

YOU BELONG TO ME

Local author debuts sensual, suspenseful novel

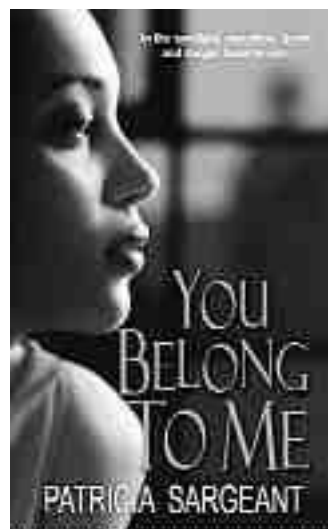
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ThisWeek Contributor

How many people say they're going to write a novel? Very few get past the "It was a dark and stormy night" stage, and only a handful of those actually finish the manuscript and sell it.

Columbus author, Patricia Sargeant beat those odds. Her first romantic suspense, *You Belong To Me*, hit bookstores Nov. 7, thanks to her talent and perseverance.



"I first knew I wanted to write fiction when I was nine and my sister introduced me to the joys of reading," Sargeant recently told *ThisWeek*. "I wanted to write stories that would transport people the way a good story transports me. Even when I didn't think I'd ever get published, the stories kept coming." *You Belong To Me* is the fourth manuscript the author completed before selling to Kensington Publishing in a two-book deal.

The romantic suspense plot features a divorced couple reunited through their work -- his production company is filming a movie based on her science fiction novels. When a stalker bent on stopping the collaboration threatens their lives, the estranged couple must resolve their personal issues to fight the danger together. *RT BOOKreviews Magazine* awarded the novel a 4-star "compelling page-turner" review.



Patricia Sargeant

"All of my story ideas come from the question 'What if?'" Sargeant explained. "The 'What if' question for *You Belong To Me* is 'What if you were given a second chance with your soul mate; what would you do to ensure your happily ever after?'"

To ensure her publishing goals, Sargeant studied both the craft and business sides of fiction writing. She recommends aspiring authors research publishers and agents to determine if their manuscripts fit. "You can have an outstanding story, but if you don't send it to the right editor or literary agency, it won't get published."

Joining an organization such as Romance Writers of America (RWA) offers benefits from the latest market news to a support system for authors at all career stages.

"I'm very lucky to have an RWA critique partner with whom I can exchange ideas and information," Sargeant said. "And authors also need to learn to market themselves. Getting published is only half the journey."

Of all the marketing tools available to an author, a reader-friendly Web site is the most important. At www.PatriciaSargeant.com, she has developed a brand based on the tone and theme of her current and upcoming releases. "My writing has been described as 'sensual, suspenseful romances,'" Sargeant explained. "That's my brand identity."

The author is currently working on her second novel for Kensington, *On Fire*, which is scheduled for a September 2007 release.

"The newspaper reporter heroine and the fire investigator hero start out as adversaries," she said, "but when a string of arsons become murders, they work together to solve the crimes." Sargeant is also developing a mystery series with paranormal elements that is set on a fictitious Caribbean island. In keeping with the "brand promise" to her readers, these books will feature sensuality and suspense.

In addition to her Web site, Sargeant is building pen name recognition through Internet reader communities and the media. After a number of print interviews, she recently took part in her first podcast Q&A. And during November she's participating in an online scavenger hunt, a lively affair popular with English-speaking readers worldwide. It's a large target audience -- 64.6-million Americans alone read at least one romance novel in the past year.

Romantic fiction comprises more than 50 percent of all popular paperback fiction sold in North America, and the books feature heroines who are intelligent and empowered.

"The main misperception I've noticed about the romance genre is that all of the stories are the same," Sargeant said. "Beautiful girl falls in love with wealthy boy, and they live happily ever after. The romance genre is much more complicated than that. It offers a wide variety of stories -- science fiction, fantasy, paranormal, inspirational, mystery, suspense, urban literature to name a few. It's as diverse as the book-buying public."

Despite the Internet's role in self-promotion, authors still enjoy chatting in person with readers at book signings. Sargeant has seven signings scheduled for the next four months, including appearances in the Cincinnati/Dayton area and West Virginia. The details of these and her three Columbus signings are posted on her Web site. The events are also an opportunity to meet the booksellers who can "hand sell" her books and to network with other writers at these multi-author signings.

"For me, the most important part of book signings is meeting readers and thanking them for buying my book," she said. "For someone to spend the time and money to read my book is a great compliment."