

Bestselling author extends a helping hand

Lori Foster: Jude's Law

By *MARCIA ANDERSON*
ThisWeek Contributor



Lori Foster

Her novels grace bestseller lists from *The New York Times* and *Publisher's Weekly* to *USA Today* and *Waldenbooks*. In 2006, she'll have five new books and four reissues on store shelves. By anyone's definition of the word, this Cincinnati-area contemporary romance author is a success. But Lori Foster hasn't forgotten the people who helped her in her career.

"I've gotten so much great advice from so many authors that I'm forever astounded at the generosity of the women in our genre," Foster recently told *ThisWeek*.

Among those novelists who gave her a hand up were Catherine Coulter, Linda Howard, Jayne Ann Krentz and Elizabeth Lowell. Echoing the sentiment of many in her field, Foster described romance writers as "the most wonderful community in the world."

Popular romantic suspense author Stella Cameron provided Foster's first cover quote -- a short recommendation printed on a book's front cover that carries weight with potential readers.

"I know her stamp of approval helped sales on that first book," Foster said. "Stella Cameron was a saint. To this day, I still get her advice on things."

Repaying that support and offering it to others is important to Foster.

"Because so many authors were helpful to me, I wanted to give back where I could." One way is her participation in Romance Writers of America (RWA), a 10,000-strong professional association. Foster is involved in several RWA chapters, including the local Central Ohio Fiction Writers.

Through e-mail loops and her own message board, Foster shares her insider knowledge of the more than \$1-billion romance industry. In addition, she held a contest on her Web site (www.lorifoster.com) in past years that brought aspiring authors to the attention of her Kensington Publishing editor. Thanks to that contest, more than 15 writers made their first sale.

Foster's Web site includes a tributes page recognizing fellow authors and allowing visitors to post their own testimonials.

"Throughout my career, I've met some phenomenal people, and I like to give an acknowledgement to them so others can learn of their big hearts and generous spirits," she explained.

Kensington author Dianne Castell, who will participate in a Feb. 18 Columbus booksigning with Foster, was herself honored by a Web site tribute. And Foster is there for her when Castell wants to brainstorm a plot point or needs publishing advice.

"Lori is a true friend," Castell said. "When I have a question, I ask her, and then I do what she says. No one knows this business like Lori Foster."

When Foster suggested sponsoring a unique event to thank their readers and help both aspiring and published authors, Castell joined her enthusiastically. In June 2005, they held their first annual Reader & Author Get-together in Cincinnati.

"We cover all the costs ourselves, except for meals," Foster said, "as a thank you to the others in our genre, readers and writers alike."

Foster has a strong fan base and never forgets the importance of her readers.

"They're my peer group, and this writing gig wouldn't be nearly so special without them," she said. "They've enhanced my life, and they make me feel very, very blessed. If I give them even a smidge of that back, I'm glad."

Castell agrees. "It's always wonderful to meet the readers," she said. "They're why we write [And] readers are more willing to take a chance on a new author once they meet them and hear about their books."

Registration has already begun for the second annual Reader & Author Get-together, scheduled for June 9-10.

"We [will] bring in an editor and an agent," Foster said, "and we have many volunteers who organize games, prizes, raffles, a used book trade and a new book fair." Proceeds of the raffles will go to the local battered women's shelter.

Foster enjoys fund-raising for deserving organizations, such as supporting her local Animal Adoption Foundation last year.

"With the help of my assistant, we collected donated books and prizes and auctioned them off on eBay. Writers are notorious animal lovers, and the effort bloomed. One author sent me a check for \$1,000 along with a hardcover book to auction."

The romance community has also rallied to raise money for authors with catastrophic illnesses and -- most recently -- victims of the 2005 hurricanes.

"Lori and I both feel that you have to give back," Castell said. "What goes around comes around ... a million times over."

Foster brings that philosophy to her writing.

"I won't write about dishonorable heroes or heroines. They can't deliberately hurt others, no matter what's in their past," she said. "Other than the villains, my characters always put children first, period. And my books are sexually explicit, because to me, love is physical as well as emotional, but I deal only with monogamous relationships between mature adults who will spend a lifetime together."

Despite the popularity of the industry -- more than half of all paperback fiction sold each year are romance novels -- authors like Foster still run up against people who disparage the feel-good books. Still, she practices what she preaches in her writing.

"Life shouldn't be about tragedy. It should be about triumphs and love and working out problems," she said. "That's the focus of romance novels ... It's easier, in books and in life, to create havoc than it is to find an intelligent, sensitive, believable way to a happy ending."

What: Lori Foster, along with fellow authors Dianne Castell and Heather Grothaus, will participate in a free booksigning event. She will be signing her new release, *Jude's Law*.

When & Where: Saturday, Feb. 18, from 3 to 4 p.m. at Liberty Books and News (The Shops on Lane Avenue, 1649 W. Lane Ave., Columbus).

For More Information: Call Liberty Books and News at 614/486-5238