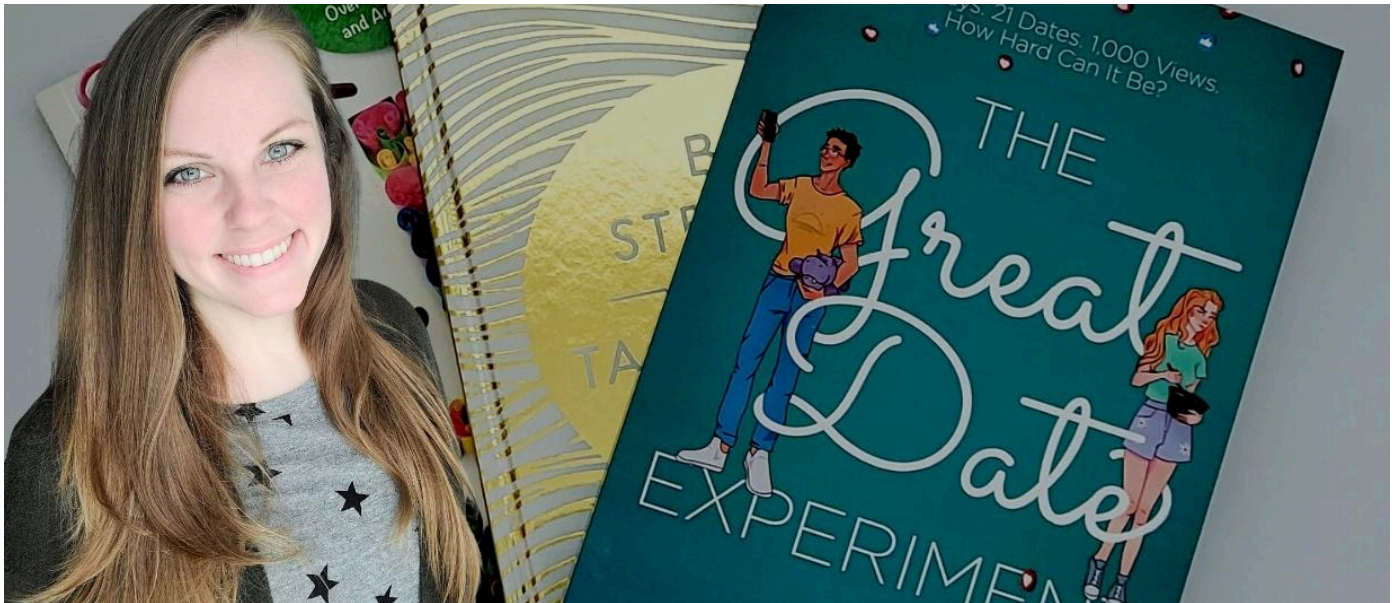


**ALUMNI**

## Author Ashley Mays' Love for Writing Ignited in GWU English Classes

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### National Novel Writing Month (<https://nanowrimo.org/>) Encourages 2007 Alumna and Others to Bring Their Words to Life

Ashley Mays, a 2007 alumna of Gardner-Webb University, recently published her first Young Adult Fiction Novel, "[The Great Date Experiment](https://ashley-mays.com/) (<https://ashley-mays.com/>). It's an achievement she has worked toward since the fourth grade, when she realized her love for writing while preparing for the state writing test. Her interest in literature deepened in middle school, because her mom became a librarian, and Mays went there after school.



▲ Ashley Mays celebrates the release of her first novel.

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“It was like having my own personal library,” she reminisced. “I’m pretty sure I read every book published between 1996 and 2003, everything was right there for me. It was special for (my mom) too, because she got to see me all the time, and we got to enjoy this space filled with books.”

When she began her college search, she visited numerous schools in nearby states. At Gardner-Webb, she saw the climbing wall and said, “I’m in. I love rock climbing. You know God gets you where He wants you and however He needs to. I did rock climbing for my PE credit. It definitely ended up being the best place for me. I found my community there. One of my roommates from Gardner-Webb is still one of my best friends today.”

She continued, “I found an English department that cared about me as a person. I ended up being able to do my work study in the English department. I got to know them all really well and felt like they were a family to me. I loved spending time there.”

Mays discovered her passion for Young Adult Fiction in the second semester of her senior year. Her interest in the genre was so intense that she threw out the thesis she had worked on the previous semester to begin a new one that focused on self-image and relationships in Young Adult Fiction.

“I loved that young adult fiction class; that was hands down my favorite class my entire career at Gardner-Webb,” Mays affirmed. “It was so much fun to be able to sit and read young adult fiction and talk about it in class. We had such a great time.”

Her professor and mentor was Dr. Gayle Bolt Price, who passed away in 2012. “I studied Young Adult Fiction from the 1940s all the way through the early 2000s,” Mays explained. “It was really fun to get her perspective and hear her thoughts and her understanding of the time and the literature and how it evolved and how it changed.”

What Mays learned that semester and in her previous classes as an English creative writing major, formed the foundation for her career as an author. In addition to her first novel, she has authored two non-fiction books for Zondervan.



Mays is a self-proclaimed pantsner—a term used for authors who write by the seat of their pants. “I don’t plot anything out,” she confessed. “I just kind of put the words out there and see what happens. When I started writing the book, I had no idea where it was going. It took me about two months to write the whole thing and then I went back and it took me another six months to fix all of my plot holes—the things that happen when you don’t plot ahead of time.”

While she doesn’t have a plot when she begins a new book, she does set writing goals. I have a daily word count that I like to hit for myself, and I do that six days a week; for me, it’s 1,200 words a day,” she related. “It’s important to have a daily goal. You can’t just sit and wait for inspiration to hit you, you have to work at it. Sometimes that means really bad content, but that’s OK. You’ve just got to get in the sandbox and throw stuff up there and see what happens.”

She said the first few times she sits down to work on a new project, it takes more time to reach her daily word count. “It’s like my brain is fighting me the whole way there, and I’m just trying to make it happen, but the longer I do it the speedier I can get,” Mays described. “In November, it’s called National Novel Writing Month (<https://nanowrimo.org/>). (NaNoWriMo) and a lot of writers do it. It’s crazy, we all try to write 60,000 words in a month. It’s a lot and it’s significant, especially over Thanksgiving, but I usually find at the beginning of NaNoWriMo I’m a lot slower. At the end, I’m like, ‘Just get it out there.’ It’s definitely a process.”

## WebbChat with Ashley Mays

Listen to the following interview with Ashley to learn more about the inspiration for her first novel, *Moonpies*, her non-fiction books, her Gardner-Webb experience and the advice she would give her 17-year-old self.