## **NOVELIST**

FROM PAGE CI

ulous. She was raised by parents who understood little about parenting; a mother who was too young and a father who had been a wonderful man before suffering a closed-head injury in a car accident.

suffering a closed-head injury in a car accident.

"She was very frustrated," Simmons said of her mother. "My mother was way too young. She had no hackground when it came to being a parent."

The family moved from place to place in Michigan, always poverty-stricken. Simmons was riddculed at school because of her clothes and appearance; her mother would never spend money on her children or herself.

"I didn't have my first real haircut until I was 18. There were a lot of things we missed."

Simmons mother had a difficult childhood herself and didn't get any support from her husband. Simmons has grown to understand the whys of her childhood. She and her mother, who lives in Texas, have reconciled. Simmons' father died in May after a massive stroke.

massive stroke.

He didn't live to see his daughter's first novel, 'Anything, My Love' reach book stores in June. That it was written at all is a testament to the power of the written word and Slmmons' own tenaci-

#### READING CHANGED EVERYTHING

She picked up her first romance in

1975, while baby-sitting at a neighbors' house. It piqued her interest, and she asked to borrow it. Simply carrying the thick novel around finally drew some positive attention from her classmates, who asked what she was reading. This book was something that intrigued me. There was a picture on the cover of a girl riding a horse. I never dreamed I d finish it.

Not only did she finish it, Simmons read the book twice, looking up words she didn't undorstand. Before long, her baby-sitting money went to buy books, because there were never any at home. Gradually, she stopped thinking of herself as deserving of a miserable life. When I started reading was when I knew I was half-way decent. When I picked up that first book, things just changed.

### MANY CHALLENGES

It took years for her to work through a series of challenges, from raising three children through a divorce, caring for her ailing father and reconcilling with her mother. Simmons also went back to college, flying through 21 credits and carning a spot on the Dean's list. She also obtained a Realtor's license. A writer since her high school days, she finally pulled out the novels she'd been working on for years after her grandmother suffered a stroke in 1998.

"I wanted to get something published while she could still see it,' Simmons says of her paternal grandmother, whom she adored.

It wasn't to be. Shortly after her

grandmother died, Simmons brought her father home, where he remained until his condition required more inten-

until his condition required more intensive physical care.
Now, she is able to immerse herself in her writing, sometimes burying herself for days in her bedroom office, coming out only to eat and grab a cup of coffee now and then. She chose the romance genre because it was the first thing she read, and Simmons believes the ease with which she writes convincing plots and dialogue comes from all those years spent secluded in her room as a child, trying desperately to escape what felt like an intolerably miscrable life.

A VICTORY

Reading romance was her escape then; writing romance is her victory now. In addition to honing her writing skills, her dedication to historically accurate books has allowed Simmons to delve into research she enjoys.

"Romances have so much to offer. They're always stories that have such a good basic theme people can relate to and learn from. The main characters are good people, and love conquers all. The underdog wins."

That's really the story of Simmons' own life. Though she seems to see a value in her past, her eyes are firmly fixed on a much brighter future.

"People say be grateful for the life you had, I don't took at it that way, I don't think you should be grateful for the struggle."

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Cynthia Simmons

# OCC Fire Institute graduation was Nov. 15

Following 11 weeks and 440 hours of intensive truining, the Oakland Fire Safety Institute at Oakland Community College graduated its 30th Basic Fire Academy class on Nov. 15.
Commencement ceremonies were at the Royal Cak Campus Lilla Jones Johnson Auditorium. A handful of the 34 graduates represented fire departments and public safety agencies from throughout Oakland County including Southfield, Pontiac, Farmington and Waterford.
The majority of the graduates from Oakland, Macomb, and Water Southeast South College and Calledon College and Waterford.
Wayne counties, as well as

rom Ozeanni, Maccomit, and Wayne counties, as well as Ontario, Canada. The Oakland Fire Institute is based at OCC's Auburn Hills Campus. Three basic sessions are offered each year: two full-time doytime sessions in the spring and fall, and a part-time session at the Troy Fire Department.

The graduates, their departments and hometowns are: Kelly Adams, Preservice, Roseville, John Attard, Preservice, Birmingham; Andrew Baker, Preservice, Clawson; Stephen Bardett, Preservice, Livonia; Clarence Bennett, Huntington Woods Dept of Public Safety; Brad Blaker, Pontiac Fire Department; Seott Brown, Farmington Dept. of Public Safety, Brad Blaker, Pontiac Fire Department; Seott Brown, Farmington Dept. of Public Safety, Brad Blaker, Pontiac Fire Department; Seott Brown, Farmington Dept. of Public Safety, Brad Blaker, Pontiac Fire Occasion, Preservice, Royal Oak; Joseph Giglio, Preservice, Sterling Heights; Stephan Eberhard, Preservice, Royal Oak; Glen Goodson, Preservice, Hazal Park; Timothy Griffin, Preservice, Suthifield; Kurtis Grover, Waterford Fire Department; Jayme Hall, Preservice, Eastpointe; Michael Kingler, Preservice, Commerce; Adam Kowalski, Preservice, Commerce; Adam Kowalski, Preservice, Commerce; Adam Kowalski, Preservice, Berdey, Jamile Lee, Preservice, Canada; Michael King, Preservice, LaSalle, Ontario, Canada; Michael Morner, Southfield; Joshua Fouldment, Preservice, Highland; Michael Shase, Preservice, Highand, Michael Shase, Preservice, Highand, Michael Shase, Preservice, Highand, Michael Shase, Preservice, Bochester, and John Wilkskost, Preservice, Southfield; Johna Goodson, Preservice, Southfield, Johna John Wilkskost, Preservice, Southfiel

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