

SELLING TOO SOON

Interview by Kelly Callihan

Stop laughing. I'm serious.

Selling too soon can be almost as bad as never selling at all – I did say “almost.” For those of you who have been at this for years or have several books under your belt, selling today may not be soon enough. But for many new authors the drive to sell overshadows the big picture – a publishing “career.”

When I finished my first book, I started thinking in terms of a plan. I have a business to run and a pretty hectic schedule so I couldn't just sit back and wait to find out how everything would turn out. I needed to know what I would do if I got the call the next day. If I had received a call to buy that manuscript the next day, it would have been too soon. I still had a lot to learn, such as how much time book two and three would take to write.

For some people, book one takes at least a year to get it written and polished. Many more spend two to three years completing that first manuscript. Those books are written when the writer finds time. Very rarely do I hear a new writer working on a first book say they sit down everyday on a schedule and produce pages.

If you haven't completed several books, how can you know what you will do when a bona fide deadline looms?

When I got The Call in 2004 that my first book was sold, I was writing on book five. The months that ensued were filled with revisions, forms for the marketing department, copy edits, galleys, a second book submitted, revisions...and business projects and family situations and – well, you get the picture. If all of that had happened to me in 2002 when I first submitted my full after a request from an editor appointment, I doubt I would have five books written right now or that I would have any idea what it takes me to produce a manuscript. But I was already writing on book two when I submitted that first one.

Back in 2002 I ran across an author who had rave reviews on her first sale and never sold another. Digging further, I found more one-book authors. I started asking editors and agents why some authors never sold a second book (I found quite a few with only one published years ago). The condensed answer is that those authors sold very quickly and never got off the ground running. Their second book was rushed and rejected. Maybe the third and fourth book was also kicked back. Confidence floundered. Some of those authors were overwhelmed and never got their footing. I found it sad that a talented writer reached her dream only to have it fizzle.

Take the time to make that first sale. Write your book, polish it then start the next one. Make the most of the time you spend waiting on an answer from an editor or agent. The busier and more productive you are, the faster that time will pass.

And when you get The Call, you'll thrill your new editor with a second book just as polished as the first one.

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Kelly: Hello Dianna, thank you very much for taking the time to share with us! Can you tell us a little about your writing background and how long it took to sell your first book and March Silhouette Intimate Moments release, WORTH EVERY RISK?

Dianna: I started writing in 2001, by accident. I had ideas I wanted to give to an “author” who could use them since I wasn’t an author. But when I started writing, I found out I couldn’t stop. The story quickly became mine. Being a type-A personality, I’m driven to learn something that interests me. When it dawned on me (about two months into the process) that I wanted to write that first book, I focused on learning everything I could about creating a novel and the publishing business. I’m that strange person who uses both the left and right sides of her brain. I’m an artist by trade, but I’ve been in business since my teens. I either studied something about the craft or searched for new information on publishing every day. I joined Georgia Romance Writers and met an incredible group of published and unpublished writers. I attended conferences and workshops – some that were non-romance. I put my pages out for critiques, then listened closely. I pitched my first book to a Silhouette editor at national in 2002, entered it contests for 2003 and the book was purchased in 2004 by Intimate Moments. I had a second book to submit soon after that is now with the senior. Tip – keep writing constantly.

Kelly: You won the 2003 RWA Golden Heart with WORTH EVERY RISK (originally titled Angel On The Run), as well as placed and won many RWA contests. How did winning the GH and your other contest finals play a factor in your journey to becoming published?

Dianna: Winning the Golden Heart and Overall Daphne in 2003 was a huge boost for me in terms of confidence in my story and name recognition, because those are two high profile contests. But I believe every contest I entered gave me a push toward publishing. Finals and wins are wonderful, but all those terrific writers who spent time judging/critiquing my story offered suggestions and encouragement. When it came to contests, I had a plan. My goal was to final – if possible – so an editor or agent would read my pages. Once that happened, it was up to the story to make an impression and be requested. I fully understand throwing a first chapter out there for feedback, but if you are going to spend a significant amount of money and time on contests, I honestly think you should have two-thirds or more of your book completed to capitalize on a successful contest result.

Kelly: On your website (www.diannalovesnell.com) you list an impressive promotional itinerary for this year. Being newly published how did you come up with the opportunities and make contact for the various book signings you have scheduled?

Dianna: I do have a hairy schedule in place. ;) I was contacted by chapters for some of those speaking engagements and submitted workshops for others. Probably a third of all the promotional opportunities come as suggestions from writing friends. Networking is important in this business. I try to cross promote with new authors, established authors and soon-to-be published writers, many of whom know much more about promoting than I do. We should try to help one another as much as we can in this business. We aren't competing with each other.

Kelly: In March your award-winning, WORTH EVERY RISK hits shelves. An exciting accomplishment. Please tell us about the story and what we can look forward to reading about your characters.

Dianna: I'm thrilled that Zane and Angel's story is published. These two characters kept me up all hours of the night with their adventure. A life-altering event cost Angel her dreams and gave her a deep mistrust of any law enforcement. A great job turns into a nightmare when she finds herself involved with a crime ring. Fleeing for her life, she runs into the arms of a sexy charter pilot, but shares nothing about her identity with Zane to keep him safe from a very evil man. Zane knew he had no business risking his undercover DEA mission on the long legged stowaway he found in his plane. He can't decide if Angel is a felon or only guilty of stealing his heart. He'll never know unless he can keep her alive...something worth every risk. ☺ Romantic Times BOOKclub gave WER four stars and Cataromance gave this story five stars and a rave review. I'm very flattered.

Kelly: It's been a pleasure chatting with you, Dianna! (And congratulations on those great reviews!) Any last writing tip you would like to share with our chapter?

Dianna: The best advice I can give is to be open to critique, develop a thick skin. Don't change your story with every suggestion that comes along, but don't be so married to what you've written that you don't hear good advice on your characters and plot. Judging and critiques prepare you to be sold. Agents and editors love to work with those authors who are not defensive about suggestions and who know how to revise. Above all, keep writing. We have a saying when it comes to riding motorcycles – "The more you do, the better it gets." Your writing will constantly improve with every page you type.

Thanks so much for this opportunity to talk about my favorite subject. Good luck with your writing!