

## Ten Questions for Susan Wiggs

By Lynne Marshall

December 2006

I originally wrote this article for my local RWA chapter, The Los Angeles Romance Authors. Though it appeared in the May 2005 edition, I feel Susan's answers are still relevant today. Enjoy!

Perhaps the definition of prolific should include Susan Wiggs' name. Writing in both Historical Romance and Contemporary Women's fiction, she never seems to run out of ideas for wonderful stories. Her wonderful book, *LAKESIDE COTTAGE*, won the 2006 RITA for Best Contemporary Single Title Romance.

On a whim, I wrote ten questions that I wanted to ask her, and she was gracious enough to answer, so I'd like to share them with you.

- 1. How long were you writing before you got published?** "About two years. I am told this is shorter than usual, but it felt like forever." **How many manuscripts?** "Two complete and a lot of false starts!"
- 2. Where do you get your ideas?** "Everywhere – research books, the news, friends who are going through life changes, fairytales, classic literature...really, everywhere. The most unusual came from a matchbook cover I was playing with while bored in a school

meeting. I thought up THE LILY AND THE LEOPARD based on a phrase on the matchbook cover (“Crispin’s Day.”) The most fun was THE LIGHTKEEPER, conceived during a storm at the beach in a power outage. That book starts with a storm, and a mysterious stranger washing up on the beach.”

3. **Do you plot and make character studies prior to starting a book, or do you fly by the seat of your pants?** “I definitely do a lot of pre-writing, including plotting and character sketches. I always do a first-person sketch in the main character’s voice.” **What is your personal method?** “I sketch out the characters and storyline, research the milieu and then plunge in. I write a complete first draft in longhand in about 40 days (not contiguous days). Then I type it up and revise for months.”
4. **How long does it take you to complete a polished manuscript?** “Six months to a year.” **How many books do you write a year?** “Two, so I guess I’d better not take a year!”
5. **What about writing makes you anxious?** “I feel pressure for my books to perform so that my publisher’s commitment to me is justified. When there’s a great review, an award or a list performance, I tend to be happier for my publisher than for myself.

Ditto the disappointment if the book doesn't sell up to expectations."

6. **Which writers do you admire?** "Jayne Ann Krentz, Elizabeth George, Jodi Picoult, Sheila Rabe, Lois Dyer, Barbara Dawson Smith, Anjali Banerjee, Catherine Coulter, Sandra Brown...there are really too many to name. And those are just the living ones!"
7. **Of all the books you've written, which is your favorite?** "The NEXT one. The one I haven't ruined by writing it yet! **Are there any that you wish you'd never written?** "Not a one. I learn from everything I write, including my lesser efforts."
8. **Are you in a critique group? Plotting Group?** "I have two critique groups, one in my town, and one in a town across the water (I live on an island). The local one is a group of five, and the Port Orchard group has nine members. One of those is a bookseller who doesn't write but who is one of the best first-readers I've ever had. My dear friend Alice Borchardt is also a first reader, and my sister is my proofreader."
9. **How do you see the romance genre evolving in the next ten years?** "I wish I knew! I'm terrible at making predictions. I like to

think women writing fabulous stories for women will never go out of style.”

10. **Any advice to aspiring authors?** “Read everything, write fearlessly and listen carefully. This is a fun business but it requires study, dedication, practice and a lot of luck. Happy writing!”

Best wishes to Susan in the 2007 RITA, I suspect she’ll be a finalist again, and thanks for answering my e-mail!