

Shades Of Romance Magazine: Please give the readers a brief bio on you the person and the writer.



Francis Ray: Wife, mother, and School Nurse Practitioner. I have 13 books and eight anthologies published. **“Incognito,”** my sixth book, was a BET TV movie in 1999. My current mainstream,

“Somebody's Knocking At My Door,” in its third printing, is a Book Sense 76 Pick, and made the *Dallas Morning News* best-selling list.

SORMAG: Tell us about your current book?

RAY: **“Somebody's Knocking At My Door”** is a story of betrayal and forgiveness, love and healing in the Big Easy and centers on three women...their unlikely friendships and their unforgettable loves.

SORMAG: What would you like your readers to take away from your book?

RAY: That you can overcome any obstacle...poverty, betrayal, abandonment, insecurity...but your first step is an unshakable faith.

SORMAG: Our theme for this issue is Poetry Writing. Have you ever written poetry and if so what type? Can you give us a sample?

RAY: No, but my daughter wrote a poem for **“I Know Who Holds Tomorrow.”** The poignant words are the catalyst between a husband and wife that leads to disastrous consequences.

**I was lonely today and you did not listen.
I was reaching out for comfort that never came.
I was hoping that you would see me.
But you ignored me just the same.**

Carolyn Michelle Ray

SORMAG: What was the best writing advice you received?

RAY: If you want to write, write. Don't talk about it, dream about it, sit down and write. Be consistent. Publication is possible.

SORMAG: How can readers get in contact with you? (mail, email, website)

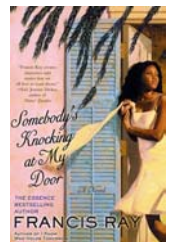
RAY: web: www.francisray.com
email: francisray.com
P.O. Box 764423/Dallas, TX 75232

SORMAG: Can you give us a sneak peek at your next book?

RAY: Once again I'll deal with three women, their relationship and their friendships as they join forces to follow their dream, but they have to decide if the cost too high.

SORMAG: Any last advice for the aspiring writer?

RAY: Read widely and not just in the genre you wish to write in. Dissect books. Find out what you like, don't like. Buy and study **“Techniques of The Selling Writer”** by Dwight Swain. Motivation, plotting, characterization, pacing must be on target. The door to publishing might have swung open, but I fear it may be swinging shut. Good luck.



**Mary Kay Cosmetics
Brenda Turner
(314) 382-4585
www.marykay.com/ittybt**

Shades Of Romance Magazine: Please give the readers a brief bio on you the person and the writer.



Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez: I was born in Albuquerque and knew I was a writer when I was nine years old. I got a bachelor's in music (tenor sax major) at Berklee College of Music in Boston, and a master's in journalism from Columbia. I worked as a staff writer at the *Boston Globe* and *Los Angeles Times*. *The Dirty*

Girls Social Club is my first novel. I live in New Mexico with my family.

SORMAG: Tell us about your current book?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: *The Dirty Girls Social Club* is a book about the enduring power of friendship. It centers on six women who became friends while students at Boston University. They're all Latinas, and "Dirty Girls" refers to the tongue-in-cheek nickname they gave themselves, "Las Sucias." We catch up with them when they are 28 and see how friendships help them triumph in life and love.

SORMAG: What would you like your readers to take away from your book?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: I really want people to have a good time when they read my novel. I want them to feel like they've made six new pals.

SORMAG: Tell us about your journey to publication.

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: My agent circulated a nonfiction proposal I'd put together, including a sample chapter. Publishers said they could not buy that particular book. But they told my agent they liked my writing and asked for a novel. Lucky for me I'd been writing novels for years. I just didn't think anyone would want to buy one.

SORMAG: What does it feel like to see your writing dream come true?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: The validation of publication is wonderful. But I really haven't changed my relationship to writing. I wrote for pleasure before all this. I still write because the process of

writing brings me joy. I feel like the same person, only more exposed.

SORMAG: Many writers start books, but having trouble finishing. How did you finish your book?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: Newspapers trained me well to be a disciplined writer. I write, every day, whether I want to or not. I feel lucky because the stories come, and want to be told. It really is tremendous fun for me.

SORMAG: Is being a published writer what you thought it would be like?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: Yes and no. Seeing your book in stores is a kick. But having to endure press (no offense) is a hard thing for someone used to being on the other side of the interview table. I'm adjusting.

SORMAG: What was the best writing advice you received?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: From Robert Crais: If you can't find the book you want to read, write it. Also from Robert: Don't believe reviews, or, as he says, "you're never as good as they say you are, and you're never as bad as they say you are."

SORMAG: What is the latest pager-turner you've read?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: *Thirty Nothing* by Lisa Jewell. It's a fun, informed love story full of humor and vivid description.

SORMAG: How can readers get in contact with you? (mail, email, website)

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ:
www.alisavaldesrodriguez.com

SORMAG: Can you give us a sneak peek at your next book?

VALDES-RODRIGUEZ: It's called *Playing With Boys*, and it's about a young female saxophonist and her 89-year old male mentor.



The ALL-PREPARED Book Signing Checklist

By Tracee Lydia Garner

Book signings at times can seem like long, drawn out, and ill organized events requiring a lot more forethought and preparation than you thought. But they don't have to be. Take an old briefcase, tote bag or nice shopping bag and fill it with these items and your event is sure to look nice, come off without a hitch and run smoothly even if you the author are feeling a little flustered and nervous about your event.

I've offered these items below, and a word of caution or a personal experience about each. Enjoy and write me if you'd like to share comments or ask questions.

TABLE CLOTH - Ever go to a signing and the only thing the vendor provides is some rickety looking table?

White is great: elegant and very ritzy looking but it doesn't hide stains and by the end of one hour, you'll have a zillion pen marks on it. If you do decide to go with white and you find a stain, just turn it over (but don't forget to wash it by your next signing, you can only turn it over so many times, and some inks DO NOT come out). I would suggest a dark color, something busy (but not themed) e.g., flowers, confetti and etc... those really hide stains. Why have a tablecloth at all? Bookstores and other venues seldom provide tablecloths and without it you're looking at a ratty, tatty table that contains coffee mug rings, sticky spills, and a host of other unidentifiable but hideously gross things. Plus having a tablecloth is just a good thing for those of us who get a little relaxed while wearing a skirt or dress, I mean no one wants to see, London, France and your underpants.

CANDY DISH - DON'T FORGET THE CANDY TO FILL IT - breath mints are great especially considering you're going to have people breathing all over you, but if you're not real worried about that, go for the chocolate. Me? I go for the Werther's (butterscotch candy) and so do most people.

BOOKS duh? Display books in an intricate design. Ensure people can see the front but interweave them. Count the books you put out, don't put a huge stack but maybe no more than ten to fifteen at one time. Make people think they're going fast. Whoosh!

FLOWERS - I read in From Book Signing to Best Seller by Jo Condrill and John B. Slack that one book signer had a very large and beautiful flower arrangement on their book signing table, however the people who frequented the table were more interested in knowing where the flower arrangements came from as oppose to the book the author was trying to sell, bummer!

BALLOONS - have flowers or balloons but not both. Always buy balloons at a party store if possible, and get them no more than a few hours before the signing. From a party store they are always cheaper and last much longer. Once in a hurry I bought balloons at a grocery store the all knowing floral dept regular wasn't there so a supposed "jack of all trades" (probably worked in the meat department) had to work the flower dept. Let's just say the balloons deflated before I finished setting up my table.

PENS - This is my very own personal pet peeve. I try NEVER to sign a book in ballpoint pen (If I absolutely have to just know I'm dying on the inside). You can attribute this to a pen fetish. I love pens, certain kinds but I carry a pen bag with me at almost all times and am always lifting one just laying around. But ballpoint pens, they're so...generic, Yuck! Use a nice pen, particularly one of those black gel ink pens (Dr. Grip gel, my personal favorite). However, you have postcards to sign, (people sometimes ask you to sign every item they have with your name on it) use a ballpoint pen (on postcards) as the ink on the postcard with gel pens will often smear and wipes away easily. I know, I know, then just use a ballpoint pen, works for everything? And that's fine, I mentioned having a pen fetish and as such this particular item is at your own discretion, but whatever pen you use, don't forget it entirely, okay? By the way don't sign the very inside of your cover (paperback). I have a book someone sgne for me and the print comes through the distorting the lovely cover. Sign that page that has just the title and your name.

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___ **DISPLAY SIGN** - include on your sign: book price, name of the book, author, a picture of yourself and of course a picture of your book(s) with maybe a little blurb about each. The reason for the picture of you ensures if you leave the table, people know who they are looking for. Display signs are easy and cheap and you can get them at office supply stores, blow up your postcard and laminate it or just get it blew up and laminate it yourself. Don't forget the cardboard back to make the prop, you can make those yourself too.

THE FREEBIES - Bookmarks, people like free things. Give bookmarks or postcards, notepad and other promote items for people to take on your table. Every time you sign a book, slip in a bookmark or postcard.

___ **MONEY BAG or POUCH** - (This is more for those that sell their own books, self-publishers, or if you're attending an event to sell your books with no formal bookstore present). You can get a moneybag or pouch lots of places including office supply stores, or a cheaper alternative is to simply use a pencil bag, preferably something without Scooby Doo on it. There are plenty of neutral colored ones, but black is your best bet. Write your initials somewhere in a corner on it in permanent marker. Something that looks official and that you didn't just grab from the kitchen, (e.g. a sandwich bag). If people see money, its just turn off and who wants to give away how much you've gathered already and to me it's just plain old tacky. Keep an eye on that bag and keep it behind the table with you or designate your helper or friend to be in charge of it.

___ **CHANGE** - again if you're self-publishing/selling your own books. Always get some dollar bills and loose change, particularly if your book price isn't even on the dollar, e.g. \$7.50

___ **GUEST BOOK** - You can make up individual sheets yourself or just cover a journal or notebook with some paper, wrapping paper works great and if you want to get fancy smanchy: wrap a book and make a label out of your book cover. This is a good project for those of you who have a scrap booker in or among you, (your sister, get her to do it). An actual bound book keeps the names and addresses together better than individual sheets. At the same time if you are prone to repeatedly

handling of the book it can begin to look tattered and worn, thus very unprofessional. Upon returning home, enter the addresses into your database, but don't toss the originals, keep them in a safe place incase you ever loose the info or God forbid your computer crashes.

___ **BOOK HOLDER OR PROP** these hold the signs and the books. Cheap and inexpensive = the cardboard like back of pictures, you can make those yourself.

___ **STICKERS** - Award Winning Author Stickers Or ___ **AUTOGRAPHED COPY STICKERS** - As you sign copies be sure to place a sticker on your book. When people return to their homes and years later are going through books to get rid of, because yours has an "autographed copy" sticker on the front, they'll be more likely to keep it.

___ **BOOK BLOW UP or DISPLAY EASEL** - The Book store should do this for you, ask. If not, have one ready to go. There are always events where you're it, no bookstore frills, no accommodations and thus to get people at the entrance of the venue to come visit you, have something big and attention grabbing on a display easel. Make your own sign for a display easel or have someone who can draw or write really well write in nice letters on the sign for you.

___ **NAME TAG** - If you want to go all out, have a name tag designed that has a small pic of your current book cover on it, don't forget the words "author" and ensure the font is big enough where people aren't squinting to look and see who you are. If not, your name, "author of" and the title of your book will suffice.

Don't forget to take pictures at your signing, they're perfect to put up on your website or to create a scrapbook for others to view wherever and helps to mark your special event when you want to reflect back on it.

Tracee Lydia Garner is the winner of BET's premier First Time Writer's Contest for her novella entitled Family Affairs.

Her debut full-length novel, entitled Come What May is in bookstores right now.

You can visit her site www.teegarner.com, or e-mail her at teegarner@aol.com

Spice Up Your Promotion

By Su Kopil

Chef Emeril Lagasse has sold over two million cookbooks, hosts two TV shows, owns 7 restaurants and is a National TV Personality. What set him apart from the rest, aside from hard work and talent? His signature style. He's made himself memorable to the audience. And that's exactly what you want your promotional items to do for you.

Bamm!

Branding, Audience, Money, Memorability. Four things to keep in mind when shopping for your next promotional item.

B - Branding is the hot topic of late and for good reason. Promotional items often offer limited space to get your point across. Branding yourself means knowing what you write and getting that message across to your readers every time. Think color, logo, and hook. For example, a paranormal author might use the color purple, a vampire's fangs, and the hook, "Romance with bite." This combination seen time after time on bookmarks, pens, the author's website, etc. will brand that author in the readers mind. The next time the reader is in the bookstore looking for a paranormal read, her mind will click on that author's name.

A - Audience. Know your audience. Before purchasing a promotional item, you need to know who your target audience will be. Booksellers, readers, mothers, business women, librarians... Once you decide who you are trying to reach it is easier to narrow down your choices. Ask yourself what does my audience need? What can they use? A promotional item with staying power keeps your name in front of your audience longer. For instance, a bookseller might keep a mini stapler with your brand next to the cash register. A mother can keep a bandage dispenser with your logo in her purse. A busy business woman can always find use for a sticky pad or pen sporting your logo. Know your audience.

M - Money always comes into play when talking about promotion. Face it, unless you write bestseller after bestseller, your promotional budget is apt to be small. It's important to get the most bang for your buck. Some promotional items like nail files or bookmarks can be bought in bulk. Other items call for a deeper dig into the pocketbook. Decide ahead of time what your budget can afford. Watch for sales. See if you can split the costs with another author whose books are similar to your own. You'll save money and double your audience.

M - Memorability. Giving away promotional items is all about introducing yourself to your audience. Getting your name out there enough times so that you become familiar to your potential readers. See what other authors are giving away. Look for new products. Discover innovative ways to give away your promotional items. How your name gets into a potential reader's hand can be just as memorable as the product itself.

Take the time to add spice to your promotions. Brand yourself, know your audience, make the best use of your money and make it memorable. You'll have helped yourself get a little bit closer to that bestseller list. Bamm!

Su Kopil lives in South Carolina where her Jersey accent still causes language barriers. Thankfully her husband and three dogs are bilingual. She is the owner of a promotional site for writers, Earthly Charms, which features a free newsletter, discussion listserv, workshops, custom promotional items and more. Visit: www.earthlycharms.com

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Shades Of Romance Magazine: Please give the readers a brief bio on you the person and the editor.

Niani Colom: Niani Colom is Associate Publisher & Senior Editor of Genesis Press Inc. Colom graduated from Nashville's Fisk University in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in international business. In 1993, she moved to NYC to pursue her passion for reading by working as an assistant Literary Agent. By 1995 she helped to establish Genesis Press and its Indigo Romance imprint. She left for Paris, France in 1996, where she worked for DHL Worldwide Express and pursued an MBA, with a concentration in Public Relations and Business Communications. In late 1997, Colom went to work for MasterCard International as public relations manager for the Middle East and Africa. Selected for the accelerated young executive program, a coveted fast track program based on accomplishment, she was quickly promoted to marketing director for Europe, Middle East and Africa in Brussels, Belgium. Following the events for September 11th and wanting to return to her true passion, She returned to America and to the family business in 2002, taking the post of associate publisher & senior editor at Genesis Press.

SORMAG: What is a Genesis Press Book? Can you tell us a little about your imprints?

GENESIS PRESS: Our books are journeys into love - you'll read about all of love's aspects, and feel the joy and pain of the characters. Our main imprint is Indigo, which focuses on contemporary African-American romance. We also have the Indigo Love Spectrum imprint, specializing in cross-cultural romance, and Indigo After Dark, our line of erotic romance for women, which is also very popular.

SORMAG: What makes Genesis Press books different from other books?

GENESIS PRESS: We like to pull the reader in, and make them feel like what they read is really happening. We focus on real, deep issues of life and love.

SORMAG: What kind of book will a reader experience when reading a Genesis Press Imprint?

GENESIS PRESS: The reader will experience a book full of passion - not only physical, but in the heart, and literary excellence.

SORMAG: What excites you the most about your imprints?

GENESIS PRESS: That we take the readers on a literary ecstasy of cultural learning and romance.

SORMAG: What has been your greatest achievement with your imprints?

GENESIS PRESS: The expansion of romance to cross-cultural and erotica. We feel this shows the expanded diversity of African-American reading.

SORMAG: How can a writer obtain your writer's guidelines?

GENESIS PRESS: They can be found on our website, www.genesis-press.com.

SORMAG: What kind of books are you looking to purchase (contemporary, historical, inspirational, interracial, erotica)?

GENESIS PRESS: We are always looking for contemporary African-American and multi-racial romances, as well as romantic erotica. We have just added inspirational/Christian romance to our bill, so we are definitely looking for those also. In addition, fiction, sci-fi, fantasy will be future imprints, thus we are currently accepting submissions.

SORMAG: Are you signing first-time unagented authors?

GENESIS PRESS: Yes.

SORMAG: How should a writer submit a query to you?

GENESIS PRESS: We ask for a full synopsis and the first three chapters of the manuscript, accompanied by a query letter and brief bio (optional).

SORMAG: What kind of turnaround time can writers expect on a query?

GENESIS PRESS: We normally send the author a letter within 90 days.

SORMAG: What can readers look forward to in the future with Genesis Press?

GENESIS PRESS: We have just begun a Christian Romance line with Annetta P. Lee's *Fragment in the Sand*, and we're planning on adding to it. We will be expanding the imprints to include Fiction, Romantic Sci-fi and fantasy, Self-help and young adults.

SORMAG: What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

GENESIS PRESS: Keep your heart in your story. If you begin just writing, that's the first step. And writers never stop learning their craft, if you want to write, keep reading.

**The Lord is My Editor
(Psalm 23 for Writers)**

by **Terri L. Main**

The Lord is my Editor

I shall not want for ideas

He makes me lie down my pen and pray

He leads me beside the refreshing
waters of inspiration

He restores my words

He leads me on the path of publication for
His name's sake and not my own

Yea, though I walk through the valley of rejection, I
shall fear no editor, for you are with me

Your pen and your ink they comfort me

You anoint my head with your thoughts,
and my pen with your words

My word processor overflows

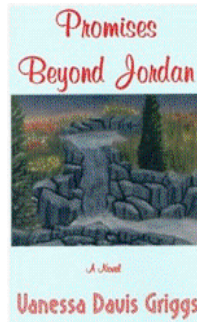
You prepare a good review before me
in the presence of my critics

Surely publication and bylines shall
follow me all the days of my life

And I shall dwell in the publishing
house of the Lord forever.

Amen

Terri Main teaches communication at Reedley College, Reedley, California. She also manages several web sites including Inspiration On-Line (<http://www.evangelpraisecenter.org>), Branches Bible Study (<http://www.branchesbiblestudy.org>) and Get Real about Weight Loss (<http://www.getrealdiet.com>)



"Have you ever loved someone that you never had?"

What kind of question is that to leave your wife-to-be with nine days before your wedding as you jet off to check on another woman?

In *Promises Beyond Jordan*, this question becomes a thundering theme for many characters of this drama-laden, spirit-filled tale of family, love, friendship, commitment, scars (seen and unseen), secrets, sacrifices and promises.

As if all this weren't enough, there's a scandal brewing that threatens to destroy Wings of Grace Faith Ministry Church along with its dreadlocks-sporting, Word-teaching pastor.



Web site: www.VanessaDavisGriggs.com

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“Creating” a Savings Plan

Michele Claybrook-Lucas

Have you ever noticed that you can spend countless hours working and re-working your literary masterpiece? Yet, when it comes to putting together a savings plan or budget, your mind draws a blank. Just getting to the point where you are sitting down with pencil and paper in hand seems like a daunting task. Although necessary, there is nothing “sexy” about creating a budget.

As writers, we must often go for periods of time without a steady cash flow. This is especially true if you freelance or have quit that steady “nine to five” to devote full time to the craft. Irrespective of your manner for pursuing “the dream”, it translates into having to rely on savings or working a part-time job to earn some cash when things get tight. Even if you are writing on a part-time basis, while working a full-time job, you still need to save.

Do you have a savings routine? Allow me to be more specific, do you have an established financial system in place that allows you to set money aside for emergencies or to cover living expenses for six months? No? Don't worry you're only like the millions of other folks that haven't found the time, inclination or motivation to create their financial plan.

Perhaps the ideal of savings makes you bristle because you think that there is no creativity involved in the process. It's boring, mundane and monochrome. You're a creative being who would much rather spend your time writing intricate plots and developing complex and multi-layered characters. The world you write about is bright, colorful and filled with excitement and drama. The thought of sitting down and crunching numbers does not stimulate you in the least

But here's a thought, the world that you live in will be filled with excitement and drama if you lack sufficient funds to cover daily living expenses or emergencies. Don't let the bill collectors start tracking you down. Approach your savings plan as you would a short story.

Just as a short story's plot is simple and compact; create your savings plan using the same format. Your protagonist in the savings plan is the goal. Develop your goal by identifying the motivation behind its existence. Is it to cover expenses? Is it to take a vacation? Buy a car? Come on, sit down and figure it out.

Once you have a goal in mind, you can work through the rest of the process with relative ease.

Using your “short story” formula, develop a compact plot in which the protagonist works through their motivation. Financial translation, devise a method in which you can work towards meeting your financial objective.

Start small and stay focused. Write it down on paper, make goals meaningful and obtainable. Set a reasonable time frame for reaching this goal. Now you're ready to put your plan in action!

1. Target your savings: Start with as little as \$1 - \$5 a week if you feel as though you're strapped for cash or you're not use to saving. Don't have the bucks to spare? Perhaps scaling back a beverage or two will result in the targeted savings amount. Pick a week and give it a try.
2. Plan to save: Want to buy a car, a house or a take a vacation? Set a plan in motion to make it happen. Using your targeted amount, set in step one, establish a time frame for your goal. The time frame can be 6 months or 6 years. You take control. It's your story!
3. Limit credit card use: This may seem hard, especially if you depend on credit cards to supplement your cash flow. However, the items that you purchase today on credit will cost you more tomorrow. Credit card companies make their money by charging interest. They anticipate that you will not pay your balance in full when the bill arrives. This translates into 21% in interest charges on your initial purchases. Cut the card (or at least take it out of your wallet), pay off the balance and save the money that you would pay in fees
4. Give yourself an allowance: Add your name to the list of those owed money. The dollar amount paid to you is based on your savings goal. Be consistent. Remember, this is a short story – no plot twists!
5. Periodically review your plan: Are you on target? If not, examine the reasons you may have fallen behind. Perhaps it's an indication that you are buying impulsively or not adhering to the saving schedule. It's okay to periodically fall off the routine. It's more important that you recognize that you're not on track and that you're determined to revive the habit of saving. Be committed.