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Chapter 33, Region 5

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Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America



Next Meeting February 21, 2009

SUCCESS AND THE SINGLE TITLE

Pamela Morsi began writing historical romance novels set in the small town and farms of the early twentieth century. She was an immediate success regularly making bestseller lists and garnering the top awards including twice recipient of the RITA, the genre's highest honor, Best of the Year from Library Journal and a starred review from Publishers Weekly.

In 2000, with a new millennium, she decided to move in the direction of mainstream fiction. Her recent works depict the voices of ordinary people pursuing every-

day challenges in an increasingly uncertain and complex world.

Pam has a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities from Oklahoma State University and a Masters in

Library Science from the University of Missouri. She lives in San Antonio with her husband and daughter. ‡





PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Angi Platt

"So, 2009 is my year. It's my time to get that story on the page and finish projects that deserve to be finished. It can be your year, too. Let's grab it together and do all we can to help ourselves further along the road to publication." January President's Corner.

The next step -- Encouragement

Our world of writing is a lonely place after we shove the voices in our heads aside. Attending chapter meetings and chatting on the loop is our village.

At the January meeting, everyone shared the excitement of a member finishing her first book, another finishing her second book, and yet another finishing her third. We also shared the accomplishments of those with submissions, rejections (yes, this is an accomplishment), and publications.

NT has a writing incentive program (Bead Your Book into Submission) and critique loop. Member Candy Havens has a fast-draft loop and free writers' workshops. We have great workshops lined up this year. Save your dollars for the November Writers Roundup with special speaker Margie Lawson.

But more than anything, visit the unique village which is NTRWA — either at a meeting or on the loop. You'll find the encouragement you need to stop for a few minutes and write. Borrow an RWA® National Conference CD, play it in the background while you're cleaning, cooking dinner, or driving. Keep your subconscious writing even if you can't make it to the keyboard.

Our friends at NT encourage and support every step down the road to publication. ‡



MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on January 17, 2009, at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 12:40 p.m. following an interactive workshop on creating hooks and developing characters by Kristi Gold.

All Board Members were present.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President, Angi Platt reported: Some of the highlights from the transition meeting are:

- a name change for Marsha's committee from Ways & Means to Hospitality.
- We're trying to compile a history of NT from past newsletters, Chris Keniston is currently working on past officers. It's also stemmed a newsletter article: Time Capsule.
- We are planning an advertisement in RWR® sometime in the late summer to advertise our November Writers Roundup. Since we're utilizing a portion of the designated PAN funds, which have been designated for at least the past four

years, we'll list our published authors.

- We have committee reports for last year and a major portion of the procedures drafted.
- We will be meeting the second week of July due to the national conference conflicting with our regular third Saturday meeting date.
- The next Board of Director's meeting will be on February 21st at 8:30 am, the place to be determined.
- The Board voted to raise annual dues beginning February 1st, and has recommended the door fee be eliminated beginning in 2010.
- Offices still open:
 - Membership Director
 - PAN Liaison
 - PRO Liaison
 - 2010 Contest Co-Chair

(Minutes continued on page 3)



(Minutes continued from page 2)

Treasurer, Chris Keniston reported: The checking account balance is healthy. Treasurer Chris Keniston moved to accept the budget. Coming from committee, no second was needed. The motion was approved by the membership with no objections.

Program Director, Marty Tidwell reported: February's workshop will be presented by Pamela Morsi, whose topic is "Success and the Single Title." March will be Wendy Watson. Anyone wishing to help with the 2009 Writers Roundup can volunteer through Marty or Gina.

Web site Director, Jen Fitzgerald: She is working on removing code to make the site look better and is updating the entire Web site. Members can send articles for the Web site at website@ntrwa.org.

Gina Nelson reported for the open Membership position: Today, we had 21 in attendance and 5 visitors, Jax Cassidy, Co-founder of Romance Divas, Jessica Madden, who has two paranormal books coming out soon, Lynne Matherly, RexAnn Meredith, and Amie Gray.

Communications Director, Alley Hauldren reported: The new deadline for the paper will be the Friday after the meeting so that Alley can get the paper copies mailed to members one week prior to the next meeting. Members can send articles to the newsletter at newsletter@ntrwa.org.

COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:

Hospitality Chair, Marsha West reported: She will do three baskets per month and sell door prize tickets. Critiques will be offered. Members were urged to contribute critiques whether published or not since a second set of eyes can be helpful to any writer. Members who draw a critique are encouraged to present their chapters to the volunteers at a time convenient for the critique provider. We are ordering black badge holders, which we'll sell for \$10.00. We have beaded necklace badge holders for sale at \$5.00 and anniversary pens for sale at \$2.00. Chris will bring donated books to the meetings to sell for \$.50 each. Chris reported she took in \$32.00 for the books she sold today. Members can order NTRWA sweatshirts and other items from Café Press at a meeting to combine shipping costs and save money.

Bead a Book Chair, Nikki Duncan reported: Members can sign up, state their planned deadlines, and receive a wire necklace for the first 5,000 words, with a bead for each 5,000 words after that. Members are encouraged to write 5,000 words each month and report to Nikki. If a member writes 5000 words in two months, he or she can still get a bead.

When the manuscript is submitted (query letter or proposal), the member gets a pendant. If a member meets her stated deadline, they will get something extra.

Audio Librarian, Nikki Duncan reported: She will bring the notebook of CDs to each meeting. Members must pay a one-time \$10.00 participation fee. A list of the CDs is on the web site. Since there isn't much demand for the tapes from national conferences, the tapes will eventually be given away to members.

2010 Great Expectations Chair, Mary Duncanson reported: The entries have all been sent out, and they are waiting for the judges to return them. We had a total of 190 entries.

Spotlight Chairperson, Shelley Kaehr reported: She will do a spotlight on Shelley Bradley at the next meeting.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: Gina spoke about how to volunteer for the Writers Roundup.

FINAL ANNOUNCEMENTS: Booksignings and accomplishments were announced.

The business meeting was adjourned at 1:22 PM.

Submitted electronically by Carolyn Williamson ‡

JANUARY WRITING

Pages Written

Jerrie Alexander 150

Marsha West 150

Shelley Kaehr 43

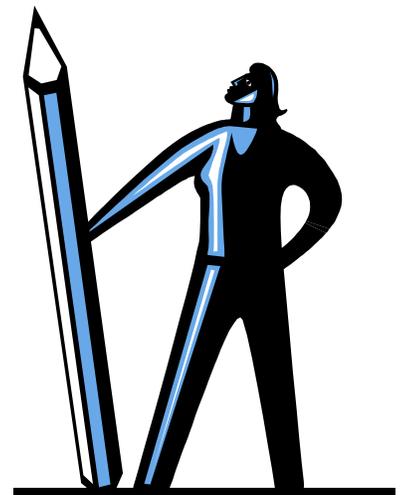
Jax Cassidy 40

Pages Edited

Shelley Kaehr 703

Mary Karlik 212

Nikki Duncan 175





SPOTLIGHT ON SHELLEY BRADLEY

By Shelley Kaehr writing romance as Leah Leonard

After sixteen years, January 19, 2009, marks Shelley's last day in Corporate America and her first day as a **full-time writer!** Congratulations, Shelley! This is awesome!

This wife and mother has worked consistently through the years, following her dreams, never giving up on her passion for writing, and now after twenty books and counting, Shelley has a foothold on her career that is sure to grow in the future.

Here's a look at the writing journey of one of our chapters most successful authors, Shelley Bradley/Shayla Black:

SK: When did you first start writing?

SB: Seriously in 1992. I dabbled prior to that.

SK: How did your background/childhood/experiences, etc. prepare you or your muse for your writing?

SB: It didn't at all. I wasn't a reader as a child. In fact, I was actually much better at math. I didn't discover a love of books until college. I started reading romances and I was hooked.

SK: When did you first know this was more than just a hobby?

SB: The first time I finaled in a contest I figured I had to have *some* ability. The judges heaped praise, including one well-known author. I figured then that all that stood between me and success was hard work and tenacity. I could muster both.

SK: How did you decide to make this your profession?

SB: Actually, I'm just becoming a full-time writer this month, but it's something I've always wanted to do. When you love something and you're passionate about it . . . you just know. I couldn't really picture myself staying in corporate America forever.

SK: How did you pick romance as your genre?

SB: It was, hands down, my favorite thing to read. My grandmother told me when I was a child that I was born to be married because I loved the idea of love. I still do. It always seemed natural to write about it.

SK: Describe your journey to publication – who did you sell to first, how?

SB: My journey was about 7 years long. I wrote 3 books before selling the last to Kensington, which they titled **The Lady and the Dragon**. I later sold my first and second manuscripts to them as well. The second had been a Golden Heart finalist in 1993. I got an agent with it, but the book didn't sell. We parted ways in 1996, about the time my husband and I discovered I was expecting. I quit writing for the duration of my pregnancy and most of my daughter's first year. Then, early in May 1998, I sent my manuscript to Kensington and got

the call about 3 weeks later.

SK: How many rejections did you originally receive before getting a yes? Or did you sell right away?

SB: I have no idea how many rejections I received. At least

30. I didn't count them. It was a no. I read it, digested the comments, if any, then filed the letter away. No point in counting how many I had. The enumeration of my rejections could only serve to depress me. Instead, I developed the mentality that I would prove everyone wrong and succeed someday.

SK: Describe your philosophy on getting published. Is it skill, luck, timing or a little of all three? Please elaborate.

SB: It is all three. You have to be able to write at least somewhat, so skill plays a part. Luck, yes. Is the editor whose desk your book is sitting on actually acquiring? Do they like that sort of book? Have they already bought one like it? Do they have a slot in which to put it? Which also plays into the timing bit, along with market timing. Now is a difficult time to sell a vampire romance, for instance. 3 years ago . . . absolutely possible. Keep on top of the industry to see what's selling. If you don't already, subscribe to Publisher's Lunch. That will give you more up-to-the-moment information about what's selling.

SK: Do you have an agent? If so, do you think this is necessary?

SB: Absolutely. But I'm juggling four publishers, two of whom I write single titles for. It's crucial to keep everything straight. One publisher has a non-compete clause that always has to be negotiated. There's negotiating foreign rights, publishing slots, co-op, publisher support, revisions, covers, electronic rights, etc. If you're e-publishing or early in your career with Harlequin/Silhouette, you don't need an agent yet. I strongly recommend that you have one if you're selling single titles. There are MANY things that can put a snag in a career, especially if you're not sure what you should be getting at any given point in your career. And if you don't like haggling about money (and many other things on the road to publication), then you really should have someone in your corner to help you play good cop/bad cop. You never want to be the bad cop if you can avoid it.

SK: If you do, describe the steps you took to get one, and again whether it is just timing, skill, luck or all three.

SB: The first time, as I said, I was a Golden Heart finalist, so it was



(Spotlight continued on page 5)



(Spotlight continued from page 4)

much easier to get the attention of an agent. After we parted ways, I didn't get another agent until I sold my third single title. At that point, I'd just sold a trilogy with a 32 page contract. I **needed** someone to help me through that. The option clauses the publisher originally proposed tied my hands for two years—something I knew I couldn't afford. I'd been talking to that agent for a few months anyway, but when the contract came, I pulled the trigger. My current agent is one I got overnight, literally. I queried her one day. She called that afternoon. We chatted for about two hours. I sent her a sampling of my work, which she read that evening. She called me the next day and offered to represent me. But that's 20+ books into my career. My first agent? She took months to get.

It is a combination of skill, timing and luck. Everything in this business is. That said, you should never, EVER get an agent you don't trust 100%, who doesn't share your vision of your career, who doesn't believe in you. Before you say yes, **talk to him/her**. If you can't have a good conversation over the phone and find some common ground, this is not the right agent for you. Additionally, if you find you know more about the genre than s/he does, that should also be a warning to you. New agents are hungry, yes. Question is, what do they know and how much clout do they have? You should also be asking about things like revisions. Will s/he give you suggestions? What happens if you have a creative disagreement? And of course, you should ask how quickly you'll receive money, in what format (I receive mine via wire transfer from my current agent), and if they charge expenses on top of their 15%.

SK: Voice – when did you first realize your writer's voice was starting to take hold? After how many books?

SB: You know, it's not something I ever thought about. I just knew I couldn't sound like anyone but me. I have different moods and tones that are reflected in my books, from my sweetest (**A Perfect Match**) to my spiciest so far (**Decadent**), but I like to think it all still sounds like me.

SK: Were you always writing spicy tales, or did that evolve over time?

SB: It evolved over time, primarily because I realized I enjoyed writing spicier stories. The passion reflects my personality. I think that rubs off on everything I do. I went to a writing seminar long ago that asked you to decide what your strengths were and to play to them. Then, define your weaknesses and work on them even harder. My strengths have always been character, relationship, and sex. So my books revolve around those a great deal. I work very hard on every book with external plot.

SK: Pen name – Shayla Black - how did you come up with it?

SB: It was a combination of me, my second agent, and my Berkley editor, Kate Seaver. We brainstormed for a name that would represent something sexy, but not something so far away from my

name that I would forget to answer to it. I decided early on to use my same initials, and in a matter of a few days, Shayla Black was born.

SK: You also write under Shelley Bradley. How did you decide how to brand yourself? Do you feel pen names are necessary?

SB: There are a lot of reasons to take pen names. In my case, I decided to adopt Shayla Black in 2006 because, at that time, I was heavily identified with historical romances, having written 9 of them for Kensington. My historical readers were angry that I was no longer writing historicals. New contemporary readers weren't finding me because they expected my books to be historical. Plus, the books I'd sold to Berkley for the Heat line were **much** sexier than anything I'd written previously. It seemed natural to come up with something completely new so that no one would be expecting historical or something sweeter, etc. I actually adopted 2 taglines to differentiate. Shelley writes "Sizzle from the Heart". Shayla writes the "Wicked Edge of Romance". That still stands.

SK: Tell us briefly about your two latest published books.

SB: In 2009, I will have seven releases. I had four in 2008. It's been a busy few years . . . So I'll pick and choose. **Tempt Me With Darkness** came out last September. It's the first of my Domsday Brethren paranormal series for Pocket Books. I'm really excited about continuing the series in 2009 with back to back releases, **Seduce Me in Shadow** and **Possess Me at Midnight** this fall. For more details, visit DomsdayBrethren.com. Berkley will also be re-releasing **Bound and Determined** as a Shayla Black book in trade paperback in March. I'm thrilled with the new cover!

SK: What advice would you give to writers who know in their hearts this is what they want to do? Any mistakes you've made you'd like to help others avoid? Any strokes of genius or personal epiphanies you'd like to share?

SB: Don't quit—ever. Don't compare your career to others'. Don't let anyone make you feel inadequate; just quietly show them they're wrong. Don't stop learning and growing; the minute you do, you're toast. Always challenge yourself. Don't fail to listen to critique partners, agents, editors . . . but keep the book **yours**. Above all, don't do it if you don't enjoy it. It shows.

SK: Please list your websites, contact info and anything else.

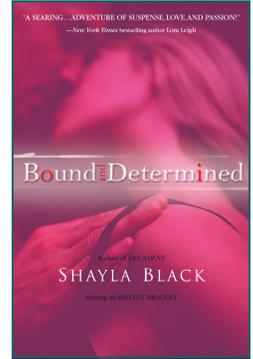
www.shaylablack.com,

www.domsdaybrethren.com, www.myspace.com/shelleybradley,

www.shelleybradley.com,

www.shelleybradley.com/blog,

groups.yahoo.com/group/wicked_writers/ †





HEROSCOPES: THE AQUARIUS HEROINE

By Bonnie Staring

The following article appeared in the February 2009 issue of *romANTICS*, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

She's the original Miss Independent.

Born between January 20 and February 18, the Aquarius heroine is the visionary of the Zodiac. She's the gal with the plan, whether it's for working the room at a fundraiser for abandoned pigmy hamsters or taking over a nation. Need to liven up a party? Make sure she's invited. She'll be the one surrounded by the giggling gaggle near the crab dip.

Honest to a fault, the Aquarius heroine has little time for cushioning bad news or toning down her squeals of glee. She feels that life's too short for words wrapped in politically correct packaging. This woman is filled with ideas and thrives in a career where she can share them with others. And don't try to boggle her down with details; she probably has taxes from 1998 that haven't been filed yet.

The Aquarius Heroine longs to be free as a bird - and nothing ruffles her feathers more than someone wanting a lifetime commitment by the third date. What attracts her most is a great mind, so ideal dates for her involve mysteries, museums and a little mayhem, perhaps served up at a carnival or '80s-band reunion tour. Famous Aquarius heroines include Virginia Woolf, Eva Braun, Oprah Winfrey and Gypsy Rose Lee.

Next month: The Pisces 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 ‡



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-Treasurer

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treasurer@ntrwa.org

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secretary@ntrwa.org

-Membership Director

Open

membership@ntrwa.org

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publicity@ntrwa.org

-Communications Director & Newsletter Editor

Alley Huldren

newsletter@ntrwa.org

-Program Director

Marty Tidwell

programs@ntrwa.org

Committee Chairs:

-Ways & Means

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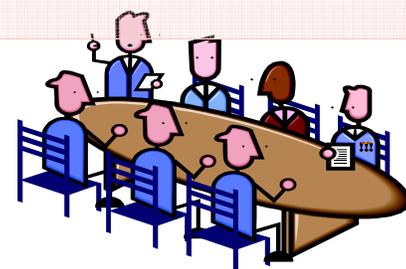
Marty Tidwell & Mary Duncanson

GEcoordinator@ntrwa.org

-Bead a Book

Nikki Duncan

BIAY@ntrwa.org



-Audio Librarian

Nikki Duncan

librarian@ntrwa.org

-PRO Liaison

Open

president@ntrwa.org

-PAN Liaison

Open

president@ntrwa.org



BABS: BEAD A BOOK INTO SUBMISSION

by **Nikki Duncan**



It's time to kick off 2009 and stick to our resolutions to write more. To help with that, NT offers the

BABS program. Below are the guidelines for the program that will hopefully be beneficial to published and unpublished authors within NT. You do not need to attend the monthly meetings to participate in the BABS program. I will keep track of your beads if you cannot make it.

RWA®, chapter activities, life, and our own creative processes sometimes distract us from the ultimate goal of writing. The BABS program is designed to provide tangible rewards for making progress in the publication process, both as an incentive to keep moving forward and as a reminder of the steps we have already taken.

How it works:

- Open to published and un-published authors
- Signing up = a "neck wire" to hold beads
- Every 5,000 new words (20 pages) = 1 bead
- Every 10,000 edited words (40 pages) = 1 bead (Editing is limited to 2 rounds per manuscript.)
- Completing your manuscript = 1 bead
- Completing your manuscript before or on your deadline or submitting ms to editor/agent = a pendant (Email Nikki before or on the

completion date.)

How to participate:

- Contact Nikki Duncan at BIAY@ntrwa.org and identify:
- The project title you are starting (or continuing)
- The projected word count of the completed manuscript
- The current word count (if it's a work in progress)
- Your deadline
- Join the BABS YahooGroup to stay accountable and get encouragement or inspiration when needed. (optional) (NTRWABABS-subscribe@yahoo.com)
- At or before each monthly meeting, report your current word count to Nikki.

Please Note: Word counts can be converted to page counts (based on an average of 250 words per page) and counted toward the clipboards when you attend the monthly meetings. The year-end-writing awards are based on pages reported at meetings members attend. The monthly page counts tally up and at the end of the year to put you in the running for NTRWA writing awards.

Once you complete a manuscript, sign up to start earning beads for a new manuscript. Build a new necklace or book thong to remember the hard work you pour into each of your books!

Sign Up Now!

~ Nikki Duncan (aka Naughty Nikki D)
2008 Golden Pen Finalist
www.nikkiduncan.com ‡

AUDIO LEARNING CORNER

By [Nikki Duncan](#)



Kick off 2009 right! Resolve to take the necessary steps to hone your craft and pursue publication. It's as simple as driving in your car.

Maybe you're new to NT and aren't aware that we have an audio library, or maybe you've heard that we have one, but aren't really sure what it's all about. Well, let me try to clear up any questions or confusions.

Each year, NT purchases the complete set of workshop recordings from RWA® Nationals. You then have the ability to check out the CD(s) that relates to what you're trying to work on or improve. The first time you use the library, we ask that you pay \$10 to NT to help cover the costs involved in keeping the new workshops on hand and available. You are encouraged to check out CDs at each monthly meeting. When you return those, check out more. It's a super simple and inexpensive way to get yourself closer to publication.

Some of the CDs available are:

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(Audio Learning continued from page 7)

CD#	CD Title
RW2-010CD	Can You Switch POV in a Scene and Be Pure?
RW6-032CD	Writing Between the Laugh Lines: Getting Humor Right
RW9-108CD	No Dumping Allowed: Creating Opening Pages that Sparkle
RW9-109CD	Breathing Life Into a Dying (Not a Death) Scene
RW9-114CD	Writing Pitfalls We All Seem To Fall Into or How To Outwit a Misbehaving Muse
RW9-115CD	Character Plotting
RW9-116CD	Men In Love: Four Heroic Types and Their Romantic Conflicts
RW9-118CD	Conflicts of Myth: Using Classical Myths to Deepen Your Contemporary Novel
RW9-201CD	Stealing From the Classics: How to Make an Original Plot From an Old Story
RW9-203CD	Finding A Man Worth Loving In Any Time Period
RW9-207CD	How Men Experience Woman
RW9-220CD	Setting as Character
RW9-224CD	Writing the Biggest Scene in Your Book
RW9-225CD	Isn't a Doctor, Doesn't Own a Ranch, Doesn't Require a Virgin: New Heroes of Cat. Romance
RW9-241CD	So Then What Happened?
RW9-242CD	Make Your Secondary Characters First Rate
RW9-250CD	Intense & Tight: Pacing the Short Contemporary
RW9-258CD	Using Sense-Ational Writing to Create a Real Fictional World
RW9-263CD	Making A Hero Tick and A Reader Sigh
RW9-264CD	It Had to Be You: Casting Your Characters
RW9-267CD	Discovering Story Magic
RW9-305CD	The Art of War: From Green Berets to Guns & All Things Military
RW9-317CD	Romantica: Remembering the Body in Romance
RW9-329CD	Yes, Ma'am, They Are Bigger in Texas
RW9-340CD	The Seven Stages of Romantic Growth
RW9-343CD	Story Between the Sheets: Write the Unskippable Love Scene

Notify
Nikki Duncan at
librarian@ntrwa.org
to order CDs

RW9-351CD	Emotional and Sexual Tension: Make Them Want, Make Them Wait
RW9-358CD	She Sat, He Stood: What Do Your Characters Do While They're Talking
RW10-075CDA	POV, Voice, & Characterization: Writing Your Story in 3 Dimensions
RW10-075CDB	POV, Voice, & Characterization: Writing Your Story in 3 Dimensions
RW10-082CD	The Heroine's Journey
RW10-110CD	Conflict Ahead: A Roadmap for Writers
RW10-119CD	Spilling the Beans: Secrets, Lies, & Backstory
RW10-143CD	Ten Tips For Writing a Romance That Works
RW11-018CD	Fresh Characters, Unlikely Heroines
RW11-021CD	A Sagging Middle and What To Do About It
RW11-024CD	Writing Action Scenes
RW11-027CD	Chick Lit Hero's Journey Or It's Not Just About The Shoes
RW11-028CD	Spice Up Your Romance Novel
RW11-050CD	Outlining Plot & Narrative Structure
RW11-077CD	Real Women Kick Ass
RW11-078CD	Make It Last Or Come Too Soon: How To Write Sexual Tension
RW11-086CD	Pointers On Point of View
RW11-088CD	Voice and Conflict
RW11-099CD	Who's On Top? Intimacy, Control, & Conflict
RW11-128CD	I Do, I Do - Challenging Couples in Love
RW11-132CD	Plotting or Pantsing
RW11-136CD	Writing on The Edge

CDs from RWA® Nationals 2008 include:

- Writing the Unputdownable Novel
- Using the 16 Personality Types to Create Believable Characters and Relationship Dynamics
- Writing Romantic Suspense
- Laughing All the Way to the Bank: Adding Humor to Your Work
- Creating Your Story's Backbone
- From Blah to Brilliant

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(Audio Learning continued from page 8)

- No Plotters Allowed
- The Synopsis Queen Tells All
- Hook an Editor on the First Page
- Writing for the Reader
- The Five Senses: Are Your Readers Living the Story?
- His Brain/Her Brain
- Chilling Villains
- Unstick Yourself
- The Purpose Driven Scene
- Developing the Romance in Your Romance Novel
- Networking Without Trauma
- Communication Skills that Can Make or Break Your Career
- Finding the Perfect Agent
- Deal or No Deal
- Contracts and Royalties
- How to Get a Six-Figure Deal
- Standing Out from the Slush Pile
- Self-Promotion - It Isn't Rocket Science
- Beyond High Concept: Developing an Author Brand
- The Birth of a Book: What Happens to a Book Between the Sale and Its Appearance in Stores
- The Real Questions You Need to Ask Before Signing with an Agent
- Publishing Myths...Why Patience Counts
- Kill Your Negative Inner Critic
- Figuring Out Your Creative Process
- Born to Write?
- Overcoming Discouragement and Other Obstacles to Success
- From Identity to Essence: Love Stories and Transformation
- Uniting Plot Structure and Character Arc

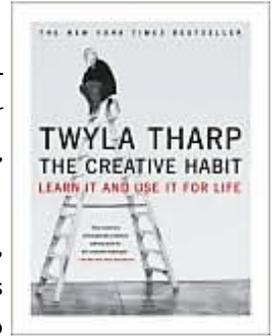
Whatever your goal may be, there's surely a CD to help you attain it. Email me at librarian@ntrwa.org, and I will make sure to have the CD you want at the next meeting.

~ Nikki's been a member of NTRWA for three years, is an RWA® PRO, has written articles that have been published in over 100 chapter newsletters throughout RWA®, and is a contributor to the RWA® PROSpects Communications Committee. She's completed five manuscripts, finished in the Golden Pen Contest, and is actively pursuing publication. ‡

A REVIEW OF THE CREATIVE HABIT: LEARN IT AND USE IT FOR LIFE BY TWYLA THARP

By Alyssa Goodnight

The following was first printed in the September 2008 issue of *In Print!*, newsletter for Houston Bay Area RWA®. Liz Webb, Editor.



As writers, some of us (the lucky ones, in my opinion) have a surfeit of ideas and a dearth of the time necessary to write them. Others of us struggle at finding even one compelling, unique, and fascinating idea. We may think we're open-minded in our search for ideas (I know I did), but after reading **The Creative Habit** by world-famous choreographer Twyla Tharp, my assessment is no longer so smug. For instance, I've never tried to go a week without clocks, mirrors, or speaking. I've never consciously assessed my 'creative DNA', never tried to 'Do a Verb' (an interesting form of performance art), never even defined 'My Perfect World' as a writer. It's enough to make me feel just the slightest bit guilty of shirking my writerly responsibility.

'The first steps of a creative act are like groping in the dark: random and chaotic, feverish and fearful, a lot of busy-ness with no apparent or definable end in sight.'

Sounds about right. With many examples culled from Ms. Tharp's own life, and many from the lives of wildly successful composers, choreographers, writers and artists, this book is an eminently readable journey towards creative inspiration.

Ms. Tharp does not belong to the school of thought 'that all creative acts are born of some transcendent, inexplicable Dionysian act of inspiration, a kiss from God on your brow'. She believes in hard work, rituals, perseverance, and a never-ending search for creative genius. This book is jam-packed with her no-complaints, no-excuses suggestions for getting and staying inspired in whatever creative endeavor you care to explore. But beyond that, it's fascinating simply to read how she's taken these ideas from theory, putting them smoothly into practice, and cementing herself as one of America's greatest choreographers.

If nothing else, you want to read about the Egg, and discover why Ms. Tharp says, 'Egg will take you places you've never been.' Trust me, you do. ‡



PROCESS EXAMINATION #2: PRE-WRITING

By Kellie Hazell

The following first appeared in the June issue of Romance of the Desert, newsletter of the Saguro Romance Writers, edited by Kellie Hazell.

This is the second unit in a series designed to help writers find or better employ the tools they use to write best.

Last month, I introduced the concept of process examination: an active analysis of how you write with an eye toward enhancing what works and removing what doesn't. This month, I focus on two ways to examine the pre-writing process for techniques that are working well and those that might need adjustment.

Whether you outline, write a scene or two of back story, sketch out a couple of turning points, or simply ponder-ponder-contemplate an idea, chances are good that you do something before you sit down to compose your first draft. In the journal (or notebook or

word processor document) that you are using for these exercises, jot down the steps you take before you draft a novel. Also, write the techniques you are interested in trying. Then think about ways to document your progress in those steps in a writing session: chapters outlined, words of back story written, characters biographied, hours thinking, and so on. Decide on a metric that best examines the performance of the writing process you prefer or want to develop for pre-writing. At the end of each writing session, note what you accomplished in those terms. You won't have to plot your progress in a graph (though you can) to see whether or not a given technique is generating the desired output. Also, journal how each writing session went. You may have written three pages of an outline, but did it take you five hours instead of your anticipated two? Did any of the techniques feel like a perfect fit or an ugly stepsister wearing Cinderella's glass slipper? List both the rough and smooth

spots of each session. The point is to figure out exactly what generates the best information in the best way possible for you to dive into your draft. You might find that a detailed outline is impossible for you, but a one-sentence story idea and a character arc essential.

Don't be afraid to try new pre-writing methods if something doesn't seem to be working, but be sure to generate an appropriate metric as described above for the new technique. Remember, process examination is active engagement with your writing process, not a strict attempt at someone else's methodology.

Next month I'll discuss how to examine your progress as you write the beginning of your novel. This is when spreadsheets come in very handy.

~ Kellie Hazell got sick of feeling like she wasn't writing as much as she could and devoted some time toward figuring out why. Her Process Examination series is the result. ‡

HOW TO GET INTO JOHN UPDIKE'S PANTS... ER... SHOES

by Jennifer Linforth

Editor's Note: I was saddened by John Updike's passing Tuesday (Jan. 27). In honor of his succinct wit and vivid prose, I selected this article by Jennifer Linforth published in the 2007 issue of Mainely Romance, the newsletter for the Maine RWA® Chapter, Deb Dunn, editor.

All I learned about networking I learned from John Updike's pants.

Pants and a little brown bird, actually. The pants were pink plaid, the bird a phoebe. As I stood before greatness, chatting with Mr. Updike about the bird nesting underneath the eaves of his

porch, all I could think about were his pants. My mind was a disorganized jumble of nonsensical thought when I should have been like that damn bird. Phoebes are little things with big attitudes. They are not afraid to speak up and scream their name: PHOE BEEEE. They fly around with their mouths open catching tidbits on mid-wing. They get noticed.

They get fed. So, when John Updike smiled and left our little chance encounter, he left me banging my head against my desk cursing my ineptitude for organized thought. I had just sent out my first query letter. Here I had the

chance to discuss writing with a Pulitzer prize winner (catching tidbits of advice perhaps) and I wanted to run like a damn rabbit. Never again. Granted, Mr. Updike probably appreciated not being hounded by a new writer and in hindsight I learned a valuable lesson. What was the point in keeping my writing a secret? How would I ever learn to progress my career if I did not speak up?

I had been writing with the intent of publishing for a year and no one knew. I

(John Updike continued on page 11)





(John Updike continued from page 10)

understood networking was going to be a major step in the business, but I was too scared to open my mouth and scream like that bloody bird. Thinking I should grow a spine, I took my first networking plunge and called the president of a major New York publishing house. Yes, you read that correctly. Here I was a new writer and I had an acquaintance in the business. Even he didn't even know I was a writer. So I organized my thoughts, dialed the phone, and enjoyed a lengthy conversation where he told me, in polite terms, to scream like that blasted bird. Start marketing myself before I ever got published and I would be leaps ahead of the game.

I graciously thought he was crazy. Odd as it sounded, he was right.

Why do unpublished writers hide in shadows covering from industry professionals, published writers, or agents? Fear, insecurity, lack of confidence? The best thing an unpublished writer can learn is that published authors love to chat about their books. Owners of small presses are eager to discuss marketing. Presidents and CEO's are not as unapproachable as one might think and agents really are on our side.

What's the first step in learning how to network correctly? Understand your GMC's and know how to roll them off your tongue. No matter who you chose to network with, introduce yourself and if at all possible, ask a well constructed question that is not only specific to their book or company, but mirrors something about your writing career. My first rule: be bold, be confident. Know that you are a professional and these people are not Gods

on pedestals. They are colleagues. There is nothing to fear in opening your mouth.

My second rule: know your limits.

You can stand before a networking contact all you want and chat about your work, but understand when enough is enough. Don't push the envelope. Like a phoebe, if you fly around with your mouth open too long, you will end up far too full to even begin to digest your information. You will throw up stuff that just does not make sense. You don't want your words appearing like your morning breakfast on the shoes of the person in front of you. Speak slowly, stay focused, but know when to shut

- ✓ Network correctly
- ✓ Know your limits
- ✓ Call their bluff

your mouth and let what you just said digest.

Rule number three: always call their bluff. How many times have you been at a conference chatting with a published writer? You exchange business cards. They say, with a note you think holds interest, let's keep in touch. Well, do you? I cannot stress how important it is to call this bluff. Successful authors are busy; some may say this to be polite. How will you know if you don't call them on it? I have done so and with positive results.

Let's say you contact a well known author via email and enjoy their reply. At the end they ask to be informed of your progress. You had better fire off an email thanking them for their time and close by saying: may I indeed keep in contact like you suggested? (insert reason here). This has happened with each and every NYT best seller I have

networked with and every last one of them is still in contact with me. Do not give them a reason for not replying to you. Wow them with your professionalism and drive to write. Go ahead, fire off an email to your favorite author. It may take some time, but they will reply! Especially if you add your PRO status or mention a specialty chapter to which you belong. List your credentials. Toot your horn. Tell them something you admire about their writing and ask that specific question. The key is presenting yourself as a go-getter, someone who understands what they want with their career beyond just a published book and is professional about getting there. For the best selling author, I think it separates the colleagues from the fans.

Don't limit yourself to authors or publishing professionals. Think outside the box. Do you have your blog up yet? Your website? Establish a following with a good blog and you will establish readers. I started mine with the idea of being the punching bag and guinea pig for new writers who wanted to know the dirty details of trying to publish. I promised readers I would list every triumph and failure. Imagine that. The free world knowing of my success and rejections. Folks came out of the woodwork to read. I was like that bird, not afraid to shout my name and admit what I was doing. My blog led to my first full request by an agent.

All it takes to market yourself correctly as an unpublished writer is a bit of confidence and the understanding that all who are in front of us were once in our shoes. No one will get in the way of your writing career — but you.

~ Jennifer Linforth is a PRO member of the Maine RWA® Chapter, Hearts Through History, and a participant in Women in Media. jenniferlinforth.com ‡



newsletter@ntrwa.org

NTRWA
2100 W. NorthWest HWY
Suite 114-1081
Grapevine, TX 76051

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

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MEMBER NEWS

On January 22, 2009, **Carolyn Williamson** spoke on "Lure Readers into Living Your Story with Deep Viewpoint" at the Fun in the Sun Conference Cruise leaving from Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

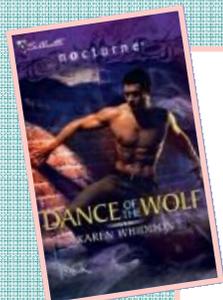
Jane Beckenham, author of **No Sex Necessary**, released January 5, 2009, by Red Rose Publishing, has been nominated for the 2nd year in a row for the Aussie Author of the year.



Sheniqua Waters' newest book, **Slave Girl**, will soon be released in print by Red Rose Publishing. **Slave Girl** is now available as an ebook at redrosepublishing.com.



Misa Ramirez has a new book released by St. Martin's Minotaur in hardcover on January 20, 2009, titled **Living the Vida Lola: A Lola Cruz Mystery**.



Karen Whiddon was mentioned in a USA Today article called [Move over, movie vampires: Werewolf pack is back](#) — "Senior editor Natasha Wilson says one of the publisher's top sellers is Karen Whiddon's **The Pack**, a werewolf-themed collection whose seventh volume, **Wild Wolf**, is due in July." Two of Karen's books will be released April 2009: **Dance of the Wolf** & **Midnight Cravings**.

