

That's My Story, and I'm sticking to it!

Way back in 1989, I discovered romance novels and couldn't get enough of them. At that time I was going to college for English and got certified to teach because I didn't know what else I could do with that major. I just knew I loved to read and write. So I started my first novel on an old Brother typewriter, had no clue what I was doing, and didn't get far. Soon after I began writing, I got married, finished my degree, and started substitute teaching while looking for a full time position. After the birth of my first child, I was offered a position but chose to become a stay-at-home mom. I started writing again when my first child was one in 1995, and partnered up with my first CP (Barbie Jo Mahoney) who is still my CP today. I needed an outlet, something just for me, but my writing became more than that. It became my passion. Naptime was "my time." Again, life got in the way with three more children and a masters degree to finish, but this time I didn't stop writing. I continued to write on and off for years as we moved time and again, but didn't really get serious about my writing until 2000 when I joined RWA and the New England chapter.

My biggest challenge other than finding the time to write has been wasting too many years on trying to make my first "baby" sell. That book that I started in 1995 took 5 years to write and has been about 10 books. I made it single title, then it was category, then it became several versions of each. Instead of writing ten books, I basically spent my time applying everything I learned to that one book. In 2004 I moved back to Central NY, joined CNYRW, and started attending writing conferences with my CP Barbie Jo Mahoney. Just when I was getting ready to finally put my first book down and start something new, ironically, that's the book that landed me my agent. It finaled in the New Jersey Put Your Heart in a Book contest in 2006 and won the single title category. Agent Christine Witthohn of Book Cents Literary Agency was at that conference. We met and hit it off instantly, and she asked me to send her the full. I sent it when I got home and two days later she called me, offering representation. I met my second CP, Danielle LaBue, at that conference as well. I could not do any of this without my fellow Book Cents Babes.

After I signed with Christine in 2006 and didn't sell right away, I had my **first revelation**. **I needed to give my agent more books to shop around instead of waiting and hoping on just one book.** So in two years time, I wrote a romantic comedy, a funny chick lit, and a funny mom lit. I kept hearing all the same things from editors: love her voice, great writing style, and if this was a year ago, she would have sold, but the market is saturated right now with those type of stories. Does she have anything else? I had my **second revelation**. **I could sell off just a partial.** I had an agent, and editors had read my work and knew I could complete a book, so all I needed was a partial now. I went on this partial kick. I then wrote a partial of a funny chick lit mystery, a funny category Christmas romance, and a humorous non-fiction narrative. Ironically again, I ended up deciding that my first book had made all the rounds anyway, so why not give the Amazon contest a shot. I entered and finaled in 2008, much to my amazement. The contest was a great experience, and gained me lots of exposure, renewing my confidence that I did have talent and I could sell if I just didn't give up.

After finaling and placing in other contests as well as the Amazon, but still not selling, I had a **third revelation. You never know what you might be good at or enjoy writing if you don't step outside of your box and try something new.** But in this case, these new editors wouldn't have read anything I wrote, so I knew I couldn't get away with a partial. I needed a full. So I took my first book yet again as well, as my chick lit adult story, and adapted them both to young adult romantic comedies. Again the editors loved my voice, but thought the stories were too old for YA, and the stories had been done before.

This led to my **fourth revelation. You can be a fantastic writer, but if the concept isn't that unique, then it probably won't sell. Yet you can be a good writer who's maybe not fantastic, but if the concept is high enough, an editor will probably take a chance on you.** I knew I could write a partial now, so I really did my research this time to see what genre was selling well. Then I tried to come up with ideas I didn't see that were unique. In 2008 I wrote a partial of a young adult fantasy, a young adult paranormal, and a young adult paranormal sci-fi. When those didn't sell, I made them tween. When they still didn't sell, I tried them at upper middle grade and finally found where my voice fit. The series I thought would sell—the straight paranormal—fell through at the last minute. I was devastated and, for the first time ever, thought of giving up. But then just 48 hours later, Rebecca Frazer at Sourcebooks Jabberwocky said she loved my voice and what else does she have. We gave her the paranormal sci-fi which was called *Hard Wired* at the time, and she loved it. She offered me a three book deal at the end of June in 2009. **Fifth revelation. Always have a backup plan because if an editor loves your voice but a particular story won't work for them and they ask what else does she have ... you will be ready!**

Since I wasted so much time in the past and because I have an agent now, I never write anything I haven't run by her. I'm not saying write to the market, but definitely pay attention to the market. You have to like writing in the genre you're in. I write funny. I would never write a thriller or horror even if they were selling like hotcakes. However, if a certain genre was hot and I knew I could add my brand of funny to that genre, then I would go for it. I also write fast, so that makes a difference. If you write slow, then something else might be hot by the time you finish. It just depends on what type of writer you are and whether or not you can get away with a partial or a full. What I do is I always ask my agent what editors are looking for. When she tells me, I do my homework. I find out what is out there already, and then I try to think of ideas that aren't out there. Then I write just a blurb for the idea and run it by my agent. If she tells me that won't work for whatever reason, then I don't waste my time. I come up with another idea and blurb. Then when I get the go ahead on an idea, I write the synopsis. I always write my synopsis first now because you don't know all the details, so there's no risk of telling everything and having a boring synopsis. If you just try to tell what the book is about like you're telling your CP about your new idea, then it comes off much more exciting. Once I run the synopsis by my agent, I don't write the story until I get the go ahead and work out any plot issues that might be a problem. Then my synopsis becomes the perfect road map for a partial which is the setup of a book anyway. After that, I plot as I go

along, chapter by chapter. I usually write about 4 pages an hour, and I write about 4 hours a day now that my kids are all in school ☺

Having four kids (3 boys and 1 girl) is great inspiration for writing young adult. They range in ages 8 to 16 so that pretty much covers all ages of middle grade, tween and teen. They are a huge help when I need language to sound true to a certain age or for knowing what is in or out, etc. For my Digital Diva Series, I got the idea from my oldest son. He is so obsessed with his cell phone and all his electronic gadgets, it's a fight to get him to put them down long enough to eat dinner. I said to him, "You're so obsessed, I wouldn't be surprised if one day you turned into one of your gadgets." And then I paused and thought, Oh my gosh, what a great idea. I was amazed with living in such a technology loaded time that no one had come up with an idea like this. The story will focus on a freak accident occurring and the heroine becoming her state of the art cell phone. She will have a GPS in her head, cell phone in her hand, camera for eyes, full internet capabilities with no hotspot required, etc. And the cute boy she's crushing on keeps making her hormones rise too high which causes her cell to block a 911 call and her GPS brain to reroute her, sending her to the rescue. On top of all that, everyone's trying to figure out who she is, so she has to disguise herself as Digital Diva while keeping her hormones under control and trying to find a way to reverse her "uniqueness." I'm having a ball writing this series, and book one is currently being adapted to a screenplay as we speak by Hollywood actor, writer, director Doug McKeon, so cross your fingers it sells to a studio.

Having taken so long to sell, it's hard to turn down an opportunity when it comes along. When my agent found out Faith Black went to Berkley Prime Crime, she immediately called her and asked her what she was looking for. Faith said they wanted her to buy cozy mysteries, so my agent thought of me since I did have a mystery, albeit more of a chick lit mystery than a cozy, but we both thought why not at least try. Well, Faith loved my voice and loved the story, but said there's no way they'll let me pick it up as a cozy. Does she have anything else? I really didn't, but at this point, it was no longer about selling for me, it was about career longevity. One of my career goals had always been to be in both the young adult and the adult world and at two different houses. I just hadn't thought it would happen this soon, but who knows when I'd get another shot, so I decided to go for it.

Revelation Six was target your homework. If you don't have anything else, but an editor loves your voice, then come up with something just for them. Since each publishing house has its own set of needs and slots to fill, I decided to research the Berkley site. I wrote down every theme they had for their cozy mysteries, and then I came up with three different story ideas. My agent gave them to Faith who was so impressed she picked the one she liked best, telling me light paranormal did really well for them. Then I wrote a ten page synopsis and my agent sent it to her. Faith loved the story and said they didn't have anything like that so she took it to her boss. Only a week and a half later at the end of November (just 5 months after my first 3 book deal), Faith offered me a 3 book deal. Now, for the first time in a very long time, I think I've finally made it. I'll freak out later over having to write them all ☺

I have always been interested in psychic ability and had always thought to do a book about it. When I was younger, I had my future told by a tea leaf reader, and I was hooked. The reading was so dead on, it was uncanny. Since then I've had readings from tarot card readers, palm readers, one who used a crystal like a pendulum, and even a past life reading. When I thought of doing a cozy and didn't see many series from Berkley Prime Crime that were paranormal, I knew I had a unique idea in my Fortune Teller Series. I plan to use a different psychic tool for each book. The heroine is a real psychic, she just uses different tools depending on which one a particular person responds better to. She has a bit of trouble interpreting her visions sometimes, which will lead to lots of opportunity for humor and great chemistry between the hunky cynical detective and her. The first book will focus on tea leaves. The heroine foretells of a murder, the murder happens, and she is now the number one suspect. She will spend book one clearing her name, and then does such a good job sleuthing, she is asked to work side by side with the disgruntled detective to solve future crimes, much to her delight and his dismay. Again I am having a ball writing the series. The hardest part in switching between young adult and adult is keeping the language authentic. Both my heroines are fun and spunky and both stories are in first person with just her pov, but the tone and the age appropriate language is my biggest obstacle. That, and coming up with a detailed schedule that will work. But trust me, people, I'm not complaining. 😊