



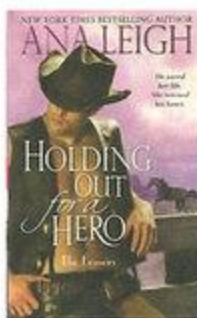
AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



Ana
Leigh

When Ana Leigh emerged on the literary scene in 1981 with **Love's Long Journey**, she approached romance writing as a hobby, not an occupation. She was the head of accounting at Allan Engineering in Milwaukee during the 1990s and the only woman to serve on their board of directors. By 1993, she had published nine books with major companies Leisure and Avon, but retained her corporate position, still looking upon her fiction as an avocation. In 1994, she officially retired from business to make the most of her

passion for writing.

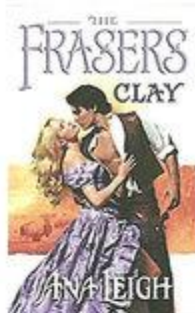
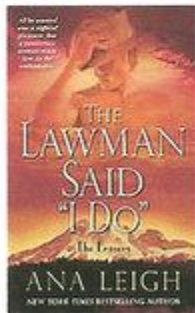
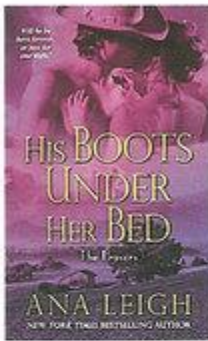


Today, it is impossible to deny this New York Times and USA Today best-selling author is a novelist by profession with thirty-three books in print. She is presently under contract with Pocket, but has released titles under imprints for Harlequin and Dorchester. Her rights have been sold worldwide. Though she is best known for historical romance set in the American West, especially her famous ten-book Mackenzies series and her five-book Frasers series, Leigh has also published three contemporaries.

Ana Leigh 's Web Site

What was the first Western historical novel you remember reading?

I don't remember the exact title, but it would have to have been Zane



Grey. I read all his, and then I moved on to Louis L'Amour. We didn't have the ladies' fiction type that we have today as far as Westerns went. They were a pretty exclusive male territory, so it was always a hero, and the heroine was very secondary in those books, sometimes none at all.

When did you know you were hooked on Westerns?

Well, I was hooked on Westerns from the first time I read them because I've always been in awe of the West. But as far as a Western romance novel, it didn't even occur to me to write one until I read *Sweet Savage Love* by Rosemary Rogers. And I thought, "Wow." I loved the book. I wish she would have stayed with Westerns because I liked her books much more—her Westerns—than I do the contemporaries that she wrote. But that's my personal taste—it's the West again, just always has fascinated me.

What do you like about Western historical romances versus other genres?

Well, the possibility for good stories is as vast as the land is out there. There's so much you could write about, particularly from the time the migration started West, which would have been immediately post... well even before the end of the Civil War.

What part of the writing process do you enjoy the most when you write?

For me, there's no question. It's research, because when you start the research you just go deeper and deeper into it. It becomes more fascinating. You're able to often build your story around a particular battle or an incident, and I just think it has so much to offer as far as an exciting storyline goes because it was a very exciting place to live in as it developed out there. And, of course, those treks West were unbelievable. What those people went through! I think that I tried to point that out in the first Fraser book—Clay Fraser. I put them on the Oregon Trail, and what those people had to experience to get from the East out to the West Coast was remarkable.

*Tell us about your newest book *Holding Out for a Hero*.*

Well, I can tell you I like it. It's unusual because the hero is a cousin of the Frasers. His father was a Fraser from Virginia, and his mother was Hispanic. He's a great hero I found to be very loveable. I integrated him in a couple of the Fraser books before I gave him his own book, and as things stand I am ending the series with Rico Fraser.

*If you were to choose two actors to play the hero and heroine from *Holding Out for a Hero*, who would they be and why?*

John Wayne or earlier ones [films] with Randall Scott and Joel McCray—those guys commanded that screen. They had the essence of what visualize the early cowboy or Westerner would be. I saw a movie with a young actor by the name of Clive Owen that I thought would make a good Western hero. Although the movie I saw him in, he wore armor—it was that *King Arthur* movie. But I still have to visualize my heroes as Westerners. I think that Gerard Butler, who was the Phantom of the Opera he might be a good one. But the best Westerners to me are what would be character actors, like a Robert Duvall or someone like that, that goes beyond being able to be a romantic hero in a movie. They have the essence of looking the part. They looked natural in the clothes. John Wayne, to me, looked more comfortable in the boots and the Stetson than he did when he made a movie that would be contemporary. Kevin

Costner's doing a good job with Westerns.

What are some of your favorite Western romances by other authors?


I think Janet Dailey always did good Westerns. Her Calder series I thought was excellent, but that was contemporary Western as opposed to being the settling of the West type of thing. Nora Hess used to turn out good Westerns. Georgia Gentry always wrote great Westerns. What surprised me is a few months ago Romantic Times did a spread on the Western novels and the indication that they're coming back. Well, I hope so. There's practically a generation that doesn't realize what they've missed in Western novels because everything is this technology now and car chases and blood splattering all over walls and what have you. But a good Western is a great, great story to follow, and there used to be great acting in them too.

What lessons do you think we can learn from those who tamed the Old West?

There's a segment in **Holding Out for a Hero** where the hero Rico is explaining to her [the heroine] about courage, and I think one of the outstanding things about the West and life and the people who chose to help settle the West had to be their courage. Those were admirable qualities that perhaps we need a little bit more of in today's world, to really believe in what you're doing instead of going through the motions, to put your life on the line to do it. There's not enough of that today. And I think that's why we have so many problems in the world—we don't learn how to really depend upon each other. Those Westerners, those early Westerners, had to depend upon one another for survival. Technology, of course, is a great thing, but at the same time it's not good for people when they are so dependent upon their technology that they can't function without it. Computers, the Internet, the television sets, the Blackberries, everything, everything is technology. We really are missing something that these early people who packed up what they could in a little tiny covered wagon and lived [with] what they could take along until they got themselves settled. They will always be my heroes because without them we wouldn't be the nation we are today.

Interviewed by Julia Ann Charpentier

*Thank you, Ana, for being in our Spotlight
this month!*

 [SEE PREVIOUS SPOTLIGHTS](#)