



A. E. Cannon

The Loser's Guide to Life and Love
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A Q&A with A. E. Cannon

1. How do you relate so well to a teen audience? Well, first, thanks for the compliment. Maybe I relate because I like people that age. I think they're complex and interesting and wonderful. I always learn something when I'm around them. Furthermore, adolescence (I kind of hate that word, actually) is the time when we actively ask all the Big Questions about Life, and that just naturally generates all kinds of interesting material. More reasons? It probably helps that I remember being that age REALLY well. And, of course, I've lived with five teenagers of my own. All boys! Definitely fun, although kind of scary sometimes.

2. Have your own children helped you make this connection or do you use your own personal experience while you were growing up? Both, I think. Ed/Sergio was totally inspired by one of my boy's experiences working at Hollywood Video one summer. His boss never got around to making him a new badge, so he wore one belonging to a former employee named (yes! You guessed it!) "Sergio." The funny thing was that as the summer wore on, my son started to morph into this other person whenever he went to work—he became more Sergio-esque. And so OF COURSE I had to write about it. There's a little of me in most of my characters, as well. Like Ellie I love music. Like Quark, I make it a point to look at the night sky. And like Scout I was a tomboy with a secret addiction to romances. The addiction hasn't changed much, actually.

3. This book is based upon Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Recently there have been many movie adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. What inspired you to create your own version of the play? How is your version of the play different than Shakespeare's original? At the same time my son was working at Hollywood, I was teaching a young adult literature course at Westminster College in Salt Lake City. Most of my students were future English teachers, so I gave them an assignment to "bridge" or connect a standard classic (think Shakespeare, Dickens, Hawthorne, etc.) with a newer young adult novel. I accepted the challenge myself when I decided to write a book based on my favorite Shakespeare comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. BTW I once saw the single worst production of this play in the history of the world while my husband and I were in London. The sets were done in black and white, the forest was turned into a dung heap, and the fairies were turned into flies. Whenever they (the fairies) were on stage, they stood there nervously rubbing their heads and watching out for people with fly swatters. Talk about glum. Sitting through that play was the single most joyless theater experience I have ever had. How is my version different than the original? Well, it's contemporary, for one thing. Also, it's set in Salt Lake City. And also I'm not Shakespeare, although sometimes I wish I were. How would it be to write the lines he wrote? But I do hope the spirit of happy confusion is the same.

4. How does writing a humorous novel differ from writing a book with a more serious tone? What are the different challenges of writing in each tone? You know, I never deliberately set out to write a funny book. Or a serious one, for that matter. What happens is that as I get to know the characters and create different situations in which they can interact, the humor just starts bubbling up. Here's an interesting thing about humor. It's very often born of emotional discomfort—awkward social moments, embarrassment, even anger. To paraphrase Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry, humor is pain recollected in tranquility.

5. You write from two boys' and two girls' perspectives in *The Loser's Guide to Life and Love*. Which voice did you find easiest to capture and why? Strangely, I find boys' voices SO much easier to do than girls' voices—maybe because I've always lived around boys (in addition to not having daughters, I also don't have sisters—just brothers). But still. I AM A GIRL. You'd think girls would come more naturally. Ed was the easiest for me to write. Ellie was the hardest. Scout and Quark were somewhere in between. Thanks for asking your questions. In closing I want to say I had more fun writing this particular book than any other novel I've written. I hope readers will enjoy meeting Ed, Scout, Quark and Ellie as much as I did.