

## CONFESSIONS OF A ROMANCE ADDICT

By Marcia James

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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 51 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% of the library's recorded book fiction section, I checked out Nora Roberts' *Hidden Riches*. Little did I know that choosing my first romance from the writings of this reigning queen of the genre was akin to shooting Grade A heroin. I was hooked.

Suddenly, the library's selection of romances wasn't enough. My habit grew at an alarming rate. I found myself at book stores adding my dollars to the \$1.375 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 romance or tread-milling at the rec center with a romantic anthology, I was embarrassed to be seen reading my feel-good books. 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.” I thought, in my incredible naiveté, how hard would it be to adapt my skills to fiction writing? In typical Type A fashion, I immediately joined the professional association, Romance Writers of America (RWA), and my local chapter, Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW).

And so began my self-proclaimed “total romance immersion.” I traveled to the national and local RWA conferences—attending workshop after workshop. I networked with an aggression that would put a politician to shame. And I listened and absorbed. I never missed COFW's monthly meetings, I asked numerous questions of the members, and I presented my romance-in-progress to be critiqued. Along the way, I learned that my inherent writing “voice” seems ideal for romantic comedy and that I have a high tolerance for being rejected by agents and editors.

Now, years since I entered this fascinating world, I'm published. My comic romantic suspense, *At Her Command*, was released in trade paperback by Cerridwen Press, and I have a short story in an upcoming Berkley anthology, *Tails of Love* (June 2009). I've learned that romance reading is something to be proud of.

The average romance reader's demographics are quite impressive. 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 chose romances set in almost any historical time, pick an inspirational novel or a super-sexy read, or try a multicultural novel or a paranormal. There's something for everyone. And, with hardback, trade paperback, mass-market paperback, audio-book, and e-book romances, there are multiple delivery systems for my addiction.

Today, I've thrown away my book cover and walk confidently forward as an ambassador of happily-ever-afters. 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.