

A BSB Interview With Graphic Arts Consultant: Sheri

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Publicist/Author Liaison

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How long have you been involved in graphic arts, and how did you first get into the field?

I have been doing this for over twenty years. Oops, my age is showing. I have been doing this for some years. I started doing layout at a newspaper when I was eighteen, and I discovered that I have ink in my blood. I have been in the publishing business since.

Where do you get your ideas for a book cover?

Mostly from the story, if I get to read it. Otherwise from the authors or from master...Oops. I mean Rad...the boss.

When I read a book, images flash in my head. The mood of the story gives me the color and texture of the book cover. Then I have to decide on the best image for the story. Images and fonts are the most important elements of a good cover. The rest is icing.

Do you work with the author and/or publisher to get help with your ideas and how do you decide whether to use a photograph, clip art, or other avenues? Are there certain things you have to worry about using?

BSB makes a considerable effort to include the authors in the cover-design process. This is their work and their creation, so it's VERY important to consult them and get their input. They don't always get exactly what they want on the cover, but we make every effort to try to get it as close as possible.

It's great getting input from the writers because sometimes it pushes me in directions I may not have gone before, and I like that. Rad actually is very good in that area. Because of her direction I am able to achieve results I did not think possible...for me anyway.

We have to always ensure that we have the rights to any image or graphic we use. So we use photos I shoot or graphics I create...or photos we buy from photo-stock companies. Sometimes we also use photos provided by the authors. But we are very careful about copyright material.

Because we print at 300 DPI (dots per square inch), the quality of our images and graphics has to be of a very high standard. It's one of the reasons our covers look so clean.

From start to finish, what is the average length of time it takes to complete a cover?

Hmm, that's hard to say because of the process. We design temp cover sometimes a YEAR in advance. These are not intended to be final cover, but we hope to have it close to the final image. If the final cover has to be TOTALLY changed, then we may have from fifteen to twenty versions of a cover, which could take up to twenty hours.

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An average cover requires between five to ten versions, which is under ten hours. But EVERY book is different. The topic, the period, and the style of the book will decide the degree of difficulty. I have designed a final cover in ONE day. But that is the exception, not the rule. I have designed final artwork in TWO HOURS, but that depends on my muse. She is very fickle sometimes.

What is your favorite part of the process? What's your favorite tool(s) to use when creating your designs?

Reading the books is the best part of the job! Can you believe I get to read all these great books!

The interesting part of the design process is trying to find the skills to achieve a desired effect. If it's something I have never done before, I have to go learn how to do it. And although this can be frustrating sometimes, it's damn cool when I can finally achieve the effect I want. Then I feel a sense of accomplishment, and I go around with a cheesy grin on my face for a few hours. Then master emails to say she has more work to do...so I snap out of it.

I love learning new techniques and new software. I go to NYC almost every year to learn new design skills, and I spend hours playing in graphics programs. And everyday I learn something new. This has allowed my work to change and hopefully evolve over the years. I like to think that I am always growing as an artist and a person. And I hope this is reflected in my work.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to get into book cover design or other graphic work?

KEEP AT IT! It took me a long time and thousands of hours to get to this point. But once you have a love for it, you will only get better. That is guaranteed!

Designing graphics is a real joy for me. I don't think of it as a job. I feel honored that I get to work on covers for so many talented writers.

Any favorite past times, hobbies or other interests?

I love the beach! I live on an island so I try to get to the beach as much as possible. I pass the ocean on my way to and from work everyday and it calms me. I love running. I try to do it a few times a week.

Photography is my passion. I spend a lot of time trying to improve my skills. I focus mostly on nature because I am really lousy at shooting people. I really enjoy shooting photos for book covers—finding the right props, trying to get the lighting right. It's fun.

We have some very interesting covers in December. I didn't shoot any of the photos, but when I designed *Heart 2 Heart* Julie asked if the female on the cover could be LESS frumpy. So I had to give her more curves. I hope she's pleased.

Fully Involved, which comes out in December, was a difficult cover for me because I wanted to FEEL the story, so I focused on textures. Hopefully the readers will also feel it.

To see more about Sheri, go to her bio on the About page on the Bold Strokes Books Web site at

www.boldstrokesbooks.com/about.html.



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