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Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America

SPOTLIGHT ON REGINA RICHARDS

2008 Enchanted Words Finalist & 2007 Hot Prospects Winner

Regina joined NTRWA about three years ago. She describes herself as, among other things, a housewife and homeschooler. Her family homeschools K-8, then sends their kids to high school and college. Regina's youngest enters high school in 2009. She has loved every minute of the homeschool years, but now she's ready to enter a new phase in her life, one she hopes will allow more time for writing.

Hi, Regina. What brought you to Texas?

The way I arrived in Texas is a very common story: Okie girl meets boy and thinks he's yummy. Yummy boy lures Okie girl across the Red River with promises of happily ever after. Three kids and twenty-something years later the boy is still yummy and the girl is a Texan.

When did you decide you wanted to be a writer?

I'd wanted to write for as long as I could remember, but didn't believe I was special enough or that I deserved that sort of delicious self-indulgence.

(Spotlight Continued on page 3)



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Chapter Mates,

Fall is upon us—cooler weather, brighter colors, and that extra blanket on the bed so we can sleep with the windows open. It's my favorite time of year. School is in full swing, but we haven't quite reached the hectic holiday season. It's a nice time to stop and enjoy the world we live in.

The board hopes you have enjoyed our speakers this year and the wide variety of topics we've covered. If there is a particular speaker or topic you would be interested in for next year, please let a board member know.

The next time we'll meet is December 13—the *2nd* Saturday of December. For our new members, this is not just any meeting, this is a party! Not only will we congratulate our incoming board members, but we'll celebrate with and reward our members who've been writing and editing—those clipboards didn't make the rounds for nothing every month. This year, we are also going to have some writing related activities. It's going to be a fun-filled meeting and we hope to see you there. And please note, due to the uncertain economy, this year we will *not* be doing the gift exchange.

Sincerely,

Jen FitzGerald

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OCTOBER MEETING MINUTES

October 18, 2008

La Hacienda Ranch Restaurant

The meeting was called to order at 12:41pm.

The September meeting minutes were approved as published in the October 2008 newsletter.

The drawings for the Golden Heart and Rita Fee drawing were held. Shelley Bradley won the Rita fee and Laura Martello won the Golden Heart fee.

Membership Director, Wendy Watson, announced that we have seventy-nine members.

Treasurer, Angi Platt, gave the treasurer's report, and reported that she had the books audited by Angela Cavener (an NT member and accountant). The books were found to be in good order. A couple of suggestions were made, including the changing of NT's fiscal year to coincide with RWA's. All suggestions will be submitted to the board for review and discussion.

Great Expectations Contest Co-Chairs, Marty Tidwell and Mary Duncanson, reported that all final round editors and category coordinators are in place.

Nomination/Election Committee Chair, Regina Richards, reported that all positions except Membership Director have at least one nominee. Please contact Regina for more information or if you would like to run for this position.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:05pm. †



(Spotlight Continued from page 1)

Then in December 2003 I stumbled across an online writing community. I couldn't contain my need to write any longer. I wrote and, with gut-churning fear, submitted. It took a long time for me to build up the courage to look at the responses. I expected those writers to rip me to shreds. To my astonishment they loved my work. I laid my head on my desk and sobbed for half an hour, thanking God for allowing me to write. Pure joy!

With those tears I gave myself permission to be the person I'd dreamed of being for as long as I could remember — a writer.

Since then, I've had plenty of my work shredded by other writers and I've grown a tough hide as a result. But that single moment of tearful joy is un-erasable and it redefined me.

What do you write?

I write whatever strikes my fancy. Contemporary Romantic Suspense, Soft Romance, Gothic with or without paranormal elements, Historical. Gothic is my current favorite.

Are you working on anything now?

A Gothic Historical with paranormal elements and a Contemporary.

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

Mystery.

Are you published?

No.

How about awards?

I'm a 2007 Hot Prospects winner and a 2008 Enchanted Words finalist.

What are you currently reading?

A Gentle Rain by Deborah Smith.

Is there a part of the writing process you find difficult?

For me, writing is pleasure, a lovely sensual indulgence. But I admit I sometimes find the whole business side of things a snore.

How would you describe yourself?

Okie intellectual, armchair philosopher, chronic optimist, mother-hen homeschooler, bathtub plotter, sometimes bold/often shy, more vulnerable than I look.

What are your writing goals?

Each year I set two types of writing goals for myself: "business of writing" goals and "craft of writing" goals. Sometimes I meet them. Sometimes I fall short. Either way, I make more progress if I'm moving toward something.

What were some of your "business of writing" goals this year?

- Complete two novels.
- Remove distractions by getting the internet and my beloved family out of my writing space.
- Organize my office, my files, my writing.
- Create a Blitzkrieg list of contests, well-researched agents, and publishers to submit to when I decide the time is right.
- Read as many categories of the 2008 Rita Nominees as possible to increase understanding of the various sub-genres and their markets.

The year is more than three quarters gone and I've achieved roughly half of those goals. But I truly believe without having set them I would have achieved much less.

If you don't achieve a goal, does it get transferred to the following year?

No. It's forgiven. I start each year with a fresh list. Though simply because something was on a previous year's list doesn't mean I might not select it for a current list.

Thanks for the interview. One last question, do you have a website?

I have a portfolio site: reginarichards.net
‡



It's that time of year! Time to make your nominations for our chapter's highest award: **The Yellow Rose**. Do you know a member who has volunteered their time and talents to NTRWA in 2008 and who you'd like to see recognized for his or her efforts? Contact Regina Richards with your nomination for the 2008 Yellow Rose Award:

Regrichards60@yahoo.com
or 940-321-6867





EMOTIONS — THEY'RE NOT JUST FOR PMS ANYMORE

by Juliet Burns

I have to admit something. Though I write contemporary, my first love for pleasure reading is Historical. Recently, I finished a book, DANGEROUS PASSIONS, by Lynn Kerstan and for the last 5 pages or so I was crying. And when I put the book down, I sobbed for about 10 more minutes. And it wasn't even THAT time of the month!!

That doesn't happen very often. Only once in a great book, like FLOWERS FROM THE STORM by Laura Kinsale. Actually, anything written by Laura Kinsale will make me cry. But there are still a lot of books that make me tear up, or put a lump in my throat, or even just sigh in deep satisfaction.

Some of that has to do with the fact that I love a deep, dark, read. But I've also read romantic comedies that literally made me smile for days after reading them. Like Jenny Crusie. In WHAT THE LADY WANTS, Mira, 2002, Jenny made me laugh out loud.

So, what is it about these books? How does the author "show" the emotion so dramatically without getting all purple prose-ish? Think about the books on your keeper shelf. Why are they keepers for you? These are usually the books that you remember years, decades after you've read them. Why? Go back through those books and study them. Was it the language? Was it a certain character? And why that character?

When you're writing an emotional moment, does it make you cry? Just as writing a love scene should make you need to take a cold shower—or jump your hubby when he walks in the door—writing an emotional moment should make you cry or laugh, or possibly both at the same time.

Think about the most intensely emotional moments in your life. I'd be willing to bet those moments held some sort of high stakes or huge change. Where everything was on the line and nothing would ever be the same. A wedding, a break up, having children, losing a parent, or finding a true love. It doesn't have to be dark, but it does have to be intense, passionate, and usually, life-changing.

But that doesn't mean it has to be external. Perhaps it's just a moment of clarity, where you realize something new about

yourself, or you come to be at peace about something, forgive someone, or accept a situation you cannot change, or you make a tough decision.

Deborah Hale says in her article, "What I did for Love", that the most emotional moments must have a sacrifice. That the hero and/or heroine must give up their goal, or something important to them to show the depth of their love.

Writing emotion is usually stronger if it's shown, not told. Telling is: *John was furious!* Showing the emotion is: *John gripped the steering wheel until his hands ached. He wished it were Mary's neck.*

Think about the physical symptoms and how you feel when you're furious and put your own fresh spin on it. If you're feeling furious as you write it, the emotions will come across on the page.

Here are some more articles on writing with emotion.

MAKE THEM LAUGH, MAKE THEM CRY, WRITING WITH EMOTION by Shirley Jump www.shirleyjump.com/articles/make-them-laugh.htm

Developing the Dark Moment by Alicia Rasley www.sff.net/people/alicia/artdark.htm ‡

Writing emotion is usually stronger if it's shown, not told.

~ Juliet's next release is THE SPY'S SURRENDER, coming in Dec 08 for Red Sage's Secrets anthology. And she has 2 more books being released in 09; LET IT RIDE, a Harlequin Blaze in May, writing as Jillian Burns, and another novella for Red Sage Secrets called THE PIRATE'S POSSESSION in December 09. For more information and excerpts you can visit her website www.julietburns.com



Sheniqua Waters new book will be out November 20, 2008!



QUITE THE CHARACTER

By Candace Havens

People keep asking me where I get my ideas for books. The truth is, I have no idea. One day I'm driving along, taking a shower, pulling my luggage of a carousel at an airport or sitting at my desk, and then boom some person is talking in my head and having a conversation. And it's not me, or my subconscious, I know us both well. No, these are strangers who want to tell me a story.

Don't send in the guys with the white coats just yet.

I've learned through the years that this is my creative process – part of the magic that helps me when I have no idea what to write next. My books begin with the characters and then I wrap the story around them. I don't usually know much about them in the beginning, but I love discovering what they are about as we go along.

I learn these things on a need to know basis. As the story reveals itself, so do these characters and many times in the most interesting ways. I was so surprised when I learned the heroine, Gillian, of "The Demon King and I" was the CEO of her family's company, as well as the owner of several art galleries around the world. She found such pleasure in art and it was something she was incredibly passionate about. It carried over into other parts of her life whether she was dealing with demons, or trying to solve a murder mystery. Art is a big part of who she is.

The art parts (that's so much fun to say) are small tidbits throughout the book, but they help define who Gillian is. They show a softer more vulnerable side of her. I was also surprised to see how she interacts with her sisters. I never had siblings growing up and she had this bond with the women in her family that absolutely fascinated me. The little nuances, pet names, rivalries, Gillian shared these things as her story revealed itself.

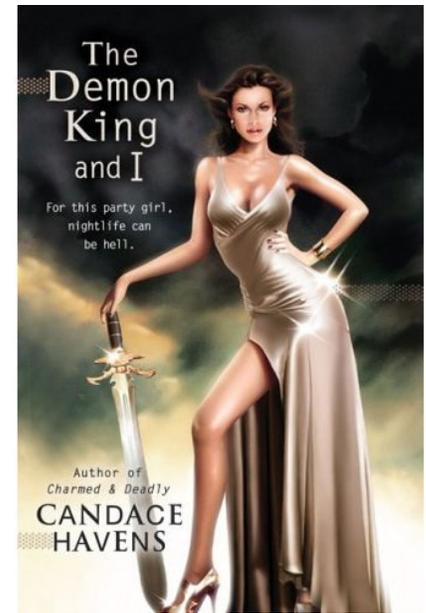
The funny thing is, not every conversation these characters have in my head ends up in the book. I'll be driving along listening to my favorite tunes, and Arath (that's Gillian's love interesting in the book, and he's the Demon King) starts talking to Gillian about his brother and those familial ties. For the two hours I was stuck in traffic they had this discussion about family. None of that ended up in the book, but Arath revealed something to me that did. I can't tell you because it's a major plot point in the book. I had no idea he felt that way, and it made him more human to me.

There are people who sit down and must know everything about their characters before they begin writing. They even make note cards. I've nothing against anyone else's process, but that would drive me crazy. I usually know their

names, but even that can change. But there is one thing in the beginning that I know, and it might help others to do the same. I know why I want to take this journey with this character. There's a reason I'm climbing on board the Gillian train, so to speak, and she usually tells me right up front what that is.

When I finish that first draft I really do feel like I've been on an amazing journey. As I go back do my fluff and puff (revisions) I learn even more about the characters I've written and they continue to have conversations in my head. Sometimes I wish they'd go to sleep, and leave me alone. But then that's part of the magic, and I really can't wait to see what they do next.

~ Candace "Candy" Havens is a best selling and award-winning author. Her novels include "Charmed & Dangerous", "Charmed & Ready", "Charmed & Deadly", "Like A Charm" and "The Demon King and I". She is known for writing strong female characters, who save the world, but aren't exactly perfect. She is a two-time RITA, Write Touch Reader and Holt Medallion finalist. She is also the winner of the Barbara Wilson award. Candy is a nationally syndicated entertainment columnist for FYI Television. A veteran journalist she has interviewed just about everyone in Hollywood from George Clooney and Orlando Bloom to Nicole Kidman and Kate Beckinsale. You can hear Candy weekly on 96.3 KSCS in the Dallas Fort Worth Area. Her popular online Writer's Workshop has more than 1000 students and provides free classes to professional and aspiring writers. www.candacehavens.com





THE YOUNG ADULT SIDEKICK

by Julianna Heaton

Don't forget the BFF.

Unless your protagonist is a loner, you shouldn't forget the impact of a best friend in the world of a teen or tween.

In 2008, kids are not as isolated as they were in the 60's or even in the 80's. Most homes have computers and even teens without cell phones will have access to home phones.

At ages ten, twelve, and even fourteen, I pretty much went home from school and didn't communicate with my friends until the next day. I watched MTV and did my homework.

Today watching television is a group activity. A teen or tween is likely to text or email friends about what they have seen.

Your character does not have to do these things, but the author does need to be aware of the current mindset of the target audience. Your character is likely to share news of all kinds with friends. Faced with a mystery or a problem, the teen's first instinct may well be to tell someone.

Your protagonist is not bound by these patterns of behavior. However, you, as the writer, should provide motivation for the actions of the character. Explain why he or she is a loner, doesn't have a cell phone, pursues the mystery on his or her own, or shuts out his or her best friend.

Lay the framework for your character's actions.

Oh, yeah. Only girls say best friends forever. Boys are still all about dude, man, and the insult. ‡

~ Julianna Heaton writes Young Adult romances and is a member of the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers.



THE GREAT DIVIDE: COMMERCIAL VS. LITERARY FICTION

by Louisa Burton

The following article first appeared in the October 2008 issue of ShoreLines, newsletter for Long Island Romance Writers. Permission to forward or reprint, with proper credits, granted.

If you've ever taught creative writing, or even just sat around with your pals chatting about books, two questions inevitably arise. #1: What, exactly, is the difference between literary fiction and the various genres? And #2: Is literary really better?

Question #1: It's kind of a trick question, because literary fiction actually is just another genre, with its own particular literary form in terms of style and story. Those who hold this type of fiction up as the only "serious," or legitimate fiction will argue with that, insisting that there are no particular expectations when it comes to "real" literature, but they're wrong. Try sending a fast-moving, action-packed page-turner to an imprint that specializes in literary fiction, and no matter how dazzling it is and it can be the most brilliant piece of writing in the history of

literature-I guarantee you'll get it back with a sniffy little note about how it "isn't quite right for us."

Question #2: Popular, or commercial fiction, which I happen to write, is obviously better than literary fiction, as evinced by its compelling stories, empathetic characters, and crisp pacing, not to mention its colossal share of the market. That's why it's sometimes called "commercial"-because it sells.

What? I'm coming off as a linguistic chauvinist who makes value judgments based on skewed and self-serving criteria? Wonder where I picked that up. Okay, so all (or most) snarkiness aside, what really is the difference between the genre known as literary fiction and the other genres, (including mainstream fiction, which is popular fiction that doesn't conform neatly to any of the other genre conventions)?

Popular fiction is a very old and classic form of storytelling, embracing certain archetypal themes, character types, and story

(Great Divide Continued on page 7)



(Great Divide Continued from page 6)

elements that go back literally thousands of years. The majority of mysteries, thrillers, romances, westerns, science fiction novels, fantasy novels and mainstream bestsellers are heroic stories wherein our protagonists draw upon their innate strength and virtue in order to battle the odds against them—whether those odds be a subtle internal conflict or Lord Voldemort. Hence the frequent and much-loved happy ending—not a deus ex machina, cavalry-to-the-rescue ending, but one that's been hard-earned—which leaves us feeling uplifted, fulfilled, empowered. Even when the ending is ambivalent or negative, there's generally a sense of balance and rightness that is, or at least should be, satisfying to the soul.

Popular fiction focuses on character and story, which in a well-written work are inextricably linked. Change one, and the other must change with it. That said, it is character, not plot, that is at the heart of the success of these stories. If they're page-turners, it's usually because we empathize with the protagonists so deeply that we have to keep reading to find out what happens to them.

When a piece of popular fiction fails, it's often because the author relied too heavily on a story that was carved in stone from the beginning, without allowing the characters to mold and shape it. Another common pitfall is the overreliance on the tried-and-true language and storylines of one's chosen genre. Writers who tend to read only within that genre are particularly susceptible to this.

"Literary fiction" is a term that's only been around for about the past three or four decades. A much younger phenomenon than popular fiction, it sprang from the so-called naturalist or realistic

literary movement around the turn of the twentieth century, in which technique, rather than content, is prized. Story and character take a backseat to style, theme, and imagery. The pacing is often stately; the artful use of language is paramount.

There are also certain common denominators in terms of how the story unfolds. In literary fiction, our protagonist isn't larger than life, but very human, and it's likely, even probable, that his struggles will be in vain. I think it's safe to say that most literary novels conclude in an ambivalent or negative way; positive, upbeat endings are rare. One of the reasons that popular fiction is, well, popular, is that most people read for the purpose of entertainment, and people by and large find it more entertaining to crawl into the skin of a heroic protagonist

than into that of one whose desperate struggle may be in vain.

Another genre convention that distinguishes literary fiction is the attempt on the part of many authors to make a statement about the human condition. Many literary novels are

truly thought-provoking. In the worst, the overemphasis on message or on linguistic gymnastics suffocates the story to the point where it's impossible to feel anything but irritation.

Obviously, there is a huge, overlapping gray area when it comes to defining and labeling stories. The best popular fiction is beautifully written, with a strong authorial voice, fascinating characters, a controlling theme, and emotions that resonate long after one has closed the book. The best literary fiction is not just stylistically impressive, but peopled by characters who grip us, and whose decisions and actions drive a story in which



we can truly lose ourselves. In other words, it's genuinely entertaining.

I feel strongly that entertainment is the primary purpose of all literature—not just popular fiction, but literary novels as well. If it's exquisitely written, that's wonderful. If it reveals greater truths, that's icing on the cake. But the bottom line is entertainment value. The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word "entertain" as: "To hold the attention of with something amusing or diverting." My Webster's Unabridged gives a similar but slightly more fleshed-out definition: "To engage the attention of, with anything that causes the time to pass pleasantly, as conversation, music or the like; to divert; to please; to amuse."

The concept of "diversion" may not seem very consequential until you reflect on the fact that we puny humans really have nothing but time, our lives being comprised of a finite number of twenty-four hour days. It's what occu-

(Great Divide Continued on page 8)



(Great Divide Continued from page 7)

pies those days that defines our lives, that brings us joy or despair or tedium, that makes us who we are. We eat; we sleep; we work; we cook; we clean; we deal with our kids, our spouses, our homes; we spend countless of the precious hours allotted to us doing the things we have to do just to get from day to day. Much of our time doesn't pass particularly pleasantly, it simply passes. Modern life being what it is, we often find ourselves physically and emotionally depleted at the end of the day.

That's when we're most likely, assuming we have a window of free time, to pick up a novel and allow ourselves to be swept away, out of our own familiar world...and into someone else's. In a way, it's as if we're trading, albeit temporarily, our own life, our own troubles, for those of the book's protagonist. This process of losing ourselves in a good book is akin to taking a mental vacation. For as long as we're absorbed in that story, walking around in the skin of those characters, thinking their thoughts, feeling their joy and pain, using our intellect to wrestle with their fictitious problems, it's as if we're a thousand miles away. And when we put that book down and return to our own world and our own problems, we're likely to come back at least somewhat more mentally refreshed.

Any well-crafted story that provides true entertainment value to the reader is a thing of great worth and beauty. And yet, there has existed for several decades a pronounced prejudice in academic and critical circles against popular fiction. The view isn't just that the two types of storytelling are different, but that literary fiction is on a higher, worthier plane. That other stuff is just escapist pulp.

Book publishers buy into this dogma, too, the ironic consequence of which is that literary fiction tends to be published more poorly than popular fiction—so poorly that most literary novels, even the most wonderful, are doomed before they hit the shelves. The print runs are often minuscule (unless Oprah comes a-callin'), the covers and titles forgettable, promotion nonexistent. Stephen King addressed this paradox in an article called "How to Bury a Book" that he wrote for his column in the April 6, 2007 issue of *Entertainment Weekly*. He'd stumbled across a novel called *Fieldwork* by Mischa Berlinski that he considered to be truly great, yet Farrar, Straus and Giroux had put it out with a drab title and an equally drab cover—typical "serious fiction" packaging guaranteed to turn off the bookstore browser looking for a good read. As Mr. King put it, "Critics, with their stubborn insistence that there's a difference between 'literature' and 'popular fiction,' are part of the problem, but the publishers themselves, who have bought into this elitist twaddle, are also to blame."

Happily, more and more critics and academics are recognizing "this elitist twaddle" for what it is. Some have been setting out to level the playing field by pointing out that "literary" needn't necessarily equal "quality," and "popular" doesn't automatically mean "pulp." Good fiction is good fiction. Bad fiction is bad fiction. ‡

~ The preceding article is part of Louisa Burton's FictionCraft series. Louisa Burton, aka Patricia Ryan and P.B. Ryan, is a former publishing professional and the author of 28 novels and novellas for Bantam, Berkley Prime Crime, Signet, NAL, Harlequin, and St. Martin's. Her books have been published in over 20 countries and won numerous awards, including the RITA and 2 Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice Awards. Way too much information about her Hidden Grotto erotic romance series and additional articles are available at www.louisaburton.com

HEROSCOPES: THE SCORPIO HEROINE

By Bonnie Staring

The following article first appeared in the Nov/Dec 2008 edition of romANTICS, newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Paula Watkinson, editor.

She's the original Miss Understood.

Born between October 23 and November 21, the Scorpio heroine is the Scarlett O'Hara of the Zodiac. She's fiercely independent and resourceful enough to take care of the plantation without any help from Rhett or Ashley, thank you very much. These passionate women are loyal to a fault and treasure honesty above all else. Do her wrong and she'll never forgive you—or forget it.

She's a woman who enjoys making a difference in the world, whether through leading a company (or department) or using her end-



(Horoscope Continued on page 9)



THE WRITERS' COACH: THE POWER TO GET UNSTUCK

by **Katey Coffing, Ph.D.**

I spent the last three weeks spinning in circles with my latest manuscript. Grumpy and frustrated with the story, I found it tough to sit down and work on it. There were a number of interesting distractions--personal, social, and political among them--but above all, I felt increasingly stuck and bored with my book. Clearly there was something wrong, but I didn't know what.

Finally, tired of knowing I needed to write but resisting it like a cat who senses there's a vet appointment, I decided to shake things up. I pulled some of my favorite books of writing advice and craft off the shelves, flipped them open to random pages, and began to read.

Within a few minutes, I recognized and solved one of the major issues I'd been having with the story, something that had only been a subconscious niggler before. I also hit on two new scene ideas and a way to strengthen my subplot--and my own interest. Those discoveries stimulated plot revisions that kept me engrossed in the novel for more than five near-effortless hours.

Julia Cameron (*The Artist's Way*) might call the effects of those seemingly random pages synchronicity, and I wouldn't disagree. I also think the following applies:

"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." - Albert Einstein

When you're feeling stuck, your subconscious may see a problem that hasn't filtered through to the rest of you yet. In fact, your subconscious is probably standing beside the problem and waving a big ol' sign that reads, "Change this!"--and you haven't noticed the sign because it's too dark in that corner of your

brain. But you can still keep an eye out for the symptoms: boredom, frustration, and the "I don't wanna"s.

If that cluster sounds all-too-familiar, the cure may be at hand. Rather than worrying or flailing (or sinking into the habit of not writing), get creative. (Or, like me, get random.)

Other solutions? Introduce a new character--or combine two supporting characters into one. Set the next scene in an unusual location. Brainstorm a plot twist, or discover a piece of backstory that changes everything.

Sometimes all your novel needs is a sparkly new idea to make you excited again. So go play! ‡

~ *Goalmeister* Katey Coffing, Ph.D. is a 2007 Golden Heart® finalist and a certified life coach who guides women writers to success. She delights in helping her clients complete and polish their manuscripts, create kick-ass queries and synopses, and get *The Call* from agents and editors. Discover more at Women-Ink.com.



(*Heroscope Continued from page 8*)

less persistence. The phrase "give up" isn't in her vocabulary unless she's directing it at the buffoon trying to pick her up at her nephew's bar mitzvah. Her unwavering determination can sometimes be seen as stubbornness, but the Scorpio heroine is always willing to revise her methods if necessary. Even on the dance floor.

These women are slow to trust, so don't expect to sweep her off her feet in the blink of an eye. She's the heroine who doesn't realize she wants a relationship until she's actually in one. Great dates for a Scorpio woman must contain some sort of challenge, such as finding an out-of-the-way nightclub, dining blindfolded or climbing Mt. Everest. Famous Scorpio heroines include Emily Post, Indira Gandhi, Vivian Leigh and Marie Antoinette.

Next month: The Sagittarius 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. www.bonniestaring.com



SHOW DON'T TELL

By Denise Robbins

The following article first appeared in the September/October 2008 issue of 'Romance, She Wrote' the New Hampshire Romance Writers newsletter, Tammy Hooker, Editor.

As writers we've all heard the words, "show, don't tell" at some point. What the heck does that mean? Unlike painters or photographers, who show their images with pictures, writers paint their images with words.

Did that describe "show, don't tell" any better? Probably not. The best way to explain this is to show you.

Tell: Max thought Samantha was hiding something from him.

Show: Samantha slammed the drawer shut and spun around, her hands hidden behind her back. She bit her lower lip then smiled wide and bright. "Max! What're you doing here?"

Showing involves physical action, facial expression, and dialogue to convey the same information as the "telling." The big advantage to the showing is that now you can see what the character is doing and feel the emotion. It's not a flat statement.

Here's another example.

Tell: It was hot.

Show: As Mary walked to the pool her rubber flip-flops stuck to the asphalt. Having found a small spot to put her towel and belongings, she slipped off the sandals and did the hot-footed dance, hopping from foot-to-foot until she reached the pool. Jumping in, Mary came up frowning. The pool felt like warm bath water.

See the difference? Nowhere in the second example did I tell you it was hot, you felt it by the visual image painted in Mary's actions.

Let me show you one more.

Tell: The basement was scary.

Show: Ruby held her breath against the musty odor as she started down the creaky stairs. When she reached the dirt floor she turned her head and listened. She sputtered, wiped at her nose and eyes. "Ugh." Her face ran into a cobweb. Stiffening her spine, Ruby took another couple of steps in the dark and dank room. "There." Something skittered in the corner. Squinting, she looked but couldn't make it out. Ruby jumped along with her heart. It ran across her feet. That was it! A loud scream ripped from her throat as whatever unseen monster sent her turning and bolting up the stairs.



Readers want to be a part of your story. If you simply "tell" the readers what's going on they are on the outside looking in. When you "show" the story, show what the characters are experiencing, your readers become engaged in your story.

Showing uses details, emotions, and senses. Showing involves strong verbs to express an idea or mood. Drawing a picture with words pulls the reader in and lets them experience the story. Practice showing the following on your own.

- Ugly
- Angry
- Beach ‡

~ Denise Robbins, computer geek by day, romantic suspense writer by night, has been a member of NHRWA since 2003 (maybe longer). Look for her new book *IT HAPPENS IN THREES* scheduled for release January 2009

DEVELOPING SECONDARY CHARACTERS

by Dr. Lin Stepp

The following article first appeared in the October 2008 issue of *Smoke Signals*, newsletter for the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers.

Characters are one of the seven major components of a story. A site on creative writing from Dakota State University lists these seven components as: character, plot, setting, dialog, point of view, theme, and style.

Different writing guides tend to categorize the characters in a book in different ways. Usually they are broken into two groups - Primary characters and Secondary characters.

Primary characters in a romance include the hero and heroine and, sometimes, other major characters integral to the plot. The leading, primary characters in a book are often further identified as Protagonist or Antagonist. Protagonists are the proactive and positivist characters in the plot. They are usually likable and the story revolves around them. In most cases, in a romance, the hero and heroine are the primary protagonists.

Antagonists are the negative, disturbing, and hindering characters in a story. They create conflict and represent the opposition that the protagonists must contend with. Antagonists do not have to be villains - they can just be characters that misunderstand, rival, wrongly judge, betray, or get in the way of the goals of the hero or heroine. How protagonists deal with the antagonists is often the central focus of a story.

There seem to be a lot of sources that discuss creating believable, vivid, compelling Primary characters. Because these characters are central to the story, authors spend an extensive amount of time developing the heroes
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and heroines of their books. But what about the Secondary characters? Aren't they important, too? The answer is Yes, Yes, Yes. And, often, it is in the development and use of secondary characters where writers show weak skills.

As Primary means 'fundamental - standing first in importance', Secondary means 'subordinate - coming next in rank.' Being one-step removed from first place doesn't imply lack of importance. Secondary characters in all avenues of life are also memorable and often acclaimed. We give awards for best supporting actors and actresses. Second and third place Olympic athletes receive silver and bronze medals. Vice presidents, administrative assistants, sales staff, and other subordinate players in business organizations are often better remembered by us than the CEO.

Nick Vernon wrote that there is no story to tell without the main or Primary characters - readers read to find out what happens to them. However, I believe a good writer can also hook the reader's interest - and keep readers engaged and involved - with good secondary characters. Think of it in a psychological sense. It has often been written that 'we are a composite of all the people we have known and all the people who have impacted our lives.' Also, 'we are known by the company we keep.' Your secondary characters help to enrich and define your primary characters. And this can be done in several ways.

Secondary characters can be long-time friends, neighbors, associates, or family members that your primary characters have known for much of their lives. Because these secondaries know your primary characters well, they can be artfully used in dialog to reveal aspects of the main characters' personalities and backgrounds that the reader might not be privy to otherwise. Secondary characters can define weaknesses and strengths in your primary characters

that their point of view alone could never reveal.

In addition, secondary characters can be new individuals the primary characters are just coming to know - in a new home or work setting, through a move or life change, in the places your primary characters often frequent. Secondary characters, in this sense, are a true supporting cast to your hero or heroine. They can champion and aid your primary characters, help them to grow and change, or block and hinder your main characters in their ongoing growth and progress. Think of the host of people that fall into these categories in your own life: the work associate who is a pain in the ass; the negative, disparaging family member; the calm, logical friend you can always rely on to see things sensibly; the drama queen friend who rides every wave over-reactively on her emotions; the chatty gossip; the faithful sidekick. The list is endless.

In developing side characters, keep in mind the ways in which they help to reveal your main characters' personalities and further your plot. Secondary characters should not be stuck in at random and without purpose. Debra Dix wrote that if secondary characters are not contributing to the main characters or the plot, they should be removed.

As you research and plot your novels, spend quality time developing both your Primary and your Secondary characters. Think out the part your secondaries will play in helping to develop your story and in helping to enrich and develop your main characters. Be careful not to develop plastic, colorless stereotypes for your secondaries. You want real people as secondaries - their character, physical appearance, and lives well developed. Your secondary characters, just like your hero and heroine, should have unique physical looks, expressions, gestures, and posture that speak of them whenever they appear. They should have well-planned lives and backgrounds that impact how they act, talk,

believe, and respond. Secondaries need distinctive quirks, idiosyncrasies, habits, ticks, and mannerisms that make them memorable. They can grow along with your primary characters or they can provide consistency and remain the same, adding balance to your story.

Secondary characters can add color and life to your novels. They can be eccentric, humorous, riddled with problems, short-tempered, biased, pesky, foils to your main characters in looks and temperament. Unlike your hero and heroine in the book, they can come to a bad end. They can die or be killed; they can have a just fate for their failings.

In film, supporting actors and actresses are not supposed to upstage the main characters. This means you need to keep your secondary characters in a secondary role and not let them take over your story with problems and conflicts that are too intense. A good example of a novel with wonderful secondary characters is J. K. Rawlings' Harry Potter. Can you imagine the story without Ron and Hermione? Harry is consistently primary but his interactions with his two best friends in Rawlings' novels give continual opportunity for dialogue, drama, action, conflict, and plot development. As a reader of Rawlings' novels, you become (almost) as attached and concerned about what will happen to Ron and Hermione as you are about what will happen to Harry. The two are perfect foils in personality and temperament to Harry, the driving character.

In a romantic sense, consider the supporting roles developed in the film *You've Got Mail*. The viewer learns a lot about the heroine Kathleen Kelly (Meg Ryan) through her interactions with her shop associates, Christina, Bertie, and George. Likewise, the viewer sees a softer side to aggressive businessman Joe Fox (Tom Hanks) in his interactions with his niece and nephew Annabel and Matthew.

This film also offers an excellent
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NTRWA Monthly Meeting
Doors Open 10:00 am
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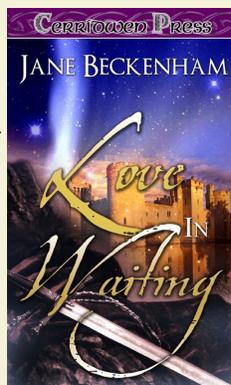
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MEMBER NEWS

Gina Nelson's NEW GIRL IN TOWN placed Second in the 2008 Lone Star Writing Competition. Even better news: Avalon editor, Faith Black, requested the full manuscript.

Barbara Woodward (aka Lynn LaFleur) announces the release of her latest book from Ellora's Cave. CAPSIZED, an M/M/F novella, will be released in ebook on November 28th. More information about the book is available on her website, www.lynnlafleur.com.

Jane Beckenham had a review in TT/Romance LOVE IN WAITING - 5 cups from Coffee Time. "...Explosive, exciting, and thrilling read. This is a riotous adventure that is filled with plenty of danger, intrigue, and romance. Ms. Beckenham does an outstanding job of making the time travel seem real and describing the past era with such vivid imagery you feel you are there. Snappy and sometimes hilarious dialog this story is always entertaining. Incredible characters and important secondary characters carry this tale with some surprises. I loved this story; if you are a fan of time travel or this is your first, you will thoroughly enjoy this tale." ~ Wateena, Reviewer for Coffee Time Romance & Reviewer for Karen Find Out About New Books



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example of how impacting single, supporting, Secondary cameo appearances can be to a story. Remember the stalled elevator scene in the film? If you don't, rent the movie and look for it as you watch it again. Four characters, one primary, one secondary, and two cameo-secondaries, reflect on their lives as they are stranded in an elevator. Their reflections touch you as a viewer - and this scene deeply impacts the hero, Joe Fox, before the scene is finally played out.

Strong secondary characters often make the difference in a good book or a bad book. Strong secondaries, well-developed and well-used in a novel, send a good story to new heights. At the end of your book — you want your readers to hate to say goodbye to the characters you've created, to be left wondering what might happen to them next. You want the characters you've created — both the primary and the secondary characters — to linger on in your readers' minds. Apply equal effort to developing both effectively. ‡

~ Dr. Lin Stepp is on the faculty at Tusculum College where she teaches Psychology courses and a Research writing sequel. Currently, Lin is writing a series of linked, contemporary regional romances set in the Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee. The first book, THE FOSTER GIRLS, is being published this spring by High Country, an imprint of Ingalls Publishing.