

RESEARCH: Yes, It's Called Email, and I'm Not Afraid to Use It

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Original Publication Date in *Love Notes*: January 2006

As writers who set about fashioning fictional worlds, there are so many things we need to know, so many facts to check, and so many mistakes to make if we don't do that icky thing called research.

I'm not only talking about the big things, but also about those nit-picky little details which, if we get them wrong, someone—maybe more than one someone—will know and disregard our entire story.

The Internet has expanded our world with the click of a mouse. No longer are we tied to buying expensive texts or trekking to the downtown library. There's this lovely thing called the world wide web. Not only can we surf and find hundreds of links for every topic we can imagine, but there are even more personal resources. Yes, it's called e-mail, and I'm not afraid to use it.

It's a fallacy to think that only historical romances require thorough research. For instance, while writing *LOVE ON THE RUN*, I needed to know how long it takes to drive from Dijon, France, to Zurich, Switzerland. I didn't have a clue, but I needed to know in order to get my hero and heroine from Dijon to Zurich in a realistic time frame. The only European I knew was a fan fiction writer from Paris, so I e-mailed Kadin (her screen name). She was able to give me a good estimate. I also e-mailed a British-born teacher, who was living in Dubai at the time, with questions about British school systems.

When I wrote *SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS*, I needed to know a lot of seemingly minor details, but they were necessary for authenticity. The story was based in New York City, and I've only been there once. Obviously I needed some help, and I found it on the Clues 'N' News list. This one lovely person was able to tell me which area in New York City I would find a restored three-story brownstone, the route from the brownstone to Queens at 7:45AM, including which bridge to use, and how long the wild ride would probably take. She even told me which hospital they would take my heroine to after she was rescued from the basement where she'd been held by her kidnapper.

Before writing my last completed novel, which is set in my own state of Tennessee, I needed to know something about the sheriff's daily routine in a small county. I started with the web site, officer.com, and e-mailed a real-live Sheriff's Deputy. He e-mailed back with a long description, detailing exactly the things I needed to know to make my heroine's duties seem real. He also validated the proposed political situation I had in mind.

When I first started working on my current WIP, which is set in New Orleans, I researched the real estate market. Since Katrina, I'll have to do another type of research, difficult research. What's still there, what has been rebuilt, and what's gone forever? Only someone who's there can tell me what I'll need to know in order for me to do justice to the people and the most unique city in the U.S. It's a good thing I have a lot of cyber pals.