



INSPIRING PEOPLE

She's Write On

How one woman overcame vision loss and discrimination to become a top romance author

● She went blind in her 50s, but Eva Rutland kept writing. She was good at it, and it sustained her. Even now, at 93, Rutland is working on her second memoir.

If anything, she says, she writes better blind. She retreats into her thoughts without distractions—a key reason she eventually became one of the most prolific and best-selling writers in her genre.

“I love making my characters,” says Rutland, who calls her talent “a gift.” Born in Atlanta and now living in Sacramento, California, she has always written stories and plays—anything that required putting pen to paper. As a

young mother in the 1950s, when racial segregation was the norm, she gained surprise success: One of her articles was published in *Redbook*. The topic? Rutland’s belief that her

COMMITTED TO HER CRAFT
During her heyday Rutland averaged two novels a year.

four children were the same as their white counterparts, “just as precious and just as fragile.”

As she recalls, “I was just telling white people to please be nice to my children.” In subsequent articles she explored other common ground, writing of her love for her family. These early pieces formed the basis of her first memoir, *When We Were Colored: A Mother’s Story*, published in 1964. Her family recollections—assailants used switchblades to cut her brothers, then teens, in a hate crime; years later a daughter sobbed when a white neighbor wouldn’t play with her—resonated with readers. Princeton scholar Cornel West lauded the 2007 reissue of the memoir, calling her story “powerful and poignant.”

But Rutland enjoys life’s lighter side, too, so she began writing fiction in the late ’60s. She was already losing her sight due to retinitis pigmentosa—an irreversible genetic condition—yet continued to write professionally, without learning Braille. She dictated stories into a recorder, then transcribed them on a typewriter. She finally sent her books to publishers in the mid-1980s. Her first Harlequin novel, *To Love Them All*, was published in 1988. By 2001 she’d published more than 20 novels and sold more than 6 million copies worldwide.

Though her pace has slowed, she still works at her craft. Besides writing her next memoir, she’s now plotting a new, “sweet” novel. —Teresa Wiltz