

Circulating Romance

by Christyna Hunter

Librarians are sort of used to being stereotyped. We're used to friends and families thinking that we sit around all day and read. Our days are filled with luxury and kind, calm patrons who adore us immensely for the services we provide. Librarians' minds are full of every book we ever read. And every book we haven't read.

Reality is a bit different. Our days are busy and sometimes patrons are not so appreciative. And despite our attempts at super knowledge, our brains can't hold all information.

But being a librarian who reads, enjoys, and promotes the romance genre can present an additional challenge. Even though the genre is half of the paperback fiction sold in the U.S., librarians often have to defend it to their customers and their co-workers.

So what's a hard-working librarian to do? Here to discuss this challenge, and tips to overcome it, are avid readers and librarians. Wendy Crutcher is Senior Librarian at Garden Grove Regional Library and the recipient of the 2011 Romance Writers of America (RWA) Librarian of the Year Award. Mary Moore was the 2012 winner of the RWA Librarian of the Year Award and until recently worked at Huntsville-Madison County Public Library in Alabama. And last but in no way least is Kristin Ramsdell, librarian at California State University, East Bay, and author of several reference books on the genre. She's written the romance column for *Library Journal* since 1994 and has written the well-known reference

guide to the genre, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (2nd edition, 2012).

Buying more copies of romance novels for library circulation is one way to support the genre and bring in readers. Librarians with collection management responsibilities sometimes slowly, almost

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secretly, order romance novels for their collections. And after doing so, they see circulation numbers for the genre pick up. Which leads to other issues. "There used to be a prejudice against buying romance. I don't really see that anymore. The problem now is that we don't buy enough of it. If you want better circulation at your library, buy more romance. It's that simple," says Moore. Adds Crutcher, "I... think you cannot discount the sheer circulating power a library can harness from romance

readers. They don't just check out one book—no, they check out six [at one time]."

Promoting thoughtful conversation about the genre is another way to educate the library workers and users about the genre. "When I did my very first readers advisory presentation on the genre, I was asked to take it on the road to a neighboring library system," says Crutcher. As a result of that presentation, she swayed a library administrator to not only read the genre but to become a fan of it.

Moore had a similar experience. When she received grant funds from RWA, she organized a day-long training for librarians. Topics during that day included collection management, programming, and promotion of the romance genre. A male librarian initially complained about such an event dedicated to one genre, but his feedback at the end of the training demonstrated respect for romance fiction and his gratitude for learning more about it.

Librarians know a thing or two about the power of getting the correct knowledge into the right hands.

Another important conversation piece is explaining what



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exactly a romance novel is. There are many misconceptions of what makes a romance novel really a romance novel. “I think some of the best conversations I’ve had with people have been the ones when I am able to explain that romances are really relationship books and that they empower women—and, no, they’re not just about sex,” says Ramsdell.

Sometimes basic terminology is an issue. “‘Romance’ still has too many negative connotations attached to [it] for a lot of folks, so if I can skirt that a bit? I will. I’m not above using trickery if I can match up a reader with their next perfect book,” says Crutcher. Others see it differently. “Librarians who don’t like or buy romance have mostly retired. I think the current attitude is that romance is mainstream,” says Moore.

Finally, another obstacle is the supposed formula of a romance novel. Readers know how it will end. But isn’t that true of most

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genre fiction? Mysteries are solved. The Wild West is somehow tamed or brought under control. New worlds are discovered in science fiction. Teenagers experience angst and confusion in young adult literature. Popular fiction usually has a formula of some sort, no matter the genre.

Romance fiction and libraries are a perfect pair. Libraries are there to serve the public and community. What better way to do that than provide the most popular genre within popular fiction? And there will always be librarians such as Crutcher, Moore, and Ramsdell who will be there fighting for and defending that partnership.

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