

A Summer to Remember

Erika Montgomery

AUTHOR Q & A

1. What inspires you to write books?

For me, stories arrive from different sources—an idea might come from a house I see when I'm driving down an unfamiliar road and immediately envision characters inhabiting it; other times it's a fascinating article in a magazine, or even just the headline that sparks a story idea. But the most common root of inspiration comes from characters and relationships; the compulsion to tell *someone's* story, to dig deep into the heart of someone who is needing something or missing something (or someone). Sometimes the idea will revolve around a single scene. I'll imagine a moment when stakes and emotions are high—estranged spouses reunited by accident, a family secret confessed over a wedding toast or a holiday meal (I blame a fascination with soap operas when I was young—every scene was a spoiler!) and the bones of the story often grow out of that central conflict.

2. What did you want to become in childhood?

An actress—always, an actress! But my compulsion for story was consistently there too, whether I was writing scripts for plays I'd rope my incredibly-patient sister into, or a plotline for a comic book I was sketching, I was constantly building characters and conflicts in my head. It was in high school, well-fed on a diet of historical romances and thrillers, when I started writing full-length novels and began my pursuit for publication.

3. Why do you think movies evoke such strong memories for us? Do you have any specific movie memories you would like to share?

I think movies give us escape. There's something just so utterly transporting about sitting in a theater, having the lights drop and suddenly the screen ignites—something so freeing and redemptive. There's a timelessness to them, a freedom. Anything is possible in a movie—time stands still, and whatever heartache or worry you carry when you take your seat can be shed as soon as that screen lights up. It's not so unlike being at the beach. Whatever emotions are roiling in your heart, one lungful of that sea air, one rush of that frothy surf on your bare toes, and your troubles retreat with the surf. That's how it is to lose yourself in a movie. And I think that's why we have such vivid



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and rich emotional attachments to the experiences of them, because we find ourselves in the story—and it becomes a part of our narrative.

I'm confident that I could tell you what sort of headspace I was in when I saw a particular movie—who I was with, how I was feeling. *Desperately Seeking Susan* and I'll remember my friend and me skipping last period in high school to catch the nearly-empty matinee, gorging ourselves on the box of orange creams we'd bought at the pharmacy next door and snuck in. Say *Sideways*, I'd remember how the screen was especially dark because I'd left my glasses at my now-husband's apartment and had to watch the whole movie with my prescription sunglasses. *The Day After Tomorrow*? I'd well up, remembering that I'd just learned I was pregnant and suddenly couldn't bear the smell of popcorn for the first time in my life.

4. What gave you the inspiration to write this story, and when did that lightning bolt strike?

I've always wanted to feature my passion for movies in a novel, but this book actually started with a small detail: the discovery of a sealed letter, which then grew into something greater—a woman compelled to deliver it, and how that simple goal would change the course of her life, and her understanding of her past, and of herself.

5. *A Summer to Remember* is rich with characters. Which character do most identify with or feel most connected to?

Can I admit I can't pick just one? Part of the joy for me in writing this novel and spending time with these characters—specifically Glory, Frankie, Louise and Maeve—was that, even though they stretched such a broad range of experience and age, I could always find something relatable in each one of them. As a mother, I connected deeply with Glory's quest early in motherhood to preserve a piece of her independence. As a wife, I identified with Louise's need to protect her intimacy with her husband, and her physical sense of self as she sees herself aging. As a grieving daughter honoring her past with her mother, I keenly felt Frankie's longing, but I also related to her pursuit of joy in the midst of her loss, as she feels such a fierce attraction to Gabe and lets herself act on that. Every woman in the book, at her core, faces a reckoning of trying to reconcile her past with her future. I think that's a universal passage for women and men, that we all walk that fine line daily, hourly even, between regret and relief, guilt and absolution.

