

Woman's World

A woman's story

The first time Cynthia Simmons read a romance novel as a young teen, it changed her life, taking her from a sad, friendless girl who couldn't read to a confident young woman with dreams of a happy future. Years later, another romance novel would change her life once again . . .



"I'm proof that dreams really can come true!" says Cynthia, with her children.

# Cynthia's happy ending

**D**erinda James, a feisty, Boston-bred beauty out to avenge her father's death . . . Clint Gage, the man she believes responsible—tall, lean and handsome. She is a mystery he intends to solve. But can he do it before he loses everything—even his heart?

My heart raced as I stood in the bookstore reading the back of a new romance novel. I'd read dozens. But this one was different . . . special. Oh, to most readers it wouldn't sound so different. But for me, a 40-year-old

Turning the pages, my heart thundered with excitement

mom of three from Farmington Hills, Michigan, *Anything, My Love* was more than 210 pages of pleasurable escape. It was my real-life happy ending . . .

This time, things are going to be different. As a young girl, I made that vow every time my family moved—and we moved at least once a year. This time, I'll have friends, be happy, I'd think.

But in each new school, I was the outsider. My family was poor, and with my bargain-basement jeans and home haircut, the other kids teased me unmercifully. And in class . . . I was never in one school long enough to

really learn anything. Reading was the worst.

"Stupid Cindy!" the kids snickered as I stumbled over words. I'd go home in tears—and sadly, I found no comfort there.

A car accident had left my father mentally impaired; my mother couldn't cope with having a disabled husband and two young children, and retreated into her own misery. There were no hugs. No "I love you's."

By the time I entered my teens, I thought I'd never be happy. Then . . .

I was babysitting when a book lying on the coffee table caught my eye. At 14, I still couldn't read more than a few words. But the beautiful woman astride a spirited stallion on the cover . . .

Picking up the paperback, I sounded out the title. And turning the pages of the romance novel, I made out more words, about love and passion. My heart thundered with excitement.

I knew it would take forever, but "Can I read this?" I asked my neighbor.

Every day, I'd sit with the book, struggling to make sense of the letters on the page. But, spellbound by the adventure unfolding, I just couldn't quit. And finally, after months . . .

I did it! I cheered. I can read. I'm not stupid!

And I'd discovered something else . . . something magical. By simply opening a book, I could step out of

my unhappy world into one filled with beauty and love.

A book became my constant companion. I read everything; but romance novels remained my favorite. Someday, I'm going to write my own, I dreamed.

But though I was doing better in school, being a writer seemed like too big a dream for me. When, after high school, my very own dashing hero came along, I thought, I'll just live my own happily ever after.

And soon, "I'm having a baby!" I bubbled. Two more children quickly followed. A wife . . . a mother . . . I never thought I'd have so much joy.

You're all going to be so loved, I vowed, making sure I gave my family all the things I missed out on growing up. If that left no time for writing, well, that was okay. I was doing something more important. Besides, it didn't mean I would never write my book.

While doing laundry, cooking, cleaning, my characters were always in the back of my mind. I never told a soul—but, secretly, I'd dream, I'm going to do it someday.

Then, when she was 11, my daughter Mistie-Dawn was diagnosed with a learning disability. Seeing my little girl struggle over words as she tried to read, my own pain came flooding back.

She's just like me, I realized. So, rushing to the bookstore, I picked out a tame but fast-paced romance novel. Mistie-Dawn's imagination was captured by the story, and before long, she was reading it for the second time—and loving it!

Soon, she was reading all

the time, and her grades showed it. I knew it. What girl doesn't love a good love story? I smiled proudly.

Sadly, though, not all love stories have happy endings. Over the years, my husband and I had been growing apart. And after 18 years of marriage, we divorced.

My kids kept me from dwelling on my sadness. But in a few short years, they were grown and living their own lives.

I had my job selling real estate, but it was just a way to make money. Suddenly, I wanted more.

"You can do anything you want," my kids told me.

There was only one thing I'd ever wanted to do. But could I really write a romance novel? I wondered.

Then I remembered there was a time I didn't think I could even read one. But I did. And just like when I was a teenager determined to read, I'm doing it, I thought.

But if I thought reading my first romance novel was hard, oh, boy . . .

Of course, there had to be a handsome, dashing hero and a beautiful, smart hero-

ine, which my Clint Gage and Derinda James were.

But what to do with them? I searched my imagination for a plot, finally coming up with a tale of murder and intrigue that took readers from the big city to the Western frontier. I spent months writing, and finally, after almost a year, I typed, *The End*.

Wow! I breathed. But was it good enough to be published? I contacted 30 agents;

I never heard from most. Others declined in form letters. Then, one day . . .

"We'd like to publish your book," a woman from PublishAmerica phoned to say. "You're sure?" I choked. I just couldn't believe it.

But now, here I was standing in a bookstore, holding *Anything, My Love* by Cynthia Simmons! By me!

I did it! I wept joyfully.

I never told a soul—but secretly, I'd dream, I'm going to do it someday

"It's the best book I've ever read!" Mistie-Dawn gushed.

My sons proudly marched into a bookstore and bought copies! "This is my mom!" they told the salesperson.

Today, a year later, with a second novel about to be published and a third almost done, I'm still amazed—and grateful.

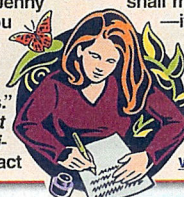
When I think about what romance novels have done for me . . . if my books could give that much hope to another young girl . . . that's a happy ending!

—as told to Deanna Pease with Kathy Fitzpatrick

How to get your book published

You don't have to be a professional to write and sell a novel," says NYC literary agent Jenny Bent. If you have an idea for a book . . .  
 ● Get the industry "bibles." *Writer's Market* and *Writer's Digest* list contact

information for publishers.  
 ● Send a brief e-mail about your book or idea. If you use snail mail, include a SASE—it'll greatly increase your chances of getting a response.  
 ● Don't follow up with a phone call—let them call you. For more tips, visit [www.jennybent.com](http://www.jennybent.com).



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Have you had a powerful, life-changing experience you'd like to share? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: A Woman's Story, *Woman's World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.