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Founded March 1983

Chapter 33, Region 5

Volume 27, Issue 5

Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America



ANNUAL ROUNDTABLE CRITIQUE ~ MAY 16

NT's published authors will be generously offering their time and talent to critique their fellow member's work. Pre-published members will be able to submit twenty-five pages to be critiqued. The member submitting will get a chance to sit and discuss their work with the author at the meeting.

Submissions should be sent to Marty Tidwell at manetjt@aol.com by **Sunday May 3rd**. Some fun writing exercises will be conducted for those who don't participate in the critique.

Please join us at the La Hacienda Ranch Restaurant in Colleyville. The doors open at 10 a.m. for a fun and informative meeting. See you there! ‡

Editor's Notes: Our main page image celebrates the month of May with Maia, who in Greek Mythology, was the eldest, most beautiful, & shyest of the 7 Pleiades girls, daughters of Atlas & Pleione. I altered the image slightly to keep a "PG" rating.

Next Meeting
May 16, 2009



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. Take Action. Keep Writing. And the next step -- Distractions.

The frustrating part about having goals is having them.

Ever been on a true road trip? A trip where you don't care what road you take, turning where you want, not caring how long it takes because you truly don't care when you get there? It's so much easier to putter along and not worry about the traffic, time, and enjoy all the side streets along the way.

Well, writing isn't like that. Writing is normally goal oriented. You need to finish something and the harder you try, the more you're aware of all the things that have to be done around you. IF you can just finish the bills, just finish the real job, just finish the laundry, the dishes, the toilets... Time to write will come just after you take the kids to soccer or you can jot down some lines while in the car at their practice. Or you have a set writing time and while sitting with your hands on the keyboard and your butt in the chair -- well, the words just refuse to make good sense.

Knowing where you're going (either in a story or career) is essential for writers. It's the essence of a great story to have an end-goal (even if you write by the seat of your pants, you still have an idea where that story's going). And a writer's career is no different. ‡



2009 OFFICERS

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MARCH MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: A regular business meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on April 18, 2009 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. Program Chair Marty Tidwell and President-elect Gina Nelson were absent. The meeting was called to order at 10:50 A.M.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President, Angi Platt reported: The February minutes were approved as printed in the newsletter and will be filed for audit. March minutes with corrections as sent out on e-mail loop were approved and will be filed for audit. The next board meeting will be held at the Grapevine 114 Olive Garden on May 30 at 11:15 a.m.

Angi Platt reported for the Program Chair: The annual Critique Roundtable will be our May meeting. Members will be sent an e-mail announcing details. Published authors have agreed to critique 25 pages of a chapter.

The Board approved the registration prices for the November Writers Roundup. NT members have a low price of \$65 if registering between June 10 and July 1, as well as an installment option with the balance paid by September 1. Beginning July 2, NT, DARA, and Yellow Rose member prices are \$85.00. The general registration price is \$95. Late registration and door price is \$115. The Roundup features an in-depth workshop by Margie Lawson and two agents. If feasible, a third agent will be added.

Treasurer, Chris Keniston reported: The treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

Communications Director, Alley Hauldren reported: The deadline for member news and articles is the Friday following a general meeting.

Website Director, Jen FitzGerald reported: Please e-mail her with any member news for the web site.

PRO Liaison, Clover Autrey reported: We now have a PRO loop. Three members have achieved PRO status this month. They are: Marsha West, Jerrie Alexander and Jeannie Guzman. A Read and Retreat event is being planned for late summer to give PRO members a "beta" read of finished, polished novels. Those wanting more details can contact Regina Richards.

COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:

Bead a Book Chairperson, Nikki Duncan reported:

Beads are ready for members who have completed 5,000 words. Check with Nikki if you need details about the program.

Audio Librarian, Nikki Duncan reported: For a \$10 (non-refundable) deposit a member can borrow as many CDs as desired.

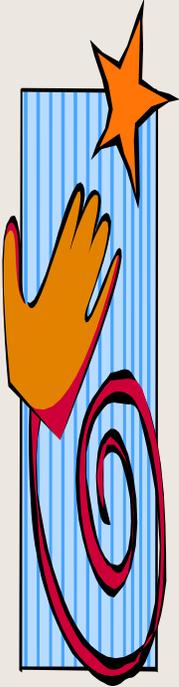
Angi Platt reported for the Great Expectations Chairperson: NT winners of the Great Expectations contest were: Angi Platt, romantic suspense first place; Chris Keniston, single title third place; and long distance member Abby Gaines (New Zealand), single title second place.

Hospitality Chairperson, Marsha West reported: She has pens, nametag wallets, and bead necklaces with clips for nametags for sale. We are doing a basket for the national literacy raffle and need donations of money and gift cards. Marsha will coordinate the basket donations.

Spotlight Chairperson, Shelley Kaehr reported: Shelley introduced speaker, Judi McCoy, and presented a spotlight on her.

Visitors were: Rex Ann Meredith, Debra Bessent, and Gay Kiser.

There was no old or new business. The business meeting adjourned at 11:09 a.m. ‡



**RISING STAR AWARDS--
MOST PAGES WRITTEN**

Christine Crocker – 137 pages
Shelley Kaehr – 53 pages
Sherry Davis – 51
Michelle Welch – 50 pages

**SPUR AWARDS--
MOST PAGES EDITED**

Carolyn Williamson – 432 pages
Shelley Kaehr – 407 pages
Bill Woodrow – 307 pages
Sherry Davis – 266 pages
Nikki Duncan – 200 pages





SPOTLIGHT: KAREN WHIDDON

From Shelley Kaehr writing as Leah Leonard

When did you first start writing?

I was one of those kids who was an avid reader, but I first started writing in the seventh grade. I loved it. I always kept a diary/journal and wrote my first romance in 1988 when I was home for six weeks after surgery. It was single spaced, 140 pages, and I was clueless! I mailed it in to Harlequin and got a very nice rejection letter. I was stunned <G>.

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

All the reading I did definitely prepared me. Traveling all over the eastern seaboard, then Colorado and that area of the west, showed me different parts of the country.

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

I always wanted to get published. Yes, I could paper a wall with those rejections, and it took a really long time (9 years!), but I knew eventually things would click. I never gave up hope.

How did you pick romance as your genre?

I just wrote what I like to read.

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

When Hilary Sares at Kensington called me at my day job in April 1997 to buy my book, I was delirious with happiness. I called my husband and told him and he said “You’re kidding me?” As soon as I got the advance, I bought my first laptop. Then, after five books with them, I was bored with writing short contemporaries so I wrote a paranormal in 2000 and sent it in to Leisure. When Chris Keeslar called me at work to buy it, I cried. I met Lucienne Diver at Dreamin’ in Dallas in 2001 and gave her a copy of *Powerful Magic* to read. She became my agent. I wrote five long paranormals for Dorchester and sold to my dream publisher Harlequin/Silhouette in 2003. Since then, I’ve published 14 books with them (including the ones coming out this year) and have contracted for more.

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

Hahaha! I didn’t count the rejections, though I kept manila

folders for each year. There were a lot. I used to belong to the [DFW Writer’s Workshop](#) and every week we’d announce our rejections and the other members would applaud, because that meant you were sending your stuff out and trying.



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

It’s definitely all three. Hard work = skill. The more you write, the better you get. Luck and timing because you have to get your work in front of the right person, whether it’s an agent or an editor. To do that, you’ve got to keep sending it out.

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

I have a wonderful agent and she has been indispensable to my writing career. She’s got my back, she gets me better contracts, more money, and is always looking out for my interests. I’ve been with her eight years now and couldn’t be happier.

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

For me, it was a combination. I’d been rejected by a couple other agents and went to Dreamin’ to meet with her and someone else (can’t remember that person’s name now). I had a solid publishing background, six books under my belt, and had a proposal (at that time synopsis and three chapters). I knew what I wanted, an agent who took on the writer, not book by book. Lucienne fit all of that, plus we got along well.

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

I think voice is always there – it’s a part of how you the writer look at and interact with the world. But I didn’t know it until an editor (who ultimately rejected me) and an agent (who also

(Spotlight c continued on page 5)



(Spotlight continued from page 4)

rejected me) both told me that I had a strong voice, but needed to learn to plot. To this day, plotting is the bane of my existence. That's where having a good critique partner to brainstorm with is key.

How did you initially develop your wolf books?

Again, I had written a lot of faery books for Dorchester and had grown tired of faeries. So I was still trying to break into Harlequin/Silhouette and my agent and I were going back and forth on this one proposal and boom – I made the heroine a shape-shifter. My agent loved it and so did Leslie Wainger, who bought it and was my first editor with Silhouette. I had no idea I was going to write more so I didn't have rules written down or even really planned. The series ended up being successful and now I have written 10 (including the 2 Bites) and am working on the 11th.

World building – what can you share with us about how you create the world for your paranormal characters to live in? Any tips?

The world is essentially the same as our everyday world. The twist is that these paranormal beings live right along with us, side by side, interacting and loving and we don't know it. As the world has grown, I've been able to expand my perimeters and I love that with Silhouette they are open to new stuff from me. My advice now (and one that I'd give myself too!) is to start a notebook and write down those rules. For example, in my first wolf book, I said that shifters could only be killed by fire or a silver bullet. Since then, I've had to live with that.

Suspense – any good advice on how to craft great suspense?

I truly believe great suspense is all about the characters. I love writing suspense and sometimes what happens is that the characters surprise me. Most times I will figure something out halfway through the book and then have to go back and seed in clues or hints.

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

My husband goes to all my booksignings and reads all my books once they're published.

Tell us briefly about your two latest published books.

OMG! The one coming out in April **The Perfect Solder** is the second book in a new series I'm doing for Silhouette Romantic Suspense. The Cordasic Legacy is all about a family with a tradition of working in intelligence. **The Perfect Solder** is about a man who was a POW and experimented on by the enemy, with the result that he cannot experience emotion. He's the brother of the hero in the first book in that series **Black Sheep Pi**. And the one coming out in July **The Wild Wolf** is a "Pack" book. It introduces a new element in my Pack

world, an organization called The Protectors, who are sort of like trained assassins. My hero is sent to assess a Feral shape-shifter who is living wild in cave in the Rockies. If she can't be rehabilitated, he is supposed to exterminate her. But things go wrong and he ends up on the run with her. That book was one of the most fun books to write.

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?

A few things. Don't give up – if this is really what you want. It's a lot of work but keep learning, reading, studying, attending workshops, critiquing, and sending out. Go with your gut – don't write what you think the market wants or what is hot right now, but write what you love, what you care about. Be humble – we all know that one person who thinks they are the next big thing. But never stop learning. The biggest thing is that you must put your heart and soul into everything you write. That will show, someone will see that, and you will eventually sell.

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

My website is KarenWhiddon.com I'm also on Myspace and Facebook.





2009 WRITERS ROUNDUP ~ NOVEMBER 6-7, 2009

Featuring Margie Lawson (www.MargieLawson.com) presenting her **Master Class: Empowering Character's Emotions**. Also featuring: Melissa Jeglinski of The Knight Agency and Cori Deyoe of 3 Seas Literary Agency. More details will be coming soon.

- ☒ Pre-registration - for NT members only: \$65 available 6/20 - 7/1 (Payment plans available, balance due by 9/30)
- ☒ Early Bird Registration - for Yellow Rose, DARA, & NT members only: \$85 available 7/1 - 9/1 (Payment plans available, balance due by 9/30)
- ☒ General Registration - for all other interested writers: \$95 available 9/1 - 9/30
- ☒ Late Registration - after 9/30 registration is \$115
- ☒ Hotel Info: - Embassy Suites DFW Airport South. Please mention NTRWA when booking your rooms. Room rates are \$95 per night. Each room will sleep five to six people. ‡



PRO READ AND RETREAT ~ AUGUST 2009

By Regina Richards, PRO Liason 2009

You're PRO!!! You've completed and polished a manuscript. Now you need a beta read. You need **someone who has never laid eyes on your manuscript before** to read it looking for big picture issues.

What are big picture issues?

A package is central to the plot in the opening chapters. The characters risk their lives to keep someone else from getting hold of this package. They carry it with them everywhere, but never have a chance to open it and see what it contains. Mid-novel the package is incinerated and then never mentioned again. Huh?

Or

The hero's motivating factor for being always under the heroine's feet is that he believes she is a black widow and plans to make his friend her next victim. Her five previous beau's have died mysterious deaths. By the end of the novel, the friend is out of the heroine's life and her heart. She and the hero have fallen deeply in love. But no satisfying explanation is ever given for the odd deaths of all her previous beaus. Huh?

Or

A heroine who appears to be afraid of her own shadow in the first three chapters suddenly turns very Laura-Croft-from-Tomb-Raider in chapter four without any transforming event. The villain, who begins the novel with dialogue that reflects his Louisiana Bayou origins, mysteriously loses his accent around chapter twelve. Huh?

Those types of inconsistencies can sometimes be overlooked by critique partners who are critting chapter by chapter over weeks or months. But they are exactly the kind of inconsistencies a beta read uncovers.

A beta is NOT a detailed line-by-line critique. It is not an appropriate exercise for a first draft. All manuscripts presented for this exercise should be reasonably clean and polished.

Participants will exchange manuscripts in July and receive instruction on how to do a beta. Don't worry if you've never done one before. It's as easy as reading a novel and noticing the big picture things that make you go "huh?". We've all probably done that more than once with books we've bought at the bookstore.

This is a learning experience for PRO members. You'll have a few weeks to read the work you'll beta and then we'll meet in August (date, location, time TBD) to share reader thoughts and (if the writer desires) brain storm solutions to any problems found.

If you're PRO, don't let this terrific opportunity to grow as a writer pass you by. Contact Regina Richards Regrichards60@yahoo.com to sign up. ‡



PROCESS EXAMINATION #5: LET GO & LET MUSE FINISH

by Kellie Hazell

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

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

Last month, I discussed how to dig deeper into your process as you wrote through the middle of your novel. This month, I focus on letting your process flow with minimal guidance. As you near the end of your novel, you want to get your analytical skills out of the way.

If ever you needed to give yourself permission to write crap, this is the time. Now that this novel has been living with you for anywhere from 45,000 to 90,000 words or more, your subconscious mind is far more aware of how things need to tie up than your conscious attention can discern. If where you



never outlined before suddenly you have the urge to diagram the beats of each scene until the end of the novel, don't hesitate to follow the urge. Keep tracking your progress and how your process changes if it does. These data will be helpful when you consider the whole of your process after the draft is complete but likely won't offer any revelations as you work your way to the end. If you find yourself stuck, look first to the content of your draft, not your process. Are you mired in a scene that requires a good deal of action? Address the sticking point in the content before you attempt to adjust your process. Chances are you will push past the block by blocking the troubling scene for each character's physical movements in a scene.

Next month I'll describe methods to examine your revision 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. ‡

HEROSCOPES: THE TAURUS HEROINE

By Bonnie Staring



Taurus by [Plutonia](#)

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

To her, things are fine just the way they are.

Born between April 20 and May 20, the Taurus heroine is the dotter of I's and the crosser of T's in the Zodiac. It's not that she's particularly picky or a control freak... well, she just likes things to be the way she thinks they should be. This gal is the perfect hostess of any party, but don't expect to see her dancing with a lampshade on her head. And keep your greasy hands off the piano.

When everyone else has given up, the Taurus heroine will still be going strong. This can make her a rather cantankerous co-worker when a project has gone on for too long or the shining star whose determination can inspire you. Whatever you do, don't ask her to change or expect her to welcome it

with open arms.

To woo a Taurus heroine is to shower her with patience and romance. She expects a lot from a potential partner and will delightfully return the favour. Great dates for a Taurus woman include entertaining her appetite for fun and food, such as a wine-tasting at an art gallery, a picnic after a hot-air balloon ride, or a game of Trivial Pursuit along with a tasty seven-layer dip. Famous Taurus heroines include Charlotte Bronte, Florence Nightingale, Cher and Catherine the Great.

~ 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 ‡

Next month: The Gemini Heroine



AUDIO LIBRARY

By [Nikki Duncan](#)

Did you know that NT has an audio library? Do you know what that means? It means that learning about agents, editors, the craft, and the business of writing has never been easier or less expensive! Pop in a CD, head to work, and learn. See? Easy stuff.

For a one-time \$10 donation to NT, you have access to the audio library. The library consists of workshops from previous conferences. You check out the CDs that pertain to your current goals at one meeting, listen to them over and over, and bring them back to the next meeting. Repeat the process.

Email me at nikki@nikkiduncan.com if you are interested in checking something out. If it isn't already on CD, I'll do her best to have it ready for you by the next meeting. If you need help figuring out what you may want to check out, I may be able to help you choose. I've listened to many of the offerings. ‡



BABS ~ BEAD A BOOK INTO SUBMISSION

By [Nikki Duncan](#)

As writers, the best way to get a story written is to write it. Seems like a simple concept, but most of us work and have families. Life easily intrudes into our writing time, minimizing the importance of getting those stories written. The BABS program is an incentive program. For every 5K new words written and every 10K words edited, you get 1 bead. Beads are accumulated to make whatever you want with them. Some suggestions include jewelry or book thongs.

Email me at nikki@nikkiduncan.com if you're interested in more information about the BABS program! ‡



HOSPITALITY ~ RWA NATIONAL BASKET

By **Marsha West, Hospitality Chair**

It's time to start thinking about our "basket" to send to RWA in Washington this summer. Some of you will remember last year we filled real boots with gift cards, books and things Texas. It was a huge success. At this point I'm asking for ideas and sharing one I received from Jeannie Guzman after our meeting Saturday. I like her idea a lot, too. "Hats off to Romance!" We get a hat box with a Stetson in it and put the gift cards, etc. in the hat.

Here's the deal, though, anyone have access to a real Stetson or know someone who'd contribute enough \$ so we could buy one? I think they're pretty expensive, but I'm not sure. I have a Turquoise cowboy hat I got from some gift store on a trip. What do I know from a real Stetson?

Email other ideas you have for the theme. I'm sure I will have received others by the time this comes out, but send away. In the meantime, whatever the theme is we need the stuff to fill whatever it is. Gift cards must come from national stores so they can be used anywhere. If you want to give dollars, you can make checks out to me, Marsha West, and I'll purchase the cards for you. I'll start collecting at the meeting in May and we'll finish up at the June meeting. If you're unable to attend those meetings my address is 7012 Allen Place Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76116. We're such a creative bunch I'm sure we'll come up with something super! ‡



THE TIME CAPSULE: DECEMBER 1987



By Chris Keniston

The following originally appeared in the December 1987 issue of the Heart to Heart newsletter, Gloria Williams Editor.

THE STRESS DIET

BREAKFAST:

- ½ Grapefruit
- 1 piece whole wheat toast
- 8 oz. skim milk

LUNCH:

- 4 oz. lean broiled chicken breast
- 1 cup steamed zucchini
- 1 Oreo cookie
- Herb tea

MID-AFTERNOON SNACK:

- Rest of package of Oreo cookies
- 1 quart Rocky Road ice cream
- 1 jar hot fudge

DINNER:

- 2 loaves garlic bread
- Large mushroom and pepperoni pizza
- Large pitcher beer
- 3 Milky Way bars

Entire frozen cheesecake, eaten directly from the freezer

This sure-fire stress buster courtesy of Sandy Steen and June Harvey (NT founding members) ‡



HOSPITALITY

By Marsha West, Hospitality Chair

For a couple of months now at meetings we've passed around a sheet and asked if you'd like to order something from Cafe Press. A few of our members have signed up. Our thinking was that the cost of shipping and handling was perhaps getting in the way of anyone ordering, and if we placed one order with numerous items and spread that cost around, it would be more beneficial to our members. (This is close to being what my critique partners call "a Marsha Sentence.")

I know many of our members are unable to attend on a regular basis, so thought it would be good to share this info with everyone in the newsletter. Go to Cafe Press <http://www.cafepress/ntstore07> and see what you'd like. Email that to me and I'll add you to the list. We'd like to place an order at the end of May. Once we have as many people as we think will order this time around, we'll calculate the added cost for shipping and let you know that amount. You then send a check to Chris Keniston, our treasurer, and we'll get it ordered. So lets' go shopping! ‡

MARKETING & PROMOTION MADE EASY

By Nikki Duncan

Marketing Tip #1: Make friends. Either online, at monthly writer meetings, or by attending book signings. Make friends with others writers. Showing your support for other writers, published and non-published, is easy and highly appreciated. Consider it an investment in your own career. (Marketing is about getting *you* out there.)



Promotion Tip #1: Have a professional and consistent online image. This doesn't have to be an elaborate or expensive venture, but have a consistent branding for yourself wherever you are on the Internet. If you're published and have book covers, it's great if you can incorporate the covers, but it isn't necessary. (Promotion is about *your product* out there.) ‡



CHARACTERIZATION

by **Barbara Schenck (aka Anne McAllister)**

This article first appeared in the April/May 1986, North Central Romance Writers of America (NCRWA) Newsletter.

Romance novels, more than almost any other kind of fiction, depend on their characters for success. Action books can hurtle us from one exciting adventure to another, and the thrill is what we're looking for. Mysteries tease us and make us hunt for clues to solve the puzzles they pose. Science fiction and westerns both transport us to worlds we don't inhabit every day.

But romance novels are simply about the growing love relationship between two people not very different from us. Nothing very earth-shattering, nothing very mysterious (unless we count love) occurs. Nothing, that is, unless we make it so. And that is the challenge. We have to create marvelously interesting characters who are believable and loveable and unique, characters with whom our readers can identify and with whom they can fall in love. We owe our readers this. The relationship between our two protagonists is perhaps the primary reason they are reading our novels.

To begin with, then, we have to know our characters well ourselves. We must see them as a part of a larger story than the one we plan to tell. Unless we begin on page one with the birth of our heroine, she will have had a life before our book. And we need to know all we can about that life. We need to think of where she has been, whom she has known, what circumstances in her life have helped make her the way she is. A woman raised by gypsies is going to have a vastly different outlook on life than one raised in a penthouse by corporate lawyer parents. Even given the same traits, their experiences would have made them different people. The same goes for the hero. Even if we write only from the heroine's point of view, we need to know what made the hero the way he is, and we need to know what he is thinking (even if the heroine doesn't), so we can help him act true to form.

This knowledge does not usually come by simply sitting down and filling out a character chart (at least it never has for me). Rather, characters develop in settings, in conflicts. Perhaps the best way to start is to close your eyes and imagine your character. Where is she? What's happening? And, most important, how does she react? The more situations you can see her in, the more scenes you have lived through with her,

the better you will know her and be able to write convincingly about her in your book.



Getting to know characters this way is not much different than getting to know the people who become our friends. We don't know everything about our friends the first time we meet them. It takes time, interest, and trust to develop a friendship. It works the same way with our characters. After you have given some thought to your characters' pasts, and what has brought them to the point where your story begins, you might try interviewing them. Rather than simply fill out a chart about their likes and dislikes, I have found more useful the format employed in the Fast Track column of the Sunday Chicago Tribune, which asks such questions as, "I knew I was grown up when...", "The worst advice my father ever gave me was...", "Nobody knows I am... when...". No two characters ever seem to answer the questions the same way, and I get a good sense of their particular voices in the way they answer, as well as in what they say. I also know that if I have trouble coming up with their answers, I haven't spent enough time thinking about what makes them tick yet. This is sometimes a long process, but it is one that cannot be rushed. Still, the insights that I gain from the thinking and the questions, often give me the detail that is so important to making characters who are memorable and alive in the book. Now then, once you know your characters, how do you communicate them to your readers?

You put them in conflict situations. When challenged they show their true characters and we can see them for what they are. You put them into interactions with other people. No one lives in a vacuum. Everyone reacts to the other people in their lives. So must your characters. It often helps if we see them in contrast to other people, then their particular traits are defined more clearly and we see them sharply. And most important, we have to see the characters change and grow. There is no story if there is not growth. But the growth must be plausible. It must come as a result of what happens to them in the course of the book and their reactions to it. They must be consistent, and yet have the potential to change. And when the change comes, it must be motivated. Beware of the character who has a change of heart for no good reason. Readers won't believe in him or her. Conversions without reason destroy the credibility of our characters. ‡



FROM THE FILES OF THE GRAMMAR COP: TURN PASSIVE WRITING INTO ACTIVE

by Cheryl Norman

The following article first appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of *The Coastal Connection*, the newsletter of the Jacksonville, FL, First Coast Romance Writers--editor Tracy Montoya. Permission to forward or reprint granted with proper credit.



When judging contests, critiquing, and editing, I've found one thing in common with all new writers: passive writing. If you're tired of editors or critique partners telling you to "show, don't tell" but you aren't sure what that means, it's another way of saying your writing is passive.

Symptoms of passive writing include:

- Overuse of adverbs, especially -ly adverbs
- Overuse of "be" verbs: was, were, to be
- Overuse of weak verbs: walk, sat, move, place, put, and felt
- Author intrusion: heard, saw, thought, believed, wondered, knew
- Too many long passages of narrative

Today's reader is impatient; she wants to be entertained, not informed. Rather than tell you how to punch up your passive writing, I'll teach by example and show you. Consider this passage:

Sally Sleuth knew better than to break in the office. She had a reputation as a klutz, as her accomplice-in-detecting and best friend Tess often told her. But she persuaded Tess to help her hunt for clues after the construction crew went home for the day. She didn't think anything would go wrong. But it was not to be. Just as she and Tess raised the window, she noticed a blinking red light on a panel. It was a burglar alarm. They hurriedly left the construction yard before security guards could catch them. Unfortunately, they had no chance to search the files and were no closer to proving that Mr. Crookshank was guilty of taking bribes.

Are you eager to read more of this story? I'm yawning, and I'm the one who wrote it! The trick is to relate the same information in a way that engages the reader, pulling her into the action. By re-writing the scene, we add word count, true, but also white space. And punch.

"Are you sure you want to break in?" Tess asked. "What if we're caught?"

"Do you want to nail Crookshank or not? We need evidence." Sally climbed the chain link fence and dropped inside the construction yard.

Dressed in black like Sally, Tess followed her over the fence. "I do. But we can't find evidence if we're sitting in a jail cell for B and E."

"Everybody's gone home. All we have to do is climb through that window on the side. The lock's broken." Sally flicked on the flashlight. "It'll be a piece of cake."

Tess crouched beside her. "Like I haven't heard that before. What about the time you fell into that fish pond—"

"Must you bring that up? One little mistake." Sally pulled on her black hood to cover her blond curls.

Tess snorted. "One little mistake? What about getting us trapped in that time locked safe?"

"Hey, that wasn't my fault. I fell—"

"My point exactly. No offense, Sally, but you're a klutz."

"Stop wasting time. Let's go."

"Wait up." Tess ran alongside her.

They reached the side of the construction trailer. Crouched beneath the window, Sally paused to listen. She'd show Tess she could be a detective without fouling up their snooping. No security guard on premise. No vicious Rottweiler. What could go wrong?

"Showtime." Sally handed Tess the flashlight then stood on tiptoe and shoved the window. It squeaked open, and she wiggled across the frame.

"See anything?" Tess asked in a whisper.

Hanging half in, half out of the window, Sally winced from the narrow metal frame cutting into her waist. "Only a flashing red light on some kind of panel . . . uh oh."

"Uh oh?"

"Quick. Help me down. We've got to get out of here, now!"

Big difference. Instead of telling the reader through passive narrative, we show through dialogue, internal thoughts, and action. Which passage makes you want to read more?

Did you notice how I sneaked in the backstory? Begin your scene "in the moment" and find creative ways to weave in need-to-know information.

Remember: Telling is for your synopsis. Showing is for your story.

~ Cheryl Norman is the author of *Running Scared* and *Restore My Heart*, romantic suspense novels from Medallion Press. For the latest on her books and appearances, visit cherylnorman.com. ‡



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Join us Saturday, May 9th 1:00 pm for an afternoon of Romance. Book
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Jax Cassidy's
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will be released
May, 2009



RWA PRO Liaison Sherry Davis's
book, **Here Comes the Bribe**,
published by The Wild Rose Press,
will be out in June, 2009!

Candy Haven's
**Dragons Prefer
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