

The View From The Other Side Of The Table

Written by Marcia James
Sunday, 19 August 2007

The 450-author-strong "Readers for Life" charity booksigning at the Romance Writers of America (RWA) national conference is a high-decibel, high-intensity literary cornucopia for readers and writers alike. Arranged alphabetically in row after row, the authors sit behind long tables stacked with books donated by their publishers to benefit literacy organizations—a cause near and dear to the hearts of all in the industry.



Eloisa James and Marcia James

This year's open-to-the-public extravaganza, held on July 11th at the Dallas Hyatt Regency, was bigger and better than ever. Over \$56,000 was raised in two hours. And for the first time in my seven years of attending annual RWA conferences, I was a published author with my own books to sign.

Eager shoppers queued up an hour before the 5:30 p.m. starting time and watched authors enter the hotel ballroom through a special door. It was a little like running the gauntlet, as we walked past the long line of booklovers, who were trying to spot their favorite authors. Thanks to my "**Marcia James**" pen name, I was seated between *New York Times* historical romance bestseller Eloisa James and Marianna Jameson, who co-write the hot thriller, *Category 7*. Both women were very nice to this newbie.

A minute before the doors opened, an announcement over the PA system warned participants to be seated. An anticipatory hush fell over the ballroom, soon broken by excited chatter, as non-booksigning RWAers and readers from the general public poured into the room. Some made a beeline to their favorites, for example, romantic suspense author Suzanne Brockmann, while others began at the A-B table and worked their way down the room to Z. Several authors who drew the largest crowds, such as Nora Roberts, were given their own tables away from the alphabetical rows. One of my goals for the future is to have a fan-following that warrants my own table.

The aisles between rows were roomier this year but soon filled with booklovers (mostly women) carrying armloads of novels or pulling wheeled totes. Marianna and I decided to stand to better engage people in conversation, and I offered my promotional giveaways—thumbcuff keychains—to those who walked by. I also spoke with the women waiting to have books signed by Eloisa and found a number of them who were interested in reading my debut comic romantic suspense, *At Her Command*.

There was a definite carnival feel to the booksigning, and at times I half-expected the strolling shoppers to be carrying cotton candy or corn dogs. Many authors had donated raffle baskets to raise additional cash for literacy, and volunteers announced the winners of different baskets throughout the event. One row over, uber-popular paranormal author Sherrilyn Kenyon signed copies of her books as her alter-ego, historical author Kinley MacGregor. A camera crew covering the event, shot footage of Sherrilyn, who was wearing a nearly life-sized black swan as a hat, to the delight of her fans.

Every time I was asked to autograph my book, it was a thrill. And the two-hour event flew by. Some authors ran out of books early and table-hopped to visit with their friends. Bestselling author Lisa Kleypas stopped by to talk with Eloisa and stayed to greet readers. When it was time to make their purchases, shoppers joined a line that snaked from the check-out area all around the ballroom. At 7:30 p.m., the authors packed up any remaining books, which many purchased at 25% off the cover price—a perk for the signing participants.

The "Readers for Life" booksigning was an unqualified success, and I can't wait until next year's in San Francisco. Whichever side of the table I find myself in the July 2008 event, I'll have a blast. But I'll always remember my first time signing in Dallas.

Marcia James, when she isn't penning romantic comedies with elements of mystery and suspense, is a freelance video scriptwriter and advertising copywriter. In addition to developing marketing and promotional materials, she writes romance articles for her local weekly newspaper. After years of dealing with such sexy topics as how to safely install traffic lights, Marcia is enjoying "researching" and plotting steamy love scenes for her romance novels with her husband and hero of many years. Her first novel, *AT HER COMMAND*, is a comic romantic suspense that pokes fun at the alphabet soup of DC law enforcement agencies. When the DEA, the FBI and the DC police unknowingly put operative undercover at the same club, sexy sparks fly.



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