

The Mid-Michigan Mirror

...A Reflection of Romance

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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Address change!

Please note that the MMRWA mailing address has been changed to:

P. O. Box 1044, Coloma, Michigan 49038. Thank you.

The President's Message



by Florence Price

Holy cow – Is it June already!?! That means RWA® 31st National Conference is a few short weeks away and the RITA and Golden Heart winners will be announced. And, as I'm sure most of you know, we have three members who are finalists this year; Alison Hart (w/a Jennifer Greene), Tracy Roper (w/a Tracy Brogan) and Ami Weaver. Congratulations to you ladies! I'll be sitting there, with fingers *and* toes crossed, waiting with bated breath to hear your names called and see your pictures pop up on the screens in every corner of the room.

Last year's 30th Annual National Conference in Orlando, Florida was my first ever RWA® Conference, and I don't think I could have enjoyed it quite as much as I did if I hadn't been there with my friends from MMRWA. It was hectic, crowded and crammed full of workshops, meeting new people and, of course, eating fabulous food. I have to say, it was an extremely inspiring experience being surrounded by dedicated, like-minded people.

One of those like-minded people I met last year was a woman named Kimberly Kincaid, who also happens to have finaled in the Golden Heart this year. Fortunately, she won't be competing with any of my chapter mates, so I'll be free to cheer for her as well when her name is called. She's a kind, talented person, with an effervescent personality and high wattage smile who came to the conference alone but fit right into our group with effortless grace. All-in-all, last year's conference was a fantastic experience for me, however I expect this year's conference to be way over-the-top, if only for the pleasure of being present when my friends participate in the awards ceremony.

And, on a completely different note, please plan to attend our meeting on June 18th (Grandville), where awesomely talented Patricia Lazarus will be presenting a program on Creating Cover Art. I will also be joining in with a short presentation on putting together a book trailer.

I hope to see many of you at this month's meeting, but until then... Happy Writing!

Happy Writing!

Florence

Please Welcome our Newest Members!

Sharon Pisacreta was born and raised in Detroit but now lives in Douglas, MI. Sharon writes as Cynthia Kirk. She is a two-time Golden Heart finalist, and has published a play, magazine stories, nonfiction, and several romance novels. Her novel *Stolen Hearts* was published by Leisure books and won a Rising Star Award for Best First Romance Novel. She is currently a staff writer for west Michigan's *Natural Awakenings Magazine* and editor of LakeEffectLiving.com.

Treasa Davidson is from Southwest Michigan and writes as Alexis Teagan and Ana Bane. She has been writing since childhood and covered news stories as well as writing her own column for her hometown newspaper. She currently lives in Kalamazoo and loves reading and writing romance novels. She has three grown children and is an animal lover. She writes dark paranormal, historical and contemporary.

This Month's Meeting! June 18th at 11:30am at Famous Dave's in Grandville

After so much time, struggle and effort, you have sold your romance novel! The phrases you slaved over are now in perfect order, every sentence reads exactly as you want it to, and your characters have become vivid images in your writer's mind, down to the smallest hair of your hero's perfectly quirked eyebrow, each whisker of his sexy five o'clock shadow. But before your pride and joy can be introduced to a waiting world, your book needs a cover. Join us on Saturday, May 18th as we welcome cover artist Patricia Lazarus. Pat has been designing book covers for 15 years, while holding a full time job at an Elementary School. An artist from the time she was a toddler, she was given the first opportunity to design covers by Linda Kichline, CEO of ImaJinn Books. As of this date she has designed for 4 different publishers and several independent authors. She has over 140 book covers in her portfolio, and has also done web art for several different authors. Now retired from her "day job" as a title one parapro at Delton Kellogg Schools, she intends to devote full time to designing book covers and as Art Director/YA editor for Tell-Tale Publishing.



At our meeting, Pat will discuss the importance of having a good book cover since it takes a reader only a few seconds to become interested or to reject your book. Pat says, "Unless you are a really famous author, the cover is the first thing that attracts that reader. This has changed a bit since the advent of ebooks, but the cover can still sway someone to take a look at your book instead of pass it by. With this comes the importance of making a cover with an attractive graphic and a title that is plain even in thumb size. I'll discuss differences in cover design pricing for indie publishers, and what kind of information the designer will need. I will walk the attendees through filling out a cover information form for any book they wish. We'll draw one of those forms, and I will make a free mock cover based on the cover questionnaire for that person within a month of the meeting."

So be sure to join us at 11:30am on Saturday, June 18 at Famous Dave's, 4505 Canal Avenue, Grandville, MI 49418. (616) 301-7711.

Directions To Famous Dave's 4505 Canal Avenue, Grandville, MI 49418 (616) 301-7711

- **Directions from Kalamazoo and southwest:**
- Merge onto US-131 N. (35.5 mi)
- Take the M-6 W exit, EXIT 77, toward HOLLAND. (2.0 mi)
- Merge onto MI-6 W. (6.8 mi)
- Merge onto I-196 E to GD RAPIDS. (2.6 mi)
- Take the 44TH ST exit, EXIT 67, toward RIVERTOWN PKWY. (0.4 mi)
- Turn RIGHT onto 44TH ST SW. (0.1 mi)
- Turn RIGHT onto CANAL AVE SW. (0.1 mi)
- End at Famous Dave's

- **Directions from Lansing and points east:**
- Take I-96 W toward GD RAPIDS. (44.4 mi)
- Merge onto MI-6 W via EXIT 46 toward M-6 W/HOLLAND. (19.3 mi)
- Merge onto I-196 E toward GD RAPIDS. (2.6 mi)
- Take the 44TH ST exit, EXIT 67, toward RIVERTOWN PKWY. (0.4 mi)
- Turn RIGHT onto 44TH ST SW. (0.1 mi)
- Turn RIGHT onto CANAL AVE SW. (0.1 mi)
- End at Famous Dave's

- **Directions from Grand Rapids:**
- I-196 W toward HOLLAND. (5.5 mi)
- Take the 44TH ST exit, EXIT 67, toward RIVERTOWN PKWY. (0.4 mi)
- Turn LEFT onto 44TH ST SW. (0.4 mi)
- Turn RIGHT onto CANAL AVE SW. (0.1 mi)
- End at Famous Dave's

MMRWA 2011 MEETING SCHEDULE

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of most months and begin at 11:30am.

June 18	Grand Rapids (Grandville) - Creating Cover Art by Pat Lazarus
July	No Meeting
August 20	Lansing - Member Critiques
September 17	Kalamazoo - Personality Disorders by Renci Denham
October 15	Jackson - Point of View by Ami Weaver
November 19	Grand Rapids (Grandville) - Cover Letters by Cindy Arends
December 10	Christmas Party – Location TBD

I Will Write a Book Contest

Once again, our chapter sends out a challenge to its members to complete a book this year. The challenge has a two-fold purpose: it is goal-setting for the writer and a fund-raiser for our chapter.

The rules are simple:

- Declare the title of the book you plan to finish and send \$5.00 to the coordinator by June 30, 2011; more than one title may be entered at \$5.00 each.
- By November 30, 2011, send the final page of the ms to the coordinator.
- At the December meeting, one of the pages will be drawn and the winner will receive half of the money collected.

Regarding the title of the book you plan to finish:

It is okay to say “untitled (historical)”, for example. Plans change and the book you finish may not be the one you declared. That’s okay, too. Just let the coordinator know the change in title before the end of the challenge.

FMI, contact the coordinator, Diane Burton, at dmburton@charter.net

Member News & Recent Sales!

Rosanne Bittner: Still working on new book (untitled) and waiting for contract w/Source Books for back issue reprints and e-books. Wrote an article for the Mirror and working on 3 more.

Tracy Brogan: is working feverishly on a pitch for her Golden Heart manuscript, as well as working on a second book titled, MISSING YOU. She is looking forward to Nationals and has bought some really uncomfortable but awesome shoes to wear. She may regret it.

Diane Burton: Revising detective story; attended Sisters in Crime chapter-in-progress chapter meeting; exploring how to self-publish book (out of print).

Sue Charnley: June 1, 2011 is the release date for my erotic romance, The Widow's Revenge by Rue Allyn. Details about The Widow's Revenge are available at <http://RueAllyn.com>.

Treasa Davidson (new member): Finishing editing for Harlequin. Currently working on 2 paranormal romances.

Jean Finkler (new potential member): Just 2 chapters away from finishing a murder mystery.



Nancy Gideon: Participating in "boxed" e-book set of Pocket paranormals with Masked by Moonlight. ImaJinn vampire series now out on Kindle.

Kim Gouwens: Plan on completing WIP in late summer. Plus, hope to finish the wood finishing for my "new" construction house (3rd year of process).

Jennifer Kamptner: I got a request for a full from Cori Deyoe of the 3 Seas Literary Agency!!! She read my query and partial and requested a full of Murphy's Law. Now fulls of Murphy's Law are at TWRP and an agent.

Laurie Kuna: Earlier this month, I submitted an article on the Algonquin Hotel to the PASIC newsletter. The Algonquin is the site of this year's Industry Appreciation reception. I'm the co-chair of the reception and was the one who got the site, so am very excited to be going. I'm working on my current project with the goal of finishing it before RWA[®], since I have a pitch to both an agent and an editor at the conference. And, I just finished the line edit on Lorelee Lillibridge's book *All That Matters*, which will be out September 9 from Tell-Tale Publishing--our debut title.

Lorelee Lillibridge: Revisions were accepted and launch date for ALL THAT MATTERS is September 9! Romance Trading cards are being printed for sharing at RWA[®]-NYC. Website is updated and blog site is in the works. Finishing a critique purchased by a member at Retreat. Continuing to work on Southern cozy mystery, as well as the first book of a single title contemporary romance series

Alyssa Marble: I'm getting ready to attend RWA[®] Nationals (yay!) and I've had another rejection from an agent. (Not so yay.) I started up a website with my new pen name, <http://alyssa-alexander.com>, and hope to be on FB and Twitter soon too under my pen name.

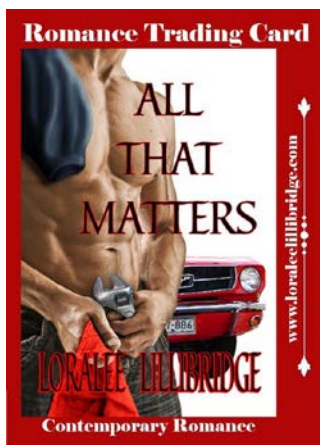
Florence Price: I'm looking forward to attending the RWA[®] National Conference at the end of this month and the opportunity to cheer for my friends who have finaled in the RITA and Golden Heart Contests. I've also been busy getting my virtual assistant business (My Girl Friday ~ VA) up and running. See everyone on the 18th!

Connie Smith: Working on self-help book, A Parkinsons Journey: Spiritual Lessons on Loss, Love, and Life.

Maris Soule: I'll be at the Lawrence Memorial Library in Climax on Thursday, June 23rd at 7:00 p.m. talking about AS THE CROW FLIES. I'm sharing the evening with a minister who's written a book. Now that should be interesting. I'll also be at the Ransom Library in Plainwell, Michigan on Thursday, July 14th at 7:00 p.m. This time I'll be on my own.

Anne Stone: Took an online class on Grammar. Worked on my website/blog—logo and imagining like what was discussed at retreat.

Ami Weaver : Got a call from RWA® that my GH manuscript was requested by a final-round judge. I finished the edit and sent it out. The last quarter or so isn't nearly as polished as I'd like but I ran out of time. I have no idea who has it and I may not ever hear from them, but still. It's exciting. Right now I'm finishing up with a contest I'm coordinating and trying to prepare for National—which I'm finding very overwhelming. But I'm looking forward to it!



Check out the fabulous Trading Card of our own Ms. Loralee Lillibridge's latest release ALL THAT MATTERS. Yum.



AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT...

Bylaws Amendment Proposals

In an effort to keep our chapter moving forward and to have members who are willing to serve on the board, the current board is suggesting we make the following amendments to our bylaws. Please read them over and if you have any questions, we'd be happy to discuss them on the Rom loop. We will vote on the amendments later this summer. Thank you,

The MMRWA 2011 Board

Bylaws Amendment Proposal 1

Changing from:

7.3.3. Limitation on Number of Terms. An individual may serve no more than two consecutive terms in any one office and no more than six years aggregate on the Board.

To:

7.3.3. Limitation on Number of Terms. If appropriately nominated and elected, an individual may serve in any one office or different offices as they are willing and able.

Reason for change: Many chapter members have already served in several board positions and have accumulated six years of service. In the past few years we've had problems finding people to run for office. If someone is willing to serve for more than six years, they should be allowed to do so. If they are not fulfilling their duties in a particular office, they will be voted out.

Bylaws Amendment Proposal 2

Changing from:

Section 5.1 Officers. The officers of this corporation shall be the President, President-Elect, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary, and shall be elected according to the provisions set forth in these Bylaws.

To:

Section 5.1 Officers. The officers of this corporation shall be the President, President-Elect, Program Chairperson, Treasurer, and Secretary, and shall be elected according to the provisions set forth in these Bylaws

Reason for change: Since adding the position of President-Elect to the board, the Vice-President no longer serves in the same capacity. Title of Program Chairperson is more appropriate.

Bylaws Amendment Proposal 3

Changing from:

Section 5.4. Vice President. The Vice President shall be responsible for planning and overseeing all program-related activities undertaken by the chapter, including those at regular meetings, workshops, and conferences; and fulfill any other obligations designated by the board. The Vice President shall also be responsible for planning and overseeing all official chapter communications tools, including the chapter website, and public relations; and fulfill any other obligations designated by the Board of Directors.

To:

Section 5.4 Program Chairperson. The Program Chairperson shall be responsible for planning and overseeing all program-related activities undertaken by the chapter for regular monthly meetings and workshops; and fulfill any other obligations designated by the board. The duty of overseeing MMRWA's annual Retreat From Harsh Reality shall be strictly voluntary. The many activities involved in said Retreat should be considered a responsibility of all members of Mid-Michigan Romance Writers of America. "

Reason for change: The duties of Vice-President-- now Program Chairperson--have changed and this will more accurately reflect the responsibilities of that office.

Deconstructing the Local News Release

by Lana Miersen

Of all the promotional tools in a writer's toolbox, the local news release is the most effective for attracting a local following for your books and increasing your local sales numbers. You need only follow one simple rule to ensure your release will help you achieve those goals.

Lead with a local hook and milk it.



It doesn't matter what you want to promote—a new book you're signing at a bookstore, a reading at the local library, an award you received, a speaking engagement, a conference appearance, the contest you're sponsoring on your website or a class you plan to teach at the local college—include a local tie-in.

For example: you were born and raised in the town, you went to high school or college there, you married the mayor's son or daughter, you are the mayor's son or daughter, your parents and/or grandparents still live there even if you don't, your grown children and grandchildren live there, you lived nearby while stationed in the armed services, you used the town as a setting for your novel and so on.

If you have a local hook, your news release may become the basis of a feature article or an on-air/online interview. A lot depends on whether it's a slow news day. If you don't have a local hook of some kind, your release won't see print or air time. Local news media are not in the habit of giving away free advertising.

I wrote a sample news release using this simple rule; it accompanies this article and was written with tongue planted firmly in cheek. (I'm irredeemably irreverent.) When you read it, take note of the release format and how the local hooks are intertwined with the information the author wants to impart in the body of the release. What follows is a detailed list deconstructing the release.

- The author's complete contact information is at the top left of the page. This information is for the editor; it is not part of the release itself and will not be published.
- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE is noted above the release headlines, and the release is dated and submitted two weeks before course registration is set to begin. A release should be submitted no fewer than ten days before the event date.
- The release begins about midway down on the first page, giving the editor room above it to write notes, such as publication date, to whom he/she will assign to write the story and the maximum word count wanted.
- Both the primary and secondary release headlines contain local tie-ins (...SMALLTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE) and (Smalltown's own award-winning author...).
- The dateline is local (Smalltown, Michigan, August 15, 2011).
- The first paragraph contains a local hook ("...lifelong Smalltown resident...").
- The second paragraph leads with two local hooks ("...the daughter of former Smalltown mayor...") and ("An honors graduate of Smalltown High School, Class of 1999...").
- The third paragraph contains a local hook ("... the 2001 graduate of Smalltown
- Community College (SCC) returns to her alma mater to teach...)
- Author quotes make up the fourth paragraph; both quotes are related to the seminar's subject matter. (The author doesn't plug her book in the quotes; she takes care of that in the first paragraph.)
- The hometown connection was established in previous paragraphs. The fifth, sixth and seventh paragraphs wrap up the release with website/Facebook/twitter information for the author, and registration and contact information for the college.
- Indicate the end of the release by typing "# # #" centered on the page.
- The release should be readable: double-spaced, in a 12 point font and kept to one or two pages. If two or more pages long, put your name, date and page number in the header in the event the pages become separated. Select different first page when creating the header. Put the word "more"

Contact: Lotta Lust
 2 Sweethearts Court
 Smalltown, Michigan
 1-800-ILUST4U
 lotta@lottalust.com
 www.lottalust.com
 www.facebook.com/lottalustauthor
 www.twitter.com/lotta_lust

memberships in professional organizations.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

in the footer on page one and subsequent pages to indicate additional copy follows.

- After you finish studying the release I provided, set yourself down in front of your computer and write one of your own. You have the roadmap; just follow the directions and you'll get there.

SIDEBAR

The following are important items to consider including with your news release when you send it out:

1. **A brief cover letter (or email) introducing yourself.** Tell why you're submitting the release and let the news/features/lifestyles editor know if your release is time-sensitive.
2. **A captioned 8x10 or 4x6 portrait photo of yourself.** Splurge on a professionally taken portrait photo and have the photographer assign the rights to you. When you caption the photo, just be sure to give the photographer photo credit. Include the photo with your release, whether printed or digital. If nothing else, your photo might be used with an expanded caption that summarizes your release in brief. Very brief. (Print, broadcast and online media all love photos.)
3. **Your author bio.** In addition to a brief summary of your life and career, make certain to include your author credits, such as published titles and articles, awards and contest wins, whether any of your titles made a best-seller list, rave reviews and

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR LOTTA LUST TO TEACH AT SMALLTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Smalltown's own award-winning author will conduct a seminar on writing today's romantic fiction.

Smalltown, Michigan, August 15, 2011: If you ever read a book and said, "I could write better than that," you are not alone. That is exactly what lifelong Smalltown resident Lotta Lust said ten years and thirty novels ago. Her thirtieth release, *Loins of Flame*, is burning up the charts; it's currently number three on the Paperback Best Seller list. *Loins of Flame* is Lust's first historical romance novel and has garnered rave reviews from both critics and readers.

Lust is the daughter of former Smalltown mayor Randy Lust and wife Cookie. An honors graduate of Smalltown High School, Class of 1999, the prolific Lust is also a three-time winner of the Rita Award®.

Lust has been nominated twelve times for the award, the highest accolade given by the Romance Writers of America®. Her novel *Deflowered under the Bleachers*, set in a small town in Michigan, won for Best Contemporary Romance of 2010. This third win also earned her a Hall of Fame Rita Award®.

Lust will divulge the secrets of her success this fall, when the 2001 graduate of Smalltown Community College (SCC) returns to her alma mater to teach “Romancing the Novel: How to Succeed in Writing Romantic Fiction for Today’s Reader.”

“Most people have an archaic view of romance novels. I intend to change that view,” Lust said. “The romance novel has evolved with the times. It’s not your grandmother’s ‘bodice ripper’ anymore!” When asked about the content of her seminar, Lust replied, “Let’s just say it will give new meaning to the phrase *adult education*.”

For more information about Lust, visit her website (www.lottalust.com) and follow her on Facebook (www.facebook.com/lottalustauthor) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/lotta_lust).

SCC expects Lust’s six-week seminar to be extremely popular. As class size will be limited, aspiring romance writers should register as early as possible. Registration begins on August 29 and ends September 9. The first day of class is September 19.

For additional course information, please contact SCC at 1-800-HIGHIQS or go online to the college website, www.scc.edu/adult_education.

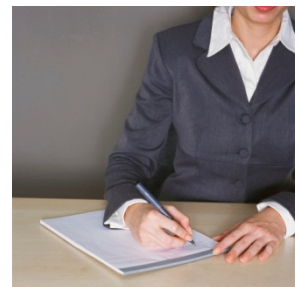
MMRWA member Lana Miersen is a former teacher and journalist who once toiled in a deeply dysfunctional New York advertising agency. She left to save her sanity. (Although, there are some who say she didn’t leave soon enough.) Lana now does occasional pro bono PR for MMRWA. Her unpublished science fiction romance FALCON’S WAY won first place in the paranormal categories of the TARA First Impressions, Suzannah Award

and Daphne Award Contests. She is hard at work on another science fiction romance.

PLEASE ... JUST WRITE!!

by Rosanne Bittner

I have to admit I felt a bit daunted the Sunday morning of Retreat when I listened to our speaker's predictions for all the changes that are (and will continue to be) taking place in the publishing world. I



I don't know about the rest of you, but at 66 years old and as busy as I am, I'm not about to take time out to take a course in media print/advertising and spend hours delving into the ins and outs of today's internet offerings. I know such knowledge is important to writing today, but we all have enough things going on in our personal lives to stress about. I don't intend to add my lack of techy expertise to the long list of other things that keep me awake at night. I fully understand that the things we learned from Cindy are indeed happening, and that publishing

will likely progress even further and in even more complicated ways into the internet's infinite future. However, one thing kept going through my mind as I listened to all the mind-boggling twitter, Facebook, blogging, rain-running-down-the-computer-screen, music-in-the-background, e-book, Kindle, Nook, iPad mumbo-jumbo ...

HOW ABOUT JUST WRITING A DAMN GOOD STORY FIRST?

I think we writers need to focus more on that than how in heck we'll market our books once they are published. The key is to first GET published, and that remains the primary purpose of MMRWA. Yes, I know we were told that there are numbers/marketing gurus out there now who don't give a darn how good our stories are. But, my fellow writers, that can only go so far. The reading public will spend their money on pure junk for only so long. The demand for really good stories is still out there, and it will grow.

It all still comes down to the right editor at the right time seeing the right story. I guarantee that if you have written a really wonderful novel, if you make an editor laugh or cry, if you hand in a book that the editor can't put down – he or she will find a way to climb over the numbers chief and get that book published. As the author, you might have to settle for a trade-off – maybe an extra low advance and not much marketing on the part of the publisher – but at least you will be published and on the e-book shelves or the "in print" shelves.

I think we need to step back and take a deep breath. Shake all the internet highways out of your thoughts. Stop wondering and worrying about advances and how you will advertise and don't even worry about what the latest genre trend is now or the one soon to come. We need instead to first get away from the computer, cell phone, iPad, blah-blah-blah all together and just go sit outside. Find a nice park somewhere – or if you live in the country and have acreage, go

out onto your own land and just sit. Don't take your computer or iPad. Take a pad of real paper, a pen or pencil, and just let your mind wander. Think about your story, your characters, your setting, your plot. What do you really want to do with your story? What is its purpose? Are you writing from the heart? Are you writing a subject matter that you truly love – writing for yourself rather than the market? And don't forget the importance of the age-old key to good stories - goal/motivation/character development. Close your eyes and put yourself into the shoes of your characters. BE your characters. It will be a tremendous help when it comes to how they speak, react, feel, believe, move, love or hate. It will help you bring your characters alive, make them real people with whom your readers can easily identify and empathize.

In all my books I have "been" the heroine. I've had over 50 affairs in the past 30 years, because I fall totally in love with every one of my heroes.

Don't ever ask me who my favorite hero is, because I've loved them all. In the couple of books in which my hero died (yes, I've done that), I've balled my eyes out. I even had my husband crying once. He went into the bedroom and shut the door because he knew what was coming. Ladies, if you knew my husband, you'd know what a monumental accomplishment that is!

Have any of you seen the commercial where the mom gets into her new van and locks herself inside for her own little "retreat" from the craziness of family life? I've done that – often. And whether it was getting stuck in a certain part of my story, or just needing to rev up my own writing juices, I can't tell you the number of times I have solved a writing problem by putting everything down, getting into my car with a pad of paper and a pen, and just going to sit and think someplace where I am completely alone.

I worry that younger people don't realize how motivating and helpful it can be to stop all the

texting and e-mailing and Facebook'ing once in a while. To all you younger, newer writers – stop once in a while and just "listen" to your own thoughts. Be honest with yourself about your writing – why you write – what you write – what your heart is telling you. Listen to the silence. Play some mood music. Dream about your story, because in the end, you can be the cleverest person who ever sat in front of a computer and advertised/promoted your books on-line, through every possible venue out there ... but if you aren't creating a good story, and telling it well, then all the advertising and fancy marketing in the world isn't going to help you sell a lot of books. Even if you do sell a zillion copies of that first book, if you disappoint your readers (who thought, because of your fabulous marketing, that your book must be the greatest story ever written), they aren't going to buy your NEXT book.

Always keep that in mind – not just the story you are working on now, but also your NEXT book. Editors like to know you're good for more than just one good story. When you get into publishing, you'd better be in it for the long haul. I personally have never bought ANY excuse other than dying for not writing. There is ALWAYS a way. You can MAKE time if you love your craft enough. I could easily break away here and talk about how to write through bad health and tragedy and the "business" of life, but that's for a different MIRROR article. Suffice it to say that where there is a will, there is a way. You will wade through rejections, multi-editing, and even failed contracts. You will fall and get up and fall and get up again, so be ready for the life of a writer who intends to write all his or her life because it's as important to you as breathing.

My fellow writers, PLEASE stop fretting over all the changes that are taking place in publishing – stop fretting over whether or not you know how to market your book through the internet – stop spending hours and hours setting up your twitter and web sites and then more hours and hours sitting there tweeting and checking

Facebook messages and on and on. For one thing, I have discovered that you can actually do all that "checking" and "answering" pretty quickly if you just take a quick look once in a while and not allow yourself to fall into the temptation of "chatting" on-line. Remember that the purpose of on-line marketing is to SELL YOUR BOOK to the reading public, not to tell the world about the latest cute thing your child or your dog just did. Remember that to get published, you first must write that good story, and THAT is what you should be spending hours and hours doing. WRITING!

There are so many avenues out there that you can explore when it comes to advertising your books. And there are savvy people (like our own president, Florence Price) who actually know what they are doing when it comes to the internet and actually love doing it. Florence is turning her computer smarts into a business.

There are a lot of people out there like Florence who can HELP YOU. You DO NOT need to waste writing time playing with the internet and trying to figure out by yourself how to get started. Yes, I am on Twitter now – and Facebook. I have a great web site and now a blog. But I spent little to no time on any of it. Michelle Crean created and maintains my web site. All I do is send her new info. and she gets it in there. Florence created and helps maintain Twitter and Facebook and my blog. You CAN find people out there who will do these things for a nominal fee. The cost is WORTH IT. You will have more time to spend WRITING, because in the end, SELLING YOUR BOOK TO A PUBLISHER is the first thing you have to do. And that is how you will make the money you can use to pay someone else to do all the rest for you.

I think it was F. Scott Fitzgerald who said the following when he was asked to speak to a group of writers ... "All of you want to be writers, so go home and write." And then he left. At least that's how the story goes. True or not, it really makes the point. Yes, workshops and retreats and now the internet are all ways

to learn about writing and publishing ... but no university on the face of the earth, no workshop, no conference or retreat, no famous "other" author you might sit and listen to is going to help you get a book published or even teach you how to write the most wonderful book ever. That only happens when you have a PASSION for writing, a PASSION for your story and your characters, a natural talent for story-telling - and when you put all the other mumbo-jumbo aside

and sit down and WRITE. The rest will happen by itself.

Good luck to all of you - and hey – THANKS FOR THE ANGEL AWARD! I am so touched. ALL of you are angels!

(Rosanne has been writing since 1979 and sold her first book in 1982. Since then she's had 57 historical novels published about America's Old West and Native Americans. She has won numerous writing awards and has conducted many writing workshops. Rosanne has traveled the American West for years and has visited just about every historic site mentioned in her books. She currently is treasurer for MMRWA, belongs to many historical societies, and is also treasurer for the Coloma Lioness Club, a non-profit volunteer organization that raises money for local needs. She lives in southwest Michigan with her husband of 46 years, Larry, and the couple has two sons and three grandsons. In winter Larry and Rosanne spend two months at their condo in Las Vegas.)

Grammar Tips for the Modern Writer

Other Irritants for Writers

by Carolynn Carey

Last month I wrote about words and usage that writers find irritating, such as hanged/hung and me/I. This month I want to touch on a couple of others that are irritants for some people.

One that was mentioned on one of my writers' loops is the question of which is correct: "could care less" or "couldn't care less." As I was growing up, everyone said "couldn't care less." Then, when I was in college, I started hearing people say, "I could care less." In fact, one of my professors (not an English professor) insisted that "could care less" was more insulting than "couldn't care less." I disagreed but couldn't convince him. Now, all these years later, we seem to be swinging back toward "couldn't care less." However, I suspect that, whichever way you say the phrase, most people understand that you're relatively uninterested.

Another error in usage that is fairly common these days occurs with fewer vs. less. The distinction seems rather simple to me. If you can count it, use fewer. If you can measure it, use less. In other words, one would write, "There were fewer people at Mark's party than at Susan's, so Susan had less punch left over."

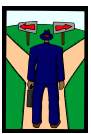
Of course, like most rules, there are exceptions. The expression less than is used in front of plural nouns denoting a measure of time, amount or distance. For example:



School is out in less than three weeks.



I paid less than ten dollars for all of my yard sale bargains.



You will go less than two miles before you come to the fork in the road.

Usually, you can depend on your ear to determine which usage is correct. If it sounds right, it probably is.

This article was first printed in the April 2011 Smoke Signals, newsletter for Smoky Mountain Romance Writers. Permission granted to reprint or forward with proper credit to author and newsletter.

Carolynn Carey is a charter member of the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers. She is a retired academic editor and a published romance author. She also writes a blog, "Carolynn's Clues," that appears each month on the <http://www.WeWriteRomance.com> website. This article was originally published as a contribution to that blog.

The Absolutely Final Dictum on How to Write a Book

by Janis Susan May, aka Janis Patterson

Back before there was an RWA[®], just about the time the dinosaurs were browsing outside the cave, I sold a romance novel. The experience warped me for the rest of my life.

Then a bunch of other authors who had sold romance novels got together in Houston and said, "Let's start our own club!" and before long, there was RWA[®]. So, that makes me a founder of RWA[®], which makes me... old.

So much for credentials. Since then I've sold a number of things in a number of genres, culminating last month with two sales in two genres in two different lengths submitted in two different months under two different names. That dazzling feat hypnotized our Fearless Editor into begging me to write an article for the newsletter. The poor dear obviously thinks I know what I'm doing!



There is a Magic Secret to getting published, you know. It's simply to write such an unbelievably good book that everyone will want to read it that a publisher can buy from you cheap and sell expensively to the public. Usually it isn't that cut and dried in actuality (thank goodness!) but I firmly believe that is the dream which lurks deep in the darkest spots of a publisher's heart.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Just write a good book. Yeah. Piece of cake.

I have two major tools in my ongoing attempts to write a good book.

My personal plotting device is one I have rather pretentiously titled Susan's Super Suspension Bridge System. I am something of a pantsner and as I like to find out things as I go along I don't do much pre-plotting. So – I know where I am going to start, and I know where I am going to finish – sort of; you do have to allow for some tweaking. Then in the middle I know where there are two or three major plot points. Beginning, end, two or three solid points in between – sort of like the framework of a suspension bridge.

Now you start storytelling by weaving the cables between the points. The roadway is the immutable part of your story – timeline, place, theme, all the things that don't basically change. Throw in a couple of knots, a weak place or two in the webbing, and there is your story line. You can keep it minimalist or embellish it to the max, but if you have good towers (beginning, ending, plot points) and strong cables (the webbing of the story itself) you will have a book.

Just be sure to use good tools and materials. Inferior steel and stone can ruin a bridge; poor grammar, spelling, cardboard characters and inconsistency of storyline can condemn a book. Whatever you do, always make sure to use the best quality of everything.

My second tool is the most powerful.

It is an acronym.

B. I. T. C. H.

This stands for **Buns In The Chair Honey**, meaning sit down and write the book. Don't talk about writing, don't lose yourself in plotting and re-plotting or filling out character sheets or any of a hundred other things determined to keep you from writing.

The only way to write a book is to write – put down one word at a time, one after the other, repeat as often as necessary. A lot of it may not be usable, but a lot will be. As Nora Roberts said, "Write the book. It may be garbage, but you can fix garbage. You can't fix a blank page." (Or something like that.)

There is a little piece of paper taped to the edge of my monitor that I look at every day before I start writing. First there is a quote from the terribly underrated philosopher Ashley Brilliant – "Writing is easy; all you do is stare at a blank page until drops of blood appear on your forehead." Next is "How bad do you want it?" Finally there is "B.I.T.C.H."

Anyway, that is my system, for whatever it's worth, and if you try it just like that I guarantee it won't work for you. Why? Because it is MY system. It is something I have evolved over more years and more books that I care to admit. It's intensely personal. Now you're welcome to try it and I hope you do. The underlying principles are sound, but when you do it there will be subtle changes and adjustments simply because you are you and not me.

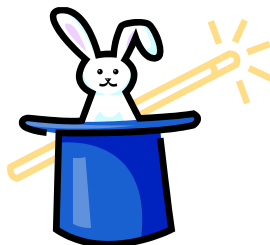
Some of you will take these ideas and mold them to fit yourself and they will become your process. Some of you won't be able to work with them at all, and that's okay, because one of the wonderful things about writing is that there are many, many routes to producing a saleable book. This is one industry where the final product far outshines the process it took to create it.

Just never stop being a B.I.T.C.H. writer!

This article first appeared in the February 2011 issue of DARA News, the monthly newsletter of Dallas Area Romance Authors. Permission granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA® chapters with proper credit to author and chapter.

Well known for her romance novels, Janis Susan May is also known for her mysteries under the name of Janis Patterson, children's books as Janis Susan Patterson and scholarly works as J.S.M. Patterson. Sing a Song of Spying, a mostly fictional romantic adventure, will be released in Winter 2010, and Danny and the Dust bunnies in October 2010. She and her husband, a Naval Reserve Captain currently on overseas deployment, live in Texas with three rescued fur babies – two neurotic cats and a terribly spoiled little dog. Find out more about Janis Susan May by visiting her websites:

<http://www.janissusanmay.com/index.htm> & <http://www.janispattersonmysteries.com/>



LEARNING TO WRITE FASTER*

by Anna DePalo

A bad thing happened to me on the way to a romance writing career.

In a word, *kids*.

Now, I love my children, but there's no disputing that (little) kids are a time suck that makes getting things done so much more challenging. Suddenly, I needed to learn how to be efficient. *A lot more efficient.* No more slaving over every word, or trolling the Internet mid-paragraph for some arcane piece of research.

So, along the way, I picked up a few tips from the experts about how to write faster, as well as figuring a few things out on my own. The following is what worked for me. It could work for you if you find yourself equally time-challenged for whatever reason (let's say you're returning to work full-time, or you suddenly need to start caring for a sick family member).

Write straight through.

Try not to go back and edit (and re-edit) what you wrote at least not until you're well into the book. *Really.* As Nora Roberts said, „I can always fix a bad page. I can't fix a blank one. If you take the time to polish every five pages or ten pages, you may find yourself slaving over passages that later need to be deleted or changed. If you find that you need to research something that will send you off on a tangent, try leaving a blank spot with underscores in the manuscript to hold your place.

Note that I'm not suggesting that you compromise quality, but just be smart about how you spend your editing time. The majority of very successful romance novelists are also fairly prolific writers. The nature of the publishing industry these days almost demands it. So, backlog your editing. Edit a lot *at the end*.

Write in short spurts. Set a timer, if necessary. I like to think of writing a novel as a series of short sprints that add up to a marathon. This method will also help you avoid the pitfall of getting out of the groove of a story while you wait for your next consecutive five free hours which may be *never*. In between sprints, you can get up and stretch, make coffee, do laundry or whatever.

If I had enough short sprints available to me, I'd do a challenge such as Book in a Week or National Novel Writing Month. Sadly, I don't. Instead, I'm proof that, regardless, it is possible to write a book in a reasonable amount of time.

Manage your day in a smart way. When the kids are awake and playing (or yes, I admit it, watching TV), I do writing business that is short and less involved. I answer emails, update my web site or write articles. I save most of the novel writing for when the kids are at school, sleeping, napping, out of the house or distracted by the television.

Do not make yourself crazy. There's a perception that all brilliant creative types were mad, sad and bad, but I prefer to hold on to my sanity at least until the kids leave the house <g>. I discovered that I can't write with a lot of distractions or „on the run% while a kid plays Little League or jumps around the playground. Likewise, I haven't tried voice-recognition software that will let me speak my novel a computer. These methods, however, may work for you. We each have our own threshold for multitasking or even being able to write messy.

Here's the funny thing: along the way to writing faster, I became a better writer, not a worse one. It's as if writing faster unchained my inner muse. No more self-censoring. And writing *faster* also meant I was writing *more*. I was getting better simply by writing, writing, and writing. I was well on my way to putting in Malcolm Gladwell's minimum of 10,000 practice hours to develop a skill.



So, get it to it, and I'll see you at the finish line!

This article was published in the August issue of the Heartline Herald, newsletter of New Jersey Romance Writers.

Anna DePalo's tenth book, *HIS BLACK SHEEP BRIDE*, the first in her *Aristocratic Grooms* trilogy, is out from *Silhouette Desire* in August 2010. You can find her at www.annadepalo.com, on Facebook and MySpace, and at <http://community.eharlequin.com/content/silhouette-desire-author-blog>.



How to Win Writing Contests

by Clarissa Southwick

“This is the worst contest entry I’ve ever read, and I’ve been judging for twenty years.”

Ouch. It doesn’t sound like that author is going to win any writing contests, does it?

That’s a direct quote from the score sheet of the first writing contest I ever entered. Yet, somehow I’ve managed to place in more chapter contests than I can count and final in the Golden Heart with two different manuscripts. Along the way, I’ve learned a thing or two about writing contests.

Before I give you the secrets to winning writing contests, I must post some disclaimers: I’m not writing about anyone in particular here. Everything in this blog is based on patterns I’ve observed when interacting with large groups of writers. Your personal experience may differ.

A single writing contest means nothing. No one wins every contest entered. There’s always the chance you’ll get the crazy judge, and you can’t do anything about crazy. Here, I’m talking about gradually progressing over a period of time until you can regularly advance to the final round and get

your manuscripts in front of editors and agents.

Here’s what you need to know to win writing contests:

Attitude is Everything.

Believe it or not, your attitude shows in your manuscript. It shows in how you string words together. It shows in your characters. It shows in how you respond to contest feedback. Stop Showing Off. If you think you’re some kind of writing genius and your brilliance far exceeds the intellect of stupid contest judges, you will get low scores. Judges get tired of being yanked out of the story with cutesy one-liners and complicated prose. Nobody cares if you wrote your entry in iambic pentameter. They just want to be caught up in a good story.

Choose your Contest Carefully. Be sure the contest has the correct category for your work. Don’t try to squeeze your novel into a romance category if it’s not a romance. Look for contests that throw out the lowest score so you don’t fall victim to the whims of a single judge.

Read the score sheet and the rules BEFORE the contest: This sounds obvious, but I'm frequently approached by outraged authors whose low scores were perfectly predictable. If the score sheet lists required elements and you do not include them, the judge cannot give you a high score, no matter how much she loves your story.

Read the score sheet AFTER the contest: Look at the numbers. If you consistently score low on the same elements, you need to stop entering contests and take a class on that topic. Hone your craft and the rest will fall into place.

Get all the Easy Points: You should always get a perfect score on the "Mechanics" section. Submitting an entry that is full of spelling and grammar errors shows contempt for the judges. Don't be surprised if their comments reflect that same insulting attitude back onto your manuscript.

Show you Know the Rules Before You Break Them: When used sparingly, fragments and odd punctuation can be used to great effect. Just be sure it's obvious that's what you're doing. You're not Jack Kerouac, and *On the Road* wasn't his first novel.

Stop Making Excuses: Authors tend to come up with explanations for why they can't get ahead. "Judges don't like stories written in first person." "Judges don't like strong heroines." "Contests only reward mediocre writing." Yet, I've seen winning entries disprove all of these theories. Don't let

myths keep you from hearing what the judges are actually saying.

Listen. Really. Listen. There is only one difference between those who succeed at contests and those who don't. The winners have learned how to set aside their emotions and use the judge's feedback properly. Sometimes it's hard to get past the snarky comments to the lesson hidden underneath, but you have to do it if you want to learn anything from the experience. Know when to polish, and when to start over: If your scores are typically lower than 60% of the total possible, you probably want to start over. But if you regularly score in the 80% range, you only need to polish. Don't throw out the first chapter and rewrite it just because you didn't final. If you do, you will always be submitting a first draft and your chances for success will plummet.

Don't enter before you're ready: Twice I've entered contests on a whim, typing up the final pages minutes before the deadline. Both times, I thought I was just entering to get feedback on an idea. Both times, I ended up in the finals, embarrassed to have a first draft in front of a final editor. Don't do it. Only put your polished work out there. Trust me on this.

Volunteer to Judge: It's the easiest way to learn how judges think. You'll see your own writing differently once you've seen other writers making the same mistakes.

Lose the Anger. Angry, bitter writers tend to write angry, bitter characters. No one enjoys spending time with a hateful heroine. If you're miserable because you've failed to succeed in the harsh world of publishing, take a year off and rediscover the joy of writing.

Attitude is everything. No, that repetition is not an error.

Love writing, love what you write, and the judges will love it too.

This article first appeared at www.gemstatewriters.com. Two time Golden Heart finalist, Clarissa Southwick writes tales of adventure where cultures and hearts collide. 2010 & 2011 Golden Heart Finalist www.gemstatewriters.com

Between the Covers with Cindy Arends:

From your PAN liaison, Nancy Gideon



A native of Michigan who still lives in the same town she grew up in, Cindy Arends likes to think of herself as a normal run-of-the-mill thirty-something woman who's parlayed a quirky sense of humor into a burgeoning career in romance writing.

Where a dash of snark meets dark, she's **Arianna Skye** an award winning author of fantasy erotic romance. Her first novel, **Wings of Desire** from Eternal Press is a sexy jaunt into the magical world of Fey and is a double finalist in the Greater Detroit RWA®'s Booksellers Best contest in Erotic and Best First Book categories.

As **Sidney Ayers**, she writes sinfully snarky paranormal romance and loves infusing her stories with steam and laughter. Her current release, **Demons Prefer Blondes**, the first in her Demons Unleashed series with Sourcebooks Casablanca, is a 5-Star Top Pick at Night Owl Reviews, who said, "It's books like Demons Prefer Blondes that make me love being a reviewer. This story, with it's chimpanzee, BFFs, betrayals, swords, magic, immortals, and sex is full of tension and is funny as all heck. The characters are full of life and fully realized. The heroine is as kick-ass as the hero and the author has done a great job weaving together an intricate plot. Sign me up for more."

So, let's meet Cindy/Arianna/Sidney. . .

Q: A double *Booksellers Best* nominee, *Romantic Times* 4-Star review, a *Night Owl Review* Top Pick... how excited are you about your career's momentum?

A: I don't think it has all completely sunk in yet. I'm a little excited that my books have gotten somewhat of a good reception.

Q: Describe your road to publication: rollercoaster or express lane?

A: A little of both. There were ups and downs when I first started submitting to publishers and agents. But since then, wow! It's been quite a ride.

Q: What's in a name? You've got enough aliases for a Post Office flyer. What's the story behind the pseudonyms?

A: I wasn't quite proactive when picking out pen names. One of my original pen names started bringing up links to adult video sites. Not the kind of exposure (pun absolutely intended) that I wanted. I knew I'd need more than one though, for my different genres. Also, my father is a local government official, so I wanted to keep things slightly anonymous for his sake.

Q: We all have our Black Moments. What was the worse advice you ever received on your way to publication?

A. The worst piece of advice I've ever received came from a purported editor in a contest. Her words were: "Please use your burgeoning voice and apply it to a plot we can actually relate to." We? Like everyone relates the same way she does. Anyway, that book was DEMONS PREFER BLONDES. And if I had actually taken that advice, who knows where I'd be right now.

Q: What advice do you have for writers who are just starting out?

A. Never give up. Write every day. But my most favorite piece of advice is this: Write what you love, love what you write... otherwise no one else will either.

Q: You're a techie girl (I'm so envious!). How are you using Social Media skills to get yourself 'out there'?

A. I do a lot of guest blogs and am a huge Twitter user. I am kind of lax when it comes to Facebook. I've set it up that Facebook updates with my tweets though.

Q: Pantser or plotter?

A. I'm more of a hybrid... a Plotting Pantster, if you will.

Q: Describe your 'average' writing day?

A. If I told you what my average day was like you'd wonder how in the heck I get a book done. I am a horrible procrastinator.

Q: What does the reader get when they pick up one of your books?

A. A rollercoaster ride of snarktastic proportions. Basically a really fun and funny book.

Q: Which do you give the most credit to, luck or hard work?

A. Hard work, of course with a little of luck sprinkled in.

Q: What do you wish you knew then that you know now?

A. I wish someone would have told me to wear more comfortable shoes. That way I wouldn't have fallen flat on my face in front of the editor that will remain nameless.

Q: What communities, organizations, groups do you belong to that you feel help you professionally or just emotionally?

A. I am a member of RWA[®] of course, MMRWA, and a few online chapters as well. I'm also a member of Savvy Authors which is a great community to network with other authors. I also am a member of a local writing group in Grand Rapids who have been very supportive.

Q: What distracts you from getting words on the page? How do you overcome it?

A. Shrinky dinks. If you've seen the promo items I've done, you'll know what I mean. I try to only spend so much time a day on promo so I can dedicate the rest of my time on writing.

Q: Where do you see your career in five years?

A. With the way the market is evolving and changing, it's hard to say. I'd like to think I'd make enough from my writing to work from home in my jammies all day.

Q: What's your ultimate goal with your writing?

A. I just want people to read my book and enjoy themselves. If I make a couple dollars from it, then that's just an added bonus.

Q: What's next?

DEMONS LIKE IT HOT, the second book in the Demons Unleashed series, will be out in December, 2011. It stars caterer Serah SanGermano and the demon Mercenary Matthias Ambrose who's been sent to protect her. The kitchen has never been hotter! Right now, I'm currently working on the 3rd book in the Demons Unleashed series. It stars quirky demoness and jack-of-all-trades, Kalli Corapolous and cardiologist, Joshua Carlson. Hell is unleashed in the most odd, not to mention inopportune, places. I also foresee myself delving into the historical fantasy realm.

I foresee a lot more from Cindy/Arianna/Sidney on the shelves! You can keep up at: www.sidneyayers.com or www.ariannaskye.com.

Demons Prefer Blondes (AKA: *Beauty School Demon/Succubus Unleashed/Unleashing Your Inner Sex Demon*), the first in the Demons Unleashed series of snarky paranormal romances set in the fictional town of Connolly Park, Michigan, follows Beautician Lucia Gregory and her band of quirky friends as they fight evil and find love along the way. NOW AVAILABLE!

(Note from Nancy: I've resuscitated BETWEEN THE COVERS from my old newsletter days to give our authors: new, upcoming and mature, the spotlight they deserve. If you've just gotten THE CALL or had your career spike in a new and exciting way, contact me at ncgideon@msn.com for a future feature interview. Plus it gives me the chance to say I'm doing something with my college education as a journalism major!)

A SAD LOSS by Rosanne Bittner

Recently we lost an icon of TV westerns - James Arness, better known as Matt Dillon of the longest-running TV western ever - GUNSMOKE. I was very saddened to hear this, partly because Matt Dillon was my hero in my teens, and also because there are so few TV heroes left - actually, none that I can think of. TV sets no good examples of a strong line between "good" and "bad" any more. The old westerns did that. Cheesy sometimes, but kids understood that if you did something "bad" you had to pay for it. Respect, honor, manners - very little of any of that on TV any more. GUNSMOKE survived as long as it did because it had several characters with whom one could identify and empathize - like Doc Adams, Chester Good, Festus, and Matt Dillon's long-time "girlfriend" Kitty. The only western hero left as far as I can see is Clint Eastwood. When he is gone it will be a HUGE loss for quality movies as well as another icon of western movies and also TV (remember Rowdy Yates of RAWHIDE?). I always wanted to be able to meet James Arness, but now that will never happen. But he remains "alive" to me through continued re-runs of GUNSMOKE, which I watch every evening.

RETREAT FROM HARSH REALITY – CONFERENCE WRAP-UP

By Julie McMullen, Retreat Director

Even Mother Nature was in need of a Retreat From Harsh Reality as she blessed us with one of the first warm and sunny spring days on Friday, April 29th, the opening day of our 2011 Retreat at the Yarrow Golf & Conference Resort. This year's Retreat featured award-winning author, Cindy Dees, who has penned over thirty novels since 2002. Forty-seven people attended Retreat 2011, the largest group in at least five years, including two guests from out-of-state – one from Missouri and one from California.

At noon on Friday, a number of us gathered in the Pub downstairs to enjoy lunch and laughter as we caught up with old friends and made new ones. Smiling faces and helping hands continued to arrive all afternoon as we prepared to pamper our muses and revive our spirits this weekend.

Friday afternoon found the Book Basket Assembly crew gathered in the Main Lodge coordinating the vast assortment of donations into nearly fifty creatively themed baskets as well as organizing the raffle books. These terrific ladies and gentleman also organized the authors' promotional materials and folders for the Goodie Bags for all the Retreat attendees. As an added bonus this year, each attendee received an autographed copy of one of Cindy Dees' books. Florence Price once again designed the professional looking name badges for all attendees, as well as the Book Sale and Author Signing signs.

Retreat officially opened at 6:30 pm with an all-you-could eat pizza buffet followed by the "Dessert Anyone?" feast that simply oozed with chocolate and other sweet treats that were all either low in calories or calorie-free. All these culinary treasures ensured that we were ready to tackle the first activity of the evening – the Ice Breaker led by Nancy Gideon. This year's Ice Breaker was based on a 'speed dating' theme with each guest asking as many questions as possible in a specified amount of time. What a great way to get to know so many people in so little time! The questions were as varied as our Retreat guests as were our responses. Thanks, Nancy, for an entertaining way to start our program!

In the free time after the Icebreaker, we enjoyed socializing in the pub and in our hotel rooms, while

some guests found time to write or critique and others quiet time to relax.

Saturday morning dawned slightly cooler but that certainly didn't diminish our spirits. After a hot breakfast in the Main Lodge, our guest speaker, Cindy Dees, took center stage and presented "Putting the BIG in Big Commercial Fiction." During this hour long session, Cindy explained how to build "big" characters, relationships, scenes and plots to make editors sit up and pay attention to your stories. She encouraged us to torture our characters, to drive them to the brink of their limits and then push them even harder, all in the name of good fiction. And don't forget to ask, "But how do they feel?"

In her second session, "Between the Covers," Cindy explained the spaghetti bowl technique to characterization, using Laurie Kuna's story as an example. While brainstorming the characters and their relationships to each other, plot threads and scenes naturally evolved to help with the plotting of the story. Extraneous characters were removed to tighten the cast of performers and to strengthen the overall story.

New this year were Mini-Sessions taught by MMRWA members. Elizabeth Fortin and Nancy Gideon presented "Getting the Most Out of Social Networking." Their program covered how to establish and maintain an online presence, and was beneficial for both published authors and new writers alike. Alyssa Marble taught us about "Electronic Storyboarding" using X-Mind, a free downloadable software program as well as describing the finer nuances of Windows 2007 that can be used to assist writers. Julie McMullen taught "Goal Setting for the Writer in You."

Our Book Sale was hosted by Kazoo Books, featuring Gloria Tiller and Jean, and featured a variety of reference books. Authors signing this year included our guest speaker Cindy Dees, Maris Soule, Rosanne Bittner, Lucy Kubash, Margo Hoornstra and Cynthia Arends writing as Ariana Skye.

The presentation of the MMRWA Angel Award is always a highlight at Retreat. Since 2002, the chapter bestows this prestigious honor upon one of our chapter sisters who has been nominated for her outstanding work and

unselfish dedication to our organization. Annette Briggs, last year's recipient, presented Rosanne Bittner with her wings as the 2010 Angel Award winner. Congratulations, Rosanne!

The Member Recognition Committee led by Florence Price proclaimed our many accomplishments during the Toot Your Own Horn segment. A notepad decorated with "The Alchemy of Writing" and a pen was presented to each individual whose achievements were celebrated. During dinner, we raised our champagne glasses high in a celebratory toast to each other and shared best wishes for another even more successful year ahead.

Last-minute bidding wars on the silent auction baskets drew to a close shortly after four o'clock and the winners were announced thereafter. Winners of the book raffle selected their prizes. Then the event we were all anxiously awaiting -- the live basket auction. Laurie Kuna, our Auctioneer Extraordinaire, ruthlessly convinced many of us to willingly bid higher than our self-imposed limits. One hundred percent of the money raised from the live auction benefits the Kalamazoo YWCA Domestic Assault Shelter. This year, our efforts resulted in a generous \$1300 for the Shelter.

On Sunday, after a short business meeting and a review of the weekend's events, the Biz Round Table Talk with Cindy Dees began. Cindy shared with us details about her writing career and how the publishing industry is evolving. E-publishing and self-publishing are just the tip of the iceberg. Cindy projects that in five years, books will be multi-media creations integrating pop-up images and comments, videos, pictures of characters and locales, side-stories, music, scents and sounds imbedded into the story. Even games and websites will be integrated into the books. Already children's books have some of these features.

Cindy was honest about how difficult the market is and will continue to be as it further fragments into a niche market. The market is concentrating on a few mega authors who are dominating 80 percent of the market. Last year only 37 authors filled the best-selling lists. The mid-list and the newbie authors are getting pushed off to the small presses and self-publishing.

As a writer in today's market, you have to build your own path to publishing. Not only do you have to write the best book you can write, you have to be able to market your book and yourself by building a fan base using the internet and social networking media. Cindy said that you need to understand it's going to be a longer journey

and you have to write more books in less time and promote yourself more.

After one last photo opportunity, it was time to say good-bye to our friends and return to harsh reality, having refilled our writer's creative well, rejuvenated our writer's spirits and nourished our muses with a profusion of chocolate and laughter. Fond memories of our weekend retreat at Yarrow and our newly acquired knowledge inspire us to continue to march onward in our pursuit of publication.

Plans are already underway for our next Retreat From Harsh Reality, which will be held in April 2012 at the Yarrow Golf & Conference Resort in Augusta, Michigan. Eileen Dreyer will return for an encore speaking performance for two sessions. Watch for details to be finalized over the next several months. Online registration will begin January 1, 2012.

See you again next year!

A SPECIAL THANK YOU...

Just as it takes an entire village to raise a child, it takes an entire chapter to put on our Retreat From Harsh Reality. I tried to include everyone who helped with Retreat in its many facets and if I've forgotten anyone, please accept my apologies. So many of you helped behind the scenes in the organizational stages and/or during the actual event. Some special thank yous are in order here...

To Cindy Dees for flying to Michigan for a whirlwind weekend at our Retreat. I hope you have as many fond memories of us as we do of you! Many, many thanks for sharing your pearls of wisdom on writing big, commercial fiction. And especially thanks for sharing your spaghetti bowl approach to characterization. Ever since I learned that technique, I've found my characters are much more in-depth and well-rounded, and subsequently my plots and sub-plots are much more intricately woven. I look forward to reading many more of your engaging stories!

Two particular people deserve special recognition and appreciation: Dawn Bartley, for being my number one back-up person and for coordinating the published author critiques; and Lucy Kubash, for securing donations for our book raffle and auction baskets and for stepping in wherever and whenever she was

(Thank You Continued...)

needed. Retreat could not have gotten off the ground without the two of you!

To Florence Price for printing our name tags, our Book Sale and Author Signing signs, organizing the Toot Your Own Horn segment, and picking up much-needed last minute items on your way to Retreat!

To Rosanne for your promptness at handling Retreat finances. You are an angel!

To Laurie Kuna for inviting Cindy Dees to present to our group and for being our Auctioneer Extraordinaire – a position you hold for life and then some!

To Nancy Gideon, Elizabeth Fortin and Alyssa Marble for presenting Mini-Sessions that truly enhanced our Retreat experience.

To Pat Lazarus for her wonderful artwork for the Angel Award Plaque.

To the published authors in our group who volunteered their time and talents to offer critiques to our unpublished writers. This is the first year we sold out on critiques.

To everyone who brought or sent items for the book raffle and auction and who donated entire baskets, thank you for going out of your way to put such fabulous treasures together.

To the Book Basket Assembly Committee – I salute you and your talents for coordinating such marvelous baskets that helped raise monies for the YWCA Domestic Assault Shelter and our chapter.

To the Registration Committee – Anne Marie King-Jakubiak, Maris Soule, Lorelee Lillibridge and Pat Klein – thanks for lending your smiling faces to greet our arriving Retreat guests.

To Lana Miersen for writing such outstanding promotional articles about Retreat and our published authors. Your talents are amazing!

To Tracy Roper for always reminding me about the deadline submission for the Mirror newsletter and granting me leeway every month so I could get my Retreat information included.

To the Food Committee/Friday Night Dessert Committee – thanks for coordinating all the yummy treats Friday night and the table snacks throughout the weekend.

To Wil Emerson for helping with the Book Sale and Author Signing.

To everyone who attended this fabulous event – you made Retreat even more special simply with your presence. We are a talented group of writers and I love how we support one another on our writing journey. Here's to a lucrative publishing contract for all of us in 2011!

Finally, to everyone at Retreat, thank you for the beautiful gardenia tree that sits on my patio, scenting the air with its aromatic blooms while I write on my laptop from inside my gazebo. Also, many thanks for the gift bag filled with unexpected treasures and the beautiful mini rose plant that sits on my kitchen counter, blooming day after day as a constant reminder about our fabulous weekend Retreat From Harsh Reality.

On the next page, check out the fabulous & fun Trading Card that our own President, Florence Price has designed. She'll be passing those out at the RWA® National Conference at the end of this month. I'll be passing some out for her, too, as I connect with other techno-challenged writers like myself. Please consider doing the same. Good luck with your new business, Florence!



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Final Reflections

By Tracy Brogan

First, let me offer a big, hearty thanks to Nancy, Rosanne, Julie and Lana for contributing to this month's newsletter! We have an abundance of expertise in our chapter so I appreciate them sharing a sliver of theirs. Nancy's new column will help us learn a little bit about our fellow MMRWA-ers. And since I had zero idea how to write and submit a press release, Lana's article was extremely useful to me personally.

And speaking of personal, this is my space so I'm going to get a little. Personal, I mean.

Rosanne's article really hit home for me. As a new-ish writer, I'm still learning how to nurture the seed of an idea and make it grown and bloom into a completed, published work of fiction. Last year, I knew even less. In fact, I remember sitting next to Rosanne at my first Retreat From Harsh Reality and asking her, "What's a Golden Heart?" She looked at me like I was a moron struggling to be an idiot and said, "It's a contest."

Well, I've learned quite a bit since then. If I may be so bold, I might even say I've made good progress. So, why am I currently overwhelmed and incapacitated by all I still don't know?

Thankfully, after reading, "Please, Just Write," I've realized I'm focusing on the wrong things. Although I have a completed manuscript, an agent, and am proud to be a Golden Heart finalist, I haven't written in weeks, because I've been so busy, and distracted, trying to 'build my brand.' Yes, creating an on-line presence is (so they say) essential in today's market, but as Rosanne pointed out, all the great marketing in the world won't make people love your book if you don't write the best damn story you can produce. (The Twilight series might be the exception to this, but let's not go there.) So, rather than spending an hour tweeting, Facebooking, blogging, and cyber-schmoozing, I should work on my word count. I should use a (*gasp*) pen and paper and put myself in my characters shoes for an afternoon. I love the idea of sitting in my car where no one can find me. (I confess, it will be painful to turn off my phone, but I will try!) For the next few weeks, I'll focus on WRITING rather than MARKETING.

This is a pivotal shift for me and one that I'm grateful to make because the stress of 'trying to get published' has made me doubt I'm cut out for this business. So, right now, I will remind myself what I LOVE about writing. The fleshing out of the characters, learning their idiosyncrasies, figuring out what makes them tick. Making them happy, and then snatching it all away, only to bring them to a better place in the end. I intend to concentrate on writing the best damn story I can write, and as far as getting published? Well, in the immortal words of Scarlet O'Hara, "I'll think about that tomorrow."

