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Erie romance writer finds humor helps with happy endings

BY ROBB FREDERICK
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Holly Jacobs is an Erie-born Harlequin romance author, a mother of four with a million copies of her books in print. Jacobs recently had a cover of her book painted, framed and hung in her office in her home. (Vivian Johnson / Erie Times-News)

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The tall, dark prince stared longingly lustily lovingly into his new bride's eyes. They lay across an old oak sleigh bed in a country inn with a window view of the cliffs, tangled in 250-thread 400-thread exquisite 500-thread whisper-pink Pinzon cotton sheets.

"I love you," he said.

And that's when the author Holly Jacobs might bop him on the head, knock him off the bed, land him with a crash with his elbow in the bedpan. And why not? For all the hot love on the covers -- nice abs, Fabio -- the magic of a romance paperback comes not from the man but the laugh.

"Comedy is our first line of defense," Jacobs, an Erie native, says. "So it kind of comes naturally to me."

It helps that she's happy. She has four kids, a cop husband and a dog named Ethel Merman Fuhrmann.

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She's a Harlequin star, the 40-something author of 31 novels, with more than a million copies in print. She is L-O-V-E incarnate.

As a kid, she was smitten with Trixie Belden,



(Chris Sigmund / Erie Times-News)

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the spunky girl detective. But it was fantasy that really grabbed her: Heinlein, Tolkien and the whole journey from Middle-earth.

You read it here first: Holly Jacobs, our homegrown romance queen, is a closet Hobbit fan.

She drops another log on the fire. She quiets the dog with an oatmeal cookie. She talks about her books, from "Laugh Lines" back to "Mad About Max," "A Snowball's Chance" and "Be My Baby," which was printed in Canada, France, Belgium, Holland, Mexico, Italy, Finland, Poland, Korea, Argentina and Sweden. She says she sells especially well in Brazil. She is not sure why.

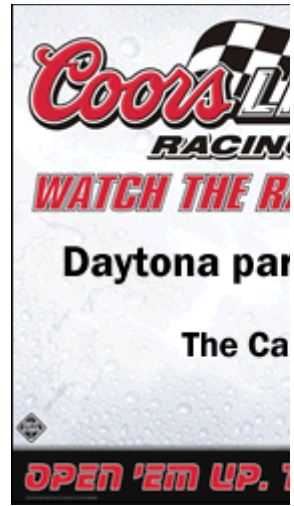
But love is love, right? Language is letters and tense and syntax, and the way Jacobs types an "XX" every time she has to mark a gap for some little fact she'll come back to. Love is bigger than that.

"Everybody wants to be loved," she says, on the couch now, legs crossed. "Everybody wants to feel accepted. Everybody wants to have that sense that they fit into the picture.

"Romance, maybe more than any other genre, gets that," she says. "If the core relationship isn't there, it isn't going to work."

She sold her first book in 1997. She sold one to Harlequin in March 2000. Her fall book for the company, "The House on Briar Hill Road," will be part of Harlequin's Everlasting Love series, a line of epic, contemporary romances. "The Notebook" is the gold standard.

"What sets Holly apart is the honesty in her writing," says her editor, Katherine Lye. "Her characters have weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and they struggle to overcome them. And I think readers really respond



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Holly Jacobs, an Erie-born Harlequin romance author, is published around the world. (Vivian Johnson / Erie Times-News)

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to that.

"Life is pretty tough," Lye says from her office in Toronto. "So you look for those special moments. And Holly always puts them in her books."

Jacobs writes five pages a day. She often stops to fold laundry, or to watch the first 15 minutes of "The View."

"The beautiful thing about what I do is that I'm home all day," she says. "I'm in my quiet little house with my dog and my fire, writing stories about a hidden princess."

The humor comes to her. Like the time she caught a

child who will not be named rappelling from the garage with a rope sewn from bathrobe belts.

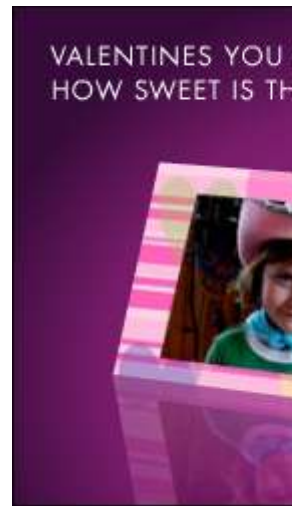
"But it's all fictionalized," she insists, as if to protect the innocent.

And it is innocent. Romance, like everything else, has splintered into genres. Browse a big used-book sale and you'll spot romances set in the West, or laced into Victorian corsets. You'll get Scottish historical love stories, medieval pieces, even kissy science fiction.

Done right, Jacobs says, a simple kiss can be promiscuous explicit illicit. So enough already with the bodice ripping.

"I don't really write 'hot,'" she says. "That's not to say I haven't included a love scene in a book. But I'm far more likely to say, 'and then this happened,' and close the door."

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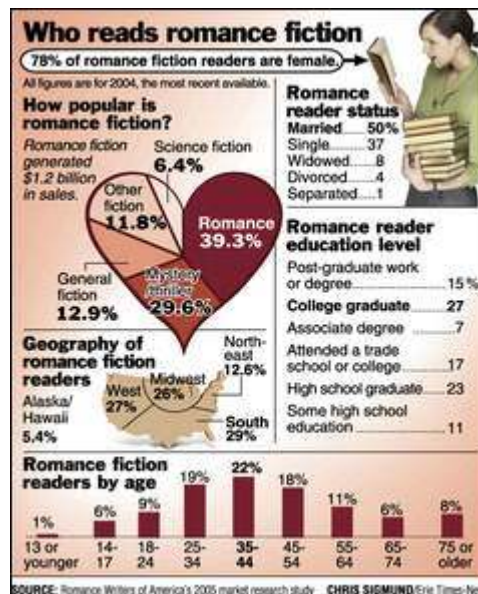
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