

Thanks for wanting to spend more time talking and thinking about the novel, *Comfort Foods*.

When did the term “foodie” become a hot-button word? I don’t know, either, but it’s real. I’m too picky to be a “foodie,” but I completely relate to the idea of being in love with the process of food, planning food, shopping for products, recipes, execution of processes, and presentation of a meal—and by golly, it better be appreciated, too. I don’t have the will or the temperament to be a chef, but I know some who think they could have been, if only the fates had been kinder.

But this story didn’t start with Rudy Delgado, or his dazzling (and totally imagined) restaurant, Stella’s.

It started with the rise and fall of “influencers.” I am of the generation when social media rose from oblivion into an all-consuming pit and having skirted the edges of this inferno. I’ve seen the lives eviscerated by the fire. To be fair, I don’t think many of us knew the power of this beast called social media when it first emerged. It didn’t take long, though, and we all had stories to tell. It’s from this, that a plot formed about Lacy Cavanaugh.

Lacy first came into my book world through the very first story I wrote and set in Comfort—*Emeralds Mark the Spot*. It’s the free novella I offer for download to those who subscribe to my newsletter at kimberlyfish.com. Lacy is the younger sister of the main character, Kali Cavanaugh, and in those slim pages she reveals spunk, personality, a beauty queen history, and a yearning for the road. Since Kali and her husband, Jake Hamilton, seemed to be all over the pages of the previous Comfort novels, I felt like it was time to give Lacy her spotlight. I hope you agree, it was a big one. Fame, fortune, beauty, wit, some street skills, and a tenacity that is lacking in most people; this is Lacy’s calling card. I would like to think that if I were in Lacy’s high heeled shoes, maybe I’d have the same perseverance, but maybe not. Would you?

This story also proves that not everyone who comes to Comfort, Texas, does so because they’re happy. Sometimes the best things in life feel like punishment, at first. This plot allowed me to introduce some characters with scars and grey hair, and a world of hurt. Perfect companions for a golden girl on hard times. Gloria and Frank Bachman were a delight to write and delve into their backstory. I wanted to give them their own book after I spent time imagining their lives, but Gloria will get her turn in the Comfort and Joy trilogy. The art of newspaper journalism, production, and distribution has been flipped on its head in this last decade, and as one who has always loved her paper, I wanted to give an ode to a changing artform. I got my first writing credits on an elementary school newsletter and worked my way up to assistant editor of my high-school year book—don’t you think those are great credentials for creating an editor of a small-town newspaper? As a modern girl, Lacy certainly has ideas about Frank and the paper’s future. I’m so glad she stuck around to make them play out. Were any of you involved in your local newspaper? Did I get the process right?

Of great pleasure to me was creating the Comfort Food and Wine festival. This doesn't actually exist, but if it did, we'd all go, right? I loved writing Rudy Delgado's character, his back story, his friends, his ex-wife, his enemies, and his precocious daughter, Luna. I would never have thought to add recipes to a novel, but I did recipe experimentation along the way with this character development and thought, why not? Did your mouth water reading some of those pages? Mine, did. The process for the James Beard Foundation Awards are rigorous and worth all the commendation. I did quite a bit of research to get that just right. Rudy was deserving.

I'm curious to know how you felt about the behind-the-scenes world of Stella's? Also the front of the house, back of the house elements described in the book. Many of you have worked in restaurants and probably have oodles of stories. You should share them with your friends.

Few of us have competed in beauty pageants, or would even want to, but did you have any sympathy for Lacy and her journey? What about the Amy Marsh(es) of this world? Why is it women can be so cruel to each other?

Divorce is all too common and despite pleas to the contrary, it can have a profound impact on children. Learning disabilities are a common struggle. Luna found a way to cope, and this might be a good time to talk about the way children deal with unpleasant realities in life. Good and bad, and sometimes ugly.

If you could magically create the perfect restaurant, what would it be?

If you take a do-over on your career, what would it be?

If you witnessed something as awful as Lacy—the suspected human trafficking in a sleepy town like Comfort—would you have handled it like she did? Are you aware of the tragedy of human trafficking happening in almost every town in America? Take time to get informed and hopefully make a difference in someone's life.

How did getting involved, beyond her own motives, move Lacy from being one-dimensional into someone you could really care about?

On a lighter note, do you think two such gorgeous human beings, like Rudy and Lacy, can really have a happily-ever-after or will their strong personalities get the better of their happiness? And why?

Thanks,
Kimberly

PS I frequently write extra content exclusive for subscribers to my newsletter at kimberlyfish.com. Maybe one day, we'll find out if Rudy gets his James Beard award, and if he still wants it.