

WRITING LADY OUTLAW

Idea

Caleb and Jennie's story was actually meant as companion novel to the very first book I ever wrote. It took me a year to write. The story went through several revisions and eventually took on a life of its own so that it no longer fit with that first book.

I knew I wanted a female outlaw as a heroine for this story. Originally I was going to have Jennie rob trains or stagecoaches, but my dad suggested she take money that had already been stolen. I liked the idea because it helped with the sort of female Robin Hood image I wanted for Jennie, since she's trying desperately to save something worthwhile—her ranch.

Title

One of the three original titles I had for the story was *Lady Outlaw*. I used a different title when I sent the manuscript to Harlequin, but because it was also the name of a blog, so I needed to change it after accepting Harlequin's offer of publication. I came up with a whole list of titles, which included the words *Lady Outlaw*. My editor e-mailed back and asked what I thought of *Lady Outlaw*. I had to smile since that was one of my original titles!

Publication

I began seriously writing in 2004 a couple months after the birth of my oldest son. I wrote my first book, then set to work on the companion novel, which was Jennie and Caleb's story.

I finished *Lady Outlaw* in December 2007, but I didn't have any plans for the manuscript. I did send it piece by piece to my critique group. Then in 2010, I went to the ACFW conference. I met with an agent there, and though I pitched a different story to her, I also told her about the other two books I'd written. She liked the premise of Jennie's story and asked to see the whole thing. Up to this point, I hadn't thought much about it being a viable story or considered trying to get it published.

I hurried to revise it, using suggestions from my critique group and husband, and sent it off. That agent retired a few months later, but when Harlequin announced a contest for writers to pitch their story ideas in May 2011, I decided to pitch Jennie's story. I was picked as one of the finalists in the contest, and in a scheduled chat online, I received a request from Harlequin to see the whole manuscript.

Initially I received a rejection from Harlequin, though the editor who reviewed my book did mention things she liked about the story. I wrote her back, and asked that given what she liked, would she consider looking at it again. She agreed.

I was excited, and a little overwhelmed, with the opportunity to fix things and send it in a second time. I wasn't sure if this was my last shot, so I wanted to nail it. Again with my husband's and critique group's help – and much reliance on the Lord – I revised the problem areas in less than two months. It was at this stage that Caleb became a former bounty hunter and his conflicted back story came to life. This was the piece I'd been missing before and just didn't know it until then.

When I sent it back to Harlequin this time, the story was much stronger than any of the earlier versions. I waited to see if they agreed. On January 13, 2012, I saw that I'd missed a call from the editor who'd reviewed the book before. I called back and was excited and shocked when she said Harlequin Love Inspired wanted to publish my book. It was a weekend for being on Cloud Nine! That same day, I contacted a literary agent I'd worked with the previous summer on a different manuscript, Jessica Alvarez of BookEnds, LLC, and received an offer of representation from her three days later.

While I didn't think *Lady Outlaw* would become my first published novel, I realize now how fitting it is, how in the Lord's timetable everything worked out. This is a story of romance, adventure, forgiveness and courage, and I can't imagine a better beginning to this new chapter in my life as an author.