

## **Confessions Of A Romance Addict** **By Marcia James**

My name is Marcia, and I'm a romance addict. Romance novels, that is. But I'm not looking for a cure. Sexy contemporary romances or seductive historicals, erotic paranormals or tempting time travels, I love them all. It's a guilty secret – a “happy ending” addiction – that I share with over 41 million readers (and not all with two X chromosomes) in the United States alone.

How did my habit start? What was the “gateway” to my addiction? The library. As a voracious consumer of popular fiction on audiotape, I read mysteries, science fiction, even westerns, but continued to disdain romances. Finally, having exhausted 90 percent of the library's recorded book fiction section, I checked out Nora Roberts' *Hidden Riches*. Little did I know choosing my first romance from the writings of this reigning queen of the genre was akin to shooting Grade A heroine. I was hooked.

Suddenly, the library's selection of romances wasn't enough. My habit grew at an alarming rate. I found myself at bookstores adding my dollars to the \$1.35 billion in annual romance sales in the United States. I also purchased a plain, quilted book cover to hide the romance titles and sensual cover art from prying eyes. Whether at a restaurant enjoying lunch and a good Regency, or treadmilling at the rec center with a romantic anthology, I was embarrassed to be seen reading my “bodice rippers.” And yet, I couldn't just say “no” to this addicting “mind candy.”

I searched desperately for a way to justify my romance cravings. How could I, an advertising copywriter with a graduate degree, explain to my friends and family my preference for this much maligned popular fiction? Simple. Become a published romance author and refer to all my romance reading as “research.” In typical Type A fashion, I immediately joined the professional association, Romance Writers of America (RWA), and its local chapter, Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW).

And so began my self-proclaimed “year of total romance immersion.” I traveled to the national, regional and local RWA conferences – attending seminar after seminar. I networked with an aggression that would put a politician to shame. And I listened and absorbed. I never missed COFW's monthly meetings, asked numerous questions of the members and presented my romance-in-progress to be critiqued. Along the way, I learned I “head-hopped” or switched my character's point-of-view too frequently and my inherent writing “voice” seems to be ideal for romantic comedy.

Now, 16 months since I entered this fascinating world, I have a request for my manuscript from Harlequin and have been elected COFW president. I've also learned that romance reading is nothing to be embarrassed about. The average romance reader's demographics are quite impressive: the majority are between the ages of 20 and 54, continue their education past high school, earn from \$35,000 to more than \$100,000 a year, and enjoy a very active love life. And, contrary to popular belief, not all romances are about secret babies, lonesome cowboys and marriages of convenience.

Today's romances empower women, explore family relationships, and cover serious issues from cancer to child abuse. Readers can choose romances set in almost any historical time, pick an inspirational novel or a super-sexy read, and try one of the new multicultural lines. Hardbacks, paperbacks, audio books, and electronic- or e-books – there's something for everyone.

Today, I've thrown away my book cover and walk confidently forward as an ambassador of happy endings. I pass along my favorite books with a promise, not a warning, that they are habit-forming. I even recommend romances as "instruction manuals" for my romantically challenged male friends. Enlightened and empowered, I am proud to say I am a romance addict.