

The Mid-Michigan Mirror



... A Reflection of Romance

August 2008

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Winner of the 1999 RWA® Mid-size Chapter Newsletter Contest

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MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Mid-Michigan Chapter of Romance Writers of America® is to promote excellence in romantic fiction, to help writers publish and establish careers, and to provide continuing support for writers within the romance publishing industry.



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—THE BOARD ROOM—

Borders Group Romance Buyer Sue Grimshaw Speaks to us in August



RWA® presents its Vivian Stephens Industry Award annually to one special industry professional who demonstrates notable support of romance authors and the romance genre, and whose love of the romance genre promotes the continued success of the romance-fiction market. On Friday, August 1, 2008, at the RWA® National Conference Awards Luncheon in San Francisco, RWA® recognized Sue Grimshaw's exceptional devotion to the romance genre by presenting her with this prestigious award.

Our August speaker began her career with the Borders Group in 1995 as a children's book buyer and as a buyer for the medical, reference/test preparation and the fitness/nutrition categories for Waldenbooks.

In 2001, when she became enthralled with historical romance novels, Sue was named romance buyer for Waldenbooks. In 2004, her role expanded to include Borders as well. Sue Grimshaw is more than a buyer and a voracious reader of romance; Sue is an active promoter of the romance genre.

Here is what Rob Green, Borders Group executive vice president of merchandising and marketing, has to say about Sue: "Our company, our customers, and the publishing industry have benefited from her love of the category, her critical eye, and most of all, her willingness to share her expertise without holding back—whether advising first-time authors or guiding established publishers on important issues. Sue has played a key role in the growth of our romance business over the years." *

Sue's topic on August 16 will be "Buying Romance." She will discuss what it takes to get your books on the booksellers' shelves. It's the next-to-last step your book takes on its journey from your imagination to the eager hands of your readers.

Join us to get insider information on what's hot and what's not. We will meet in the banquet room at La Señorita Restaurant in Lansing on Saturday, August 16, 2008 at 11:30 a.m. RSVP to program chair Lynette Curtis at lynnettemichelle@yahoo.com so we may have an accurate head count. Directions to La Señorita are on page 2. **MMM**

* The information above was obtained from RWA's® 28th Annual National Conference Program.

2008 MMRWA Meeting and Program Schedule

MMRWA holds monthly meetings on a rotating basis in the areas of Grand Rapids, Jackson, Kalamazoo, and Lansing. The Saturday luncheon meetings are held from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in local restaurants and are open to the public. Meetings begin with lunch (optional) and the programs start at approximately 1:30 p.m. There is no charge for the meeting and program; luncheon charges are the responsibility of the individual attendees.

- January 19** (Lansing): Taxes and the Writer. Kathy Rampe of H&R Block, speaker.
- February 16** (Kalamazoo): A Soldier's Story. Heather and Curtiss Austin, married Marine reservists who spent time in Iraq, speakers.
- March 15** (Grand Rapids): So You're Published, Now What? Loralee Lillibridge, speaker.
- April 18-20** (St. Ives Resort, Stanwood, MI) Retreat From Harsh Reality; Cindy Dees, 2008 keynote speaker.
- May 17** (Grand Rapids): Special Event — "Working with an Agent." Michelle Grajkowski of 3 Seas Literacy Agency, speaker. Members only, by registration; not open to the public.
- June 21** (Kalamazoo): Psychic Investigations. Kathy Condor, speaker.
- July:** No meeting.
- August 16** (Lansing): Buying Romance. Borders Group Romance Buyer Sue Grimshaw, speaker.
- September 20** (Grand Rapids): Sub-plotting to Success. Lisa Childs, speaker.
- October 18** (Jackson): Write What You Love or Love What You Write. Nancy Gideon, speaker.
- November 15** (Kalamazoo): Civil War Dress Presentation.
- December** (Lansing): End-of-Year Business Meeting and Holiday Party.

Calendar & Reminders



AUGUST

16: Selection of Nominating Committee members to recruit candidates for the 2009 Board of Directors Election.

OCTOBER

18: Deadline to declare candidacy for the 2009 Board of Directors Election.

NOVEMBER

15: Election of 2009 Board of Directors.
30: Deadline to submit final manuscript page in the 2008 I Will Write a Book Challenge.



August Meeting Directions



Directions to: La Señorita Mexican Restaurant
2706 Lake Lansing Road, Lansing, MI
Phone: 517-485-0166

From the North (Mt. Pleasant): Take US-127S to Lake Lansing Road Exit #79 and get into the exit ramp's middle turn lane. At the traffic light at the end of the exit ramp, turn RIGHT onto Lake Lansing Road. Get into the left turn lane immediately and turn LEFT at the Kerry Street traffic light (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left). Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.

From the South (Ann Arbor, Jackson, Kalamazoo): Take I-94 to US-127N / I-496N. Take Exit 8, 127N toward Flint/Clare to Lake Lansing Road Exit #79. From the exit ramp, turn LEFT at the traffic light onto W. Lake Lansing Road. Turn LEFT at the second traffic light onto Kerry St. (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left). Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.

From the West (Grand Rapids): Take I-96E to merge onto I-69E via Exit #89 toward Flint/Clare. Go 10 miles. Merge onto US-127S via Exit #89A toward E. Lansing. Go 3.2 miles to Lake Lansing Road Exit #79 and get into the exit ramp's middle turn lane. At the traffic light at the end of the exit ramp, turn RIGHT onto Lake Lansing Road. Get into the left turn lane immediately and turn LEFT at the Kerry Street traffic light (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left). Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.

From the East (Brighton): Take I-96 West to merge onto US-127N / I-496N via Exit #106B toward Downtown Lansing. Take Exit 8, 127N toward Flint/Clare to the Lake Lansing Road Exit #79. From the exit ramp, turn LEFT at the traffic light onto W. Lake Lansing Road. Turn LEFT at the second traffic light onto Kerry St. (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left). Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.

2008 OFFICERS**President**

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I Will Write a Book/Write for the Money

Flavia Crowner

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Lucy Kubash and Maris Soule

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Chair Needed

Members as Resources

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Lana Miersen

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The President's Two Cents Worth

By Annette Briggs



As the President of Mid-Michigan RWA, I took part in the all-day Leadership Seminar at National this year and I came away with an itch -- the deep down persistent urge to become an enabler.

Yeah, I know enabler is a dirty word in mental health circles. But in the case of Mid-Michigan, being enablers is what we're all about.

What are your dreams for the coming year? When we have dreams, we can make goals and achieving goals draws us closer to our dreams.

We can scratch each other's itch. Make available your gifts. Each of us has something we can offer. See Florence (Renci) Denham, our newly appointed Members as Resources chair. Take stock of what you need at this stage of your writing journey and make those needs known. Our dynamic vice-president Lynette Curtis can tailor her programs to your needs. Lana Miersen, our newsletter editor, has access to a vast amount of expert information. Take advantage of member critique groups. Another option is our 101 loop. It's awesome.

Don't you feel it gnawing at your gut? Aren't you just as eager to give help as you are to get it? Let's get focused on what it takes for our success and let's get started.

All the best,

Annette



June Program Recap: Speaker Kathy Condor, Paranormal Investigator

Reported by Annette Briggs

Paranormal Investigator Kathy Condor comes to us from Michigan Paranormal Encounters, a group that conducts its investigative activities based on a philosophy of integrity and objectivity in the study of the paranormal. As a Science major in college, she felt there must be a way to study and document paranormal phenomena under controlled conditions. She feels her involvement in paranormal investigation is doing just that and she relies on psychic impressions to lead her in the right direction. Keeping an open mind, while maintaining a healthy skepticism, is her rule of thumb.

Kathy opened our program by saying, "I can't remember a time when I couldn't sense spirits around me." She recalled when she was some distance from her family home and she looked back toward the house and saw her uncle on the porch. She hurried back to offer him some refreshment, but when she got there no one else had seen him. She was later told the uncle had passed away that morning. Maybe his spirit was there for one last visit before joining the afterlife.

She went on to explain that she had the kind of family that could accept the reality of her special abilities. In fact, in her homeland of Greece, her mother's mother was thought to have "powers" or to be a witch. That belief began when the grandmother, then a girl of fifteen with practically no information about her body or childbirth, had paused from her work in the field to birth what turned out to be twins, with only the assistance of an equally unschooled twelve-year-old. Mother and infants survived this often deadly situation and, when the locals credited the survival to her "powers," they may have encouraged her to develop her talents.

Children are sensitive to the presence of ghosts around them, but they're often discouraged by adults to trust what they sense. Now that Kathy is an adult, she says she must open herself to the spirits, almost meditate, but when she was young, she got it all the time.

When Kathy started seeking scientific methods to record paranormal activities, she organized Michigan Paranormal Encounters, a group of the gifted who function based on the philosophy of integrity and objectivity in the study of the paranormal. As stated on the website at: <http://www.michiganparanormalencounters.com>, trained investigators located in Michigan work with clients throughout the Midwest. Many years of experience and study of the paranormal has provided members with the rich background needed in this field of study.

State of the art equipment provides investigators with essential tools to rule out natural causes for unexplained phenomena before paranormal explanations are explored. In many cases, frightening and disruptive occurrences can be explained by things that are in no way paranormal. If it is determined that paranormal forces are at work, investigators work with clients to resolve the issue in the most effective way possible, while offering support and understanding throughout the process.



Kathy Condor, speaking at the June meeting at Brewster's in Grand Rapids (Photo courtesy of Roger Nelson)

"I can't remember a time when I couldn't sense spirits around me." –Kathy Condor





“People ask me if I get scared waiting around for ghosts,” Kathy said. “I really don’t. It’s rare that the entity is truly evil. If the spirit really wanted to hurt you, it would have already done it.”

Annette Briggs is president of Mid-Michigan RWA.

The Chapter publishes its business meeting minutes, treasurer’s reports, and other legal documents online in the files section of the members-only MMRWABUSINESS list. See Policy, page 12.

Kathy pointed out that spirits are energy and she believes they can be detected. Some tools they use are: thermometers, EMF meters, cameras, and audio recorders. Ghosts use energy to move and to make noise. Often cold spots are found at the site of hauntings.

If, after preliminary research for possible causes—like a traumatic happening—the situation seems to merit investigation, they go to the site and set up their technical devices and keep watch.

Kathy does have audios of voices, gunfire, horses and the like, and photos collected from sites she or some of her associates have investigated, though it’s very rare to see a full bodied apparition.

According to Kathy’s experience, the place haunted doesn’t have to be old. The most likely places to encounter earth-bound spirits are: battlefields, graveyards, lighthouses, antique stores, jails, asylums, and hospitals.

“People ask me if I get scared waiting around for ghosts,” Kathy said. “I really don’t. It’s rare that the entity is truly evil. If the spirit really wanted to hurt you, it would have already done it.” If they determine the entity is truly evil, she said they don’t go further.

There are two kinds of haunting, active haunting and residual haunting. With active, there is someone present that the ghost can connect with. With residual, there was something important that happened in a place that has left its imprint.

Commonly held beliefs of why spirits don’t move on to the hereafter are:

- Death from trauma where the soul has had no time to prepare and the spirit is confused.
- Loved ones come back to someone with whom they have deep ties.
- Sometimes those left behind grieve so deeply that they bind the spirit to them.
- Children who pass in their sleep linger because at first they may not even realize they’ve passed. They may wonder why they’re being ignored and not taken care of. They usually find their way beyond.
- Unfinished business, between loved ones or enemies.
- Intense emotions like anger or hate or rage at their killers or at injustice will hold them back.

Why all the bother to prove it? A lot of times the people who are experiencing paranormal occurrences just want to be told they aren’t crazy or they’re not going to be hurt by the spirits. They may want to contact the spirit. “We never promise to get rid of the ghost or ghosts, but if clients want to try, we use whatever methods are in keeping with their faith—like Christians would use a cross.”

Kathy Condor has taught many classes about her field of interest and continues to share her knowledge and experience in various speaking engagements. For more information, she can be reached at: kathy@michiganparanormalencounters.com. **MMM**



—CHAPTER CHATTER—

June/July Member News

Cindy Arends: Submitted requested material to two agents. 4th place in Feb 5 for *Wings of Desire*—partial requested.

Dawn Bartley: Still on WIP.

Tereasa Bellew: Waiting for response from editor on partial. Working and baby-sitting. Looking forward to the garden.

Rosanne Bittner: Finishing some final edits to contemporary paranormal proposal and another western romance. Recently contracted for another printing of *Montana Woman* in France - nice extra money! Steeple Hill inspirational, *Walk by Faith*, will hit the stands as a re-issue in September. Speaking at the Wisconsin Regional Writers Assoc. conference in Wausau, WI September 27-28. Anyone interested can go to www.wrwa.net to view itinerary and download a registration.

Annette Briggs: Going to National for the first time.

Lisa Childs-Theeuwes: Working hard to meet deadlines. Turned in American book that's first in my Citizen's Academy series. Turned in the novella for Nocturne Bite. Working hard to meet deadline for *Immortal Bride*.

Lynette Curtis: Finishing last read-through/edits on current WIP and finishing plotting next WIP.

Leah Denda: Started second ms.

Margo Hoornstra: Received contracts for 2 free reads at Wild Rose—designed to bring readers to the website. Working on edits on novel for them. Have three more stories coming out in the near future.

Anne Marie King-Jakubiak: No writing—cleaning house and finishing stained glass works commissioned by a client. Waiting for grandson #4.

Lucy Kubash: Turned in edits to Wild Rose, should hear back by July 15 if editor accepted them. Signed up for I Will Write a Book, hope to finish book that has 9 finished chapters.

Gail Gaymer Martin: Hope all is well at MMRWA. I sold two new novels and need to write them but instead I'm traveling all over the country, plus I'll be teaching and doing a keynote at an International Christian Writers and Journalist conference in Jamaica at the end of September. The woman heard me in Colorado in May and loved my teaching style -- so that's an all-expense paid trip plus a stipend for each workshop. Wishing you all good things.

Cathy McClain: My story, *The Mechanic's Dream*, is a finalist in the Emerald City Opener Contest Series Romance category! Woohoo!

Lana Miersen: Spent more than a week computer trouble-shooting for dh and spent a week in North Carolina visiting family. Landscaping back yard between thunderstorms. Continued revision of futuristic when time permitted; edited the *Mirror* when time permitted. Going to National in SF.

Rog Nelson: Started another romance involving a bicycle trip along the Erie Canal in New York.

Amy Olle: My submission from *Chasing Starlight* took 2nd place in the Alaska RWA Break-Up Contest.

Florence Price: Still working on first book.

Maris Soule: Submitted *The Crows* for consideration with Books in Motion. Worked on 1-page synopsis. Ready to submit to agents. Getting rights back to all but 2 H/S books.

Ami Weaver: Preparing agent submission. Sent requested partial to editor at Superromance. Entered the Maggie. Chasing my kids and hanging out in my garden. **MMM**



August

- 10 Sandra Stone
- 15 Anne Marie King-Jakubiak
- 26 Reneé Hand
- 29 Tamyra Kearly

September

- 08 Mary Todas
- 15 Wil A. Emerson

Congratulations are in order!

2008 RITA Winner for Best Romance Novella



"Born in My Heart" in *Like Mother, Like Daughter* by Jennifer Greene
Harlequin Enterprises, Harlequin NEXT
(0-373-88134)
Melissa Jeglinski, editor



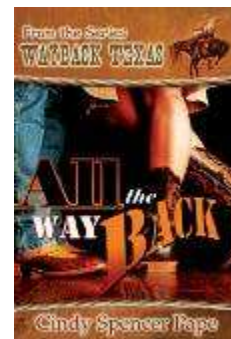
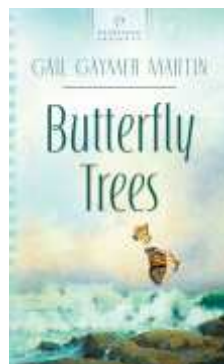
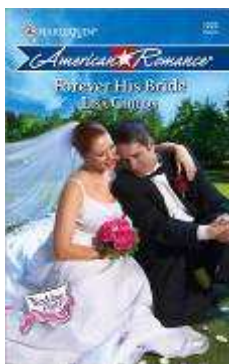
Members' Current and Upcoming Releases—Summer 2008

Lisa Childs: *Forever His Bride*, Harlequin American Romance, August 2008.

Margo Hoornstra: *Forgotten Alliance*, Wild Rose Press [Rosette], e-book, July 2008.

Gail Gaymer Martin: *Butterfly Trees*, Heartsong Presents, August 2008.

Cindy Spencer Pape: *All the Way Back*, Wild Rose Press, July 2008; *Stone and Sea*, Ellora's Cave, August 2008.



—THE WRITING LIFE—

2008 RWA® PRO Retreat Agent Panel

Reported by Lana Miersen

It was all I could do to keep up with the agents on the panel as they answered the questions put to them by the PROs at the PRO Retreat. I condensed their answers as I took notes, and most of the replies are not direct quotes. I'm sure I didn't get it all, but I did my best to get most of it.

2008 PRO Retreat Agent Panel: **Laurie McLean** (Larsen-Pomada Literary Agency), **Barbara Poelle** (Irene Goodman Literary Agency), **Laura Bradford**, (Bradford Literary Agency), **Nathan Bransford** (Curtis Brown Ltd.) and **Jennifer Schober** (Spencerhill Associates Ltd.)

First Question: What have you sold recently and what are you looking for?

Laura Bradford: She sold paranormal and romantic suspense, and is not into contemporary.

Laurie McLean: She is looking for urban fantasy. She doesn't do inspirational or erotica, is interested in historical paranormal, and Elizabeth Pomada does women's fiction.

Barbara Poelle: She does YA, and she has a science fiction author who also does urban fantasy. She is hungry for YA. She would love to find a thriller. She loves cross genre, would love something wholly fresh and different and will help to find it a home. We want you to be good. We want you to be the one. We're on the same side of the field as you are.

Nathan Bransford: Recent sales of YA. He says he knows what he likes when he sees it.

Jennifer Schober: She has sold to Kensington Aphrodesia, and Source Books. She sold 50 books in the last year. She doesn't differentiate with genre and will consider genre-bending work. If the work is cool, with vivid, great writing—that rings her bell. She prefers email queries rather than paper. [She also mentioned that Karen Solem would like to see some horror right now.]

Q: How do you work with an author?

LM: It depends on what the author needs—great negotiating skills to get bigger advance, for example. She thinks of herself as a writer's business partner.

BP: She agreed with McLean, and she added that she is very hands on.

LB: It's up to author. She is about meeting the author's needs. She will hold an author's hand when necessary.

NB: He agreed with the others. He added that it is important to keep the lines of communication open. The author needs to trust the agent, should ask questions, and shouldn't be afraid of the agent.

JS: She loves to work and build the relationship. She is the nurturing type. She said it's a two-way street; she's communicative and expects the same of the author. She wants to hear if you're happy or not. She can be hands on if needed. One of her best skills is knowing what an author needs. She tries to make things easier for the author so the process is fun for both.

Q: What do you look for in an author, besides a great book?

BP: She looks for someone who is serious about a career, not a dabbler, and who will work to succeed. You have to be prepared to put in all the work in all aspects of your career.



Laura Bradford
Bradford Literary Agency

"I'm a one-woman shop. I read all the queries addressed to me and respond to them myself."—Laura Bradford



Nathan Bransford
Curtis Brown, Ltd.

"You should write what you love. Different is good."—Nathan Bransford





Laurie McLean
Larsen-Pomada Literary Agency

On queries:

"Make your query about the hook, the book and the cook, just three paragraphs."—Laurie

McLean

"This is your book's job interview. Don't be cutesy."—Barbara Poelle



Barbara Poelle
Irene Goodman Literary Agency

JS: She looks for professionalism, someone totally committed to writing. Coming to the relationship like it's a career is important and makes a difference,

Q: What is your taste in romantic suspense?

LB: She likes the kind of romantic suspense that is counter to what is popular. She likes romantic adventure/suspense on the lighter side —Indiana Jones and National Treasure, for example. She said some books are harder to sell than others. Authors must have realistic expectations.

NB: You should write what you love. Different is good.

Q: Can you define urban fantasy for us?

LM: Urban fantasy is the conceit that these paranormal creatures are living among us in the contemporary world.

[Everyone on the panel agreed that she nailed the definition.]

Q: Should we target agents who represent what we write?

BP: Yes, they understand the genre you write in.

NB: Yes, you should target someone who is into the same genre, but not an agent who represents someone who writes something very similar to what you write.

Q: Do you read all queries yourself?

LM: Yes.

BP: She has an assistant who reads queries. Sometimes she pretends to be her own assistant when she answers the phone so the writer won't get nervous. *[She got a laugh with that response.]* She passes queries on to someone else who might be interested if she isn't.

LB: I'm a one-woman shop. I read all the queries addressed to me and respond to them myself.

NB: Yes.

JS: Yes. She is an agent and an assistant too. She sometimes reads Karen Solem's queries also.

Q: What do you think about writing outside the box—pushing the envelope?

NB: It's your take on something that's different from the standard fare.

JS: She is looking for new voices.

Q: What do you look for the initial query?

BP: This is your book's job interview—don't be cutesy.

LB: Something pithy and to the point. She prefers a paper query.

LM: The pitch is what the story is about and should show that you've done your homework, i.e., that you went to the Larsen-Pomada website. She likes an email query; it has an electronic trail on her computer that she can find and refer to. She wants everything in the body of email—no attachments. Include a 1-2 page synopsis like a movie trailer (hit high points—action sequences). After a brief synopsis, paste in the first ten pages.

NB: He has a blog that includes guidelines on how to write a query and tell what your book is about: <http://nathanbransford.blogspot.com>

JS: I want a sense of your voice in your query. Let the magic begin there. I want my socks knocked off by your query. Give me a taste of your Mojo.

LM: She has a blog but it's shorter than Nathan's.

NB: My blog is called the Bran Fans.

LB: Send a query letter and the first 30 pages [by snail mail].

BP: Send her an email query of three paragraphs—why the book, why you, why me—and paste in the first ten pages—no attachments.

LM: Make your query about the hook, the book and the cook—three paragraphs.

Q: What is your turn around time?

LB: Eight to ten weeks, maybe fewer.

NB: Usually the same day. When you email him, he reads it right away and responds.



JS: Her clients come first, so it's about a six to eight weeks wait for submissions from new authors.

Q: If I call to tell you that I have an offer for my book, would you represent me?

BP: She would want to read the material first.

LB: She has mixed feelings. It is a big decision. She can sense author panic but wants to read the manuscript first, and most of the time it's a no.

LM: It's not just the money, it's also the rights. She tries to hold out rights like film, drama. If you can't get an agent to negotiate for you, you can also get a literary attorney. Tell the editor "let me get back to you in 48 hours." You don't have to answer right away to an offer.

Q: Is there a market for ancient historicals?

JS: If you have a great book, go for it.

LB: She doesn't like ancient historicals, but she wouldn't discourage submission. She said the market is a bit tight.

BP: It's a tough market. She has two right now that she can't sell. They need to have romance in them.

Q: Do you want to see queries for a series?

NB: The first book has to sell or you don't have a series. He would caution against doing a series right off the bat.

Q: Does self-publishing hurt or help in getting an agent or editor?

LB: She doesn't think it helps. She has some e-published authors.

NB: He is open to looking at a self-published book, but only case by case—maybe the market missed out on it—and if the author worked hard to promote the book.

LM: She will not look at self-published books. Write a second book and send that to an agent.

JS: Be careful about self-publishing, be wary.

LB: She agreed with Nathan. She would decide on a case by case basis.

Q: Do you accept simultaneously submitted queries? Or queries on works in progress?

BP: Always do simultaneous submissions. An author shouldn't have to wait six months to a year for an answer before sending it elsewhere. For a debut author, a query must be for a completed manuscript. She would accept a work-in-progress query from a published author.

LB: She accepts simultaneously submitted queries and wants the query on a full manuscript only.

NB: He accepts simultaneous queries on a full manuscript that is polished.

JS: Yes to simultaneous queries on a full manuscript. She wants the work ready for an editor to see. She doesn't accept non-fiction.

Last Question: Chick Lit – what is it called now? Is it dead?

BP: She doesn't like to hear that a genre is dead. Other genres have been pronounced dead and have come back to life again. A writer can trick an agent or editor by changing a chick lit novel from first person to third person.

LB: She never cared for the genre. We can call it humorous women's fiction now. Previously its scope was very narrow—urban, fashion, jobs, dating etc.

NB: He agrees that the name Chick Lit is dead, but humorous women's fiction isn't dead. It goes all the way back to Jane Austen.

JS: It shouldn't be about the genre's name, it should be about the quality of your work. The genre is evolving from chick lit into contemporary romantic comedy.

[Time ran out—end of session.] **MMM**



Jennifer Schober
Spencerhill Associates Ltd.

"I want a sense of your voice in your query. Let the magic begin there. I want my socks knocked off by your query. Give me a taste of your Mojo."

—Jennifer Schober

The October 2008 issue of Writer's Digest has a spotlight on literary agents, including their Chapter One turnoffs. Also, a blog to check out is guidetoliteraryagents.com/blog. Guide to Literary Agents editor Chuck Sambuchino posts agent interviews, agency openings, conference info and industry news. —Ed.

Lana Miersen is the editor of the Mid-Michigan Mirror and an RWA® PRO.



Linda Howard
[Photograph by Brian Velenchenko]

Linda Howard's Words of Wisdom

Reported by Lana Miersen

From best-selling author Linda Howard's speech at the RWA® PRO Retreat:

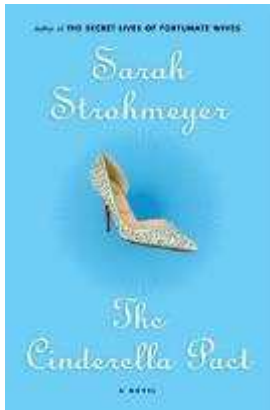
"I practiced for 20 years before selling my first book. I am a seat of the pants writer. I don't know how to write a synopsis or what it is."

"I probably break every rule about writing. Rules are good when you're first learning, but afterward throw them out the window."

"Don't ever abandon an idea. No one can do it the way you can. What if the voices you hear are from another plane of existence and can only be heard through you?"

"You have to dream your own dreams and write them. You have to dream big and write big because no one will remember you if you write small."

"If a writer goes too far, we can pull her back, but if she doesn't go far enough, we can't pull her through." **MMM**



The Cinderella Pact by Sarah Strohmeyer

Reviewed by MMRWA Member Roger Nelson

Sarah Strohmeyer has written several books including the Bubbles Yablonski mystery series (5 books, very entertaining), *The Secret lives of Fortunate Wives* (chick lit), and *The Sleeping Beauty Proposal*.

In *The Cinderella Pact*, three women are denied their favorite seat in a restaurant that has a new waiter. They figure it's because it was a window seat, and the waiter was saving that seat for really good looking people who would attract new customers. Since these three women are overweight, they make a pact to lose weight.

One woman has bariatric surgery.

Another woman gets a personal trainer to help her work out.

The third woman, Nola Devlin, goes about it the old fashioned way. She's an employee at a fashion magazine, has applied for a new job opening there and is turned down. She thinks it's because of weight discrimination. So she goes to her college yearbook and uses a picture editing program to make herself thinner, blonde, and even gives herself pink cowgirl boots. She turns in a new job application with the new picture and uses the name Belinda Apple, from Great Britain, and with all the exact same qualifications as on the application that was rejected. She gets hired at twice the salary.

How long will it be before she is found out? Will she lose the weight? Will she meet her prince charming? Will her friends lose weight?

I suggest reading this wonderfully entertaining book to find out. **MMM**



Roger Nelson

—THE LAST WORD—

Editor's Note: The 2008 RWA® National Conference

The new and improved RWA® National conference debuted in San Francisco this year. I give it four stars and two thumbs up.

We started off with lots of bang for our bucks by raising more than \$50,000.00 at the Readers for Life Literacy Autographing on Wednesday evening. I promised myself I wouldn't buy one single book this year—not one—since there is no longer any space on my bookshelves (or the floor).

I bought a half dozen.

Usually, I buy at least twice that many. I displayed enormous restraint in buying only a half dozen. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that I'm addicted to books, romance novels in particular. I cannot pass a bookstore without going in for a fix. When it comes to the acquisition of books, I am powerless to resist. The temptation to buy them is too great. (I bought some at the book fair too.) I also promised myself I wouldn't take any of the freebie books home, and I didn't.

I shipped them home.

I know what you're thinking, but technically, I didn't *take* them home so it doesn't count.

The conference committee revamped the usual lineup by eliminating the welcome cocktail party on Thursday evening, which as we all know is anti-climactic since most of us have been at conference for two days by then. The committee opted instead for a rousing opening session on Thursday morning. Motivational speaker and performer Theresa Behenna got the conference off to a high-octane start. I was flagging a bit on Thursday because I skipped my morning cup of tea—the usual way I jump start my day. Thanks to Theresa's inspiring and energetic performance, I didn't need it. She's a human spark plug!

The AGM followed—a stroke of genius, that. It got most of us into the meeting room while we were still feeling upbeat and motivated. Incredibly, even with 2,500 members in attendance at the conference, we failed to reach a quorum and could not conduct any business—not enough members sent in proxies and not enough of us were there in person. Instead of conducting business, we listened to reports from the officers and directors, and from what I heard, RWA® is doing very well. We even have our own building now, and we are almost 10,000 members strong.

The PAN and PRO retreats were held after the keynote luncheon instead of in the morning as they had in the past. I liked the new schedule much better. Also, thanks to very insightful coaching I once received from Melissa Lucken, I didn't try to kill myself by going to a workshop every period

Submission Guidelines

Topics: writing-related—business/marketing, craft, how-to, interviews with industry professionals, book reviews, member news, member bios, members' latest releases, and program recaps, etc.

Manuscripts: single-spaced, readable 12 pt. black font, no special formatting or colors, one-inch margins, saved in rich text format.

Deadline: the 2nd Saturday of the month, unless otherwise stated. Member News deadline is the 3rd Saturday (meeting day).

Policy

The Mid-Michigan Mirror's policy is to offer our original MMRWA articles to other RWA® chapters and loops to use with all credits given unless the author specifies restrictions in the article. The *Mirror* staff reserves the right to edit submissions for such things as spelling or typographical errors, punctuation, grammar, size requirements, etc., and content with author's approval.

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Chapter Information

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and falling prey to information overload. I attended the PRO Retreat and only four workshops that I selected because I felt they would help with my current projects. I actually retained the information presented, and I had some free time to explore San Francisco—for research purposes, of course.

My top five conference highlights were: 1) getting to meet and speak to Rita Clay Estrada and shake her hand and thank her for all she has done for romance writers; 2) the wacky inscriptions Lisa Childs and Dana Corbit wrote in my books at the Literacy Autographing (you had to be there); 3) running into Nanci Race and Nita Shoemaker, the KOD gals who invited Lorelee and me to room with them in Dallas a few years back when she made her first sale and I finaled in the Daphne (they even smuggled a brownie to me from the Death by Chocolate party Thursday night); 4) hawking MMRWA's wares with Cathy and Katie at Moonlight Madness and exchanging banter with the customers (again, you had to be there); and last but not least, 5) hearing Alison's heart-tugging, emotional acceptance speech when she won the Rita for Best Novella—she had me in tears, and I wasn't wearing waterproof mascara. (I was dressed all in black, so I must have looked Goth when the mascara ran.)

I had a great conference experience this year. It was informative, upbeat, fun and relaxing—except for the red-eye flight home. I may rethink that next time—and book my flight a lot sooner to get a better schedule.

Lana Miersen, Editor



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