



The Road to Publication: One Woman's Journey of Persistence

by Carol Smilgin

My path to publication began with a horoscope.

I was working as the Building Manager of a private girls' school in Manhattan when word filtered down through the administration that a psychology professor at a women's college on Fifth Avenue was conducting a study on character traits.

She was asking for volunteers to come in and have their horoscopes read. Anyone interested should call, give their name, date, time and place of their birth, and an appointment would be set up for them. Intrigued, I called.

Two weeks later, I arrived at the college for my appointment. For an hour and a half, the professor and I reviewed my horoscope wheel and associated celestial signs. Then, indicating a particular section of the wheel, she said something like, "This portion is so strong, I recommend that you follow it up and do something about it." When I asked what it was, she said, "Writing."

Several years went by before I acted on it, however. In addition to my Building Manager's job, I'd been assigned the job of "Owner's Rep" for a four-floor addition to the school. As a result, I'd enrolled in building construction classes with New York University's Continuing Ed program. This was no time for additional projects.

Another three years went by. Then, one Sunday I attended a one-day seminar on writing, given by Elizabeth Ayres, Founder of the Creative Writing Center in Manhattan. Weekly writing exercises with Ms. Ayres followed. That fall, I attended a three-day writing retreat in Montauk Long Island, sponsored by the Elizabeth Ayers Center and led by Ms. Ayres.

Each evening, each of us was asked to read aloud something we'd written that day. One story was more heart wrenching than another; and I remember thinking that if these were examples of what writing was all about, I was out of my element. None of my life experiences had been as dramatic or disillusioning as the majority of those being read. Dejected, I returned to New York.

The following month, Elizabeth Ayres moved to New Mexico. I'd begun thinking about the wonderful times and experiences I'd had during the forty plus years I'd lived in New York; and, bit-by-bit, a romance novel – "Love Was a Stranger" – began to take shape.

I joined the Manhattan chapter of Romance Writers of America (RWA), attended the weekly critique sessions held upstairs in a mid-town, Lexington Avenue deli, and attended that year's New Jersey RWA conference.

By the time I'd finished "Love Was a Stranger," it was a whopping five or six hundred double-spaced pages long. Not knowing what else to do, I submitted it to Elizabeth Ayres' assistant who'd agreed to read it.

Afterward, she suggested I purchase a writers' manual of some kind.

Life was hectic. I was in the process of selling a house in NJ, house hunting on Cape Cod, and still living in Manhattan. As a result, I'd stopped attending the critique classes and was totally clueless about how to take my novel to the next step. So, I gave the manuscript to a friend whose job included considerable proof reading.

I'm embarrassed to say that when she returned it to me, the pages were covered in post-its. I kept the manuscript for several years as a reminder of what never to submit in the future. Somewhat reassured, I began writing "Provenance," a romantic suspense novel built around art stolen during World War II.

By 2005, I had moved to Cape Cod, was helping out at the Cape Cod Writers' Center. I worked alone for six hours a week, covering the CCWC office left empty for three months due to illness. I started helping out at the CCWC August Conference, and continue to do so each summer. I've now been on the Board of the Writers' Center for the last six years and on the Executive Committee for the last four.

Still a member of RWA, I joined the local New England Chapter who met off-Cape. My "Provenance" manuscript was finished, and I decided to pitch it at the New England RWA conference the following March.

I was assigned to Hillary Sares of Kensington and was thrilled when she asked me to send her both "Provenance" and "Love Was a Stranger." Sadly, both were turned down because the suspense wasn't strong enough for her category of Romantic Suspense.

Undaunted, I had a hip replacement and began writing another novel, "Concerto."

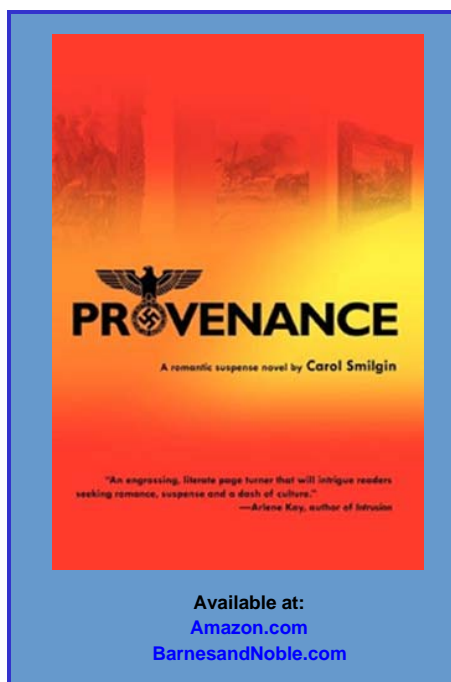
By 2009, millions of government files had been declassified and increased information about World War II that included detailed information about Nazi confiscated art, was now available. "Provenance" needed revision.

To fine-tune the manuscript, I registered for a month-long, online course on plotting through the Orange County Chapter of RWA.

Halfway through, our monitor, Carol Hughes, suggested that I further develop the plot and make "Provenance" more of an international romantic suspense thriller. I began the revision.

During the eight months that ensued, I contacted iUniverse and hired an independent copyeditor. I'd been retired for several years and felt that time was of the essence.

On June 25, 2011, my hard work finally paid off. PROVENANCE was published at last!



Carol Smilgin lives and writes on Cape Cod. She serves on the Executive Committee of the Cape Cod Writers Center and belongs to the New England chapter of the Romance Writers of America. PROVENANCE is her first published novel.

On April 22, Carol will be speaking at a breakfast hosted by the Falmouth Jewish Congregation Brotherhood/Sisterhood about her book and on the subject of WWII Nazi-confiscated artwork.

On April 27-28, Carol will be signing copies of her book at the New England RWA annual conference, "Let Your Imagination Take Flight," held at the Hawthorne Hotel in Salem, MA.

Visit Carol's website at <http://carolsmilgin.weebly.com>

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