

# For the Greater Good: Writing Issue-Themed Romance

By Melinda Rucker Haynes

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## **Why we write what we do**

People often ask romance authors why we write what we do. Depending on the audience, perhaps we go literary with, “I write because I must.” To another we might wax romancy, “I’m in love with love and think the world needs more of it.” Perhaps by our very nature we writers are inherently questioners of life and the roles people play, starting with the novelist’s primary question of *what if* to the journalist’s half-dozen of who, what, why, when, where and how. However, answers about why *you* write what you do may be best found within where you can hear the voice of your dearly held beliefs, your ideals. Then when asked why, you might answer you endeavor to write novels that entertain, inform and inspire because this world of insensible violence and loveless cruelty needs hope of happy endings, or so declares the voice of my ideals. Yours may say something else.

## **Ideal characters or characters with ideals**

My personal development ideals oblige me to write and work for my own growth as well as for the greater good. Consequently, I believe the most interesting, compelling fictional characters must also struggle throughout their story to find the meaning of their choices within their core beliefs or ideals and take responsibility for the outcomes. By the end, the characters must have come into awareness of their weaknesses and strengths to grow out of their self-defeating, loveless behavior. Stories of such characters with ideals may inspire readers to begin to open to positive possibilities in their own lives, thus serving the greater good.

Keeping to my ideal of writing authentic characters, I chose to create a fictional character in my novel, *Breach of Trust*, who had been a victim of domestic violence (DV). The character’s life is severely impacted by childhood abuse, the effects of which he has to overcome in order to trust himself to give and be worthy of love—just as many real DV victims do, I discovered. Determined to create characters with ideals instead of idealized characters, I researched carefully, interviewed DV victims and those who try to help them. Then the issue of domestic violence came home to me a couple of months ago when a neighbor’s estranged husband barricaded himself in their house with a gun after his wife escaped, then the man was killed by the police. Now I have personal experience with the devastating effects of domestic violence that will be with me from now on. One proactive way I can deal with the disturbing fallout of this tragedy is to draw on these strong images and emotions to task and empower future characters to make them more authentic, drive them toward their ideals and create a better ending.

## **For the greater good**

I may write a character who has suffered domestic violence and is still deeply affected by it in his adult life, but I cannot leave him there—secretly afraid, angry and cynical. That would not serve the character or the greater good. He must act even if he’s afraid. He must choose to come into his own power and take action. He must have hope of a better future, if not for himself then for those for whom he sacrifices. The character’s triumph over personal adversity or, since I write contemporary fantasy, big stakes paranormal WMD gives us hope that we can overcome the obstacles in our lives, too. I must remember that as a storyteller I have to be a clever issue-theme weaver as few readers will tolerate a heavy-handed, preachy message in their romances. The more memorable stories feature relevant themes deftly conveyed through authentic

characters' ideals-based choices and actions. To many readers, the stories we tell are real because the characters' lives seem mirrors of the readers' own, and they write to us about their emotional connection with our characters' redemption and empowerment that gives them hope.

While researching the domestic violence issue, I talked with the director of Domestic Abuse Women's Network [www.dawnonline.org](http://www.dawnonline.org) who had never read a romance novel. I shared that today's romances deal with most women's issues, including domestic violence. To help the director understand romance writers' positive contributions to women, I compiled a list of romance novels dealing with the DV issue. You'll be proud of our RWA members' novels that are on **THE LIST** of domestic violence themed romances at [www.melindaruckerhaynes.com](http://www.melindaruckerhaynes.com). If you don't see your favorite DV themed books listed, please email [melinda7ml@hotmail.com](mailto:melinda7ml@hotmail.com) and let me know as the much downloaded **THE LIST** is updated constantly.

For your own and the greater good, let me encourage you to write that issue-themed romance about characters with ideals that you've been meaning to write. Take inspiration from the issue-themed bumper sticker that says: Visualize Whirled Peas. . .uh, that may not be the best one. Anyway, whatever you choose to do, listen to your ideals and create from your heart. You'll be the better for it. We all will.

*Melinda Rucker Haynes wonders if she were also a crusader in a previous life where her fascination with swords and battling evil may have begun. Speaking of ancient magical swords, Melinda's next book, **Essence of Trust**, is a June 2005 hardcover release in her paranormal romantic thriller saga for Five Star Publishing.*