

VICKI ALLEN

A Prescription for Success

by Jessica Ferguson

At a nostalgic drugstore and fountain-style restaurant in historic downtown Alexandria, Louisiana, author Vicki Allen goes to work every day—as a pharmacist. It’s a running joke for fans and customers to catch her entering her place of business grumbling, “I could have written twenty pages today.”

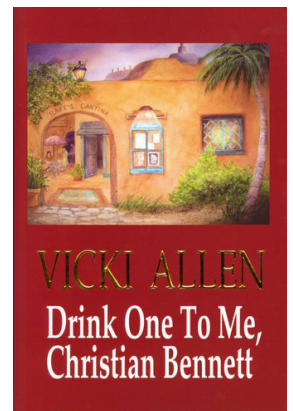
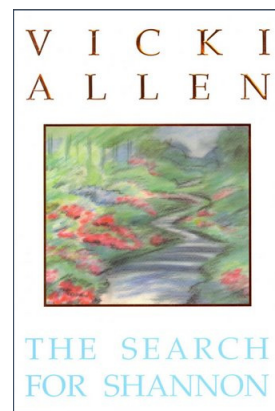
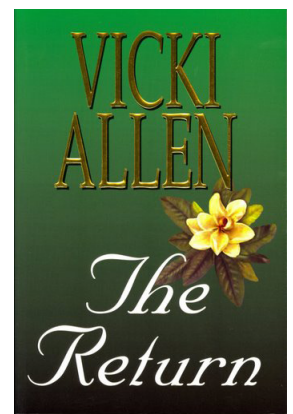
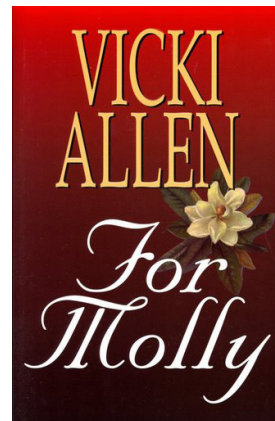
Vicki says her best ideas come when she’s in the middle of other obligations. “My husband has walked in countless times to find me sitting in a bathrobe with my wet hair in a towel, scribbling furiously into a notebook, minutes before we’re due to be somewhere.” On one occasion she was sitting in her car, waiting to rendezvous with her son and husband, when suddenly a book was born—plot, characters, and dialogue. “My son climbed into the car, noticed the odd expression on my face, and asked, ‘What’s wrong with you?’ All I could tell him was, ‘I have to go write.’”

And write she did, almost nonstop for two weeks. When she wasn’t typing, she scrawled scenes and dialogue into the composition book she keeps with her, even at work. “Ideas were coming so fast I couldn’t wait until I could get home to my computer. I had to write them down as they came. It was the most incredible writing experience I’ve had to date and I’m dying for it to happen again.”

Vicki is the author of four books: *For Molly*, a contemporary coming of age novel set in the Deep South, and its sequel, *The Return*. Her third book, *The Search for Shannon*, is the story of four women brought together by the birth and adoption of one baby. *The Search for Shannon* was inspired by meeting her own birth mother, and was a fiction finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award. Her fourth book—the one that came fast and furiously into her mind—is *Drink One to Me, Christian Bennett*, a fictional account of an American photographer who travels to Mexico and is abducted by the powerful and dangerous leader of a drug cartel.

Two of Vicki’s books are on reading lists at local Louisiana high schools. Students are assigned to read both, along with completing individual and group projects on each. At one school, they’re required summer reading and both remain accelerated reader selections. Vicki suggests that authors who want to appear on a school’s reading lists get to know community educators and offer to speak to their students. She adds, “Donate books to schools and public libraries. One never knows how or when their work might fall into the right hands.”

Vicki advises new writers not to be discouraged by rejections or criticism. “Both are simply forms of opinion, and what one critic/



agent/publisher hates, another could very well love. Above all things, be true to yourself. Write not for fame or fortune, but for the sheer joy of doing what you love.”

She didn’t let rejections hinder her career. “I was raised by an enthusiastic man, and married another one. After a year or more of receiving as many rejections as queries sent to literary agents and publishers, my father and my husband came

up with the brilliant solution of ‘Let’s just do it ourselves. After all, it can’t be that hard,’ and responded to the less-than-eager expression on my face by assuring me, ‘We’ll take care of everything. All you’ll have to do is write.’”

Then they researched, reading everything they could find on the subject. One tackled copyrighting, formatting, cover design and book printers, while the other concentrated on marketing and distribution, and miraculously, over a period of a few months, everything just seemed to fall in place. We met our talented cover designer, Robert Lange, at kindergarten open house.”

Vicki says they’ve made mistakes but they’ve learned from them, and everyone has worked hard to further her writing career. One afternoon, Vicki’s husband Kent was browsing through a magazine and came across a layout on Oprah Winfrey’s new retreat where she could go to get away from it all—to restore herself. Kent was inspired and announced, “I’m going to build you an office.” Three months later, Vicki moved in, in awe of the amount of unclaimed space. “The Hut (they can’t remember how the affectionate name originated) is wonderful, built adjacent



to our house to eliminate distractions. My desk and writing paraphernalia are at one end, and a workbench and mask supplies are at the other, allowing for countless hours of mostly uninterrupted creativity.”

Mask supplies? Vicki has never-ending talent, energy and creativity. She has teamed with New York costume designer Kelli Haase, who also happens to be her daughter, to create beautiful Mardi Gras masks. She admits she makes lists and sets alarms on her phone to stay organized. “My days are typically 18-19 hours long. Obviously, sleep isn’t very high on any of my lists!” Currently, Vicki is working on three different books, one of which she hopes to have completed this year.

An inspiration and a success by anyone’s standards, Vicki hopes readers take away from her books the power of love, the significance of family, the value of friendship, the strength of the human spirit—but most of all, she hopes they’re entertained. ■