



## Q & A with Francine Rivers Author of *The Masterpiece*



*New York Times* bestselling author **Francine Rivers** has published numerous novels—all bestsellers—and she has continued to win both industry acclaim and reader loyalty around the globe. Her Christian novels have been awarded or nominated for many honors and in 1997, after winning her third RITA Award for inspirational fiction, Francine was inducted into the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame. In 2015, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW). Francine's novels have been translated into over 30 different languages, and she enjoys bestseller status in many foreign countries. She and her husband, Rick, enjoy spending time with their children and grandchildren.

***New York Times* bestselling author Francine Rivers returns to her romance roots with this unexpected and redemptive love story, a probing tale that reminds us that mercy can shape even the most broken among us into an imperfect yet stunning masterpiece.**

A successful LA artist, Roman Velasco appears to have everything he could possibly want—money, women, fame. Only Grace Moore, his reluctant, newly hired personal assistant, knows how little he truly has. The demons of Roman's past seem to echo through the halls of his empty mansion and out across his breathtaking Topanga Canyon view. But Grace doesn't know how her boss secretly wrestles with those demons: by tagging buildings as the Bird, a notorious but unidentified graffiti artist—an alter ego that could destroy his career and land him in prison.

Like Roman, Grace is wrestling with ghosts and secrets of her own. After a disastrous marriage threw her life completely off course, she vowed never to let love steal her dreams again. But as she gets to know the enigmatic man behind the reputation, it's as if the jagged pieces of both of their pasts slowly begin to fit together . . . until something so unexpected happens that it changes the course of their relationship—and both their lives—forever.

**1. You often say that each of your novels is prompted by a faith-related question. What question inspired *The Masterpiece*? Were there particular Scripture verses or stories that guided your writing of this novel?**

The question that came up for me was whether two people from severely dysfunctional backgrounds could have a healthy relationship. Grace and Roman both come from abusive childhood experiences and developed different coping mechanisms to survive. The past often intrudes and sometimes blocks people from moving forward, but we are all ultimately responsible for the choices we make. Each of us must decide who Jesus is. That choice decides where we spend eternity. It also makes a difference in our life in the here and now. When abuse occurs, a child's view of God is twisted. That raises other questions. What might need to happen to open the door to the true God and faith in Him? What if someone grows up knowing nothing of God other than as a curse? I had questions enough for



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several books, and wallowed around in the mire through several drafts. Hence, so did my characters. Grace and Roman are each on different journeys. What brings them together and what keeps them apart? I was well into the project before I knew which Scripture God was showing me: Ephesians 2:10—“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” This is the heart of the book.

### **2. What kind of research did you do for this novel? Did any findings particularly surprise you?**

Most of my research had to do with the patterns and psychology of victims of abuse. It wasn’t pleasant reading. It’s heart-wrenching. I didn’t want to misrepresent survivors of abuse. I talked with a friend who is a strong Christian, highly educated, and a certified family counselor. She suggested I present my characters to a group of counselors who meet once a week. When we all gathered, I explained my dilemma and presented my “case studies.” One gentleman cried and said he’d worked with young men exactly like Roman Velasco. Grace’s emotional trauma and means of coping are also common.

I also needed to learn about graffiti artists. I started with online searches and then met a young man who had been a gang tagger in the Bay Area. We talked about his motivations, experiences, and the dangers he faced, not the least of which was leaving the gang. I found a website with terms and definitions regarding graffiti. I also read some books about the young man’s idol, Banksy. No one knows the identity of Banksy, but his work is known around the world. I liked the mystery element and employed it.

The surprise came after the book was written and I had the opportunity to meet Cameron Moberg, a Christian graffiti artist in San Francisco. He does work around the world, as well. He reaffirmed what I saw happening in Roman Velasco’s life. Cameron’s art is also on the cover of *The Masterpiece*. Many of his works are of spectacular, imagined birds. How could I not see God chuckling at how He brings things together?

### **3. Your novels look deeply into characters’ motivations and emotions. What do you hope readers will learn from delving into the inner thoughts of the characters in *The Masterpiece*?**

Sometimes the hardest-hearted person you know is the most broken inside. All too often, we judge by the outward appearance, but God knows the heart. Also, even when we don’t see God at work, He is working. Never give up on anyone. Just keep praying and walking the walk. You never really know what’s going on inside someone. The blessing is you may witness the creation of a new God-ordained masterpiece.



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4. **The main characters of *The Masterpiece*, edgy artist Roman Velasco and his new personal assistant, single mom Grace Moore, might not receive a warm welcome in every church across the country. What do you want readers to see in these characters—and in themselves—as they read?**

Never judge by outward appearances. It takes courage for people to come into a new church—or enter a church for the first time. Christians are, after all, “aliens,” very different from the world—or should be. Visitors and newcomers may look different than we do. They may come from different places. If people seem unapproachable, offer a smile and nod of greeting. Give them space. Give them time. Extend courtesy and welcome to all. And when the door opens, talk with them about Jesus—not just inside the walls of a church, but anywhere.

5. **Roman Velasco is unlike any other male character you’ve written. What was most challenging about crafting the character of a rebel graffiti artist? Why did you choose this character?**

I thought the hardest part in writing about Bobby Ray Dean/the Bird/Roman Velasco was going to be learning about the art form, challenges in doing it and getting away with it, terms and materials. But the real challenge was figuring out what drove this boy/man to paint graffiti—and the kind of graffiti pieces he did.

We have crews in town that go out and buff (cover) graffiti as soon as possible. Many times, graffiti is a territorial marker, a challenge, evidence of war going on in your community. I wanted Bobby Ray Dean to have other motivations which evolve as he grows up and into the persona of Roman Velasco. He feels illegitimate as the Bird, but strives for legitimacy through Roman Velasco. The graffiti and the canvas work he does show the war going on inside him. It takes God to bring the two sides together and blend the mediums into a new, unique art quest and passion.

6. **Did memories of your writing career “before Christ” inspire how you wrote the art career of Roman Velasco?**

In some ways, yes. Before I became a Christian, I wrote steamy historical romances in the general market. Those books and the years of working on them taught me a lot about the craft of writing. When I gave my life to Christ, God used all that training for His good purpose when I began writing *Redeeming Love*. Certain elements stayed the same: the setting—early California history—and a passionate love story. The difference was the focus of the novel. It was all about how high, deep, and wide God’s love is for each of us. Jesus was a central “character” in the story, whispering to Michael, who strove to live out his faith



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in front of Angel, a broken child of God whose soul had been deeply damaged by the abuse of others. Brokenness, healing, and redemption are consistent themes in my work.

7. **The names of your characters often carry special significance—can you tell us how you have gone about naming characters in the past and, without giving too much away, tell us a little about how you chose the names of the characters in *The Masterpiece*?**

Grace's full name tells her life story. I admit there is no great spiritual meaning to Roman's names. I liked the sound of Bobby Ray Dean. His initials—BRD—and where he did his graffiti work created the second name: the Bird. And secondary characters in the story came up with the name Roman Velasco. They were joking about it, but Bobby Ray takes on the name and uses it to launch a new life.

8. **What does *The Masterpiece* have in common with your other novels? How is it unique?**

Every story I've written contains a love story. This book has that in common with all my others. However, in other stories, I've had one main character be strong in faith. The difference in this novel, both people are broken and struggling. Grace is the Christian, but she has fallen several times, and suffered greatly for it. Her faith is an uphill, arduous climb. Roman adds to that battle. They both come from traumatic childhood experiences that have shaped their lives. The strong Christian voices in this story come from secondary characters.

9. **What do you hope your readers come to know about God through this story?**

I want readers to know that no matter who you are, where you come from, what you've done, when you accept Jesus, God will make you into His masterpiece.



***The Masterpiece* by Francine Rivers**

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