

# 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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## March Program: Tax Strategies for Writers

by *Margo Hoornstra*  
*Vice President/Publicity Chair*

**T**ax Strategies for Writers, presented by Bruce Meyers, Certified Public Accountant with the Hantz Financial Group, is the topic for the March 19, 2011 MMRWA meeting which will be held at La Seniorita's Restaurant in Lansing.

Completing and filing individual income tax forms is one item all of us need to cross off our personal to do lists by April 15<sup>th</sup> of each year. For authors and artists, allowable deductions and rules, particularly as they pertain to the IRS hobby versus business regulations, can be different and confusing.

Taking part in the March 19 meeting will help make this task somewhat easier for MMRWA members and guests. The program itself will be brief in order to allow plenty of time for a question and answer session. Bring your income tax questions and plan to join us on Saturday, March 19 at La Seniorita's Restaurant, 2706 Lake Lansing Road, Lansing, Michigan beginning at 11:30 AM.

***Bruce Meyers is a graduate of Michigan State University with both a Bachelor of Arts in Accounting and a Master of Business Administration. Bruce began his career in 1995 as a tax consultant with Ernst & Young LLP and became a Certified Public Accountant in 1997. Bruce's professional experience also includes time as a management consultant helping Fortune 500 companies install and/or upgrade their accounting systems.***

## The President's Corner

*By Florence Price*



**W**ell, here it is March already. Spring is just around the corner and so is our big Chapter event, Retreat From Harsh Reality! I hope you're all as excited as I am about this year's Retreat. I mean, what could be better? To spend a weekend surrounded by good friends in a lovely setting and to participate in a workshop presented by the fabulous Cindy Dees...Or, if we're lucky, to be entertained by the musical stylings of the multi-talented Laurie Kuna, Lisa Cardle and Pat Lazarus (which is worth the trip in and of itself). And the food – Oh, the *food* – Between the goodies our members bring to share and the gourmet meals Yarrow serves, you need to just give up and leave your diets at home because there's no resisting all the good stuff to eat! So please, plan to attend our Retreat From Harsh Reality at the beautiful Yarrow Golf & Conference Resort this April. It's a guaranteed fun, educational, motivating weekend and the perfect opportunity to get to know your fellow MMRWA members better.

And speaking of getting to know other members better...In preparation for the Toot Your Own Horn Ceremony at Retreat, I'm asking for your 2010 writing achievements. We'll celebrate your successes, whether big or small, in unabashed Horn Tooting! Please send me your Toots at [greg-flo.091094@sbcglobal.net](mailto:greg-flo.091094@sbcglobal.net).

I also want to remind everyone who has a Facebook page to "Like" our Mid-Michigan RWA Facebook page. It would be great if we could have a more active presence on Facebook, so remember to post your news, info on your websites and blogs or appropriate links there too. We'll be posting information about Retreat on the MMRWA page, and the more people who have "Liked" the Page the bigger the networking possibilities. Please contact me if you have any questions.

I hope to see many of you at the March meeting in Lansing, but until then...

Happy writing!

*Florence*

## MMRWA 2011 MEETING SCHEDULE

<b>January</b>	No chapter meeting
<b>February 19</b>	Grand Rapids (Grandville) Member Critique
<b>March 19</b>	Lansing Income Tax Information For Writers
<b>April 29 – May 1</b>	Kalamazoo (Augusta) Retreat From Harsh Reality Yarrow Golf Course
<b>May 21</b>	Jackson Grammar and Copy Editing by Laurie Kuna
<b>June 18</b>	Grand Rapids (Grandville) Creating Cover Art by Pat Lazarus
<b>July</b>	No Meeting
<b>August 20</b>	Lansing Member Critique
<b>September 17</b>	Kalamazoo Personality Disorders by Renci Denham
<b>October 15</b>	Jackson Cover Letters by Cindy Arends
<b>November 19</b>	Grand Rapids (Grandville) Point of View by Ami Weaver
<b>December 10</b>	Christmas Party – Location TBD



## March Meeting Directions

**La Señorita Mexican Restaurant**  
**2706 Lake Lansing Rd., Lansing, Michigan**  
**Phone: 517-485-0166**

- **From the North** (Mt. Pleasant):
- Take US-127S to Lake Lansing Road Exit #79 and get into the exit ramp's middle turn lane.
- At the traffic light at the end of the exit ramp, turn RIGHT onto Lake Lansing Road.
- Get into the left turn lane immediately and turn LEFT at the Kerry Street traffic light (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left).
- Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.
- **From the South** (Ann Arbor, Jackson, Kalamazoo):
- Take I-94 to US-127N / I-496N.
- Take Exit 8, 127N toward Flint/Clare to Lake Lansing Road Exit #79.
- From the exit ramp, turn LEFT at the traffic light onto W. Lake Lansing Road.
- Turn LEFT at the second traffic light onto Kerry St. (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left).
- Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.
- **From the West** (Grand Rapids):
- Take I-96E to merge onto I-69E via Exit #89 toward Flint/Clare.
- Go 10 miles. Merge onto US-127S via Exit #89A toward E. Lansing.
- Go 3.2 miles to Lake Lansing Road Exit #79 and get into the exit ramp's middle turn lane.
- At the traffic light at the end of the exit ramp, turn RIGHT onto Lake Lansing Road.
- Get into the left turn lane immediately and turn LEFT at the Kerry Street traffic light (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left).
- Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.
- **From the East** (Brighton):
- Take I-96 West to merge onto US-127N / I-496N via Exit #106B toward Downtown Lansing.
- Take Exit 8, 127N toward Flint/Clare to the Lake Lansing Road Exit #79.
- From the exit ramp, turn LEFT at the traffic light onto W. Lake Lansing Road.
- Turn LEFT at the second traffic light onto Kerry St. (a Mobil Service Station will be on your left).
- Take the first LEFT off Kerry (just past the Mobil station) and turn LEFT again into La Señorita's parking lot.

## Member News!

**Margo Hoornstra:** Last month, I received two contracts from The Wild Rose Press for the second and third books to be part of their Class of '85 reunion series. They are titled Next Tuesday at Two and To Be, Or Not. The first book, Glad Tidings, came out on December 1 (Not even sure I shared that, you see how behind I am) They project the second to come out in June, the third toward the end of the year.

**Maris Soule:** Now has three books available as e-books on Smashwords.com and is working on making one more of her romances available as an ebook. AS THE CROW FLIES will be released March 16th, but it won't be in book stores until April 6th. She is bringing copies to the retreat.

**Loralee Lillibridge:** Polishing requested proposal for cozy mystery. Finished judging a packet of RITA entries. Attended mystery author Laura Alden's booksigning at Coopersville Library. Considering putting three unsold romance manuscripts on Smashwords as e-books when I have time to figure out the formatting. Getting geared up for Retreat From Harsh Reality in April.

**Ami Weaver:** I finalled in NTRWA's Great Expectations Contest in Contemporary Series. There's a bit of drama with this final, in that I entered it at the last second (literally wrote a query and sent it off in the last hour before the deadline), sent 2 different versions of revisions (email glitch+panic=second guessing myself) so I don't know which version Victoria Curran has. And amazingly, since I don't know, I'm not stressing anymore. However, this is not the way I recommend handling contest finals. In the meantime, I'm working on a new untitled category ms and on the paranormal I wrote for NaNo this year. Also, I'm trying not to lose my sanity as my 14-year-old cheerfully chucks his common sense out the window and trips merrily down the path of academic self-destruction. May we both survive the rest of this school year.

**Lucy Kubash:** Wrote synopsis for a sequel to Chance's. Looking at short stories I want to put on Smashwords and maybe Amazon.

**Anne-Marie King-Jakubiak:** Reached my writing goal.

**Annette Briggs:** I enrolled in The Wild Rose Press retreat in May!

**Dawn Bartley:** Now working full-time in the corporate world after six years. Huge adjustment.

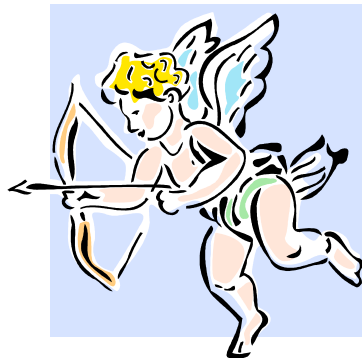
**Karen Holthof:** Three chapters have been considered by TWRP for my romance with suspense elements and they asked for revisions, which I am in the process of.

**Anne Stone:** Been working on WIP. Slow going but I'm trying to work on it everyday. Busy with family. My daughter's senior year – need I say more? Just enrolled in a self-editing workshop for March.

**Alyssa Marble:** 11K into my WIP, doing lots of research to get my characters backstory developed. Took online class in Developing Historical Characters.

**Julie McMullen:** I met writing goal posted at the December meeting. Yea! I've been busy with the Retreat planning and promotion. We have a great Retreat planned for April 29-May 1!

**Florence Price:** I've begun working on the design for the MMRWA display that will be set up in the Saranac Public Library in April. I plan on displaying pictures, books and information on our chapter and our Retreat From Harsh Reality. I'm also working on putting together a video/slideshow featuring the book covers of our published authors, which (when it's finished) will be uploaded to our new MMRWA YouTube Channel.



## THE HISTORY OF SEX (Part 1)

By Lecia Cornwalls

Be warned, dear reader.

This article isn't erotic or racy. It's a fun look at sex throughout history, and how it influences us as writers and human beings today.

Picture your latest hero—is he a pirate, like the alpha males who sailed the bounding main, redrawn in an Armani Suit and standing on the heaving deck of his latest Wall Street takeover? Or is he a knight in shining armor, transformed into a surgeon in a modern hospital? The legends we create on paper reflect the desires of our biology and our social conditioning. Picture a typical love scene as a fair lady wakes up next to her handsome knight, who's just gotten home from slaying a dragon, or maybe a neighbor.

"She woke first, as the morning sun streamed through the window of their luxurious tower room. The light gleamed on colorful tapestries and polished wood, and a fire crackled merrily in the hearth. She turned to look at him, and he smiled that special smile, his teeth even and white. She snuggled deeper into the crisp linens and soft furs and he followed, reaching for her, drawing her close. He smelled of warm wool and masculine scented soap. "Your hair smells like flowers," he whispered. "And your skin is like silk." He kissed her, his mouth warm and sweet, and..."

In reality, it probably went more like this:

"She woke when a servant yelled at a dog for squatting in the rushes. Not that it mattered. The rushes were already full of excrement not to mention fleas, mice and old bones. The sound of the curses carried over the makeshift curtain that separated the lord's bed from the rest of the hall. An icy draft came through the hide-covered windows, blowing smoke around the room. She could smell the privies on the breeze, too. They needed cleaning again. She'd send a lad down the hole on a rope later to break up the clog. Her lord woke when his squire, who slept on the floor beside the bed, farted. Her maid, sleeping on her side of the room, cursed the odor. The hero smiled that special smile, his teeth crooked and yellow. He scratched a pus filled flea bite, and she huddled deeper into the furs, though they smelled of smoke. He followed, farting loudly, the rancid meat from yesterday's stew wreaking its revenge. He smelled like his horse, old sweat and unwashed underwear. It was to be expected, since bath time wasn't for another three months. She hoped he fell into a stream while he was out killing something for dinner. "Your hair is greasy and reeks of cooking odors," he whispered. Her body was hairy and unshaven, her skin pricked by flea bites and those little black rotten spots caused by using lead face powder..."

Okay, maybe the second version was almost as extreme as the first one, but still closer to the truth. The point is that from Cleopatra to Katy Perry, the glamorous image of sex is the one that sells, which is good news for romance writers. Women are the primary influence on sexuality in any culture. This has been true from the dawn of time right up to the women's liberation movement. When men figure out what's going on, they spoil everything by taking control. Let's go way back to a time when men had no idea where babies came from. They thought women got pregnant by a whim of the moon. The ability to create new life resulted in matriarchal societies ruled by powerful mother goddesses and priestesses.

When humans settled down and began farming, men had the opportunity to sit and watch the livestock mating, and finally got the concept of paternity. Don't you wish you could have been a fly on the wall of that cave? Life changed. Men took credit for everything. Women became property, protected from other males to ensure that the children she bore were his. Goddesses like Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love, fertility, sex and war, were replaced by the male gods like Marduk, and downgraded. Ishtar became

the poster girl for King Hamurabi's brilliant ad campaign that put it about that Ishtar sent STDs as a curse against anyone who broke Hamurabi's famous laws.

Men were so thrilled with their new role, that they went right out and founded penis-worshipping cults with (forgive the pun), all male members. They paraded through the streets bearing well-endowed idols, asking which way to the orgy.

Let's visit Egypt, land of Cleopatra, one of the world's most enduring sex symbols. She seduced two of history's most powerful men, and used her sexual wiles (which included her brilliant mind), to manipulate politics in Egypt's favor against the mighty male power of Rome.

Egypt was an intensely sexual culture. They had all the vices and variations, including homosexuality, transgenderism, incest, exhibitionism, prostitution, adultery, bestiality and even necrophilia. They also had many of the sexual virtues we admire—love poetry, respect for their mates, and according to ancient writings, they were inventive, erotic lovers.

Egypt was a matrilineal culture, where all inheritance, came through the female line. To be king, Pharaoh had to marry his sister, who carried the essential spark of divinity. For lesser folk, marrying your sister kept property in the family. Often, these marriages were platonic, and sexual pleasure was found outside marriage, giving Egyptian women a measure of freedom that females in the rest of the ancient world just didn't get.

That brings us to the end of part one of our whirlwind tour of the history of sex. Next month, we'll look at the history of sex in ancient Greece, China, and the middle ages. Please have your passports ready, and line up at the gate...

*The History of Sex is based on a lecture by Lecia Cornwall. Lecia is a member of the Calgary Chapter of RWA. Her debut novel, Secrets of A Proper Countess will be available from Avon March 29, 2011. To read an excerpt and learn more, visit Lecia at [www.leciacornwall.com](http://www.leciacornwall.com)*

## Phaetons, and Crumpets, and Franking, Oh My! Or Reading Historical Research without Running Mad

by Karen Hall

Ah, the dreaded historical novel! So many authors avoid it because of the legions of picky, picky fans who lay in wait to pounce on any small error (or errorette as my Choir Director calls it) the author makes. These are the people who will bombard your web-site with scathing commentary and question not only your creativity but your intelligence as a writer. Can the acronym WTSTL (Writer Too Stupid To Live) be far behind? And while I am a positive Luddite when it comes to technology (yes, the tale you've heard that I own a microwave only because my mother forced it on me is absolutely true) on cold snowy days, I am grateful to the Internet. I can research to my heart's content while clutching a steaming cup of Earl Gray in my oldest most comfortable clothes.

But I digress. Anyone can use the Internet. I am here to recommend several books—yes the actual things with covers and pages that smell of ink!—that are fun, easy reads that will provide you with a plethora of facts and make you look really, really smart at conferences and/or parties. And yes, I OWN EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM!



**AN INCOMPLETE EDUCATION** by Judy Jones and William Wilson. This book boils down such erudite topics as Art History and Economics into readable "bites" (wrong spelling, but I'm a foodie) A must for weaving in social things for your characters to discuss and do.

**UPPITY WOMEN OF THE MEDIEVAL AGES** by Vicki Leon. Who knew this time period could be so much fun? Ms. Leon gives a light-hearted, somewhat irreverent approach to real-life women. Sinners and saints, doctors and blacksmiths abound. The drawings are great too.

**HOW TO MARRY AN ENGLISH LORD** by Gail MacColl and Carol McD. Wallace. If you've read or seen (although it was years ago) *Buccaneers*, based on a novel by Edith Wharton (one of my all time favorite authors) this is the book for you. Newly rich 19th American heiresses flooded London looking for rich, titled husbands (Winston Churchill's mum among them!) From its light, happy tone, you'd never guess this a work of scholarship. A must for lovers of Victoriana.

**REALLY USEFUL-The Origins of Everyday Things** by Joel Levy. A colorful book with brief histories of things we claim we can't live without (including-drumroll please-THE MICROWAVE! In Heaven, my mother is laughing). Especially important to have so you don't have England's George IV "zipping" (or should that be unzipping) his pants.

**VICTORIAN SHOPPING** by Maurice Baren. Yes, Victorians practiced one of our favorite pastimes, and did it with great style. Lots of beautiful color postcards that served as advertisements for the many wares our great-great-grandmothers bought.

**JANE AUSTEN AND CRIME**-Susannah Fullerton. Trivia buffs, and not just Janites, this is for you. More scholarly in tone than the others, but still quite readable. Ms. Fullerton breaks down a variety of crimes committed in the early 19th century (Did you know a relative of St. Jane spent a year in what amounted to imprisonment on charges of shoplifting a piece of lace?) A must for the criminally minded (I mean, if you're writing about it).

**The BICENTENNIAL ALMANAC-200 YEARS OF AMERICAN HISTORY**, edited by Calvin D. Linton, Ph.d. A wonderful resource that goes back to 1776 and outlines happenings by the month and day. A good resource for double checking dates and facts.

**THE TIMETABLE OF HISTORY** by Bernard Grun. Beginning in 5000 BCE until 1990 (ok, my copy is old, like the above book. My birthday is in October if anyone wants to help me out) Using six headers History, Literature, Science, etc, this book like the one above, will quickly supply with you important dates and events. Also useful as a doorstop.

**QUEEN VICTORIA'S LITTLE WARS** by Byron Farwell. What? Moi, reading military history? You bet. This excellent book breaks down every major military conflict during Victoria's very lengthy reign. Mr. Farwell's breaks it down into a series of readable essays and explains why and where each happened. (Remember the Light Brigade? A fiasco.)

Finally, **CLASSICAL MUSIC FOR DUMMIES**. Very helpful if your characters go to concerts and you want to be sure that the composer's work they're hearing was actually written at that time I'd recommend the same title for Opera, but my chapter members would revolt. Just don't have your Regency types go to see La Boheme.

*Karen Hall writes Victorian Romances for The Wild Rose Press. Her current release, Pursuing Love is on sale now. Coming in 2011 be on the look out for the sequel, Lessons in Love. And if you like Christmas all year round, check out her two Christmas short stories A Zebra in the Manger (TWRP) and A Christmas Proposal (available from Books to Go Now).*

*This article first appeared in the February 2011 issue of The Writer's Saddle, the newsletter of the Calgary (CaRWA) Chapter. Permission to forward granted with proper credit.*

# Multimedia for Writers: Creating the Author's Presence Online

by Katie Lovette



Are you branded? When people hear your name, do they immediately think of a certain writing genre or business? Does your readers know when you have an article published, a post on Facebook happens, or your website is updated by the icon that pops up on their wall or twitter account? Does your writing reputation extend beyond those in your local chapter or those who know you personally – and if so, are they biting their nails waiting on your next book?

Without doubt, these are tough question, but probably ones that all writers should address. We are all the chief branding officers of our own personal brands and as writers a brand can determine our fan base or how we are presented to an editor. We have the power to determine and control much of our own careers, whether through our WIPs or what we decide to Tweet. We are able to create our own sense of distinctiveness, trust and confidence. In every environment, from the workplace to the Web, people make choices that affect their personal brand — whether it is who to work with (and who to avoid), who to follow, who to “friend”, or what special message to share in 140 characters.

How you manage your personal brand in any of these mediums will determine how others view you — and ultimately shape your career and your life.

To crystallize your personal brand, as a writer ask yourself what you genre(s) do you write and what do you want to be known for — what differentiates you from all the other writers in that genre? In other words, what skills, abilities, knowledge and attitudes do you have (or are developing) that will make people want to work with, follow or “friend” you — online or off? What writing advice can you offer to others as a friend, blogger, colleague, or author?

How do you create a brand? Below is a list that will aid you in developing a brand that can be easily recognizable.

- Choose an appropriate avatar<<http://personalbrandingblog.com/11-rules-for-best-personal-branding-results-with-avatars/>>, personal logo, icon, picture to use for all social media sites as well as your website. Remember to pick something that represents you in a respected way. For this icon will be with you for many years to come.
- Pick a color theme that immediately allows the readers to understand the genre you write. Example: your website is light pick background with flowers bordering the left side and in the header. There is a picture of a Gibson Girl walking in a flower garden. This picture is above a bench and beside a window with a half arch. What genre are we speaking about? If you said sweet romance or historical you would have it.
- Join brand-related communities on social media (such as LinkedIn Groups, Facebook, and of course Twitter), in discussion forums, newsgroups and mailing lists.
- Create a website that resembles you. Add articles, pictures, links, and any advice to aspiring writers. Sometimes an ‘ask an expert’ website is a great way to entice new readers. Allow them to ask questions about craft or industry.
- Have a social media resume<<http://mashable.com/2009/01/13/social-media-resume/>>of your writing. Build it like a regular resume.
- A personally branded version of a free online tool that your audience will find useful. Google Web 2.0 tools. There are so many tools available for free that finding one that works for your brand shouldn’t be a problem. Create a link for your readers.
- A Personal blog In today’s social media world this is a must! Link this to your website. Run contests that remind your

readers what genre you write. Be sure to use your icon on the blog and on the contest.

- Register your own name as a domain name. If not available, use your personal brand name or some variation that won't confuse people and will still reinforce your brand.
- Syndicate your blog in brand-related sites and networks.
- List your blog in pertinent website, blog and RSS directories.
- Your brand should be found in your email signature, forum signature, all social media and Website personal profiles (like Twitter and YouTube<<http://ning.com/>>) that allow you to fill in a short bio and list your website or blog. Don't forget the software-based personal profiles, like Skype's<<http://skype.com/>>
- The name field in blog comments forms should mention your personal brand name.
- The website field in blog comments forms should point at the website that best brands you, whether your blog, social media resume, LinkedIn profile<<http://linkedin.com/>>, or anything else.
- Use Twitter <<http://twitter.com/>> or other micro-blogging services to network, ask and answer questions, share and learn.
- Create a social bookmarking account (e.g. on del.icio.us<<http://delicious.com/>>) specifically for articles related to your profession or interest, and then encourage people to help you find related articles.
- Arrange to have bios posted about you on Wikipedia <<http://wikipedia.com/>>, Knol <<http://knol.google.com/k/>>, Squidoo <<http://squidoo.com/>> and other user-generated media.
- On your Facebook site launch a Facebook Page <<http://www.facebook.com/advertising/?pages>>about your industry niche.
- Tie together everything in a dedicated Friend Feed<<http://friendfeed.com/>>profile that allows people to follow your online activities from one source.

Below is a list of other areas online that will help you.

- Produce your own podcasts (audio or video).
- Dedicated video channels for you on sites like YouTube.
- Launch an online initiative related to your profession.
- Participate in other online initiatives to get noticed.
- Put out press releases when you have a newsworthy accomplishment to share.
- Write op-ed articles for mainstream media.
- Start a newsletter about your field of expertise.
- Conduct (free?) webinars about up and coming topics.
- Create your own products.
- Grow an affiliate network to promote your products, which means they're also promoting you.
- Likewise, promote products that you can recommend which those buyers will.

- Leave insightful comments on related blogs.
- Have online chats or Q&A sessions about brand-related topics.
- Guest post on pertinent blogs.
- Interview industry celebrities, trendsetters and other people of interest.
- Be one of those people of interest and get interviewed on related topics.
- Post presentations you've given on topic, such as by publishing them on your LinkedIn profile and blog.
- Write an eBook.

Remember it is about you the author and what you write. When I first started writing in this industry, it was about promoting your work. All that has changed. Now it's about you. Once the reader knows you then the next step is about the book. Go for the personal interaction and the book sale will come.

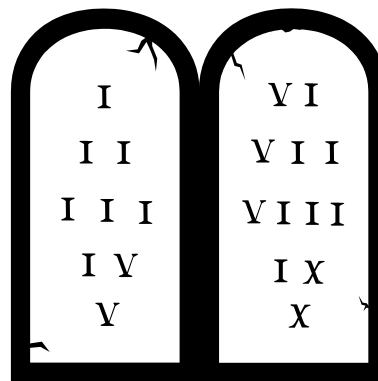
*Katie Lovette teaches media at Pellissippi State Technical Community College.*

## Twips for Tweeps: Or Ten Do's & Don'ts for Using Twitter as a Promotional Tool

by Lisa Hughey

Twitter has grown from a little networking site to over 200 million users. There are many varied, creative uses for the social networking site. If you aren't just using Twitter to connect with friends, shadow your favorite celebrities, or follow a particular cause or political party, but also to interact with your audience (readers) as a promotional tool, here are some general reminders of what you should and shouldn't do.

1. Don't openly diss agents, editors or other writers: No matter how much you think they have wronged you, an open forum like Twitter is not the place to voice your discontent. All you will do is torpedo your career.
2. Do retweet: If your friend, colleague, favorite author has good news, retweet. Share the love. Good news should be celebrated by everyone.
3. Do promote current blog posts: If you guest post on a website, let your followers know. If you've posted a new recipe on your own blog, let your followers know! Twitter is a promotional tool. Use it.
4. Don't rant: If someone cuts you off in traffic, please don't give followers a three or four tweet rant on it. If someone gives you a bad review or doesn't choose your workshop to be included in a conference, don't complain about it to your Twitter followers. Vent to your friends or vent to yourself but don't, don't vent to your readers.
5. Do share interesting articles or research tidbits: Especially if they relate to the business of publishing or promote your agent, publisher, or friends. Or if you find out some really fascinating information about how violets grow and your story is about a Violet Hunter, then share.



6. Don't talk about religion or politics: Just as it holds true at dinner parties, your position on religion and your political affiliation are going to be controversial for someone. Discussing either subject leaves you open to arguments and rants from someone who follows you. Conversely, if you follow someone and they post something you feel is incendiary...unfollow them but don't argue with them!

7. Do network with publishing professionals you don't personally know: It's okay to post responses to an author whose work you admire. It's such a small business. You may even know some of the same people. But don't DM them requesting they buy your book. You also want to follow people in the publishing industry. There are editors, publishing houses, agents all on twitter who sometimes run impromptu TweetChats. Lots of great information about what the editors/agents do and don't want to see is available. But you need to follow them.

8. Do use organizational software: If the number of people you are following has gotten crazy large, use organizational software. Use TweetDeck, HootSuite, Echofon. There are many software tools out there to help you create group filters. Maybe you need separate filters for actors you follow, publishing industry professionals, chapter members, critique group members, close friends. Create filters for them all, that way you can get your tweets organized for more efficient reading.

9. Don't over-share: No one needs to know that you are sick of your husband leaving his underwear on the bathroom floor, or that your son has the stomach flu and puked all over his bedroom. Instead, post something that alludes to your problems without going into specific agonizing detail. Make it clever, make it cute, make it suggestive, but don't be graphic!

10. Do be professional: Twitter is a promotional platform. Every tweet puts you and your author brand out into the Twitterverse. Don't post indiscriminately. Pause for three seconds and think...is this something you want associated with your name? Then press send or delete the tweet.

Happy Tweeting!

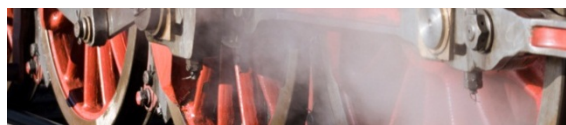
P.S. One last personal Don't: Don't post your children's names (mine have nicknames which I use when I'm proud of them or want to strangle them) online. It's just a good safety precaution.

*Lisa Hughey is an avid romance reader and aspiring author. She has several projects under submission with publishers and spends her time on the web at [www.pensfatales.com](http://www.pensfatales.com) and on Twitter @lisahughey. Come visit!*



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MARCH BABIES!**

**JACKIE BRAUN, LYNETTE CURTIS & CYNTHIA IRISH**



**S**teampunk  
by Val Roberts

Over the last six months, I've noticed two things editors are asking to see more of, YA and Steampunk. Apparently both genres are on their way to being the Next Big Thing. Only time will tell which of them makes it (my fingers are crossed for both), but Steampunk is the genre that consistently has writers scratching their heads trying to figure out what it is.

Steampunk, when boiled down to its essence, is historical science fiction. Sometimes it has paranormal elements, but it is normally gadget-centric rather than beastie- or magic-centric. Examples include the movies *Wild, Wild West*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Sherlock*, *Van Helsing*, and even *The Golden Compass*.

The word "steampunk" was coined in the middle 1980s to describe a branch of alternate-history speculative fiction, just about the same time William Gibson popularized "cyberpunk" with the novel *Neuromancer*. Steampunk isn't necessarily dystopian the way cyberpunk is, however; it's more interested in airships, brass goggles, and giant gears.

In Steampunk worlds, beloved Victoria Regina is safe in Windsor Palace and having nothing to do with the problem at hand, which might be a giant squid menacing the Strait of Gibraltar, or how Jack The Ripper escaped from a locked room at Scotland Yard, never to kill again. Government isn't necessarily corrupt, and often tasks the lead character with investigating the initial situation.

And then there are the gadgets—giant mechanical spider transport, anyone? Or a submarine powered by giant brass coal-fed boilers, then, if spiders aren't to your taste? Whatever a writer's imagination can come up with given the constraints of Victorian-era science and technology is a viable steampunk gadget. They don't even have to be practical; these were the people who put skirts on piano legs, after all.

Steampunk has spread beyond its literary beginnings, too. You can find steampunk jewelry, steampunk fashion, steampunk online role-playing games, steampunk blogs and conventions. It's almost as if we had to pass through the form-follows-function minimalism of the middle twentieth century to get back to the point where we, as readers, writers, and other artistic creators-of-stuff could appreciate the sensibilities of the age of steam.

A few misguided souls have suggested that works by Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle can be counted as Steampunk titles, which is roughly equivalent to confusing a 1914 Detroit Electric Car sedan with a 2010 Toyota Prius. Those venerable authors were writing inventing speculative fiction, not reinventing it with a twist. It's a matter of historical record that Verne, Wells and Doyle influenced the scientists and engineers of a generation.

If you're interested in reading a few books to see if you like the genre, I can recommend *The Iron Duke*, by Meljean Brook, *Steamed!* by Katie McCallister, and, for zombie fans, *Boneshaker* by Cherie Priest.

*Val Roberts is an active member of CBC-RWA. Her science fiction debut, *Blade's Edge*, spent many weeks at the top of Samhain's best-seller list. Visit Val at [www.valroberts.wordpress.com](http://www.valroberts.wordpress.com)*

## Striving for Perfection: The Climb

by Tina Glasneck

A cold wind blew against my back, pushing me forward. I shivered. My thin coat did nothing to protect me from its harsh bite. Instead, focused on the mountain before me, I marched onward, pulling the thin wool jacket tighter around me. Each step brought me closer to my goal until it happened. I fell.

My perfection was soiled. Ducks leave it on the shores of ponds and lakes; dogs leave it in parks and horses make it in piles. It is odiferous, sticky and its stench is hard to get rid of. My desire to reach the apex was stopped by my face being dredged in the large pile of black horse apples.

The path to publication can be filled with obstacles, some self-made and others inherent to the course. Each year the publishing industry is flooded with new writers. Between 2008 and 2018, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts an influx of fifteen percent of new writers into the job market. Each year brings new writers, a new pool seeking representation, and a chance to accomplish the dream of publication.

When it comes to writing, just as with a stroll, things can come up which distract and cause the goal to flounder and that which could have been perfect to become imperfect. Yet, how, in light of such a setback, does one get back on track?

### Rise

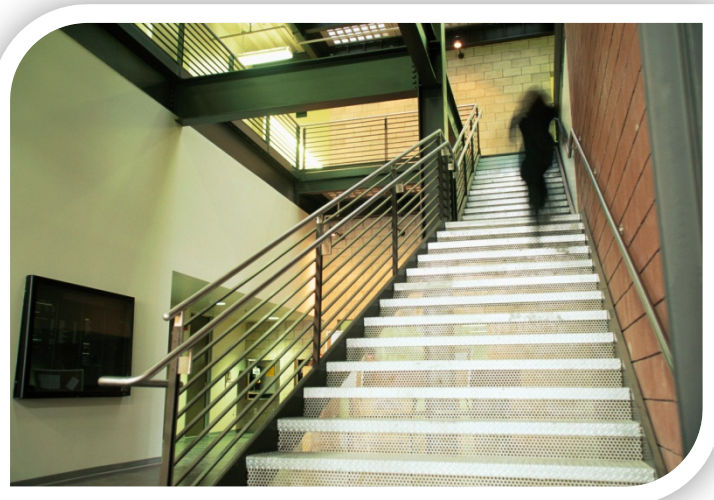
We learned to walk by falling; we learned to hold our balance and to place one foot after the other. It was a slow process, but each moment, as babies, we tried it again and again until we were able to accomplish what seemed like such a large task. Now, we walk rarely falling. Our shoulders are pulled back and we do it without thinking. It took years to get to the place of self confidence, to that ability, but over time and with practice, we accomplished it.

Acknowledge the disappointment. Through it we learn and grow as writers.

### Wash and Redress: Revise and Resubmit

Once a setback occurs, it is necessary to cleanse oneself of the dreck. Surround yourself with trusted friends and family and allow their healing words to wash over you. Writing can be lonely, but friends, family and communicating with other writers can be cathartic. Their presence has the power to revitalize us and help us to be able to achieve more. With renewed strength, through an emotional and/or analytical cleansing, we can address the problem.

Here is where one must ask the difficult questions: Is the characterization three-dimensional? Does the dialogue ring true to the different characters? Showing or telling? Is there too much narration? Is the plot viable? Is there enough conflict? Since we now know what to expect through our misstep, our eyes can recognize the deficiencies. We're now on the lookout for any mistakes, errors, or necessary changes. It's part of the revision process.



Revisions are part of what makes us grow in our craft, and makes the end product enjoyable for the reader.

If a story is getting rejected, it is a good idea to reanalyze it. Is there anything that can make it a stronger story? Is there any change that can be made to improve the manuscript? Revisions are always necessary.

Walk on

Just as critique groups provide feedback on the actual manuscript, it is imperative for new writers to learn about the business of writing. There are many unscrupulous people and businesses looking to prey on the uninformed. Although writing can be a lonely pastime, it doesn't have to be. Get connected with other writers, those that have been in the business for a while and soak up whatever you can. Take advantage of the offered conferences, workshops, and abundance of literature about the craft and business aspect of writing. Professional associations, like Romance Writers of America, offer new writers a smorgasbord of information to help get them started. Each step that you take to achieve the impossible dream brings you closer to fulfillment. Remember, the professional writer was also once a novice. Be inspired by the climb before you, the chill in the wind and the chance of getting stink on your face. Only those that participate in the climb have the chance of taming the mountain.

I stomp forward and I hope you will too.

*Tina Glasneck is a writer of craft articles, short stories and theological thrillers with a twist of romance. She enjoys creating heroes with bite, villains with motives and a plot with an impeccable pace. She is currently working on ANGELS CRY, the follow-up novel to THOU SHALL NOT, which she plans to release late this summer. Visit her at [www.tinaglasneck.com](http://www.tinaglasneck.com) and [www.tanglemagazine.com](http://www.tanglemagazine.com).*

## The First Page of Your Novel

By Karen Hudgins

**W**riting a first page for a new novel is often a formidable task for a writer. Understandable, as the first page has a purpose and role like no other in the book, and is as significant as a baby's first steps. For one thing, it's a unique time and way for putting an author's best foot forward through showcasing their voice to readers, to tantalize (hook), raise questions, and simply promise readers they're sliding into a good read. Much can happen at first-sight—on the surface, between the lines, or subliminally. So there's much to do and consider. These notes should help writers reach their goal: creating a fab first page!



It's easy to see that no two first pages are alike. Yet, there are some universal elements expected by readers and are inherent to story structure. Initially, everyone needs oriented. Keeping it simple, paying attention to readability and interest, works well for ushering readers into a story. Offer something familiar to readers, easy to recognize or identify with, or to gain a foothold. Then, once they're on-board by page two, blast them into fantasy. At first, have characters engage in an action that has to do with his her social context, fits the genre and the situation, and what's to come. For more orientation, it's important to clue the reader into location and the time. Are they reading an historical or contemporary, and does the story unfold in Wyoming, or in space? For stronger openings authors should avoid cliché openings like the weather, or long descriptions, information dumps, or gimmicks that are obvious hooks meant for shock value and little else.

If opening with dialogue, authors ought to give it punch, intrigue, because readers don't know the characters yet. It's just too soon, and they have no sympathy for them. Introduce likable characters in an easy-to-understand situation/moment...one that shows there are things at stake here, things can get worse, and they're worth worrying about. Reveal character attitude and/or emotion for "pull power."

At least hint at a conflict on the first page. There are countless conflicts, but what's this one? And we all know--no conflict, no book. The most effective, admirable first pages also reflect the underlying story theme or question. They could open a can of worms that gets closed by the end, making a story circle--in addition to character arc for growth, change, and realism. A seed planted on page one.

Content and writing style on the first page sets the tone and mood for the story. Good pacing for the opening scene is crucial. Starting at the right place is crucial. Save background or details for weaving later into the story. Remember, we start with something compelling going on, or is about to happen.

Sometimes an author believes they have what they want or need as the opening, then later discover what they really have is paragraph two or three. Nothing says they can't add more material later for a better, solid opening. It's all legal.

Plant a sense of immediacy; vary sentence structures, offer narrative and dialogue for visual appeal. The book cover, the title, the back cover blurb are all "warm-ups" for Page One that intentionally scoops up readers and takes them to page two, and so on. If it's done well, is strong, on the beam with solid good writing and an understanding of how the beginnings of novels tick, first pages can rock. Good ones sell good books. That's why so much emphasis is put on them, and contests are built to honor the best. Not easy, but an author can tweak page one throughout writing the book, if that's what it takes. So relax, sort of.

A suggested exercise is to survey first pages of books at the bookstore or library or in your e-reader. Doing this reaps a volume of instant comparisons and examples, soon patterns even emerge, and a sense of why editors are acquiring those books. After all, books are the best teachers.

Prologues are another kind of opening. Prologues work for two reasons: Time gap exists and scene holds critical info to the story, or there's a critical part of the backstory that's plot relevant, which reader needs to know up front. Everything else weakens the work, and authors risk them not being read at all.

Writing first pages are indeed a challenge, but they are the best, built-in opportunity for gaining readerships. So studying them, writing them wisely, and appreciating them are all part of an author's job. Strive for the strongest beginnings and reap the early benefits by page two...and beyond. First impressions are lasting, every time, every book. Make them count.

*Karen Hudgins continues to write contemporary romantic fiction and has produced five published novels since 2001. She's a mom, holds a B.S. degree, and joined MORWA in 1992. Karen also dabbles in digital Photography, particularly liking nature. She works part-time for a university and lives with her husband, dog and cat. Visit Karen at [www.karenhudgins.com](http://www.karenhudgins.com) and her publisher at [www.wingsepress.com](http://www.wingsepress.com).*

## Member Websites and Blog Addresses

Lucy Kubash	<a href="http://www.lucynaylorlukubash.blogspot.com">www.lucynaylorlukubash.blogspot.com</a>
Maris Soule	<a href="http://www.MarisSoule.com">www.MarisSoule.com</a> ; <a href="http://marissoule.com/blog/index.php">http://marissoule.com/blog/index.php</a>
Sue Charnley	<a href="http://www.susancharnley.com">http://www.susancharnley.com</a> ; <a href="http://waitwhostolemychocolate.blogspot.com">http://waitwhostolemychocolate.blogspot.com</a>
Tracy Roper	<a href="http://rueallyn.com">http://rueallyn.com</a> (Rue Allyn/erotic romance pen name) <a href="http://www.TracyBrogan.com">www.TracyBrogan.com</a>

## To Contest or Not To Contest

by Kristi Lea

The glittering world of the RWA contest circuit is like Las Vegas. Shiny lights and flashy neon signs are everywhere. For whatever romance subgenre you write, there is a contest begging you to enter. Those finalist lists beckon like Powerball numbers. You can see your name in print. You can get your work in front of an editor. You can win a certificate, a gift card, a pendant, a cake server, a cool graphic for your website. But before you start feeding twenties into the great Contest Slot Machine, you need to take a step back and think about what you are doing and why.



### The Prestige

You covet that Golden Heart-shaped pendant. Just a little. And if you don't, it might just be because you have one of them already. Few of us are immune to the excitement of the Golden Heart contest, and the glamor of the awards ceremony. The dresses. The shoes. Come on, admit it: you have totally rehearsed your acceptance speech (even if you've never entered). I know I have.

Winning is fun. Winning is exciting. Winning is not the same as getting published. I know authors whose manuscripts final in contest after contest, but don't get published. I know writers who never final in any contests and still land multi-book contracts with big-name houses. And, yes, I know authors who land publishing contracts as a direct result of contest entries. Every writer needs to sort out their own priorities: is it more important to see your name in the "Contest Finalist" column of the RWR, or in the "First Sale" column? And while you are entering contests, are you also submitting to agents and editors?

### The Feedback

A lot of writers enter contests for the feedback. Or so we say. Contests are good for testing the waters with a new manuscript idea, and for getting objective feedback from people who don't have to look you in the eye afterwards.

Contest feedback can be great. And it can be a huge motivation killer. Every time I read my own contest feedback, I stop writing for days or even weeks. Even if you final. Even if you get a perfect score. It is way too easy to fret over every point deduction ("Why a 4 and not a 5 in conflict?")

Contest feedback can also be painfully cruel or completely off-the-wall strange. As someone who frequently sees a difference of 40% between my highest and lowest scores in the same contest, I know. It is difficult to sort out which comments will help your manuscript and which won't. It is even more difficult when the feedback that is the harshest points out a real problem with your work.

There are other ways of getting feedback on your writing. Find a critique group or partner. Meet regularly (online or in person). Until you get to know a critiquer, take all feedback with a grain of salt. Some contests will tell you a bit about the judge—whether they're Pro or Published, for example. But "published" doesn't always mean "published in the specific genre being judged". You have to know your critiquers and trust them, as well as put their feedback into context. Can a multi-published author who writes series contemporaries give spot-on feedback for single-title-length paranormal world building? Maybe, maybe not. Getting to know the people behind the feedback is essential to really using it effectively.

Consider the old adage of "What goes around comes around." Spending time critically reading other writers' work can teach you so much about how to improve your own writing. And when you develop relationships with critiquers, you are building your support system (and your cheering section). You need someone to thank at that Golden Heart podium besides "Judge number YA001".

## The Exposure

Savvy writers only enter contests where the final judge is someone "good". Finalling in a contest guarantees you that your work will land you a few minute's time with your dream agent or editor. Have you queried that dream agent? Have you submitted to that dream editor? It is true that many editors do not accept unsolicited submissions, so a contest may very well be your golden ticket to fame and fortune. But not all final judges require a contest. Sometimes a plain ol' email or an in-person pitch session will have better results.

Keep in mind that it is no secret which editorial houses only accept agented submissions. If you are drooling over the prospect of Senior Editor Jane Doe of Publisher XYZ, then so are a few hundred of your fellow RWA members. And while I'm sure you're entering your best work, so is your competition. I have helped coordinate entries for a chapter contest and I can tell you that the competition for those top three slots is fierce and subjective. Manuscripts that get perfect scores in some contests will be solidly middle-of-the-pack in others.

## Supporting a Cause

I have contests that I enter because the proceeds go to a good cause. Whether it is a charity auction or my local RWA chapter contest, I know that my money is going to make a positive difference. In the case of my local chapter, I know exactly what programs are funded by my contest fees, and I support my chapter contest wholeheartedly. I benefit directly from it, and I volunteer my time to make sure it is a success. Everyone has to decide for themselves whether it is worthwhile to enter a contest for charitable reasons. It very well might be.

## The Bottom Line

Some writers will tell you that writing is not about the money. They do it for the love of the craft. Bullpuckey. Writing itself might be about love of the craft, but none of us are entering contests just for the thrill of filling out a webform. We aren't pursuing publication for love. We are doing it for the recognition of our mastery of the craft. And that translates into money.

RWA does not encourage us to treat our writing as a spiritual journey. We are a business. And every business, no matter how fledgling, has to consider the bottom line. Entering contests takes time and money. We all know that time is money, therefore entering contests takes money and more money.

Last year I spent \$200 entering RWA contests. I know writers who regularly spend more than that. For my trouble, I earned two second place certificates and no requests from the final judges to see more of my work. None. Zip, zero, zilch. One of my certificates wasn't even paper—it was a digital certificate.

Without spending a dime, I also submitted multiple queries and manuscripts and received a full request from one agent and full-manuscript rejections from two editors. Those stats aren't contract offers, but they do represent progress. I don't even think I submitted my work to enough places.

The time I spent formatting and polishing versions of the first 25 pages (or 20 pages, or 10,000 words, with or without a 1/2/3 page synopsis) was time I didn't spend submitting my work to agents and publishers. It was time I didn't spend polishing pages 26 and on. It was time I didn't spend starting a new manuscript.

What else can you spend your money on that would help you improve your writing? What about books on craft, a class at a local university, an online class, a regional writers conference? What about a latte per week at the local coffee shop where you meet with your critique partners?

## Decision Time

Am I advocating boycotting RWA writing contests? Nope. I plan to enter a few myself this year. But I do advocate treating each contest decision as a business decision. Weigh the pros and cons of each contest before clicking that PayPal button. And look at your alternatives. Is your time and money best spent chewing your fingernails for three months waiting on the finalist list? Or is it better, this time, to send a few queries and pick up that book on plotting that you've heard so many good things about.

*Kristi Lea is a member of the Missouri RWA chapter. Learn more about her at: [www.kristilea.com](http://www.kristilea.com).*



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### **RETREAT FROM HARSH REALITY 2011**

**April 29-May 1, 2011**

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### **OUR GUEST SPEAKER: CINDY DEES!**

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### **The Site –**

### **A fabulous place to relax and be inspired!**

The Yarrow Golf & Conference Resort in Augusta, Michigan is the perfect setting to kick back, open your mind, and reconnect with your muse. Magnificent scenery and unparalleled hospitality make Yarrow the place to rest, relax and renew your creativity.

**CINDY DEES** started flying airplanes while sitting in her dad's lap at the age of three and got a pilot's license before she got a driver's license. After earning a degree in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Michigan, she joined the U.S. Air Force and became the youngest female pilot in its history. She flew supersonic jets, VIP airlift and the C-5 Galaxy, one of the world's largest airplanes. During her military career, she traveled to forty countries on five continents, was detained by the KGB and East German secret police, got shot at, and flew in the first Gulf War. Her hobbies include medieval reenacting, professional Middle Eastern dancing, and Japanese gardening.

In 2010, she won a RITA award for Best Contemporary Series--Suspense and Adventure. She's a Golden Heart winner, Holt Medallion, Reader's Choice, and Bookseller's Best finalist, and a Romantic Times Lifetime Achievement Award nominee. This author's first book was published in 2002 and since then she has published over thirty novels. She loves to hear from readers and can be contacted at [www.cindydees.com](http://www.cindydees.com).

### **THE SESSIONS:**

#### **PUTTING THE "BIG" IN BIG, COMMERCIAL FICTION:**

Every editor you ask these days says they're looking for a book with big, commercial elements. Cindy Dees will walk us through what they really mean and how to build "big" and "commercial" characters, relationships, and scenes and plots to meet the demands of an ever more competitive publishing industry.

#### **BETWEEN THE COVERS: a Q & A Session about the Writing Process**

Cindy will answer questions about the journey of writing your book from "Page One" to "The End" and offer tips on characterization, plotting, setting and anything else you may be interested in.

## RETREAT SCHEDULE

### FRIDAY, 4/29

6-7:00 p.m.	Registration
6:30-7:30	Dinner
7:30-8:00	Dessert - Chocolate Anyone?
8:00-9:00	Official Welcome & Ice Breaker
9:00 - ?	Bed, relaxation, private critiques...

### SATURDAY, 4/30

7-9:00 a.m.	Breakfast
8:00-9:00	Registration
9:00-9:15	Welcome
9:15-10:30	<b>Cindy Dees - "Putting the BIG in Big Commercial Fiction"</b>
10:45-12:00	Mini-Sessions/Writing Session
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:00	Book Sale & Author Signing
2:00-3:00	<b>Cindy Dees: "Between the Covers," a Q &amp; A Session about the Writing Process</b>
3:00-4:30	Mini-Sessions/Writing Session
4:30-5:00	Champagne Celebration: Angel Award, First Sales, PRO Pin Recognition, Toot Your Own Horn
5:00-6:00	Book Basket Raffle, Silent & Live Auctions (proceeds benefit the YWCA Domestic Assault Program)
6:00-7:00	Dinner
7:00-9:00	Muse Sessions or Time on your own

### SUNDAY, 5/1

7-9:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00-9:30	Chapter Meeting
9:30-11:00	Romance/Biz Round Table with <b>Cindy Dees</b>
11:00-12:00	Retreat Wrap-Up
12:00	Adjournment

\*\*\*All activities are slated to be held in the Main Lodge in the Dogwood Room. Meals will be held in the Evergreen Dining Room, also at the Main Lodge.

### THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- **Registration will be open through April 15, 2011. You may make a minimum deposit of \$50 to hold your spot with the balance due by April 15.** Registrations for weekend packages may be accepted after April 15th if space remains. Please contact Julie at [retreat@midmichiganrwa.org](mailto:retreat@midmichiganrwa.org) to verify availability and pricing. No refunds can be made after April 15th. Final room arrangements are due by April 15th. A limited number of Saturday on-site registration spots will be available.
- **Published Author Critiques:** MMRWA's published writers are again offering one-on-one critiques for only \$15.00. For this amount, you will receive an in-depth critique of your first fifty pages and your synopsis, either in person at the Retreat, by phone or by mail. Contact **Dawn Bartley** at [members@midmichiganrwa.org](mailto:members@midmichiganrwa.org) or see our website for more information.
- **Muse Sessions:** Bring your own work in progress to share with other writers and get great feedback and suggestions for improvement. We suggest you focus on your main characters, your plot/timeline or your 5-page synopsis and/or query letter for a small group brainstorming session. Detailed information will be e-mailed with your pre-Retreat packet.
- **Desserts and goodies:** Bring your favorite dessert to share Friday night!
- **Want to relax an extra day or play golf on a championship course?** Contact Julie at [retreat@midmichiganrwa.org](mailto:retreat@midmichiganrwa.org) for information. These reservations must be paid in full by the Retreat deadline.

Confirmation via email will be sent upon receipt of your registration form. Directions and additional pre-Retreat information will be sent two weeks before Retreat. To reserve a space, you may send a *partial payment* but **full payment must be received by April 15**. One night stays can be arranged. **Please notify me if you require special room arrangements or have special dietary needs.** Questions? Contact Julie at [retreat@midmichiganrwa.org](mailto:retreat@midmichiganrwa.org) or visit our website at [www.midmichiganrwa.org](http://www.midmichiganrwa.org).

## RETREAT FROM HARSH REALITY 2011 REGISTRATION

### April 29-May 1, 2011

*Circle the package you want, write amount in Subtotal column, add critique if desired & fill in Grand Total.*

Package Choice (Weekend includes room & Board)	Total for MMRWA Member	Total for non-MMRWA Member	Subtotal
Weekend - Double Occupancy (2 persons per room)	\$195.00	\$205.00	
Weekend - Single Occupancy	\$280.00	\$290.00	
Sat. only with breakfast & lunch	\$65.00	\$75.00	
Sat. only with breakfast, lunch & dinner	\$85.00	\$95.00	
<b>Want a Critique by a published author?</b> \$15.00 per critique			
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>			

*Each Standard Room has two double beds and a bath for either a Single or Double occupancy. Limit of two people per room. Friday night dinner, Saturday breakfast, lunch & dinner, and Sunday breakfast are included with the full weekend package.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

*(Email will be used only to confirm receipt of your registration and for 2011 Retreat-related information.)*

Please print your name as you wish it to appear on your name badge: \_\_\_\_\_

If sharing a room, you MUST list your roommate: \_\_\_\_\_

*(If you do not know who your roommate will be, assume you'll be in a single when you make your payment - or pay the deposit minimum of \$50 until you determine your room arrangements. If you pay a higher rate, we'll refund the difference if you end up with a roommate. We have a block of 25 rooms reserved until the April 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. All payments must be received in full before Retreat or your room will not be held at our lower rates.)*

Do you have any special room needs or food allergies we should know about?

**You may pay a minimum deposit of \$50 to reserve your spot at Retreat. Additional forms and brochures available at [www.midmichiganrwa.org](http://www.midmichiganrwa.org). Make checks payable to MMRWA and send this form (or a copy) & your payment to:**

**MMRWA Retreat**

**P.O. Box 2725**

Kalamazoo, MI 49003-2725

**All advance registration fees must be paid in full by: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2011**  
There will be a limited number of one-day on-site registration slots available (cash/checks only).

**Questions? Contact Julie at [retreat@midmichiganrwa.org](mailto:retreat@midmichiganrwa.org)**

## Final Reflections

### *My First Time*

By Tracy Brogan

I remember my first time like it was yesterday. I was sixteen. Much too young to be doing what I was doing. But there was this smokin' hot pirate who I simply couldn't resist. I'm talking about, of course, reading my very first romance novel. Wait... what did YOU think I was talking about? Well, anyway, the memory of Jonathan Creighton Hale and his unbridled lust for Lady Catherine Aldley still burns fresh in my mind.

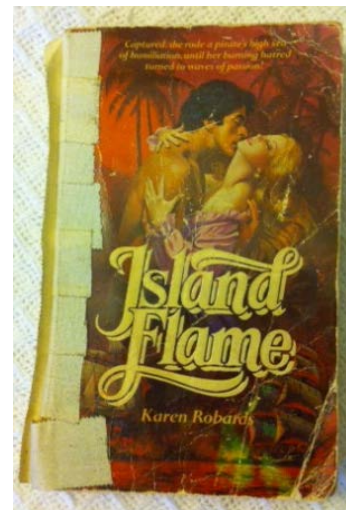
You see, my mother, two older sisters, and I were driving to Walt Disney World. Imagine, for a moment, four mostly grown-up women crammed into a Chevette, driving straight to Orlando from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Nothing says family vacation like a relaxing twenty-two hour ride in a tiny backseat. But we were ecstatic because we were embarking on our first visit to the Magic Kingdom. All our collective lives we'd been looking forward to this trip. After driving through the night, past Ruby Falls, and Macon County, we were giddy with exhaustion and excitement, not to mention hopped up on Tab and Little Debbie cakes.

Although each of us had a driver's license, my oldest sister drove the entire way. Why? Because my middle sister was more interested in finding Hall & Oates on the radio, I'd only had my permit for a couple of weeks, and my mother couldn't turn left. We didn't have the yet-to-be invented GPS or On-Star. We had maps, and something from AAA called a Trip-Tick. We didn't have game-boys, iPods, cell phones or even a cassette player in the car. It was a Chevette, remember? So the only form of entertainment we had was the radio (gasp!), conversation (aka bickering), or reading. Luckily, a quick stop at an Indiana gas station provided me with a life-altering option. On a rickety wire shelf sat a motley selection of books. Now, we all know how sixteen-year-old girls are nothing if not adaptable, easy-going, simple to please, the list goes on. So needless to say, I was not impressed with the reading selection.

Until one titillating cover caught my eye.

A shirtless man (who bore a striking resemblance to Erik Estrada) was clutching a bosomy vixen against his muscled torso. (She looked like Cheryl Ladd. It was the 80's, people. Work with me, here.) Looking at the cover art, I couldn't quite tell if she was pulling him closer or trying to push him away. The tag line read, "*He claimed her as his pirate's prize – then humiliated her as only a pirate can humiliate a lady.*" "Hmm," I says to myself. "That sounds interesting." So I surreptitiously purchased the book while my mother used the restroom, and I snuck it back to the car.

My secret was soon revealed. As I read, I giggled, I gasped, I flushed, and I sighed. And I finally had to confess what I was reading. I told them about the captivating adventure of Lady Catherine and her untamed pirate (who was secretly a duke, because, come on! Aren't they all? I mean who wants to read about a pirate who's really nothing but a scalawag?) I read aloud lines like, "Yes, she was drunk. Drunk on the heady nectar of his love." The book, *Island Flame* by Karen Robards, is a bodice-ripping cheese-fest at its absolute finest. And I say that with the utmost of affection. (If you never had your bodice ripped, you owe it to yourself to give it a whirl.)



When the gleaming spires of the Magic Kingdom came into view, I asked my sister to please drive a little slower because I wasn't putting that book down until it was finished. I blissfully soaked in the final paragraph just as she put the car in park. Life was good. A few hours later, my heart raced, giddy with joy once again as I climbed into a little fiberglass boat and set off on my own adventure with the Pirates of the Caribbean. The boat bobbed precariously, water splashed, and the hiss and pop of gunfire sounded in the distance. We floated blithely from the cave to suddenly find a huge pirate ship bearing down on us! Cannonballs lobbed into the water, each one closer than the next. And I couldn't help myself. I yelled out, "Don't shoot, Jon! It's Cathy!" And my own mother pretended not to know me.

My copy of *Island Flame* is held together with dingy surgical tape. The pages are yellow and crackle when you turn them. Stylistically, this story might not hold up in today's writing market. Bodice ripping is passé, as the romance industry has realized that seduction may be about persuasion, but it's never about force. And yet, I love this book. It was the first one that truly swept me away to another place (okay, besides Narnia, maybe) and made me want to write. To write about passion, and about history. To elicit powerful emotions and tell an extraordinary story about men and women who might have lived in another time, but loved like there was no tomorrow.