



Connections

The official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

Connecticut Chapter, Romance Writers of America, Chapter 1, Region 1

President's Letter

May 2009

Almost like being in love

As romance writers, we're lucky. We fall in love quite a bit more than the average person. We fall for our heroes, we watch our heroes fall for our heroines...sigh! It's so romantic, isn't it? That first kiss, the heated glances, the accidentally-on-purpose touches. What a great way to spend our time!

Granted, there are times when we all struggle to write. Maybe we have no problem filling a page...but that page doesn't ultimately seem worth keeping. Maybe we're just stuck at coming up with a new idea...or fleshing out that idea so it really could become a book. It can be hard to find the right concept...easy to keep fishing around, but when it comes time to commit, nothing seems right. Characters resist us, instead of the preferred method of leaping out fully formed, like Athena from Zeus's head. Let's admit it. There are times when writing seems like a chore.

But then, thank heavens, there are the times when things work. We seize on an idea, and suddenly it's like...well, like falling in love. We meet an idea that seems kind of cute. Flirt with it a little. Make an advance...and the idea perks up. The courtship begins. We take that idea out to dinner, mention it to friends. The idea has a lot of great qualities, doesn't it? Then we start dating a bit more seriously. There's real potential here. Yes, this is the one, isn't it? From there, we enter a committed relationship...we start writing. And we keep writing.

Every day, we think about that book. It's fair to say we've become obsessed. We keep a notepad by the bed, a tape recorder in the car. We e-mail ourselves ideas from work. We can't stop thinking about that book. We're in love! The hours we spend at the computer fly by. Our spouses or kids have to remind us to come up for air.

It's these times that make everything else worthwhile. The rejection letters, the tedium of sending out queries, the expense of conferences, the stresses of deadlines...they're all barely a blip on the radar screen when things are going right. Everything is worth it when you're in love. So here's to those times, and hoping you're enjoying them right now.

~Kristan

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NEXT MEETING

May 9

Putting Your Baby On the Bus: Preparing Your Manuscript for Submission

MONTHLY MEETINGS of the CTRWA are held at The Four Points Sheraton in Meriden. Non-members are welcome to observe a meeting before joining. Meetings begin at 10:30 a.m. with a speaker or workshop at 11:00. PYOW lunch follows. See our website (www.ctrwa.org) for more information and directions.

COMMUNITY

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Does good weather help or hurt your writing efforts?

Theresa Diaz: Good weather helps my writing efforts because bad weather makes me want to cuddle under the big comforter.

Marie Roy: Good weather actually helps me get more writing done because then I can get out to my favorite walking spots and get inspired. Particularly if my brain becomes sluggish and I'm stuck on a scene then I'll go out and breathe in the fresh air and suddenly my brain starts to work again!

Patricia Grasso: Summer weather gives me angst. If I stay home to write, I look out my window longingly and think everyone else is at the beach having fun. If I succumb to temptation, I keep telling myself that the beach isn't helping my writing career.

Kristan Higgins: To me, there's nothing like writing on a rainy day.

Bob Bonitz: It only causes a problem when I can't resist and go out fishing for the day. The whole day usually. My laptop doesn't go well in a canoe.

CALENDAR: Save the Dates!

May 2: *Connecticut Fiction Fest*

May 9: *Putting Your Baby On the Bus: Preparing Your Manuscript for Submission*

June 13: *Karlee Etter: The Best or Worst Dressed Heroine, an Authentic Historical Wardrobe*

News from Lindsay Downs

On March 31st the *Special Ops* anthology was released Highland Press Publishing. I have the story 'Angel From Above' in it. I will be signing it at the conference on May 2.



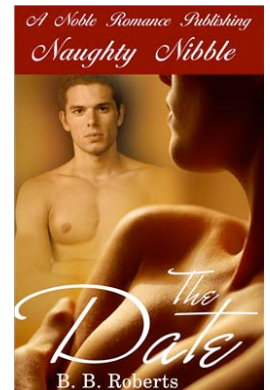
As part of the coalition forces sent to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield, Lt. Cristal Johnson expects to encounter many things, but love isn't one of them.

Repeatedly being called to duty running recon missions in Iraq and Kuwait, Lt. Paul Stevens has little time for affairs of the heart.

Cristal attempts a daring rescue of Paul and his A-team from Iraqi soldiers. Will she and her *Iron Maiden* copter crew safely bring them out of harm's way and will love triumph?

News from Bob Bonitz

On April 24th, Bob's first published work was released!



The Date

By B. B. Roberts

Helen Wordmann is homeless and desperate, ready to throw herself in front of a truck. Don Benton, a guy she hasn't seen since their high school prom, offers her a room for the night. His room. With him in it. She'll do anything he wants for another chance at life and takes his offer. But what does he want? Not what she expects.

Order your copy today at <http://www.nobleromance.com/>

COMMUNITY

Member Interview: Shaunee Cole

Tell us a little about yourself.

Well, I have five kazillion million jobs (I'm Jamaican and these are the ways of my people). In order to prepare for these jobs I got a B.A. in Lit and an MFA in Creative Writing. With the skills I gained I can do everything from answering phones to falling asleep during Broadway shows (I fell asleep during Stomp if you can believe it) to graphic design. Also I write.

What do you write?

Officially I write urban fantasy, but I love romance so I tend to include elements of romance in my work.

What inspired you to start writing?

Professor John Steinbrink of Franklin & Marshall College. Took a writing class of his my freshman year thinking, "no problem, easy A." The stuff I handed in was horrific—me imitating someone else's writing. Steinbrink didn't let me get away with it. He ridiculed and bullied me until I started taking things seriously. At the end of the semester Steinbrink called me into his office and told me that I should think about doing this for a living. Èt Voila!

How do you manage to write with three day jobs?!?

Having three jobs does make finding time to write a challenge, but it's not impossible. I write by hand so anytime I have a spare moment—a lunch break, in line at the grocery, in the waiting room at a doctor's office, even sitting in traffic—I grab my spiral notebook and write.

I also set word count goals for myself, which I don't always meet. I don't beat myself up about that though. The point, for me anyway, is putting words on paper every day. When I have more time, there are more words.

I've read a little of your work, and your descriptions are beautiful. Can you give us a sample?

"Alechi," Fel said. "You're looking good." He nodded at the thin scars embossing the exquisitely dark backs of her hands and the curve of visible breast. "Genealogy's coming along nice."

Delicate impala lilies decorated her flesh shyly almost as if their presence there was only granted after humble, ritualistic entreaty, while the lines that anchored each bud and petal resembled the immeasurable braggadocio of a virulent weed.

What is your writing process?

First comes the best of intentions - which means meticulous plotting.

Before I finish doing that I get anxious to just start writing already. That's when the pantsing comes in.

Invariably I run out of outline/bullet point/post-it notes and the seat of my pants isn't generating any ideas. When that happens I write a short story. It doesn't have to have anything to do with my current manuscript and is sometimes influenced by the news. Sometimes it's a continuation of a conversation I eavesdropped on (I'm a notorious people watcher).

Once I've finished I go back to my manuscript. Sometimes the short story will work in the MS and I hold on to it until I get to the place where it fits. If it doesn't, I toss it in my book idea file.

Do you 'cast' your books?

For my current work in progress I made a point of casting, starting with the most flamboyant member: the city. I was inspired by the artwork of Daniel Merriam, specifically some of his limited edition pieces. He is incredibly whimsical, but occasionally his work has a dark bottom note that make you wonder if you'd be entirely safe in his landscapes despite their allure. I created a psychological profile for my city—why does it pulse the way it does? Why is it so conflicted?—and filled it with people. Since we are partly a product of our environment, coming up with issues for my characters to be struggling with was a snap. A discordant city can slough off its issues on families, friends and my hero/heroine. Sort of the trickle-down effect of angst and ajada.

What brought you to your first CTRWA meeting?

I needed to be around my peeps! (Say it loud, I'm an unpublished, totally struggling, occasionally poor writer and proud!)

Has it been helpful?

Have you ever seen those penguins at the South Pole huddling together for warmth? There's this continuous rotation of bodies that happens, so that the penguins on the outside of the huddle eventually make it into the middle where it's warmer.

That's CTRWA. I suppose I could've accomplished what I needed to on my own (eventually), but I'd be freezing my ass off in the process. These days I'm nice and toasty.

Contests – Are They the Opportunity You’re Looking For?

by Anne-Marie Carroll

I’m not new to the contest circuit. I’ve been on the contest rodeo tour for the last few years, entering, finalling, winning, receiving requests, judging, and chairing TARA’s contest. Say that ten times.

When peers ask me about entering RWA chapter sponsored contests, I ask them what they want in return.

Is it to receive constructive feedback?

Is it to final?

Is it to get their baby in front of major acquiring editors? Is it for the BLING? Sorry, I couldn’t resist. But who can? I just love contest bling, plaques, and chachkas (knick-knacks and trinkets).

When I enter contests now, (on a tried manuscript) I gauge who the editors are judging the category and pray for a final, win, and a request. If I’ve just started writing a new manuscript, it’s all about the constructive feedback. Many times judges will ask questions that get the little voice in my head to write, improve, and tighten my story. I’ve been blessed by judges’ comments to fix plot holes I never knew I had. Go figure.

When I’m judging contests, (and I average judging six to eight major RWA chapter contests annually) I try to help new writers improve their writing, without rewriting their story, and experienced writers to final, get their baby in front of editors, and shoot – to win BLING. That’s not saying only experienced authors achieve those dreams. I’ve judged some of the best entries from new writers who have a voice that sings and prose that dances. Good constructive feedback is valuable.

DON’T MAKE CHANGES JUST BECAUSE A JUDGE SAYS YOU SHOULD. I don’t want to sound like I’m yelling, but I’ve seen too many people, myself included, who change their story just because a judge said to. This is your baby. Do only what you feel works for your voice, your characters, and your plot. Put your entry aside for

a couple or a few days. Only tackle the judges’ comments when you’re ready. Gauge each judge’s comments to how it works best for your story.

CHANGE ONLY IF IT WORKS FOR YOU. I read every comment and pay special attention, analyze and consider how I can improve my story and especially when more than one judge has commented on the same element.

During my years of judging and coordinating contests, I’ve found that entrants...

1. enter the wrong category, although some categories can overlap.
2. don’t follow contest rules.
3. rush to get an entry together and enter the contest last minute; therefore, more errors get through.
4. don’t have someone outside their family and friends proofread their entry.
5. make grammar, punctuation, and formatting errors.
6. write too much back story. Would your story benefit more with less or interweaving it throughout your story? K.I.S.S.
7. don’t start the story in the correct place.
8. don’t have varying sentence structure. Haven’t developed cadence.
9. haven’t utilized the five senses.
10. don’t have sympathetic characters or characters the judges (readers) can root for. In other words, characters who don’t deserve to breathe, let alone live.
11. haven’t created consistent characters. One minute they do or say something, the next they’re saying or doing the complete opposite or something that doesn’t ring true to their character.
12. tend to overwrite. Too much visceral or flowery description. I’m guilty as charged.
13. have point-of-view issues. Not only head hopping, but also writing things that the POV character would never think about themselves. i.e. *Jacque tucked her thick, raven hair behind her delicate diamond-studded ear. Jacque would never think this about herself, right? Changes are she won’t think about the color of her eyes, hair, clothes, or the shape of her legs, etc.*
14. introduce secondary character’s too soon or when not necessary.

CRAFT

15. fill their story with clichés instead of creating their own unique style.
16. write passages that slow pacing. Would your story benefit by eliminating some of your great words? If the answer is yes, delete and save in a file. Who knows, you may be able to use it later in this manuscript or in a future story.
17. create dialogue that isn't consistent with your character or that is stilted.
18. don't have a good balance between dialogue and introspection.
19. don't cement goal, motivations, and conflicts (GMCs) or make them strong enough to carry the story. Set up road blocks.
20. have plot holes and inconsistencies.
21. don't end a scene or their entry with a hook. You want to stop at a point that will make the reader, judge, and editor want to read more.
22. and if there's a synopsis required, be sure it's written in the same voice and tone as the entry.

Take your entry or manuscript through the above checklist and make yourself the promise to enter what you believe is your best work possible at the time. Entering and judging contests are the best ways to help you develop your craft to become an outstanding writer – a published writer. Baby steps. But no matter what, don't ever give up on your dreams.

Do you have any other flaws to add to the contest checklist? What do you look for in a contest? What draws you to a certain contest?

A great contest opportunity is the upcoming TARA Contest. I hope to see a lot of you there.

As the TARA Contest Chair for the past three years and judge of numerous RWA chapter sponsored contests, Anne-Marie Carroll is no stranger to contests. In fact, her dark romantic suspense and sassy, sensual romances have finalled and won several contests. You can look for Anne-Marie at www.anne-mariecarroll.com

Heroscopes: The Taurus Heroine

by Bonnie Staring

To her, things are fine just the way they are.

Born between April 20 and May 20, the Taurus heroine is the dotter of I's and the crosser of T's in the Zodiac. It's not that she's particularly picky or a control freak... well, she just likes things to be the way she thinks they should be. This gal is the perfect hostess of any party, but don't expect to see her dancing with a lampshade on her head. And keep your greasy hands off the piano.

When everyone else has given up, the Taurus heroine will still be going strong. This can make her a rather cantankerous co-worker when a project has gone on for too long or the shining star whose determination can inspire you. Whatever you do, don't ask her to change or expect her to welcome it with open arms.

To woo a Taurus heroine is to shower her with patience and romance. She expects a lot from a potential partner and will delightfully return the favour. Great dates for a Taurus woman include entertaining her appetite for fun and food, such as a wine-tasting at an art gallery, a picnic after a hot-air balloon ride, or a game of Trivial Pursuit along with a tasty seven-layer dip. Famous Taurus heroines include Charlotte Bronte, Florence Nightingale, Cher and Catherine the Great.

Bonnie Staring is a comedic triple threat (writer, performer, coupon user). Her articles regularly appear in a variety of magazines and she conducts workshops on creativity and discovering your inner superhero. See what else Bonnie's been up to at www.bonniestaring.com

This article first appeared in the May 2009 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

CAREER

PROFESSIONAL OR AMATEUR

by *Elizabeth Sinclair*

PROFESSIONAL: noun 1. a professional person. 2. a person having impressive competence in a particular activity.

AMATEUR: noun 1. a person who takes part in a sport or other activity without being paid. 2. a person regarded as incompetent at a particular activity. 1. a person who takes part in a sport or other activity without being paid. 2. a person regarded as incompetent at a particular activity.

Which of the above descriptions would you want applied to you following book signings, conferences, or any other gathering at which your actions and appearance will be judged by your boss (read editors), the public, and your readers?

Seems like a no-brainer, right? You'd think so, but it's not always true. Simply by the nature of what we do and the functions we attend, the relaxed atmosphere has a tendency to brainwash us, to drag us into a laid-back frame of mind. All that pent up energy we suck up while sitting at home alone staring at a computer screen rises to the surface like cream. In short, we forget we're professional representatives of our publishers, our agents, and our books, and that our unprofessional behavior reflects on all three, but mostly on us.

As a professional, we should make sure that we appear in public dressed appropriately and that you act appropriately. Why? Because you never know who the person at the next table is. Don't show up at an agent or editor appointment dressed to go to the local bowling alley. A suit is not necessary, but jeans and a T-shirt are not appropriate either. There's a middle ground. A dress or a skirt or a nice pair of slacks and a blouse works just fine.

It's quite common for agents and editors not to wear name badges at conferences. You never know for certain if the stranger you just insulted in the elevator was the editor with your manuscript on her desk. You don't want to find out that the person you fell over in the bar after having one to many Margaritas was an editor or an agent you've been

trying to sell to. Drink if you must, but do it in moderation, before you become the loudmouth drunk who leaves an editor or agent reluctant to admit they know you, much less eager to buy your next book.

Conferences and book signings should be fun, enjoyable. But they are nevertheless a professional activity and should be regarded as such. Relax, enjoy yourself, make connections, interact with friends and colleagues, but always do it with grace and dignity and always remember you are a professional at a professional event.

Elizabeth Sinclair currently writes romantic suspense for Silhouette Romantic Suspense and paranormal romance for Medallion Press. Her latest book, Angel Unaware, is a December 2008 release from Medallion. Visit her web site at www.elizabethsinclair.com.

The following article first appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of the Coastal Connection, the newsletter of the First Coast ROmance Writers of Jacksonville, FL—editor Tracy Montoya.

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So It's a Tight Market—So What?

by Patricia Kay

Lately it seems as if all I've been hearing is how tight the market is. Everyone I've talked with sings the same mournful song: things are tough in the publishing world, especially the world of romance publishing.

So what else is new?

When I started writing (seriously writing, that is) in January of 1986, I was told the same thing. "Oh, it's very difficult to get published nowadays. There are so many people trying to write romances. The market is glutted.

And demand is down. Way down!"

Over the next five years, I heard different variations of that same theme. Markets closed. People predicted doom and gloom. "Romances are dying out," some people said. "The boom is long past," others said.

But guess what? Romance is still healthy. Yes, some markets closed. But others opened. Some lines died out. But some lines expanded. And some new lines were introduced. Some of them made it. Others didn't.

The romance segment of the publishing market is the same as any other segment of any other business. It fluctuates according to supply and demand. When supply is overstocked, demand is decreased. When supply is meager, demand is increased. Outside factors enter into the equation as well. When people now say, "The war and the recession have really affected sales," they're right, of course, but that doesn't mean we won't still sell books. Because it doesn't matter whether the market is tight or loose, whether the line you're targeting is bought up into the next century or not, whether there's a recession or a war or a hurricane, whether two thousand or ten thousand others are also trying to sell their manuscript.

The only thing that matters is whether your manuscript is good enough!

A really good manuscript will always sell—good market or bad—tight market or loose. I don't care how bought up a publishing house or line is. If you send them a book that is compelling enough, they'll buy it. They'll make room for it. Why? Because if your book is that good, they won't want to see anyone else publish it. They'll want it for themselves.

"But how do I get them to even read it?" you wail? "It's fine and dandy to say if it's good enough they'll buy it, but if they won't even read it, what chance do I have?"

Well, I will admit that's a problem, but not an insurmountable problem. Let's take a 'for instance.' Let's say that X line or X publishing house has recently announced it will no longer take unsolicited manuscripts. Does that mean they won't ever again read anything new? Of course not! All it really means is that X line or publishing house doesn't want or need a thousand manuscripts from hopefuls at every stage of writing expertise. They will almost always read something that's been highly touted by an agent they respect. They will also read manuscripts in contests they've agreed to judge. In other words, they will still solicit manuscripts in one way or another—just not as many as they had been soliciting.

Remember what I said earlier? You've got to have a book that's good enough!

So what does all this mean? It means instead of weeping and gnashing your teeth about the terrible market and how you wish you'd started writing in the early 80s or 90s like Jane Doe and Mary Smith, you should use that energy to become better at your chosen profession. The same advice Jane Doe and Mary Smith were given still applies: work hard, learn your craft,

CAREER

... cont'd

write every day, study the markets and lines, read as much as you can, never say die, attend conferences, enter contests, network, learn, write, write, write.

If you do all these things, you're bound to get better. If you keep writing—especially if you keep writing whole books (but that's another article)—you're bound to improve. And one day you'll write a book so good, so compelling, so unforgettable, that it can't help but sell.

This advice applies to those of you who are already published, too. Recently a friend complained to me about how glutted her particular line is. My advice to her is the same as my advice to you: if the book you submit is terrific, they'll buy it.

*Patricia Kay is the USA Today best selling author of more than thirty-five novels of contemporary romance and women's fiction. Her first novel for Berkley, *The Wrong Child*, was a RITA® nominee for Best Contemporary Single Title of 2000. Her most recent novel is *Secrets Of A Small Town, Silhouette Special Edition*, October, 2003. Upcoming is its sequel, *Man Of The Hour, Silhouette Special Edition*, August, 2004. To learn more about her, visit her website at www.patriciakay.com.*

This article first appeared in the November/December 2003 issue of Happily Ever After, newsletter of the West Houston chapter of RWA.

Why Do We Write?

By Victoria Janssen

Most writers I know write for reasons other than making money. We write to express or fulfill ourselves, even if our income is dependent upon writing. Of course there are also those who write only for personal fulfillment; some of those writers show their writing to others, and some don't. Most of us who've gone as far as to join RWA do show our work to others; otherwise, no one will buy it.

What, exactly, do we get out of writing? What do I get out of it?

1. Stories. There are stories I want to read that no one else has written, so I write them myself.
2. Sharing. I want to share my joy in my stories. I want others to love the story of them, to think about my characters, to put their own spin on my ideas.
3. Pride. I have pride in my skill at making characters, stories, prose itself, and I have pride in my perseverance and in the market savvy that got my work published. I have pride in my dedication that allows me to continue publishing my work.
4. Money. I know I mentioned reasons other than money, but it's very, very satisfying and validating to be paid money for doing something you love and find fulfilling. Also, I like spending the money on things like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* DVD boxed set.
5. Secrets. Having secrets is having power. Writing is something all my own; my characters and stories are all my own; I can think of them in my head, planning and plotting and exploring new ideas for future projects, all the while keeping the story to myself as a secret pleasure of which I share only fragments.

What do you get out of writing?

*Victoria Janssen www.victoriajanssen.com *THE DUCHESS, HER MAID, THE GROOM AND THEIR LOVER*, December 2008 from *Harlequin Spice*. *THE MOONLIGHT MISTRESS*, December 2009 from *Harlequin Spice*.*

<http://www.ktliterary.com/daphne.html>