I haven't attempted this endeavor yet, but it's on my bucket list. I have some super dark thrillers in mind. The kind that are sick and twisted and one day they will meet the world. It's all in time and honestly, I'll more than likely use a pen name to separate the two worlds. Be on the lookout!

THE REAL STATS

Q: How do you define success for yourself as an author? How will you know if/when you have arrived?

This is a question I struggled with for a very long time. This market is a tough one. Hell, I'd go so far as saying it's damn near impossible. We so easily get caught up in what others are doing.

How many books they are realizing, how many newsletter subscribers they have, how many likes and followers they have, and stalking their ranks when they release. You know you've done it and if you say you haven't, then you're nose is growing. Seriously, it's so easy to get lost in everything and I have been there more than one time.

After years, of publishing, I've realized to focus on me. I do lose myself in the world of competition even now. However, I focus back on the fact I'm releasing my story and sharing the love of words with many and that is everything.

Q. Do you have any type of formula as you write to include a good balance of seriousness and humor?

I don't. Good or bad, I let it fly as I write. I'm the same in person. You never know what is going to come out of my mouth and I practice the same thing in my writing. Not going to lie, I love my smartass characters the most. They keep it real and tell it like it is.

We all have that one friend who may or may not cringe when we bring them in public. After the cringing ensues, you laugh your ass off and that's the way I roll.

Q: How many readers do you have on your email list?

Honestly, I've bounced back and forth on this one. I've been up to 35K and then cleaned out my list down to 6K. It was one damn scary step, but I made it. My open rates were off the charts and the interaction aspect was key. I included lots about my personal life and the wonderful state I've lived in my whole life.

JUST FOR KICKS

Q: What is your all-time favorite book?

Wallbanger by Alice Clayton. If you have not read this one get the hell on it. Literally, get on it! You won't regret it!

Everyone needs to read this one. It will have you rolling and hooked on every single word. I swear it's the only book I've reread several times!

Q: What is your favorite holiday to celebrate? Why?

Anyone that involves candy. Okay, I guess that's all of them.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Q: What is the best way for our readers to connect with you?

FREE BOOKS http://bit.ly/2Lwofma
Amazon http://amzn.to/2tjmFtN
Goodreads http://bit.ly/2dpb58Z
BookBub http://bit.ly/2PU1IlO
YouTube http://bit.ly/2tQTY9q
Facebook http://bit.ly/1nCFZeM
Twitter https://twitter.com/HJBellus
Instagram http://bit.ly/2t7ymsu
Website http://authorhjb.com/
Reader Group http://bit.ly/1HYQgsk
Email hjbellus@gmail.com