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Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America

General Meeting October 18, 2008

PUTTING YOUR CHARACTER IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Join us Saturday, October 18, at the La Hacienda Ranch Restaurant at 10:30 am for **Sharon Mignerey** (www.sharonmignerey.com). She has written books for Silhouette Intimate Moments, Zebra, and most recently for Steeple Hill Love Inspired Suspense (another imprint of Harlequin). **THE GOOD NEIGHBOR** will be out in November 2008. Sharon is a self-confessed dreamer who knows the only way to make dreams come true is to work diligently toward their achievement. Part of that is learning craft, and she is always happy to share what she has learned through workshops and online courses. She's had articles published by The Writer magazine, and she's a regular contributor to The Rocky Mountain Writer with a column entitled Muse Sings. Sharon's books have won several awards including The Golden Heart, the National Readers Choice Award, and the CRW Keeper Award. She's

active in RWA chapters, both in her new home in Texas and her old home in Colorado. She was named the 2003 Writer of the Year by Colorado Romance writers, and the 2000 Writer of the

Year by Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers. When she's not writing, you can find her learning how to garden in the Texan heat where she moved a couple of years ago or playing with her two rescued Shih Tzus.





PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Chapter Mates,

Let's get ready for the **Great Expectations Contest!** Marty Tidwell and Mary Duncanson, our co-coordinators, are doing a great job. Almost all category coordinators and final round judges are in place. We've opened up our contest to writers outside RWA. If you're a member of non-RWA affiliated writing groups, please feel free to pass on our contest info when it becomes available. And don't forget that we'll be giving away a GE entry fee as one of door prizes at our December meeting.

Speaking of entry fees, the chapter will also be holding a drawing for a Golden Heart and a Rita entry fee at the October meeting. So if you're planning on entering one of those two, make sure you enter.

We are also still looking for a few good men and women to round out our 2008 Board. If you'd like information about any of the positions, please contact Regina Richards or the board member currently serving in the position.

As we race to the end of the year, we only have one more regular meeting. Sharon Mignerey will be here in October for a spectacular interactive workshop. We hope you'll be there to learn how to "Put Your Characters in the Drivers Seat."

See you there!

Sincerely,

Jen FitzGerald

THOSE PESKY ARCHETYPES

By Juliet Burns

My critique partner is laughing herself silly thinking of me writing about characterization, because she knows how bad I am at it. Yep, you guessed it, I'm a plot-driven writer—which comes in real handy when you need a great plot. But, out of pure necessity, I've had to learn how to get to know my characters. And what I don't know, I definitely know WHO to ask. Or in this case, I have some great resources for you to go to.

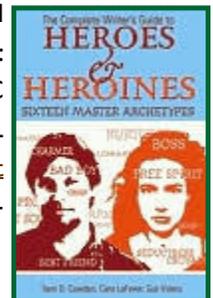
I've heard some authors say they NEVER write a word until they KNOW their characters. Others say, they get to know their characters AS they write and, usually by the 3rd-5th chapter, they know their hero and heroine well enough to finish the book.

I think I finally nailed down exactly who my heroine was in my latest WIP about the next to last chapter. Can you say, *revision?*

Needless to say, I rely heavily on [THE COMPLETE WRITER'S GUIDE TO HEROES AND HEROINES. SIXTEEN MASTER ARCHETYPES](#), by Tami D. Cowden, Caro LaFever, and Sue Vidars. This, folks, is my BIBLE for getting to know my characters.

There are also some other really good books about fictional characters out there:

— 45 MASTER CHARACTERS: MYTHIC MODELS FOR CREATING ORIGINAL CHARACTERS by [Victoria Lynn Schmidt](#)
— CREATING UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS by [Linda Seger](#)



Some authors use astrology—here's a link to an interesting article about that: <http://www.cjwinters.com/astrochars.html>

Some use character interview sheets (see below) or character charts: www.geocities.com/poetess47/100questions.html

Some use the character's name to divine their meaning or at least, choose the name with great care. Here's a fun article about the importance of names www.kabalarians.com/index.cfm

But the archetypes idea is my personal favorite. Is your hero a Chief or a Bad Boy or a Charmer?

Is your heroine a Spunky Kid or a Crusader or a Boss?

(Archetypes Continued on page 3)



(Archetypes Continued from page 2)

Each archetype comes complete with strengths and weaknesses, lots of traits and there's even a section in the back for the layered archetype. Maybe your hero is part Chief and part Charmer. Also in the back of the book, the authors give you examples of how each archetype interacts with the others. They also give examples of each archetype from TV and movies and once you start getting to know these archetypes, it's fun to be able to pick the ones to match your favorite characters from the TV and movies you watch. This really helped me.

After you determine what archetype your character is, make sure you incorporate that into the decisions he/she makes, and into the actions he/she takes. As a plot driven writer, I struggle with this. A "character driven" writer writes what the characters tell her they would do next. Makes sense, right? But, oh, not for me. That would be *too* easy. I tend to think about what I want to happen next (for example, I need the bad guy to harass the heroine so the hero can jump in and, well, be heroic) but a lot of times, I have the characters do something just because I WANT them to for the plot to work out. THEN I have to come up with a reason WHY. Many times I have to go back and rewrite because it just doesn't make sense that this particular character would behave in this way. To borrow a quote from a friend: "If I can't set a good example, I'll just have to be a horrible warning."

So, be sure to stay true to your character's archetype. Watch what motivates them. For example, a WARRIOR is usually

motivated by HONOR. A CHIEF is motivated by wanting to be IN CONTROL.

Here are some links to some of the best articles I've read about characterization. They can explain it a lot better than me.

WE NEED A HERO by Tami Cowden www.likesbooks.com/eight.html

THE WOMEN WE WANT TO BE: THE EIGHT FEMALE ARCHETYPES www.likesbooks.com/78.html

Here's another article by Tami on how to show characterization: www.hodrw.com/fourstepstocharac.htm

On getting your reader to become emotionally involved with your characters www.webster.edu/~schustjm/emotion.htm

And here's one about Breathing life into your characters www.absolutewrite.com/novels/breathing_life.htm

~ Juliet Burns is an NTRWA member and winner of the 2002 Golden Rose Contest, then published it with the Silhouette Desire editor who placed her. Juliet now has two books published: HIGH STAKES PASSION & THE SPY'S SURRENDER (with Red Sage Publishing). Find out more about Juliet Burns at www.julietburns.com/.



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SPOTLIGHT ON MAYA REYNOLDS

By Nancy Connally

Like many writers, Maya has had more than one career. She was a high school teacher, worked at a stock brokerage house, volunteered in the Psychiatric ER at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, earned her MS in Social Work, and planned and developed the first psychiatric mobile crisis team for kids in Texas. And for several years now, she's been writing . . .

Hi, Maya. When did you decide you wanted to be a writer?

I can't remember a time when I didn't want to write. When I was nine, I was writing plays for my brothers and friends to perform.

What do you write?

I have one erotic romance published; the second is due out in April 2009. I submitted a proposal for an urban fantasy to Penguin. They're asking me to expand the proposal to three books.

Is there any genre you haven't written but would like to try?

I love both mysteries and thrillers. I've brought some of that love into my romances, but have yet to write a true mystery.

Are you working on anything now?

I'm currently trying to spin the world of my urban fantasy from three chapters into three books.

Are you published? Is anything you wrote due for publication this year?

Bad Girl was published last September. *Bad Boy* is due out in April. I expect before I'm finished there'll be a *Bad Dog* <G>.

Do you have any pen names?

Maya Reynolds is my current pen name. My agent and I are in discussions about how to handle my pen name if I sign to do the urban fantasies for another imprint of Penguin (I'm currently published with NAL). I'm still trying to decide how to differentiate my erotic romances from the urban fantasies. My agent believes I need a new name. We may go with M.A. Reynolds—just because I don't want to have to create a whole new website, etc.

Most writers are readers. What do you read for pleasure? Do you have any favorite authors?

I have less time these days for pleasure reading. What I do have is mostly devoted to urban fantasies. My current favorite writers are Patricia Briggs, Marjorie M. Liu's *Iron Hunt* series, Ilona Andrews, Jim Butcher and Mike Carey.



Do you remember the first romance you read, or perhaps one that encouraged you to write?

The first romance I ever read was "Jane Eyre." I received it as a gift for my ninth birthday. When my aunt told me it was a romance, I became determined to read it. I tried every year from the time I was nine until I was fourteen before I was able to read that book. I still have that same copy on my bookshelf.

My first erotic romance was "The Lady's Tutor" by Robin Schone. I was stuck in a hotel overnight on business and picked it up at the newsstand. I don't usually read historicals, but I stayed up all night to finish that book. I can remember thinking, "This is what I want to write."

Is there any particular part of the writing process you find difficult? If so, do you have any helpful hints about how to overcome it?

For me, it's finishing the book. I fall in love with my characters and don't want to let them go. I've learned that when I get about 70% through one manuscript, I start the next. That way, I'm eager to finish the first one so I can get to the second one. I admit, it's a mental trick but it works for me.

If you could turn any book you've read into a movie, which one would it be?

I'd love to see *The Lady's Tutor* as a film.

(Spotlight Continued on page 5)



(Spotlight Continued from page 4)

Who would you cast in the leading roles?

Ramiel is the bastard son of a countess and a sheik. I'd love to see either Javier Bardem or Viggo Mortensen in the role.

Elizabeth is the proper Victorian married woman whom he tutors. I think Naomi Watts or Cate Blanchett could capture a woman who appears plain, but who blossoms as the result of her lessons.

Are you a member of any other writing organizations?

I've had to cut back on a lot of things just to stay on top of my day job at the university, my writing job, my blog and the writing classes I teach. Right now it's just RWA, the Writers' Guild of Texas, and the Irving Writers' Connection.

Do you have a website?

I maintain a daily blog at: www.mayareynoldswriter.blogspot.com
I talk about writing, reading, the publishing industry and other things that catch my fancy.

What do you consider your greatest writing accomplishment?

Selling that first book. It's a long, hard road, and I'll never take that accomplishment for granted.

How would you describe yourself in 50 words or less?

I'm a woman who has lucked into two jobs I love—both my day job and my writing career. I enjoy both enormously. I have a wonderful family and good friends to whom I'm very loyal. I love my life, my home, and my garden. I'm out of words. <G> ‡

HEROSCOPES: THE LIBRA HEROINE

By Bonnie Staring

~ The following article first appeared in the October 2008 issue of *romANTICS*, newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Paula Watkinson, editor.

What's really on her mind? You may never know. Born between September 23 and October 22, the Libra heroine is the peacekeeper of the Zodiac. Whether in romance, business or friendship, these fabulous women are often the glue that holds everything together. No that a Libra heroine needs to work hard at this, her penchant for good times brings people out of the woodwork and has them coming back for more.

She's charming to a fault; with all those fans around her a hero may have a hard time getting close enough to get to know her better. This Libra woman is brilliant on the one side and brilliantly lazy on the other. For her to put forth an effort, the task has to be something she believes is essential or really fun to do. Like steam-cleaning the rugs or snake charming.

Libra heroines are enchanting creatures, so those around her are drawn in, whether that was her intent or not. When there are too many suitors, woo her with romantic gestures and intriguing, fun outings. Ideal dates for a Libra gal include hot-air ballooning, a night at a comedy club or even a haunted walking tour, where she can hold your hand to comfort you. Famous



Libra heroines include Eleanor Roosevelt, Bridgette Bardot, Carrie Fisher and Moon Unit Zappa.

Next month: The Scorpio Heroine

~ Bonnie Staring is a comedic triple threat (writer, performer, coupon user). Her articles regularly appear in women's magazines and she conducts workshops on creativity and discovering your inner superhero. See what else Bonnie's been up to at www.bonniestaring.com ‡



SEVEN GUIDEPOSTS OF SUCCESS

By Shelley Bradley

The other day, I received one of those catalogs with the gorgeous landscapes and the inspirational sayings underneath. You've probably seen these hanging in offices here and there.

I personally never paid much attention to them. In fact, they seemed somewhat silly, since I keep all those beliefs inside. But when I received this catalog, I glanced through it and realized that many of these saying apply to writers, whether you're getting started on your first manuscript and wondering if you can do it, or you're multi-published author staggering under deadlines and wondering how you'll manage and if it matters anymore. (You'd be surprised how often I talk to people in both situations.) But after 24 books, in 4 genres for 5 publishers, translated into a half dozen different languages over the course of 10 years, I've realized that these people with their pictures have it right!

1. Believe and Succeed: *We cannot change yesterday. We can only make the most of today, and look with hope toward tomorrow.*

Wise words. If your last contest or last book release didn't go as well as you wanted, that's in the past. If you've been flailing, procrastinating, angsty, etc... that was yesterday. You make today what it should be and think about the fact that everything you do now sets you up for tomorrow.

Yes, I know it sounds simple. If you've been struggling, how do you just wake up one day and change everything, especially your attitude? Remember the next principle:

2. Success: *Some people dream of success...while others wake up and work hard at it.*

Okay, y'all, this is my soapbox. What separates you from the others is your willingness to work for what you want—and not apologize for it. For 10 years, I woke up at 5:30 every day, went to a full-time job, came home and did the dinner/family thing with a small child, then started writing at 9pm. I was often criticized for being overly-ambitious, a bad mother, stretching myself too thin, etc. During those 10 years, I wrote and promoted 18 books, with a year and a half off in the middle to strategize a new career plan and implement it. I gave up a social life, TV, being the volunteer mom, etc. Because I knew what I wanted and wasn't veering from that path. When people talk about giving up writing because they've been at it for the last (fill in the blank) number of years and nothing is happening, I always ask one question, "How bad do you want it?" Yes, we've all considered throwing in the towel. But I maintain it's not always the most talented that survive; it's the most persistent.

The next two go together for me and, I think, define principles that have guided me for the past 2 years in particular. And they have yet to let me down:

3. Excellence: *Success is a direct reflection of the effort, pride and passion with which a person lives.*

What I've taken out of this is, don't ever say anything is "good enough". Don't settle. Don't rest. There's always someone else as talented as you, yet hungrier. If you don't bring you're A game to the table, others will—and they'll succeed at your goals.



4. Passion: *There are many things in life that will capture your eye, but very few will capture your heart. These are the ones to pursue. These are the ones worth keeping.*

This particularly helpful when you're wondering what to write, trying to decide between that book of your heart or that book of the market. Unless that book of your heart is completely unmarketable (a midget and a bearded lady in an 18th century Russian circus), then write the book of your heart. Always. Never invest your time in something you can't be 100% behind. Lack of passion shows to editors, reviewers and readers. In my career, I've written 2 books of my heart that I believed I was writing for me and would never sell. But I wrote them because I had to. Not only did both sell, they both completely changed my career. Passion shows.

So let's say you've worked hard and believed in yourself, demonstrated your excellence and passion—and you achieved your goal. You're there, right

NO!!!! Don't make me get on my soapbox again...

5. Achievement: *Unless you try to do something beyond what you*

(Seven Guideposts Continued on page 7)



(Seven Guideposts Continued from page 6)

have already mastered, you will never grow.

In other words, unless you want to be a I-hit wonder, be abandoned by your editors and readers for being the “same”, you have to keep growing. With every book I write, I start with a challenge in mind. Likely, no one will ever know that challenge but me. But it’s my way of growing and stretching and making myself reach for new heights. And it’s not about sales goals or things I can’t control. It’s...can I write a good book with these seemingly difficult elements? I don’t know until I try.

The sad reality of life is that, even when you’ve worked hard, had conviction, acted with passion—done all the right things, you may not achieve your goals. That’s when you remember this:

6. Embrace Change: *Temperatures will rise and fall. Winds will shift. Leaves will drop and buds will form. And with every transition new beginnings will be revealed.*

This is another way of saying 2 things that I’ve clung to in tough times: Everything happens for a reason (though you probably can’t see at that moment) and when one door closes, another opens. Don’t give up when things get tough!

In my career, I’ve had to start over not once, but twice. Start from scratch. Re-invent myself. Find a new publisher, convince them I was capable and willing to work hard and could capture a readership. This saying will apply to you, whatever your goals, if you don’t succeed the first time—or even the tenth:

7. Bring it on: *You may have to fight a battle more than once to achieve victory.*

Translation: you can’t win if you give up.

Funny, how a catalog can be full of sayings that can change your internal barometer and, thus, the course of your life. But if you believe in your success, embrace passion, do your best to excel, grow, change as needed and learn to fight, I believe you’ll achieve your goals.

‡

~ Shelley Bradley, aka Shayla Black, is the author of the *Doomsday Brethren Series* Watch for *TEMPT ME WITH DARKNESS* August 26! "This orgasmic paranormal...will have Black's fans panting for the next installment." ~ *Publisher's Weekly* www.shaylablack.com & www.doomsdaybrethren.com

NTRWA RITA/GH ENTRY FEE DRAWING

Wendy Watson says

Are you planning to enter the RITA or the Golden Heart this year? NT will reimburse one member's RITA entry fee and one member's Golden Heart entry fee!! To participate in the drawing, just fill out the entry form (available on the NT Yahoo loop or by e-mailing Wendy Watson at wendylynwatson@gmail.com) and return it to Wendy by October 15. That's all you have to do!

The drawings are open to all members-in-good-standing (as of October 15, 2008) of NTRWA who meet the eligibility requirements for the RITA or the Golden Heart and, in the case of the Golden Heart drawing, are members of RWA PRO as of October 15. Each interested and eligible member who completes an entry form will be entered once in either the RITA or Golden Heart drawing. Entry is free. At the regular October meeting of NTRWA, one name will be selected from the RITA pool and one name from the Golden Heart pool. NTRWA will either (1) pay the RITA/Golden Heart entry fee for the recipient directly to RWA National or (2) reimburse the recipient for the entry fee (upon proof of entry and payment).

Again, entry forms are available from the NT Yahoo loop or from Wendy Watson (wendylynwatson@gmail.com). Completed forms may be scanned and returned to Wendy via e-mail OR mailed to Wendy Watson, 1000 W. Hickory St., Denton, TX 76201. Entry forms must be received by October 15. ‡

COOKING THE LASAGNA: CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

By Regina Richards

It's Sunday afternoon in my kitchen. Autumn sunlight pours through the windows deepening the purples and greens of the wallpaper grapes that surround me. On a counter huge bowls of real Mozzarella, Romano, and Parmesan cheeses stand beside a carton of free range eggs and several massive tubs of Ricotta. Fragrant basil leaves, and fresh garlic cloves await mincing on a cutting board nearby. An enormous pot of red sauce bubbles on the stove while lasagna noodles, still steaming from the boiler, stretch cooling on wax paper.

I am cooking for fifty. In another
(*Lasagna Continued on page 9*)



AGENTS & EDITORS SPEAK UP: GRABBING ATTENTION AND KEEPING IT

By **Nikki Duncan**

Last month I went over what Lucienne Diver, Holly Root, Nathan Bransford, Caren Johnson, Kim Whalen, Jim McCarthy, Heather Osborn, Chris Keeslar, and Deb Werksman had to say about websites, voice, and marketing plans while at RWA Nationals in San Francisco. This month we'll talk about what you can do to get the attention of an editor or agent and what they expect of you once you have it.

We all know that one of the most common first steps to getting the attention of an editor or agent is to send a query letter. Cold contact sales are difficult to make in any business, but in publishing with editors and agents receiving hundreds of queries a month, sometimes in a week, it's remarkably tougher. And increasingly important to stand out from the masses. One simple way to give yourself a leg up, though it's something that numerous people fail to do, is to always do your research into the query/submission guidelines for the industry professionals you're targeting.

Lucienne Diver, Holly Root, Heather Osborne, and Nathan Bransford respond to every query and submission that crosses their desks and meets their guidelines. Caren Johnson tries to respond to all queries, but if twelve weeks pass with no response she suggests you follow up with her. Deb Werksman, because she accepts un-agented and unrequested full manuscripts at the beginning of the submission process, will send a reply that varies on how far she gets into the manuscript. If she makes it through the full manuscript, almost always the writer will get a call with direction or an offer. Chris Keeslar (in

regards to full manuscripts) tries to respond within 4-6 months if it's close to what he's looking for, but no one should wait longer than that before sending it elsewhere.

With as tough as it is to get beyond the query letter, I began wondering just how much weight agents and editors put into the one page letters that we sweat and panic over. Have you ever wondered if you are being judged as the author more than the concept of your story? Can they get a sense of you and how far you'll go in your career?

One of the quickest things an agent or editor can tell from a query letter is whether or not you've done your homework. If you're querying Nathan Bransford with poetry or screenplays (something he says on his blog that he doesn't represent), even if you have an amazing query letter, you're sending the message that you weren't proactive enough in your own career planning to research the person you want as an advocate.

As Lucienne Diver said, it's a matter of the author hitting the right notes of capturing the tone of their book, maintaining professionalism, and showing that they've done their research. Holly Root and Caren Johnson feel that while they can get a sense of a person from their query letter, sort of like the professionalism of targeting the right person for your work, it ultimately takes talking via phone or email or working together to deepen an understanding and establish your ability to work together in a professional way.

Chris Keeslar says the most he can get from a query letter is a sense of some-



one's focus, talent, energy, and intelligence, which lines up with Nathan Bransford's opinion that it's sometimes more a sense of seeing what isn't there that should be. So when you're working on your query letters remember to customize it for each agent or editor you intend to send it to. And rest assured that they are not determining the health and longevity of your career as they read that single page.

Though industry professionals don't judge you as a person based on your query letter, and they remain open to resubmissions of new work from you that fits their guidelines, there is a sure-fire way to cut off your chances of working with them: misbehave in the wrong settings.

Every person I interviewed agreed that an author talking negatively about an agent, editor, or another author, or generally behaving less than professionally in situations where the behavior may be witnessed or overheard by industry professionals or possible future readers, could be directly hurting their career. Regardless of talent, few agents or editors want to take on an author that they know will be difficult to deal with or manage, so bear that in mind when you attend conferences or even join in on chats online.

In speaking with agents, editors, and aspiring and published authors it became



(Paranomal Continued from page 8)

obvious to me that so many people seeking agent representation or publication target their energy into writing the story and putting together a query letter. A small number of people that I've met think to question what happens once they get an offer. In fact, most either have taken, or say they will take, the first offer from an agent or editor. Why that is not the mindset an author should have is for another article, but one thing I walked away from my interviews with was the importance of asking what your chosen agent or editor expects of you once you've entered into a relationship with them in regards to how many books a year you should produce.

Lucienne, Holly, Heather, Nathan, Chris, and Kimberly all agreed that the number of books produced per year depended on the author. Lucienne will advise her authors to slow down as soon as she notices their quality slipping or if she thinks they are beginning to no longer enjoy the work. Holly feels authors need to stay focused and have a strategy. Than an author's outlook should reflect their pride in themselves and a high quality of work. If an author can support a multi-book schedule per year then Holly is more than willing to support that.

From an editor's standpoint, Chris and Heather like to see at least one book a year from their authors. Chris feels two is better, but anything less than one a year makes it hard to establish a career.

So when you begin the query dance with agents and editors consider how long it takes you to write a book and have it ready for submission, and as a debut author if you can have an inven-

tory of books then you could ease some of your own stress in the first year or so after you sell. Though it is not necessary to have an inventory.

You are the best judge of you, how fast you can work, and what you want from your career. Agents and editors are advocates for you and your books because they feel a connection to the stories you craft and because they respect what you do, but there are some who do not always have your best interest at heart.

Take your time with the query and submission process. When the moment of decision comes, take your time to consider all of your options before signing on the dotted line. Never allow yourself to feel that you've sold out too early or settled for less than you wanted.

Chris Keeslar is a senior editor with Dorchester. www.dorchesterpub.com

Deb Werksman is an editor with Sourcebooks. www.sourcebooks.com

Heather Osborn is an editor with TOR. www.tor-forge.com

Caren Johnson is an agent with the Caren Johnson Literary Agency. www.carenjohnson.com

Holly Root is an agent with The Waxman Agency. www.waxmanagency.com

Jim McCarthy is an agent with Dystel and Goderich Literary Management. www.dystel.com

Kim Whalen is an agent with Trident Media Group. www.tridentmediagroup.com

Lucienne Diver is an agent with The Knight Agency. www.knightagency.net

Nathan Bransford is an agent with Cur-

t i s B r o w n L t d .
www.nathanbransford.blogspot.com

Nikki's a member of RWA, North Texas RWA, Dallas Area Romance Authors, and is a RWA PRO. She is currently working on her fifth manuscript. Nikki's a contributor to the RWA PROspects Newsletter and her articles have been published in over fifty RWA Chapter newsletters and list serves. While seeking publication, Nikki continues creating the stories living vividly in her imagination and studying the publishing industry. More on Nikki can be found by visiting www.nikkiduncan.com.

(Lasagna Continued from page 7)

kitchen, miles away, a friend is doing the same. Like me, she will work for hours and then deliver large platters of food to the organization we both belong to. Together we will make enough food to feed a hundred teens this evening. All over town other women are also at work preparing the green salads, garlic bread, drinks, and desserts that will be served with the meal.

I won't be there when the dinner is served, won't take a single bite of the product of all my labor today, yet I am being fed.

I am fed by the knowledge that my children, my friends' children, and the children of people I don't even know will sit together at long tables this evening, talk, laugh, share food, find acceptance, and build community. I am fed by the memories of my own teenage years when I was the one who dined without laboring, participated in events without volunteering, and was the beneficiary of work performed by others. As I layer warm noodles and cool cheeses,

(Lasagna Continued on page 12)



GEARING UP FOR NANOWRIMO

By **Danniele Worsham**

This article was first published in the October, 2008, THE HEART MONITOR, a newsletter from the RWA Heart of Dixie Romance Writer's Chapter.

Last year, over 100,000 people chose to spend the month of November writing 50,000 words during National Novel Writing Month. This phenomenon, now in its 10th annual event, has grown from a few like-minded friends, to a non-profit organization that promotes literary endeavors for both adults and young people.

What is NaNoWriMo?

This is the 10th annual National Novel Writing Month event. It started out with 21 people doing this for fun. But 2 years ago they established a non-profit called the Office of Letters and Light that runs NaNoWriMo and the NaNoWriMo Young Writers Program through sponsorships and donations.

From previous donations, they've established 22 libraries in countries including Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. NaNoWriMo had 101,510 individual participants in 2007, including 366 schools, and university courses at UCLA, Phoenix College, and George Mason University.

If you choose to participate, you're in good company. Previous winners include

- Lani Diane Rich — **MAYBE BABY, TIME OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR**; www.lanidianerich.com
- Sara Gruen—**FLYING CHANGES, WATER FOR ELEPHANTS**; www.saragruen.com;
- Lisa Daily — **THE DREAMGIRL**

ACADEMY; stopgetting-dumped.com/

- Jenna Bayley-Burke — **JUST ONE SPARK**; www.jennabayleyburke.com

What are the Benefits?

Hopefully, one obvious benefit is that you'll be that much closer to finishing your novel. Whether you hit the goal of 50,000 or lag behind with 25,000, that's 25,000 words you didn't have before November 1st.

Compressing the time spent with your novel and characters into this intense time frame completely immerses the author in the story. There is no break in the connection because you will eat, drink, and sleep this project.

For many of the NaNoWriMo's I corresponded with, the greatest benefit was discovering more about yourself as a writer. One author summed it up best: "You really learn what you're capable of when you truly focus on your passion."

You'll learn exactly how many pages you could produce if you were under a tight deadline. Whether you have the stamina, patience, and mental focus to succeed at BICHOK (Butt In Chair, Hands On Keyboard). The experience might reveal to you whether you need more preparation before you start on a work. Or help you reach that momentous occasion of finally typing your first "The End".

Steps to Success

So you want to write the equivalent of a category romance length book in a month? Here are some steps to help you achieve your goal:

1. Sign up on the website at www.nanowrimo.org. This will provide



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you with the accountability of listing your word count and encouragement from the forums, including some forums specific to the romance genre or certain areas. For instance, there is one for northern Alabama, as well as one specifically for the Birmingham area. The staff also offers weekly pep talks and podcasts for encouragement.

2. The website also offers meters and electronic banners to add to your website so your readers can help encourage you in your quest.

3. Remember, quantity is what counts here, not quality. According to the website, "This is a fun, seat of your pants approach to novel writing." And believe or not, that's a good thing. Perfection is not required!

4. First drafts are called drafts for a reason. They are designed to be rewritten, and rewrite them you should, just not in November. Having to get this number of words out this fast will help you to turn off that pesky internal editor that so often hinders our progress.

5. Prepare ahead of time, whether you are a plotter or panster. Sorry, pansters! If you are going to crank out 50,000 words in 30 days, you don't have

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time to stop and figure out where you are going. At the very least, you need a clear idea of your characters, the beginning and end of your book, and a few key points in between. This will give you a general map of where your story is heading, the target each scene should aim for. If you are a plotter, do everything you would normally do before you start writing before November 1st. For me, that includes comprehensive plot points, Story Magic plotting, and a character collage. Unsure how to prepare? Check out **NO PLOT? NO PROBLEM!** By NaNoWriMo founder Chris Baty.

6. Let's talk about numbers. To write 50,000 words in 30 days, you'd have to write 1665 words each day. But, if you write 2000 words each day, you can compensate for a few off days, like Thanksgiving. Plan how many off days you might need and factor them in when calculating your word goals. Trust me, if you think you can slack off during the month and then race to the finish, odds are against you. But be ready to give up all the spare time you have to achieve this goal. If you are a fast writer and hit your goal really quick, great! For the rest of us, be prepared to sacrifice!

7. Success Strategies: Here are a few strategies I received from fellow writers and former NaNoWriMo's to help you crank out the pages during November.

8. Use a timer: Try writing in timed sprints. Some examples I ran across included 45 minutes on/15 minutes off, 2 hours on/1 hour off, 30/30, or whatever works for you. But when it is time to start, do nothing but write. No email. No internet. No television. No children.

9. The Buddy System: Accountability can go a long way toward helping you

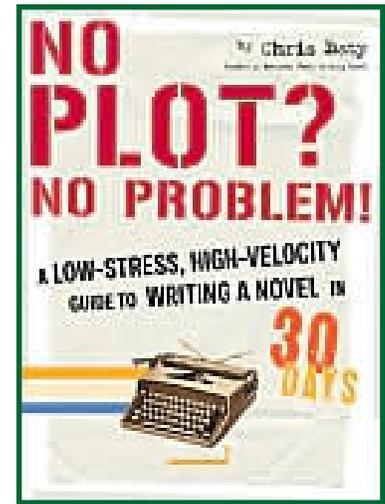
achieve your goals each day. It's easier to fail when no one is watching. Try the timed sprints in conjunction with your friends, exchanging emails at each break time with a progress report via email. I've recently enjoyed success with challenge days: days devoted to writing as much as possible throughout the day, reporting in with page counts via email. My lowest accomplishment was 6 pages. My highest was 28.

10. Create a Writing Challenge with a prize. Everyone throw in \$10 and the person to write the most words by the end of the month gets the cash or the equivalent in an Amazon gift certificate.

11. Don't stress! This is supposed to be fun. Okay, I'll admit I can't imagine this being fun, because I don't enjoy writing my first drafts. I enjoy REwriting them. But the chance to immerse myself in my story with the encouragement of other writers who are traversing this same journey with me sounds invigorating.

12. Reward Yourself. All work and no play makes Jane an awfully dull girl. Don't forget to reward yourself for all that hard work. If you need the carrot, plan smaller, weekly rewards for meeting or exceeding your work count goals. Some ideas include: a new book or magazine, some TV time or a movie, dinner out, or chocolate (always a good choice). If you can hold out, treat yourself at the end of the month with a big reward, like a manicure/pedicure or massage, a new outfit, or a night at a B&B. Why not plan an ending party with fellow NaNoWriMo participants? On the website, they call these "Thank God it's over" parties. Meet at your favorite restaurant or get together for a potluck and night of Rock Band.

And don't forget the most important reward of all. If you meet the 50,000



word count, upload your manuscript to the NaNoWriMo counter, so your hard work can be verified and your name added to the list of NaNoWriMo winners! Don't worry, all manuscripts are deleted as soon as they are counted.

Whether or not you actually hit the 50,000 word goal, the important part is that you invested time and hard work into your goal of finishing a book. Out of all the NaNoWriMo's I talked to about their experiences, whether they finished or not, they all agreed that it was worth it. You're that much closer to writing "The End" on your romance. That is definitely something to be proud of! ‡

~ Danniele Worsham writes contemporary romance and runs a resume writing business from her home in northern Alabama. She's a founding member of The Writing Playground and can be found on their blog every Monday. www.writingplayground.com

Shelley Bradley Booksignings

10/4 – B&N Hurst, 2-4pm
10/25 – B&N Southlake, 2-4pm
11/1 – B&N Lewisville, 2-4pm



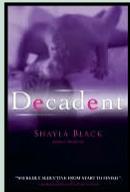
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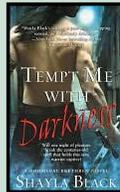
NTRWA Monthly Meeting
Doors Open 10:00 am
La Hacienda Ranch
5250 Highway 121 South
Colleyville, TX
Visitors Welcome!

We're on the web!
www.ntrwa.org

MEMBER NEWS



Shelley Bradley (writing as Shayla Black) has sold **DECADENT** to Spain and Italy and **TEMPT ME WITH DARKNESS** made Bookscan for 2 weeks.



Judi McCoy says CBS Productions bought her March 2009 book, **HOUNDING THE PAVEMENT**, for development into a television series. The book is the first in HER new romantic mystery series. Book two, **HEIR OF THE DOG**, will be out in December, and another eight/nine months after that. The big push for this first book is that I'm donating ALL royalties to Best Friends, the largest no kill animal shelter in the US.



Jane Beckenham says she received a four star review for her TT - **LOVE IN WAITING**. The reviewer said.... "I love time travel romance, and this is a good one. There were several twists and turns to the plot that kept me turning pages. Jayne had a fiery temper, but she met her match in Callum. Together they made a fantastic couple. Love In Waiting makes a great summer read."

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I am filled with gratitude for the many volunteers who provided for me in the past and I am grateful to be at a place in my life where I can pay their generosity forward to a new generation.

Like the teens who will share pasta and friendship tonight at their organizational meeting, the members of NTRWA find encouragement and camaraderie at our monthly meetings. But someone must "cook the lasagna". We need volunteers to keep our organization strong.

There are currently three 2009 board positions (Secretary, Membership Director, Programs Director) for which we still have no nominations. Please consider carefully whether you might be able to "cook the lasagna" for NTRWA in 2009 by volunteering your time. Contact Regina Richards at richardsfive@centurytel.net to learn more. We need you! ‡

~ Regina Richards is a 2007 Hot Prospects winner, a 2008 Enchanted Words Finalist, and a proud member of North Texas RWA. Visit her website at reginarichards.net