

SLWG Spotlight: *We're pleased to present...*

**Elaine Sandra Abramson**



*Photo, Dress Design, and Painting © Elaine Abramson. All rights reserved.*

**Artist, Author, Designer, Licensor  
2007 St. Louis Writers Guild Member of Distinction  
SLWG Member since 2005**

**ELAINE SANDRA ABRAMSON** is a multi-talented creator who hails from a family of very creative individuals. On her father's side, her Aunt Yetta taught art at the Cleveland Museum Of Art and gave Elaine her first art lessons when she was six. When she was eight, her Aunt Sylvia, a suit and dress designer for a Cleveland clothing manufacturer, taught her design basics and how to use a sewing machine. Her Aunt Mary also designed clothing and taught her how to construct soft toys. Elaine's father and Uncle Jack designed and invented military weapons for the US Army Air Corps during World War II. After their separation from the military, the brothers designed and remodeled homes and continued to design and invent machinery for businesses. And her grandmother encouraged her creativity, calling her, "My Elaine with the golden hands." Elaine believes that with a background like this, she was destined to be creative.

Elaine opened her first business when she was twelve. Watching the door-to-door salesmen working her street, she got the idea to take her doll and the doll clothes she had designed around her neighborhood. At each home, she displayed the clothes she had made. She gave mothers a choice of colors and clothing styles for their daughters' dolls, took orders, and went home and made up the outfits. During the Chanukkah/Christmas season she was unable to keep up with the orders, so she taught her girlfriends how to cut and sew and shared her profit with them.

Like most young children, Elaine fell in love with Walt Disney's animated characters. She spent hours and hours drawing the characters she saw in the magazines hoping to become a Disney animator when she grew up.

At Kent State University, Elaine filled a hole in her schedule by taking an enameling course. She fell in love with the art and made it her major. Her enamels were in the Cleveland Museum Of Art's May Shows, Kent State's national traveling exhibits, and the Cleveland Institute Of Art's Shaker Square Exhibits. But she quickly learned that she could not make a living as an enamelist. She discovered that patrons of the arts would pay far more for a painting that cost almost nothing to create than they would for an enamel which cost hundreds of dollars just for the sterling silver and gold wires and foils to make it.

Elaine's first job after college was as a textbook illustrator for the Educational Research Counsel of Cleveland. She taught art in Cleveland's inner city public schools during the riots of the mid-60's. When she left to have her first child, she quickly became bored with staying home and opened an art studio. But selling paintings was not enough to challenge her. Combining her knowledge of enameling, sewing, painting, and drawing, Elaine began designing her own characters and children's soft toys. She sold them to local art galleries. She also became the leading artist at the Sassy Cat; her whimsical papier-mache chartreuse striped cats and blue frogs were used to promote the gallery.

During this period, Elaine began relating stories from her life. Listeners thought they were hilarious and encouraged her to write them down. But time slipped away from her, and it was years before she began committing them to paper.

In the early 70's, Elaine created a series of cartoon character wooden wall plaques for children's rooms. At the Maryland Hospital For Israel art show in Baltimore, a grandmother bought 25 wall plaques, saying, "They're so cute, I can't just buy one. Then all my grandchildren will fight

over them.” Elaine received a Mayor’s proclamation for selling more individual pieces of artwork and more dollar volume than anyone else in the show. Seeing this, a friend said, “Why wear yourself out cutting and painting the same characters over and over again? Why don’t you take them to a manufacturer and have him reproduce them? You’ll earn less money per piece, but in the long run you’ll sell more and make more money.”

Elaine took his advice and sold the characters to Craft House. The owner asked her if she could design latchhook kit rugs. She said yes, went home, taught herself how to make latchhook rug kits, and sold the designs to him and Rapco, too. Shortly thereafter, she also sold them to Paragon. During this period, Elaine also invented *Create-A-Puzzle*, a three-dimensional puzzle in which the foreground and the background are capable of coming forward or receding at the will of the player. IRV Merchandising, the agent for Universal Studio’s Woody Woodpecker, heard about Elaine’s puzzle and offered to represent her.



Photos and “Diamonds” Create-A-Puzzle™ & © Elaine Abramson. All rights reserved.

IRV also represented Elaine’s *Golden Gourmet* children’s cartoon characters. But he told her that drawings and toys were not enough to make animation studios pick them up and asked her to write stories for them. So Elaine’s writing career began. Elaine was able to sell more stories, artwork, and designs than IRV was; so, after four years, she left her agent. During this period, she learned that it is easier and more profitable to work as a work-for-hire author, artist, and designer also known as a *ghost*. On a royalty basis, the creator is paid a percentage after the work is sold. In art, toy design, and publishing, one can wait years before the first check comes in. But as a ghost, one gets paid up front whether or not the work sells.

A year after she left IRV, Viacom Entertainment, the owner of CBS TV, Paramount Movie Studios, and Simon & Schuster Publishing, and Taft Merchandising, the owner of Hanna Barbera, competed to represent Elaine’s *Golden Gourmets*. Elaine chose Viacom as the agent for her art and writing. That relationship ended a year later when Elaine had to make the choice

between trying to save her life from DES cancer, and producing the huge amount of work necessary to sustain her relationship with Viacom. The mother of two young children left Viacom to fight the cancer.

Five years later, JMP Merchandising, the former licensing agent for Walt Disney, picked up Elaine's contract for her *Those Characters From Cowtown*. Again Elaine outsold her agent. So three years later she terminated that relationship, too. This was followed by Cache', the agents for Nintendo. When she outsold Cache' also, she terminated that contract as well. Elaine learned from these experiences that an author or artist can often be he his or her own best salesman. After all, she knows her creation far better than any agent does. The author or artist also has a vested interested in the work and therefore has a greater incentive to work harder at selling it. But she found that this also has its downside because the artist or author has far less time and energy left to create new works when she is also functioning as a salesperson.



*Cow-Town plush toys, animation cell, and photos <sup>TM</sup> & © Elaine Abramson. All rights reserved.*

Elaine also fought a long and hard battle for seven years against discrimination toward women artists. The Texas Legislature held an annual competition for the position of state artist. She obtained more signatures supporting her candidacy than any other state artist ever had and became the first woman in the competition's twenty-two year history to become a state artist of Texas and the only one appointed via proclamation. As a result of her efforts to end discrimination in the arts, she was nominated for the Guinness Book of Records and the Nobel Prize. Elaine's *Those Characters From Cowtown* were used in Texas tourism, were on television, the Internet, in publishing, on licensed merchandise, and have a Federal Elections Commission ruling permitting them to be used in federal election campaigns. Her *RomantiCats* and *Golden Gourmet* characters have also been licensed and on the Pixelon Network.



*RomantiCat paintings and photos*™ & © Elaine Abramson. All rights reserved.

Elaine is the former director of the Animagic International Animation Apprenticeship Studio School. She created *The Creative Entrepreneur Series* program for Richland College. Richland College described it as, “A must have program for animators, visual artists, authors, composers, crafts persons, filmmakers, game developers, musicians, photographers, and performing artists. Award-winning artist and author Elaine Sandra Abramson shares her knowledge of the business and legal side of creativity.”

In *The Creative Entrepreneur Dress For Success* segment she relates her first meeting with the vice president of Viacom. During the 1980's John Malloy published a series of books about how to dress for success. In them he advised dressing like a Wall Street banker for all business meetings. Hoping that Malloy's advice could help her improve her art sales, Elaine bought a Brooks Brothers suit, tailored white shirt, and silk bowtie and wore them to the meeting. The VP came into the room, took one look at Elaine, and said, “So you're our new accountant.”

“No, sir. I'm the artist, whose work you are going to license,” she replied.

“Get the hell out of here and don't come back until you're dressed like an artist,” he scowled.

Elaine went to a thrift store in Manhattan, bought torn jeans, a ratty turtleneck shirt, bright colored beads, and sandals and returned. The VP signed the contract. From this experience she learned that, in addition to creating the very best artwork and writing, creators have to look like what the public perceives them to be in order to sell their work.

In 1990, Elaine and her son were the only mother and son taking courses at New York University at the same time. At NYU she earned a certificate in Appraising Fine & Decorative Arts. Elaine was the first person chosen to intern at the Appraisers Association Of America and write a column for *The Appraiser*. She writes syndicated art and appraisal columns. Elaine also worked as a volunteer with the Texas Accountants and Lawyers for the Arts, the Graphic Artists Guild, the National League Of American Pen Women, and the Texas Association For Film/Tape

Professionals. Elaine was described as *A highly praised appraiser* in a *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* feature article.

Elaine's middle-aged appraiser and amateur detective Susan Goodwin Earl assists the Metropolitan Toronto Police in catching an art forgery ring and a murderer and finds love with a younger man in *The Murderer's Art*. British avant-garde enamelist Lydia Sidney stumbles upon a string of murders and economic espionage in NASA's high-tech space exploration industry in *The Red Planet Murders*.

She has completed the first book in her *Damned If I Do* series, a memoir composed of vignettes from her life. She is working on the second book and is having it critiqued by the St. Louis Writers' Guild memoir critique group.

After Elaine was diagnosed with DES cancer, a drug-induced cancer that can only be passed from mother to daughter during the birth process, she began an intensive search for her biological mother to obtain her medical history. Elaine says, "My identity was stolen at birth. Even though I am an award-winning artist, to this day no one knows who I am. While searching for my birth mother, I opened Pandora's box. Military, government, and family plots and coverups tumbled out." Her search unearthed her five legal birth certificates, uncovered that her father and uncle had invented secret weapons at a phony US Army base in California that the government destroyed to hide what took place there, and revealed that the Army created false and misleading documents for her father and uncle. Elaine's search culminated in her finding her mother and writing her memoir, the *Deception Trilogy*. The first book in the trilogy is *Conspiracy Of Silence*.

In 2003, Elaine went to Canada to attend the American Booksellers/Canadian Booksellers Convention in Toronto, attend the Bloody Woods mystery conference, visit relatives, and do genealogical research. Immediately after landing at Pearson International Airport she was falsely arrested and incarcerated for eighteen days in Mississauga's infamous detention center, where she was tortured. *Conspiracy Of Silence*, her memoir detailing her search for her mother, how her Canadian father invented secret weapons for the US Army Air Corps during World War II, and how he and his wife might have been spies, was confiscated by the Canadian government. In an effort to prevent the publication of her memoir, the Canadian government kept Elaine in prison until after the ABA/CBC left town and Bloody Woods was over. To this day, the Canadian government refuses to return *Conspiracy Of Silence* to her.

**[Read an excerpt from: Conspiracy Of Silence by Elaine Abramson](#)**

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