



Monday, March 26, 2007

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In writing romance, Martinsville author living a real adventure

Writer's 22nd novel coming out this week

By BOB CONSIDINE
Staff Writer

The journey of an author's imagination to the mind's eye of the reader might seem instantaneous but is really anything but.

If you're lucky to have the inspiration of a story, then there is the matter of executing it and answering questions along the way.

Am I effectively telling a story that will grab hold of the reader and never let him or her go? Is it plausibly possible? Has this been written before? Am I repeating myself? And did I really just leave that participle dangling?

Then it's on to convincing a publishing company to put its name and money behind your creation, while staying true to your craft in the face of suggestions -- or demands -- from your editor.

So if there's a giant gale coming out of the Martinsville section of Bridgewater on Tuesday, it might just be the exhale of Andrea Kane.

"Dark Room," Kane's 22nd novel and seventh romantic thriller, will be released by HarperCollins Publishing (\$23.95). And nothing gets old about putting out something new.

"I just got the first hardcover copy of 'Dark Room,' and I found myself doing the same thing I did with my first book," Kane said last week. "I hold it, look at it and say, 'Did I really do this?' I don't think seeing that book for the first time ever becomes mundane."

Of course, Kane, 51, is already well into her next book -- where some of Hunterdon County and North Jersey will serve as muses.

But this is the life where little is as it appears. Kane wrote "Dark Room" in her brightly lit and contemporary office. Behind those walls is an unseen back room cluttered with files of research and photo materials that enrich her work and enslave her to it.

There's also a punching bag hanging from the ceiling.

"It can be a very isolated and lonely profession," Kane said. "Sometimes, you live with your fictional characters more than you live with real people."

Born to write

There isn't ink in her veins, but writing was always in Andrea Kane's blood.

"I don't think I ever actually started writing," she said. "When I was a little girl, I was already writing in my head, creating imaginary characters and stories to go with them."

Still, aside from high-school essays and journals, Kane didn't get much published. After graduating from the University of Rochester in New York -- where she met her husband, Brad -- she took on literary jobs that kept her on the fringe of her true calling. She was as an editorial assistant at a publishing firm. She wrote reviews of other books for magazines. She even started a school newspaper at her daughter's elementary school.

"The novel was already there in my head, but I knew I couldn't devote the time and energy while raising my daughter (Wendi)," Kane said. "But I was learning at the same time while doing the reviews. I learned how to fine tune. I learned not to sort of ramble on and on forever."

Ultimately, Kane put thoughts to paper. "My Heart's Desire" was published in softcover Oct. 1, 1991. She was 35.

"I think your first book is like your first child," she said. "You write it over nine months, like the gestation of a baby, and then it's out there in the world."

It was the start of a very prolific period for Kane. During the next eight years, she would write 15 books under the wordy genre of "historical romance suspense." It wasn't until late 2000, with the release of "Run For Your Life," that she became a



Kane

More Information

A LOOK AT SOME OF KANE'S BOOKS

Here is Andrea Kane's take on some of the key books in her career.

- "My Heart's Desire" (released October, 1991): "My first published novel. The start of my life as a published novelist."
- "Masque of Betrayal" (June, 1993): "My only historical romantic suspense set in America. It was set in Philadelphia in the 1790s at the time when it was the U.S. capital. I became an admirer of Alexander Hamilton, who's an actual character in the book."
- "Samantha" (December, 1994): "This was my first spin-off. Samantha was the hero's sister in 'My Heart's Desire,' and all my readers begged for her story. Even with the suspense, it's very much a Cinderella story. The first sentence is: 'In walked the man of her dreams.' It's still one of my biggest sellers and most beloved novels to my readers."
- "Run For Your Life" (November, 2000): "My first contemporary romantic thriller. My first appearance on the New York Times best-seller list. My transition from England to America. It takes places in Manhattan."
- "Scent of Danger" (February, 2003): My entry into the perfume industry so that I could creatively devise the ultimate perfume, C'est Moi, meant to be irresistible to members of the opposite sex. Who knows? Given the interest C'est Moi generated, I might one day hire a chemist and go into production to get bottles of this perfume on the market."

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writer of contemporary romantic thrillers.

"The first 14 books that I wrote were romantic thrillers, just set in historical times," largely in England, Kane said. "I didn't really make a transition. I just transitioned the time period."

However you deem the change, that softcover book turned her into a New York Times best-selling author. The stakes were raised, and Kane would up the ante with a dedicated research ethic that breathed more life into her characters and prose.

Details, details

Andrea Kane is writing fiction, but sometimes she'll make readers wonder if it's fact.

To paint the most vivid pictures, she said she becomes one with the subject or science presented in her words of each story. Sometimes, it's picking the brains of doctors and surgeons to present what's really going on in a stab wound or ruptured spleen. Other times, it's turning to psychologists to investigate the human condition.

"You really need to get into the gray area of the antagonist and what makes him think he's a hero in his own mind," she said.

But Kane gets the most out of just being part of things herself.

In her books "Dark Room" and "Wrong Place, Wrong Time," the character Pete "Monty" Montgomery serves as a private investigator. Kane channeled "Monty" by riding through the streets with a retired Brooklyn homicide detective, turned private investigator.

She found he had a story at every corner.

"He was great," she said. "He took me on different tours, even to the Fountain Avenue dump where the Mafia would throw all of their bodies.

"You know, each book is like a new career," she added. "All of my characters do different things, and I have to learn a whole new world. Sometimes, what I learn may only reveal itself in a simple line or two, but I find it's the best way to do things."

Other research projects for Kane have included trips to the FBI in Quantico, Va., and learning what it feels like to fire a glock 22.

But it's not always so serious. For "Dark Room," she also took an interview as a client for MChatfield -- a boutique match-making service based out of Oldwick.

Don't worry. Husband Brad was well-aware. In fact, he takes part in most of Andrea's research efforts.

"He's the most awesome human being in the world," she said. "When we go out for research, he does the note-taking and I do the listening. Then we'll sit down and go over it in the hotel room.

"I think he loves the brainstorming, too," she added. "I can write something and show it to him and he hands it back to me and says, 'It's really great. I just tweaked a few words.' Then I look at it and it's ripped to shreds. Sometimes, we kill each other in that process, but we're best friends."

Epilogue

Kane, who started writing for Simon and Schuster before joining HarperCollins four years ago, is grateful that she is not a new author starting out.

"I think one of every 10,000 manuscripts get published now," she said. "So I feel so bad for people who are trying to sell their first novel. The competition is so much more now."

Kane said she is fortunate to have a good collaborative relationship with HarperCollins. She's receptive to editorial suggestions and recommendations on the artwork, even if it goes against her original visions.

"If I hate something, they've been pretty good about it," Kane said with a laugh. "The way we work together is my editor (Lucia Macro) reads what I give, and she will give me all of her input. If it's a technical thing that needs correcting, nine times out of 10 she is right. But if it's a conceptual thing, sometimes she's right and sometimes I'm right. But there's always discussion."

Macro, incidentally, loves working with Kane.

"I never feel I have to hold her hand through the process," Macro said. "And when things get crazy, as they sometimes do in publishing, I know we can sit down and have a good laugh about it later."

Kane said she is not a big believer in how well a book sells, or even how it is received by critics. She instead buys into the idea of having inspiration find her, rather than the other way around.

"Nora Roberts said to me, 'You never write to get on the New York Times best-seller list,'" Kane said. "I think the most important thing is to write what's inside you to give."

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- "I'll Be Watching You" (January, 2006): "This was my first hardcover and my first book with HarperCollins. Even people who know me well are creeped out by this stalker story!"
- "Wrong Place, Wrong Time" (December, 2005, re-released in hardcover March 2007): "My first 'Montgomery' book, featuring Pete 'Monty' Montgomery, the NYPD detective turned PI. My foray into the world of Olympic horse show jumping and my first secondary character relationship that involved a couple in their 50s who re-found each other."
- "Dark Room" (being released on Tuesday, March 27): "My newest 'baby,' featuring the return of Monty, a peek into the personal lives of a political family, a boutique social agency, and a 17-year-old murder investigation that has traumatized my heroine since she found her parents' bodies at the tender age of 10."

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