

Ohio author receives crash course in publishing

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ThisWeek Contributor

At 1:30 p.m. on Feb. 11, 2005, Kay Stockham got "the call."

Harlequin, the romance industry behemoth, wanted her seventh completed manuscript. There was just one hitch -- instead of the usual 12-18 months prep time from contract to book release, there would be only seven months until the novel hit the shelves. But the aspiring author was up to the challenge, one she has documented in a lighthearted blog on her Web site (www.kaystockham.com).

Stockham was at her southern Ohio home when "the call" came, but it was her husband who actually answered the phone.

"He didn't have a clue and thought maybe I'd joined [Harlequin's] book club or something," the author recently told *ThisWeek*. In truth, the editor had called to buy her 80,000-word manuscript, *Saving Grace*, for Harlequin's Superromance line. After six years of aggressively pursuing publication, Stockham had realized her dream.

The newbie author wasn't on Easy Street, however. The road ahead was filled with revisions, self-promotion and a crash course in Publishing 101. The contract was the first obstacle.

"I didn't have an agent ... but I do have a multitude of published friends," Stockham explained, "one in particular who went through the contract with me over the phone, word by word."

She managed to make some changes to the contract but found the process nerve-racking. Soon afterward, Stockham signed with an agent, whose responsibilities include negotiating advances and selling future manuscripts.

"I'll leave that part of the business in my agent's hands and keep the creative side," the author said.

During the next two weeks, Stockham worked with a professional to design and launch her Web site -- an author's most effective self-promotion tool.

"I could visualize the end result but had no clue of how to pull it together," she said. "I wanted something rich and elegant, something that would grow with me as a writer."

Stockham also received her editor's nine-page revision letter. While she was making these changes to her manuscript, the art fact sheets arrived. Multi-tasking, the author completed these sheets to provide Harlequin's art department with the information needed to create the book's cover. This data included descriptions of the hero and heroine as well as details about three key scenes in the book.

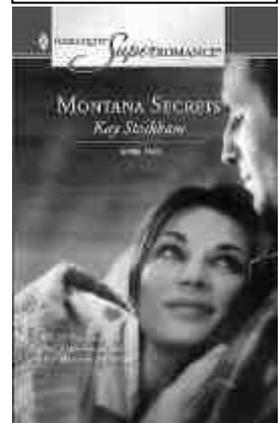
Eye-catching covers are both a draw for readers and images authors can use on marketing materials. Stockham was pleased with the rich colors and attractive models on her debut novel's cover. Before ordering logoed pens and bookmarks, though, she used her Romance Writers of America (RWA) contacts to research how best to spend the money she'd budgeted for advertising.

"My fellow writers were more than willing to share their experiences ... with what promotion had worked, didn't work, or was just plain ineffective," she explained.

She didn't have to send press releases to the local media, however, to obtain coverage in her rural newspaper.



Kay Stockham



"(It is) one of the benefits of living in a small town," she said. "Everyone knew 'some lady' had sold a book to a big publishing house. Within two days, I'd gotten a call for an interview." Despite concerns of being misquoted, she was happy with the final article.

How an author is portrayed in the newspaper was only one thing Stockham had no control over. For example, publishers often -- and seemingly arbitrarily -- change a book's original title. Less than two months after she'd sold the manuscript, *Saving Grace* became *Montana Secrets*. Thankfully, the new title captured the story's theme, since her characters all have secrets.

Her next job was writing the book's dedication page. Following this, the dreaded line edits arrived and, a month later, the final printout or galleys. Along with each task, Stockham dealt with worries common to the first-time author.

"I've sold a book ... what if it was a fluke?" she said. "What if it doesn't sell well?" While readying her manuscript for publication, Stockham also developed a proposal for her second book and submitted it to her editor. That step brought its own set of concerns.

"What if I never sell another ... and I'm a one-book wonder?"

That negative nickname won't be applied to Stockham. Mining the drive she describes as "a combination of my love for telling stories, determination, perseverance and, perhaps, a bit of stupidity," she did sell a second book, *A Man With A Past*, which will be published by Harlequin in May 2006.

It's been a hectic seven months for Stockham, who recently participated in a romance readers appreciation event in Cincinnati, followed by her first RWA national conference as a published author. And thanks to Harlequin mailing her novel to their bookclub members a month before its release date, she just received her first fan letter.

This week, *Montana Secrets* hit the bookstores. A reunion story featuring a physical therapist who cares for an injured ex-lover, the novel is already winning kudos. *Romantic Times Bookclub* praised the "strong characters," and A Romance Review Web site wrote, "Kay Stockham has written a story that will touch her readers' hearts and stay with them long after the last page has been turned."

"Romance readers are savvy individuals who know what they want," the Stockham said. "With romance novels, you get the guarantee of a happy ending." With hard work and determination, Stockham has created her own happily ever after.

Meet the author :

What: Kay Stockham will sign *Montana Secrets* as part of a free, multi-author booksigning that includes Dianne Castell, Lori Foster and Sherrilyn Kenyon.

When & Where: Open-to-the-public booksigning -- Saturday, Oct. 22, from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Adams Room of the Radisson Hotel at 7007 N. High St., Worthington, Ohio.

For More Information: Visit Central Ohio Fiction Writers' Web site (www.cofw.org) or call the Radisson Hotel at 614/436-0700.

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