

Lynne was asked to contribute the following article to a non-romance blog in October. It was well received, and she was told it was very helpful by several of the readers. For those in the market for an agent, Lynne hopes you'll get one step closer after reading this article. If you like it, drop Lynne a line at her [Contact page](#).

CAPTURING THE ELUSIVE AGENT by Lynne Marshall©



This picture pretty well sums up the way I felt the day I got the call from an agent saying she wanted to represent my book.

First off, let me tell you a bit about myself. I have sold seven books. I have never had an agent. Let me explain a bit further. I write category romance and have managed to sell my books without the aide of an agent. But I also write single title books. And that is where the quest for an agent comes in.

These days it is necessary to have an agent to even query many of the big publishing houses. The market is getting tougher and tougher to break into, the advances are shrinking, and us little ol' writers need someone in our corner to get our work in front of an editor and the best deal possible.

After years of searching for an agent, I had gotten to the point where I thought I needed an agent to GET an agent. The task of finding the perfect representative for my writing seemed to be slipping farther and farther from my grasp. I couldn't tell you how many times I'd been rejected by agents. I'm trying my darndest to forget! But it wasn't all bad. A few times I'd made it to the full request stage, and once I received an "exclusive" request – which means I had to promise for two months that no one else would be reading my book while this agent read and decided whether or not to represent me – because she was serious about evaluating the book. My reward? I wasted two months of valuable time to hear I'd been rejected ... again. Writer, editor and publisher Deb Dixon once said at a workshop I attended that agents are looking for money in the street. What does that mean? They need to see a book that will sell, and they need to have a solid idea where they can sell your book before they'll take you on. The era of growing an author with talent appears to be gone.

Let's start from the beginning. Where did I look for an agent? Jeff Herman's *Guide to Book Publishers, Editors, and Literary Agents* is a good start. He offers extensive information about many agents including their areas of interest, their idea of a dream client (one who makes them money!!!!) what **not** to do, and how to contact them with either a partial or full manuscript, a query letter via snail mail or whether an e-mail query is acceptable. However, many agents do not submit information to Mr. Herman's guide, so keep looking! Predators and Editors (as well as agents) is a good website to peruse before sending out your precious baby manuscript to a stranger. Also, it is reassuring to know that any agent you are contacting is a member of AAR – Association of Author's Representatives, which holds the members accountable to a set of standards.

I also read up on other agents at **AgentQuery** – a website that promised to "help me find the agent who would find me a publisher." www.agentquery.com. This website breaks down the areas that each agent is interested in representing, and that is how I found an agency interested in representing unusual women's lit, or boomer lit as I call it. BINGO!

I sent out ten queries and received many boomerang rejections right off. I was also asked to send a partial to a couple of other agents, and from one of those partials I was asked to send off a full manuscript. Things were looking up.

One of the responses I'd received from my query came on what I thought was a photocopied rejection form letter ... until I read it. Surprise, surprise – this agency had requested a full manuscript from my pithy and entertaining query letter. (My words, not theirs.) I recommend that you read and study about the art of writing query letters. There are on-line courses, workshops, and many great comprehensive books that include this information. **Manuscript Makeover by Elizabeth Lyon** is a great all inclusive book about novel writing that includes an informative chapter on query letters. I highly recommend this book!

Over the next few weeks I found out that there is a new SOP – standard of practice –among many agencies. If they are not interested in your work, they do not respond, even if you have sent an SASE

– self-addressed, stamped envelope! This makes the author with a lagging ego feel even less important. But it is reality folks, and as savvy professionals, we have to suck it up and move on.

As always is the case, when we least suspect something, it happens. I had had a lousy night's sleep and decided to take a nap one Friday morning. Within ten minutes the phone rang. My first thought was – "It never fails!" I answered the phone to hear a pleasant voice ask for me. Trying my best to sound coherent I admitted who I was. Before I realized what was happening, this wonderful young woman was telling me that she'd read my book and wanted to represent me! Every question I had always promised myself I'd ask an agent when given the chance flew from my head. I apologized for sounding like a blithering idiot, and she was kind enough to offer to answer any and all questions I had, once I recovered. By the way, an excellent book to refer to for questions to ask an agent before signing with their agency is, *The Author's Toolkit – A step-by-step guide to Writing and Publishing Your Book*, by Mary Embree.

The agent said she'd hoped she'd made my day, and boy had she ever! And now I can happily say I have a NYC literary agent! We'll be shopping my manuscript around in early 2009. Wish me luck!

Here's wishing you much success with your agent hunt.

Lynne Marshall's current release for Harlequin is titled – **Pregnant Nurse, New-Found Family** and is available a www.eHarlequin.com under Medical Romance.