

Chapter 33, Region 5

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NORTH TEXAS ROMANCE WRITERS OF AMERICA

# Heart to Heart

## December Christmas Party

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By Jen FitzGerald

Have you been naughty or nice this year? Well, it really doesn't matter to us!

Join us Saturday, December 9th at La Hacienda for our annual Christmas Party, which includes a Chinese gift exchange. Bring a wrapped gift to exchange, but please spend no more than \$10 to \$15.

And don't forget that December is also election month for our chapter. Please bring your ballot from the November newsletter so that we can vote in officers for 2007.

Also consider getting involved this year—it's going to be a great one as we celebrate 25 years of romance on the North Texas prairie. There will be plenty of areas needing volunteers as we celebrate with some really fun events.

Looking forward to seeing you on December 9th...



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*We do not write because we want to; we write because we have to.*  
Somerset Maugham

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## President's Corner

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Signing off . . .

It's been an eventful year, but it's time to hand the proverbial gavel over. It was an honor and a privilege to serve as your president.

As Christmas approaches, ushering in the end of the year, I hope each and every one of you takes the opportunity to look back on the challenges and achievements of the last twelve months.

We learned from informative speakers and workshops on Dialogue, Setting, Characterization, Plotting, etc., along with the business of writing. I think we've seen it all this year. In addition, those of us who were able to attend the Roundup had an opportunity to practice our "pitching" skills.

This year, we pushed each other to produce, to finish the book, and send it out. Several members received agent representation, PRO recognition, contest finals and/or wins.

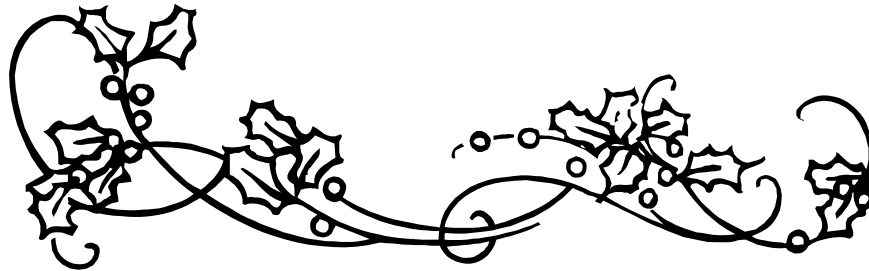
We commiserated with the rejections, highs, lows and the unpredictable and sometimes odd misfortunes of a writer's life.

We celebrated new book deals for our published authors and first sales for those writers who worked hard to polish and revise their works to the industry's high standards. Several members have full manuscripts waiting on a senior editor's desk.

To all of you on the cusp of NYT, that first sale or the first word of the very first manuscript, I wish you good luck in all your writing endeavors.

May the New Year continue to bring you contracts, recognition, and supportive friends like those I've found here at NTRWA.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,  
Sherry Davis



## 2006 NTRWA Board Members & Liaisons

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◆ Vice President/Programs Shannon Canard shannon_canard@hotmail.com	◆ Recording Secretary Paula Wachter paula_wachter@comcast.net	◆ PAN Liaison Juliet Burns julietburns@gmail.com
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# Christmas Traditions 'Round the World

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By Katherine Bone

The following article first appeared in the December 2006 issue of HOD's The Heart Monitor (northern Alabama).

Christmas, according to The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories, is from the old English *Cristes maesse*, Christ's Mass. In early history, December was typically the month to decorate temples with offerings of greens at the feast of Saturn. This practice was adopted by Christians after Christ was born in Bethlehem. In Germany and Scandinavia, holly and holly-trees were called Christ's-thorn. W.C.T. Dobson, R.A., an English painter, designed the first known Christmas card in 1844. Decorating trees with candles and placing presents beneath them became popular after Queen Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in 1840. It was also during this time that the patron saint of Germany, St. Nikolaus was first introduced.

As new and old traditions merge, just as they have throughout time, the month of December

generates great expectation. Here is an overview of traditions celebrated around the world.

**Africa:** In the Congo, carolers sing and gifts are laid on a platform of the Communion table. In South Africa, Christmas is a summer holiday. Revelers go to the beach and hang stockings on Christmas Eve for Father Christmas to fill. In Ghana, churches and homes are decorated the first week in Advent to coincide with the cocoa harvest. Carols are sung and churches are decorated with evergreens or palm trees. A feast of rice and yam paste, fufu, is enjoyed. In Liberia, homes are filled with oil palms decorated with bells. On Christmas morning, families are awakened by carols and presents of cotton cloth, soap, sweets, pencils, and books are exchanged.

**Australia:** Christmas is celebrated during Summer Holiday. Many old English traditions survive but cook-outs, glazed ham, cold chicken, duck, cold deli meats, pasta, salads, pavlovas, and ice-cream are the norm. Swag Man, wearing a brown Akubra, a blue singlet and long baggy shorts,

spends the winter with his dingoes then hops into his four-wheel drive and leaves a trail of red dust while out and about delivering presents.

**British Isles:** English traditions date back to Victorian times and Charles Dickens. Until Victorian times, gifts were exchanged on Twelfth Night or New Year's Day. Father Christmas arose from a pagan spirit who made appearances at Medieval Mummer's plays. Wearing long robes and sporting sprigs of holly in his long white hair, he reads the smoke from children's letters, which have been thrown into the fireplace. It is said that stockings were initially hung to catch gold coins dropped from Father Christmas's pockets while he labored to enter through the chimney. Another tradition, singing carols, dates back to the middle ages. Serenaders, called waits, traveled from house to house singing carols, songs of joy. Greens were used as decorations to lift sagging winter spirits.

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## Administration

**PAN** (Published Authors Network) is the name given to the discussion group intended to meet the needs of writers published or contracted to publish works in the romance genre.

**Heart to Heart** is published monthly by NTRWA, a non-profit organization founded in March of 1983 by aspiring and published writers of romance fiction.

**Heart to Heart** welcomes articles for publication in its monthly issues. Articles should contain fewer than 1000 words and pertain to matters of interest to romance writers.

**Heart to Heart** reserves the right to edit according to space or clarity, and to refuse articles that its editorial staff deems inappropriate for its readership. Deadline for publication is the 25th of each month.

**SISTER CHAPTERS:** Feel free to reprint articles from our newsletter as long as proper credit is provided for the chapter and the individual author.

**Non-RWA organizations** please contact the editor regarding reprints.

# Lessons from Katrina

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By J.C. Wilder

The following article appeared in the Dec 2006/January 2007 issue of "Write From the Heart," the news-letter of the Central Ohio Fiction Writers.

When I sat down to write this article, I grabbed my photo albums and journals to revisit those months that were both horrifying and exhilarating at the same time. The life lessons I learned are numerous and I can safely say I am forever changed for the better by my experiences.

After hearing Katrina was headed for the Gulf Coast, the first phone call I made was to my local police department where I volunteer. A call was put out to the officers, volunteers and their families for medical supplies, food, water, clothing and items specifically for infants at risk. Within thirty six hours we'd gathered enough to stuff my car and then some.

By the time I did the final tally for

the Katrina efforts I'd headed up, I'd distributed roughly ten thousand pounds of anything imaginable from phone cards, deodorant, antibiotics, wheelchairs, clothing, food, tents and the list goes on and on.

After I delivered my first load of goods, I set out to visit the shelters in and around the Houma, Louisiana area. There were seven shelters and every one of them had large lists of items that were desperately needed and this was where a good friend came to the rescue.

When I told romance author, Shiloh Walker, about the people who needed little things like toothpaste, a hair brush, clean underwear or a pair of shoes, she was eager to lend a hand. The shelters did not have the funds to visit Wal-Mart and buy what was needed as they were run by churches or community volunteers and cash was in short supply. Shiloh headed up the fund raising and together we raised approximately twelve thousand dollars, all of which was used to purchase items for those

living in the shelters.

Every morning I would drive to each shelter and pick up my shopping list for the day. Most of the time it was mundane items such as lotions, Poligrip, soap for sensitive skin, scented items for the ladies, aftershave for the men, or note pads and pens. Very quickly I realized the shelters were in desperate need for large sized men's and women's clothing. I'd met a woman who had boarded the bus to Houma with only a bed sheet because her clothing had been destroyed in the flood.

As a woman of size myself, it broke my heart to think of Ms. Rose, who'd lost everything including her family, not having even a pair of pants to call her own. I contacted a friend who came up with the brilliant idea of posting notices on the Weight Watchers chat boards. Within forty-eight hours thousands of pounds of clothing was in the mail and headed to Houma.

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## Visiting NTRWA

Anyone interested in the romance genre is invited to attend NTRWA meetings and workshops.

Visitors may attend three times before NTRWA requires they become members. All members of NTRWA must be members in good standing of Romance Writers of America (RWA).

Romance Writers of America  
16000 Stuebner Airline Drive  
Suite 140  
Spring, Texas 77379

[www.rwanational.com](http://www.rwanational.com)

Phone: 831-717-5200

FAX: 831-717-5201

[info@rwanational.com](mailto:info@rwanational.com)

# Becoming a Love Linguist

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By Sue Rau

The following first appeared in the October 2006 issue of *Writer's Saddle*, newsletter for CaRWA, the Calgary Chapter of RWA.

This summer has been exceptionally exciting at the Rau Haus because our daughter became engaged. One of the books her pastor encouraged her to read was Gary Chapman's "The Five Love Languages", by Northfield Publishing. It describes the "five ways that people understand and speak emotional love." Chapman distills the myriad expressions of human affection into a manageable quintet: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. He maintains that "We cannot rely on our native tongue if our spouse does not understand it. If we want him/her to feel the love we are trying to communicate, we must express it in his or her primary love language."

Love languages operate at a subconscious level. When I first heard of them, they reminded me of the three main categories that are used to explain how people learn: through

auditory, visual or kinesthetic stimuli. Even though there is much that is universal in the human experience, the precise way that we each perceive and interpret our personal universe varies a surprising amount. It's these differences that often fascinate and draw us towards a potential lover.

Opposites attract, at least until the rosy glow of infatuation fades. Then, it starts to get interesting.

As a romance writer, I'm excited by possibilities suggested by the concept of love languages. They can be a prime tool to heighten the level of angst between two prospective lovers. Isn't one of my prime objectives to create obstacles for my characters to overcome? If I can learn to work with the love languages, my ability to cause misunderstanding between my characters increases. First, the two potential lovers have to discover what language they each speak. Next, they have to decide if they're willing to make the effort to change their mode of communication to match their partner's. Last, they have to learn to speak in the way that their love interest is eager to hear. It

sounds straight forward, but this is fiction! I can make it as convoluted as I like, make certain that the messages are well mixed, and have my characters second guessing each other until the final chapter.

Granted, I probably wouldn't use Chapman's ideas to form the primary conflict in my book.

I think most authors are very good at creating mountainous roadblocks for their characters to navigate as their readers cheer them on. I love

those twists and turns, the joy of pitting my heroes and heroines against impossible odds. The problem comes with knowing how to forge multiple layers of conflict, the more subtle difficulties that may not be as obvious. That's where the love languages can be helpful. As Solomon said, it's the little foxes that spoil the vines.



Continued on page 8...

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## Many Happy Returns...

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Teresa Southwick, Dec. 2  
Sheniqua Waters, Dec. 5  
Carolyn Williamson, Dec. 7  
Jennifer Malone, Dec. 18  
Rosemary Clement-Moore, Dec. 22  
Regina Richards, Dec. 25  
Andrea Geist, Dec. 30  
Mary Karlick, Dec. 30



# Lessons from Katrina Continued

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Continued from page 4...

One Person Can Make A Difference – Even now as I read through my journals and look at the photos, I am amazed at what I (with the help of dozens of friends, fans and complete strangers) accomplished. In the days immediately following Katrina, we clothed more than one thousand people and many of them received an extra change of clothing. We arranged immediate shelter for three families in Mississippi, four in Louisiana and two in Texas. We reunited thirteen family members, located at least ten 'missing' people on the Gulf Coast and tracked down the members of the members of the Southern Louisiana Chapter of RWA, based in New Orleans. This list only scratches the surface of what we accomplished, but I think you get the picture.

Wants vs. Needs - We live in a nation of overabundance. Did you know that forty percent of all food produced in America will be thrown away? Shocking statistic isn't it? When I reached Houma, the stores were closed and the closest gas station was an hour and a half away.

It was then I came to understand that I didn't need a great deal to survive. When I returned home I immediately cleaned my house from top to bottom, donating at least half of what I owned to charity. I don't need to own ten pairs of boots; I only need two working feet.

Community – Family isn't about the group of people you were born into, it's about those you chose to gather around you. I worked with some of the most selfless, giving people I've ever met in my life. Some of them had even less than those they were helping and still they continued to work long, hard hours. I've remained in contact with many of them and they continue to amaze and inspire me.

Everything in Life is Temporary – When I worked with the National Guard, our mission was to locate survivors and give them aid. In our travels through the devastated New Orleans, I saw many bodies and I couldn't help but wonder just how many had died with an unfinished To Do list?

Modern life has become so hectic

that we barely have time to draw breath, especially at this time of year. If those victims could speak, what would they tell us? That it is okay to skip hitting a sale in favor or reading a book to your child? Donating time to a charity will do more to help your heart and mind than an hour in the gym? Always skipping dessert might be good for the thighs but not for the soul?

I can't speak for them but I was reminded of a lesson I'd learned long ago. Every human being is allotted a finite number of hours on earth and once they're gone, we never get them back. Life does not allow for 'Do Overs'.

So take a few minutes to ask yourself: If today was your last on earth, how would you spend your time?

J.C. Wilder is an award-winning author who also writes as Dominique Adair. Her latest title, All She Wants, is a December Cosmopolitan Magazine Red Hot Read. You can read a day-by-day account of her Katrina experiences at <http://www.jcwilder.com>.

Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you;  
He is Christ the Lord.



# Look Over Your Shoulder, Not At the Mountain Above

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By Christy Janisse

This article first appeared in West Houston RWA's newsletter, *Happily Ever After*, November 2006.

That is one of my favorite sayings from my days as an instructor at American Express. Whenever I taught a class on technical advancements, new processes or anything the adult employees had a hard time grasping, I'd tell them to avoid thinking "I can't do it" or "I'll never get it."

Once they learned to look how at far they had come from the beginning of the class to the end, they relaxed. The learning became easier, and their self-confidence soared.

This applies to anything in life that is new, or goal oriented. Writing is no exception.

Sure, it's not easy to remember, especially when a contest package arrives in the mail and it hasn't finalized, or the scores are not as high as we'd like. Or when you receive a rejection letter from an agent or editor.

But, if you'll just take a moment to stop, breath and think back, it'll be easier.

First, remember why you're writing. You love it, right? Even if you don't love the pain, torture, disappointment, at the heart of it, you have a story (or many stories)

waiting to find a place on the computer screen or paper. What happens if you quit? Nothing. Life won't cease to exist, books by other authors will continue to come out each month, and you'll still have the stories inside you.

However, wouldn't it be better if they were published? Isn't that the ultimate goal of any creative person who arranges the thought into words?

So, you're not going to quit. You're going to start setting goals.

Yes, that's plural - G.O.A.L.S. Remember the mountain. Your goal is to make it to the top. But you can't take one step and whoosh, you're at the top. Never mind rumors that a few others have done it—JK Rowling may seem like an overnight sensation, but in reality, she had lots of climbing to do—we just didn't know about it at the time she started.

So, first goal. You decide. It can be creating an outline or synopsis. It can be finishing your first draft. Or maybe just attending a writing course. But jot it down.

Goal two—and I'll borrow Donald Maas' instructions on writing the break out novel—Make It Bigger.

It can be entering a contest, joining a critique group, or even submitting to an agent or editor. You're choice. Just write it down.

Continue on the steps all the way to the peak goal—PUBLICATION.

Now, take the paper, cut each goal out, and put them in an envelope. You know what the top of the peak is—no sense in looking up at it and thinking, "I'll never make it."

Post your first goal somewhere near where you write. Tape it to your computer or laptop, or tack it on the wall.

When you've accomplished it, take it down and put up the next goal. Take the one you've accomplished and tack it up somewhere as your accomplishment wall. This is what you'll look at—"look over your shoulder" so to speak. When you accomplish your next goal, follow the same steps.

Now, each day, you need to look at your wall of accomplishments. Look at your current goal, and pat yourself on the back.

You can do it. Just keep looking over your shoulder at how far up the "mountain" you've come and each step higher won't seem so insurmountable.

Christy Janisse is a Jackie of all Trades, but her love is to write Romantic Suspense, some with light paranormal elements. She has finalized in the 2006 Golden Acorn, the 2006 Dixie First Chapter, and the online contest for Romance Junkies. She is the editor for WHRWA's newsletter, *Happily Ever After*.

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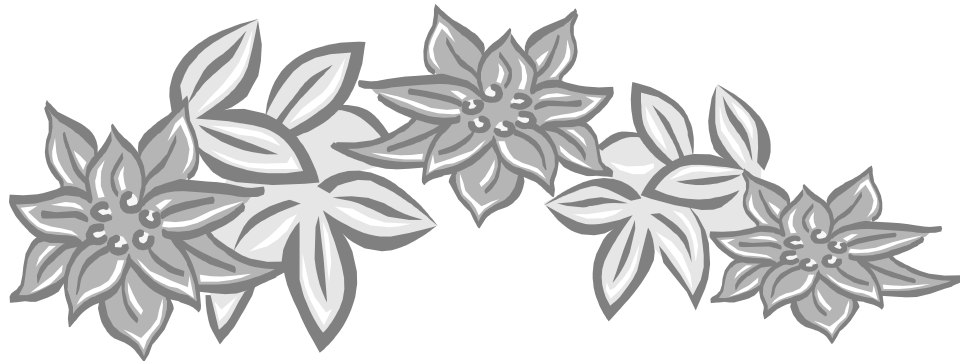
**Newsletters are now available in electronic format.**

**If you are interested in receiving your newsletter via email,  
please contact Jen FitzGerald at [jen@stormsedge.com](mailto:jen@stormsedge.com).**

## Member News

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Congratulations to Mindy Obenhaus who had a request for a partial from agent Janet Grant at Books & Such Literary.



## Becoming a Love Linguist Continued

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Continued from page 5...

Consider the quandary of two individuals who may not understand what they each want, and have no idea how to tell anyone else how to communicate with them. They only know that something isn't working. Petty irritations and insecurities are mounting. The harder they try to make a significant connection, the worse their lover reacts. Sounds like one of those delicious but vicious circles, one that demands an epiphany of some sort if the relationship is going to work. By now, the readers are frantic, because these two characters should be the perfect match for each other, but they're ready to either walk away or commit double homicide.

Imagine Monika's frustration at the deluge of gifts from Marcus, when what she really wants is an hour or two of his exclusive attention. But to Marcus, finding and presenting Monika with the perfect treasure

means that she's worth the expense and the energy. He's determined to buy her a new wristwatch, so he spends two hours on a Google search to discover what make is the most durable, efficient and accurate. Then he scours the newspaper and makes seventeen phone calls to find the best deal in the city. Of course, it happens to be across town, but Monika is worth it. After Marcus makes his decision, the jeweler asks him if he wants his gift engraved. How romantic is that? So then he has to repeat the procedure to find the best engraving deal in town. By the time he reaches Monika's apartment with the watch in his pocket, she hasn't seen much of him for two weeks. And then he informs her that he can't stay because he has to put in some overtime in order to pay for the perfect gift that he's so excited about. Are you impressed yet? Monika sure isn't.

The idea of love languages may not appeal to you, or you might gravitate

to it immediately. If nothing else, I hope my discovery will inspire you to explore the story ideas suggested by whatever non-fiction you find yourself reading. How does that work? For example, as I plowed through one of Judith Martin's "Miss Manners" books (It was from my brother – should I take that as a hint?), I found that I loved her professional voice, shrewd wit, and dry humor. If I could create a protagonist with her insight and spunk, I'd be laughing. Or maybe a book on sleep disorders will spark a story about an insomniac and a dreamy doctor. Or that dog-eared pile of term papers you haven't gotten around to marking... Okay, so there are limits! But whatever you find yourself leafing through, why not dig beneath the surface and see if there's a story lurking inside. And then tell it in the language that you love best.



# Christmas Traditions 'Round the World Continued

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Continued from page 3...

Kissing beneath the mistletoe stems from an ancient Druid rite. Wassail, meaning good health, is made up of mulled ale, curdled cream, roasted apples, nuts, eggs, and spices. Wassailing hails from the old tale of a beautiful Saxon maiden named Rowena who presented Prince Vortigen with a bowl of wine and toasted him with the words *Waes hael*. Great fanfare is used when transporting the Wassail bowl into the room. To accompany the Christmas feast, a wild boar's head was served, stemming from an Old Norse practice of sacrificing a boar at Yuletide in honor of the god Freyr. The feast of St. Stephen is unique to Britain. On this day, the alms box is opened at every church and the contents distributed to the poor.

Canada: For Anglophones and the upper middle class since 1875, Christmas is celebrated with Christmas tree, crèche, nativity scene, with santons, little saints, and plaster figures, gifts and a Christmas reveillon, 'waking up' or banquet. For Francophones, new celebrations came after WWI. Turkey is the norm but in the old days people ate *Tourtiere*, pork pie, or *Boulettes*, small meatballs. Christmas dinner is eaten after Midnight Mass.

China: Paper lanterns and trees, called *Trees of Light*, are decorated with paper chains, flowers, and lanterns. Muslin stockings are hung and a visit from Santa Claus, *Dun Che Lao Ren*, Christmas Old Man, is eagerly anticipated.

France: Nativity scenes and crèches are displayed with santons crafted from the south of France. Added to

the scenes are figurines of local dignitaries and characters. Yule log-shaped cakes, *buche de Nol*, Christmas Log, are served during the great feast of *le reveillon*, a late supper held after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. *Pere Noel* travels with his companion *Pre Fouettard*, bringing children gifts, and in some places, *le petit Jsus* brings the gifts.

Greece: St. Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors. Drenched from head to foot with brine, his sweaty face expresses how hard he has fought to reach sinking ships and rescue sailors from violent seas. Children travel from house to house singing *kalanda*, carols, with metal triangles and clay drums. Pigs are slaughtered and served with *christosomo*, Christ Bread, sweet bread embossed with the family's profession.

Japan: Houses are decorated with evergreen and mistletoe. Carols are sung and a Japanese god or priest, *Hoteiosho*, closely resembles Santa Claus. *Hoteiosho* has eyes in the back of his head so children know they must be good when he is near.

Iraq: After a reading of the Christmas story, a bonfire of thorn bushes is started. If the thorns burn to ashes, good luck will follow in the coming new year. Each person jumps over the ashes three times and makes a wish. After a special service, blessings are passed from one person to another.

Italy: Inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, Giovanni Vellita created the first manger scene in the village of Greccio. Cannon are fired in Rome from Castel St. Angelo on Christmas Eve. Small presents are drawn from the *Urn of Fate* and children eagerly anticipate a visit

from *La Befana* who brings gifts for those who are good and punishment for those who are bad. Usually *La Befana* is depicted as a fairy queen, a crone, or a witch, because she is the one who refused to give the Magi food and shelter.

Netherlands: Here St. Nicholas is known as *Sinterklaas*. He sails from Spain on his feast day, December 5th, and children prepare for his visit by putting hay and sugar in their stockings so he, in turn, will fill their stockings with gifts like nuts and candy. Special horns are blown to ward away evil spirits and to announce the birth of the Christ child. Three to four feet long, the one year-old sapling horns sound like foghorns.

Mexico: Market stalls, *puestos*, offering crafts, foods, and flowers, are decorated in every town. *Poinsettias* are native to Mexico and are believed to have been used, for the first time, during Christmas in the 17th Century when Franciscans included the flowers in their celebration. According to legend, a boy named Pablo was visiting a Nativity scene and realized he had nothing to offer the Christ child. Seeing some green branches nearby, he gathered them. Though ridiculed by the other children, he laid them by the manger. Suddenly, before everyone's awed eyes, a red star-shaped flower appeared on the branch. *Las posadas* is the main celebration in Mexico and is a reenactment of Joseph and Mary's search for a place to stay in Bethlehem. It begins nine days before Christmas to symbolize Mary and Joseph's nine day journey.

Continued on page 10...

## Christmas Traditions 'Round the World Continued

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Continued from page 9...

Norway: Celebrated by a gift bearing gnome or elf, Julebuk, Christmas Buck, appears as a goat-like creature. This tradition dates back to Viking times when pagans worshiped Thor and his goat. Julenissen, Santa Claus, brings the children gifts.

Poland: Wigilia begins on Christmas Eve when everyone participates in a strict twenty-four hour fast that ends in a large feast. Officially known as Bozz Narodzenie, this tradition is referred to as Gwiazdka, little star. When the star appears, a blessed oplatek, rice wafer, is broken into pieces and passed around. The feast itself, consists of twelve courses, one for each Apostle, and the table is always set with an extra setting just in case a stranger or the Holy Spirit should appear.

Russia: Legend has it that in the 11th Century Prince Vladimir traveled to Constantinople to be baptized. He

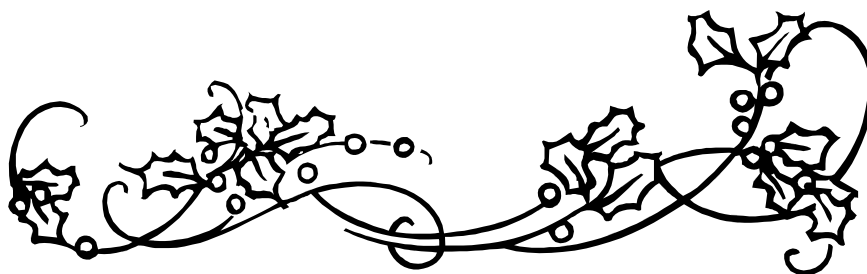
returned spreading stories of the miracles he witnessed by St. Nicholas of Myra. Since that time, Nicholas has been the most popular name for Russian boys. Before the revolution, Babouschka brought gifts to children. Like La Befana in Italy, Babouschka refused to help the wise men on their journey to visit the Christ Child and is forced to roam the countryside. During communist years St. Nicholas was transformed into Grandfather Frost.

Spain: Celebration begins with the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th in front of the Gothic cathedral in Seville in a ceremony called los Seises, dance of the six, performed by ten costumed boys. Christmas Eve, Nochebuena, the Good Night, and the Magi are greatly revered. In Spain, Balthazar rides a donkey and leaves gifts for the children.

Sweden: 1,000 years ago King Canute declared Christmas would last a

month, from December 13th, the feast of St. Lucia, to January 13th, Tjugondag Knut, St. Canute's Day. Lucia carried food to Christians hiding in underground tunnels during the days of persecution. To light her way, she wore a wreath of candles on her head until she was arrested and martyred. On feast day, the eldest daughter in a Swedish family dresses in a white dress with a red sash and puts an evergreen wreath with seven lighted candles on her head, then she passes out coffee and buns to family members. On Christmas Eve, a gnome, tomte, emerges from under the floor of the house or barn carrying a sack over his shoulder and then leaves gifts for all.

Katherine Bone is a member of the Heart of Dixie, Southern Magic, NAWW and Hearts Through History.



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## Enter NT's Great Expectations Contest

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Enter the first 25 pages, either electronic or hard copy entries accepted  
Cost: \$20 for NTRWA members

Check the website for all the details: [www.NTRWA.org](http://www.NTRWA.org) or call Angi for entry forms: 214-727-3398

To judge, please contact Angi via email, [angiplt@aol.com](mailto:angiplt@aol.com) or at the number listed above.

# RWA Conference Workshop Review

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Reviewed by Kim Grooms

RWA® 2006: *The Care and Feeding of the Big Black Moment*, Presented by Debra Dixon

With standing room only, Debra Dixon did not disappoint. *The Care and Feeding of Big Black Moments* was riveting and I was thrilled to come away with many new nuggets of information. My only problem: I continually got too caught up in the presentation to remember to jot down everything I was learning!

The workshop began by answering the question of what exactly is the Big Black Moment. The BBM is the moment of hopelessness. The moment the characters (and readers) realize all may be lost. And according to Ms. Dixon, it is NOT an event. Instead, it is a living breathing organism. Beginning from page one, the characters themselves fuel the BBM with self-realization. You want to begin worrying the reader early and drop echoes of the BBM throughout the entire book. And then, when the worst that can happen happens, the resolution of the BBM comes from internal growth with a BIG character choice. This is where your characters will see their errors in thinking and learn their life lessons.

Once the definition was understood, we moved on to understanding how to feed this beast. The concept is that a book be broken into the beginning, the middle and the end. Well, we've all heard this before but how to handle each section was new to me. Each section requires the author to 1) Take an action, and 2) Deal with a promise. The action is defined as the author action/decision/ storytelling technique. Subsequently, the promise is the author's promise to the reader

about what to expect.

**The Beginning: Action – Choose Your Weapons.** This are your characters' weapons. You need to choose how your characters deal with life, how they are being who they are, their patterns of behavior, their coping skills, their back story, and their character traits. In other words, understand your characters and start to show it. Don't forget to mix in those internal tidbits that will become so important later when you are ready to resolve that BBM. **Promise – Make the Promise.** This one is simple... at least explained simply. Determine what kind of book you are promising to deliver (funny, sexy, gritty, etc...) and put it in the book. Let the reader know what's in store.

**The Middle: Action – Commit to a Character.** Whose story is this anyway? One of your characters will have the biggest emotional change. This is where you need to make sure the book is telling that character's story. **Promise – Develop the promise and show it in your scenes, from vague to concrete.** As the middle of the book progresses and the BBM is growing closer, keep delivering what you promised the reader in the beginning and don't forget to continue dropping those hints along the way. Scenes need to continually have new information and your characters need to be learning more and more throughout the middle.

Now let me explain another WOW! moment I picked up in the workshop. In the middle of the book you need to have a gray moment. That's right, a gray moment. This all made perfect sense once explained and now that I know it, I know I've seen it in the best of books. But it was not a phrase I had heard before. The gray moment is something that initially looks like the worst that can happen, but then we

find out it isn't so bad. The character's failure turns to success and you need to show the beginning of some significant internal change here.

**The End: Here it comes, the Big Black Moment! Action – Clear the Decks.** Strip all the issues to the bone and have your change. **Promise – Deliver the Goods (Make Good On Your Promise.)** Don't forget, your BBM is not an event, it is revealed by events. And the resolution must come from the characters' internal growth. This moment should have the biggest emotional impact of anything in your book.

As quoted from the workshop handout, "During the beginning and middle, your BBM job has been to weave the fabric from which you can solve the unsolvable by plucking at the threads of self-realization." As you are resolving the BBM, make sure those threads are there. Do your weapons help to overcome the BBM? What's the incentive for the character to fight? Be sure you've shown how the characters have changed and what they learned that will allow them to succeed.

So that's it. Hopefully my notes weren't missing too many details to get you started down your path to the care and feeding of your BBM. Start with your conflict, your characters' internal problems, build on them, weave in traces of the BBM and the internal growth needed to resolve it, show the conflict, show the growth, and finally, only then can your Big Black Moment have a satisfactory resolution..

Kim Grooms writes contemporary romance and is currently working on her first novel. She works for a large insurance company as an IT Project Manager and lives for the day she no longer has to report to a cubicle.



Jen FitzGerald  
Newsletter Editor  
7000 Robinhood Lane  
Fort Worth, Texas 76112



NTRWA  
2100 W. Northwest Hwy  
Suite 114-1081  
Grapevine, TX 76051

## Meeting Information

December 9, 2006

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NTRWA Monthly Meeting

La Hacienda Ranch

5250 Highway 121 South

Colleyville, TX

10:00 ~ 10:30 Meet & Greet  
10:30 ~ 10:45 Welcome & Announcements  
10:45 ~ 11:45 Workshop  
11:45 ~ 12:00 Break/Order Lunch  
12:00 ~ 1:00 Business Meeting

Visitors Welcome



Christmas Party  
&  
Elections