



Jenna Harte

Q&A Interview Questions

When did you start writing fiction?

I would have never guessed I'd become a fiction writer. I wasn't much of a reader when I was younger. The closest I came to writing, outside school, was fan fiction, although at the time I'd didn't know that's what it was. There was no Internet, so I figured I was an oddball putting my favorite characters into new situations. I rediscovered fan fiction as an adult, and became a popular writer with fans of the show. When one of my stories was stolen twice, I wondered if maybe I had a talent. By then I was reading for pleasure, mostly romantic suspense, so I had some idea of fiction writing. I decided to try my hand at original fiction. It took forever to get those first books written. But through practice and yearly NaNoWriMos, I'm much quicker now.

What is your writing process and schedule?

My goal is to write at least a thousand words first thing each morning. It's a trick I picked up from mystery author Mollie Cox Bryan. It works, too, if I can stick with it. A thousand words a day adds up quickly. The exception is if I'm revising or in developmental edits. In that case, I don't usually get any new writing done.

As far as my process, I'm mostly a panster. I usually have key scenes blocked out in my mind and I might even have some notes, but for the most part I sit and write. I wish I could plot more, but I find that most of the story evolves through the process of writing.

What is the hardest part of your writing process?

My biggest challenge is that my first drafts are pretty weak and I worry I won't be able to fix them. Especially in romances, the snap and crackle required between characters is usually non-existent in my first draft. I'm also weak on descriptions (setting and facial). So during revision, I spend a lot of time going through my thesauruses to find the right words to express what I see in my head.

How do you develop your characters? Are any of them like you or people you know?

Like my weak scenes and descriptions in early drafts, my characters are often flat when I first start writing. They deepen during the writing process. That means, they're not really based on anyone in particular. However, Tess Valentine in the Valentine mysteries likes old R&B music and chocolate, as do I. And she's not very tall. Neither are two of the characters in the Southern Heat series. I'm not very tall either. Technically, I'm short.

Do you ever experience writers block?

I don't experience block per se. Mostly I have writers reluctance. If I'm feeling blah or the writing is bad, it's hard to sit down to write. That's why I try to do it first thing in the morning. After lunch I'm pretty worthless on tasks that require a lot of mental energy.

JennaHarte.com | JennaHarte@gmail.com



Why do you use a pen name?

Some people think I want to hide what I write, which isn't exactly true. My mother knows what I write. But I already have a brand in my given name and I didn't want to confuse people. It's easier to keep them separate, although it's more work because I have multiple websites, social media accounts, email lists, etc. I will say, I haven't told my grandmother or my in-laws in my pen name.

You are both traditionally and self-published. How did you decide what route to take for your books?

For the most part, the decision to self-publish the Valentine Mysteries came from an inability to get an agent to take a chance on the concept. Several liked the first book, but pushed me to sell it as a stand-alone romance. I always knew I wanted to do a mystery series featuring a romantic couple. I knew I couldn't be alone in that, but agents and publishers are sensitive to book stores, and no one felt it fit well into the mystery-lane, and romances don't usually continue with the same couple. I've started to see some change in this, but at this point, with five books and a novella, and a sixth book in the conception stage, it will remain self-published.

For Southern Heat, a series of interesting events happened. The first was that I had this old romance sitting on my hard drive (it was so old it mentions dial-up Internet). I thought would be a fit for a Harlequin line, but at the time they only took snail-mailed manuscripts, so it sat. But then a few years ago, I noticed an online pitch contest with Harlequin Blaze and thought, what the heck, and entered. I won one of the five spots, which led to a request for the first three chapters. The problem was, the book was far from done, so I spent the next few weeks getting it finished and revised. Harlequin then asked for the full manuscript, and then it sat for nearly two years. I finally got an agent, who was able to get a response (no), but she helped me beef up the story and sold it a few months later, as a series.

Both traditional and self-publishing have their positives and negatives. What many new authors don't get is that it doesn't matter what route you use, marketing is the key success in writing.

You call the Valentine Series a "sexy cozy." What does that mean?

Traditional cozy mysteries involve an amateur sleuth from a small town. They don't have any swearing, violence or sex. The Valentine mysteries meet the cozy requirements, except for the sex. I include intimate scenes between my two protagonists. I use the term "sexy cozy" to warn traditional cozy fans that intimate scenes are included. I even have a warning in my description.

The Southern Heat series is a departure from your mysteries. What made you decide to write them?

The first book, *Drawn to Her*, I wrote so long ago, I'm not sure where the idea came from. When the Harlequin pitch contest came about, I decided to try and sell it. To be honest, I'm not much a contemporary romance reader. I usually prefer romantic mystery or suspense. So this series is quite an anomaly for me. When it became a three book deal, I already had ideas for the other two stories, one of which has a bit of suspense. Moving forward, my ideas are for the Valentines, a traditional cozy, and possibly a paranormal.



Jenna Harte

Both the Valentine Mysteries and the Southern Heat series take place in Virginia. Are you originally from the south and do you use southern language and culture in your stories?

I'm born and raised in California, but have lived in central Virginia for over 20 years. I wouldn't call myself southern, but I've learned much about the language and culture, and try to share that in the Southern Heat series. Of course, you'll find things like "Bless your heart," but there are other southern sayings. Plus southerners still try to instill the use of "sir" and "ma'am," although that seems to be waning. They also encourage children to call elders by mister, missus or miss, even to close friends. For example, the child of a friend of mine would call me Mrs. Jenna. The child of an acquaintance would call me Mrs. Harte. It always reminds me 18th century English literature.

Publishing has changed a lot in the digital age, especially the importance of author marketing. What are your favorite methods for marketing your books?

Right now I like Facebook. I have a street team that I enjoy engaging with. And I like to attend other authors' Facebook author take over parties. Some of my best fans I found through other authors.

What authors or books do you enjoy reading?

I'm a huge J.D. Robb fan (married couple solving mysteries). I also like Sandra Brown and Linda Howard...mostly their older stuff, but I haven't had a lot of time for pleasure reading, which is why I'm not caught up on new books. I like to listen to audio books when I run, and Linda Howard is good for that. Bella Andre's Billionaire stories have been good in audiobook too.

What is next for your writing?

I just sent final copy edits back on *Meant to Be*, book two in the Southern Heat series and I hope to have book three, *Wed to You*, finished in the next couple of weeks (it's due July 1). I've promised Valentine fans a new book this fall, so I'll be working on the sixth full-length Valentine mystery. After that, I have a traditional cozy mystery I've already started that I plan to complete, and hope my agent will like enough to sell.

Where can we find your books?

The Valentine books are in print at Amazon and Barnes and Noble, and ebook at Amazon. The Southern Heat series is in ebook at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, iBooks and Kobo, and available in print at your favorite book retailers.

JennaHarte.com | JennaHarte@gmail.com