

brenda novak

*right where
she belongs*

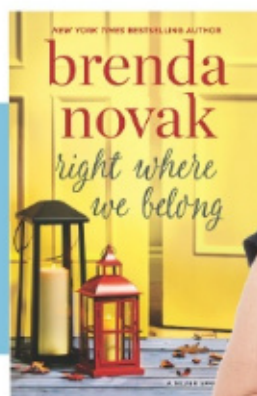
BY GARY FEARON

It could have easily been a scene from one of Brenda Novak's suspense novels: a day care provider drugs young children to make them sleep all day. But it happened to Brenda's own children, and her discovery of it led her to quit working, stay home with her kids, and come up with another line of work. Leaving behind her life as a loan officer, she decided to write.

Today, the New York Times and USA Today Bestselling Author has written over 60 books and novellas and garnered awards that include Book Buyer's Best, Book Seller's Best, the National Readers Choice Award, the Write Touch, the Award of Excellence, the Beacon Award for Published Authors, the Thrillerfest Silver Bullet Award, and five RITA nominations. Not bad for someone who claims she started out without a creative bone in her body.

"I read other books and tried to figure out why they worked or didn't work. I also wrote—and edited and edited and edited until I liked what I'd written. I realized that what I put down might not be perfect, but if I could at least get something out there, I could shape into something better."

The former business major says it took five years to learn the craft of writing and complete her first novel, *Of Noble Birth*. Much of that time was spent researching the Victorian era, the time period in which *Of Noble Birth* takes place. Brenda chose that era partly in homage to *Jane Eyre*, the classic



that first got her interested in literature. She nearly gave up on reading as a child because Dick & Jane weren't doing it for her. But things turned around when she discovered the classics.

Once Brenda felt her debut manuscript was ready for prime time, Romance Writers of America helped point the way. "I found them when I was five months pregnant with my fifth child and had just finished my first book. I attended my first RWA national conference (it was in Texas that year) and sat through several publisher spotlights. I also attended many craft and marketing classes that gave me the information I needed."

It was at this convention that she realized her first effort might need some trimming. "I learned that my 800-page manuscript was too long, that no one would want to publish it. But I also listened to several publisher spotlights and received the guidance I needed on how to proceed from there. I feel like I owe RWA a great deal.

"After I realized *Of Noble Birth* was too long, I trimmed it to a svelte 430 pages and started to submit to agents. I was lucky enough to find one within my first year of having finished my manuscript. About the same time that I was named a finalist in the Golden Heart (RWA's national contest for unpublished romance manuscripts) about eight months later, I'd



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connected with Pam Ahearn, who signed me right after.”

Brenda recalls receiving the box from her publisher containing her first book, and how it felt to hold it. “It was amazing. I remembered the many times I’d walked into a bookstore just to dream of the day I might see one of my books on the shelf. My first signing at Barnes & Noble was magical.”

Eager to keep the magic going, Brenda went right to work on another novel. “I knew I needed to come up with another good idea, so I kept thinking until I had one and wrote another historical. My editor loved it and said we’d go to contract when she returned from her vacation, but she came back to a pink slip. HarperCollins (my first publisher) was merging with Avon and were letting all their own romance editors go. That meant I lost my slot, too, before my first book was even published. Fortunately, I segued into writing contemporary romance for Harlequin, and they’ve published as much as I can produce ever since.”

Brenda’s vast catalog covers multiple genres that include women’s fiction, romantic suspense, contemporary romance, and historical romance. “I’m an eclectic reader, so I’m an eclectic writer.” Each book takes about four months to write, which was the case with her latest novel, *Right Where We Belong*, about a woman whose life unravels when her husband is arrested. After her divorce, she returns home with her children to Silver Springs, where Brenda’s most recent series is set.

“I’m not sure where the idea came from. Often I can point to something I’ve seen or heard (on TV or elsewhere) that has spurred an idea, but this one just came out of my head.”



One recurring theme in Brenda’s novels is that of beating the odds. “I like stories that feature wounded heroes, love seeing them tackle their challenges, overcome and live happily ever after. That’s what happens in this story—it’s a come-from-behind win.”

Much like her characters, Brenda encourages other writers to believe in themselves and follow their dreams. Pointing out how much easier it is to get a book on Amazon now than when she started writing, she recommends having a solid social media presence and developing a mailing list.

Most of Brenda’s writing sessions begin by reviewing and editing some of her previous day’s work. A self-declared “pantser,” she shuns outlining in favor of letting her characters reveal to her where they want the story to go.

Writing from home at her desk and sometimes in bed, Brenda feels that three things are important to good storytelling: a strong sense of conflict, engaging characters, and a unique “voice.” She’ll continue to merge all three as she writes more novels in her new Silver Springs series as well as her more suspenseful Evelyn Talbot series.

“I also hope to write four more Whiskey Creek novels and eventually get around to writing a seven-book straight historical series that has been running around in my head for years.”

With each book, Brenda challenges herself to top the one before. “I love starting a book, love building the conflict and creating the characters and the world in which they live.”

She, however, is far less fond of ending a book, she adds with a laugh. “I guess that’s because it’s the ‘clean up’ phase, where you have to answer all the questions you’ve created in the reader’s mind and can no longer build drama.” ■