



Playing God

Anna Lee Baier, 77, romance novelist

The Grafton resident is the former head of accounting at Allen Engineering in Milwaukee and the only woman to serve on its board of directors. Under the pen name Ana Leigh, she became a *New York Times* best-selling author of more than 30 books.

I knew nothing about writing a novel. I was an insatiable reader, so consequently presumed I could write a book. Well, my first book (*Love's Long Journey*, published 1981) had no transitions. It had men giving long, flowery, romantic sentences. I mean, let's face it, five words in a sentence is a lot for a man.

It was just pitiful, lacking the skills of a writer. I broke in at the right time. Today, I wouldn't have a prayer with that book.

Writing is a struggle initially because you simply are not going to get reimbursed for the hours you put into it. And you have to build that following in your readership, and that takes years because there's so much competition out there.

People who know me would tell you I'm a very independent soul, and I'm just true to myself. If the public doesn't like me, I can't worry about that.

Generations make a difference in how you define romance. Some people like an alpha male, and others like a beta male. It's the standard joke that all my heroes are Tom Selleck clones.

To define what is love would be difficult. Speaking for myself, I find it goes far beyond sexual. That's early marriage, but there is a later marriage. It seems the longer it lasts, the deeper it grows. That may be why more people should read romance novels, because a romance novel signifies total commitment by the time that book ends.

Man has always dreamed of something. So everybody needs a form of escapism. Suzy Homemaker, who picks up that romance novel, is no different than that engineer who's trying to design a rocket to the moon.

I find that by writing, it's keeping my mind active. This is your chance to play God, so why give it up? It's the only thing in life I really have control of. It's my salvation.

— As told to Julia Ann Charpentier