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Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America



Next Meeting March 21, 2009

THE HEROINE'S JOURNEY: ADAPTING CLASSIC NARRATIVE STRUCTURE TO YOUR STORY

The hero's journey (or heroine's journey) does not need to be a physical trek. Instead, it defines the arc of a satisfying story, and the journey itself may be purely emotional, psychological, or intellectual. So leave your dragons, swords, and damsels in distress at the door while we walk through the heroine's journey, using the classic narrative structure to plot everything from romances to mysteries to literary fiction. Drawing on examples from two movies ("While You Were Sleeping" and "Working Girl"), we'll discuss the elements of the heroine's journey, and participants will begin mapping the journeys of their own protagonists.

Wendy Lyn Watson writes light, funny mysteries (because what could be funnier than murder?) featuring Tallulah Johns, the proprietor of Dalliance, Texas' old-fashioned ice cream parlor,



Remember the A-la-mode. The first Mystery a la Mode, "I Scream, You Scream", will be published by NAL in October 2009. While Wendy is a native Buckeye and has called a half dozen states "home," she and her husband now live a stone's throw from the courthouse square in a north Texas town, in their very own crumbling, historic house. ‡



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*

Goals. Encouragement. And the next step -- Take Action

5872 . . . the number of revised pages reported at NT.

2028 . . . the number of new pages reported at NT.

This year has been different for me. Over the last month, I actually put my writing before my day job of softball, sometimes even before NT day-to-day work, and definitely before housework. My husband travels and I get to set my own hours, watch TV when I want, eat what I want, and definitely clean when I want. It also means that I write when I want . . .

Or does it? Because it also means that no one is holding me accountable if I don't write.

My husband reminded me recently of something I'd heard many times. In order for something to become a habit, you need to do it daily for two weeks. Sounds reasonable. Pam Morsi, our February speaker, admitted that she liked to write every day. The longer she was away from writing, the further she got away from the story. So my challenge to myself this month is to write every day...no matter what. Writing isn't a bad habit to develop.

I'm also challenging NT members to join the BABS program headed up by Nikki Duncan. There's a reward system and a loop to report your progress and encouragement. It's also FREE. And don't skip on reporting your pages at the NT meetings. The above numbers have been reported by 19 members. Develop your own writing habit during March. ‡



FEBRUARY MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America was held on February 21, 2009, at the La Hacienda Ranch Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 12:10 p.m. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as printed in the January Newsletter. Communications Director Alley Hauldren was not present.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President Angi Platt announced:

- Dues are \$30.00. Members who don't renew will be removed from the roster and the loop on Monday, February 23, 2009.
- The board voted to place an ad in the August RWR spotlighting our authors and promoting Writers Roundup and the Great Expectations Contest.
- An outside auditor was approved by the board to audit last year's financial records at no charge to the chapter.
- Shelley Bradley agreed to be the 2009 PAN Liaison.

President-Elect Gina Nelson reported for membership: We have 58 members. We had 25 members and 3

visitors in attendance. The visitors were Telethous McKinney, Jill Nelson, and Michelle Welsh.

Program Director Marty Tidwell reported: Next month's workshop will be presented by Wendy Watson entitled the Heroine's Journey. She will be posting "homework" assignments on the Yahoo loop prior to the meeting.

Treasurer Chris Keniston reported: The January financial report was given and filed for audit.

Website Director Jen FitzGerald reported: There is now a link on ntrwa.com connecting visitors to ntrwa.org. She has been streamlining the pages for a better appearance. The pages upload faster. She is working on developing a Members Only section. She requests members send her their news.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Audio Librarian Nikki Duncan reported: CDs from the last five RWA conferences and would burn others from 2008. Please request by e-mail and members will receive the CDs at the next monthly meeting.

Bead a Book Chairperson Nikki Duncan reported: Members can sign up for this program and get on an e-mail loop for encouragement. Writers get a bead for every 5,000

(Minutes continued on page 3)



(Minutes continued from page 2)

words written or every 10,000 words revised. After completion and when a member sends a query, he or she will get a pendant. There is also a prize for meeting your preset deadline.

Great Expectations Chair Marty Tidwell reported: The first round of judging is finished, and the finals have been announced. Marty thanked the coordinators and presented them with notebooks. The contest winners will be announced in April.

Hospitality Chairperson Marsha West reported: Door prizes include a critique by Clover Autrey. Marsha requested other members to volunteer critiques. She announced name badge holders are on sale for \$10.00, badge holder chains are \$5.00, and pens from the 25th anniversary celebration are \$2.00. She mentioned members can order NTRWA items from Café Press as a group to offset high shipping costs.

Old Business: none

New Business: none

The business meeting was adjourned at:
12:29. ‡



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HEROSCOPES: THE PISCES HEROINE

By Bonnie Staring

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

She's earned the Oscar for best supporting role.

Born between February 19 and March 20, the Pisces heroine is the emotional barometer of the Zodiac. When those around her are happy, she's happy – and the same is true when bad things happen to the people she cares about. This fabulous woman easily loses herself in trying to make everything right for everyone else when she should be going after her dreams.

Oh, don't cry for her, Argentina. The Pisces heroine has an uncanny intuitive ability and she does well when she "goes with her gut." This is a woman who doesn't suffer fools well, and she can spot a Florida swampland salesperson from a mile away. In business, she prefers a role where she's not the leader, but able to contribute her brilliant ideas and emotional insight – preferably in the arts and entertainment industry.

A Pisces woman is meant to be wooed. She's charming, mysterious and has a cautious way about her that brings out a man's protective nature. Successful dates for her include laughter, adventure and romance, perhaps in a corner booth at a comedy club or getting your palms read at the Psychic Expo. Famous Pisces heroines include Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Goodall, Elizabeth Taylor and Tammy Faye Bakker.



Next month: The Aries 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 ‡



YOUR CHAIR ... YOUR BUTT ... SUPER GLUE™ ... SUCCESS!

By J. L. Wilson

The following was published in the March issue of Midwest Muse, newsletter of Midwest Fiction Writers (MFW), Jody Vitek VP-Communications Editor, Midwest Muse

I work a forty-hour week in an office, I'm married and have home commitments. I help care for my elderly mother ... and I have four books releasing this year, in addition to eight books released in the last two years. I have contracts for four more books and six more waiting to submit. I also do online promotion daily and I maintain my web site, my Facebook page, my MySpace page, and I twitter.

I'm continually asked, "How? How do you do it? How do you write so much and promote and still have a life?"

There're several things that make it possible for me to do what I do:

- 1) Discipline: I work every day on my WIP. I research, edit, review, or write. I don't have a daily goal, but have a 'finish' goal. If I start a book at Thanksgiving, it should be done by Valentine's Day. If I start a book on Valentine's Day, it should be done by Memorial Day. This isn't because I'm interested in speed. I know if I don't wrap up a book in that time frame, I'll get bored and my writing will suffer.
- 2) Habit: I'm asleep by 10:00 every night and I'm up by 4:30 a.m. I'm at work by 5:00 and work intensively until 3:00. I come home, I work out (a 10-minute intense cardio or a 20 minute walk) and by 4:30p.m, I'm at my computer. I take a break at 5:30 for a snack, then I'm back (at either my desktop computer or my laptop, for a bit of variety). I do this until 8:30 or 9:00 at night. This is a routine I've followed for almost 15 years. Find a schedule that works for you and stick to it. Yes, I do occasionally deviate to dine out with friends, meet my critique partner, etc. But this is my 'normal' schedule.
- 3) Family support: My husband works erratic hours so we seldom dine together. He knows my writing is important to me and doesn't disturb me on the weekends when I have uninterrupted time to write. We schedule our family times around his interests (sculpture and photography) and mine (writing).

- 4) Write all the time. I write everywhere: I carry a voice recorder in the car, I jot notes at the gym as I work out, I jot notes at work, I keep a pad next to my chair. My story is always in my mind, first and foremost, so I can imagine dialog, setting, and plot points at any time.



- 5) Find your voice: Figure out what you want to write (mystery, romance, time travel), figure out how you want to write (first person, third person, a mix?) then decide on your working style (plotter? Off-the-cuff? A mix?) Once I discovered first-person mysteries were easy and fun for me, my writing improved, as did my completion time. My third-person romantic suspense books are a nice break, but they're trickier for me to write. Find your voice and life gets a lot easier.
- 6) Keep at it. Yes, you have rejection letters. We all do. Getting published is about finding the right editor, at the right time, with the right market, with your book honed and polished, and arriving on that desk (or that computer screen) at just the right time. It's a crapshoot, just like a lot of things in life.
- 7) Define success: Don't worry about other people and what they've achieved. Define what you want out of your career. I made a promise to myself I'd stay in publishing if it was fun. Writing isn't hard for me -- it's fun. If it's a struggle, it's time to leave. Is there more? Of course! I may find an agent or submit to a NY house. Or may not. For now, I'm happy where I am. Make sure you continually check and make sure you're happy, too.
- 8) About that Super Glue™: Sit down, put your hands on the keyboard and write. It really is that simple: find your time, find your voice, find your motivation ... and write.

9)

~ J. L. Wilson had her first book published in 2006 and hasn't looked back since ... check here to see where you can find her:

<http://tinyurl.com/ak8h18> ‡



EIGHT STEPPING STONES TO PRO STATUS

By Ann DeVorre

This article first appeared in the January 2009 edition of LARA Confidential, the newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors chapter of RWA. Talia Clare, Newsletter Editor.

We all need goals in our lives. Without them we don't easily accomplish much. Some of us plan ahead for years, others only for the next few hours. Sometimes our goals are planned consciously, other times they're not. However you plan your goals you probably take small steps along the way. Those small steps are the stepping stones to your ultimate goal, in this case to be a published author.

Stepping stone one: A story idea. So let's agree that if you are reading this article you're probably thinking about getting your PRO status—a step away from being a published author. You have a great goal. Now what steps do you need to take to reach that goal? Well, how about a story idea? You can't get published without a story. Hey, this isn't so bad; you are on your way.

Stepping stone two: Gather all the information needed to take your idea and make it into a completed manuscript. Next you need to find a way to make that story come alive. This is a bit harder but, you're a writer, right? You could be a plotter or a panster, it doesn't matter the end results are the same. You find what works best for you.

Stepping stone three: Write, write, write and complete your manuscript. Okay, now you have your goal and your idea and your information. What to do with that? Well here's the big one—you need to write the story! You aren't a writer if you don't write. If you don't write you won't finish that manuscript. If you don't finish you can't publish it. I don't know about you, but I'd be happy with making a third of what Nora Roberts earns on each book. You can't do that without a completed manuscript.

Stepping stone four: Read, edit and critique. Now you have that major task done and you wrote "The End". Pat yourself on the back, send a note to LARA Milestones that you have a completed manuscript, and take a small break. Then get back to work with re-reading, editing, and critiquing. You want to make sure that your manuscript is readable by a professional (editor, agent, whatever way you choose to go); because that is one important step you will be taking pretty soon.

Stepping stone

five: Research your market. Who is going to read this? Know which editors, publishing houses, genre, or agents to target. Read works by other authors that write the same genre as you. See who they are



published with. Visit those authors' websites. Visit publishing house websites and read what their editors are looking for, read their formatting and submission guidelines.

Stepping stone six: Prepare query letter, synopsis, and at least three chapters for submission. When you have decided who to target and have read their guidelines for submissions, STOP! Take a deep breath and remind yourself you can do this. Some submissions might require a query letter only, a query with chapters or a synopsis and chapters. In some cases they might require all three.

Stepping stone seven: Send it out! What more can I add? The last and not-easiest part is the waiting. Mark your calendar with the date you mailed off your submission. Don't bug the person you have submitted to. They are busy people and most will get back to you with a response if you have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed, return envelope. You will want that response one way or the other because that is what you will need to submit for your PRO status. Wait patiently for a response. Follow-up within a reasonable length of time if you haven't heard back by their response window.

Stepping stone eight: Mail off your application for PRO status. Finally, the letter arrives. Butterflies are bouncing around in your stomach; you can't wait to open the envelope. But, maybe you set the envelope down and worry yourself over the contents—afraid to see what's inside—acceptance or rejection? You won't know if you don't OPEN THE ENVELOPE! Whatever the answer is, you can now leap to that last stone. Be proud of yourself for your accomplishment, and know your fellow writers are too. ‡





THE GOLD AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW:

THE OTHER 4 LETTER WORD



By Alley Hauldren

At the beginning of 2009, like most Americans, I pondered what I might set as New Year's Resolutions or, in writer's terms, Goals and Milestones for the next 365 days.

So, I asked myself "What have I done?"

Writing-wise, I have several novels in various stages, well-rejected short stories, and a few published articles and poems. I've attended workshops, conferences, and writing groups.

Working-wise, I've been working since 1973, and a lot of my self-image, rightly or wrongly, depended on my ability to not only be productive, but in how much I made and how much power and independence I acquired in my profession. I invested years training in electronics and quality assurance, and over thirty years working in the aforementioned fields, finally hitting my stride in my forties in management. All those years of raising kids as a single parent, night school, and overtime finally paid off.

But as successful as I had been in quality assurance, I wasn't really following my dream, the dream of everyone reading this article – to write, and not only to write, to write full time, and to publish.

I grew up with the same story as every other writer, journaling, (even bad teen-angst poetry), dabbling in creative writing in college, and even attended a special invitation-only writers' workshop in the '80s. All of that was shoved aside like the pickled beets nobody wants, relegated to a dark corner in the pantry until it's finally just a container used to prop up a shelf as I pursued my life with my career, my kids, and later, my new husband, busy with "L-I-F-E".

Then, I got the "Big C", cancer, one of the most hideous words in the English

language. The thing nobody wants, but almost everybody gets . . . eventually (unfortunate, but true). I lost my health, lost my job, lost my hair, (never lost weight though, what's with that?), lost my energy, and worst of all, lost my dreams.

By summer 2008, I'd finished my second round of chemo and I'm ready to jump back into work and at least begin to pay off the mounds of bills I've accrued while unemployed. But wait a minute. There's this thing called a recession. Just my luck, right?

That's what I thought . . . last year.

This year, I'm here to tell you, there's gold at the end of the rainbow, IF you have faith – in yourself, your talent, and your skills. I'm still writing those novels. I'm still submitting those short stories, poems, articles. And the funniest thing is happening – I'm getting published and I've found a way to put some change into my bank account while I remain at home and write full time.

What did I do?

I took stock in who I was. I learned to accept my experience from work, which I never thought would apply to the writing profession. All this time, I'd been ignoring the essential "me".

For over thirty years, I'd been working in quality assurance. And what do QA people do? They look at patterns, trends, details, and analyze. And what have I been learning to do these past few years? I've been attending writers groups, workshops, and conferences. Learning about writing – details (skills), patterns (character arcs, plot arcs, etc.), trends (marketing trends), and analyzing (critiquing).

And, I said to myself, that's all well and good, but I wanted to DO something. I wanted something tangible, and green,

in my hands, or at least, in my bank account. The bills were piling up higher than a giraffe in heat. What could I do differently to

jump-start my career and bring in some extra \$\$\$ so I didn't have to return to working outside the home?

I could freelance. And so I did.

- Just before the end of 2008, I accepted a job as a copyeditor for a local small publisher.
- & published a short story.
- In January 2009, I created a website to present my skills to the world.
- By February, I had three editing clients.
- By March 1st,
 1. I had five clients,
 2. another short story published,
 3. a Paypal account,
 4. & money in the bank.

Now, my problems are ones I don't mind (how do I juggle more clients and which tax form do I use?).

Like the Irish pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, I've managed to turn an unlucky event into the career of my dreams using skill, talent, and a bit of that other four-letter word – "L-U-C-K".

~ "Alley" Pat Hauldren is a freelance editor & speculative fiction writer. She's a 2nd year board member & newsletter editor of Heart to Heart at NTRWA.org Read more at EditAlley.com ‡





DO YOU CLAIM YOURSELF AS AN AUTHOR?

By Carolyn Williamson

Do you claim yourself as an author? To other writers? Your family? To your friends?

You should. Not everyone can write a novel. To plumb the depths of emotions, to make a reader root for your character and entertain a reader for hours, that's an ambitious and worthy undertaking. Be proud of what you do.

Do you claim yourself as an author to the IRS? Now that's a different story — or is it?

But you say, I'm not published yet. How can I do that?

Even if you haven't received that all important call, you can file a schedule C form, which details your business expenses. Yes, writing is a business, and even though you may not have made money yet, that is your goal. You can claim all your expenses and show a loss, which can offset your other income and lower your taxes.

What can you claim as expenses? You probably can think of the obvious ones, such as paper, ink, pens, notebooks, binders, sheet protectors, and postage. You can also claim charges for internet service, business cards, chapter and RWA dues, and mileage (number of miles to the meeting or conference and back, times the amount the IRS allows per mile. For 2009 it's fifty-five cents per mile). Don't forget to claim mileage for trips to critique group meetings, to the post office to mail manuscripts, and to the office supply store. Claim the costs of a computer, a printer, and writing related software in the year you buy them. Don't forget charges for classes, conferences (including hotel and parking) contests, (both fees and postage) because you are improving your skills in your writing business.

Also, you can include restaurant tabs for lunches during or after chapter meetings and meals for critique group meetings because you are networking about writing and learning your craft. Of course, the IRS requires that you count only fifty percent of the cost of meals (see the place to calculate that on the form), but even that can add up. What about all those books you buy? Even if they are not resource books or how-to-write books, novels are good examples of publishable writing. (I know, you wonder how some books get published, ones you could do better, but they sold, didn't they, so you could learn from them. It is recommended you only claim books like you are writing, but I've never had my totals questioned.) Save all your receipts in a file folder. You may be surprised how they add up. **All of this stuff has to be listed on a Schedule C.** After you file your taxes, keep the receipts with your copy of the tax return in case you get audited.

Home offices are more difficult to claim. **Many accountants refer to this as a red flag item.** If you claim this, follow the rules. The IRS states **the business** area of your home must be used exclusively for writing, so don't keep items unrelated to writing in that part of your house. Also, you must calculate the square footage of **the business** area and figure out what percentage of your house that is. Say it is ten percent. Then claim ten percent of the electricity bills, water bills, house insurance and mortgage payment. Long distance calls to an editor or agent in New York or elsewhere are legitimate business expenses. If you have a separate phone for business, you may be able to claim that also.

If your spouse works out of your home and also claims expenses for a home office, it's not a good idea for you to claim those expenses also.

You've heard of the rule that you must make a

What can you claim?

How do you claim?

What are red flags for the IRS?

How long can not make a profit?

Do I count contest fees?

profit three years out of five. If you cannot do that yet, you must prove that you are seriously involved in trying to become published. You can do this by submitting your query letters and manuscripts to editors and saving the rejection letters. Also, keep a notebook listing the times you write and what you worked on. For example, note that you worked on chapter three for an hour, revised chapter one for half an hour, prepared a contest entry for two hours, or prepared query letters to three agents for an hour and a half. You should show at least ten hours per week. (If not, how are you going to finish a book this year?) You want to prove you are a serious writer, not a hobbyist.

It helps if you can show some income. Have you been paid for editing or writing any published articles? **Money you won as a contest finalist is income.** Keep proof of those payments also. If you are published and sell books on the side, you can also deduct the sales taxes you pay.

You should be able to claim expenses as a professional writer during the time you are waiting for your book to be published. Some tax preparers may not allow you to claim these expenses, but you can prepare your own taxes or find a tax preparer that is "author friendly."

~ Carolyn Williamson has been claiming writing expenses since before her book, *There IS Life After Lettuce*, was published and doesn't make a profit every year. She has been audited and was cleared. ‡





SPOTLIGHT ON LEANNA ELLIS



By Shelley Kaehr writing as Leah Leonard

When did you first start writing?

I first started writing in 1991. I was a teacher back then, looking for some other career path, and my sister suggested I start writing because I was always writing in my

journal. So I did!

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

I was always very creative as a child, from rearranging my bedroom on a weekly basis to choreographing dances. Eventually that creativity took the form of teaching and finding new ways to get a concept across to a child.

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

Immediately. It was always a career path for me.

How did you decide to make this your profession?

I leaped before I looked, but I'm so glad I did.

How did you pick romance as your genre?

It was what I read at the time. Now, I really write more women's fiction than straight romance.

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

I first sold to Silhouette Romance back in 1995. It was the first contemporary I'd written on my own, as I'd been writing with a collaborator. It began to place and win in contests. It was a Golden Heart finalist, and I sold not long after finalists were announced. So winning GH was like icing on the cake.

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

Oh, I don't remember, not sure I ever kept track of a number. I had written two historicals and five contemporary romances with a collaborator. So this was my eighth book. I'd been writing for 3 and a half years, so I'd had numerous rejections. My collaborator and I came close to selling to Harlequin American. An editor was recommending to buy it, but then she had her baby and didn't return to the publisher and that book lost its cheerleader. That rejection took 14 months. So I've had my fair

share of rejections, but you learn to deal with it and move on.

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

Part of writing is a gift; the ability to put words together and create compelling characters and interesting stories. Part is craft. Many aspects of writing can be learned with time and practice. But I think the most important part of writing is determination. Some of the most gifted writers often give up. That never-give-up attitude can push you through the difficult times before and after you sell.

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

Yes, I have an agent. I had an agent for most of my category romances and also sold some on my own. For category, I don't think having an agent is necessary. It can be helpful, but it's not vital. For single title, whether in the ABA (American Booksellers Assoc.) or CBA (Christian Booksellers Association), I do think it's necessary. My agent is a valuable asset to my career.

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

My first writing instructor said, "when you're ready the right agent will swim by." There's a lot of truth in that statement. With my first agent, a mentor/writer/friend of mine pointed me out to the agent during an awards ceremony where I won for two manuscripts. So began the submission process for my early career. For my current agent, I wanted someone skilled in both ABA and CBA. I queried her and she read *Elvis Takes a Back Seat* and took me on as a client. It was the right moment.

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

I don't think I really discovered my writer's voice until after I'd sold 12 books and walked away from writing category romance and began writing in first person.

Were you always writing inspirational romance or did that evolve over time?



I experimented with a lot of different types of books. My life journey eventually led me to women's fiction. A lot of prayer led me to inspirational fiction. I actually thought I was supposed to aim my women's fiction for the ABA. But then one summer, I felt as if God was suddenly telling me to go to the

(Spotlight continued on page 9)



(Spotlight continued from page 8)

CBA. Go now! The spiritual aspects were already in my novel, I simply tugged them to the surface and doors suddenly opened wide. I didn't know it at the time but my publisher was just beginning to acquire for their new fiction line and *Elvis Takes a Back Seat* became their launch title.

Tell us about your family. How have they supported your writing career?

My husband is incredibly supportive. We married three months after I sold my first book, so he knew from the beginning writing was important to me. We now have two children who are very supportive and encouraging. They help put it all in perspective. I really couldn't do what I do without their support and encouragement.

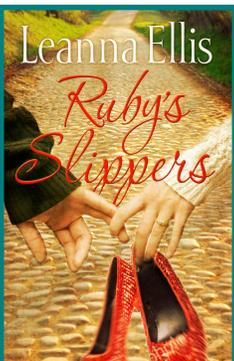
Tell us briefly about your two latest published books.

Lookin' Back, Texas came out September 2008. A devoted wife and mother must return to her Texas hometown of Luckenbach, Texas, to help her mother plan her father's funeral. Trouble is – he isn't dead! And neither are the secrets she buried there years ago.

Ruby's Slippers hits bookstores April 2009. When Dottie Meyers loses her 'no place like home' during a Kansas tornado, she wakes up to find a pair of ruby slippers left by her father who abandoned his family thirty years ago. With her sister hot on her trail to find the treasured ruby slippers, Dottie travels a yellow brick road with three friends to find her father. No wizard can solve her problems. Only the love of a heavenly father can heal her wounds and give her the desires of her heart.

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?

First, writers write. So sit down and write. Every day. Even if you don't feel like it. Writing takes discipline. Second, learn your craft through writing classes, seminars and conferences, books on writing and critique groups. Third, don't give up. It's



not a quick way to earn money. There's not a quick road to success. If you're writing because you love writing then giving up isn't really an option. So hang in there. The right time will come. And that's not always the time we envision.

Please list your websites, contact info and anything else.

www.leannaellis.com

THE TIME CAPSULE: MARCH 1990

By
Chris Keniston

On a quest to rediscover some of NTRWA's lost history, I've been given stacks of old Heart to Heart Newsletters dating back to 1987. Reading through articles, spotlights, and first sale enthusiasm,



I've been blown away by what it must have been like to be a part of NT those first years. This year's board thought it might be nice to share some of that history. We plan to reprint interesting tidbits from past newsletters in the new segment The Time Capsule. For our first article it seems appropriate to start with a short introductory piece NTRWA's founder June Harvey wrote for the chapter's seventh anniversary. The following article originally appeared in the March 1990 issue of NTRWA's Heart to Heart newsletter. Enjoy!

This Month's Meeting Intro By June Harvey
(First NTRWA President)

Seven years ago, Ronald Reagan was in the White House. For that matter, so was George Bush. We were watching The Love Boat, Washington beat Miami in the Super Bowl and Terms of Endearment; Nutra Sweet was approved for use in soft drinks; we stood in line to buy Cabbage Patch Dolls while singing along with Every Breath You Take or Billie Jean; we watched Sally Ride, Queen Elizabeth tour the U.S. and Martina take Wimbledon . . . it doesn't seem so long ago, does it?

Something else happened in 1983. March 12 to be exact. Sixty-seven writers gathered at the Eules Public Library for the first meeting of the North Texas Romance Writers of America. Forty-seven joined before leaving and another twenty-three had done so by April. Over forty five percent of our current members are published in historical or category romance. Many members are published in other genres - poetry, short stories, screen treatments, periodicals, nonfiction, and science fiction. Heart to Heart, the chapter newsletter, is mailed each month to over two hundred members, editors, agents, friends and an ever growing exchange with sister chapters.

As our seventh birthday approaches, it seems timely to thank each other for seven wonderful years past and look forward to many more. ‡





PROCESS EXAMINATION #3: IN THE BEGINNING

by Kellie Hazell

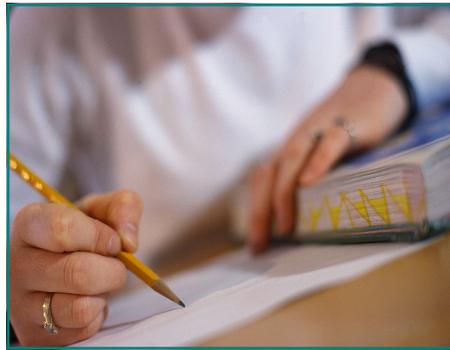
The following first appeared in the July issue of Romance of the Desert, newsletter of the Saguaro Romance Writers, edited by Kellie Hazell.

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

Last month, I suggested you measure your progress with a given writing technique and journal your reactions toward it. This month, I focus on how to engage your process as you begin composing the draft.

The most important habit you can start in this stage of the game is to record your draft's progress after each writing session. Whether you are more comfortable tracking word count or page count or scene completion, create a spreadsheet in which you can enter your chosen metric. You might not ever graph this data, but having it handy prevents you from relying on anecdotal evidence when it comes to whether or not a given writing process is working. I also find it helpful to take notes about each session such as weekday and what prevented me from writing as much as I had wanted. This allows me to quickly find trends: I write best on Mondays, worst on Fridays, and I often avoid writing on Wednesday by watching TV. Armed with this information, you can go into each writing session aware of the output you routinely generate and what is likely to derail you and plan accordingly.

When it comes to the draft itself, maintaining the journaling habit will be useful. Document each urge to go back and rewrite the opening scene (or to delve into backstory, or to research a world building element, etc.) and analyze as much as possible why that urge came:



did you just hear a great presentation about the importance of the first page or did the muse inspire you with a perfect opening line? Try not to stall any forward progress on the draft for as long as possible to gather as much information as you can about what is triggering you to stop creating that draft. If, after giving in and going back to the first page, you find that writing the draft moves quickest when you are certain your opening line sparkles, then by all means indulge in the desire to go back.

As with the pre-writing, detail any ritual you use as part of your writing sessions. Do you spend fifteen minutes composing the perfect music playlist for the upcoming scene? Do you jot down notes for the scene you will be writing? Any time you want to experiment with an adjustment to your ritual, be sure to explain the change and the result you hope it will bring, and continue to journal and measure your progress.

Next month I'll discuss how to keep yourself on task through the dreaded middle of the novel while still being aware of what is and isn't working in your process.

~ 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. ‡



WHAT IS PLOT?

By Georgia Woods

This article was first printed in the Jan/Feb issue of the Passionate Ink newsletter.

As a senior editor for an e-publisher, I see a lot of manuscripts. Some of them I start reading and I'm caught up from the first few lines. Others I am unable to stay interested enough to finish the first chapter. And sometimes both authors started out with equally great ideas, good characters, interesting situations. What makes the difference?

What do you think plot is? The standard definition is that it's whatever happens in a story . . . but does that mean every scene is part of the plot?

Plot is the significant events that build a given story. Notice I said *significant* events . . . For example, if your character is washing her kitchen windows, that can be a scene, but it's not part of the plot necessarily.

But if your character's house is about to be burglarized and the fingerprints which catch the suspect are left on those clean kitchen windows, then washing them could be part of the plot.

In the best books, every single scene moves the plot forward. If you have scenes that don't move the plot, it slows down the momentum. For example, our window washing scene from the prior paragraph would, if not making an important point, possibly end up fodder for the editor's knife. Some people will argue and say well, in print or longer single title works, you can have scenes that are descriptive, part of setting the scene or character or world building. But if you think about it, those things are part of the plot - you can't have a story without a world and characters, so they have a significant place in the plot. However, it is my belief that

(What is Plot? continued on page 11)



(What is Plot? continued from page 10)

no matter what type of work it is, every scene should be of concern to you as a writer, and you should make sure each and every scene keeps the reader's attention while it gives information. If you bore the reader with too much information, even information you feel important, they might lose interest and even quit reading.

Think of it this way . . . when you go to a party and become involved in the conversations and happenings there, if something occurs in front of you, say a fight or a romance or any significant event, do you, as an observer, need to know what shaving lotion the man is wearing? Do you need to know his parents' names? Do you need to know she bought three dresses before she could decide which one to wear? When we meet people in real life, we take them at face value, and we can come to care about them without knowing everything about them.

You should give just enough to build a character sketch, but not their life's history, enough to hook the reader into caring about them or what happens to them, but you want to keep the action moving and the reader interested.

Action will keep the reader engaged more effectively than anything else. And action can be a dinner out, a fight scene, whatever, but things have to be happening, and the reader should be learning what's going on from those things that are happening, not things they are being told by narrative. And be careful — new writers sometimes use the dinner scene to have a dinner conversation and introduce information they want the reader to have which isn't necessary. The reader isn't interested in learning why a character acts the way they do by hearing them tell their life's story over dinner. They are interested in learning what makes a character tick by how

they react when things happen to them. Action, action, action.

Also, try to keep the idea in the back of your mind that a reader is always looking for a good place to stop, where they can be satisfied to go to bed or go make dinner or go do laundry or whatever, and you don't want to give them one. You want them to be so embroiled in the action of your story, so hooked into what is happening to your characters, that they don't dare stop.

Now, you can use the dinner table to impart important information. In a book



Plot is the significant events
that build a given story.



I just finished editing, there's a scene over a dinner table at Denny's, well actually over coffee . . . and it's terrific. But it's terrific because of the information imparted, not because of the setting. On one side of the table, you have two vampires, male and female lovers, and on the other side of the table are two vampire slayers, male and female. The vampires are trying to convince the vampire slayers to help them rescue someone instead of completing their slayer duties. The conversation, the way the two males glower at each other while the women try to keep the peace, meanwhile a truce is being set up and they almost come to blows several times as the conversation goes back and forth. It's a great scene for both illustrating how the characters are working out the power hierarchy and showing character traits, so it can be done.

It is my opinion and preference as a reader that every scene teach me something about where the story is going and how it's going to get there, and if it doesn't do that, I skim and keep moving

until the next scene where I start reading again. I know as authors you find yourselves skimming on occasion, and it's frustrating. Scenes shouldn't be random, they should all have reasons, something to show the reader that is important to the story, either to the internal conflict, or the external one, or to the story arc, the character arc, a logical reason for being in that place at that time. Don't add scenes that encourage your reader to skim.

So, what makes a scene or story worth caring about to your reader? For the reader to care, there has to be something at stake, something of value to be gained or lost. And there should actually be at least two things at stake, an external one, like a bad guy to be defeated, and an internal one, like too much pride to be overcome. And the biggest attribute, I believe, you can use to make your story more interesting is to make sure the matter at stake is extremely important, and the battle to win it isn't fair. If you think about it, when you get something without having to fight for it, you don't value it as much. Think back over the lessons you've learned in life and when you've learned the most important lessons. When you do everything right, you don't learn a lot. We learn the most by fighting against very high odds and making lots of mistakes. That's what makes life and a good story interesting. When you make mistakes, you are putting yourself out there knowing you don't know it all and willing to take the chance because something you want is more important and you are willing to go after it even knowing you might fail. That is what makes a story.

Do you ever plot, then have your story take off in another direction? What do you do? Redirect or go with the flow? I think learning to be flexible when you are writing is part of having "living" characters - they learn something that

(What is Plot? continued on page 12)



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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

Visitors Welcome!

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(What is Plot? continued from page 11)

changes their choices, or changes their minds, and you have to allow for that, I think, for the story and character to stay true to life. You can plot all day long, but when you sit down and write the story, something can happen that makes your plot not work, you may find a flaw in the logic, or something the character does that doesn't seem "human", and you have to allow for that. I think if the plot/story is forced into its twists and turns, it feels forced. Things happen and if you try to remain too rigid, you lose the spontaneous emotion and reaction that elicits amazing, and true, things to the writing.

For plotting, I'm a mix of pantster and plotter. I make what I call my outline, but it's basically a list of scenes I've planned to get my characters from here to there, but how the scenes hook together is up in the air and allowed to just happen. I do number them, and I'll do a. b. c. under them if I have specific points I want to make sure the scene includes. But I allow for my characters to be human, to make mistakes and have to go back and fix them, to inject their personalities and take the story in a bit of a different direction than I'd planned.

So plot your story, then feel free to allow your characters to grow, to learn, to be real, and let them drive the story, not the story drive them. In this way, your story will be real, will read as if it is true and real, and your characters and scenes will come to life in the minds of your readers. Georgia Woods is a senior editor and Editor for Author Development at Loose Id. She will be happy to answer questions. ‡



MEMBER NEWS

Sold! — **Shelley Bradley** sold 2 novels & 1 novella for the Doomsday Brethren series to Abby Zidle, Sr. Editor, Pocket; Kim Whalon, agent, Trident Media Group

Released! — **Wendy Watson** has an October 2009 release date for *I Scream, You Scream..*

GE Finals:

- **Angi Platt**, *See Jane Run*, Romantic Suspense
- **Chris Keniston**, *Prodigal Daughter*, Single Title
- **Abby Gaines**, *Make It Perfect*, Single Title

EVENT:

Booksigning—**Shelley Bradley** March 21st Booksigning in Lewisville. ‡