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Love is always in the air and on the page for romance novelist Brenda Novak. The Carmichael-based *New York Times* best-selling author talks about how a working mother's worst nightmare led to her dream career, how she doesn't get so hot and bothered about writing steamy sex scenes, and why there was no place like home for the setting of her new book. by Elyssa Lee

## AUTHOR

## Brenda Novak

**The story of how you got into writing in the first place is dramatic enough to be turned into a book itself. Can you tell us about it?**

Yeah, I caught my day care provider drugging my kids with cough syrup and Tylenol so they would sleep. This was 20 years ago. It still makes me angry to think about it. I had three of my five children at the time. My youngest girl, Alexa, was just six months old.

I found a baby bottle in the fridge that was shoved to the back. I thought it was juice. When the lid came off, I could smell [the medication]. It was so strong. I was hurt and angry. I really trusted [my babysitter]. But mostly, I was upset at myself. I thought, "How did I miss it? I left my children vulnerable to this." [The next day] I confronted her and she admitted it.

I quit [my job as a loan officer] almost immediately because I didn't trust anybody else [to monitor my children], but I also felt like I had to work. My husband had started a residential development business, but the market had just fallen apart. I was between a rock and a hard place. It was as if somebody had tied my hands and thrown me into a pool and said, "OK, now swim."

I started searching for something I could do [for work] at home. I was reading a good book, [*A Knight in Shining Armor*] by Jude Dever-



aux, a romance book that my sister had recommended to me. It was something that I just loved. I ate it up. And I started thinking, "I wonder if I could do this."

It was a dark time, but finding writing was the silver lining. Writing was what I was meant to be doing all my life. Once I found it, I got that sort of "click" sensation, like, "Ah, yes, this is what I was born to do."

**How long did it take for you to write your first book?**

It took me five years to teach myself the craft and to finish that first book. So it wasn't an immediate fix. We lost everything—[my husband] lost his business and we lost our home. I remember my mom giving us her car. So it was a time when [my writing] wasn't helping us financially. But emotionally it helped me a great deal because when I'd go to bed at night, I would think, "But my book is good. It's turning out great."

**How did you learn to write?**

By reading and writing. I learn best by example and there are millions of books, so all I had to do was read and see how other authors did it and try and build my own voice. It was just practice and trial and error. I didn't take any courses and I didn't know any other writers at the time. ▶

"I think people get so confused about romance [novels]. They think it's about sensuality, but it's not. They're not the bodice rippers of the '80s."