

HN Book Critic Erin McCabe [recently reviewed](#) M. Garzon's young adult novel *Blaze of Glory*. This week, she teams up with HN Movie Critic Amanda Ronan to interview the author. From Amanda (AR) and Erin (EM):

EM: What was the spark that got you started with *Blaze of Glory*?

That's a tough one to answer, because I didn't have any concrete plans to write a book, other than the usual 'Maybe one day I'll write my memoirs...' kinds of musings. But one day I woke up and this story was flailing to get out, and it would NOT take no for an answer. The spark was really more of a conflagration.

EM: How long did it take you to write *Blaze of Glory*? Did you set out with the goal of publishing it when you began writing?

It took about 10 months to write the first draft, which was a blistering pace considering I'm a single parent and my kids were 2 and 4 at the time. Added to that was another 6 months or so of back-and-forth editing.

When I began writing, my only goal was to appease the muse. It was only when a friend of mine (a rider and osteopath, a combination you may recognize from the book) convinced me to let her see the manuscript that the idea of publishing began to germinate. At the time my friend read it, the manuscript was about 2/3 done, and her daily calls, emails and general harassment to get more of the story made me think others might like it, too.

AR: *Blaze of Glory* covers mainly polo, hunter ponies, show jumping, and natural horsemanship techniques such as "join up." Why did you choose these particular disciplines for your story?

Other than polo, those are areas that I have personal experience with. I've also done some low-level eventing (which is awesome!), but didn't find a way to integrate it into the story. The round pen work (join up) was of particular interest to me but I've only done it with donkeys and mules, when I was working at a donkey sanctuary. Monty Roberts rules!

AR: I'm always fascinated by the way authors research their subject matter. Guide us through your process in regards to the "horsey" parts of your story. Did you visit polo clubs, racetracks and hunter/jumper barns in search of material?

I worked at a track for a little while (Woodbine in Toronto), and I rode H/J for years, so the only discipline I had to research was polo – and that was fun! (And I'm not just saying that because the polo players were hot). Luckily there's a polo club not far from me so I made a pest of myself one summer and got the scoop on things.

AR: We know that you rode professionally for ten years prior to a career-ending injury. Can you tell us a little bit about your history with horses and how they affected your life?

This could probably be a book in itself. I was one of those kids born with the word ‘horse’ on her lips. I always had to struggle to ride, since my parents were completely baffled and largely uninterested by my obsession. I actually just [wrote a guest post for HorseJunkiesUnited](#) that covers this in detail. Let’s just say that I can’t imagine what sort of person I’d be if horses hadn’t been such an integral part of my formative years. They’re woven into every strand of my being.

EM: How did your life with horses prepare you (or not) for life as a writer? Aside from the obvious choice of subject matter, of course.

With the right attitude, I think most skills are transferable. Horses taught me that patience really is a virtue, and it’s one that writers need plenty of. Also, with horses it’s impossible to hide your emotions. You might fool everyone else with your cucumber-cool exterior, but if you’re faking, your horse will know. Learning not to hide from your feelings, especially unpleasant ones, is important for a writer—at least, it was for me, and it’s not something I’m naturally good at.

AR: Are any of your characters based on personal experiences?

Most of the equine characters are based on horses I’ve known in ‘real’ life. For instance, at a barn I used to manage, we had a horse named Schweppes, a small palomino who wasn’t thrilled with his job as a school horse. I used to think he’d be happier doing something like polo, so in the book I made it true for him.



Schweppes

‘Blaze,’ in personality, is very much like my old jumper Jamie, although Blaze is a Dutch Warmblood and Jamie was the best OTTB ever.



Jamie (Togetherwefly)

And I did borrow many of my human friends' names, and in some cases a bit more.

My main character was easy for me to write because I share many of her traits, particularly the recklessness and lack of foresight. The accident described in the book when she dislocates her shoulder was based on something I've actually done (kids, don't try this at home)!

EM: You've mentioned the futility of arguing with "the muse." How much does inspiration or "the muse" factor into your writing process? Is there a point where you no longer "hear" the muse?

I'd say that Blaze was very muse-driven. The sequel, which I'm currently in the process of writing, seems to be a bit less so. Or maybe it's simply that the characters have evolved, so the tenor of the story must change, too, and the muse's contribution is more subtle. And the muse is completely uninterested in editing – I think she goes on vacation for that part.

EM: What have been the biggest challenges or surprises about being a published author?

I feel very, very lucky that my first book has gotten such a warm reception, and that part's still a bit of a surprise. Other than that the biggest challenge/surprise is the amount of time that goes into promoting a book. Most publishers don't spend money marketing unknown authors, so the author ends up doing a lot of that work.

I've also learned that I'm not that comfortable in the limelight (as dim as it is), but I'm now doing newspaper and radio interviews as well as book signings, so I've had to learn to creep out from behind the laptop.

EM: *Blaze of Glory* is considered Young Adult, although it has some pretty mature themes. Do you think you'll ever write for an older audience?

I don't write with any particular age group in mind. I wasn't thinking YA when I wrote *Blaze*, although my agent pitched it as such, but I suspect that had more to do with the age of the protagonist. On Amazon it's actually classified as both 'coming of age' and 'romance.' As an aside, most of the fan mail I get for *Blaze* is from adult readers.

After the sequel to *Blaze* is finished I plan to write a fantasy book. My protagonists will be young, but a good story is a good story – I'm hoping it will appeal to a wide range of readers.

AR: You are currently working on the *Blaze* sequel... will we see more of the same characters and equestrian disciplines or something new?

Most of the characters are the same, with a few minor characters being new. Mostly we get to know the existing characters better. The disciplines are also the same, although there's less polo in this one.

AR: Can you give us an excerpt from the sequel?

Well normally I'm a bit leery of releasing excerpts before the story's done, especially since you never know what will be pruned during editing. But since it's HN, I'll give you a (short) horsey one:

"This time Hades was ready and eager, and as I crouched over his withers he lengthened stride confidently into a ground-eating, thundering gallop. The air shook around us as we flew, and I moved my hands further up his neck and stayed as still as possible, hoping he would barely notice I was there. But that's not what happened. Instead I felt his glee at moving with me, and my heart flew even faster than our joined bodies. This was what I loved, what I lived for—this feeling of complete union and understanding between two creatures so different that it was still a source of wonder to me that we could communicate at all."

AR: The latest breaking news is that *Blaze of Glory* has been optioned for a new television series! What can you tell us about that?

I can tell you that:

- 1) It's super exciting! (at least, for me...)
- 2) It takes a long time to go from idea to actual show, so we're looking at 1-3 years before it's on the air, if all goes well.

AR: And just because I'm the HN movie critic I have to ask... What is your favorite horse movie?

Okay, I know it seems childish but I really love Spirit, Stallion of the Cimarron. The Black Stallion, of course – that one's a classic, as is The Man from Snowy River. I especially love that I can now share those with my kids, who are 5 & 7 and love ponies.