

## **Author to Author with Mindy Friddle**

**The Author: Jennifer Manske Fenske**

**The Book: Toss the Bride (Thomas Dunne Books)**

Jennifer Manske Fenske jokes that “the births” of her debut novel and her first child happened at the same time. Her daughter, Pendleton, arrived in early February, just as her book, “Toss the Bride,” arrived in stores.

Fenske, who graduated from Mauldin High School and the Fine Arts Center in 1990, now lives in Atlanta with her husband and fellow Clemson graduate Jonathan Fenske, a visual artist. A frequent visitor to Greenville, where her parents live in the Hollytree community, Fenske, thirty-four, recently dropped into a downtown coffee shop to discuss her upcoming booktour.

Unable to travel around the time of her pregnancy, Fenske is now visiting bookstores in Greenville, Asheville, Charlotte, Columbia, Anderson, Savannah, and Beaufort, among other places. “I missed a sort of golden period of publicity since the two ‘births’ were so close together, so I decided to catch up with pushing the book now,” she said. Fortunately, May and June is wedding season, the perfect time to promote “Toss the Bride.” The comic novel is about a high-profile wedding planner from Atlanta who specializes in dealing with difficult brides-- while yearning to walk down the aisle herself. “Tossing brides,” is protagonist Maci Fuller’s term for finally getting high-maintenance clients married off.

While in high school, Fenske was sure she wanted to pursue an acting career. She headed to Clemson where she majored in English and minored in theatre. But a writing class spurred a new love: fiction writing. After graduating, she moved to North Carolina where she rented a cabin, waited tables at Grove Park Inn, and set about to write, in her words, “the great American novel.”

She wrote a novel, but it was never published. So Fenske, decided to write another one. But first, she headed off to graduate school, earning her Masters with emphasis in Creative Writing from Stonybrook/SUNY in 1996. She moved back home to Greenville to “work and save money.” While a lifestyle reporter for the Anderson Independent Mail, she interviewed authors such as Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, George Singleton and Ashley Warlick, “and then I would close my reporter’s notebook and ask them about writing and publishing. How did they get started? How did they get an agent?”

In 2000, she moved to Atlanta to work for an online company, but after “the dot com bubble burst,” found herself with a severance package, a new job with a

flexible work schedule at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, and more time to complete her novel.

When she decided to seek an agent, “I sent out query letters to 29 agents and got 29 rejections,” she said. She sent a follow-up letter to one of them, Sally McMillan, thanking her for the helpful comments included in her rejection letter. The thank you note got the agent thinking again about her manuscript, Fenske said, and McMillan decided to represent her.

“I know second chances don’t happen often. I made the revisions she suggested and she took the book on in 2002.” One year later, when it hadn’t sold, her agent told her to think about writing another novel. “She suggested getting my name out there by getting published in some literary magazines.” Fenske took her advice. Her story, “In the Okeyfenokee” appeared in the *Nantahala* in 2003. “My agent read it and told me, ‘this seems like a novel.’ ”

Fenske expanded the story, which eventually became chapter three of “Toss the Bride.” She wrote the first 70 pages and a rough outline and her agent sold the partial manuscript in April 2004 to Thomas Dunne Books, an imprint of St. Martin’s Press.

Her biggest surprise about publishing a book, she said, is “how long it takes.” From 2004 when it was bought, to 2006 when it was published, Fenske had three editors, but has no complaints. “Each editor was fortunately around for each stage of the process. The first editor bought the book. The second saw me through the edits and then the copy edits. My third and current editor has been on board for the publication of *Toss the Bride*.”

Fenske provided feedback about what the book cover should like, she said, since, “I didn’t want a generic bride cover. I didn’t want high heels or shopping bags or purses. I wanted a hint of comedy.” As for being labeled a “chick lit” or women’s author, Fenske says, “I always wrote fairly ‘serious’ fiction before—lots of moody characters and open endings. So, if people feel more comfortable about putting a label on books where a woman seeks answers—usually some sort of happiness—that’s fine with me. I love to write. You can call it whatever you would like. As for me, I call the book a southern novel.”

These days, her mornings start off “with a flurry of phone calls and emails to bookstores and the media for the upcoming tour,” she said. When “not rocking a fussy baby or packing up the diaper bag,” she’s working on her next novel, called “Miss Your Lips Ruth.” “It’s the story of two sisters and I am really having fun working on it. I have written two novels and half of a third. It’s definitely gotten easier. Those first hundred pages of my

unpublished first novel were hard to write. Watching the pages click off as I wrote them seemed to take forever.”

When it comes to writing novels, she says, don’t put your dreams on ice. “You’ll never have enough time or money to write that novel you’ve been dreaming of for years. Start with one page and then write another the next day. And then keep it up.”

*Mindy Friddle is the author of the novel “The Garden Angel” (St. Martin’s Press/Picador.) Visit her website, [www.mindyfriddle.com](http://www.mindyfriddle.com), for more information on writing and publishing.*