Learn How Ritter Ames Turned Her Dream into a Successful Literary Adventure

(Image created at BookBrush.com)

***I write the books I love to read.* ~Ritter Ames**

Ritter Ames has honed her craft of penning traditional and cozy mysteries turning her work into an exciting, successful and profitable literary adventure. Whether traveling around the globe to source ideas for plot and character or garnering inspiration from home, Ames has gathered a wealth of wisdom and creativity during her writing career. We are ever so grateful that she has agreed to share some of that with us here.

About Ritter Ames
Ritter Ames is the USA Today bestselling author who writes the fast-paced suspense Bodies of Art mystery series and the cozy Organized Mysteries series. She focuses most of her time and writing energies on globe-trotting the world via her keyboard to create memorable characters and fascinating fiction novels for readers *(Source: Amazon)*

Now for our exclusive interview with Ritter Ames.

THE REAL AUTHOR

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your work space or what type of environment you prefer to work in?
I work on an Acer laptop, and while I have a home office, I can basically write anywhere—and usually do. I'm fine with noise, one of my super powers is selective hearing (just ask my mother—I honed that skill at a very young age), and I'm also a master at looking like I'm working when I'm really eavesdropping on interesting conversations at coffee shops and at kids' sports practices. It's amazing what you can hear when people think you're too busy to be paying attention to them.

Q: What is the number one thing in your life that motivates and/or inspires you as an author?
Okay, I know people want to hear I write my passion and all of that—and that my characters inspire me—but this has been my living for a very long time. So, getting the paycheck and keeping my lights on and my refrigerator filled is what truly keeps me working at a regular schedule. I quit my corporate job over a decade ago and started nonfiction, then switched to mostly fiction in 2014. Now I write two

mystery series and have another set to go with the first two books coming out in early 2019. I'm always working on something. And that doesn't even count the equal number of hours I spend marketing my writing.

Q: What tips would you have for budding authors to help them maintain a successful writing career while balancing their personal life?
Set goals, have a clear focus, stand up for yourself, and guard your time.

Q: What do you find to be the most challenging part of being an author?
Challenging, of course, can go both ways. On the positive side, the most challenging part of being an author is looking for that perfect plot twist, that best phrase for a character, or finishing a closing scene that absolutely brings the story full circle to an unexpectedly marvelous conclusion. These kinds of challenges invigorate me and give me a second wind when all these different parts of the writing universe come together in a fabulous aha! moment.

However, when considering what is challenging from a more negative side, that usually comes from outside stresses that I have to deal with while I'm trying to stay on-task and be creative. It's amazing how someone else's problem, or when another person drops a business ball that affects me, all can result in my losing hours and even days of writing time because I don't have the luxury to focus on my own tasks. Which is why I shared, "guard your time," in my answer to the question on tips for budding authors.

Q: The most rewarding?

Hearing a fan loves my characters as much as I do. Stumbling onto a note on someone's Facebook or Goodreads pages that say I'm one of that reader's favorite authors. Oh, and getting a huge royalty check, of course.

Q: What does your daily writing schedule look like?
I'm up by about six. I drink tea and coffee do a quick scan of early email, then I write until about eleven. At my first break, I read my email, load up my tweets for the day and eat some lunch. By 11:30, I'm back writing again until two in the afternoon. I take another half-hour break at two, and start marketing, retweeting, posting, etc. until about six in the evening. Then I'll put in a few more hours of marketing work or working on business tasks (thank you so much, IRS—LOL!) and reply to late-day FB notifications and email as my husband and I watch TV in the evening.

Authors like John Grisham can talk about not even working thirty hours a week, but most authors are like me—one-person shops—and thirty hours barely gets the work week started. My goal for 2019 is to hire a virtual assistant to free up a little of my time.

Q: Who or what do you have in mind as you write? Your reader? The characters? The story?
Plot has always been my strong suit, which is extremely helpful since I write mysteries. I love adding twists and surprises. So, when I'm starting the individual books, I have to figure out first what will happen and why. But I can only do that after I completely know my characters. That's one of the things I love about writing series—I not only get to see how my characters get into and out of the messes I put them into, but I get to find out what they've been up to while I've been away writing on another series.

A lot of writers talk about how their characters take control of a story. Mine don't do that exactly, but they are quick to tell me where I'm going off-track if they get a better idea. And my characters can really get mouthy.

THE REAL STORY

Q: When did you begin writing and what did you write?
I wrote my first "book" in the fifth grade—but it was really just a long short story. I was hooked on ***Trixie Belden Mysteries*** *and* ***Agatha Christie*** *by then, and I think everything I've ever written has had some element of mystery in it. Even if the work itself didn't truly fit the mystery genre.*

Q: Tell us how you homed in on who your reader would be and how you came to the decision that writing cozy mysteries would be your genre.
I write the books I love to read. I don't just write cozies, though. My ***Bodies of Art Mystery*** *series are actually traditional mysteries, and they don't really fit the cozy parameters—but there isn't any gratuitous language, sex, or violence, so they often land on cozy lists. However, my* ***Organized Mysteries*** *series is absolutely a cozy series, as is my upcoming* ***Frugal Lissa Mysteries****.*

I love writing cozy mysteries for the same reason I love reading them—I enjoy being dropped into an inclusive environment where everyone knows one another, and it's as important to watch the people as it is to look for clues. Plus, I can relax as I read them, knowing that good will triumph, the bad guy will get caught, and I won't have to face any on screen evil or heinous act. Basically, it's the closest thing in the mystery genre to books with a happily ever after. I can relax and read.

However, I love writing my traditional series too. It's a little less clear-cut on who is good and who isn't, and the characters globetrot around the world—but mostly Europe—instead of staying in a small town. There's a little cursing—just PG stuff—and readers are on the scene when the main characters are chased and have to fight their way out of deadly situations. There's also a little romance, but nothing to detract from the mystery plot and no sex. I love writing the ***Bodies of Art Mysteries*** *in the same way I love watching* ***Indiana Jones*** *movies and television shows like* ***Leverag****e—there's a mission to meet without a guarantee of winning (though the characters are all smart and readers aren't disappointed), the pace is pretty much non-stop, and my characters will do whatever it takes to make sure they come away with whatever art treasure they're pursuing. And they'll do all of that via clever ideas, witty dialogue, and pure brash initiative. Oh, and a few slick gizmos and gadgets.*

Q: Following up on the question I asked before, specifically, as you begin a new book, what comes first? The characters, the storyline, the title, something else?

Since I don't write standalone novels, if I'm starting a new book in a series, I usually start with an idea because I already know the characters. Then I start thinking about how my characters would handle the challenges of that storyline idea. The title usually comes later, but if it's for a book in an already established series it will have to match the previous titles, so readers know which series it belongs to. That's soft marketing I do even before a book is in preorder (or finished).

If it's a first book in a new series, I start with having an idea of how I want the storyline to run, but first I get to know my characters. As a reader, I have to like the characters, or I find it hard to stay interested in a book, and readers of my books have told me the same thing. So, while

I may not know everything about my main and secondary characters when I start writing a book, I do know a lot. And by the time I write the last page we're all longtime friends.

Q: Do real experiences, people and places from your personal life make it into your books? If so, how do you go about disguising them? Or do you disguise them?
I don't start with anything or anyone from my life, but I do take experiences and kind of turn them on their head sometimes. Especially with the ***Bodies of Art Mysteries****. I've used impressions and experiences from my travels to flesh out situations in those books.*

For the cozies, I'm sure I use insights gained from living in a small town and learning to deal with different personalities. None of my characters are based on real people—though I've threatened to use some people for murder victims who've created too much stress in my life.

Q: Do you plan to write anything outside of mysteries? Is there a novel or a travel memoir in you, perhaps?
I never say never. Since I wrote nonfiction for a lot of years, I know I can turn my hand at anything once I set my mind to it. However, I'm truly writing what I love now, so there are no plans in sight for any genre changes. Probably the closest thing to a change would be for me to finish a thriller that keeps getting put on the backburner because of other manuscript deadlines.

THE REAL STATS

Q: How do you define success for yourself as an author? Do you feel like you've arrived?

I'm a fairly confident person, and I've felt I was a writer since about the eighth grade—despite the fact that I worked in corporate acquisitions for more than a decade after college. But those years in business helped me immensely in my writing business, and I can read a bottom line better than a lot of writers. All of that has kept my writing business flowing in black ink—whether it's the ink of published work or keeping my accounting books in the black.

Q: How has becoming a *USA TODAY* Bestselling Author contributed to you financially? Is this something other authors should consider as a goal?

Everyone has their own opinion. USA TODAY does, which is why they like authors to always write their names in all caps when we reference the publication in our credits. It has definitely opened doors for me, especially when I'm trying to get marketing opportunities scheduled—so that probably helped in sales. But do I think people buy because they see I've made the list? I truly don't know. As a reader, that isn't something that will convince me to buy a book—I rely mostly on book covers, descriptions, and maybe reading a few of the first pages—and I think most readers are like me. So, I focus on writing the best book description and story I possibly can and getting readers attention with great covers.

Q: How many hours each day would you say you spend on writing? On promoting? On managing the business?

In a regular week—not one where I have a New Release—I'm writing about six hours a day. But I'm truly most effective the first four or five hours. The last hour is usually kind of wrapping up, brainstorming things I think need fixed, or noting things I need to add or revise in the manuscript.

About three to four hours a day in the afternoon/early-evening are spent on promotions. Since I start working on promotions for New

Releases six months before the title goes live, I'm working on promoting both backlist books and pre-work for new releases all the time.

And another hour every day (minimum) is spent doing business stuff. This can also be something that becomes all-consuming during the different tax times throughout the year.

However, if a New Release is just a few weeks or so away, I could be working promotion stuff for a solid month as I complete posts for blog tours, do interviews to promote the upcoming release, do podcasts, and schedule events with prizes to draw readers' attention. This is after I've already scheduled my ads, tweets, and personal posts.

Q: You predominantly (or exclusively?) publish through Kindle as opposed to print. Why did you choose this route and what are the pros and cons as they pertain to your publishing success story?
First, I don't publish predominately through Kindle—only an ***Organized Mysteries*** *novelette is exclusively Amazon, and it will be out of KU (Kindle Unlimited) the middle of this month. All my novel-length books are available wide (meaning all booksellers), and with the exception of* ***Organized for Murder****, my other cozies in that series sell more in non-Amazon markets (as a whole) than they do on Amazon. The first two books in that series were available in print, but the book covers were modified, and I haven't set things up for print again yet, because I've been waiting for all the kinks to get worked out with the CreateSpace/KDP Print merger. But they'll be back in print—as will the rest of the series—in early 2019.*

The ***Bodies of Art Mysteries*** *are all available in print—both trade paper and hard back—as well as at all bookseller venues. I sell less wide in this series because my publisher tends to focus on Amazon sales. That's one of the differences in how authors have to adapt the business between*

how we market traditionally published books and the books we self-publish.

But putting books out in print is really just to cater to readers who still prefer print to eBook. I don't do a lot of in-person book signings, so I barely break even on the cost of print copies. EBooks are, by far, where I make most of my income.

MORE REAL STATS

- How many readers do you have on your email list? *About 5000*
- What is the largest number of books you've sold in one day? *I don't have stats on all of my books, so I can't be sure of one day sales.*
- What is the next milestone you are shooting for in book sales? *I work off 1-year, 3-year, and 5-year plans for my business that I revise annually, but I don't share that information with others. Sorry.*
- How many books do you sell in the first week of launching a new release? *That depends on the series. Cozies always sell more and faster than my traditional series does.*

JUST FOR KICKS

Q: What book(s) do you constantly recommend to others?
I recommend the Maizie Albright, Wannabe Detective series by Larissa Reinhart, anything by the late Elizabeth Peters, and the Bryant & May series by Christopher Fowler. And I adore the Jackson Brodie series by Kate Atkinson, as well as anything by Laura Lippman.

Q: If you could spend a month writing anywhere in the world other than home, where would you go? Why?

Florence or London. Florence because it's Italy and there's so much wonderful art and fabulous food. London because…well, it's LONDON. I love both cities so much. Though, now that I think about it, I'd probably be better off in a quiet little cottage on the Irish coast, because if I went to Florence or London, I probably wouldn't get any writing done until I returned home.

Q: What is your favorite holiday to celebrate? Why?
I honestly love April Fool's Day. There's nothing that tells you more about a person than the way they react to a prank.

Q: Did I miss anything? What would you like to communicate to our authors that I didn't think to ask?
There are so many different ways people quantify who is an author and who isn't, and we're bombarded with information on how to build (or rebuild) our platforms and increase readership. But if I could offer one bit of advice on all of this, I'd go back to two tenets I keep in mind every day: ***write what you love to read, and your readers are your fans****—not really your customers (no matter what all the marketing material tells you).*

Finally
Q: What is the best way for our readers to connect with you?

I'm very accessible. Here are just a few ways—

https://www.amazon.com/Ritter-Ames/e/B00I78AQEW/
https://www.facebook.com/RitterAmesBooks/
https://www.bookbub.com/authors/ritter-ames
https://twitter.com/RitterAmes
https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7371830.Ritter_Ames
subscribe to my newsletter--http://smarturl.it/NewsltrSubcribe