

# 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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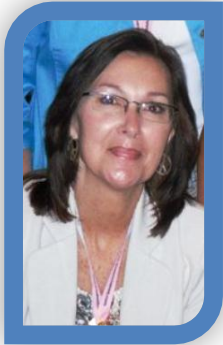
*Welcome New Members!*

**Darcy Woods** is from Williamston and writes YA. She was a finalist in this year's Golden Heart contest!

**Keri Kruspe** is from Manistee and writes paranormal romance. She attained PRO status in 2010 and is currently working on a series.

**Tamara L. Lemon** is from Lansing and writes contemporary romance.

*Glad to have you aboard, ladies!*



## The President's Message

Nominations for the 2012 board positions have been filled! Margo Hoornstra and Rosanne Bittner have both graciously agreed to continue in their current positions, while Alyssa Marble and Jennifer Lowery Kamptner have kindly stepped up to fill the positions of 2012 President-Elect and Secretary, respectively. Thank you, ladies for your continued Chapter involvement. Laurie Kuna will be stepping down from her position as 2012 President due to her extremely busy schedule for next year, so we'll also be voting on a proposal of a one year extension of my President's and Lucy Kubash's Past President's terms to fill the 2012 positions.

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, I participated in the 90 minute RWA Webinar: Introduction to myRWA Chapter Websites. I was surprised to find that this platform will offer many advantages in organization of chapter news, events, member info, etc. to our chapter. First and foremost, there are no fees involved in implementing and using this platform. The program will even offer payment availabilities, such as making dues, contest registration and event registration payable online. The payments would go directly to our chapter, with no fees charged for the processing of the payments, as, for example, there are in PayPal, so the entire payments would go to our Chapter. And, contrary to what I'd initially understood about the program, besides the login feature for members, there will be a page available to display our chapter information to the public. We'll be allowed to link any information we'd like to include on any of the pages of this website. Needless to say, I was extremely impressed with the platform offered by RWA, and I think it would be a great advantage to our chapter to be involved with this program. I'd recommend you all to take a look at the Washington D.C. Romance Writers' (<http://www.wrwdc.com>) new site, which uses the platform. The program even allows us a certain amount of leeway in design, so we could add some individuality to the site, and I'll be putting this topic on the September Meeting Agenda for discussion.

I hope to see many of you at the September meeting that will be held in Kalamazoo this month.

Renci Denham will be presenting the program Personality Disorders, but until then...

Happy Writing!

*Florence*

### Local Conference Announcement:

Cindy Arends and Patty Gordon are members of the Grand Rapids Region Writers Group, which is hosting a writing conference at the Riverfront Radisson in October. Maris Soule and Lisa Childs will be presenters. Info about the conference, and online registration, are available at:

<http://grandrapidsregionwritersgroup.blogspot.com/p/ive-always-wanted-to-write-book-hosted.html>

## MMRWA 2011 MEETING SCHEDULE

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

<b>September 17</b>	Kalamazoo - Personality Disorders by Renci Denham
<b>October 15</b>	Jackson - Point of View by Ami Weaver
<b>November 19</b>	Grand Rapids (Grandville) - Cover Letters by Cindy Arends
<b>December 10</b>	Christmas Party – Location TBD

**This Month's Meeting!**  
**September 17<sup>th</sup> at 11:30am**  
**Brewster's Junction**  
**5135 South Portage Rd, Kalamazoo, MI 49001, (269) 344-0600**

### DIRECTIONS TO: Brewster's Junction

#### **From the North:**

Merge onto US-131 South to I-94  
 Merge onto I-94 E via EXIT 34A toward DETROIT for 4.1 miles.  
 Take the PORTAGE RD exit- EXIT 78-toward KILGORE RD. 0.3 miles.  
 Turn RIGHT onto PORTAGE RD. 0.1 miles.  
 Go 1/4 mile South moving immediately into the left turn lane and turn left at that next light.  
 Brewster's is at that intersection and will be immediately on your right as you turn. Turn right into Brewster's parking lot.

#### **From the West:**

Merge onto I-94 E going toward Detroit.  
 Take the PORTAGE RD exit- EXIT 78-toward KILGORE RD. 0.3 miles.  
 Turn RIGHT onto PORTAGE RD 0.1 miles.  
 Go 1/4 mile South, moving immediately into the left turn lane and turn left at that next light. Brewster's is at that intersection and will be immediately on your right as you turn.

#### **From the East:**

Merge onto I-94 W toward JACKSON.  
 When nearing the Kalamazoo area, Merge onto E KILGORE RD via EXIT 78 toward PORTAGE RD. 0.3 miles.  
 Get into the left lane as you approach the ramp stoplight. This is a Michigan Left/Right intersection; go through the intersection in the left lane and then take the U-TURN to come back and turn right, going south on Portage Road.  
 Go 1/4 mile South, moving immediately into the left turn lane and turn left at that next light. Brewster's is at that intersection and will be immediately on your right as you turn. Turn right into Brewster's parking lot.

#### **From the South:**

Take US-131 N. Merge onto I-94 E via EXIT 34A toward DETROIT. 4.0 miles.  
 Take the PORTAGE RD exit- EXIT 78- toward KILGORE RD.0.3 miles.  
 Turn RIGHT onto PORTAGE RD. 0.1 miles.  
 Go 1/4 mile South, moving immediately into the left turn lane and turn left at that next light.  
 Brewster's is at that intersection and will be immediately on your right as you turn. Turn right into Brewster's parking lot.

## MEMBER NEWS & RECENT SALES

**Jackie Braun:** My April 2008 Harlequin Romance, Expecting a Miracle, is #1 on Kindle's list of best-selling Harlequin Romances and #5 on Kindle's list of best-selling series romances. It's been bopping around between the top couple spots for HRs and has worked its way up from 17 on the series list a couple weeks ago when I first started paying attention. :-)

**Lee C:** Just returned from a weekend at Dragon\*Con. Two complete writer's tracks (and some of the most fascinating people-watching ever). Met several editors/ agents, and half plotted the story arc of my next two books. Very inspiring.

**Rohn Federbush:** After watching 'The View' where the most published author, first name Danielle, talked about working on five books at one time, I don't mind sharing: I'm working on editing one historical romance, one biblical proposal, and one contemporary mystery with ACFW Great Lakes Chapter critique groups. We trade critiquing services. Hope MMRWA is able to set up a like service for unpublished authors like me. My computer guru is working on setting up a blog for me, too. [rohn@comcast.net](mailto:rohn@comcast.net); [www.rohnofferbush.com](http://www.rohnofferbush.com)

**Patty Gordon w/a Patricia Kiyono:** The Legacy, was published by Astraea Press. It's a charity release - all proceeds are sent to victims of the earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster. It's available at [www.astraeapress.com](http://www.astraeapress.com) as well as Amazon, B&N.com, and Bookstrand. Right now it's on sale for only \$1! I'm hoping it makes LOTS of money for Japan Relief. And, since I am so good at finding ways to procrastinate when I should be writing/editing, I have created a facebook fan page for my alter ego. I'd love to get a few "likes"! <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Patricia-Kiyono/149294485148710>

**Lucy Kubash:** Judged in the YA category for the Maggies. Survived the death of my two year old laptop. Finished rewriting two previously published short stories; working on number three to put on Smashwords.

**Laurie Kuna:** Well, I'll be driving Nancy Gideon to Detroit this month to speak at GDRWA's monthly meeting, (I've actually had a valid chauffeur's license for the past 25 or so years) then I'll be GDRWA's speaker in November. Other than that, I want to have my WIP done by the end of the week, but can't seem to keep from distracting myself with pesky things like lawn care, cleaning, taking my father to his doctor's appointment, etc. Of course, to hell with the lawn care and cleaning, I can ignore those two practically forever. But my 88 year old dad, not on your life. In addition to that, Tell-Tale Publishing launches this week with Lorelee Lillibridge's All That Matters, so I'm very proud of being part of that. And, I'm once again coaching volleyball--this time, the 8th grade A team for Lowell--and tryouts begin today.

**Lorelee Lillibridge:** Busy writing blogs for my blog site, Across the Back Fence, designed by My Girl Friday! I had talented cover artist, Pat Lazarus, as a guest blogger. My contemporary romance, ALL THAT MATTERS, was released Sept. 9 by Tell-Tale Publishing for Kindle and Nook. I'll be doing blog tour and interviews Sept 5-23. I've guest blogged for Jennifer Kamptner Lowery, Romance Me and Tracy Brogan. And, I've received glowing 4-book review from Reviews by Molly. I'm working hard on WIP due Oct.15 for Bell Bridge Books. Oh, and I was interviewed by Nancy Gideon for the chapter newsletter.

**Florence Price:** I've had a very busy month working on Lorelee Lillibridge's blog tour for her new book ALL THAT MATTERS, which is launching September 9th, and also working on getting the Romance Me blog (<http://romancemeblog.blogspot.com>) up and running. I'm currently taking a class on putting together a successful blog tour and also judging the YA category for the Golden Pen Contest. See everyone at the September meeting!

**Tracy Roper (Brogan):** I have been busy working on the newsletter ; ) and preparing to pass Editorial duties into the capable hands of Jennifer Lowery Kamptner, who has graciously agreed to take over. I've judged for the Golden Pen, and entered my current WIP into several chapter contests. I've been working with some Golden Heart nominees to develop a history focused website. And I launched "Interview an Awesome Author" series on my own website, TracyBrogan.com. Be sure to keep an eye out for some MMRWA names! In other news, I have succeeded in failing to teach our new puppy that pooping should be done outside.

## ***Between the Covers with Lorelee Lillibridge***

by Nancy Gideon, PAN liaison

Someone, I believe it was Thomas Edison, described a success as not giving up after trying 99 times and succeeding the 100<sup>th</sup>. The road to a publishing career can be summarized that same way. In 2005, Lorelee Lillibridge sold her first book, and in 2011, she sold her second. Lorelee's is a success story. Why? Because she didn't give up before reaching the next goal. To celebrate the release of that second book on September 9, 2011, let's glean some inspiration from our former MMRWA president (and one of my fabulous critique partners!):

Q: About that "second book syndrome"...Share some of the career frustrations you've had since your first book *Accidental Hero* came out with *Silhouette Special Edition* in 2005.

A: Not making an immediate second sale was a real eye-opener for me, as well as a huge disappointment. Since *Accidental Hero* did fairly well in sales for a first book, my high-hopes bubble was deflated big time when a contract for the second submission wasn't offered. I'd heard about the trials and tribulations of that "sophomore book", but optimistic me thought it wouldn't apply to my work. Big surprise! So, over the course of the next few years, I kept submitting, taking time out only for some health issues. Still the "no, thanks" followed from my editor. I just wasn't writing what they were looking for. Revisions, re-submittals, rejections. It was a stressful cycle and I often felt like a hamster on one of those running wheels. Since each submission had to be a full manuscript, it took over a year for each one to come full circle from submission to rejection. That long wait was my biggest frustration.

Q: To what do you attribute that difficulty in getting the second book sold? Market changes? Agent? Timing?

A: The fact that I acquired an agent didn't move the submission process along any faster, even with the agent's efforts. Market changes are always a factor in some way, but I tried to keep up with the latest and still write the story I loved. That probably was one of the reasons I didn't sell. My voice didn't quite fit the line I was targeting. Timing on my part was also a problem, since I'm not the fastest writer on the planet. I eventually parted with my agent because I no longer felt marketable. I was admitting defeat, giving up. I could put the blame on everything listed, but to be honest, I was, and still am, my own worst enemy. In order to sell and sell fast, I needed to turn off my internal editor and simply write the story. To this day, I'm still working on getting rid of that bad habit.

Q: How close did you come to just giving up, and what kept you going?

A: So close I actually stopped writing for a time. I had no agent, no motivation. But I discovered I was miserable, so I tried different genres – single title contemporary romance, mystery, and even a "free-range" writing experiment. My loyal critique group refused to let me get away with walking out. They pushed, pulled, prodded and threatened me with dire results unless I made an effort to write something – anything. I will be forever indebted to them for always being the wind beneath my wings.

Q: Talk about a great rebound! How did it feel to make not one, but Two series sales within weeks of each other?

A: I'm still in shock, believe me! A contract in April and another in July. Unbelievable! I was already contemplating self-publishing as a last resort, convinced there was no longer a place for me in the publishing world I was trying to re-enter. The fact that I'd submitted one of the rejected romances to another publisher and had it rejected there only because they had no romance line for it at the time, led to that manuscript being recommended to a new publishing company that loved it and offered a contract. All That Matters, one of my Texas Hill Country romances, is a September release from Tell-Tale Publishing Group, and I couldn't be happier about being part of their launch. Exciting times here in my corner of the world.

Q: Tell us a little about your new projects and how you came up with the ideas.

A: Small towns are what I know best and I find it easy to write within those city limits. All that Matters is a Cinderella-in-reverse story about Buddy Lee Walker, the hunk on the book cover, (thanks to talented cover artist Pat Lazarus) the hero from the wrong side of town who falls in love with the banker's daughter. An unlikely friendship that turns into a marriage of convenience and love by accident, All That Matters is an emotion-packed story with believable and a touch of small-town humor. I absolutely fell in love with Buddy Lee before I ever found the right heroine for him. I was fortunate that the editors at Tell-Tales fell in love with him, too, and offered a contract along with glowing words of enthusiasm. I was over-the-moon excited.

Though Bell Bridge Books passed on All That Matters because they didn't have a line for romance, they did like my writing and my voice. Urged by my extremely pushy writing cohorts, I reluctantly submitted a proposal for my cozy mystery series, Joyful Noise. That project was the result of the "free-range" writing I did with no goal other than having fun inside the mind of a rebellious preacher's kid all grown up, as she returns to the Southern, ultra-conservative small town to redeem her past and put the shine back on her tarnished halo. Who knew the story would lead to a humorous cozy mystery series that also addresses the bullying issue so prevalent in schools now days? Joyful Noise found its way to Memphis and Debra Dixon and Deb Smith of Bell Bridge Books, who were so enthusiastic about my proposal they offered a two-book contract and enough excitement to spark a party at our RV lake place, where I happened to be when the offer came. I admit to making my own version of joyful noise that Saturday afternoon.

Q: What else is cooking on your creative back burners?

A: My back burners are full and turned up high. Another submission for Tell-Tales will be ready to send very soon. Her Hill Country Man (working title) is all about choices. The right choice isn't always the first one we make, but many times it's the hardest to make. This story is a favorite of mine with a cowboy/cop hero and a heroine, and how their first choices impact their lives in different ways. Another emotional story I hope will make you sigh with satisfaction at the choice they make in the conclusion. A third one is complete and also on a back burner.

The second book in the Joyful Noise series for Bell Bridge is still in the simmer stage, but I promise it will be a fun one, too. More on that as it develops.

Q: How has the market changed since you sold your first book? Any new tricks you've had to learn?

A: Market changes have changed drastically in my opinion. The e-book revolution has impacted the publishing industry in so many ways. Writers are self-publishing right and left, some making millions, others not so much. There are so many opinions out there on the subject. Big publishing houses are trying to catch the ebook wave while still hanging on to their traditional publishing. Readers are becoming more and more familiar with myriad

ways to read their favorite books now, so many brick-and-mortar stores are closing, to the dismay of everyone. Right now, it's a wait and see situation for most of us.

New tricks, technology and upgrades, oh my! Can I tell you I'm still reeling from all the social media, Twitter, Facebook and blogs that are now the responsibility of the writer if they want to get the word out about their books? First time around, my efforts at publicity consisted of a website and some book-signings and speaking engagements. This time, I've discovered that's not enough. I'm poorly equipped to enter this highly-social online network and working with two publishers, I truly don't have enough time. My answer to this dilemma? I hired a virtual assistant. My Girl Friday, a virtual maker of magic, has saved my life on more than one occasion and will continue to do so forever, if I have my way. I would not be able to meet my commitments without her help.

Q: Where can we find out more about you and your books?

A: My website, [www.loraleelillibridge.com](http://www.loraleelillibridge.com) and my blog, Across the Back Fence, <http://loraleelillibridge.blogspot.com/> will give you an opportunity to meet me, read an excerpt of All That Matters and watch the video book trailer.

A new website is in the works for Lora Lee's new venture into the world of cozy mysteries. Watch for it later this year when her double life officially begins.

## HISTORY MYSTERIES (AND REASONS WHY HISTORY IS SO INTERESTING)

by Rosanne Bittner

The following came from an old e-mail I received from someone named Mary Murphy 9 years ago. I have no idea where she got the information, but I printed it off and saved it and I often use it to read to young people when I speak at a schools. They always get a kick out of it, and it helps them appreciate history. Following are some very interesting and "oh my gosh" real facts from history – and a demonstration of the ways in which - in today's ultra-modern world – we continue to be affected by the past.

Did you know that the way they lived in ancient Rome still has a profound affect on us today? I am not talking about the fact that a good share of our language is derived from Latin. I am talking about today's railroad tracks. Yes, railroad tracks – and their width – which has not changed since the Romans conquered half the world and used chariots to get them where they were going!



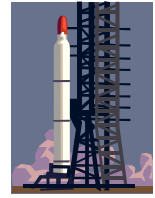
Today's standard railroad gauge (the distance between the two rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. What an odd number, but it is used because that's the way they built railroads in England, and English expatriates built the U.S. railroads.

Why did the English use that gauge? Because before the railroad, tramways were built using that same gauge. Why did they use that gauge for tramways? Because those who built tramways used the same jigs and tools and measurements that were used to build wagons, and wagon wheels were spaced 4 feet, 8.5 inches apart. If wagon wheels were spaced any differently, they would break apart on the roads because that was the width of the ruts in the old dirt roads.

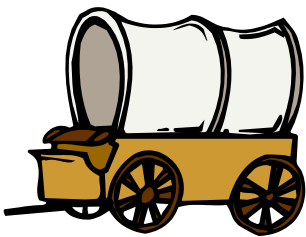
And why were the ruts in the roads that width? Because originally the road ruts in England and in most of Europe and Africa and even parts of Asia were worn into the ground by Roman chariots, and the wheels of those chariots were 4 feet,

8.5 inches apart. And why were they this width? Because the chariots were built just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses!!

Soooo ... The U.S. standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot! But that's not all, folks. Here is an ironic twist!! When sitting on the launch pad, a space shuttle has two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These "solid rocket boosters" (called SRB's) are made by Thiokol at a factory in Utah. The engineers who designed them wanted to make them a bit fatter, but the SRB's had to be shipped by train from Utah to the launch site. The railroad line runs through tunnels in the Rocky Mountains, and if the SRB's were any fatter, they couldn't get through the tunnels, which are only slightly wider than the railroad tracks, which you now know are only wide enough to fit two horse's behinds. So a major space shuttle design feature of what is the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's ass!!! And you thought being a Horse's Ass was not important!



Yes, history can be surprisingly interesting! Save this, dear readers, and read it to your children or grandchildren when they ask why they have to bother learning history. It helps them understand that history can be fun! Following are some very interesting facts that come from a writer named Priscilla A. Maine, who sent me this in an e-mail also in 2002. I would first like to quote something she wrote that perfectly fits the reason I write western historicals ...



"My great-grandmothers came west with a wagon load of dreams. They birthed and buried their infants alone, plowed fields, outlived husbands, survived dust bowls and the Great Depression. It is their hardships, tragedies, and triumphs that inspire my writing."

Following are some wonderfully interesting facts in Priscilla's e-mail:

The reason June is a popular month for weddings is because in the early days most people took their "yearly" baths in May, when it was getting warm and they couldn't stand how they smelled after the long cold winter. These baths didn't always get rid of all the smell, so brides carried bouquets to help hide the body odor! And because water was not always handy, in areas where it was scarce the man of the house came first. He got the nice, clean water. Then came the sons, and finally the women and children, who all used the same water! Because children were last, we are left with the term, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water!"

Ever hear someone say, "It's raining cats and dogs?" Well, in the old days many houses had a thatch roof (thick straw piled high). Because in winter it was warm there, small animals would sometimes climb up onto the roof to burrow in. When it rained these roofs sometimes became slippery ... and well, you can figure out the rest. Of course, there wasn't anything to keep bugs and such from falling into the house either, so women would hang sheets on a four-poster bed to keep rodents and insects from falling onto the bed. And thus we have the "canopy bed."

The floors in these houses were, of course, dirt. Only the wealthy had wood floors – thus the term "dirt poor." See? Didn't I tell you history can be interesting? And sometimes the wood (slat) floors of the wealthier people would get slippery in winter, so they would spread straw on the floor to help keep from slipping. As they kept adding fresh straw, it would sometimes build up enough that when the door was opened some of it would get pushed outside. They therefore built wooden barriers across the bottom of the doorway – and thus we have "thresh holds."



In the old days families were big (often extended families lived together) and thus they were always eating. Because of this a woman of middle-income or poor families would keep a large kettle hanging over the fire always filled with something to eat. As people ate from the kettle, the woman would continue adding a little water and salt and fat keep throwing in leftovers and pretty much anything someone might bring home from the fields or woods (and if they were lucky, a little meat). Every morning the woman would re-light the fire, and the "stew" in the pot would be eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This might go on for days – thus the term – "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Isn't this fun? Families who could afford pork considered themselves quite special, and when visitors came, they often hung up their bacon to show off! And so it was considered a sign of wealth when a man could "bring home the bacon." Sometimes the woman would cut off a sliver of bacon to share with guests and they would sit around and "chew the fat."

Want to know why for about 400 years tomatoes were considered poisonous? Well in the old days most plates were made of pewter. The lead in the pewter would leach into foods with a high acid content, which of course they did not know. When people ate them, they would contract lead poisoning and many died from it.

Want to know where the term "trench mouth" came from? Well, those who did not use pewter plates often used bowls called "trenchers." These trenchers were usually made of wood, but sometimes they were made from stale bread that was so old and hard it could be used to eat from. Of course, eventually worms and mold got into the old bread, and sometimes even into wooden bowls, since they were usually just wiped out and almost never washed. When this happened, people would get sores in their mouths and other diseases ... thus the term "trench mouth." Don't you wonder sometimes how ANYONE lived to get older and produce more children back in those days?

And then there is the term "upper crust." That comes from the fact that often when a woman baked her bread, she gave the bottom (hardest, sometimes burned part of the bread) to the help. The family got the middle. Guests were always served only the top of the bread – thus, "upper crust."

And did you know that ale and whiskey were usually served in lead cups? If a man was a heavy drinker, the combination of the alcohol and of course – more lead – would sometimes knock him out so deeply that he seemed to be dead. But because people realized he'd had too much to drink and might NOT be dead, they would lay him out on a table and wait a couple of days to see if he might wake up. Thus, they held a "wake."

And in old England, where room to bury people was scarce, graves were often dug up and the bones taken to a "bone house" so the grave could be re-used for someone else. The horrifying part is that in many instances when they dug up the old coffins, they would find scratch marks inside the lids!! Thus, they began looping string around a dead person's wrist, pull it through a hole in the coffin and attach a bell to it, so that if a person "woke up" they could pull the string and alert those "above" that they were still alive! Thus, they would be "saved by the bell" and were considered "dead ringers." And people were hired to sit in graveyards at night and listen for those bells, which is why night workers work the "graveyard" shift!!!



Read this to your kids and then tell them "and you thought history was boring!"

## Like a Virgin

by Natascha Jaffa

"If you wish to be a writer, write!" – Epictetus

So, you want to write a novel. It's always been a goal of yours and you have an amazing idea that readers will eat up. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done as thousands of writers have learned, but you have to begin somewhere. Before you write that first line though, ask yourself:

**Why?** What is your reason for wanting to write your book? Motivation is central for every writer to discover for themselves. Why are you writing? If it's to be published, you've chosen the wrong career. Writing for the market (the trends) is going to end in disappointment. Trends come and go and readers are looking for the next best thing. By the time you finish your novel, the market may have moved on and you will be left with a novel that agents have seen enough of. Write for you. Your passion will be noticed, and respected, if you write a story you are in love with.

**Do you have the time to invest hundreds of hours on one project?** Oh yes, my friend. HUNDREDS of hours will be spent, not only to write that first draft, but to revise it as many times as you need to before submitting the manuscript. It will be hard. It will be time consuming and take more patience than you have at the moment. If you are serious about writing and have children, school, work or other obligations, you'll want to make a writing schedule. Even fifteen minutes a day is progress and sometimes you will even need to force yourself to do it. It won't be easy. You will get frustrated and you'll need to power through.

**Can you accept that writing might not pay your bills?** Chances are you aren't Stephen King. You're not Nora Roberts and your novel won't be a New York Times Bestseller right out of the gate. The truth is, most writers have a day job and advances aren't as large as they used to be. The industry is changing. It's going digital, but it's also impossible to know whether books will be digital or some print will be left in the next decade. Costs are down and profits are up concerning digital books (e-books). Royalties are rising for authors, however, advances are shrinking or not being offered at all. In an industry, and an economy, that's always changing, have a backup plan. This is not to discourage you, in fact, it's to motivate you to push harder. If you want writing to be your life, make it so. Go back to school for your English degree, attend conferences, join a writers group, check out freelance work. While you're waiting for those royalties, invest in your education and keep your day job.

**Are you ready to be a professional?** Just as with every industry, publishing is a business. So treat it as such. Maria Conner once advised in the Romance Writers Report, "Become a professional writer: meet deadlines, educate yourself about the market, network, refine and apply your skills, complete and market projects." You may not be published, but getting into the swing of things is going to help you in the long run. Build healthy habits such as setting a writing schedule, meeting deadlines, getting dressed to write even if it's in your own home and researching. Treat your writing as a job.

**Do you know where to start?** You might think this is the easiest part of writing your novel. You already know what your characters look like and maybe a basic (or detailed) plotline, but there are a couple more items to consider.

First, you need to ask yourself if you are going to have a prologue. Nowadays, prologues aren't that popular. They usually consist of backstory, which is a giant NO-NO to start your book. If you find yourself writing nothing but memories, set up or flashbacks in a prologue or first chapter, cut them out and put them someplace else if they are that important to the plot.

Second, what is your first suspenseful scene? Make that your beginning. Sometimes it won't happen until 50 pages in, but you want to drop your main character (MC) in the middle of the action to reach out and grab your reader (or agent) so they will never want to stop reading. You will want to do this for every novel you write. It does not have to be a shoot-em-up scene, but your MC will be involved and the stakes will be crystal clear to keep your reader interested.

**Are you willing to learn?** I learn something new about my style of writing and my craft every day. I am not right all of the time and my willingness to try new things has made me a better writer and taken me one step closer to being published.

You must admit to yourself that you are going to make mistakes. How else will you learn to be a better writer without making a few? The best and fastest way to make your writing better is to submit your manuscript and query letter through critique groups. BETA readers are great to start with, but in order to make your novel shine, group input is crucial. However, you MUST remember not to take their suggestions personal because that's exactly what a critique group does: they give suggestions.

**Do you have tough skin?** I'm sorry, but nobody thinks you're serious about writing. You can tell family and friends how much it means to you, that you must write because you can't not write, but they won't care. They will view it as a hobby that you'll give up soon or a phase. These realizations are going to hurt, but that's when you need to suck it up and make new friends. Writer friends. Writer friends think you're serious and they'll give you support every step of the way. Find a local writers group or friends on the blogosphere. They will be more than willing to encourage you to keep going and to lift you over the next hurdle. The next hurdle being the agent. Agents are a wonderful guide through the publishing world. That is their job. They help you negotiate contracts, they pitch your book to editors and publishers and they give advice. Sure you can do it alone with some publishers, but you probably don't know much about contracts or haven't made the effort to study the industry.

You need an agent, but what you need tough skin for is rejection.



It will happen many, many times and with every book you pitch. It's just a fact. However, you must realize, and this took me a while to learn, that a rejection is not personal. It's just good business. It may seem as a personal attack, but it really isn't! This person/agent has never met you before, they haven't read your book and they have another thousand query letters to slosh through. You are just a letter that didn't keep them interested. It hurts, I know. I've cried many times throughout the process, but if you are not willing to go through rejection, you are not ready to be a writer. What you must do, especially after rejection twenty, is to dedicate yourself more. Revise the query letter, send it out to other writers for critiquing and submit. Rinse and repeat again, and again, and again until there is an agent out there who can support you. The worst that can happen is an agent or publisher saying, "No".

Resilience is one of the most important traits of a writer. In her novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood wrote, "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum." Don't let the bastards grind you down.

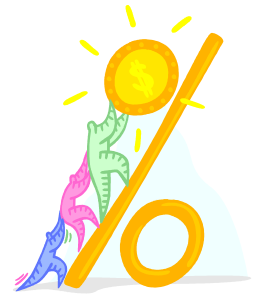
Thousands of individuals such as yourself have dreamed of writing a novel, leaving a legacy and a mark on the world. You can educate yourself, research the market, dress as a professional and attend conferences, but the best way to ensure your success is to write your book. What are you waiting for?

*Natascha graduated with a degree from Utah Valley University in psychology and is now seeking her Bachelor's in English Literature in hopes of starting a career in editing. She is an active PRO member of Romance Writers of America in the Las Vegas Romance Writers chapter and the Kiss Of Death Mystery/Suspense chapter and a member of Mystery Writers of America. She resides with her husband in Las Vegas, NV. She can be contacted through her website [www.thelasvegawriter.blogspot.com](http://www.thelasvegawriter.blogspot.com).*

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## Six Ways To Give Your Favorite Authors a Boost

### by Cheryl Alldredge (aka Charlie Allden)



One of the great joys of being a member of RWA® is that you get to know lots of writers—many of them published. You might be thinking that there is little you can do to help your published author friends, but there are actually a lot of really easy things you can do. We all know that it is hard for books to make a splash in the very crowded book market. Why not throw a few pebbles to help improve the odds for your favorite authors? Here are a few quick and easy things you can do.



#### View their book on Amazon!

Did you know that just by viewing a book while you're shopping you're contributing to the vast data Amazon uses to recommend books to other Amazon customers? It's true. As you're shopping Amazon notices what books you view and recommends similar books you might like. No one knows all the secrets of the Amazon algorithms but it is safe to say that the more data they have on a book, the more likely it will show up in their recommendations. One of those data points is what books people are viewing.



#### While you're shopping, like a book!

Do you shop at Amazon or Barnes & Noble? Online retailers now represent a huge chunk of all book sales. If you're already there and shopping then you have an account. If you have an account, you have the power to like a book. You don't even have to have read it (though it would be best if you at least liked the premise). Just click the like button. You will also have the option to share that like using Twitter or Facebook, but that isn't required. The down side of using the like button is that it is also used to shape the recommendations YOU receive, so liking books you don't actually like could make your own recommendations less accurate.



#### Or vote for a favorable review!

As a registered customer at an online retailer you can help move favorable reviews up to the top of list by clicking YES beneath the review to indicate that it was helpful. Again, you don't have to have read to book. You can also like reviews on GoodReads. Liking the review will make it appear in your update stream and might encourage people who follow or friend you to check it out.



#### Create a list!

This one takes a little more thought and time, but creating lists that include a book with similar books on Amazon or GoodReads is another way to help expose a book to more readers. Make sure your title is catchy, clear, and likely to be relevant to the target readers for the book. Include more established books on the list so the list has a better chance of appearing to browsers more often.



#### Consider rating or reviewing any books you have read and enjoyed.

Amazon, B&N, GoodReads, Fictionwise—whatever booky places you hang out online, they probably allow reviews and/or ratings. You don't have to write a lengthy review. Just a few positive words and a rating can be a big help. Ratings and reviews can help others decide whether or not to buy the book and, on Amazon, they are also believed to factor into those recommendation algorithms that can propel a book to a higher level of sales and recognition.



#### Talk it up!

Authors have to be careful about talking up their own books, but you can spread the word with more credibility. Twitter, Facebook, blogs—anywhere you can mention a book is a plus. Mention it on release day. Mention it when you've read it. Mention it when it wins the RITA®! No author expects all of her writer friends to read all of her books. Nor does she expect them to sign up for the street team. In fact, anything you choose to do will likely be enthusiastically appreciated. Give it a try. You might find it is fun and painless to send some positive energy out into the booky universe!

*Cheryl is a fan of love, adventure, and happily ever afters. Her short novel, Ladybugs and Fireflies is out now from Highland Press. She blogs about writing, Florida, and books at [www.cheryllalldredge.wordpress.com](http://www.cheryllalldredge.wordpress.com) and about all things SciFi at [www.smartgirlsscifi.wordpress.com](http://www.smartgirlsscifi.wordpress.com). She is also active in RWA® and is currently president of First Coast Romance Writers. This article was originally published in the Fall 2011 issue of Coastal Connections newsletter for the First Coast Romance Writers. Permission granted to forward or reprint with proper credit to the author and newsletter.*



## FROM SKEETERS TO STOCKINGS —WHAT YOU CAN DO BETWEEN NOW AND THEN



by Lisa McManus Lange

The long, hot days of sunglasses, sunscreen and skeeters are almost gone, and before you know it, Christmas and New Year's Eve will have whizzed past, leaving a trail of red and green ribbons. But don't panic yet, because as of September 1, there are 115 shopping days left until Christmas, and all leftover, discounted gift wrap from last year will start appearing in stores.

And during those 115 days, it's also a good time to look back at any resolutions, goals or deadlines you set for yourself at the beginning of the year.

Didn't make any? Wish you did? Forgot about the ones you made?

All is not lost. Now is the time to reflect on what you have and haven't done during the previous eight months, and take action.

As you start flipping through cookbooks planning your Christmas baking, ask yourself a few questions:

- \* Are you near achieving any of your goal(s)?
- \* What was your initial intention in setting it/them?
- \* Why haven't you achieved it/them? What's stopping you?
- \* What can you do to get on track—with even just one small aspect of your goal?
- \* How about setting mini-deadlines, putting aside that big looming December 31 deadline?



And if a routine is what you are after—because, as you know, a writer writes every day—remember that it takes three weeks to make or break a routine. Keep that in mind, as there are just over 17 weeks left before the end of the year. You have lots of time...

Even if you haven't achieved your goals in exactly the way you planned, did you accomplish some aspect of your goal? Let's say you intended to drop 40 pounds during the year—have you started dieting or exercising yet? Have you changed your ways or lifestyle to start you on your mission? Remember that three-week rule...

Or how about you wanted to get a book out there to editors/agents/publishers? Have you started it yet? First draft? Second? Submitted? Even achieving a stage or step of the goal can be a reward in itself, even if you don't complete the whole goal. How about just plotting the story, analyzing the characters, or even writing 250 words a day?

For me, previous goals set in 2010 were to create a routine and write more; pretty vague, if you ask me. I had no clear idea of what that meant, or how I was going to go about doing it. Write more—how and what?

Set up a routine—when and how? I did it, but I had to take baby steps.

I started writing in the mornings. Then, writing monthly for my chapter's newsletter and my blog fostered my goal of writing more. The two goals went hand in hand, and in the end, the continuous cycle of writing daily, for two "deadlines"—my blog and my chapter's newsletter—pushed me towards my goal(s). I didn't have a big deadline of SELL EPIC NOVEL BY DECEMBER 31! I had mini, achievable goals to kick-start my writing career—my writing life. It set a pattern, a routine and a way of life which I still maintain to this day.

And now, as the end of 2011 sneaks up, I have re-directed my focus on what I am writing. I have still maintained my 2010 goals, thereby fostering my 2011 goals. Day by day, month by month, I have inched my way closer to where I eventually want to be. There is nothing wrong with setting the goal of SELL EPIC NOVEL BY DECEMBER 31. But mini-goals—things achievable in short amounts of time—can be rewarding in themselves.



So back to Christmas.

Before the next four months fly by, and before you get lost in Christmas gift wrap and baking (not for your own consumption, of course—remember your “dieting” goal) with your goals getting lost in the chaos, start planning now. Look forward to what you can achieve in the next few months, and push yourself to try for just one goal—or part of it. You can do it; give yourself a nudge. You have lots of time left. It’s up to you.

And while you’re at it, stock up on Scotch tape.

*Lisa McManus Lange has already started buying last year's gift wrap. Her lead on a Scotch tape supplier will be kept under wraps, though. Write her at [lisamc2010@yahoo.ca](mailto:lisamc2010@yahoo.ca) or visit at [www.lisamcmanuslange.blogspot.com](http://www.lisamcmanuslange.blogspot.com)*

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## Taking The Plunge Into Social Media

by Gerri Bauer

Embrace the world of social media that surrounds us today. Use it to empower you, your work, and our chapter.

Fine, you say. But just what is social media? Well, it's a term that encompasses a rapidly growing collection of online tools that all have the same goal: interconnectivity. The reason social media is called "social" is because it opens up new ways for engaging with others. You post news, photos, comments, videos, etc., on your social media pages, and others respond. Likewise, you should respond to what others post on their social media sites. In social media, the conversation moves fast, and it moves 24/7.



New social media platforms seem to crop up almost daily, but the behemoth is Facebook (FB for short). What started as a way for college students to "connect" with one another via the Internet has grown into a kind of global yellow pages. More than 750 million people use FB, according to company statistics. You can create a personal page and keep it as public or private as you like: My personal page is viewable only to other FB users I accept as Friends, while my teenage godson's is open to the world beyond his circle of 900 Friends. If you want to engage young romance readers, you'd be wise to establish an author page such as member Catherine Kean has done.

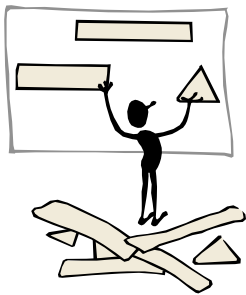
FB also allows users to create pages for organizations, which is why I was able to create a FB page named Volusia County Romance Writers. We've been on FB for a year, but our site cries out for more engagement - the give and take between social media users. More about that later. Romance Writers of America® is on FB, as are many chapters. I posted news of the Laurel Wreath contest on about 30 other RWA-related FB sites, some as far away as Australia and New Zealand.

The best FB pages - indeed, the best sites in any form of social media - are ones that stay vibrant and active. You want to regularly post news of interest, personal thoughts, questions designed to spark conversations, photos of events, videos. Our VCRW FB page would be livelier if everyone who posted success news on the loop would also post that same news on our VCRW FB page. And those who congratulate other members on their successes could also post those congratulations on our VCRW page. Such activity will show the world what an energetic and fun bunch we are, and could help us increase membership.

FB, by far, isn't the only social media platform. It's just the biggest one. Other big sites are Twitter, a kind of microblogging platform; YouTube, dedicated to videos; and flickr, a photo site. Many authors or groups of authors maintain blogs. Our own Kaitlyn Schultz keeps her Nocturnal Readings blog lively and engaging. Published member Barbara Cameron is one of four authors who write the Amish Hearts group. Published member Connie Mann houses her Busy Women. Big Dreams blog at a web address in her own name: [www.conniemann.com](http://www.conniemann.com). Such initiatives help keep your name and your books in front of the world.

As with anything else, there are rules of engagement in social media. Always be professional and courteous. Social media, by its very nature, is public. You don't have to dig deep to find horrendous examples of people acting negatively and even illegally. Maintain high standards at all times. Step in slowly if you are new to social media, but do take the first step. Like it or not, social media is a part of our world. Make the most of it.

*This article first appeared in the Sept/Oct 2011 edition of Novel Notes, the newsletter of Volusia County Romance Writers, and may be used by sister RWA chapters with proper credit to the author and chapter.*



## "REVISE AND RESUBMIT" by Nancy Holland



In April I sent off for the second time a full manuscript that had been requested by an editor last fall after she judged it in a contest. Two months earlier, I had received the coveted and dreaded "revise and resubmit" letter. While I don't know yet whether I "nailed" the revisions, I thought the process of revising under these circumstances might be of interest to other writers for two reasons. First, some people might wonder exactly what such a letter means and how to go about responding to it. And, second, one thing I learned from the process was that if I had done some of the same things before I sent off the manuscript the first time, my

"revise and resubmit" might well have been a sale.

Let me start, however, by saying that I am unpublished and have no special insights, just lots and lots of experience at revising. And what worked for me might not work for others. (Not to mention that how well it worked for me is still up in the air - can you tell I'm just a tad anxious about that?) So, take what works for you from what follows, adapt where necessary, and always respect your own process.

### Stage One: The Big Stuff

I said above that "r&r" letters are both coveted and dreaded. Coveted not only because they're way better than a flat-out rejection, but also because of all the great advice they contain, advice that is specifically about your story and how to sell it to specifically this editor. "Golden" is the most common word used to describe them. Most of the dread comes from this stage - the need to make major or at least large-scale changes in your story. My opinion is that you have to make these changes first because they'll have an effect all of the other changes that you need to make. Unfortunately, most of those changes are story-specific and/or vague ("pace is too slow"), so there's not much I can say about them that will be useful to anyone else. None of the ones that were suggested for my story were really big, but at least one of them was "sneaky big". That is, it was a fairly small change that reverberated through the whole story and kept me dancing the whole rest of the way through the revision process to make sure I'd made all the dozens of necessary wording shifts. Necessary, but not fun.

The real surprise for me was that some of the larger changes that were suggested were changes I'd known all along needed to be made. I just hadn't been ready to do it yet. That lovely page and a half of description and reverie in the first chapter I loved so much and my critique partners chopped down to a page? Now a paragraph. A short paragraph. Of two added scenes, one had actually been in my original notes for the story, but it took a suggestion that I add a few scenes for me to see clearly how it revealed a lot about the hero's character and backstory that could be shown through action, rather than "told".

### Stage Two: Layering

My writing voice tends to be understated (which is itself probably an understatement). This is an advantage in my non-fiction writing.

In writing romance, not so much. My critique partners are always telling me to say more about my character's motive and show more of their emotional reactions. The editor didn't put it in exactly those terms, but she did want to see more intensity, which I took to be a reference to the same problem in my writing.

So, once the big cuts were made, I went through the story very slowly to layer in the missing motives and reactions. That didn't always mean I added stuff. Sometimes it was just as important to make small cuts to emphasize the impact of an action or an event. I also tried to deepen the point of view in each scene, to color it through the eyes of the POV character, so everything about it would tell the reader something about her/his emotional responses.

This was the hardest, and slowest, part of the revision process for me. For others, it might be unnecessary or even involve showing less emotion if you tend to an over-dramatic style (and depending on the sub-genre - this was series contemporary). The important thing is to be certain you've achieved the intensity of emotion the editor is looking for.

#### Stage Three: The Important Small Stuff

This part of my revision process had three sub-parts. First, I used the "search" function on my word processing program to find and eliminate (as much as possible) unnecessary and over-used words. You can find a standard list of unnecessary words ("that", "just", "really") in a number of places. I've adapted my list over several years to reflect the words I'm most prone to use. Of course, what counts as an over-used word (or phrase) will vary wildly among writers, so you'll have to develop your own list of those. When you find an offending word, sometimes you can cut it. Other time you can't, so you have to leave it as is. Still other times you have to rewrite a whole sentence, or even a whole paragraph, to make it work. The reworked version is almost always better, often much better, than the original. That's what makes the tedium of this process worthwhile.

The next sub-part was to read the whole thing aloud. You'll be amazed at what you've missed. Another trick I've used with shorter pieces is to read it aloud backwards, one paragraph at a time, but that was frankly too daunting with a 60,000 word novel. Some writers use their computers ability to read text to have it read the story to them, but that's beyond my technical skills. Others use different fonts to make errors jump out; many print a hard copy to read aloud, and some of those print it in different colors to make sure they're reading exactly what's on the paper instead of what they meant to write but didn't. I learned about these tricks too late for this revision process, but some of them sound worth trying next time.

Finally, I went through one more time trying to follow Donald Maass' advice to make one thing better on every page. (Thanks to Elise Beatty for this one.) Slow, tedious (again), but so, so worth it in the long run. And sometimes kind of fun in the short run, too.

#### Stage Four: Take a Break

This is the easiest stage. When you reach the point where you can't stand the thought of going through the manuscript one more time, don't. Don't even think about it for at least a week, preferably two or three. Write something else. Read. Refill the well. This is the time to send the story to a knowledgeable beta reader, if you have one. I was lucky -- one of my critique partners joined the group late and hadn't read this particular story before, so I was able to send her the editor's letter and the fully revised (I thought) ms. Of course, as she immediately made clear, it still needed more revision. Her suggestions about how to do that were as invaluable at this stage as the comments of my other critique partners had been in getting me this far.

#### Stage Five: Push "Send"

When you're responded as fully as you can to your beta reader's comment, or at least have read through your story one more time with fresh (or at least not glazed-over) eyes, it's time for the sealer on the polish you've put on your story. Just before you print or collate the separate chapter files into one document, read every word of it one last time, very carefully. Resolve everything the spell checker and grammar wizard/demon have underlined. Remind yourself why you love this story. Then box it up and ship it or, if you're lucky enough, just push "send". Your work here is done. It's time to start writing something new.

*Nancy Holland is a long-time member of Midwest Fiction Writers. A 2010 Golden Heart finalists, she writes short contemporary, fantasy, and paranormal romance. She's still waiting to hear the outcome of her own "revise and resubmit" while she tries to focus on the next story. This article first appeared in the September 2011 edition of The Midwest Muse, the newsletter of the Midwest Fiction Writers (MFW) Minneapolis MN. Chapter of 24, Region 2 of Romance Writers of America.*

*Permission is gladly granted to RWA chapters to reprint and/or forward the article with proper credit given to the author and her chapter.*

## Writing Characters Across Generations

by Lynn Cahoon



One day, while putting in my time at the paying job, I was sitting in a training focused on the changing face of employment. These days, the work place is a multi-generational affair with Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X-ers, and Millennials all having a place around the conference table. While I listened to the trainer explain the differences in values and work ethics between the four age groups, I couldn't help but come to one conclusion. By using generational characterizations to help develop backstory, I'd be giving characters footing in the real world.

So what are the four generations and why do you as a writer, care? Let me show you...

I write contemporary romances. In each of the three manuscripts I've completed and the one I'm writing, I have a grandfather figure. These men are solid, hard-working, and family focused. The characters are the Traditionalists (Born 1922-1945.) They saw the end of America's innocence with the atomic bomb and World War II. They lived during the Great Depression and saw the beginning of social programs like welfare and Social Security. And our society changed from agricultural to industrialization during their watch. Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964) lived during the Vietnam War protests, hippies and the free love crowd, the birth of Rock and Roll, and a television in every house. Ozzie and Harriet turned into the Brady Bunch, the Partridge Family, and Donny and Marie. Boomers are competitive and out to win. They're hard working but independent and questioning. This group has never set a goal they didn't embrace. As a card carrying Boomer, when I met with my guidance counselor in high school, I was offered three career options, nurse, teacher, or secretary. Rejecting that advice, I made my own career plan.

Generation X (Born 1965 – 1980) saw America put a man on the moon. Then they watched the Challenger blow up. Personal computers and video games were the new technology. Gen X's were the Breakfast Club, Ferris Bueller, and Home Alone. The two-income family moved this generation into a world of latch key kids who are highly tech savvy due to logging so many hours on Sim City and other games. Their heroes? Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, all the wonder kids who turned nerd into a good word.

And then you have the Millennials (Born 1981-2000). These are also called Generation Y or Echo Boomers. They value choice – they were raised in a kid centric society. This is the trophy generation where participation is just as important as competition and winning. They can multitask with the best of them. Need your smart phone fixed? Give it to a Millennial. Their world included the Internet, the fall of the Berlin wall, the OJ Simpson trial, Columbine, and September 11th.

Of course, no one lives his or her life in a vacuum. Each generation molds the next so traits can flow between generations without conscious thought. And each character will be a mixture of the life experiences that have affected their lives and the lives of their parents and grandparents.

So how do you meld this information into your characters? Sit down with a blank piece of paper and see where your character fits. (MORWA members – I've posted a worksheet on the yahoo loop for your use.) What values resonate with your characters? Why? Who are their heroes?

Let's imagine a heroine named Janice. Janice is twenty-eight (Millennial) and a single mom. She's a manager of a local pub and believes in hard work as her ticket to a better life with her daughter. (Traditionalist.) Although she's worked at the pub for five years, no one seems to know much about her (private - traditionalist) but she's fiercely independent (Gen X) with no family ties in the area.

So, as a Millennial, Janice should be valuing work life balance and expecting her employer to be flexible with her needs and lifestyle. Instead, she's a workaholic who fits in being a mom in the back room of the bar while her daughter does her homework.

Sometimes, even in real life, stereotyping doesn't work. A man who is chronologically a Millennial, may lean more toward being a Traditionalist based on his values and beliefs. Why? He grew up in a small town and went away to the military right out of high school. His experiences molded him into a person who may feel more comfortable with the Silent Generation than his own.

And your character's perception of what defines a generation may be right on or skewed. While watching a nationally televised singing show, I listened with interest to an auditioning Millennial who was accompanied by his dad, a baby boomer lost in the sixties. The dad wore the uniform of the hippie, right down to his long gray braid and handkerchief around his head. The singer was upset because kids at school had always teased him that his dad was a hippie. He knew his dad wasn't a hippie because all they did was have sex and his dad wasn't like that. The father refused to be interviewed for the show. He just smiled and waved.



I think his dad was a hippie. And so did everyone who watched that show.

But isn't it the contradictions that make the most interesting stories?

In conclusion, don't just rely on a statement of your character's age to paint a picture for your reader. Age is just a number. Tell us what they've experienced. Who are their heroes? Did they walk to school barefooted in the snow? Or hide under their desks when the air raid siren test went off? Explore the generation and use that to understand your main characters, just a little better.

For me, I'm left thinking about my grandfather. A Traditionalist who built a farm out of the Indian lands of South Dakota. He didn't hide his disbelief when a man stepped on the moon. Then when we visited Idaho's Craters of the Moon Park one summer, he was certain the entire moon landing was fiction and filmed at the volcano ash covered park. Maybe Grandpa believed the HG Well's War of the World's radio cast. Fool me once...

*Lynn Cahoon writes small town contemporary romance and cozy mysteries. She's published short fiction and essays, in a variety of publications including Chicken Soup for the Soul. This article was first published in MORWA's March 2011 Edition of the Ruffled Sheets. Permission gladly granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA chapters with proper credit to the author and the chapter.*

## Final Reflections

By Tracy Brogan

What's that old saying about the definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over again but expecting a different result? For those of you who have ever suffered extended writer's block, you can probably relate to the idea of insanity. And while some days the words flow like clear, mountain water over the precipice of a waterfall, some days finding the right words is like sucking peanut butter through a cocktail straw.

So, what do you do if your words are stuck? Do you sit there staring at the computer like you did yesterday? And the day before that? Do you fill your time up with mundane computer tasks and tell yourself you're 'too busy' to write today? Do you check Facebook and email, and generally fritter away your day? Maybe you've got your butt in the chair and your hands on the keyboard, but have you written any words? Or have you done everything except draft?

If you're in that rut, you'll get no judgment from me. But you will get a piece of advice. Bichok only works if you're actually working on your manuscript. Blogging about it doesn't count. Research doesn't count. Googling images of hot men to be the new 'face' of your next hero doesn't count! (Pleasant? Yes. Productive, not so much.)

As writers, we all know 'you can't fix an empty page,' so rather than doing the same old thing and expecting a new result, try something a little different to get your creative juices flowing. Try using a timer and typing stream of consciousness for fifteen minutes. Better yet, do that but have the 'stream' be the thoughts of a character who has you stumped for characterization. Interview your characters. Ask them their favorite food, or color, or movie. Ask if they like board games? Are they competitive? Passive? Why? Don't worry about which scene you might roll that into. The idea is to get into their heads, so they'll be awake in yours, and soon you'll find the words flowing again.

Here's another crazy idea. Turn off your computer. Yes, you heard me. Step away from the keyboard. Take a walk. Call a friend. (But not the really chatty one or you'll use up TOO much time.) Flip through your file of story ideas. You do have a file of story ideas, right? Read one of your old favorite books and refresh your memory of why it resonated with you. When sitting at the computer, waiting for your muse ain't working, take a break. But a short one!! Drink a cup of coffee while staring out the window. Then reboot your system when the caffeine and sunshine have rebooted your spirits.

Here's another tip: Give yourself permission to walk away from a story that isn't working. Start something new. Just make sure that you aren't giving up on the other story just because it's getting stressful. I've spent a chunk of time trying to write a story I'm no longer in love with because it fits a market trend. Hear the alarms sounding? We all know that's no way to spend your day. So, rather than working on the story I'm dreaming about, I keep trying to convince myself I 'should' be working on this one. So I've gotten blocked – and I've ended up not working on EITHER story. Shame on me! But good for me, too, because I'm learning more about myself as a writer with every hurdle I tumble over. And as long as I never quit, then I have not failed. Somebody very wise said that but I can't remember who.

So, the next time you're blocked, don't stay in the same rut, doing the same thing day after day and expecting a different outcome. Change up you day. Write in the afternoon instead of the morning. Wear a funny hat. Try a new latte flavor. Write in a different location. Change the lighting in your writing room, anything to break the cycle of monotony that will make you look at things a new way. And realize that we have all been there, done that. But don't let an hour's block turn into a day. And don't let a day turn into a week. Get some words on the page and you can worry about perfecting them later. Good luck!

And speaking of good luck, please join me in sending good wishes to our new Mirror Editor, Jennifer Lowery Kamptner. She has graciously agreed to take over as editor starting with next month's edition. I have thoroughly enjoyed this role but would like to dedicate my time to other things in the coming months. I am grateful to be passing this important job into her very capable hands! Thanks, Jennifer!! My best to you all and hope to see you at the next meeting!

