

INSPIRATIONAL ROMANTIC SUSPENSE -- ROXANNE RUSTAND

2009 Romance Writers of America National Conference

Workshop: "Face Off: the Many Faces of Suspense"

Speakers: Kylie Brant, Maria Carvainis, Cindy Gerard, and Roxanne Rustand

1

My books don't pull any punches. I don't think most inspirational romantic suspense does. I've dealt with incest, serial killers, divorce, spousal abuse, all kinds of issues. In *Abomination*, the serial killer left body parts and uploaded the GPS coordinates so geo-caching enthusiasts found the bodies. Not for the faint of heart. LOL

Colleen Coble

<http://www.colleencoble.com>

Cry in the Night (Rock Harbor series)

Lonestar Sanctuary (Lonestar series)

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I've written 34 books in the general market, most for Harlequin/Mira, and am now writing for Howard Books, a division of Simon & Schuster. When I realized I was being offered an opportunity to write Christian fiction, I wasn't certain my particular Romantic Suspense voice would work. But I've been welcomed by reviewers and readers far beyond my expectations. I tell you all of that to say this: My book, *Blood Bayou*, opens with a gritty murder scene. It is an example of the freedom my editor allows me in writing for the CBA. In fact, my plot ideas are really no different than the books I've written in the ABA. I've simply incorporated a faith journey, a journey that must be intrinsic to the plot.

Karen Young Stone

www.KarenYoung.net

BLOOD BAYOU, May 2009

MISSING: MAX, May 2010

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Any of these titles will be good examples of inspirational romantic suspense: Of course there's Brandilyn Collins and Ted Dekker, along with Eric Wilson, Travis Thrasher, and TL Hines. Mike Delosso is getting good buzz for his books, (though) they border on the horror genre. None of them are cozy, almost all are gritty, except for TL's latest. It wasn't gritty, but very suspenseful. Eric's latest series is about vampires from Jerusalem, and its excellent. His are a little graphic, but nothing gratuitous. I haven't read Travis, but Michelle Sutton's review of his latest book stated that it was downright scary and graphic, too much so for her. The language factor, however, is nil. Readers won't be getting any cusswords with these novels, or vomitous scenes, but still enough suspense and realism to keep you on the edge of your seat. All of these authors are excellent, excellent writers.

I would say that if you enjoy Stephen King and Dean Koontz, you'll like these authors.

Kathleen Fuller

www.kathleenfuller.com

www.kathleenfuller.blogspot.com

www.amishhearts.com

Regency Romance

A Daring Return (Avalon): August, 2009

Amish Fiction

An Amish Christmas (Thomas Nelson): August, 2009

A Man of His Word (Thomas Nelson): September, 2009

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Specific advice for selling in my genre (Inspirational women's fiction) - the stories I find easiest to sell are those where the heroine's journey is believable. She may have made a terrible mistake, but if the motivation behind that mistake is understandable, and her journey takes her to a new, stronger place, not only in her faith but as a person, then my editor is far more likely to be interested.

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2

My Sister Dilly is the story of two sisters, one who makes a terrible mistake that lands her in prison and the older sister who comes home to "help" once the sister is released. Oh, and the mistake? She attempted a murder/suicide—overwhelmed with hopelessness over taking care of her profoundly handicapped child. Even trying to kill herself and her handicapped child wasn't taboo, although the actual event that landed my character in jail is off stage, but clear to the reader as to exactly what she tried to do.

I write for Tyndale, and I've found them to be very open to stories like mine — women's fiction that can certainly have a romantic angle - or not, however the story is best served. They do need the spiritual impact to be clear, but they're open to stories of all kinds.

Maureen Lang
www.maureenlang.com
<http://maureenlang.blogspot.com/>
My Sister Dilly, October 2008
Look To The East, August 2009

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Good inspirational suspense? Anything by Brandilyn Collins, and Amy Wallace's Defenders of Hope series (FBI and crimes against children.) Brandilyn's is seatbelt suspense (straight) – heart-pounding and scary. Amy's books are almost dark. She has intense antagonist psychos who prey on children.

Ane Mulligan
Southern Fried Fiction
ane@anemulligan.com
<http://www.noveljourney.blogspot.com>

Heart of the Amazon (Jan 2007), Buried Secrets (Oct 2007) and Forsaken Canyon (Oct 2008)--were romantic suspense with a strong adventure element in them along the lines of Romancing the Stone and National Treasure. They are all Love Inspired Suspense. Vanished, May 2007, dealt with a police chief's young daughter being kidnapped. He had to be the investigator and the father at the same time.

What advice would I give to someone who wants to write inspirational romantic suspense? Read in the genre, as many books as you can, to get a feel on how to intertwine faith, suspense and romance. It can be a delicate balance.

Edgier stories sometimes can be a hard sell, especially for a first time author. I think an inspirational (and) romantic suspense is a natural fit. When we are in trouble, turning to the Lord can be so natural in a story. There can be violence in the stories, but it has to be there for a purpose. No sex scenes and swearing. I heard an ex-FBI agent talking the other day and he said in real life cops don't swear like they do in the movies (it seems like every other word).

Margaret Daley
<http://www.margaretdaley.com>

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Inspirational romance has three story arcs: romance, suspense and faith. It's a braid that to be woven well has to have three equally weighted strands. A well developed faith arc is what truly makes an inspirational romance different from a non-inspirational romantic suspense. Someone can pray or quote a scripture in a regular romance too, but that doesn't make it an inspirational.

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3

I'm not a suspense author but I love exciting, adventurous books. My advice if you want to write suspense is to read Christian suspense authors, such as Terri Blackstock, Margaret Daley, Colleen Coble, Brandilyn Collins. Study the craft, and see what works and what doesn't.

I write mostly historical Christian romances, although I do have a couple of contemporary books published. The most important thing is to get your research right. Study the area your book is set in and the time period. You can't say things like: His touch sent a jolt of electricity shooting up her arm if your book is set before electricity was widely used. Another tricky thing is to avoid using words that are common now but weren't back in the 1800s, like 'okay.'

Also, read other writers in your genre and study publishers' guidelines. Some publishers want 50,000 word historicals while others want 100,000. Historicals are generally considered any time period before World War 2. Different publishers prefer different time periods, so again, study the guidelines.

As far what's not hot in this genre, it would probably be harder to sell something set in the 1900s or before the 1700s than the 1800s, but that doesn't mean it can't be done. Some publishers steer away from Civil War stories, but others like them. The important thing is to write what's on your heart. If you don't sell it, consider it practice and start on another book.

Vickie McDonough
www.vickiemcdonough.com
Outlaw Heart
Straight for the Heart.
* I'd recommend reading *Writing the Christian Romance* by Gail Gaymer Martin. For the suspense arc I'd recommend Carolyn Wheat's *How To Write Killer Fiction*

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What advice would I give to someone who would like to sell a book in my genre? The same as with any genre. Read as many authors as you can. Taboos, hard sells, trends depends on the publisher. Know the criteria of the publisher you want to submit to backwards and forwards. Some are edgier than others, some are more conservative than others for a reason, that reason being they have a specific audience they're serving. They're all upfront about what they absolutely will not print. I'd tell them to be familiar with the CBA publishing houses.

Anna Taylor Sweringen
writing as Anna Taylor
Through A Glass Darkly, The Wild Rose Press, ISBN-13: 9781601542335

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Thanks so much for getting the word out that we inspirational authors are digging deep into complex issues too! Here are my three books and where they'd fit on the list:

Ransomed Dreams: Divorce, Grief, and Child Abduction
Healing Promises: Cancer, Missing Children
Enduring Justice: Rape/Sexual Abuse, Domestic Violence,
Pornography, Racism

Also, here's my bit of advice: Inspirational romantic suspense needs strong action, flawed characters, and a faith plot that flows from the characters to the page, not from the author to the audience. So be true to your characters' journeys and don't be afraid to go deep into universal truths, painful realities, and the difficult path to healing.

Amy Wallace
www.AmyWallace.com
Healing Promises
Enduring Justice

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4

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All of my suspense novels are kind of gritty:

Evidence of Mercy (suspense, spousal abuse)
Justifiable Means (suspense, about rape)
Ulterior Motives (suspense, child kidnapping)
Presumption of Guilt (suspense, child abuse)
Private Justice, (suspense, serial killer)
Shadow of Doubt (suspense, woman accused of poisoning her husband)
Word of Honor (suspense, terrorist)
Trial by Fire (suspense, racism)
Line of Duty (suspense, 9/11 type story with fire-fighters killed in a disaster)
Cape Refuge (suspense, two daughters try to solve their parents' brutal murder)
Southern Storm (suspense, cop accused of murder he didn't commit)
River's Edge (suspense, serial killer)
Breaker's Reef (suspense, someone being framed for murder)

I have many more, but that gives you the gist. I think that, in suspense, you can write about anything as long as you don't glorify sin, or make your readers wallow in something that makes them feel defiled or unclean. I don't get too graphic with blood and guts. For instance, in Justifiable Means, I had a woman commit suicide in a bathtub. I didn't describe that the tub was filled with blood. The reader knew it was, but I didn't want to make their minds linger on that. In the same book, which dealt with rape, I had the rape happen off-stage, before the book opened, so I didn't have to describe the play-by-play. Christian readers like gritty books, but they don't want to evil images trapped in their minds.

Terri Blackstock,
www.terriblackstock.com
Zondervan
Intervention, September 22, 2009.

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Some names and book titles to include in a reading list for the participants, to illustrate the range and depth of what is out there: Brandilyn Collins, Colleen Coble, DiAnn Mills, Elizabeth White, Mindy Starns Clark, Hannah Alexander, Linda Hall

Read what is out there. Visit www.LynCote.net and click Christian Agents & Publishers Page, to see who the publishers are, and what they are looking for.

Just remember that onstage gore is minimized in an inspirational. But really any topic can be explored except for perhaps pedophilia and incest. (I would definitely avoid those.)

In my last LIS series, I featured a single mom heroine, a sheriff hero who'd nearly killed someone as a teenager (Dangerous Season), a hero who was a recovering alcoholic who had just spent 7 years in prison for vehicular manslaughter, and had a subplot with a pregnant mom who had started crack, was facing prison for drug charges, and didn't know who the father of the child was--it was either her lover or her husband (Dangerous Game and Dangerous Secrets).

After all, mystery writers write murder mysteries and suspense without sex or gore on every page. Suspense is what the romantic suspense reader wants, along with a good puzzle to figure out and a great romance."

Lyn Cote
The Desires of Her Heart, 2-10-09
<http://www.strongwomenbravestories.blogspot.com>
Every woman has a story! Share yours.

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5

1. Read this type of book--across the line from short category to longer more mainstream, to get a feel for what an inspirational romantic suspense is like.

2. Writing LIS means you have to have a tight, fast-paced book that covers romance, suspense and faith elements all rolled into one package. There has to be a good balance there. As far as what not to write, look for publishers' guidelines and try to follow them within reason.

Lenora Worth

www.lenoraworth.com

<http://craftieladiesofromance.blogspot.com>

From Love Inspired Suspense:

The CHAIM series:

Heart of the Night (January 2009)

Code of Honor (April 2009)

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My first novel, Abduction, was about a serial killer that was molesting and killing little girls and then cutting their hearts out. My second book, Obsession, was about a killer targeting young women at a local college... killing them and dumping their bodies in the park. I think the bottom line here is that you can take any secular suspense novel, take out the profanity and sex and you have an inspirational suspense novel....

Wanda Dyson

<http://www.wandadyson.com/>

Shepherd's Fall

Shepherd's Run

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In my reading experience, inspirational romantic suspense tends to tackle many of the same issues and have many of the same elements as secular romantic suspense, but without sex on the page, cussing, or gratuitous violence. Most of the ones I've read avoid gore. Otherwise, they are similar.

The things that inspirational romantic suspense have that secular romantic suspense don't always have are: 1) the characters' internal struggles tend to have a Christian slant or a Christian worldview, and 2) the ending is almost always uplifting, satisfying, and justice-oriented. I appreciate the positive endings even though I know that's not realistic, for the same reasons I like romance--the happily ever after. The justice-oriented endings I think are a nod to the conservative Christian readership.

The best thing a writer can do is to figure out which publishing house and line they're targeting and read the books in that line. Before I submitted to Steeple Hill Love Inspired Suspense, I read 30 books from the line to get a feel for the editorial direction, the types of storylines that have already been released by them (so I don't repeat anything), and the level of suspense required by the line. I continue to read the Love Inspired Suspense novels released each month to keep up with the line.

Camy Tang

Single Sashimi (Zondervan)

Deadly Intent (Love Inspired Suspense 2009)

<http://www.camytang.com/>

Romance with a kick of wasabi

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Three inspirational books I've read that have great romantic suspense in them are: *Breaker's Reef* by Terri Blackstock, *Midnight Sea* by Colleen Coble, and *Every Now and Then* by Karen Kingsbury

Rylee Andrews

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My favorite writers of inspirational romantic suspense are John Olson and Colleen Coble. There's a genre list on the ACFW website.

Cathy Richmond
cathyrichmond.com
Ordinary People... Extraordinary Love

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PLACES FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Non-members of ACFW (American Christian Fiction Authors) can access a list to look up favorite secular genres or authors, then find comparable inspirational authors at:

<http://acfw.com/readers/authorcomparison.shtml>

This organization is a fabulous resource for inspirational writers, and hosts an annual conference similar to RWA's national conference every fall .

The Faith, Hope & Love RWA Chapter is also a wonderful resource.

www.shoutlife.com has a strong community of inspirational writers and readers.



Roxanne Rustand's fifth inspirational romantic suspense novel, FINAL EXPOSURE, is the first in her Big Sky Secrets series for Steeple Hill Suspense, and will be out in September, 2009. You can visit her at:

www.shoutlife.com/roxannerustand

www.roxannerustand.com

<http://roxannerustand.blogspot.com>

the "all creatures great and small" place for writers & readers

Future releases:

5/09 SH Suspense: DEADLY COMPETITION

8/09 HSR: SAVE THE LAST DANCE

9/09 SH Suspense: FINAL EXPOSURE (trilogy bk #1)

2/10 SH Suspense: FATAL BURN (trilogy bk #2)