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A Reflection of Romance



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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 become published and establish careers in their writing field, and to provide continuing support for writers within the romance publishing industry.



Many thanks to contributors to the
JULY/AUGUST Mid-Michigan Mirror

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Our own prize-winning multi-published Roseanne Bittner presented our June program, "Staying the Course—Staying on Top During Industry Change." Please see page 2 for the recap.

Gail Martin will speak on "Shoring Up the Sagging Middle" at our August 20th (next) meeting in Jackson at Daryl's Downtown. One of Gail's lessons appears on page 8. Please see page 13 for meeting directions.

Morning Glories by our own MMRWA member Rohn Federbush

Happy Birthday to:

JULY

Patty Gordon 2 DeAnna Pyle 6 Jennifer Armintrout 15 Marsha Ransom 15 Barbara Wismer 18

AUGUST

Jodi Lynn Copeland 1 Cheryl Steimel 12 Anne Marie King-Jakubiak 15 Gail Martin 28 Tamyra Kearly 29

A Note From Wil's Desk

By Wil Emerson, President



I'm at a phase of life when I have to practice what I preach. It sure isn't easy. When life gives you lemons, you have to make lemonade. I've said that to more patients, friends and family members than I dare count. Now it's my turn to squeeze the lemons, add a little sugar and water and stir the pot. I won't belabor the fact that tremendous challenges are ahead of me with family medical problems--we all face similar situations at one time or another.

What I do want to stress is the importance of being part of a group that understands adversity, relates to heartache and is still generous in heart and mind. Romance writers must dig deep into their emotional psyche to convey their stories, make them real yet fill them with hope and faith. Sometimes it takes blocking out reality to achieve writing goals. But the best part of knowing romance writers, is their hope for a brighter future never wavers. Page after page, with tension rising and declining, a distant ray of sunshine draws us nearer to a blessed ending.

The next few months will test my patience and my physical tolerance to care for a sister who is on the West Coast. My need to continue to function as a member of this chapter is the lemonade in my life. I'm thirsty...I need to fill up--over and over again. I'm not worried about the role I have accepted this year as your president, I'm more worried that I won't have time to participate in discussions, send words of cheer for your successes, and support your endeavors when the possibility of a sale is pending. I like being a real member of our chapter because we are a chapter that offers a generous helping of encouragement and applause.

So while I assume more family duties than anticipated, I'll do my best to offer a heartfelt good luck, best wishes and hurrah for all your trials and errors in this crazy world of writing for publication. I welcome the opportunity to attend National in Reno and will share the outcome of the Presidents meeting when I return. If my emails are slow in response to queries about our chapter business, I'll catch up with all of them as soon as possible. In the meantime, plan your work and work your plan to become a published writer. I can't think of a better way to make lemons out of lemonade.

Cheers, **Wil**



Staying the Course—staying on top during industry change

A Recap of Rosanne Bittner's June program by Annette Briggs

"I'm going to be very candid here," Rosanne told us. "I'm even going to talk about money, which most writers won't do, just to explain how things keep changing in the writing industry."

Let's just figure on writing each book just once with no rewrites (and we all know you go through two or three of those), ignoring all the proposals. Some of my proposals were twenty or thirty pages long. Ignoring all the magazines articles and speeches I've written and so forth, we still end up with roughly 19,950 typed pages, at least 40 reams of paper, 5,985,000 words, approximately 20,000 hours of sitting on my ass (probably far more than that), so it's no wonder I'm getting arthritis in my hands and we know my ass could use some work too. Now that's just one draft, mind you, and it excludes all other forms of writing. And for several of my writing years I was also a secretary, so add in that extra typing and so forth.

Staying the Course continued on page 3

Staying the Course continued from page 2

I received roughly thirty-five various awards, including a RITA nomination. And I've given talks and conducted workshops at conferences all over the country. About twenty-six of my books have been sold for foreign publication and when I think about it, I'm a little tired, but my enthusiasm for writing has never waned, nor have I ever experienced writer's block or considered retiring from writing. At any rate, after fifty-seven books I still have never run out of ideas. In fact I have file drawers full of articles and notes and more ideas. I just need to clone myself so that I can write all the books I've like to write. So that's why I'm talking about staying the course.

I've written through a full time job, raising two rambunctious and very active boys, helping clean up a large piece of property we bought when I first started writing, helping my husband farm asparagus, my father's death from cancer, and my sister's death from cancer.

When my father was dieing of cancer I was writing *Thunder on the Plains*, a hysterectomy, brain surgery, that I put off for months so I could finish *Chase the Sun*, two broken wrists, a son who fought a cocaine problem for nearly ten years, helping build a family business, and now finding time to spend with three very active grandsons, the light of my life.

When I worked full time I wrote on my lunch hours. I wrote after supper at night. I would stay up sometimes until two in the morning and fall asleep with my head on the typewriter, not the computer. I made carbon copies. I was scared to death--well, ancient as I am, I'm not sure they even had computers when I started writing--but eventually I considered one and I was scared to death to try it.

The first computer I got, I cried and I told my husband, "Let's take it back and get our money back because I'll never learn how to use this." And, you know, what would we do without them now?

We lived in a much smaller house [then] and the TV was blaring away four feet away from me and the kids were wrestling on the floor, but I just kept it up. I was working full time and I was sleeping about four hours a night in order to do all of this. As we started to discuss at the table earlier, there was no help back then. I didn't know RWA existed and I'm not so sure it did. There were no groups. I wasn't aware of MMRWA. I knew no writers whatsoever. I had no guidelines to speak of. I just wrote stories. I had nobody to turn to for advice. I didn't know there was a book called the *Writer's Market* that might have helped me a lot.

I didn't really know what I was doing, but I had read a book called *The Proud Breed* by Celeste de Blasis. I had always read books about pioneers and Indians and for some reason—I guess because I grew up in the era of nothing but westerns on TV and movies and John Wayne and the whole bit, and I just loved it, loved it. Never been out west in my life, so I have no idea why. I just loved it. So I always knew if I did write, I'd write about the American West, basically. So I had nothing to go on but old movies, and, of course, we all know that some of those old movies can't be counted on for accuracy. Lots of reading for research, looking at pictures, reading a wealth of books about pioneers and Indians, and I had a wild imagination as well as a deep love for my subject, the American West and Native Americans.

Once I sat down and started my first book, I went bonkers. I found my purpose in life. I was going to write the greatest story ever told, the next *Gone with the Wind*, and, in fact, I titled my first book *Winds from Oregon*. There was no stopping me. The house went to Hell, my children didn't know they had a mother, and my husband was sleeping with a blow-up doll.

Well, the first book was a 3,000 page disaster. I didn't have any idea how to skip time. I took a couple out west, a day by day blow of their journey west. No one could have survived all the things that happened to these two people on their journey west. I pretty much threw everything in there I'd ever seen in a movie or read in a book. And it was this wonderful, great love story. It was so thick that I had to use one of those square kind-of beer cases to mail it out in.

Staying the Course continued from page 3

Then I tried the subsidy publisher route. And I actually got an offer. They would fix it up and publish it. This is the honest to God's truth. I still have the letter, for seventy-five thousand dollars. Of course I didn't do that.

Can you see Larry (husband) falling for that? He wouldn't have paid seventy-five dollars to have my book published. He was wonderfully supportive, so much so that he said, "Look you're going to get paid. You're not going to pay somebody else to publish your book."

So, I just went on to another book, and another book and another book. I just kept writing books and I kept them all circulating all the time. And that's what gave me hope every time I got a rejection. I told myself, that book's over there. Maybe they'll want that one. I finally sold the ninth book that I wrote.

Zebra bought it and they wanted to know if I could make it into a four book series. I said, "Sure I can." I didn't know what I was going to do, but I did it. Those four books turned into seven and on I went from there.

I was thrilled with that first five hundred dollars, but I did make the big mistake of quitting my job right away. Don't ever do that! And right now I'm thrilled to still be writing at all. My first royalty check—we were going to be rich. We moved to Colorado. Larry (Rosanne's husband) couldn't find a job.

We were starting to freak out, especially my husband. He's very much more money-minded than I am. We thought, well at least when we get home, we'll have our royalty check, my first royalty check. Got home and the check didn't come and I called Zebra. Well they had sent it to Colorado. So then I had to wait for it to get transferred back to Coloma. So I asked my editor, "Do you know how much it was for? Can you find that out at least?" My husband knew from the look on my face that he'd better go out looking for a job real fast. It was about enough to buy groceries for a month, that's about it.

I sold my first fifteen books without an agent. Needless to say, I made next to nothing. That's another story. I did finally get an agent. I've had her ever since, about twenty years now. She's in New York City.

Before I got the agent, those first books I got about five hundred dollars a book and two per cent royalty. I gradually got up to about fifteen hundred dollars and four percent before I got my agent. Then I went to six and eight per cent. Six percent usually on the first hundred thousand and then if I sold more than a hundred thousand I'd get eight per cent on those next books. So if you want to know if an agent is worth it, **yes**.

After making almost nothing, the first deal my agent got for me was three books for six figures*. Now, I'm talking about money. I want to show you how there's hope and things can also go wrong. But anyway, things went great. My later contracts at Bantam were for a nice five figure amount* per book. Writers don't tell you this stuff. Nobody will say what their making.

Let me tell you what I'm making now. I personally believe, how in the heck can new writers know what to expect as far as planning a career if they don't know anything about what a writer can make? When I started, it was a real heyday for historical romance. They were so hot, publishers were paying big money. It was just a good time to get started. Now, with the numbers falling, publishers are becoming much more frugal, much more wary, and they are not nearly as eager to pay big money as they once were.

I don't make the [five figure amount] per book anymore. I generally make about [1/3 that amount*]. I'm not saying that's terrible. It probably sounds like a lot of money to a new or unpublished writer. I can't complain since my husband's excellent at investing. He did well when I did make good money. But I want to point out that nothing is guaranteed in this writing world. And, after all the books I've written, I'm either flying high or I'm in the pits. So, it's no different for multi book authors than it is for new people.

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But, after all of that, should I worry about selling another book? You bet. I'm currently unemployed because the book that's coming out in October is the last book of my latest contract. I'm hardly any different than new authors when it comes to that next phase. The writing business has little difference from singing or acting. You're always looking for that next gig. Even if you are popular and successful, you worry about that very changing and fickle public and mostly the very changing and fickle world of publishing. It all comes down to numbers and to how far a publisher will go to promote a writer.

Sorry to say, after all these years, after writing for seven major publishers, I still haven't figured out the secret formula for guaranteed eternal success. Nor have I figured out what makes publishers tick. Or have I had a New York Times Best Seller. I've come close, but not quite there.

So, here I am scratching my head trying to keep up with changing genres and publisher requirements. The word today is FRESH, FRESH, FRESH. And then I read a review in *Publishers Weekly* about a book title *Everything I've Eaten Over the Past Year*. Barf! That took a lot of thought. It got a *Publishers Weekly* review and it was literally a book about what this man ate everyday for every meal, what it was, how it tasted, who he ate it with, and where he ate it. Talk about discouraging.

My numbers reached a peak, then I got caught between decreasing popularity in my particular genre, which was Indian and western romance, combined with an editorial change at Bantam Books that suddenly changed their mind about taking more Bittner books even though they were doing very well.

Even my agent was surprised when Bantam said they weren't going to take anymore Bittner books. That was a big stumbling block. Add to that the vicious circle of numbers. If you have a book that sells two hundred thousand copies and your next one sells one hundred thousand for whatever reason, that is all that the buyers look at. They don't give a crap if it's the greatest story ever told if you did sell five hundred thousand at one point. They only look at the sales on the last book. If the sales went down or if they had too many returns on that book, they're not going to buy as many of the next one. If the orders start coming in lower to the publisher, the publisher is not going to pay you as much for the next book or they might not even take the another book. So I got kind of got caught in this domino effect that really kind of blind-sided me.

I'm an old horse. I come from the era of hot Indian romances in their heyday. Suddenly this old horse has to learn some new tricks. Suddenly I'm forced to consider other genres. And, as a woman who loves to write, that's okay.

A writer is a writer. I ought to be able to write in new genres. But it scares me to death. I'll admit I hate my current situation. I can't write what I absolutely love. The only way I'll be able to do that according to my agent, is to write a big sweeping historical that even involves real people from history. I have a book in mind to do about the birth of Chicago, similar to *In the Shadow of the Mountains* which I wrote about the birth of Denver. In that book there was a fictitious founding family, so I'm thinking of doing something about Chicago. You have to be careful when you're talking about real people who lived, so it will be a bigger project. I'm working on a contemporary that is at least set in the west. The hero is an Apache Indian. If I'm going to do contemporary, then I can at least set them in the west and I can have a cowboy or an Indian for a hero. They're still out there. That helps a little bit too.

The other subject I do truly love is the subject of World War II. I'm working on a proposal for a World War II love story called *Last Night in France*. I'm going with kind of the Titanic approach. This book starts with an eighty-five year old woman who gets a phone call from a friend of hers and her first words are, "They found him." My heroine says, "Found who?" Then it hits her. "Oh my God, they found Josh." The man she loved during WWII who came up missing and never came home. The story is about both these women, although Clare is the major character in the story.

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Staying the Course continued from page 5

Both these women loved the same man and both of them have children by him. I got the idea from a tiny newspaper article about the remains of a World War II soldier being found in Belgium and it really hit me hard. I thought, Oh my God. Can you imagine sixty years later, your husband if you're an old lady, or your son or your Dad that you never knew?

My agent likes the proposal and she's working on finding a buyer, so I'm very hopeful. I'm not afraid I'll never ever sell again, but it's going to be harder and it's going to take a little more work than I'm used to. I've written what I write for so long that so much of it is in my head already. It's not a whole lot of work for me to write a western romance or an Indian romance. I have all the material I need. Now we're talking World War II. I have lots of material, but it's not all in my head like the other is, so I'm going to have to do a lot more research, a lot more studying, making sure I get my facts straight. Since it's a more recent era of history and there are still people still around who were there, I want to talk to some of the soldiers, especially if I can find somebody who was in France, because part of it takes place in France, obviously, from the title, Last Night in France.

The thing is, when I do this book, I have to use a pseudonym for the first time in all these years, after spending twenty-five years building the name Rosanne Bittner. Why? Because buyers will look at Rosanne Bittner's last book or two and see that her numbers slipped. They feel they're not as likely to have a big selling book. Publishers will also look at these numbers and they won't offer as much if they know that my numbers were down on my last book. My agent wants to submit me as a brand new writer. So this is where there's hope for all you new gals.

Go figure. So there's hope for new authors. Right now a brand new name might get a bigger sale than one who's been on bookshelves for twenty-five years. That's what I mean about the fickleness of the reading public and the publishing industry and that's what I mean about staying the course. If you've got to change your name, you've got to change your name.

Just like an aging rock band that loses its popularity, writers like me are facing the same problems. There was the big band era and then Pat Boone and Fats Domino, and Elvis and then the Beatles, and then hard rock and then soft rock, and then punk rock and then rap, and now the teeny-bopper girls with their bellies undulating onstage. And even that seems to be fading in popularity now. We seem to be heading back ever so slightly now to what I call real music. And I hope that eventually we'll get back to the bigger saga type stories that I like to write. I hate skinny books, just hate them, but that's all they want now. I like to write five to six hundred pages and three hundred is pushing it nowadays. I guess they don't want to spend money on paper.

So, in the meantime, I will keep writing because I can't not write. This old horse keeps plodding along. And I'm always here to give advice and critique to some of you young whippersnappers. But all of you had better be in this for the long haul and for the love of writing.

The constant change in the publishing industry gives lots of hope to new writers. Because publishers are always looking for the fresh and different and unusual, new names to push. Something they can throw out there to buyers and say, "Hey, this is this author's first book and she's great. We're going to really push this one." They want writers who don't have a track record that could spoil the numbers on their "first book." Writers they can tout as a brand new author who is going to be a best seller. And, of course, there may be a slew of readers out there who may buy that first book just to see what that new author is about.

A few of you may not even have been born yet or were just toddlers in 1979 when I first set down to write a book. And many of you are hardly even aware that we ever had any presidents besides Bill Clinton and George Bush, except for some of you who grew up with Reagan. It's hard being an old horse. I don't like it.

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Staying the Course continued from page 6

And it is hard to learn new tricks. But I'll do it, even if it means new aches and pains. Because this sixty year old woman is still young at heart and I know more today about love and life than I ever did when I first started writing. I've been slammed in the face with the awakening that no one's life is idyllic. No one's marriage and children are perfect. And you know what? To be a good writer, you have to do some plain old living.

Today I might write a book about an older woman who's starting over or remembering some secret from her past as in my World War II story. I'll understand those things far better than if I were younger and trying to write about them. I see life in far deeper colors than I did when I first started writing. I understand much more about the complexities of a character's personality than I did twenty-five years ago. I can write more colorful characters because I understand better all the different things a person goes through in life and how that affects their acts and their decisions. What I might do or say today might be a far cry from what I would have done or said thirty years ago.

Things are going to change and you have to be willing to change with them. You have to be realistic about what you can make. Never quit your job on your first or second sale. You have to listen to editors and listen to your agent. You have to be open to criticism. With my first books, for me it was very hard for me to take criticism. It really hurt and I took it very personally, but you don't need to. If you want to get real and sell a book, then you have to listen to the criticism. Try to do the things they ask you to do unless it's completely off the wall for what you wanted for your story.

There's a lot of hope out there for seasoned authors like myself and a lot of hope for brand new writers as well. So I'll keep writing. But, just to prove that some of those earlier books were damned good, you just might find a rewrite of some of my old *Savage Destiny* books on the shelves again with a new title and maybe written by a new author. Or readers might pick up a book titled *Winds from Oregon* by a brand new author, Francis Rose. That's what I'm going to go by. And it just might be that New York Times best seller. And those readers will never know they're reading the very first book ever written by Rosanne Bittner twenty-five years ago.

If anyone can talk about staying the course, it is Rosanne Bittner. She's been writing for twenty-five years with 57 published books. The latest, *Follow Your Heart*, published by Steeple Hill, is out in October.

*Rosanne gave us the specific figures in person. She has offered to discuss the amounts privately.

Coming up at our August meeting will be the chance to bid on a lovely pink antique-style hat box full of goodies, including 3 Bittner books, a candle, and cosmetics donated by Rosanne Bittner. Bids start at \$20. Proceeds go to our chapter.

Approaching September Birthdays

Michele Hickerty 11 Wil Emerson 15 Ann Marie Sanders 23 Patty Hall 28

MEMBER NEWS

Rosanne Bittner: Currently working on new proposals for my agent—trying new genres. My agent is currently marketing my WWII proposal. Next book to be published – *Follow Your Heart* – October '05.

Johanna Brown: Working on plotting a paranormal chick lit.

Wil Emerson: Progress on a YA, submissions out on a mystery, struggling to find time to write.

Shar Koenig: Received good review for *Ink on Her Nose*, sending the screenplay to producers and contests, working on a nonfiction and a children's fantasy.

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MEMBER NEWS continued from page 7

Lucy Kubash: Working on a romantic suspense, starting chapter four tonight!

Jodi Lozon: Writing again! A new release June 22, and a large author book signing in June and July, still waiting to hear back from Brava.

Kate McAuliffe: I am working on chapter four of a contemporary. I made a critiquing meeting Wednesday. In July I'll be taking the GRE in preparation for graduate school winter term.

Cathy McClain: Finishing last revision on finished manuscript – almost ready for more queries! Ready to get back to my next WIP.

Lana Miersen: Working on rewrites and revisions now that I'm back from vacation.

Gail Gaymer Martin has sold her 34th and 35th novels, *In His Eyes* and *In Her Eyes* to Steeple Hill. She also sold a novella and coordinated an anthology titled *Mackinac Island* for Barbour Publishing. Gail's novel *Adam's Promise* is a finalist for both the Holt Medallion and Bookseller's Best Award. She just returned from London, England where she spoke at a Christian writer's conference. While there on her two week visit, she researched another story idea. While in England, she learned that her Barbour book, *Michigan*, is being distributed in the UK and that her hardcover Christmas release, *That Christmas Feeling*, will be available in paperback from Harlequin, Mills and Boon this fall. The book will also be released in paperback in the U.S.

As of June 23, *Some Practical Magic*, by Laurie R. King, was the number 10 bestselling e-book at Fictionwise.



Romance with Hooks

By MMRWA member Gail Gaymer Martin

Every novel needs a variety of hooks to keep the reader turning pages. Romance is no exception. Hanging on to the reader's interest can result from story hooks based on a theme or a twisted premise. Opening hooks keep the reader captivated by using accepted techniques that grab the reader's interest. Finally plotting hooks can move the reader from the end of a chapter or scene into the next without realizing it. A hook makes the story memorable. It involves the reader so deeply that all sense of time vanishes, resulting in late dinners and missed appointments.

Theme Hooks

Certain universal fiction themes have been proven through the years to attract the interest of romance readers of both secular and Christian fiction. These themes tend to grab emotions or provide unique backdrops for the stories. Some of the standard romance themes that have proven themselves are: medical romances, office romances, holiday romances—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day. Other themes involve: undercover agents, cop heroes, women in jeopardy, single moms, twins, reunions, exotic locations, forced proximities, hidden identities, hidden agendas, kidnappings, characters on the run, abducted children, heroine transformations, multi-cultural characters, second chances, match-makings, and marriages of convenience.

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Romance with Hooks continued from page 8

The opening of *Christmas Moon* in the two-in-one hardcover novel, *That Christmas Feeling*, uses the marriage of convenience hook.

"Rose...I want you to marry me."

Rose Danby's spoon clanged into the sink as she spun around to face her employer. She searched his face, expecting to see a grin, but he looked serious. He was handling the joke with the skill of a stand-up comedian.

"So...what's the punch line?" Rose asked.

Paul Stewart faltered. "It's not a joke. I was thinking that--"

"It's not a joke?" She felt her forehead rumple like a washboard. Not that she wouldn't want to marry a man as kind and handsome as her employer, but she was his twins' nanny. "What do you mean it's not a joke?" His gaze searched hers. "I'm sorry. I shocked you." He moved closer. "It just makes sense."

"It makes sense to you, maybe, but I don't get it."

This theme, like the others, grabs the reader's interest from the opening lines and draws them into the story. This particular marriage of convenience theme also has a twist.

Twisted Premise

A premise is an assumption the reader makes from the story's beginning, based on what is usually expected—a doting husband is in love with his wife, a beautiful woman who has everything is happy, a successful businessman is confident, an engaged couple is planning a wedding.

When hints suggest early in the story that things aren't what they seem, the reader's curiosity is nabbed. He or she can't put down the book until the reader understands the story's twist. If a book opens with the death of a fiancé, the reader assumes he is dead, but what happens if that is not the case and it's all a set up? Think of movies like *The Sixth Sense*, *Ghost*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and others that lead the fascinated reader on a twisted journey.

Page One Hooks

Good writing uses a variety of techniques to grasp the reader's interest from the book's first pages. Some of the methods to open with are: action or dialogue, at the point of change, with a sense of urgency, with captivating characters, with a humorous or novel situation, leaving the reader curious, puzzled, or intrigued, or with the reader wanting to know what happens next.

Notice the effect of these samples from well-known Christian authors:

Action: Angie Hunter stared out the tiny window of the Bombardier turboprop, keeping a death grip on the armrest as the plane bounced and dropped in the turbulent air above the still, snowy mountain range. (From *Legacy Lane*, Robin Lee Hatcher)

Dialogue: "Listen kids. Stay right here while I get the car." Standing under the shelter of the covered mall entrance, Debra fixed her gaze on one precious child then the other. All the while a downpour hammered against the roof above them. (From *Footsteps*, DiAnn Mills)

Humor: Two things had been on Cat Simmons's mind. Gage Farrell's handsome face. And a dirty undershirt. (From *Hope's Garden*, Lyn Cote)

Intriguing, Curious: Keryn Wills was in the shower when she figured out how to kill Josh Trenton. (From *Double Vision*, Randy Ingermanson)

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Romance with Hooks continued from page 9

What will happen next: The noises, faint, fleeting, whispered into her consciousness like wraiths in the night. (From *Brink of Death*, Brandilyn Collins)

Opening lines as those above hook the reader and give the promise of an intriguing writer's voice and a compelling story.

Plotting Hooks

Two standard plotting hooks are: the time bomb and the Jack-in-the-box. The time bomb refers to a story line that has an explosive time limit—time is running out. A young woman is heir of her wealthy uncle but must find a husband within the month or she loses the fortune.

The Jack-in-the-box technique is a plot with surprises. From hints, foreshadowing or rising conflict, the reader senses something is going to happen and the waiting helps to cause tension. For example, the hero is in love with the heroine, but hints he has a secret that would destroy his relationship with the heroine.

Chapter and Scene Hooks

Most readers prefer to put down the book at the end of a chapter or scene. A good writer can learn techniques that will draw readers into the next scene or chapter without them being aware. End each chapter with action, a vital piece of information or a thoughtful question that pulls the reader into the next scene. Don't stop the scene at the end, but carry some of it over at the point of interest. In *A Love for Safekeeping*, the heroine senses someone is following her. She darts for her car, hits the remote to unlock the door, and these two lines end the chapter:

A hand clamped down on her shoulder.

A scream tore from her throat.

The next chapter opens with a continuation of the action.

Another technique is to shift action and point of view (POV) from one character in a scene to a new scene involving another character's action and POV. This works well especially in a dramatic situation. In *Loving Hearts*, the hero and heroine end their relationship. In frustration, he takes his sailboat out too late in the season and a storm comes up on the Lake Michigan. Meanwhile she has second thoughts and tries to call him to beg his forgiveness. When she learns he is on the boat and knows a storm is brewing, she panics. The reader is moved between the two characters and experiencing their independent struggles.

Using Hooks

Hooks are vital to writing a page-turner. A combination of hooks: plotting, theme, twisted premises, openings, and closing scenes or chapters can be used to capture the reader's interest. Not every chapter or scene needs to open and close with a dramatic hook, but these techniques should be scattered throughout the story. The goal of a good writer is to write a book people can't put down until the end.

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Award-winning author Gail Gaymer Martin writes for Steeple Hill single title, Steeple Hill Love Inspired and Barbour Publishing. See "Gail Martin" near the end of MEMBER NEWS for an update on Gail.

The following article first appeared in the June issue of the LARA Confidential, the newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors RWA Chapter. Madaleine Laird, Editor, LARA Confidential

Tips For A Great Conference

by Cara King

RWA's national conferences are fantastic — and huge. Not sure what to expect, or afraid you'll forget something? Then this article's for you!

The smart attendee at Reno will be prepared and professional, save money, and network fruitfully. And if you do all that, I guarantee you'll have a good time.

Be Prepared. Before you go:

- 1) First off, check out the CONFERENCE FAQ article on the RWA website (www.rwanational.org). It has a lot of useful tips.
- 2) Pack for "JUST IN CASE." Bring safety pins, needle and thread, tape, Band-Aids®, aspirin or similar, antacids, Pepto Bismol®, allergy medicine, sunscreen, and (of course) any medications you take.
- 3) You'll need EXTRA ROOM in your luggage to bring back all those books that you'll buy and be given. So either bring an extra bag (the soft kind you can bring folded up inside your other luggage), or bring several small, empty boxes inside your luggage that you can fill up later! Or, if you don't like the idea of lugging a bunch of heavy books back with you, take along whatever you need to ship books back home.

When there:

- 4) REGISTER as soon as you can. You'll get info when you register that will make everything else easier!
- 5) The first event you'll probably attend will be the LITERACY SIGNING on Wednesday, which is HUGE. Look at the list of signing authors before you go, and decide whom you want to see. Write these names down and bring them with you so you don't forget your favorite author! And beware: to pay for these books, you will stand in a VERY long line once you're done. Expect this, and adjust your time accordingly. (And if you're willing to pay with cash, you may just have a shorter line.)
- 6) If this is your first national conference, you'll want to attend the first-timer's ORIENTATION held on Wednesday night. (Don't stay too late at the Literacy Signing, or you'll miss it!)
- 7) When choosing which sessions you want to attend, review the offerings carefully ahead of time in the SCHEDULE you get when you register. (Once you get to the conference, don't use the schedule you got with your RWR — it's likely to be much less accurate than the schedule you'll receive there.) If there are any editors you hope to sell to, be sure to go to whatever sessions or panels they'll attend to learn what you can about them. If you're interested in several sessions held at the same time, give priority to sessions that aren't taped (it's your only chance for the information.)

Be Professional

- 8) You'll make the best impression and feel most comfortable if you DRESS PROFESSIONALLY. Of course, our profession is writing, so professional wear does not need to be a suit! Most attendees find, however, that jeans, t-shirts, or athletic shoes feel a little casual for conference. Beyond that, though, most types of clothes fit in fine. However, you DO need to take into account physical comfort. Wear shoes that won't kill your feet by the end of the day (there can be a lot of walking and standing), and keep in mind the hotel air-conditioning! Most conference hotels are COLD — so you'll probably want to wear an outfit with a sweater or a jacket.

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Tips For A Great Conference continued from page 11

9) Keep in mind that you're at the conference not only as an attendee, but also as a member of RWA, so be a GOOD CITIZEN of RWA. Attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and stay until the end, if at all possible. Attend the lunches, and stay to the end here, too —particularly for Friday's honors luncheon.

10) Before asking an EDITOR questions in a session, be sure you've done your homework! After all, you won't make a good impression on Leslie Wainger if you ask about the Silhouette Intrigue line.

11) If you're fortunate enough to have an AGENT OR EDITOR APPOINTMENT, prepare your pitch carefully. If you have a group appointment, don't take all of the editor's time with a long, drawn-out description of your plot so that no one else gets a chance. (This happens surprisingly often, probably because writers get so nervous when pitching! But practice ahead of time so you don't accidentally babble on and on.) And when pitching, of course, know all you can ahead of time about the editor or agent, and the publisher or agency.

12) Be sure not to mar a workshop, luncheon, or other function with a ringing CELL PHONE, a beeping watch, or any other noisemaker.

Save Money

13) Take advantage of the FOOD that comes with your conference membership! Go to the breakfasts and lunches provided, and keep in mind that Thursday evening's Welcome Reception often provides enough food to serve as dinner.

14) Consider bringing SNACKS along to the hotel room. Crackers, nutrition bars, or other foods that travel well can substitute for a meal if you want to save money. And avoid pricey vending machines by bringing whatever sweet or salty munchies you might get a craving for. You can bring beverages as well, but don't count on a hotel refrigerator in your room unless the hotel has assured you you'll have one.

Network Fruitfully

15) Wear your BADGE at all times in a way that it can be seen, including at meals! (You may have to fiddle with it a bit to make it hang high enough at meals that it isn't hidden behind the table.)

16) If someone gives you a business card, consider writing INFORMATION about that person on the back of it (where you chatted, what you chatted about, even what they look like if it'll help you remember the person). Absent business cards, you can write this info down in a notebook when you're done talking.

17) Try to say POSITIVE things.

18) REMEMBER: that unimpressive-looking woman next to you may be a bestselling author, and that girl young enough to be your granddaughter is probably the editor you want to sell to. The things that often create "rank" or status in the outside world (age, looks, clothes, education, where you live, what your household income is, what your day job is or even if you have a day job) are insignificant in the writing world, so try not to let them sway you.

19) BE CLASSY. Don't run down other genres (or subgenres), and don't complain about how dreadful you think certain successful authors are. Thank volunteers. And no matter how wise and experienced you are, never think there isn't more you can learn. These tips could all fit under "be professional," but it's good to keep in mind that these things will help you make a good impression on people, too. Above all . . . have a great time at conference!

Reno will be Cara King's sixth RWA national conference and the second at which she presents a workshop. Signet Regency will release her first novel, My Lady Gamester, in November, 2005.

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CONTESTS

Compiled by Donna Caubarreaux

7th Annual Picture This Contest, Inland Empire
Received by August 1, 2005
Send us the best scene from your book, 5-12 pages.
<http://geocities.com/SoHo/Studios/2936/contest.htm>

Where the Magic Begins, Romance Writers Ink
Received by August 1, 2005
First 25 pages and 1 pg unjudged synopsis
<http://www.rwi-rwa.com/>

Write Hook Query Contest, Pocono/Leigh RWA
Received by August 2, 2005
Query Letter
<http://www.plrw.org/>

Golden Rose, Rose City Romance Writers
Received by August 8, 2005
Synopsis + First three chapters (55 pg max)
<http://www.rosecityromancewriters.com/grpage/index.html>

On the Far Side (Pubbed & Unpubbed) FF&P RWA Chapter
Received by August 8, 2005
First 15 pages of your manuscript and an un-judged synopsis
of up to 2 pages, single-spaced.
http://www.romance-ffp.com/otfs_contest/otfs_rules_2005.htm

Hot Prospects, Valley of the Sun
Received by August 10, 2005
Synopsis + beginning not to exceed 25 pg max.
<http://www.valleyofthesunrw.com/vos-hot-prospects.htm>

The Golden Pen, The Golden Network
Email Deadline August 10, 2005
Synopsis + beginning, not to exceed 55 pg max.
<http://www.thegoldennetwork.com/>

Silver Rose Award for Web Site Excellence,
Sponsor: Sacramento Valley Rose
Received by Deadline: August 15, 2005
Eligibility: open to published and unpublished writers.
Enter: author's Web site.
Categories: professionally created and home grown.
<http://sacramentovalleyrose.com/contest.html>

Magic Moment, Heart and Scroll RWA
Deadline: Postmarked by August 15, 2005
First ten pages.
<http://www.heartandscroll.com>

Finally A Bride, Oklahoma Romance Writers
Received by August 15, 2005
First pages of your manuscript - total entry
no longer than 30 pages.
www.okrwa.com

Southern Heat Writing Contest, East Texas Chapter
Received by August 15, 2005
First 10 pages + Synopsis - 5 pg max
<http://home.earthlink.net/~ralsobrook/contests.htm>

Laurel Wreath Award – Published, Volusia County
Romance Writers
Received by August 31, 2005
Copyright of 2004
http://jcy.net/vcrw/vcrw_contest_01.htm

Harlequin Blaze Contest (Open to Published &
Unpublished)
Postmark: August 31, 2005
first chapter (maximum 25 pages) and a synopsis
(maximum 5 pages)
<http://www.charlequin.com/cms/learntowrite/ltwArticle.jhtml?pageID=050501wz02001>

Gateway to the Rest, RWA St. Louis, MO Chapter
Received by September 1, 2005
First Chapter 25 pg max. + 1 pg unjudged synopsis
<http://www.morwa.org/Chapter1.html>

CONNECTIONS 2005, Connecticut RWA
Postmark by Sept. 1, 2005; Received by Sept. 5, 2005
First thirty pages + five page synopsis (max)
<http://www.geocities.com/CTRWA/Connections/05newconnections.htm>

Fiction From the Heartland, Mid-America Romance
Authors
Postmark by September 1, 2005
First chapter + synopsis (35 pgs. max.)
<http://www.mararwa.com/Contests/Contests.asp>

Best Laurie for Published Authors, Deadline:
September 15, 2005
Any romance novel published between August 1, 2004
and July 31, 2005.
<http://www.smrw.org/contests/pubbedlaurie/publaurie.htm>

Suzannah, North Louisiana Storytellers
Received by Oct 1, 2005
First 30 pages + one pg synopsis, unjudged.
www.shreve.net/~nola

Duel on the Delta, River City Romance Writers
 Postmarked Oct. 1, 2005
 Prologue and/or 1st chapter, not to exceed 20 pages
 combined
http://www.rivercityrw.com/2006_Contest.htm

Romancing the Tome, Coeur de Louisiane RWA
 Received by October 8, 2005

First five pages + two page synopsis
<http://www.geocities.com/coeurdelouisiane/Main.html>

Delacorte Young Adult Contest, Complete book from
 100 to 224 pages
 Prize of a book contract!
<http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/writingcontests/#youngadult>

Check out Contest Alert-All the news on upcoming contests, plus Finalist & Winner listings, questions, etc. Sign up now! ContestAlert-subscribe@yahoo.com. Donna Caubarreaux is a member of Coeur de Louisiane, Scriptscene Chapter, NOLA Stars, Heart of Louisiana, Kiss of Death, and ChickLitWriters of RWA. She received a RWA Service Award in 1997. USED WITH PERMISSION

HELPFUL SITES

I Am Your Editor: Submitting Your Novel

"I have been in publishing for over ten years, mostly as an editor. I am the person who accepts or rejects your manuscript. Here is how I make my decisions." <http://www.mallet.dircon.co.uk/nadvice18.html>

More Than Just A Name by Emory Hackman and Linda Adams. Interesting advice on character naming.
<http://www.writergazette.com/articles/article34.shtml>

MMRWA 2005 Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held the third Saturday of each month on a rotating basis at area restaurants and meeting centers. The usual meeting agenda is as follows:
11:30 a.m., lunch (optional) □ 1:00 p.m. (approximate time), program/speaker □ 2:00 p.m. (approximate time), business meeting.

July: No meeting due to RWA Nationals in Reno, Nevada.

August 20: Jackson; Daryl's Downtown, Gail Martin will speak on "Shoring Up The Sagging Middle."

September 17: Grand Rapids; Damon's (tentative), Dawn Bartley will speak on "The Skimpy Writer," how to skim by and still afford to be a writer.

October 15: Mason/Lansing; Hall (tentative), Don McGaffey will present a workshop on firearms.

November 19: Jackson; Damon's, The MMRWA Board will speak on "The Submission Process," what makes a good query, opening, etc.

December 10: Location TBA; End of Year Business Meeting, 2005 Year Recap and Christmas Party

Directions to August meeting at Daryl's Downtown
151 W. Michigan Ave., Jackson, MI 49201
1.517.782.1895

West (Kalamazoo): Take I-94 East. Then take US-127 N/M-50 exit #138 toward Lansing/Jackson. Turn right onto MI-50 E/US-127 S. Turn left onto W. Michigan Ave./MI-50/US-127 S. Turn slight left onto W. Michigan Ave.

Northwest (Grand Rapids): Take I-96 East. Merge onto MI-50 E/US-127 S. Turn left onto W. Michigan Ave./MI-50/US-127 S. Turn slight left onto W. Michigan Ave.

East (Detroit): Take I-94 West. Exit on M-106/Cooper St. exit #139 toward down town Jackson. Turn left on Cooper St. Turn right onto E. Ganson St. Turn left onto N. Mechanic S. Turn right onto W. Michigan Ave.

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 Vice-president: Jodi Lozon Jodi.Lozon@ttmps.com
 Secretary: Shar: Koenig: koenisha@Macatawa.org
 Treasurer: Lisa Childs Theeuwes: ltheeuwes@msn.com

2005 Mid-Michigan Romance Writers of America Committee Chairs

I Will Write a Book/Write For the Money: Flavia Crowner flacro@datawise.net
 Happily Ever After Contest: Jodi Lozon Jodi.Lozon@ttmps.com
 Library: Maris Soule SOULEM@aol.com and Lucy Kubash lucykubash@parrett.net
 Membership/Historian: Dawn Bartley bartleyd@chartermi.net
 Member Recognition: Pat Lazarus LazWriter@myway.com and Lorelee Lillibridge loralee530@sbcglobal.net.
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Non-members seeking information about Mid-Michigan, meetings, and joining our group may contact:
 Dawn Bartley bartleyd@chartermi.net

The Mirror is in need of “how to” articles, reviews of writing books and writing related websites, member bios and photographs, member book news and activities. Please send all contributions for the Mirror to: brainchilde@websurfers.biz or afbriggs@hotmail.com. If you do not have access to e-mail, please send by regular mail to Annette Briggs, Box 374, Three Rivers, MI 49093. DEADLINE TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SEPTEMBER 2005 MIRROR is AUGUST 22. Guidelines are available at the above address or e-address. Looking forward to your contributions, Annette Briggs, Editor.

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