

Going behind the glitz of

Gloss

with author Jennifer Oko

BY CEARA SCULLION

With a passion for writing that was ignited at a young age, MIRA Books author Jennifer Oko's talent shines in her latest novel, *Gloss*. The story is about TV morning show producer, Annabelle Kapner, who uncovers a sensational scandal that shakes up both her career and her romantic life.

It was Jennifer's love of language and words that led her into the field of journalism, but the imaginative writer always kept a hand in fiction. "While I take facts and the truth very seriously for my journalism, for me what was always the most interesting was the story telling."

Jennifer's role as producer of a popular television news show exposes her to the inner workings of a hectic TV network, however, crazy characters and manic mishaps are usually limited to her fiction. "I am very fortunate that the vast majority of the people I work with, both on and off air, are in fact tremendously talented and thoughtful people. But you can't be in this business without hearing stories about some of the less appropriate behavior people do have to contend with...and, yes, occasionally I have experienced some of it myself."

Demonstrating impressive skill in different styles of writing, Jennifer finds the freedom of fiction both liberating and challenging. "With real stories, you know how it ends. The plot is laid out for you! I do believe, however, that good fiction is often more truthful than any facts you might find."

Allowing her characters to develop naturally, Jennifer lets them guide her through the story, creating an exciting, yet still realistic destination. "I had no idea how *Gloss* was going to end until it did. I am grateful to my main character Annabelle for

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leading me there. But that is the beauty of fiction writing for me. The characters can really come alive and take me places.”

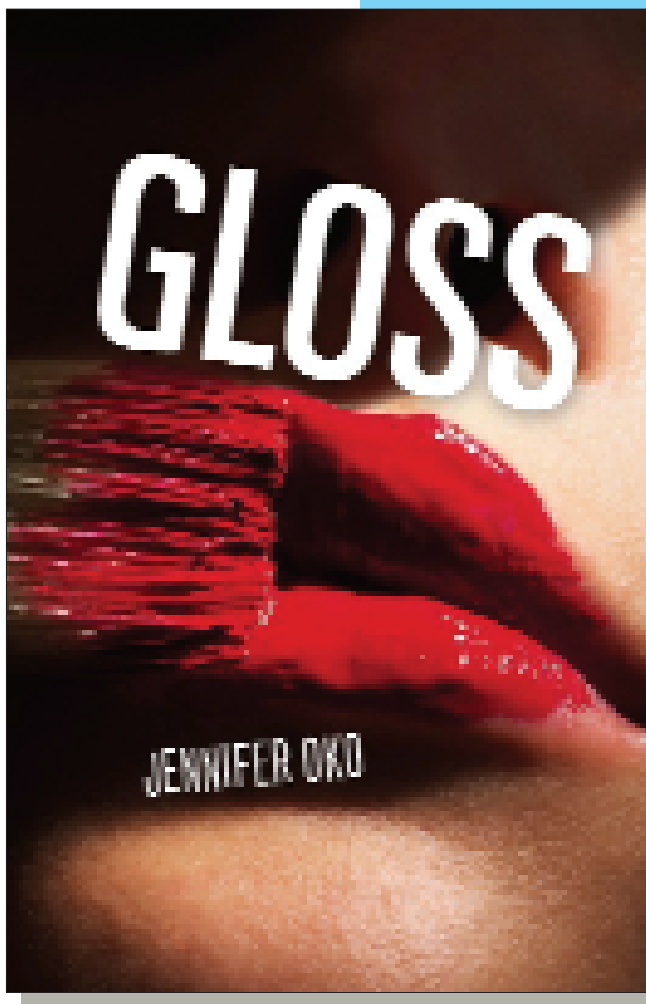
When it comes to stirring up creativity and inspiration, Jennifer finds that the need to get the work done is a great motivator. “The truth is that the heat of deadline fire under my butt tends to work wonders with me. And having a small child really helps me focus and keeps me efficient with my time, because I don’t have a lot of it.”

As a woman who appears to manage both family and career with great ease, Jennifer says that it can be quite hard, but that it’s having so much on the go that keeps her productive. And with a second baby on the way, she’ll

definitely have her work cut out for her. Even with all her success and accomplishments, Jennifer remains grateful to be in a situation that allows her to embrace all her passions. “I am extremely fortunate that I was able to work out a fairly flexible work situation and even more fortunate that I have an incredibly supportive husband and a toddler who is as easy going as a parent could ask for.”

With a 2-book contract with MIRA Books, the prolific writer is already excitedly working on her next story. “It is loosely based on the book I started writing oh so many years ago—a mad caper about psycho-pharmaceuticals, a trendy 20-something New Yorker, and the dark and dangerous world of international organized crime. In some ways, it is the kind of story that *Gloss*’s Annabelle might want to investigate herself!”

Once readers slip into the glamorous and fast-paced fun behind the cover of *Gloss*, they will eagerly anticipate more from the very talented Jennifer Oko.



“...good fiction is often more truthful than any facts you might find.”

Here is an excerpt from Jennifer Oko’s new novel *Gloss*:

“30 seconds to air!” The stage manager skipped over the wires strewn about the floor and jumped behind the row of semi-robotic cameras.

The frail makeup artist rushed forward, armed with a powder puff, and dove for Ken Klark’s shiny, pert nose. The white dust settled and she was gone, out of the shot.

“Ten seconds!”

Klark stroked his chiseled chin, smoothed back what there was to smooth of his ever so trendy close-cropped salt and pepper hair, and ran his tongue over his neon white teeth. \$4,000 in caps right there. He had expensed them to the network and they did not contest.

“Five seconds!”

He tugged his dark blue blazer behind him once more and sat up cock straight.

“Three! Two!” On the unspoken count of “One” the stage manager mimed a gunshot at Klark, who smiled, leaned a bit forward, waiting a beat for the zooming camera lens to settle on him.

“Good morning, everyone! It’s a New Day, USA!” he said. “Today is April 4th, and this is ZBC News. I’m Ken Klark.”

“And I’m Faith Heide.” A small, bobbed blond in a fitted red sweater popped up on the screen, emitting a girl-next-door smile into eight point five million homes.

I ran into the control room behind the set, twenty minutes late. You are supposed to check your graphics and cyrons before the show, not when it’s already live on the air.

It was never a good thing to enter the control room without at least having had a sip of morning coffee, because even with the dimmed lights and hushed tones, the place was electrically charged. Figuratively, I mean. Of course it was

literally, too. I often thought they turned down the lights not because it was easier for the director to focus on the monitors since the darkness cuts down on the glare, but because sometimes it seemed the energy emitted by live television was too powerful to face front on. Think about it. For something to have enough energy to hold the attention of someone as far away as, say, Huntsville, Alabama, imagine the energy it has when up close and personal.

I tiptoed over to the row of graphics terminals.

"Maria," I whispered to the unionized (and therefore to be treated very nicely), woman whose job it was to hit the button to call up each title as the director asked for it. "Can I check my cyron list at the break?"

She didn't respond, but I knew she heard me. So I hovered, counting down the seconds to the commercial interruption, at which point I knew, because we had been through this before, she would wordlessly, if slightly aggressively, punch up the titles on the computer so I could make sure that none of the characters in my piece would have a misspelled name show up underneath them on the screen. I did this because such an error is one of journalism's cardinal sins. No matter how moving, how well-crafted, well-researched, well-written, well-produced— if you spelled someone's name wrong, your piece, be it an article or a lower-third graphic for a segment of fluff, was as good for your career as if you got caught sleeping with the big boss's husband. Actually, that's a bad analogy. In network television, most of the big bosses had wives.

"It's P-U-R-N-E-L-L," I said. "Not P-E-R-N-E-L-L."

"That's what you sent us." She didn't turn to look at me when she said this.

"I know. That's why I'm here. We have to fix it." I was talking through my teeth but trying to sound sweet and sympathetic all the same.

"Whatever," she said, typing in the correction one rigid finger at a time.

I exhaled. It was 7:12. That meant about eighteen more minutes for airing "important" stories and twenty-three minutes until mine.

I went to the green room to steal some coffee. Technically, that pot was for the guests. But the mud they made for the staff was just plain

offensive, and I'm sorry, I worked very hard and I was entitled to something that was, at the very least, drinkable.

I turned to exit, carrying my hot, filled to the brim cup of much needed coffee, I walked right into—Oh!

"Oh, my God, I am so sorry," I said as I put down my Styrofoam cup and grabbed for some paper napkins.

"Don't worry. It's just my shoe."

"No, but..." I bent down to mop up the brown liquid that was pooling on the front crease of this guy's tan suede Wallabies.

"It's really OK." And then he bent down just as I was looking up and...

"Ow." Shit. My head hit his chin.

"S'ok." And his tongue was bleeding.

This was worse than misspelling a name. I had now ruined the tongue of a man who, I assumed, was supposed to be a guest on our show. A speaking guest.

I pulled myself up and started to apologize again.

"Wheelly," the guest said, tongue in cup, green eyes on me, "I wasn't wooking either."

A barely post-pubescent production intern appeared to say the guest named Mark was needed in make-up.

The tongue-less guy stood up. " 'At's me."

"Let me show you where to go," I said.

"I promise it's safe now."

He laughed and followed me down the hall.



To get your copy of the hardcover *Gloss* by Jennifer Oko in June 2007—buy it online at eHarlequin.com, at your favorite book store or call Customer Service. *Gloss* will also be available in eBook format, visit eHarlequin.com to download your copy.

The only thing better than reading a great book...is talking about one. Visit www.ReadersRing.com to join our online discussion on *Gloss* by Jennifer Oko or to get a copy of our reading guide to bring to your own book club.