

# PAN SPO TLIGHT

**Q: How long have you been writing?**

Eight years.

**Q: How long did it take you to publish?**

8 years (although I actually sold in 2006, which would be 6 years, the book won't be out until April 2008)

**Q: How many manuscripts do you have hidden away/under the bed/in storage?**

One

**Q: Do you have a writing schedule and if so, what is it?**

I always write on Fridays. That is the only for certain day I can plan on with my hectic schedule. Otherwise, I work it in when the opportunity arises. I don't watch TV or have any other hobbies, so every moment I'm not raising my family or working at my teaching job or running "mom" errands, I'm at my computer, writing or editing. Most times that is Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and occasionally Sunday, if I'm lucky, for a couple of hours each time.

**Q: Do you have a critique group? If yes, how many are in the group?**

I have a fabulous critique group, the Midwives. There are currently five of us, although we just lost a member to a move.

**Q: If this is not the only critique group you've participated in, how many others did you have before finding the one that worked?**

I had a great group in Los Angeles before I moved to Houston, the Four F's. They were wonderful and I missed them greatly when I had to leave. We still keep in touch and I visit now and again. Before that I was in another large group that was made up of hobbyists and those wanting to seriously publish. The group was far too large, though very supportive, so several of us with intentions of turning PRO left to form our own group (which eventually became the Four F's).

**Q: When developing an idea for a new story, which comes first – the plot or the title or the characters?**

Usually it is the first scene. It will pop into my head before the characters become clear to me or even what the story is about. I'll usually write a full chapter before I get an idea whether it is something I want to pursue or not. Often, in the writing of that chapter, a bit of the mystery will reveal itself and let me know whether I have something workable. That first chapter rarely makes it into the finished product, but it is a great way to explore the story and characters for interest.

**Q: How do you handle new story ideas that pop up when you're in the middle of a project? (ex: notebook by the bed/separate word file, etc?)**

I write that first chapter to get it out of my system, then set it aside. If it pokes at me enough, I'll go back to it when I'm through with my current project. I've found that I need at least a year to percolate a project before it is ready for me to focus on it, so it's a good idea to have something else going on in the meantime. That's what happened with my second novel. While writing *The Legacy*, my first book, a secondary character I hadn't even planned on showed up and tried to take over the story. I promised him if he behaved, he'd get his own book. That was my hero Wolf's middle brother, Günter, and his story is told in *The Promise*, due out in May 2009.

**Q: Have you ever gotten to the middle of a project and got bored or lost your momentum? If so, how did you handle it?**

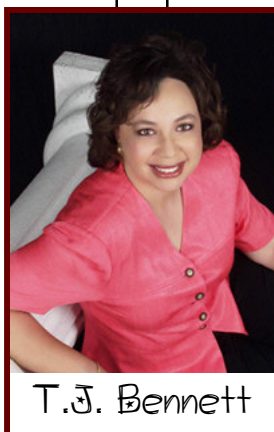
Sadly, yes. I've got several stories that are unfinished for various reasons--some due to lack of time to do the research, others due to lack of percolation. *The Promise* languished for over two years before I went back to it while I was working on some contemporary manuscripts, simply because it took a while to sell the first historical and I figured what was the point of writing a sequel if I was unable to sell the first? Luckily, I did sell *The Legacy*, and went back

and finished *The Promise*. I have another work-in-progress now that, although I love it, I'm not able to work on it because I'm revising a manuscript that received a lot of interest but no bites. I'm convinced if I can make some changes, it will sell in the second round, but honestly, I'm about sick of the thing right now and would like to move on! LOL!

**Q: Finish this sentence: If I could write anything I wanted and knew it would sell, it would be....**

Another German-set historical! I loved that time period, and it would be nice to use all that lovely research stuffed into my file cabinets. Or, a novel set in Cromwell's England. That would be cool. I love focusing on those moments of historical change and the impact they have on the average person who lived at the time. I also love writing my "what if?" paranormals. I'm convinced the one I'm working on now is some of my best work.

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T.J. Bennett

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**Q: What is the best piece of advice you've ever received in regards to your writing career?**

That was from Susan Squires. She told me not to be discouraged at my abysmal contest placements. I was receiving widely divergent scores on the same manuscripts--very high and very low in the same contest. I couldn't figure out what to do, and assumed I was just a bad writer. She told me such scores are usually indicative of a strong "voice." Authors with strong voices eventually get published--readers either love or hate you, but those that love you will stick with you forever. Best advice I ever received, because it kept me from tempering my voice too much to try to fit into the bland midrange of scores contests often encourage.

**Q: What is the worst?**

That I "couldn't" do certain things I wanted to, because the "rules" of romance writing didn't allow it. Things like using a different font, or making my hero have unsavory qualities, or having the hero handcuff my heroine to her own bed, that sort of thing. When I broke free of the "can't's" and started asking "why not?" my voice really began to come through.

**Q: What is your favorite part of the writing process?**

When it's over. LOL! No, I think it's when I'm working on a really emotional scene, and I'm in the zone, and I'm writing dialogue that sings. Nothing beats that. Also when it's over.

**Q: What is your least favorite?**

Research! I'm horribly lazy, yet a perfectionist, and I just hate doing research because I'm so anal about getting it right. It is one of the reasons I switched from historicals to contemporary paranormals. The research burden was getting me down, even though I enjoyed the historical period. I like to write fast, and it isn't possible to do that when one has to look up practically everything. Since my period was German-set Reformation historicals, trust me, I had to look up everything. My contemporary books are usually about LA cops, however, and I find them fascinating, so the research I do for that is more than fun.

**Q: Which came first for you – the editor or the agent?**

The editor. I sold two years before I ever got an agent, and honestly, the agent wasn't interested in my small press books. She really loves one of my paranormals and believes in it enough to hang in there with me while I work on the revisions.

**Q: How many contests did you enter before you sold? How many did you final in?**

I entered dozens of contests before I sold. I was a veritable contest diva. I finaled in half a dozen with my Golden Heart finalist, Dreamweaver, which never sold. I finaled in three more with my current paranormal, The Justice Seeker, the one many editors were interested in and came "this close" to selling. The Legacy finaled in one contest, The Promise none. Go

figure.

**Q: How do you promote your books?**

Blog tours, contests, keeping a website, spreading the news about good reviews, giving ARCs to booksellers--the usual. I'm also hosting a book launch party at Read it Again & Again bookstore in Houston on Beechnut on April 18 from 6 - 8 pm which is open to the public. The owner has been fabulous about hand-selling my book to her customers. I'm giving a talk in Los Angeles on April 13 and having a booksigning after, and teaching an online class for RWA Elements in May. I belong to a number of Yahoo loops and I'm promoting the book where appropriate on those as well. Both my publisher and I have placed ads in readers magazines, too.

**Q: Free form - your chance to tell us anything you'd like - tidbits, advice, funny stories, pet peeves, hopes, dreams, etc.**

The Legacy has had such a long road to publication. When I first started in in 2000, I wasn't concerned about market trends or anything like that. I had a damn good story to tell and set about telling it. It wasn't until much later that I realized what a radical act it was to set a romance in an unusual place and time like Reformation era Germany (something else people told me I couldn't do), and what a hard sell it was going to be. Contest judges, agents, and editors alike had such strong reactions to it, both for and against. So did early readers. Either people loved the book, or they hated it. I actually once had a contest judge tell me my heroine was "too stupid to live" (devastating me). Another nit-picked it to death because she claimed my hero would have had a beard because ALL men had beards during this time (even though I had many portraits and woodcuts contemporary to the time that showed the opposite). I used to joke that some contest judges hated my story so much, they'd give it really low scores then try to find out where I lived so they could burn my house down, too. (I was kidding--mostly.)

But I never stopped believing this was a good book. I didn't always believe it would sell, but I knew, years after I'd written it, when I could pick it up and read it with some objectivity and found myself laughing and crying in all the right places, this was a story that deserved a chance to be published. I'm so happy now that the time has come to see my baby on the shelves of bookstores everywhere. When I look back to how far I've come, and where I am today, and where I might be in the future, I never dreamed the kind of journey it would take me on, what I'd learn, or the friends I'd make along the way. I made my dream come true. If I never publish another book, I'll always be content with that.