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Founded March 1983

Chapter 33, Region 5

Volume 26, Issue 12

Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America

NTRWA HOLIDAY PARTY!

Join us Saturday, December 13th for our annual Christmas party. **Please note, our meeting is the second Saturday instead of the third.**

This year we will have some writing related activities, but we will **not** be doing a gift exchange. Come join us for lots of fun and socializing. The La Hacienda Ranch Restaurant doors open at 10:00 am and the party gets under way at 10:30. We hope to see everyone there! .

2009 GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The 2009 GE contest is now open and will accept paper or electronic entries until December 27, 2008. Click on the link above and check out the Great Expectation Contest page for all the rules and regulations and to see our terrific slate of final round judges.

ξ

Send questions to the contest coordinators:

[Marty Tidwell](#) or [Mary Duncanson](#)

Next Meeting
December 13, 2008



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Chapter Mates—

Thank you all so much for the opportunity to serve as the chapter's president these last two years. It has been a time of growing and learning. I do, however, happily pass the podium to Angi Platt. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience that will stand the chapter in good stead for the coming year.

I want to thank each member of the board for all their hard work this past year. Honorable mentions go to Regina Richards for her help on two very important committees this year (and for her suggestion of Deer Lake Cabins for the retreat), and to Marsha West for her great door prizes.

With Christmas right around the corner, remember to give yourself the gift of time to write.

I wish you all a truly blessed Christmas, a rollicking good New Year's Eve, and many sales in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Jen FitzGerald



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MEMBER NEWS



Sheniqua Waters says her book SLAVE GIRL was up to #5 on the Best Seller list at Red Rose after being out for only two days! SLAVE GIRL is now available and is a top seller at Red Rose and also list the website where people can find out about it. Her website is www.TheWorldsBestBook.com

Mary Malcolm announces the sale of her first novel, DINER GIRL, to The Wild Rose Press.

Karen Widdon says her agent, the wonderful and talented Lucienne Diver, has just negotiated for me to write two more Silhouette Romantic Suspense books, three more Silhouette Nocturne books, and a Nocturne Bite e-book!



Jane Beckenham says her book, DESPARATELY SEEKING SANTA, debuted on Dec 12th, published by Red Rose Press. www.janebeckenham.com/



THE SOPHOMORE SLUMP: MAKING THAT SECOND SALE

By Juliet Burns

When Kira asked me to write an article about surviving the time between sales, I thought, “You’ve come to the right person.” Not because I’m an expert on making a second sale, but rather, because it was such a long time between my first and second sales.

When I got “The Call” I had only been writing three years. And the book I sold was the first book I’d ever written. And I’d spent that whole time revising it. I had started a second manuscript, but it was in the very beginning stages and... well, let’s just say I still had a lot to learn about writing.

With my naturally glass-half-full personality, and a Harlequin editor on the other end of emails, I set about finishing my option book. I was new. I was naïve. I was way too confident. Because I was still so new to the business, I took too long to turn in the book (9 months) and during that time my editor received a promotion. I was very lucky, however, that I wasn’t orphaned, but was given a new editor.

Unfortunately, two weeks after I finally mailed off the full manuscript and a proposal for another, the Sr. editor for the line I sold to sent out an email informing authors that the line would now have new guidelines. Silhouette Desires would now feature mega-rich heroes “with a sense of entitlement”. She went on to describe what was acceptable. The hero—for instance—could OWN a ranch, but he could not be a ranch hand. Well, guess what? My hero was a ranch hand. I emailed my editor and told her she could just trash my option book.

Nevertheless undaunted, I picked myself

up, dusted off my keyboard, and started over. Three months later, with the green light from my new editor, I turned in a partial and 2 more synopses for an Italian prince trilogy. My editor asked for revisions. I revised. She loved it and sent it up to the Sr. editor. I got my hopes up and finished the manuscript. By this time it had been two and a half years since my first sale. Then came a crushing rejection.

I’d received rejections before. But those had been part of paying my dues, pretty much expected. This wasn’t. I had a hard time bouncing back. I decided, for the family finances, I needed to apply for a job outside the home once school started.

My editor and I decided to switch lines, try to write for Blaze. I read every Blaze I could get my hands on trying to get a feel for the tone of the line, which was totally different from Desire. I submitted 6 blurbs to my editor to get her feedback on which ones might work and again, with her go ahead, I started over and within a few months, submitted a partial.

While I was waiting, I kept up with chapter loops, continued learning the craft. Tried a romantic suspense that got rejected. And I wrote an erotic romance novella for Candy Haven’s Fast Draft class, and submitted it to Red Sage.

It sold to their Secrets anthologies in March of 07. Over three years since my first sale. A novella doesn’t count as a second sale to RWA, but it did keep me believing in myself. I kept writing, hoping for good news about the partial I’d submitted for Blaze. Over the summer, my editor was promoted. I didn’t hear from her.



Finally, in September of last year, I got a call from a different editor saying they wanted to buy the book. And that call was almost as thrilling and exhilarating as the first one, three and half years earlier.

I learned a lot in those three and a half years: Nothing is for certain. You gotta have good writing friends who understand the ups and downs of this business and who stick with you through the good times and the bad. And last but not least, you can’t stop believing in yourself. Even if you have to apply at Wal-Mart, don’t give up. ‡

~ Juliet Burns spent her youth reading romance, immersed in the worlds of Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennett. She lives in Texas with her husband of twenty years and their three active kids. Juliet likes to think her emotional nature—sometimes referred to as moodiness—has found the perfect outlet in writing stories filled with passion and romance and believes romance novels have the power to change lives with their message of eternal love and hope. Her novella *THE SPY’S SURRENDER* is on shelves now in Red Sage’s Secrets anthology, Vol 26: *BOUND BY PASSION*. 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, Vol 28 called *THE PIRATE’S POSSESSION* in December 09. For more information and excerpts you can visit her website www.julietburns.com You can view the book trailer here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4rhLMdnMw



THE PROCESS IS A PUZZLE

By **Connie Brockway**

The following was published in the December issue of Midwest Muse, newsletter of Midwest Fiction Writers.

I read a lot of “How to Write a Novel” books, books on craft and creativity, on what constitutes a “best-seller” and how to map my “hero’s journey,” books by fellow authors, agents, screen writers, movie developers and, yes, the occasional academician. I pay attention, I take notes, I nod in agreement, I have flashes of “That’s it!” and yet seventeen full-length novels later, I’m still trying to figure out the process for writing a book. A process that works for me.

And there’s the rub. While there are aspects of these prescribed processes that work for me some of the time, none of them work for me in toto. And worse, those things that hit the jackpot for one book (ask me about *AS YOUR DESIRE* and *THE HEROS JOURNEY*) might not pay off in the slightest bit the next. And worst of all, I don’t have a clue going in what’s going to work and what’s not. So I end up what a lot of people would consider wasting huge amounts of time rereading those “how-to” books, furrowing my botoxed brow, taking missteps that result in chapters that never see publication.

But after years of this nonsense, along with eight Rita nominations and two Rita awards, I’ve decided it’s not a waste. It’s my process. I’ve come to appreciate (to varying degrees depending on how far I am behind deadline) that I “see” books as jigsaw puzzles whose parts include but are not limited to plot, character, dialogue, theme, narrative drive, conflict, motivation and goal.

You know how when you’re putting together a jigsaw puzzle and you sometimes start with a color and sometimes with an object in the picture? That’s how writing a book is for me and, I’ll bet, a good number of you. Sometimes you “see” the object clearest and so start building from there. At other times, you’re just trying to put together colors until a shape emerges, then fill in the pieces. Sometimes you start at the edges, sometimes the corners. Each of these processes works, just like using templates for hero journey, goal/motivation/conflict, or through outlining. Along with other methods, these all work. How well they work depends on you and your book.

When I was asked to write this article, it was suggested I compare the process of writing contemporaries to historicals. Guess what? I use the same process (or some cruel folks might say non-process). In *HOT DISH*, I started off with the hero,

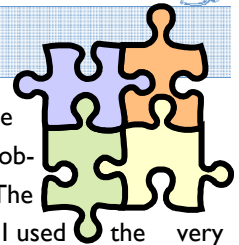
Steve Jaxx, because that piece of the puzzle I recognized earliest—his character, his problem, his strengths, and his weaknesses. The rest of the book developed out from that. I used the very same process in writing the historical romance *ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT*, with Jack Seward. To aid finding the plot in both these books, I used both *WRITING THE BREAK-OUT NOVEL* by Doanld Maass and *STORY* by Robert McKee.

In *SKINNY DIPPING*, I knew my setting, the “color” if you will, of *Chez Ducky* before I could identify any individual characters—including the hero and heroine. So that’s where I started from, the edges, asking myself who would live at place like this? What threatened the status quo? *Who* threatened the status quo? *AS YOU DESIRE* started with a similar situation. I saw that first scene in the desert before I understood why the heroine was there or where she would end up. In both these books, I relied on the *THE WRITER’S JOURNEY* by Christopher Vogler to help me map the storyline.

Of course, there are some tricks I’ve managed to develop on my lonesome over the years. A few questions I ask myself before ever starting to tickle the keyboard. I put myself in the place of my protagonist and ask “What can I do that would be unforgivable?” then, “What would I not ever be able to forgive?” I may never address these issues in my manuscript, but just knowing the answers really helps me identify the character and from there, their unique strengths, weaknesses, their desires, their fears.

I also always start writing by knowing the end. I struggle with the opening, I fly blind through the middle of my story, but I always know the last scene, many times including the last line. It helps me create a foundation for that final, happily ever after, off into the sunset scene. It also acts as a lodestone to keep my characterization on track. For example, if the last scene is my heroine and hero trying to keep track of how many diapers they’ve changed, there better be a lot in the book about how much they either do, or do not, want children.

But these are just my tricks. I’m sure you all have your own. The bottom line on the writing process is that you do what works. For some people, that means sticking to a tried and true method that always produces results. For others, that means flipping over elements of each new book like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and staring at them until something stares back. Whatever your process, take comfort in the fact that it’s an ever evolving one. I do. ‡





A WEE BLETHER: HOGMANAY

By Jennifer Carroll

The following article first appeared in the November/December 2008 issue of 'Romance, She Wrote,' the newsletter of the New Hampshire Romance Writers of America.

Hogmanay is the Scottish name for the last day of the year. Historically, New Year has always been a much bigger holiday in Scotland than in England. Perhaps because at one stage in its history, Christmas was banned in Scotland, the Scots have always made New Year's Eve something special. The second of January is still a bank holiday in Scotland to allow us to recover from our extensive celebrations.

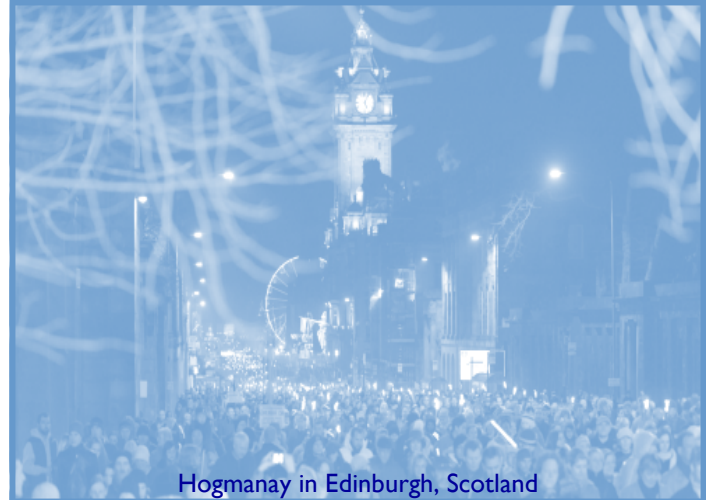
Traditions vary immensely, but in my family on Hogmanay my mum would bake shortbread and lemon cake to have for our Ne'erday. I've read that 'Ne'erday' is the Scottish word for New Year's Day, but I've never heard it used as such. I've always known Ne'erday' to be the cake and drink that you had to toast the New Year and bring in the bells (the chimes of Big Ben on the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve.)

That night, we'd sit down together to watch the Hogmanay television shows. There was always a feeling of great excitement and anticipation at the thought of what the New Year might bring — and which TV host would have one too many whiskies and embarrass themselves on national television! As the bells approached we would make sure we had a drink in hand and as midnight chimed, we'd drink a toast and go round everyone in the room shaking hands, kissing, and wishing each other a Happy New Year.

Immediately after the bells we'd set out 'first-footing' to wish our friends and neighbors a Happy New Year. Traditionally, it was good luck and an indication that it was going to be a prosperous New Year if a tall, dark stranger crossed your doorstep with a lump of coal for the fire. (You didn't want a blonde or a redhead landing on your doorstep, for fear they were one of the barbaric Vikings.)

Nowadays, people would still welcome a tall, dark stranger, but he wouldn't be thanked for bringing coal. First footers now bring a wee minding - like shortbread or a bottle of whiskey. A first footer would never arrive on your doorstep empty handed. First footing can go on all night and some years it feels as if the whole of Scotland is on the move in the wee hours of that New Year's morning.

One of my favorite Hogmanay parties was at the home of



Hogmanay in Edinburgh, Scotland

Scottish country dancers who threw a *ceilidh* (pronounced 'kayli' which is a Scottish dance) in their converted barn. At the bells, a kilted piper played as the roast turkey was brought in and we sang Auld Lang Syne, linking arms and kicking our feet up at the last verse. I've never got through that song yet without bawling.

Like many Scottish cities, my home city of Glasgow hosts a Hogmanay street party in George Square with live music and fireworks for 100,000 plus hardy partygoers. Unfortunately, the great Scottish weather (driving wind and rain) has put a halt to the celebrations on more than one occasion. The pop band Wet, Wet, Wet played one particularly dismal year and the irony of this was not lost on us sharp-witted Glaswegians.

To complete the Hogmanay festivities, the following day — New Year's Day, — bleary-eyed families get together for a celebratory dinner and the tradition meal is steak pie, tatties (potatoes) and neeps (turnip.) Many a Scottish boy has faced his mother's wrath at having had so much to drink the night before (and more than likely no sleep whatsoever) that he can't stomach his mum's home cooking on New Year's Day. ‡

~ Jennifer Carroll is currently serving as NHRWA's PAN/PRO Liaison and has been a member of RWA since 2006. A day-dreamer for 30 something years, she regrets not putting pen to paper until 2005. Her first manuscript (which is nearing completion) is a contemporary romantic comedy set in the west of Scotland. Jennifer immigrated to the US from Scotland in 2000 and loves the American way of life. She lives in NH with her Scottish husband Robert (who bears an uncanny resemblance to Shrek) and their two boys.



HEROSCOPES: THE SAGITTARIUS HEROINE

By Bonnie Staring

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

She flits; she flirts, and then flies away.

Born between November 22 and December 21, the Sagittarius heroine is the Energizer Bunny of the Zodiac. No matter which obstacles fall across her path, she'll keep on going and going. Freedom is what she craves the most, even more than chocolate and a great massage by Sven and his twin brother Lars.

Adventurous to a fault, the Sagittarius woman can be hard to track down. Don't bother asking her to make the brownies for the bake sale or chair the nudist colony; she's too darn busy trying to get someone else take care of all the details of her own life.

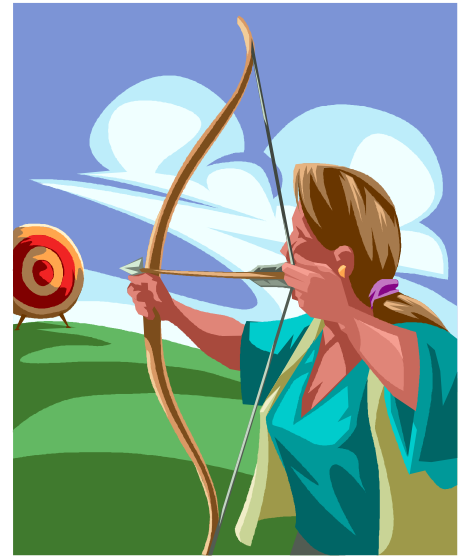
She's a woman with a sunny disposition who refuses to get caught up in others' emotional nets. A true friend to those in her circle, she expects very little in return.

These women feel that life's too short to partake in mind games, no matter how attractive the players.

This fabulous woman isn't one for instant sparks of soul mate recognition. To get close to a Sagittarius heroine is to befriend her first. Great dates for her must include a large serving of the unexpected, such as taking her to a tavern with a resident ghost, midnight hang-gliding or treasure hunts. Famous Sagittarius heroines include Jane Austin, Billie Jean King, Margaret Mead and Sinead O'Connor. ‡

Next month: The Capricorn Heroine

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



APOTHECARIES: DRUGSTORES OF THE 1800S

by Kate Bridges

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

Drive past any drugstore today and you'll see the signs:

Open 24 Hours.
Pharmacist on Duty,
Refill Orders by Phone.

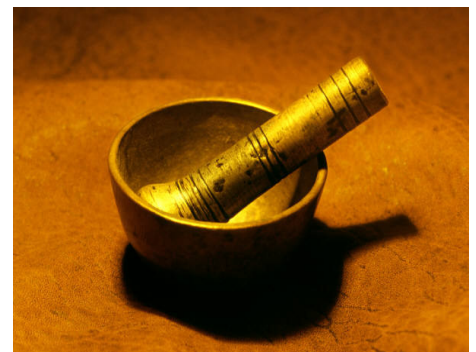
We even have drive-thru pharmacies, unimaginable more than a century ago.

How did the settlers ever manage? What did they do if they had a stomach cramp in the middle of the night or their

sinuses were full?

If they lived on the open range, they used a home remedy or suffered through it. But if they lived in a bigger town like St. Louis or Cheyenne or San Francisco, they visited their local apothecary. The drugstore of their day.

The word apothecary came from the word 'apotheca', meaning a place where herbs, spices, and wines were stored. During the thirteenth century, it also came to mean a person who sold these substances from a shop or street stall. Thus the word is used interchangeably — it can refer to the person or the pharmacy itself.



Herbalists existed well before this time, though. Monks, for instance, grew herbal gardens in their monasteries and used them for healing in the ninth century. Native Americans were expert herbalists, too. And across the other
(*Apothecaries Continued on page 7*)



side of the ocean, so were the Chinese.

By the mid-sixteenth century, apothecaries in England had become the equivalent of today's pharmacists, measuring and dispensing medicine.

Some apothecaries had formal college training in medicine, some learned as apprentices. Whatever the case, folks considered them a godsend. Apothecaries diagnosed problems, gave advice, and sold remedies. Most drug laws in the U.S. never came into effect till after 1900, so these druggists were free to sell whatever helped.

By the seventeenth century, medical practice in England was divided into three groups: physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries. However, at that time, the groups did not carry over to the United States. A doctor from England who landed on American soil was expected to practice general medicine, do surgery, and dole out medication. The American Medical Association was formed in 1847 to oversee education and practice. They started to regulate the profession, on who could and could not call themselves a doctor. Specialization started to take place after that.

The American Pharmaceutical Association was founded in 1852.

Famous apothecaries in history:

Benedict Arnold, the famous American General in the American Revolution who switched his loyalty to the British side, apprenticed as an apothecary in his youth. Four of his siblings had died of yellow fever.

John Keats, the British poet, also trained as one. He attended medical school before he focused on studying literature. His mother and his brother both died of tuberculosis. Keats eventually

died of it, too.

John Parkinson, a famous herbalist and apothecary to King James I, was one of the founding members, in 1617, of the now world-renowned Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in England.

Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was the first woman in the U.K. to be granted a medical license by this Society of Apothecaries, 1865. (The first female doctor in the U.S. to obtain a medical license, graduating at the top of her class, was Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, 1849, not an apothecary.)

Western Frontier:

On the eastern seaboard, many apothecaries had patrons who were wealthy, and the shops reflected this in their rich architecture, beautiful bottles of various sizes, wall-to-wall shelving and drawers, and huge sunny windows that fronted the streets.

On the Western frontier, apothecaries (the buildings) came in all shapes and sizes. Some were little more than shacks.

A common tool they used was a pestle and mortar, used to crush and mix substances. The pestle was the pounding tool, the mortar was the bowl. They were often made of stone, marble, or brass hard enough to crush the medicine without crushing fine particles of the tools themselves. The tools had to be extremely washable, where residue from one medicine would not mix with another. Apothecaries sometimes ground uncooked white rice in them to clean them repeating the procedure until the rice came out completely white.

Apothecaries also had very fine tools and trays where they made their own pills, before pills were manufactured by



machine. As you can imagine, precise measurement was extremely important, and keeping each pill exactly the same size was an art form. Apothecaries had their own precise system of weighing mass in liquid and solid form. And some grew their own herb gardens.

Until about 1900, most medical recipes were written in Latin. Latin was the universal language, understood in Europe and America.

During the twentieth century, drug-stores became a blend of soda fountains and drug dispensaries. Remember Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life* working in one as a boy?

A list of reference sources for this article can be found on www.katebridges.com. ‡

~ Award winning author Kate Bridges writes sexy historicals set in the Canadian and American West. Before becoming a full time writer, Kate was a pediatric intensive care nurse. Her novels often include medical situations. She's a regular blogger on www.petticoatsandpistols.com and member of the Toronto Romance Writers. Watch for *WANTED IN ALASKA*, coming from *Harlequin Historicals* in February 2008! For an excerpt, visit www.katebridges.com



THE PERILS OF TIME TRAVEL

by **Vanessa Hart**

The following article first appeared in the Fall 2008 issue of The Galleon, the newsletter of the Ancient City Romance Authors of St. Augustine, FL – Tracy Montoya, editor..

What is the appeal of time travel stories?

Since reading Mark Twain's A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING AURTHOR'S COURT as a teen, I've loved the "fish out of water" element of a time travel story. If you're new to time travels, by all means read Twain's book. It's his best as far as I'm concerned.

H.G. Wells's THE TIME MACHINE, of course, was early science fiction. As entertaining as it was, it didn't compare to later variations on the theme. I loved the movies Final Countdown, Time Rider, Terminator, Somewhere in Time, Time After Time, Timeline, Back to the Future, and most recently, Kate and Leopold. With the exception of Twelve Monkeys, I've loved every cinematic variation on time travel I've seen.

I'm even a fan of TV time travel (Time Tunnel, Voyagers, Quantum Leap).

Books that have entertained me with time travel romance include LEGEND by Jude Devereaux and TIMELESS PASSION by Constance O'Day Flannery. I also enjoy all of Marilyn Campbell's time travels. The strongest time travel romance I've read, however, was written by a man and remains my favorite time travel novel: LIGHTNING by Dean Koontz.

The Adventure of Writing Time Travel

Inspired to write my first time travel, a story that had buzzed around in my brain for years, I typed out the first scene. A young woman boards a plane in Jacksonville, FL., falls asleep, and wakes up 45 years earlier. Great beginning, right?

Wrong! In a "Chat With" session led by a publisher at an RWA conference, the editor made the statement that reading a time travel in which the character simply wakes up in another time is the kiss of death for the manuscript. On the other hand, she also wasn't looking for science-fiction contraptions, so the aircraft couldn't be a time machine. Back to the drawing board. How do I get my heroine back in time?

I came up with a paranormal element that explained the time jump, although the reader and the characters don't understand this until well into the story. Okay, so she's now in 1963 and meets the hero. Now I was rocking. I didn't need to worry

about conflict because the fact that they are from different worlds is conflict enough, right?

You know better, and so do I. I still needed to develop an

external and internal Goal-Motivation-Conflict for her and him. In other words, I had to do everything I'd do for any contemporary romance story. I began to build the romance by having the two interact. Then the fun began. I realized in writing dialogue that these two spoke different versions of English and would struggle to communicate. I needed to distinguish the character voice.

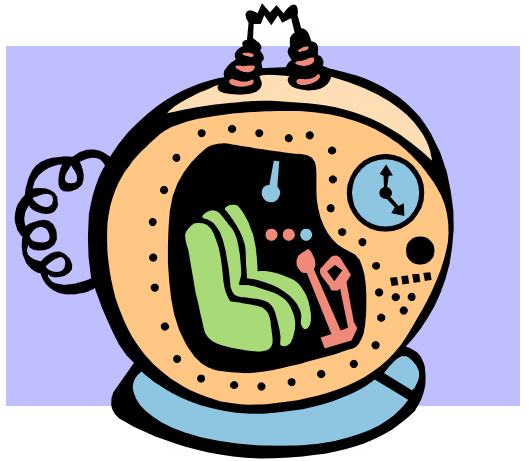
Imagining how the hero would see and hear the heroine through his 1963 viewpoint was truly fun. But it kept me on my researcher's toes. Living during the height of the Cold War, immediately after the US-Cuba missile crisis, when people still danced the Twist and knew next to nothing about computers, the hero couldn't understand talk of e-mail, MasterCard, cell phones, or laptops. Yes, this part was fun, and it was also the most work.

Avoiding anachronisms wasn't easy, even if I do remember the sixties. But research wasn't limited to fads and fashions of the times. I also set my story on an Army base in West Germany. I've been on a base once in my life, and it wasn't in Germany. I never even went to Europe! Fortunately, I had a good resource for photos, maps, and old issues of Stars and Stripes that kept my details accurate. I also visited the library periodicals section. I read all of my military sequences aloud to my husband, who served in the US Army, for verification.

In other words, I wrote a historical romance set in 1963.

Earlier I said I was writing a contemporary romance. It's not that I'm indecisive. With a time travel story, you write both. You research both. Sounds like double work? Yup! There are all the elements necessary in all romances plus a second setting. Back to my first effort, I finally felt on track. Now I understood

(Time Travel Continued on page 11)





PLAN YOUR WAY TO A HOLLY JOLLY HOLIDAY

by Julianna Heaton

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

Writing through the holidays can be nearly impossible. If you are on deadline for an editor, you manage. But you, just maybe, mutter under your breath as you write. Your holiday spirit goes right up the chimney, and your thoughts are not quite jolly.

One-hundred percent writing. Zero percent fun.

If you aren't on deadline, you are facing an entirely different struggle. How do you find time to write? If you don't write, you're consumed by guilt. It's like being a working mother; whatever you manage to do, you feel like you're neglecting something else.



How can you possibly manage to work, write, handle all of your other commitments, and meet the strict time-consuming demands of the holiday season?

First, you admit the truth. You cannot do everything.

Really. I know you think you can. Want to think you can. But you can't.

Something's gotta give.

Unlike the situation with the deadline, you still have the chance to enjoy the next two months.

Balance is probably the hardest thing to find in any arena of your life. But, you need to make some plans. Set some rules and stick to them.

First, decide how much you're writing now. My goal is about three hours a day, twenty-one hours per week. Do I meet that goal? Sometimes. For the holidays, I've got to be realistic.

Make a list of your holiday-related activities.

For example, work party, lunch with x group of friends, four hours per week on choir rehearsal, etc.

The number of children in your immediate family and your level of involvement with your religious institution will be important factors to consider. Four kids may mean four school/church pageants.

For me, the holidays can mean spending time with people I don't particularly like. There. I said it. I resent the obligation and the drain on my time. Can I get out of these plans? Mostly no. But consider carefully. Sometimes the line between sick and freakin' exhausted is close enough to claim illness. Really. It's a holiday rule. Mono and a nervous breakdown by December 25th won't help anyone. Consider the impact on our health care system, the strain on your insurance carrier.

Think back on last November and December. Make a list of the activities you cherish, the ones that wear you out but you love anyway, those that you could do without, and the dozen or so that make you miserable. Cut the latter two areas by half. Promise that you will not get sucked back in to more than one-half of those half. You've just regained twenty-five percent of those hours. The hours attending, dressing for, maybe even

shopping or baking for those activities.

So, **rule one**—cut out some of the holiday have-to's. Schedule a meeting with writing friends. It's called a prior commitment, and it's an acceptable excuse. So what if the meeting is an email or two back and forth from the comfort of your own home. "I'm writing. Are you?"

Rule two—cut your planned writing time by at least twenty percent. Fifty percent if the circumstances call for it. Be honest. Be practical. You have to shop. It's required. There is no way to avoid the holiday hullabaloo. So, my personal goal is down thirty percent. One child plus overtime at work to help with holiday bills. My goal is now 14 to 15 hours. I have six or seven hours freed up for the want-to's and have-to's. By making this rule, I've gotten rid of the guilt. I don't have to flog myself on a daily basis, adding stress to an already stressful season.

Rule three—budget some extra time for rest. I know, the idea is completely foreign to you. Relax? During the holidays? You know you need it. You'll be tired, stressed, and way busier than usual. Schedule an extra hour or two of downtime every week.

Your goals and modifications may differ from mine, but the ultimate result will be the same. You'll get some writing done. You'll allow yourself to enjoy the holidays. Maybe you'll even manage to stay healthy. ‡

~ Julianna Heaton writes *Young Adult romances*.



WRITING A NOVEL IS LIKE A MARRIAGE: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP

By Maggie Jaimeson

This article first appeared in the September edition of Words From the Heart, the newsletter of From The Heart Romance Writers. Laurie Darcey, Editor.

If you've been writing very long, you've heard about terms like the "muddy middle," the "black moment," and the "HEA." And, if you're at all like me, you know that every novel you undertake has its moments of great expectations, feeling like an utter failure, and some type of acceptance. My most recent novel really solidified this emotional journey in my mind. Then I realized that writing and completing a novel is like a marriage, or like any committed couple relationship. This time, I knew that being older and wiser (and being married, divorced, and married again) actually pays off in this process. It gives me a sense of perspective for the long haul I will undertake.

At the beginning of every novel I always experience that euphoric feeling of hope and excitement. Excitement that I'm exploring a new world, a new group of characters, a new journey that I'm invited to take vicariously. Hope that this novel will be the one—the one to generate a call, the one to get noticed among all the others. For those who have published many novels, you might feel this is the one to take the next step—break you out, hit a bestseller list. This beginning phase of my relationship with my novel is very similar to the honeymoon in a marriage. Sex is good and can happen at any time and anywhere. It's where everyone is beautiful and, even if bad guys are chasing and scaring my characters, I have no doubt that together we'll all end up happy and sipping Mai Tais on a tropical island together by the end.

Then, somewhere around page 150 or so, that newness and hope is really tested and challenged as I approach the muddy middle. I question why I thought

this was a good idea, why my characters are no longer talking to me clearly, or may have stopped talking all together, and why I'm putting myself through this angst yet again. For those of you who have a day job, like I do, I know you'll understand when I say this is when I ask myself "What in the hell are you doing? Don't you think the fact you already worked 50, 60, whatever hours this week is enough? Why don't you go play? Why don't you take time off? Why do you fool yourself into thinking you're a novelist? Are you out of your mind?"

These questions are then followed by a for-your-own-good type of demand. "Move away from the computer. Shut it down. Turn it off." Then I start with the rationalization for giving up, and the voices inside my head say: "Spend time away. You'll realize there is a whole world out there that is so much more fun than writing."

That's when writing a novel takes real commitment, just like a relationship. That space after the newness wears off and before you are really comfortable with each other is the time when you look around and something—anything—new draws your attention. It is that space where I glance around and wonder, what if...? And, just like a marriage, I have to look away from the lures to other people and places and tell myself I made a commitment and I'm sticking with it. That sticking with it part may have moments of joy or wonder, but the truth is most of the time it's slogging—putting one foot in front of the other. Each day I have to ignore the invitations to start a new book, to join that exciting party of characters somewhere else. Each day I have to go home with the book I started.

After the next 150 pages or so of sticking with it, the novel again starts taking on new depth, new meaning. I see the themes and, being an unapologetic pantsner, I can finally see the end. Just



like a committed relationship, I wake up one morning and I realize I'm really with someone who is amazing, someone who has new things to offer me, someone who has offered me new, deeper ways to be together, a closeness I could have never imagined before.

The more we are together, the more I want to know—the more I want to touch, experience, feel. I feel the build toward the climax and I can barely stand the excitement. I want to rush it—I want to explore it. All of it. *Right Now!* It's like realizing that the sex I was having for the past ten years was leading up to this. It's nothing compared to what it is now. This...this is mind-blowing. This is a person who knows me so well, and has such patience, and engenders such complete trust that we can go to places I never imagined before. I'm willing to stay up late or even all night because it's so amazing. My characters are sharing secrets, my novel is writing itself and everything is crystal clear. And I rush to the end because I can't stand a moment longer of not getting there.

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(Writing a Novel Continued from page 10)

When I finally write the climax, and get to the finish, I bask in the afterglow for a couple of weeks. I dream about all the editors and agents who will be begging to read it. I make a list, check their requirements, and plan my grand distribution to everyone important. I have dreams about how each person who reads it is going to be blown away by my prose, the depth of thought, the complexity of characterization, the universal themes that speak to everyone. I see the headlines: "Portland Woman is the First to Win the Nobel Prize in Literature with a Romance Novel."

However, being the professional I am, I decide that—although the novel is close to perfect—before I send it off and await the six figure advance, I'll go back to fix those very few "little niggling things" I probably overlooked in my rush to the climax. It will only take a moment. (Cue ominous music here) Just one or two evenings after work and I'll package it up and send it off—or email it to all those who requested the full by email attachment.

OMG! You might as well kill me now. Just like a marriage, I am shocked at all the things I'd overlooked before. What happened? Did I suddenly walk into another dimension? A parallel world? How long has my husband been bald? When did the bathroom mirror start getting those yucky speckles right after he flossed? Oooooo all that swearing at the television. I don't remember him being so rabid about football, the elections, the general stupidity of people. Oh no! What happened to that caring guy I was so close to two weeks ago? The one where I couldn't tell where I started and he ended? The one who always listened to me, always took my feelings into consideration. Where did this other man come from? Is he a "walk-in" spirit who has taken over my husband's body?

Is my passive voice that awful? Why did my characters allow me to put them in

such a ridiculously cliché situation? The first three chapters? I don't remember writing that *dreck*. Did my critique partners accidentally send back my first draft of a previous novel and I somehow included it? I know better than to drop in all that backstory. That argument between my hero and heroine, it sounds like two fourteen year olds. Who wrote this?

Maybe this relationship wasn't at all what I thought. Maybe it was just lust—lust after an idea. Maybe it was all on the surface. I was fooled into believing it was something more, but now I can see that it isn't. Maybe...maybe...I really have no clue what I'm doing and I've been fooling myself all along that I'm a writer.

Yup, I'm back to slogging again. What keeps me going? I made a commitment. I made a commitment to go the distance, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer. Right now it seems pretty darn poor. And the cycle begins again, but with editing the timeline is shortened. The emotional ups and downs are not quite as big. When I do send it off, I'm neither outrageously in love with my novel, nor am I depressed about my choice. It is what it is—my best effort. One that I truly believe is worthy of publication.

Then, I start the next book. For me, the next book is really a continuation of my marriage with writing novels. It may be new characters or a new world, but I know the themes are the same. It is still part of me. That same relationship is still important, and I want to plumb the depths of that relationship again. Why? Because I know that I get to experience that euphoric beginning and that amazing deepening. I know that I'll still dream about the headlines. Yes, I'll have the slogging too, and the disappointing times. But...in the end...I have faith that I'll be rewarded—not only with the sales of the books that I write, but also with an amazingly deep relationship that is more than I can ever imagine. ‡

~ Maggie Jameson has been married for eight years this time around. When asked how long they've been married, her husband has been known to say it is for 28 years—because he wishes he'd met her first, and he feels they know each other and love each more deeply than eight years would suggest. Though Maggie is a successful non-fiction author, with four books and over 80 articles, she has found writing novels the most challenging writing she's ever done. Maggie has completed six novels in the past four and a half years. Two of which she calls her "learning" novels and are no longer submitted. The other four, however, consistently get requests for fulls from editors and agents. She's waiting for the right partner to ask her to the dance, so she can start walking down that publishing aisle. (Cue wedding music here). HEA!



(Time Travel Continued from page 8)

everything, right?

Hardly. I was writing an erotic romance. So involved in the language, dress, and setting of the two different times, I nearly forgot my publishing contract was with an erotica publisher. Hello? When could these two characters from two different centuries have sex on an Army base? After more research, I figured out a way to make the story work and be credible, but it wasn't easy.

Finally, I finished my part-contemporary, part-historical paranormal time-travel erotic romance. Whew! With the help of a couple of strong critique partners and my very own Army resource/husband, I polished the draft and made my deadline. Barely.

The Adventure Continues?

Would I write another one? You bet. It's become my favorite sub-genre! ‡

~ Vanessa Hart is the alter-ego of one of ACRA's members, published in romance that is more ... naughty? Explicit? Visit her web site at <http://vanessahart.com> for more information on her books.



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Visitors Welcome!

We're on the web!
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A CLICHÉ FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Fellow Writers,

Your friendly neighborhood chapter newsletter editor here.

I could have put a lot of things in this space — hunky heroes and sexy sirens (and you probably preferred I did :) — but what better time and place to thank our prolific writer’s group for allowing me to edit our 2008 Heart to Heart newsletter?



I haven’t been a member of NTRWA long. Because, like most writers, I’m poor. How could I afford to fork over \$75 freakin’ dollars to a once-a-month group? I could do a lot of things with that 75 smackeroos: buy several books (always my first choice :) ; buy more Dallas Stars Hockey tickets, or better yet, move closer to the ice (I never win the seat upgrade); treat Hubby to a fancy meal (though he doesn’t like Italian and tolerates my Tex-Mex fetish); stick it in my “fly to Holland” fund (though I always spend it beforehand); order a male escort (shshshsh ... a tough decision with sites like Men4RentNow.com and RussianMaleEscorts.com ... and no, I won’t link up to them like I do other links in the newsletter); indulge in Chocolate (my vitamin C); indulge in Coffee (my other vitamin C, as in Senseo and Douwe Egberts, Dutch coffees); and more. But a couple of years ago, I finally took the plunge, and invested in RWA. And I’m so glad I did!

NTRWA has been so welcoming and friendly, to me, to others, that I feel blessed to call everyone my chapter ‘mate’ (Aussie for “friend” :). (OK, yes, I’ve watched way too many McLeod’s Daughters.) I’ve learned so much, made such good friends, that it all sounds so cliché. But sometimes, clichés are the best way to express an almost inexpressible emotion — that of profound thanks.

This past year, as I’ve edited our newsletter — fumed at misaligned text, ferreted out perfect images, fiddled with layouts, cursed Microsoft —, I’ve learned about our membership and, as a board member, learned more about the workings of RWA, a truly unique and awesome organization. I’ve attended several Nationals and promoted our group at other writers groups and conferences I attend.

For 2009, I look forward to more fun, to making new friends, and to learning, always learning, from such a positive and knowledgeable group of people. So let me say one last cliché before the year ends — **Thank you.**