



## Over Two Dozen Things You Never Knew About Me, L. J. Smith

I took these questions from a class project questionnaire emailed to me by a young fan. Then I added a couple of questions on my own. Fun facts are in bold blue type!

### What is your birthday? When were you born?

My birthday is September 4. When I was born is a secret but it was in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and on my father's birthday! **I was a surprise birthday present for my dad!**

### Do you have any siblings?

**I have one sister, born Judy Lee Smith.** She is married to Peter, who is a Stage IV (the worst stage) malignant melanoma survivor. It took Peter over eight years, but he is a champion, and he beat the disease that melanoma boards call "The Beast" because the survival rate is so low. He had many operations and constant bio- or biochemotherapy or vaccine therapy. He even drank raspberry smoothies each day because raspberries are supposed to boost your immune system! **Peter recently received a Courage Award from one of his doctors who has become famous for his revolutionary biochemotherapy, Dr. Steven J. Oday.**

### Do you have nieces or nephews or cousins?

One niece and one nephew, from my sister Judy. **They are Lauren and Brian, and I am as proud of them as if they were my own.** I have literally dozens of cousins, from both sides of my family, and they are all wonderful. I plan to visit my paternal cousins who live on the Eastern coast once STRANGE FATE is finished.

### **What are the names of your parents?**

My parents are Glenn Carroll Smith and Kathryn Jane Cecilia Smith. (The Jane in my name comes from my late mother. My mother died over five years ago, far too young, of lung cancer. *Do not smoke! You WILL regret it.*) My mother was a Catholic and took on the name of St. Cecilia at her confirmation. **But because my father was a Protestant, they didn't get to have a big wedding! They had to elope, because my mother's family was opposed to a non-Catholic marrying their daughter!** The wedding picture of my mom and dad shows them both in nice clothing, but no bridal gown or tuxedo!

### **What are the names of your grandparents?**

My mother's parents are John G. Check, Jr. and Mary Check. My father's parents are William Heartwell "Heart" Smith and Lucy Lee Smith (my sister's middle name is from her). **My maternal grandfather's father stowed away at the age of thirteen on a boat from Czechoslovakia and when he entered Liberty Island his name was so complicated that they just dubbed him "Check."** He started as a coal miner, but made a fortune to pass down to my grandfather. My Grandfather Smith lost all his money in the Great Depression of the 1930's, but my father went to college on a football scholarship. **My dad could have become a professional football player, but before that he joined a partner in an engineering venture and made his own fortune.** He's even got several engineering patents!

### **Where did you grow up?**

**In sad sunny superficial southern California.** By the time I was a toddler my family had moved there, after living in Florida and Arizona. I spent my years up to fifth grade on Transit Avenue in the town of Anaheim (where Disneyland is!). **One big bonus of living so close to Disneyland, my sister and I always took all our friends there for our birthday parties.**

Almost every street on the block had kids my age or a little younger or older, and we all played hide and seek and other games in the evenings, boys and girls together. The girls played "princesses" with the flower girl gowns my Great-Aunt Agnes sent me. She owned a bridal shop and spoiled me and my sister completely. **I would make up stories and the girls in their lovely pastel flower girl gowns would act them out. Even then I was all for strong girls and we rescued princes and carried them from danger on our white horses.** We never played "brides" because romance had no real interest for me, although I had "boyfriends" from kindergarten on.

### **Who was your first boyfriend?**

William Bronson Pittman, Jr., if I recall correctly. We hooked up in kindergarten and planned to get married. **We would tramp down overgrown weeds in a field by the elementary school and dub the flat areas rooms in our house.** But sadly, we were too young at age five, and it was not to be. :)

### **Where did you go to school?**

First at Juliette Low Elementary School in Anaheim, now sadly torn down. (I used to love to visit it well into high school and it broke my heart to see it razed to the ground.) I attended from kindergarten to fifth grade there. I was a Brownie (Juliette Low was the founder of the Girl Scouts) and in a special program GOAL, Guide Our Able Learners, which kept me after school a day or two a week. **In GOAL we did such cool things as tide-pool fieldtrips (California has a lot of beaches and none of them were toxic when I was growing up) and wire and dripped wax sculptures.** My father still has a thick-wire and wax sculpture I did of him swinging a tennis racket. He absolutely loved to play tennis until his football injuries gave him a bad back, with five ruptured vertebrae.

Then, in sixth grade, a heartbreaking, ground-shaking transfer away from all my friends to a new school: Serrano Elementary. Fortunately there was a nice little girl my age in the house across the street from my house, and we'd walk to the school together.

I attended Cerro Villa Junior High School, just a block up from my house, and then Villa Park High school, just a block down. I didn't have a lot of acquaintances, but a few very close friends, whom I cherished. **Villa Park High also produced Dean Koontz, the famous horror novel writer!** However, since he was born in 1945, I don't think we had any of the same teachers.

In between high school and college I lived for a while with a partner of my father's in the U.K. I had a wonderful time with my foster-family in the little town of Goring-on-Thames, and they took me on a grand tour of first Scotland, then Wales. **Of course I instantly fell in love with the U.K. and with the older boy in the family, Christopher.** He and I went many places together, and were happy, whether punting on the Thames or watching plays or visiting museums. He later became a barrister (lawyer).

The first college I attended was Mills College which was strictly a women's school back then. I didn't like that! I was very unhappy there, and so the next year I went where several friends (including Mike, a junior high boyfriend) attended, U. C. Santa Barbara. **U.C.S.B. lived up to its name as a party school, but I graduated with honors; a double major in English and Physiological Psychology.**

I then moved back up to the Bay Area to get my master's in Physiological Psychology at "Cal": U. C. Berkeley. **But I had to do experiments on monkeys and mice and then "sacrifice" (kill) the animals to biopsy their brains. I couldn't stand it!** This was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. In addition, the brand-new house I had rented went down the hill it was perched on in a mudslide while the Bay Area experienced record rains and wind. I lost many possessions when that house went down the hill, because the moving van company my housemate and I hired was terrified that the weight of their truck would cause the hill to crumble beneath it. **I got out with only a fraction of my material goods, and my cat, Scoundrel.**

After that year, I transferred to San Francisco State College to get my master's in education and two teaching degrees, in regular and special education. **Although THE NIGHT OF THE SOLSTICE came out that year, it sold so poorly that I was sure I would be a teacher for life.** I graduated with all honors, and immediately got a job in a small town north of the house I shared with my sister and a friend.

My first year of teaching was hideous, as I had over forty children, a number of them special-ed, in a room built for twenty-five. The weather had turned to record highs, and all through the fall and into "winter" **I taught in over 100 degree weather with no air-conditioning, and heat emanating from forty small bodies crammed together like sardines.** But once I learned how to handle a class of unruly children, I had a much better time, and by my third year, I was voted my school's "Teacher of the Year." By then HEART OF VALOR had also come out, to even more disappointing sales. I couldn't understand why Macmillan was marketing my YA books to a middle-grade (for 9 to 11-year-olds) audience. The vocabulary alone was enough to ensure that a child of nine, ten or eleven wouldn't understand the books. **I didn't know then, and my, um, "subpar" agent didn't tell me that what was hot for YA at the time was not pure fantasy novels, but scary supernatural ones. I've learned since: look at the market.**

Just as I was beginning my fourth year teaching, I got a call from what is now Alloy Entertainment. Elise Donner, an editor there, had read my books and thought I might be able to

do a special task for them: to write an “upscale” vampire trilogy. She just wanted to check if I could write romance. **So I hung up, went to my computer and in twenty minutes wrote the scene from the first VAMPIRE DIARIES book where Elena, Meredith, and Bonnie are decorating the gym, and Elena meets Damon when the power goes off and almost kisses him.** The scene went into the book virtually unchanged except for the season—I turned it from a Christmas Dance into the Halloween Haunted House that they were measuring for. I faxed my scene to Elise and was immediately given the job.

There was just one other thing about doing the trilogy. **I had to produce three books in nine months.** I knew I could do it. A book every three months—but my mind was on fire with ideas. Plus, I had a manuscript for an adult supernatural book with a love triangle that I was writing. To meet my deadlines, I took the characters and plots from my adult book and altered them to fit into a YA vampire trilogy. I made all the deadlines (barely) but **I didn’t get to see the edits on the third book, THE FURY, because I had to leave on a long-planned vacation to the far east, where I was to visit Japan, China, Thailand, and Singapore, among other countries.**

### **How old were you when you found out that you wanted to be an author?**

I was a year old, I think. Or maybe earlier. **At eight months I knew all the letters of the alphabet out of sequence.** But I didn’t learn to read until I went to school. What I did learn to do was to make up stories and even some “poems.” **As far back as I can remember, I told pretend stories to whoever would listen, and I insisted on having stories told to me.** When there was no one else to tell stories to I would pretend by myself, or listen to my Disney records. Once when my father was telling me a story I asked him to “turn it over,” hoping there was a better story on the other side.

### **Do you have any children?**

No, but all the children I taught, from my days as a teen volunteering at what is now The Speech and Language Center of Buena Park, to my teaching job in my twenties, were all in a way my children, and when my brother-in-law was ill I like to feel I took part in raising my niece and nephew, of whom I am extremely proud.

### **Are you married, and to who?**

Never married, never divorced. **Perhaps because I never met an unmarried man who could measure up to the ideal bad boyz in my head. No Damon, Ash, Quinn, Julian, or Gabriel has ever come my way.**

### **When did you finish your first book?**

In my second year of college. But since I didn’t have an agent and was also one-third too long for the publishers, it took a long time to sell. **I hand-wrote the entire book in eight or nine college-ruled notebooks (those were the days before everyone had a computer; although I did get my first computer later in college.** It was a PC without Windows. Why do I always pick the wrong option? Betamax, eight-track tapes, PCs, dumb phones . . . it’s a gift.

### **Did you get any inspiration for The Vampire Diaries, and from what or whom?**

See above. I will add that I also researched everything I could find on the Internet or in bookstores about “real” vampires. I learned all the legends; then made up my own version. **The ideas of a token to allow vampires to walk in sunlight; that they don’t sleep in coffins; that they don’t have an afterlife; that they do have mirror-reflections, that only white ash can hurt Old Ones ... I created all those back in 1990.** The idea of The Soulmate Principle for NIGHT WORLD was published in 1996.

### **How old were you when your first book was published?**

In college. See above. I can remember to this day how horrified I was when I tore the paper off the package and saw the cover. I called my mother, hysterical. “Alys is black with yellow hair! Fell Andred, the house, is a spaceship, with solid beams of light sticking out like spikes!” And I have never heard anyone disagree with me that the cover alone was enough to set people running. **I even had a librarian who adored the book and invited me to join in the New Inklings, a club for writers who idolized J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, tell me she almost didn’t read the book because of the cover.** Macmillan gave me a lovely cover for the sequel, but by then it was too late. Despite great reviews, these books never sold until I became the bestselling author of THE VAMPIRE DIARIES in 1990. After that, they too became bestsellers.

### **Do you have any other works on your mind?**

**I am almost finished with a book that is already five hundred pages long: THE LAST LULLABY.** You can preview it in the Stories section on [www.ljanesmith.net](http://www.ljanesmith.net) under the name of STRANGE FATE: Brionwy’s Lullaby. It started as part of STRANGE FATE but the characters burst out of that book into a work of their own. **I am also completing STRANGE FATE, with Ash’s adventures filling in the spots where I have cut out the LULLABY characters. Ash, of course is trying to atone for his evil deeds in the past so that Mary-Lynnette will honor the Soulmate Principle which is trying to pull them together.** (See DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS, in the second omnibus of the NIGHT WORLD series.)

**THE LAST LULLABY is the story of Brionwy, daughter of Branwen, a courtesan in the harem of the Head Overseer, Rajan Aroraa, who is the head of a Great House under the rule of the Masters.** In this post-Apocalypse story, magic exists, but is rarely seen. Brionwy befriends Crispy, a young girl, or fawn, who has escaped from the pens in which all but the serving slaves of the Overseer, the guards, and the “humble and pathetic” Beauties in the harem are kept like animals.

Crispy has named herself for the burns that cover half of her body and have withered one of her arms. She considers herself slightly abled because of her arm; it looks useless but is almost as strong as the other. **Tough, cynical, and quick to laugh at herself or others, Crispy’s life changes the day that she peeps through a hole in the harem wall and listens to Brionwy playing her lute and singing a heart-rending lullaby.** Together, the two girls who come from the most different upbringings imaginable, and with the help of Crispy’s gang of dwarfed, misshapen, deaf, and otherwise *abled* misfits, solve the mystery of an ancient proverb that leads to the secret of the nearby caverns and how to fight the Masters. They need all the courtesans they can recruit when they find that an abomination is growing in the caverns. **Despite the fearsome Guntra, Head Dwenna of Brionwy’s Pavilion; despite the Overseer himself, Brionwy and Crispy find themselves leading a revolution that will change the lives of all who belong to the Overseer’s Great House forever.**