

## Interview with Susan B. Johnson

**Interviewer:** What inspired you to write *Savannah's Little Crooked Houses: If These Walls Could Talk*?

**SBJ:** My husband and I bought a cottage in the oldest, loveliest part of Savannah, and one day as I stood looking out my front window, the thought occurred that more than two-hundred years ago some woman stood in this very spot looking out this same window. I wanted to know who she was, what she saw, and what her life was like. So I began researching the history of my house and found the process totally addictive. Despite all the books that have been written about Savannah's elegant, old homes, nobody had ever written about the dozen or so antebellum cottages like mine. I researched them for nearly three years before I actually began to write the book.

**Interviewer:** Why did you choose *Savannah's Little Crooked Houses* as the book's title?

**SBJ:** My children loved nursery rhymes, especially the one that goes, "There was a crooked man who went a crooked mile. He found a crooked sixpence . . ." If you recall, the last line is ". . .and they all lived together in a little crooked house." I found the poem a wonderful metaphor for what I was doing. The "crooked mile" represented the circuitous path of research. "Sixpences" were still in use in the late 1700's when my house was built. And of course all of Savannah's old cottages have floors that slant a bit, door and windows that are slightly askew.

**Interviewer:** At what point in your life did you realize you wanted to be a writer?

**SBJ:** Of all the Christmas gifts I received the year I turned six, the one that thrilled me most was a one-year diary with a lock and key. I wrote my first short story that year—



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about a princess who lived alone in a tower and spent a lot of time sitting on her “thorne.” (A great speller I wasn’t.) Years later it hit me—that story was an allegory about me—the princess. The tower represented the solitude for which every writer craves. Clearly, the “thorne” on which the princess sat represented the pain in the ass of sitting at a computer hour after hour, day after day.

**Interviewer:** People are always interested in how writers work. Will you tell us a bit about your writing habits—and perhaps a word about any present projects?

**SBJ:** My energy level is highest in the morning, so my day often begins about 6 a.m. I usually work at my desk for a couple of hours while the house is in dark and quiet. Then I walk four vigorous miles around Forsyth Park—sometimes listening to audio books on my iPod and sometimes just thinking about my current manuscript. I’m usually back at my computer by ten o’clock, and I write until about 2 p.m. By that time I’m tapped out and ready to do something else.

I’m working on book number three—another novel—and I have completed drafts of two others, but I need distance from them before the serious editing begins.