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FACES IN THE CROWD

Writer weaves tales of romance

By **KIMBERLY PINA** CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Feb. 8, 2009, 1:34PM

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David Hopper For the Chronicle

DeeAnne Gist of The Woodlands holds four of the books she has had published. Gist has twice won the prestigious Christy Award for best romance book.

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DEEANNE GIST

- **Age:** 48
- **Occupation:** Author of romance novels
- **Community Connection:** Lives in The Woodlands
- **Fast fact:** Gist has won several awards for her work including the Christy Award for Best Romance in 2006 and 2007
- **Quick quote:** "When that first book arrives it's such a labor of love...it's second only to having babies," she said. "It's really and truly exciting."

overwhelming.

"When you have a deadline, it doesn't matter who's graduating from high school or which kid gets married or who

As a young teenager, DeeAnne Gist loved reading romance novels and following the heroine through a tailspin of emotions that led her to the altar with Mr. Right.

But as times changed and Gist grew into adulthood, the now 48-year-old said she noticed that the fictional women in more modern romance novels were making what she considered to be negative moral choices about love and intimacy.

The Woodlands resident began to wonder how her own teenage daughters would respond to and be influenced by those books, which often endorsed sex before marriage.

"Back in the 90s, I had a couple of young girls and I thought, 'What if they are romantics like me?'" said Gist, who also has two sons. "I felt a challenge to write a book for other girls showing them that there are other options. I wanted to show it's OK for Christian girls to have the same feelings and when it comes time to make a decision how to handle all those feelings."

After attending a Romance Writers of America meeting, Gist began the process of writing her first novel that she hoped would send a message to girls and women searching for love. Writing was familiar to her as she had been a freelance journalist for several years.

Her first book, *A Bride Most Begrudging*, follows the love story of a woman brought to America from England as a "tobacco bride" during the Colonial period. The story weaves the fictional romance of an unlikely couple with American History, one of Gist's passions.

Since her first novel was published in 2005, Gist has written three more books and has another book, *A Bridge in the Bargain*, due out in May by publisher Bethany House. She's also working on a collaborative crime fiction romance novel with author and theologian J. Mark Bertrand.

Gist has won several awards for her work including the Christy Award for Best Romance in 2006 and 2007, and her books have been on bestseller lists.

Becoming successful at something she loves has been enjoyable, Gist said, although the best part of writing novels is working from home - commuting from her breakfast room to the study in her Bugs Bunny slippers - and seeing her work published.

"When that first book arrives it's such a labor of love...it's second only to having babies," she said. "It's really and truly exciting."

Working with Gist has been an adventure for her editor, the senior acquisitions editor at Minnesota-based Bethany House, David Long. Her dedication to research and desire to keep readers on their toes is what Long says makes Gist's books a pleasure to read.

"She knows tension which is what keeps readers turning page," Long said. "Romantic tension, dramatic tension, comic tension even...creates vibrant stories with lots of feeling placed in settings that come alive."

The content for her books typically comes from in-depth research, Gist said, and her own imagination.

"I love American history and there are so many tidbits in our history that people don't know about," she said.

Although, she admits that deadlines can be grueling and sometimes

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gets the flu," she said. "Your deadline is your deadline."

Throughout her writing process, Gist works closely with what a critique group of writers who help her refine her stories. Her sister also provides straight-forward feedback about her work that has helped in the editing process, Gist said.

Writing novels and spending time with her husband Greg as empty-nesters takes up most of her time now. All four of her children are attending college and one of them is married.

Before becoming an established author, Gist had a varied career before becoming a published author. She previously worked in elementary education before staying home to raise her four children.

From that point on, she ran a home accessory and antique business, and a publishing company, and assisted her husband with his small engineering firm.

But writing has been her true joy, and as a Christian, Gist wanted her books to teach good morals to young girls and women while giving them freedom to love.

"God has shown favor and placed his hands on my books for whatever reason and they've done really, really well," she said. "I'm so thrilled and honored to have experienced success in the profession."

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