

Writer's Wednesday - Surviving Revisions



Hello everybody! It's Lynne Marshall (<http://www.lynnemarshallweb.com/>) from the Harlequin Mills and Boon Medical Romance line and it's my turn to blog for The Pink Heart Society's Writer's Wednesday. My topic:

SURVIVING REVISIONS!



This picture captures the feeling I always get when I open my e-mail and find revisions from my editor for my latest book.

Many writers are under the incorrect impression that the hardest hurdle in this business is writing the book. Yes, it is a major accomplishment that only a small percentage of people can claim, and you should be proud if you are one of them. But that's just the first step along the winding path to publication.

After selling seven books, I believe the hardest part about making that first sale, or any future sale, is REVISIONS! I was fortunate enough to have an article in the RWR (Romance Writers Report) back in January of this year on the same topic, and I was surprised how many stories from the writer's trenches I received from multi-published authors who had struggled with the revision process at one time or another.

Here is a sample of some of the some of the requests by editors.

Abby Gaines, *Fully Engaged*, Harlequin NASCAR, and *The Diaper Diaries* for SuperRomance, was asked to "take the Cinderella out of a Cinderella story." *Married by Mistake*, SuperRomance April '07 had enormous revisions, according to Abby. "Strangely, to get rid of the Cinderella element, I ended up making nearly all of the changes to the hero, rather than the heroine. The end result was a much more believable story, which garnered a lot of positive reader feedback."

One of my critique partners, Trish Albright, was a Golden Heart finalist in 2007 with her Historical romance, *Siren's Song*, which sold while she was attending conference in Dallas. She was promptly asked to cut 30,000 words plus the ending! My hysterical historical friend managed to make the changes and survived the ordeal with both her gorgeous red hair and sanity intact.

What are my words of wisdom?

A successful revision experience is all in the attitude. Don't beat yourself up for not writing a flawless novel. Be grateful an editor or agent sees the book's possibilities.

There are a couple of important things to remember when tackling your first or fifteenth revision letter. You need to be flexible, and you mustn't be afraid to take a hacksaw to your story and draw blood.

After twenty-six years as an RN, I tend to think through everything in medical terms. I've even gone to the extreme of equating Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' Five Stages of Death and Dying, with the revision process. Think I'm nuts? Check this out.

THE FIVE STAGES OF THE REVISION PROCESS

Denial – The book of my heart is perfect.

Right.

Anger – How dare you insult my baby!

This is the time you want to throw a fit and pull your hair out. Can't they see the gem you've submitted?

Beverly Brandt, after receiving a two-and-a-half page single spaced revision letter, said: "I couldn't figure out how to change one part of the story without impacting everything else that came before or after." (Recommended read – Article "The Perfect Book – Revised!" RWR, May 2003.)

Bargaining – If I change that, may I leave this the way it is?

Lillian Darcy, *Café du Jour*, Harlequin, Australia: Mira Books, Aug. '07, says, "--You don't always have to do what an editor suggests, but you do have to deal with her concern. - ... The opening line of my book was 'I seduced him,' which I loved. - ... The editor felt it weakened the hero...- ...She wanted me to change it ... I revised – (the flashback) - scenes so that the heroine was still convinced she'd been the one to seduce the hero, but we also saw the hero – wiser than she – understanding that in fact he was the one who'd been in control...-...This whole aspect of the book became stronger than both my original version and the version that would have resulted if I'd done what the editor wanted, and at the same time I'd stayed true to my vision..."

Depression – It won't seem like the same book. Why even bother?

This is the stage where many authors give up. Don't! If you don't try to fix y your book, one thing is sure: You won't sell!

TJ Bennett, *The Legacy*, Medallion Press April '08, once wrote an article titled "Married to It," and had this to say: "I had become too married to my story. - Passionate adoration of every word that I had lovingly opened a vein over did not make for objectivity. I could no longer see the possibilities of changing it. It was just too much work for my exhausted soul." This was part of her growth stage as an author, and when recently asked by an agent to make changes to her current paranormal, she had this to say, "My first instinct was to say no, but I asked for a few days to think about it, and I'm glad I did. I wanted an agent. If I had thought her suggestions would make the book worse, I wouldn't have agreed to change it."

Acceptance – If I make one change at a time, I think I can pull this off.

Stella Cameron, "The most important lesson I've learned about revision is to believe anything can be fixed. I'm absolutely certain any action can be motivated – as long as the writer is willing to slash out parts that don't work and start from scratch" Quoted from RWR, August 2003 article "Am I Revising Right?" by Chéré Dastugue Coen.

Eloisa James, "Rewriting is tough, but it's not nearly as bad as writing."

Quoted from the same article.



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Here's a little secret, my fifth Medical Romance, *Pregnant Nurse, New-Found Family*, (8/08 UK, 10/08 NA) is a totally revised version of the first medical romance I'd ever submitted, and which had been rejected. After selling four novels, I decided to go back and take a closer look at what had gone wrong with the story. After extensive rewrites on my own, I submitted the book only to have my editor request more revisions ... twice! Did I give up? No! I rolled up my sleeves and worked through the problem areas having to delete the prologue, and change major story threads in the process. The end result is a book on the shelf.

After reading about so many other authors' experiences, I admit it's great to know I'm not the only one who has had to wrap my writer's brain around editorial input, which hadn't occurred to me for my stories. As long as the suggestions don't seem overbearing, I comply with 80% of the requests and so far, that has been enough to satisfy my editor. Nothing can assure we'll make a sale in this fickle business, but if we don't attempt to mold our manuscripts to fit the vision of the buying editor or acquiring agent, one thing is certain, we won't have the chance to find out. And because we make the changes, the book remains ours, completely ours!



Remember; when you receive a revision letter take it seriously. It may seem like a lot of work, but it could make the difference between selling your book or storing it under your bed.

