



Tatjana Debeljački vs.

Ariana Lyriotakis

interview

Can you tell us something about your hometown and growing up?

I grew up on the North Shore of Long Island, in a community bordering New York City. My parents, sister and I lived in a brown and white Tudor-style house nestled beside a giant blue spruce tree. We used to beg my father to decorate the tree with lights at Christmas, to mimic the famous annual Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center. Summers meant long afternoons frolicking on the expansive sandy beaches of the Atlantic Ocean or catching lightning bugs in jars in my garden after the sun went down. Having grown up in Manhattan, my mother only drove when it was an absolute necessity, so I spent many years of my life walking to shops on the high street, local parks, skating rinks and libraries, hand-in-hand. There was a great love of cooking in our household and it was of utmost importance that we took time to eat dinner as a family each night, sharing bits and pieces of our day. We were very lucky to have access to an excellent public school system in which academics was highly valued alongside arts, culture and athletics.

In your oasis at home you have four lovely children surrounded by love. Whose pets are they more, mother's or father's?

Yes, we have four children: Alina (8); Finnlagh (6); Reed (2); and Jude (9 months). They each have very big personalities and are most definitely the lights of our lives! I would say that our daughter is truly the apple of her father's eye, and it has been wonderful for me to watch their relationship unfold over the years. The boys tend to cling to me a bit more, but I do think that there is a lot of give and take. We tend to be a very closely knit family.

When did you start writing and what inspires you?

I have been writing for as long as I can remember. It started with diaries and journals, and then progressed to poetry and short stories. After university, it became my career as a professional writer and translator. These days, I find that inspiration comes rather organically: I write when I have something to say that I wish to share with others, usually ranging from a variety of topics (politics, motherhood, environment, etc.) Living in Southern California, I am deeply inspired by the stunning landscape as well as by the innovation and excitement of Los Angeles.

When did you publish your first book and how did the success follow later?

Agave Magazine started out just over two years ago and the response from writers, artists and photographers has been really fantastic to experience. At first, the magazine was supposed to be a bi-annual online publication; given the interest generated, we have since expanded to four issues/year (quarterly) and have made all of our issues available in print and by subscription service as well.

Creativity aims to make a mark, to mark the faith in humans and the humane. Does this faith ever leave you?

Yes, indeed. I think that it is a normal part of the process for us to question and at times, for our faith to waver. Social media, for example, is something that makes me stop and reflect. Sometimes, I wonder if we are prioritizing our egos and self-promotion over the act of creativity itself, if whether we are trading our artistic messages for personal legacy.

You have a degree in English Literature and Political Science from McGill?

Yes, I entered McGill University in 1997 and graduated in 2000. I met some of my very best and lifelong friends while I was there, and I am so grateful to have attended. I remember opening my university acceptance letters (at the ripe old age of 17) and it was the only one that had me weeping tears of joy, quite literally. I took that as a sign.

You've earned your master's degree in Twentieth Century Literature from the University of Leeds?

That's right. I began my postgraduate work at the University of Leeds the autumn after I graduated from McGill. The MA in Twentieth Century Literature was a small group, about five of us. We were the first year of that particular MA, so in a way, we felt like pioneers of some sort. It was thrilling and challenging; studying there remains one of the best experiences of my life.

You're a published poet in the USA and Great Britain, and your areas of research are focused on modernism and symbolism?

I have poems scattered in American and British publications, and I hope to soon return to writing poetry on a more regular basis. I really ought to make more time for it, but find that between *Agave Magazine* and our family life, it makes it hard to find the necessary time or the space in which to compose. Modernism is the period in Literature with which I identify the most. The notion of breaking with tradition in order to express new sensibilities is an extremely compelling one; I feel like the writers, artists and luminaries of the modernist period remain unparalleled to this day. *Symbolisme*, as a reaction to Naturalism, is contemporary with modernism, and so I have focused my work on the convergence of the two.

You're particularly interested in the works of the American poet Wallace Stevens, as well as in the themes of identity and language in modern poetry of the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott?

For me, Wallace Stevens embodies the voice of ideas in American poetry. He expertly navigates ecstasy and despair while contextualizing these moments in imagination and reality. His poems are contemplative and philosophical, and his vocabulary is a triumph of the English language. I have studied him extensively, and based my MA Thesis around his aesthetic of evil.

Similarly, Derek Walcott's mastery of language is like no other; as a poet, he sings the song of gratitude. I had read several of his poetry books, but it wasn't until I heard him in person 15 years ago (at an outdoor celebratory reading in NYC) that I knew his particular poetic voice would remain with me forever. He encourages creativity to bloom in the silent spaces between—a retreat into anonymity, as it were.

Agave Magazine is a long-time dream come true in terms of fine literature, art and photography?

Absolutely. I had always had it in the back of my mind to launch a publication of my own, and have been especially fond of mixing genres and forms as well as finding the ways in which various modes of expression intersect and diverge.

Could you tell us something about the magazine you publish? What is its concept and what are the cultural contents of *Agave Magazine*?

Agave Magazine is a print and online publication dedicated to art, literature and photography from global contributors. We love contemporary pieces that offer all the essentials— no more, no less. When we parse through the submissions, it is important to ask questions to see if the pieces fit our criteria and aesthetic. Does the author or artist weave a story or show us a new take for a modern audience? Do they have something valuable to contribute to the discussion? Are they presenting an authenticity of experience worth remembering? We want to publish works with a clear and focused narrative or design, ones which will stay with the reader long after they've turned the last page.

Are you satisfied with the new Editorial team and the new members of *Agave Magazine*?

I am truly happy that the team has come together in such a cohesive way. We are currently putting out our sixth issue, and at this point, our particular roles feel fairly intuitive. Each member of our staff volunteers their time and energies to our

publication. I hope that we will work together as an editorial team for many years to come.

What can you tell us about your work, prizes, journeys and friendships?

Being an editor and a publisher has put many things into perspective. There is a rather steep learning curve—on the one hand, there is bringing the idea from conception to tangible form, and on the other, it is a mixed matter of business management, building relationships and technical savvy. Looking back, I find that I probably was slightly naive and impulsive about the endeavour, in the sense that I just dove in and resolved to keep plodding ahead. I had waited for what seemed a long time (at least to me, anyway) to bring this magazine to fruition—to become an independent publisher—and I wasn't going to let anything stand in my way. I like to call it “foolish determination.”

The one stand out for me, that has been a brilliant surprise, is the number of friendships that have been made between our editorial staff, contributors and creatives from around the world. I never expected for this to be such a deeply intimate experience. We are proud to call many of these individuals personal friends.

Do you think you have outwitted the expectations?

I suppose I feel as though many barriers have been broken down, but that there are many hurdles that still remain. For example, I never expected for us to receive the overwhelming number of submissions that we do, and I am truly humbled that there are writers, artists and photographers who wish to share their words and

images in our pages. I suppose it goes back to the idea that as creatives, the necessity of steady, positive and supportive outlets is paramount.

How do you manage all that with so much work that you do? Do you have time for yourself? What inspires you?

Goodness, it's a balancing act is it? But I think it is that way for most everyone, just depending on what their normal rhythm and routine look like. Honestly, I am sorely lacking in personal time, that much is very true. I get up early in the mornings and stay up quite late, just to fit in all that needs to be done. I try to put solid boundaries between managing my personal family life and my work life, so that neither gets compromised or sacrificed for the sake of the other (at least that would be the ideal).

I find that I am most inspired in moments of solitude, the quiet tracks of time when all the world feels still and my thoughts get to truly find their voice.

Is there anything that you could pinpoint and tell us about yourself between dreams and reality?

Between dreams and reality is an expansive realm of possibility where artistic creation happens. This is a place where ideas flourish and achieve the best outcome that they can. At times it can feel like a sense of longing, a nervous excitement fluttering in my belly that simply cannot wait to be expressed. As creatives, it is our goal to inhabit this space all of the time, but we must also be cognizant of the fact that it is not an instantaneous process.

What are your plans for the future creative work?

I am always writing down lists for future work, hoping that at least 50% of them make it to fruition. At the moment, we are launching Agave Press, our newest extension. In fact, we are just a few weeks away from putting out our first title. Over the coming months, we will be publishing more work, as well as posting a call for manuscripts and portfolios, in consideration for publication in 2016. I think that our readers will definitely see more special projects and collaborations from us in the near future.

Ariana Lyriotakis's career in a few years?

I look forward, with great anticipation, to seeing how the next few years unfold. I imagine that my career will still be following this trajectory, as far as I can tell. But as you well know, whenever you are dealing with creative work, things can change rather rapidly. I suppose I hope to always find enjoyment in the work that I am doing, and to feel continued pride in the creative products we are putting forth into the world. Readers are really the best judge, aren't they?

Have you achieved everything you have ever wanted to and if you could live your life again would you be an artist again?

This is a challenging question. When I was a child, my one dream was to become a mother. I felt as though being a mother was one of the most important jobs in the world, which indeed it is. However, as I grew older and entered adulthood, I realized that there were also so many other broader variations of the dream—ethical and philosophical ones—that came to the fore. At the end of the day, I suppose I understood that I needed to be comfortable in my skin, the knowledge that I have been a good person, and have treated others with dignity, humanity, and positivity. I am overwhelmed with contentment for the life I've gotten to live, and hope that we can always lead a simple, grateful life. As far as personal goals, I do wish to return to university to complete a PhD, sooner rather than later!

If I could live my life again, I would certainly continue to be an artist, but I think perhaps a ballet dancer or an opera singer. I think it would be incredibly thrilling to tell stories through movements, lyrics and music. It's already quite exciting just thinking about it!

Is there anything you would like to say that you think is important and that I haven't asked you ?

I wish to thank-you for giving me this opportunity to chat about Agave and my creative work! Readers can find us online at www.agavemag.com

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Ariana, thank-you! It was a great pleasure talking to you and you are always welcome to our house "Diogen pro culture" magazine.

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