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Publisher Profile -- Southwest Regional Library

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Interview — Jennifer Lohmann
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ATG: How did a young librarian/romance writer from the Rocky Mountain West make her way to Durham, NC?

JL: Via a long, indirect route. I met my ex-husband in college in Chicago, and he came down to Durham for graduate school at UNC. When I moved back to the United States from Shanghai, I came to Durham and eventually went to library school.

ATG: We didn’t know that you had spent time in Shanghai. That must have been a great experience. What took you to Shanghai?

JL: I went to Shanghai because I didn’t know what I wanted to do after college. I’d graduated with a degree in economics, which is a practical degree, but I wasn’t interested in the typical jobs for econ majors. I taught conversational English at the Shanghai International Studies University in their continuing education program. It was a wonderful experience, and Shanghai is a wonderful city. I have fond memories of the city, the people, and the food. I’m glad I went.

ATG: You were honored by the Romance Writers of America and named Librarian of the Year in 2010. Can you tell us about that?

JL: It was such a surprise and an honor! I had just started doing romance programming (a couple romance teas, along with inviting Sarah Wendell of Smart Bitches, Trashy Books to speak), so after I got it, I felt I really had to live up to the award, and I’ve done even more programming around the romance genre since. The prize is a free trip to the conference, and RWA treats you like a queen. You get picked up in a town car, and Debbie Macomber sends you flowers. All the publishers invite you to their cocktail parties, and every author you meet loves libraries. I made a lot of good connections at the conference and met some very dear people, many of whom I’ve invited to speak at Durham County Library.

ATG: You’ve written four novels so far. Any more on the drawing board?

JL: The life of a genre author means doing a lot of reading and being a voracious reader. You need to read in other genres, and read in the genre you want to write in to get a feel for what works and what doesn’t. I’ve written four books, and I think about the sixth one all the time. For me, writing is a form of relaxation. It’s fun to wear both at once.

ATG: How do you juggle the responsibilities of being a full-time librarian and a successful genre author? When do you find the time to think about the next novel, let alone to write it?

JL: I get up at 5:30 in the morning and write for at least an hour. I usually also write for an hour at night. One of the advantages of a public librarian’s schedule is that I work weekends, meaning I have a day off in the middle of the week. It’s harder to find the time to write on my free weekends, but those Wednesdays off are treasured writing times.

Thinking about my next novel happens all the time. Running and taking my dog for a walk are prime thinking times, because I think best about the next book when my mind is allowed to wander as I’m engaged in something else. I’m always on the lookout for the next idea and keep little notes of the little triggers.

ATG: Do you have any words of wisdom for those librarians who share the dream of becoming a published author?

JL: Finishing the book was the big hurdle for me. I really had to develop the discipline to sit and work every day. Writing is 99% butt-in-chair and only 1% muse. Also, join a local writing group; you’ll learn so much. I’m lucky because the Romance Writers of America is the most professional, supportive, and with-it writing organization out there, but you will get good information from all of them. It seems silly to say to a bunch of librarians, but reading is so important. Read in the genre you want to write in to get a feel for expectations, and read in other genres to get ideas on how to play and expand on expectations (while still meeting them).

Bob Mayer advises people to read big authors’ debut novels (the books that sold on merit alone) and breakout novels (the books where the author went from good to a great seller), and see what it was about those books that worked. And then write, because no matter how much you read, the words don’t get on the page until you put them there.

ATG: Thanks Jennifer. This has been fun. We’ve really enjoyed talking to you and we’re glad the auction was a success.

JL: Thank you! I enjoyed answering your questions. Usually I’m either wearing my librarian hat or my author one, so it was fun to wear both at once.