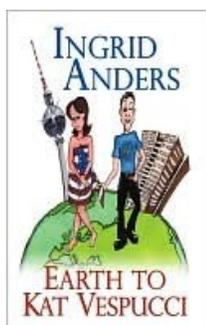


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(formatting has been modified from original context)

13 September 2011

Earth to Kat Vespucci: Review & Author Interview



Goodreads synopsis: What do you do when your sweetheart of five years dumps you for someone else before your senior year of college? Flee the country, obviously. A Jersey girl through and through, Kat Vespucci is a conservative American college student who escapes a nasty break-up by spending her senior year studying abroad in Berlin, Germany. She really wanted to travel to London, but her parents insisted she learn something about her roots. Having rarely left her home state of New Jersey, let alone traveled to a foreign country, Kat is completely unprepared for what lies ahead. Strange European customs, classmates from the former Eastern Bloc, anti-Americanism, German bureaucracy, history she's never heard of, and the persistent flasher who lurks in her neighborhood, all catch Kat by surprise. Meanwhile, she searches for her Uncle Otto, a relative the family hasn't seen since the war. At first, she feels like a house cat dropped into a lair of lions, yet she somehow manages to land and stay on her feet. Earth to Kat Vespucci is a comic, coming-of-age story about a young woman who does not discover herself and where she comes from until she leaves.

Kat Vespucci is a spunky Jersey girl who dreams of the world beyond her beloved Garden State. She heads to Berlin to see what the world has in store for her and the result is a coming

of age novel full of humor, insight, and drama.

Readers are thrust into the action of the novel straight from the first page, where we meet Kat as she is on what is most certainly the world's most awkward flight. Wedged between an overly friendly Russian little league coach and his team of feisty pre-teens on the long flight from Newark to Berlin, Kat has little time to relax or reflect before her adventures in Berlin begin. Through several flashbacks, we learn that Kat has survived a bad breakup, an embarrassing yet sentimental going away party, and three years of college. Now, in her senior year, she is ready to put her major in German to some use by taking on a study abroad program, an internship, and a quest to find a missing uncle.

Ingrid Anders' style is crisp and dry, her pacing perfect, and her characterization colorful and deft. Kat's snarky wit will keep readers chuckling and characters like Fritz and Uncle Otto round out a cast of characters worthy of their own reality show (if only they weren't fictional). The brilliant thing about this book is that in between the tales of internship nightmares and roommate drama lie lessons on the importance of staying true to one's self and the dangers of unchecked nationalism. As much of a coming of age story as it is a call to get out and see the world beyond our own front door, *Earth to Kat Vespucci* is a story that will appeal to anyone who has ever wanted to break free from the ordinary.

I'm lucky to have had the opportunity to chat with Ingrid Anders about traveling, writing, and what's next for Kat Vespucci. Here's the transcript of our conversation.

As I was reading ETKV, I realized that to classify the novel by assigning it a specific genre would be a daunting task. There is a generous amount of humor mixed with romance, self-discovery, mystery, history, and geography. In other words, there is something for everyone. Did you set out to write a cross-genre novel?

That is a great observation. I did not particularly set out to write a cross-genre novel as much as capture the vast array of experiences Kat had in Germany. As any traveler knows, the moment you leave home you encounter a myriad of mindset-challenges that work at you from every angle. That is what I was trying to portray in ETKV.

Parts of the book read as an ode to New Jersey, for all its good and bad. Kat has to deal with the stigma often associated with being from The Garden State. Was it important to you to defend your home state through your character?

Ha! I'm glad you saw it as me defending my home state. I think it was a combination of setting the record straight and poking fun at New Jersey. As a Garden State native, I never thought about what it meant to be from New Jersey until I left. That's when I discovered that people outside New Jersey have very strong opinions about people inside New Jersey ... with varying degrees of having been to New Jersey. People from New Jersey find themselves continually defending/explaining/joking about New Jersey until it just becomes automatic. Eventually, being a Jersey Girl infiltrates everything you do.

Like Kat, you've lived and worked in Berlin. How much of your experience in Germany informed Kat's character?

I love this question. The answer is all of it and none of it. I could never have written the novel if I hadn't myself lived and interned in Berlin. The novel also incorporates things I observed when studying abroad in Freiburg, Germany and visiting relatives in Stuttgart, Augsburg, and Munich. However, nothing that happens to Kat in the novel happened to me in the same way. For example, when I lived in Berlin, I had two female roommates from America and France. But Kat gets to live with the fabulous Fritz, which is a wholly more entertaining arrangement than I had in reality.

Throughout the novel, Kat struggles with coming to terms with who she is and who she was, whether through working out relationship issues or struggling to reconcile her faith with her choices. She transforms throughout the story. Do you hope that young girls who read ETKV would see her as an inspiration or role model?

Kat Vespucci as a role model ... hmmm. What I hope for Kat is that she 1) makes people laugh, 2) teaches people something about the world, and 3) motivates people to travel themselves. So, yes, when you consider point number three, I do hope she inspires people, but not before first just brightening their day.

Besides Kat, Fritz is my favorite character. He is the one who helps Kat see points of view other than her own. How important was it to you when writing this story to tackle ideas of nationalism and single-mindedness?

Extremely important! So very important. Kat is lucky that she has Fritz, someone she respects and trusts, to point out in his jovial manner these negative traits in her. Unfortunately for some of the other characters, such as Nat and Matt, they have to come to the realization at the behest of sardonic Lambert. Needless to say, it is not as pleasant an experience for them, but it is lots of fun for us readers.

The cast of characters in ETKV is quite diverse. Which character was your favorite to write?

Oh my Gosh, I love them all, from the fabulous Fritz to the cantankerous Frau Tintenpinkler. These characters are my offspring. If you forced me to choose, at best I could give you my top-five favorites. In addition to the aforementioned Fritz and Frau Tintenpinkler, the list would read: Mrs. Vespucci, Billy, Thor, Frau Schindler, and Uncle Otto. If you asked me again tomorrow, the list would be different.

What message would you hope for your readers to take away from this story?

Get out of here! Go away! Go global. If Kat Vespucci can do it, so can you.

Kat will travel to Taiwan for her next adventure. What can you tell us about the new book?

Oooh. I've just finished Chapter Eighteen of Kat Vespucci and the Renegade Province and I couldn't be more excited about it. Obviously, I don't want to reveal too much, but what I can tell you is that Kat finds herself teaching English in Taipei, Taiwan and she is dating a fantastic Taiwanese guy, who hasn't yet told her that his family is arranging his marriage. (Not to her.) How will she handle it? What will she learn? Who will the joke be on when all is said and done? I hope to finish the manuscript by the end of this year. Then the editing and publishing process begins. Stay tuned to www.ingridanders.com for updates.

Once you've gotten your own copy of *Earth to Kat Vespucci*, add your photo to the Kat Vespucci Around the World photo album on the author's Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.187207419480.119456.171617419480>

See Ms. Anders discussing her travels and her book here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clOVd9qM96M>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUZvFoH7rPk&feature=related>

Thanks once again to Ingrid Anders for allowing me to pick her brain. Congratulations on being shortlisted for the William Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition in the category of "Novel-in-Progress" for the upcoming *Kat Vespucci and the Renegade Province*.

(This review and interview can be viewed in its original context here:

<http://www.mymercurialmusings.com/2011/09/earth-to-kat-vespucci-review-author.html>.)