

## **Interview with agent Caren Johnson**

by Dianna Love Snell, 2007

### **Bio:**

Caren Johnson opened the doors on her own literary agency, Caren Johnson Literary Agency, at the beginning of this year, but she's been agenting for four and a half years. She interned with the Peter Rubie Literary Agency for a year then moved into an agent position after proving to be a quick study of the publishing business and successful with closing book deals. Caren left to join Nadia Cornier at Firebrand Literary where she stayed until realizing it was time to open her own agency, which has allowed her to work more closely with her authors while building their careers.

She's interested in working with authors who are organized, professional and turn in well crafted stories in the areas of romance (particularly romantic comedy in the vein of Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Jenny Cruisic and Kelley St. John; and historical in the vein of Susan Carroll, Diana Gabaldon, and Lauren Wittig—high concept only please!), Teen fiction (in the vein of Caridad Ferrer/ Adios to My Old Life, Scott Westerfeld/ Uglies Trilogy) and commercial fiction (in the vein of Christopher Moore/A Dirty Job, Carl Hiaassen/ Nature Girl). For the moment she's hit what she feels is a personal limit of wonderful paranormal romance (Caridad Pineiro, Lee Roland) and romantic suspense (Caridad Pineiro, Dianna Love Snell) authors so if an author submits in this genre, Caren will be more critical than she normally is and expecting something that will really surprise her. She is only accepting queries via email so send to [carenjla@gmail.com](mailto:carenjla@gmail.com).

### **Your agency name and location:**

Caren Johnson Literary Agency  
132 East 43rd Street, #216  
New York, NY 10017

### **How long have you been an agent and what was your path to becoming an agent?**

4 years; I began as an intern at the Peter Rubie Literary Agency and loved the work since it pairs two of my favorite pastimes, reading and sales.

### **How many authors do you represent and would you care to list a few? What is the majority genre you represent?**

I represent 16 authors at the moment and that's a number I'm comfortable with since I can grow each of their careers individually rather than hand them off to interns and assistants. My authors include:

Dianna Love Snell/romantic suspense/paranormal/St. Martin's Press  
Kelley St. John/contemporary, women's fic/Warner/Harlequin Blaze  
Barbara Caridad Ferrer/YA, women's fic/MTV/Pocket

Caridad Pineiro Scordato/paranormal/women's fic/romantic  
suspense/Pocket/Silhouette Intimate Moments/Nocturne  
Alex E. Roman/mystery/St. Martin's Press

These are just a few names. To see the complete list visit my publisher's marketplace page, [www.publishersmarketplace.com/members/carenjohnson/](http://www.publishersmarketplace.com/members/carenjohnson/)  
As you can see my taste runs to genre fiction, especially romance and mystery

**Genres you are acquiring and if there are any specifics about those genres you'd like the writers to know.**

I would love to find some commercial fiction, young women's fiction, and romance.

**What services do you offer an author? (for example – editing, publicity advice, career guidance)**

When an author signs with me, he/she can expect a full edit before their project goes to any editors (my goal is to get the manuscript to publishable before it hits an editors desk). Then we'll plan where the manuscript should go and how long should each editor should have to consider the book. Once the mss goes out, we start planning the author's careers. I do this by having them write down 3-4 goals they'd like to accomplish in the first year and 3-4 goals they'd like to accomplish within five years of signing with me. This way we have benchmarks pushing us along. In addition to this, I do brainstorm publicity and promotional ideas to not only push the book, but the author as well.

**What do you expect of your authors?**

I expect my authors to write the best book possible. This is my number one expectation. But I also expect that my author will take the initiative and take charge of their career. My job is to get your books in front of the right people. Once it's there, I need an author to sell themselves through excellent writing, strong promotion/publicity ideas and business savvy.

**How do you prefer submissions based on a conference appointment request?**

For submissions based on conference appointments, I prefer an email with a note reminding me of where I met you and when, what the name of your book is, what the genre is, word count and a blurb (this is important and different from a synopsis). Then attach the document with your work to the email in regular word or wordperfect.

**What is a pet peeve to do with submissions and/or working with writers?**

Please don't be overly friendly or chummy. We're not looking to be friends (though I certainly like being friends once I've signed you on as a client), but to form a business relationship. Keep it cordial and professional.

**Is there anything you'd like to add that you were not asked?**

When describing your book, I find I like a blurb of the book in the query letter. When writing a blurb, model it after copy found on the back of a book. It usually gives a brief and tantalizing description of the book, making us want to buy it. If your copy is good enough and you sign with me, I'll probably use it as my pitch

when describing it to editors. After all, you know your book better than me so your description is probably better.

When identifying the genre your book fits in, please don't say it defies genre b/c I'll immediately assume that you don't know. If you don't, then I won't. If you need to say something like, romantic mystery or sexy, sassy contemporary, which shows that your book straddles genres, that's fine. Don't get too caught up in the minutiae either. I once received a query that said the book was a mysterious romantic sci-fi drama. I think the author thought he was being helpful with this description. But it left me more confused than anything else.

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