

Coming in April:

Flower & Garden Expo

Saturday, April 21, 9am to 5pm
Sunday, April 22, 10am to 4pm
St. Johns County Agricultural Cntr.
(I-95 & SR 16, Exit # 318)

And, the Merrill Lynch's

A Taste of St. Augustine

Saturday, April 28, 12-8pm
St. Augustine Amphitheatre

From gardening enthusiasts to lovers of great cuisine and music, we've got you covered! Visit: www.epiccommunityservices.org to learn about these great events or call (904) 829-3295.

(Attend either event and you'll also receive discounts to local attractions!)



WRITER TO WRITER

Q&A with Bestselling Author Brenda Jackson BY LILTERA R. WILLIAMS

As the first African-American romance author to make the *USA Today* and *New York Times* Bestseller's List and the first African-American author to have a novel published under Harlequin's Silhouette Desire line, Jacksonville native Brenda Jackson has firmly secured her place in the writing world. She was recently nominated for her first NAACP Image Award for outstanding literary works – fiction for her novel *A Silken Thread* and faithfully lives by the motto "If you can conceive it, you can achieve it." The former State Farm supervisor turned full-time writer is a prime example of how following your dreams can ultimately result in destined success. She recently shared details about her passion for writing with EU.

EU Jacksonville: What is life like now that you are a full-time writer versus when you were juggling writing and maintaining your position at State Farm?

Brenda Jackson: When I worked as a supervisor, I got up at three in the morning and wrote from 3 am to 6 am and I would edit when I got home. So I really had two hats on at once. Now, I get up when I want and I'm governed by deadline. My next deadline is March 30th and I move right into another book, so I'm constantly writing.



EU: How do you prepare for your writing sessions and what rituals do you follow to awaken and expand your thoughts?

BJ: Because my books are character-driven versus plot-driven, I try to create a plot that I think will fit each character. The first thing I do is get down to my research. I already have an idea of a synopsis and what the story will be about, so I just write. I typically write eight hours a day, even on the weekends. Sometimes if I'm busy, I may limit it to six hours, but I pretty much write every day.

EU: How do you discipline yourself to steadily manage your creative ideas?

BJ: This is my 17th year writing and I'm on my 92nd book. It's really just the gift of storytelling, knowing what you want to write and writing it. That doesn't mean it can't change midway. I'm OK with that as long as it doesn't do anything to offset my characters. That's when I get writer's block, when I'm trying to force my characters to do something they shouldn't do. The biggest challenge is if you're trying to change a character. You can't change a character to fit the plot.

EU: Do you simultaneously advance your connected storylines or is each series constructed separately in chronological order?

BJ: They're not all developed once. I introduce a family and try to deal with the oldest member first because they're the ones I want to marry off first. I build up the popularity of the characters so that by the time their story comes out, I've already developed a following for that character.

EU: How do you develop the background details and personalities for your characters?

BJ: Most of the time I write from a man's perspective, so most of the characters are men, and I'm typically writing for a female audience, women who want men that treat them right. They don't necessarily have to be the good guy in the beginning. In fact, they prefer him to be the bad boy because they want to see his transformation and how he falls in love. That's where we get the power as a woman to conquer the male, so to speak. In romance novels, women like reading

about the guy who plays around because, in the end, the heroine is the woman who brings him to his knees.

EU: What particular themes do you try to incorporate into your books and how do you think those themes symbolize real-life events in relation to the romance genre?

BJ: Long-lasting relationships mostly. I've been married for 40 years, so I like to incorporate into my books that there is such a thing as happily ever after. The characters go through things, but in the end there's a happy ending. For some people, as soon as it gets rough, they get going and my books show that it doesn't have to be that way.

EU: How do you balance the demands of such a strenuous profession?

BJ: Time management and just keeping it together. Sometimes I do get off schedule, but I just get back on it the next day. It's all about making sacrifices. You have to discipline yourself and stick to your deadlines. The main thing that you want to do is write a good book and not just throw anything together for your readers. They deserve more than that.

EU: What advice would you give to young, beginner novelists?

BJ: Believe in yourself and believe anything is possible. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it, and don't get discouraged by rejection. Stay dedicated and seek advice from other writers. I attended writers conferences and learned this trade. My degree is in Business Administration, but I went where the writers and publishers were. My expectation was for them to share their knowledge and give me advice. It was up to me whether I used it or not.

Mrs. Jackson recently released the film version of her novel *Truly Everlasting* and is currently working on book number 22 of her Westmoreland series, *Texas Wild*, scheduled for publication in 2013. Visit her official website, www.brendajackson.net, for more details about upcoming releases.

THEATRE JACKSONVILLE PRESENTS

NIGHT OF JANUARY 16TH

BY AYN RAND

THE RISE AND FALL OF A POWERFUL MAN...
WAS IT MURDER?
YOU DECIDE!

Directed by Michelle Svenson Simkulet

MARCH 2 THRU 17, 2012

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