



Off the

Jane Porter loves a happy ending.

Perhaps that's why this international author and Bellevue Club member refused to accept that she couldn't have one of her own.

Despite parenthood, family strife and numerous rejections, Jane always knew one thing—she needed to be a writer.

At 5 years old, while many of her peers were exploring the correct spelling of “C-a-t,” Jane had already penned her first story.

“It was a story of a Christmas elf—very original,” she says, laughing. “I just hand-printed big block letters.”

Two years later, she collaborated with a friend to create a picture book that was a continuation of “Wizard of Oz,” but it wasn't until fourth grade that Porter made her first attempt at serious fiction.

“I knocked off ‘Little Women’ and wrote this 100-page novel about four sisters and their adventures,” she says.

She attributes her early start to her parents' own love for literature.

“I had two parents that read to us every night,” she says. “My dad was a professor and a writer. It was so natural.”

Nowadays, with nearly 4 million copies of her romance and modern literature books in print in 20 languages, Jane has moved well

beyond her early literary offerings.

But the road from child scribe to prolific author wasn't an easy one.

Jane wrote 13 books before she got her first romance novel, “The Italian Groom,” published in 2001.

Before that, she had gone to UCLA to study theater arts, but shied away from acting as a career.

“I just didn't like all the attention on looks,” she says. After graduation she worked for six years in business, but decided it wasn't her true calling.



Jane and her sons, Ty and Jake

“My parents had said all along that I'd be a really good teacher,” she says. “They were really annoying, but I realized they might be right.”

Jane then went back to school at night to pursue a master's in writing from the University of San Francisco, and eventually taught junior-high and high-school English for seven years.

Meanwhile, she continued to write, ignoring the mounting stack of rejection letters from publishers.

“I just don't know how to quit,” she says. “I couldn't accept that what I wanted most in the world,

I couldn't do.

“I had these big strides in the beginning where it looked very promising, and then it just kind of stopped and I didn't know what I was doing wrong,” she says. Most of her early book attempts were romance novels for Harlequin in Toronto and London. The lone exception was a lengthy medieval historical fiction piece.

“It was 900 pages—not very commercial,” Jane says with a laugh.

When she and her former husband moved to Bellevue, Jane joined some local writing groups and won a major award for unpublished manuscript in the romance genre. Within a year, she got her first book published by Harlequin.

“It felt amazing,” she says.

The next several years, Jane averaged four romance novels per year and developed a loyal following of readers with her plots featuring strong heroines and exotic locales.

To those who scoff at the genre, Jane is undaunted.

“Romance has such a positive message, and I think that's the part of the genre that's very misunderstood,” she says. “Women are the heroes in romance novels.”

Although she was producing novels at a feverish pace, Jane quickly realized she needed to take a creative break from romance.

“It was just out of desperation. I could not write one more without doing something else creative-wise,” she says. She began exploring themes of women wading through the dating world, single-motherhood and high-stakes careers.

“To me it matters very much that women feel good about themselves,” she says. “I think a lot of women don't know that they have

Shelf

Bellevue author brings strong women to life in popular novels

By John Kinmonth

a right to actually feel good, not just look good or be pleasing to society or to a spouse.”

Her first book outside classic romance, “The Frog Prince,” took three to four months to sell and was well received, but her next novel catapulted her writing into the mainstream market.

Recently aired as a Lifetime movie with Heather Locklear playing the lead role, “Flirting with Forty,” is about a newly divorced woman who’s approaching 40 and facing major life changes. Set in Seattle and Hawaii, the main character struggles with single parenthood and ends up falling for a surf instructor while on vacation.

In real life, Jane has two sons, Ty, 10, and Jake, 13, with her previous husband, and is in a serious relationship with a surf instructor from Oahu also named Ty. She’s expecting her third son with Ty in May. While she draws heavily on her own experiences for her novels, she says none of them are autobiographical.

“I think that each of my books has a piece of me, but they’re really not me,” she says. “I would have to have four or five more personalities to be all these characters.”

Jane has since written three more modern literature books, two of which—“Odd Mom Out” and “Mrs. Perfect”—feature Bellevue prominently as the backdrop. Her latest book, “Easy on the Eyes,” is about an aging anchorwoman in Los Angeles dealing with

the trappings of a career and lifestyle that thrives on youth.

She continues to write romance novels as well, albeit at a much slower pace.

“I have fans who love my romance, so it’s hard to stop,” she says. “The only negative for me is I find the love scenes harder and harder to write.”

An avid reader, Jane refuses to be defined by her genres in writing, or in life.

“In my mind, it’s not a label of romance, women’s fiction, chick lit, mom lit or whatever people want to call it—I’m a writer,” she says. “I’ve found that a lot of people want honesty and my fiction books allow me to be really honest.”

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5 Reflections

Favorite Book:

“Little Women” by Louisa May Alcott. After I read it, I knew I had to be a writer.

First Job:

I worked at A&W as a carhop. I still love root beer.

Best Advice:

Live life one day at a time.

Hero/Greatest Influence:

My dad for writing and my grandmother for strength.

Favorite Activity at the Club:

The pool—my kids love to come swim.

