

VOICE AGLOW: IN CONVERSATION WITH ELENA MARTINA

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Provided by Elena Martina

Elena Martina, Born in Peru, she moved to the United States after high school and obtained a psychology degree from Austin Peay State University in Tennessee and a nonprofit management certificate from Duke University in North Carolina. She wrote for several North Carolina newspapers and co-created the successful Spanish language publication Acento Latino. She then switched professions and worked for the U.S. Federal Government for several years. Her 2010 move to California allowed her to return to what she loves best, writing as a columnist and community reporter.

Her book Clinging to Deceit published in 2012 is a fictional novel about an arranged marriage, dowry, love, deceit and murder. Her second novel is fast approaching and it will be published soon. She currently lives in San Jose, California.

Dr. Ajit Kumar has interviewed **Eléna Martina**. She openly shares many things about her writing and answers each question with great patience.

Ajit Kumar: Congratulation for a wonderful debut novel *Clinging to Deceit*.

Eléna Martina: Thank you Ajit. My novel debuted in April 2012 and it has been a great success to me personally.

Ajit Kumar: What made you write? I mean... did it happen during studies or later in life?

Eléna Martina: I was a weekly columnist for several newspapers in North Carolina and have always enjoyed writing. In 2010, I dared myself to write a novel and proudly accomplished it in 2012.

Ajit Kumar: Is there someone who has inspired you to write?

Eléna Martina: Not really. It has been a personal choice for me.

Ajit Kumar: What is the central concept of the novel *Clinging to Deceit*?

Eléna Martina: It is based on the arranged marriage proposal of two young people who are being forced to obey their respective parent's wishes. The characters struggle immensely during the process and their opinion is significant. However, their parents expect to be obeyed without question. The story has touched many readers who never imagined reading about this particular cultural situation. It has opened many eyes about what arranged nuptials mean in another country.

Ajit Kumar: Did you write about dowry in this novel of a marriage?

Eléna Martina: Dowry is a big part of the story and the center piece in everyone's effort in dealing with the agreement. A hefty dowry is offered and paid up front, and it is the reason why the marriage is arranged in the first place. Unfortunately, parents on both sides aren't about family happiness, but greed.

Ajit Kumar: Was there any motif behind presenting the condemned social issues in married life?

Eléna Martina: My novel exposes the nature of young people whose strong individuality goes against their parents' will and the arranged marriage idea. My young female character *Aqqela* wants to please her adoring father and goes along with it, but *Hassan*, the would-be groom does not and wrestles with his thoughts thus putting up a fight against his own family. What you see in televised world news is women generally refusing to play the game of arranged marriages so I changed characterization coming from the young male point of view instead.

Ajit Kumar: Do you think that we still have a male dominated society?

Eléna Martina: It depends what country you're talking about. In the Western world male and female roles are different, but in many other countries roles are still dominated by male-only decision making.

Ajit Kumar: Exactly! According to you, in terms of relations between man and woman, what is love?

Eléna Martina: I made clear that not every country is male dominated. Now, love is a strong romantic feeling that can actually last a life time. The partnering may not last forever due to deliberate choices, but the feeling remains if you have been lucky to have experienced true love.



Ajit Kumar: Do you feel that by adding feminine issues to the novel, you would be able to have good numbers of female readers?

Eléna Martina: My novel doesn't have any overt feminine issues. It rather tells the story of two families who impose their personal and cultural wishes onto their children. It then unravels into family drama, direct violence to relatives, and murder.

Ajit Kumar: People say that you have surprised them with your debut novel, how do you react upon such comments?

Eléna Martina: It is delightful to hear that my novel has impressed them. Every author dream of such reactions from readers! So I'm very pleased. The Amazon book reviews are testimony of how much people liked reading my book.

Ajit Kumar: How do you see arranged marriages?

Eléna Martina: I know folks whose marriages have been arranged and they seem to be content yet other marriages are not happy with their results. It depends on who they are as a couple and if mutual respect is dealt with. Nowadays, I come across high level foreign professionals whose opinion count in arrangements and if the future groom or bride suits their fancy then they go ahead with the planning. It seems to me the pact has gone up a notch and parents try to consider what their children want in a partner.

Ajit Kumar: Which are the traditional customs of marriage which you don't appreciate?

Eléna Martina: I'm all for traditional marriages, however, women have exercised their will to work outside the household and contribute, and men have adapted well to sharing all responsibilities including child rearing. That to me is the best combination.

Ajit Kumar: But how much does it actually work?

Eléna Martina: Marriage is work! Both individuals sacrifice and both roles must be regarded as equally important in a relationship. The power of listening and understanding your mate is fundamental. Sure, there are other significant areas in a marriage that may not work well especially if one drinks or works excessively for example, but that's why marriage counseling is there for.

Ajit Kumar: What about reading as a background for your writing?

Eléna Martina: I prefer reading nonfiction. I do not like reading fictional stories, I simply write them. My writing experience is best done while traveling, not sitting down

reading books about other people's lives or customs. I've lived in four different countries and visited 16 or 17 countries all together and pulled writing styles from all my vacation destinations, and while living abroad. This has gotten me closer to my fictional characters daily experiences.

Ajit Kumar: Romance and betrayal in one book, how did you manage it?

Eléna Martina: A good novel should always have elements that run into each other such as love-hate, happiness-sadness, deaths-births, etc. Contradiction and problem solving is key in a story, it offers a focal point in life struggles interesting.

Ajit Kumar: What do you feel about the fiction being turned out today? Does it share the same virtues as earlier in times?

Eléna Martina: Good question. Fiction today is more intriguing in my opinion. Writers have the element of travel at their hands to improve their writings. I also see far out fiction books such as wolves and vampires and other creatures that boggles my mind... I'm not into that sort of style of writing at all. I do have to say that much earlier writing offered way better syntax and vocabulary!

Ajit Kumar: How would you love to be called... I mean as a romance writer or feminist writer?

Eléna Martina: A creative novelist.

Ajit Kumar: Do you feel that fiction is the best form of literature? Why did you feel fiction instead of drama or poetry?

Eléna Martina: Fiction writing is great for me. It allows me to take people to places they'd never imagine going. I also enjoy placing fictional characters in situations that readers might identify with or feel enticed to follow. I like writing drama and characters who feel challenged by out of comfort decisions.

Ajit Kumar: Do you think that your turning to be an author is a right decision?

Eléna Martina: I do not plan to author books for the rest of my life. Writing is something that I enjoy doing now, but it is not a permanent career move at this time and I'm free to change my mind in the future though.

Ajit Kumar: How do you feel being a novelist in U.S.A.?

Eléna Martina: There are millions of novelists in the U.S. I do not feel strange about that. Being a published author is an accomplished goal that makes one proud.

Ajit Kumar: Any future plans? I mean...what readers should expect next from you?



Eléna Martina: Readers should expect to be surprised by my novels. I do not conform to a specific story line or sequels so my next books should be interesting to all. By the way, my next novel is the story of a father and his son who commit murder at different times. It's about abandonment, family strain relations and self-actualization.

Ajit Kumar: Any message you would like to give to your readers?

Eléna Martina: Yes, first and foremost, thank you Ajit for this wonderful interview! And to my readers, thank you for your readership and if you enjoy my stories please review them on Amazon and give it kudos! Also, you can find me on Twitter and Facebook so let us connect through those online modes soon.