My Name in Lights

Last Friday evening I was honored to participate in a fundraiser for the Alpine Public Library. When I was first invited, I had no clue I would be the only author there. When I realized it, my heart went into my throat. Why would anyone pay to spend an evening in “intimate conversation” with Elizabeth A. Garcia? What would she say? Never mind; maybe no one would buy a ticket. But that would be terrible, wouldn’t it? There was no way to win this.

It was like that when I published “One Bloody Shirt at a Time.” A part of me pushed me to do it at the same time that another part told me not to. I’ve always tried to do things in spite of fear. The story was/is important to me. I needed to tell it and wanted to publish it even if rotten tomatoes were thrown at me. We have to be who we are in the short time we have here; otherwise, what is the point?

When I entered the large room at the library and saw all those chairs, I wanted to bolt. But up on the front wall was a giant-sized poster of the cover of “One Bloody Shirt at a Time.” No way was I going anywhere. I was as filled with pride as if I’d seen my name in lights!

As I walked to the podium my legs trembled. I thought about my mother and how proud she would be that I was speaking at a library about my own books. She read to me early-on and encouraged me to read before I ever went to school. Mom took me to the library and helped me learn how to find and check out books. When I was a kid, the library was the only place she let me go whenever I wanted.

“This is for you, Mom,” I thought as I took a breath and turned around.

When I saw the faces looking at me, I knew I was among friends. Paige, our librarian, gave the most thoughtful introduction I will ever receive. She took my own words about writing off my blog and knocked me over the head with them. When I heard them read by her, I was so touched I nearly started to cry. She had done her homework. But of course she had; she’s a librarian, one of the heroes on the frontlines in the fight to keep our society educated and questioning—reading, in other words.

I read for a short time from the book that was represented on the wall next to me. When I asked for comments and questions, they were wonderful. Someone asked if I’d done a lot of research into law enforcement practices before writing the story. My reply was yes, I had done some, but not enough. I got some things wrong. Writing is like life. You do your best with what you have and learn as you go, and always, always, try to do better.

Towards the end of the questions, I received this one: Are you planning to write a sequel to “The Reluctant Cowboy?” Wow. We had only been talking about the Deputy Ricos series, so the question took me aback. “The Reluctant Cowboy” is the best thing I ever wrote, but that is only my opinion. Some see it as “controversial material.” Maybe it is, but it shouldn’t be. Love is love is love, and love is all that matters. I will go to my grave believing that and writing about it.

I tell stories from my heart. Nothing I’ve ever written contains more of my heart than my coming-of-age love story about The Cowboy. Someone read it and liked it enough to ask about a sequel. I was speechless for a second. “Say something,” I prodded myself, but the question made me want to jump in the air and scream “Woo-hoo!”

Yes, I’m writing the rest of that story. Thank you for asking. I never planned to tell more about Jed, but the characters won’t let me rest. It’s not over, the same way the tales about Deputy Ricos are not over until she says so.

My final thought for this column is about our public library. Every single person in this community who believes in an intelligent, educated future for the human race should support it. Paige and her staff should be reading to little kids and figuring out what books to buy and doing whatever they do to make our library one of the top-rated libraries in the whole state of Texas. They shouldn’t have the extra work and stress of making fundraisers, but this writer is so thankful they did.