

Not your mother's romances any more

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ThisWeek Contributor



Becky Barker

Mount Sterling author Becky Barker, whose *Silhouette Intimate Moments, Undercover Virgin*, hit the stores in time for Valentine's Day, greets readers in a romance event celebrating the nation's best-selling fiction genre.

On Feb. 21, Barker joins historical romance author Janet Lynnford and multi-cultural romance author Alicia Wiggins at the Lennox Town Barnes & Noble store to discuss why -- with the increase in sensuality, stress on female empowerment and variety of subgenres -- these popular books aren't your mother's romances any more.

The free event includes author Q&A, as well as chocolate and door prizes. Barker sold her first romance in 1986 to the now-defunct Dell Candlelight line. Her next five releases were *Meteor Kismets*, followed by six sales to the Kensington Precious Gems line.

Like Dell Candlelight, the *Kismet* and *Precious Gems* lines also died, something the author jokingly swears was not her fault. In addition, she has sold two books to *Silhouette*, part of the Harlequin romance publishing conglomerate.

"When a category romance line goes out of business, an author can request the reversion of rights and resell those rights to another publisher," Barker said. "That's what I did with seven of my backlist titles. They were edited again, given new covers, and are now sold by a print-on-demand publisher, Wildside Press. I've also had books reprinted by Ulverscroft of England and more than a dozen foreign publishers."

Undercover Virgin, a romantic suspense that features government agent protagonists who are fighting to stay alive to testify against a powerful criminal, has garnered some of Barker's best reviews.

"*Undercover Virgin* is one of those books that authors call 'gift books' because it came to me so quickly," the author said. "It's fast-paced, full of sexual tension, and was a joy to write."

While promoting *Undercover Virgin*, Barker faced an interesting challenge -- a book whose cover didn't match her marketing materials.

"A few months before my book's release, the production department sent me a JPEG file of the cover art which I used on my Web site [www.BeckyBarker.com] and on promotional items," she said.

The same artwork was used on online bookstores, such as BarnesandNoble.com, and sent to reviewers. "But when I received my author copies of the book, a different scene was depicted on the book front," she said. "It's hard to tell if the cover art snafu will have any effect on sales."

RT Bookclub, the top publication of the romance industry, used the incorrect cover art in its February issue, but the mistake didn't affect their four-star review.

The magazine praised the book, stating, "*Undercover Virgin* features a smooth plot and compelling characters." The complimentary review was no surprise to Barker's fans, who share a love for the genre with the author.

"I can't remember a time when I wasn't creating stories in my mind, so writing them is a perfectly natural extension of myself," Barker said. "I love category romance. Always have, always will."

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