



North Texas Romance Writers of America

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Corner	2
Meeting Minutes	3
Proposed Bylaw Change	5
Member News	6
Nominations & Elections	7



Heart to Heart

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Chapter 33, Region 5



Spotlight on Kym Roberts

Like most cops, I like to tell stories. So instead of answering Shelley's questions in the normal format, I chose to address them in the following tale.

I wrote an autobiography for school when I was in the 6th grade naming three things I wanted to do when I grew up. The very first I listed was to become a Police Officer. This became my ambition and my dream. But at ninety-five pounds, I didn't meet the weight requirements for most departments. I couldn't gain weight no matter how I tried. So I taped rolls of pennies to my waist and went for my final weigh in. In two weeks I gained 15 pounds and lost all the skin on my stomach. I made it! Or so I thought.

The academy was grueling both physically and mentally. There were four women in my class of sixty-seven. We were divided into squads so that the women very seldom saw each other. The defensive tactics instructor was merciless and constantly on my case. I worked out during lunch while other recruits socialized and relaxed. I stayed every night and worked on defensive tactics. By the time the academy was over, I swore I'd never speak to that instructor again. We married three years later and have a fourteen-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter.

My second ambition in life was

to become an Investigative Reporter. But my view became tainted in college. At a Rainmakers concert, I witnessed a biker pick on a minority fan, jump on the band's speakers where a police officer had to physically remove him. The officer let him go with a warning. The biker then attempted to throw a steel clamp at the officer, but I warned the officer first.

As I watched the biker toss dope to the ground and swing at police officers, the crowd encircled them. It turned into a riot. The officers used only open-handed restraining techniques. I was in awe of their abilities and their professionalism. After taking my information for their reports, I was escorted to my car for my protection. The next day the headlines read: Police Brutality by KCPD.

No reporter contacted me. They spoke to the biker's girlfriend who said an officer punched her. My testimony cleared that officer and my view of reporting was forever changed. Several years later, I discovered the police officer I cleared of any wrong doing that night was my future husband.

I became a detective and was promoted to Detective Sergeant. I began working in the forgery section and loved it. I had the opportunity to work a task force with the Secret Service in Kansas City (working out of their office). It was the highlight of my career. I really admire their dedication. I also saw President Clinton at

continued on page 4

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

"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. Distractions. Recognition. Write some more. Submitting. Waiting. Writing Again. And the next step – It's out of your hands.

Writing is an art. And a business. Tell someone that you're a writer (especially a full-time writer) and what's a common reply? "I'm going to write a book when I have time." My mom is an artist. A very good, professional artist who has been paid for her work many times over. Why is it that when she says she paints, people don't reply... "I'm going to paint one day when I have time" ??? And we'd never think of saying, "I'm going to be a concert pianist one day."

Everyone has an imagination, making up those stories in their heads or different endings to movies. Unless you study the art and craft of writing a person, doesn't completely understand what it takes to finish a book. Stories, yes. Manuscripts worthy of publication, no. So what's the point I'm trying to make? Well, after several years of writing and trying to explain to my mother why she likes my manuscripts and why they were rejected, it's still hard for me to understand.

Let's just say that I hope my writing craft has improved. The stories are the same to an untrained eye (my mother's). But the layering of emotion and character growth is something I've hopefully learned a little more about. I do all I can to write the best story. I keep learning about my craft and try to keep up with the business.

BUT BUT BUT

Getting published is out of our hands. Most of us can't perform in front of thousands and become more popular like a pianist. We can't hang our work in a gallery and hope someone will purchase it. Publication depends on an editor liking (make that loving) your work. Then it depends on the marketing department believing they can MARKET your book.

After you write the best manuscript you can. After you hone it, submit it, and an editor requests it... remember that it's out of your hands. You've done your job. Now do it again. Keep writing. Keep honing your craft. Keep learning more about the publication business. And keep telling your mom she has to be patient.

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OCTOBER 17th MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: A regular meeting of the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on October 17, 2009 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 10:44 A.M.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President, Angi Platt reported: The August minutes as they were printed in the September newsletter were approved and filed for audit. The September minutes as they were printed in the October newsletter were approved and filed for audit.

The board voted to order 100 T-shirts to promote writing. Front of shirt: HAPPY TALES TO YOU. Back of shirt: 'TIL WE MEET AGAIN.

Angi Platt reported for the Programs Director: The 2010 Texas Two-Step Conference with screenwriting guru Michael Hauge will be on the third Saturday in March. NTRWA's regular meeting will be on the second Saturday of March.

Every November NTRWA will have a writer's retreat. At this time, those attending will pay for the cost.

Angi Platt reported for the Newsletter Chair: Articles for the newsletter should be in by Tuesday, October 20, 2009.

President-Elect, Gina Nelson reported: Voting will be electronic for the 2010 Board. Nikki Duncan and Susan Harrison volunteered to serve on the Nominations/Elections committee. Nominations for the Yellow Rose award with a list of reasons for nominating that person should be sent to Gina.

As part of the NT Two Step committee, Gina asked conference attendees to request or drop agent appointments as soon as possible.

Membership Director, Shelley Kaehr reported: We currently have 76 members. NTRWA gained 10 members since the September meeting.

Treasurer, Chris Keniston reported: The treas-

urer's report for September was given and filed for audit. She passed out the budget estimate for the conference. Members voted to approve the Texas Two-Step Conference budget, an amendment to the 2009 yearly budget.

Web Site Director, Jen FitzGerald reported: The members only section of the web site is ready. The bylaws, new member packet, articles of incorporation, and minutes are posted. For access, use the e-mail address used on the YahooGroups loop as ID and your RWA number as the password.

PAN[®] Liaison, Shelley Bradley reported: NTRWA PAN[®] members should contact Shelley regarding a date for the PAN[®] retreat. Lee Swift qualified for the national PAN[®] organization.

PRO[®] Liaison, Clover Autrey reported: Jeannie Guzman and Michelle Welsh have been awarded PRO[®] pins. New members should talk to Clover about the process and benefits of becoming PRO[®] members.

COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:

Great Expectations Chair, Angi Platt reported: A big thanks to Chris Keniston for securing our final round editors in each category. The 2010 contest information and revised score sheets are available on the web site. A drawing for a free Great Expectations contest entry will be held at the December meeting (you must be present to win).

Jerrie Alexander reported for the Hospitality Chair: Jerrie requested additional raffle baskets and listed agents and published authors who are donating critiques of chapters or plotting sessions.

Spotlight Chair, Shelley Kaehr reported: Kym Matthews will be the next member spotlighted.

NEW BUSINESS: Winner of the Golden Heart[®] entry fee was Angi Platt. Winner of the RITA[®] entry fee was Candy Havens.

The business meeting was adjourned at 11:23 a.m.

NTRWA welcomes member news and articles, but reserves the right to edit according to space or clarity, and to refuse articles that its editorial staff deems inappropriate for its readership. Deadline for publication is the Friday after the general meeting. The Heart to Heart is published monthly by NTRWA, a nonprofit organization founded in March of 1983 by aspiring and published writers of romance fiction.

continued from Page 1

Spotlight on Kym Roberts

the height of his 'sexual relations' scandal. I get a kick from the fact that he's the only president I will ever 'come' close to.

I worked in the Special Victims Unit as a detective sergeant with cases involving homicides, rapes, and violations of orders of protection. It became my passion. My first sergeant in violent crimes told me, "The pen is mightier than the sword." She said a good case file with well written reports will do more than a pair of handcuffs when it comes to putting a bad guy in jail. I hope I was able to pass that philosophy to the officers who replaced me.

My dream of publication has continued throughout the years. I wrote my first book in college. A romance inspired by professional golfer Severiano Ballesteros. It was a "bodice ripping" romance written by a naïve young girl. The things I could teach her today would have her turning ten shades of red!



I wrote short stories or unfinished manuscripts. Then five years ago I began writing more seriously. I worked nights while my son was in school and my husband was at work. Our efforts to adopt a child seemed to have died and I needed something to occupy my mind. I started writing *Handled By Officer*--a title I'd joked about for years with my female cop friends. I was a hundred pages into the book when I got the call. We had a baby girl. Needless to say, I

didn't touch the book again for two years. When I retired in 2007, my goal was to finish *HBO* by my mother's birthday. On May 18th, 2008 I dedicated *HBO* to my late mother and my father.

Since *HBO*, I've written *Killed In Action* and I'm currently working on *Dead On Arrival*. *DOA* is a different beast for me, it's my first novel written in first person. All my manuscripts involve strong female protagonists: police officers, military personnel, private investigators. They also involve the island of Kaua'i and Hawaiian folklore.

I continue with my faith and am fascinated with different religions, particularly the ancient Hawaiian beliefs. My books do not prescribe to one particular religion, they do however, have a sense of faith in a greater power.

I believe a person has to pursue her dreams in life. My mother died before reaching her one goal of returning to live in Florida. Since her death, I bought the convertible I always wanted, took another vacation to Hawai'i where I went surfing and took a helicopter flight around the islands. I've gone up in a hot air balloon over Albuquerque, flown around Mt. McKinley in Alaska and took a tour of Glacier Bay. I've gone whale watching off the coast of Maine and introduced my family to my childhood home of Boston. And I started my writing career.

My husband is a dreamer with too many near death experiences under his belt. It took my mother's death for me to see life through his eyes and reach out for my dreams. He has supported every one of my goals throughout our relationship, even when I was in the academy and I believed him to be the spawn of the devil. When I doubted, he pushed me forward. He's my rock. Together we believe you must pursue your dreams. Don't let anyone or anything stand in your way. If you don't go for it now, you'll regret it later. Grab life and face it with faith, strength and courage!

The last thing I listed for my autobiography was to become a nun. I really don't foresee this happening in this lifetime. In a future one...who knows?

Panic Free Pitching by Anna Sugden

Panic Free Pitching is an in-depth article and workshop. We've reprinted a small portion of the handout. For the full article, please visit her website: www.annasugden.com.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION: A lot of this is common sense, but worth repeating because somehow nerves make common sense fly out of the window.

TIME: Give yourselves plenty of time. Rushing makes us nervous and flustered.

- Set your alarm a little earlier
- Decide the night before what you're wearing and try it on (check for rips and stains)
- Find out where you have to be and when ahead of time
- Find out where the nearest bathroom is – just in case!

APPEARANCE:

- Business casual.
- Be comfortable, avoid the fidget factor.
- Lipstick: a great confidence booster.
- Avoid heavy perfumes.
- Breath mints!
- Take only business card, pitch cards, purse. No manuscript or synopsis.

PRACTICE: Make the time to practice your pitch. If possible, work with a friend.

CALMING EXERCISES: relieve the tension.

- Deep breaths, roll shoulders.

SOME HANDY TIPS — DO'S AND DON'TS

- Preparation is the key!
- Practice pitch beforehand.
- Find out about the person/house beforehand.
- Don't ask basic questions or things you could have found out with a little bit of research: word count, website address.
- Smile, shake hands, make eye contact (maybe make them do that!).
- Be enthusiastic, try to speak clearly and succinctly.
- Be honest!
- If you make a mistake/go blank, don't panic! Be honest about that too.
- Listen to advice, don't argue! Question for clarification or to raise a suggestion but don't be belligerent.
- Don't be a group hog! Don't respond or react to other people's comments or pitches.
- Don't badger them if they say no
- Whatever the outcome, be professional and thank them for their time.

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Two-time Golden Heart finalist Anna Sugden writes heart-warming contemporary romances with an English twist. To find out more about them, especially her sexy hockey hunks, please visit her website. She also blogs regularly at <http://romancebandits.blogspot.com> and at www.WritersAtPlay.com.

Proposed Bylaw Change

The following proposed change was made by board members to bring our bylaws into current practice and allow for additional board volunteers. Discussion and voting on the proposed bylaw will occur at the December general meeting.

PROPOSED

Section 7.2. Qualifications. In order to be eligible for a Board position (whether elected or appointed), a candidate should: (1) have been a General member for at least one year immediately preceding filing for office; and must (2) not have a material conflict of interest that would disqualify the person from holding the intended office, such as concurrently serving on the RWA Board [**or another chapter Board**]. In addition, a candidate for President, President-Elect or Treasurer should have been a General member for at least two consecutive years.

DELETE: or another chapter Board

REASONING: This stipulation is not currently in practice regarding on-line and sister chapters. Removing the stipulation of serving on two boards will benefit the chapter.

Member News

RISING STAR AWARDS MOST PAGES WRITTEN



Nikki Duncan - 250 pages
Mary Duncanson - 160 page
Clover Autrey - 100 pages
Kym Roberts - 67 pages
Lee Swift - 65 pages
Jean Brown - 65 pages

SPUR AWARDS MOST PAGES EDITED

Nikki Duncan - 594 pages
Shelley Kaehr - 497 pages
Shelley Bradley - 432 pages
Clover Autrey - 400 pages
Jill Wilson - 250 pages



RISING STAR & SPUR AWARDS

Each month, members who attend the NT meeting record how many new pages they've written (Rising Star) and how many pages they've edited of their own work (Spur). These numbers are collected December through October, but you have to attend the meeting to submit. Each December, the unpublished and published members with the highest numbers receive a gift certificate. We also announce the winners in the January newsletter. Reported Pages during 2009:

9,620 New Pages

31,728 Edited Pages

VICTORIA CHANCELLOR

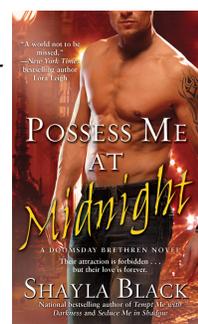
Two-Book sale to Harlequin American continuing her Brody's Crossing Series. *Texan in Her Heart* & *The Texan and the Cowgirl* will be published in 2011.

MARY KARLIK

Placed third in the Linda Howard Award of Excellence Young Adult category.

SHAYLA BLACK

Aka Shelley Bradley, *Possess Me At Midnight* will hit the shelves on November 9th. The Pocket release is the third book in the Doomsday Brethren series.



The Great Expectations Contest Line-Up of Final Round Editors

Contemporary Series – Victoria Curran, Editor with Harlequin Books

Erotic Romance – Katherine Pelz, Editorial Assistant with Berkley Heat

Historical – Danielle Poesz, Gallery/Pocket Books Editorial

Inspirational – Natalie Hanemann, Senior Editor with Thomas Nelson

Mainstream with Romantic Elements – Abbey Zidle, Senior Editor with Gallery/Pocket Books

Why enter Great Expectations?

The GE offers a quick turn around on your entry. By the beginning of February, you'll know if you're a finalist. We also judge your query letter, which is becoming one of the most important aspects of submission.

ENTER TODAY !

Dear Fellow Members,

Four years ago I began my journey toward publication by visiting an RWA® chapter here in the metroplex. I didn't join that chapter, even though it was closer and had more members. I joined NT because of the warmth and genuine camaraderie

I experienced on my very first visit. It's become my writing home--a place filled with acquaintances and good friends, challenges and accomplishments, where for a few hours every third Saturday of the month I can hide from life's banalities and rouse my loftier dreams.

It is with pleasure that I now look forward to serving North Texas RWA® in 2010 as President.

But in order to maintain the programs, conferences, and supportive environment we all cherish and enjoy, we need a Board of Directors committed to making the hard and easy decisions—a group of people willing to sacrifice only a few hours a month to keep North Texas a vital and essential part of our writing careers.

Won't you join me in serving our friends and fellow writers as an officer on the NT Board? Together we can continue to encourage and support our members, published or unpublished, new arrivals and veterans, to reach their goals and dreams.

If you are interested in serving with me on the NT Board, please drop me a line at presidentelect@ntrwa.org. I hope to hear from you soon.

Gina Lee Nelson
President-elect



Yellow Rose Award

Throughout the year, many of you give to our chapter in countless ways, big and small. Each year we honor one of our members for their devoted service with the Yellow Rose Award. It's time to nominate this year's honoree.

Please do not nominate Marty Tidwell, Gina Nelson, Jen FitzGerald, or Angi Platt as they each won this award during the past five years.

The Great Expectations Contest Line-Up of Final Round Editors

Romantic Suspense – Alex Logan, Assistant Editor with Grand Central Publishing

Single Title – Holly Blanck, Assistant Editor with St. Martin's Press

Specialized – Talia Platz, Editorial Assistant with New American Library

Futuristic / Fantasy / Time Travel / Paranormal

Young Adult – David Linker, Executive Editor with HarperFestival, HarperCollins Children's Books

25 Electronic Pages = No Postage

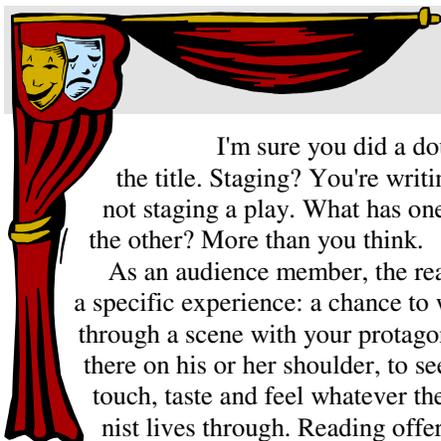
\$20 for members = that's .80 cents per page

3 critiques = that makes it .26 cents per page

NTRWA.ORG for rules = or email Angi and she'll send them to you

Deadline = December 29th

Questions = GECordinator@ntrwa.org



Staging the Multiple Character Scene

by Amy Atwell

I'm sure you did a double take at the title. Staging? You're writing a book, not staging a play. What has one to do with the other? More than you think.

As an audience member, the reader seeks a specific experience: a chance to walk through a scene with your protagonist, right there on his or her shoulder, to see, hear, touch, taste and feel whatever the protagonist lives through. Reading offers the potential for a deeper experience than a play or a movie by allowing the reader time to evolve emotionally with the protagonist.

That emotional evolution can get muddled up pretty quickly if the story doesn't flow with clarity. Keeping a story focused remains one of the writers' biggest challenges. And this can become even more difficult if your protagonist's life comes complete with a large cast of characters. So how do you cope with those murky crowded scenes, the ones that start to go fuzzy on you?

Stop thinking like a writer, and look at the scene from a stage director's point of view. Here are a few pointers to get you started in your new side career.

1. A stage director's responsibility is to interpret the text as written, so the first step is to write the scene. Don't worry about what characters walk on or off, let them say what they need to say. Transcribe it, particularly the dialogue or any specific actions that must take place to move the story forward.

2. Hand this "script" to your director. Yes, that's still you, but now you need to read through this text as if it were a movie scene. Your job is to make sure the reader can follow the action without bogging down the pace of the story. You need to keep things tight and focused, to convey images with as few words as possible.

3. Diagram your scene on a piece of paper. By this, I mean, if your characters are in a living room where a dead body has just been discovered, then draw a rectangle to represent the room and identify doors, windows, and pieces of furniture. These are the set pieces. They don't change. Hmm, come to think of it, add the dead body to this list.

4. List all the cast members in the scene and give each one a symbol. Usually the first letter of the character's name with a circle around it works. This is your "key" to the diagram.

5. Now, read through the scene and with a pencil, faintly outline a trail on the diagram of each character's movement as called for in the text. This is called "blocking," and this movement works with--and sometimes against--the dialogue to draw focus.

Does your diagram look like a Spirograph? Lots of squiggles and overlapping lines? The more squiggles, the more work you, the director, must do to simplify the focus of the scene. Here are some additional pointers to consider as you strive for clarity.

1. Consider your POV character (or characters--are you head hopping, and if so, are you doing it for a specific effect?) and make sure you describe all the characters from that person's POV. Try to avoid names, but have specific descriptors that help the reader quickly identify the other players.

2. Hopefully, by the time these scenes occur, all the characters present will have been introduced. Try to avoid introducing new characters when you already have a bunch of

them onstage.

3. Group them together, if possible, and identify who and where they all are as early as possible in the scene. From a play or movie standpoint, think how they make their entrances and where they need to end up. Try to minimize their blocked movements. Movement pulls focus, dialogue pulls focus, so people should only move when they're speaking (at least, that's the ideal).

4. Bearing #3 in mind, use exceptions to those rules sparingly for increased dramatic effect.

5. Let your reader sort out the scene at the beginning. Describe who is where in the room, and what each person is doing. This doesn't need to be long and exhaustive, the right sentence or two will do.

6. If you have mi-

"The first step is to write the scene."



continued on page 9

Pitching Is The Easy Part by Angi Platt

That's right fellow writers...

...pitching is the easy part!

If it's your first conference, your first pitch, your first encounter with an agent or editor... you're probably feeling the anxious, sick feeling that nothing you say in your appointment will make sense. Or you're going to freeze and be unable to say anything. Or everything about your book is ridiculous. You may ask yourself, "Why did I think I was ready to meet with a professional and discuss my writing?"

Well, here's a secret... editors are always looking for talented writers. Always. If they're attending a conference (no matter the size) and the work falls into the realm of their publishing house, editors will normally request the material. They know you're nervous. They'll wait for the writing to make a final decision. I haven't heard of a rejected story because the author stumbled over their words during the pitch or read from a cue card.

An appointment with an agent is a bit different, but they too wouldn't be accepting appointments if they weren't looking for talent (most of the time). In this appointment, you'll be pitching not only your manuscript, but also yourself. So relax. Breathe. If you're nervous make a cue card about yourself so you'll have talking points.

Most of my appointments have been relaxed with the exception of my first. I actually used the words, "Hello. I've never done this before. How do we start?" And the editor replied, "These things make me nervous too. How about you tell me why you like romance?" And I relaxed (still read my pitch off my cards--but I relaxed).

Again, pitching is the easy part. Writing a book worthy of publication takes practice, skill, and talent.

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Angi Platt aka Angi Morgan is a Golden Heart finalist and multi-award winning writer. She recently contracted with Marsall/Lyon Literary Agency. Visit her website: AngiMorgan.com.

Staging the Multiple Character Scene

continued from page 8

nor characters who say very little in the scene, plant them and tell them to keep still until it's their turn. Think of a movie camera--keep your focus tight on the POV character and whoever else is talking at that moment.

7. It may sound silly, but seriously, print out your scene, get up from your desk, and walk it. You know where you want those characters to be, what gyrations does the POV character have to suffer to see, hear and react to everyone else in the room.

By now you have text with notes scribbled all over it. Time to sit back down at the computer and revise. Simplify, simplify, simplify.

If you want to see a master at work, I suggest you read *Faking It* by Jennifer Crusie. I'd love to say flip to page such and such, but honestly, without reading the whole book, you don't appreciate what she's accomplished. The heroine lives with her mother, sister and niece in a boarding house over an art gallery. There are eventually four renters (one is the hero), the sister's ex-husband, and three humorous villains. All of these people come together in a gallery opening near the end of the book. Too many characters?

Not at all, because at this point, we know each of these individuals so well, that Crusie only needs a few words to give us a full picture of what's happening, how they look and sound. She directs our focus around the gallery opening and allows us time to see and experience each vignette before she moves onto the next while her POV character provides a lens that makes these images sharp and true.

So don't let that multiple character scene intimidate you. Write it and let your director work with those characters to stage it so your reader enjoys the maximum emotional involvement with a minimum of confusion.

~ ~ ~

*Former theater professional Amy Atwell realized her love of plays stemmed from the stories they brought to life and launched her quest to tell the stories in her head, first as play scripts, then as novels. Her 2008 Golden Heart® Finalist manuscript, **Public Relations**, features a soap opera hunk and a Broadway wanna-be finding love in the heart of Manhattan. Read more about her at www.amyatwell.com.*

Retreat, No Surrender by Abby Gaines

continued on page 11

Writing is primarily a solitary pursuit, but there are times when we need the stimulation and inspiration that only other writers can offer. One option is to attend a writing conference. Another option, and I firmly believe this should be an “and” rather than “or”, is to organize your own retreat for you and your best writing buddies.

My best buds are Harlequin authors Karina Bliss, Sandra Hyatt, and Tessa Radley. In fact, Karina and I met Sandra and Tessa on a sort of retreat—a weekend writing class, with the just the four of us attending. Since that “retreat” we’ve managed to carve out time in varying chunks to be together—another Kara weekend, numerous four-hour lunch/brainstorming sessions at someone’s house (think of them as micro-retreats), and a couple of days midweek at a lake-side cottage. I truly believe that without these get-togethers, I’d struggle with my writing on so many fronts (or should I say, I’d struggle even more!). When the gals and I get together, we talk craft and industry, we share lessons learned from workshops, we re-view synopses, and we brainstorm.

That’s what we do...but the options for an effective retreat are much wider than that. Recently, I talked to several authors about how they like to get together with their buddies. Read on...

J.L. Wilson organizes a writing retreat for five friends twice a year at a local casino. The buffet is inexpensive, and the rooms are nice but not pricy. The group hires a suite, which makes it easy to hold the meeting part of the retreat.

The retreat starts Friday evening at the buffet, then gets right down into business. “Everyone gets two one-hour blocks of time to discuss whatever they want: brainstorming plots, query letters, industry discussions, etc. That one hour is THEIRS to do with as they will,” J.L. says.

Her group comprises writers at different stages—published and unpublished—and in different genres, including cozy mysteries and dark paranormal. “I’ve found that the mix of genres adds a great energy to the brainstorming sessions.”

The group continues to meet throughout Saturday, taking breaks for gambling and food. Everyone brings a food item for Saturday lunch (sandwiches and chips) and the group uses the buffet on Saturday night. The retreat wraps up on Sunday.

“It’s a huge amount of fun and relatively cheap, about \$150 a person,” J.L. says. “I make up little pins just like at RWA® National with the date and the ‘theme’ of the conference.”

Bonnie Spidle says one thing she and her writer buddies like to do at their quarterly retreats is read the first five pages of published books, not necessarily romances, and study their openers, hooks, and plot/character development.

“We pick books randomly but we all read each pick,” she says. “It’s amazing what works and what doesn’t. And we discuss the whys of what works and what doesn’t. We do this bit of craft study to improve our own work, not judge in an unappreciative way. We don’t always agree about what makes us

want to read more. That’s the idea, to learn what makes a diverse group want to see what happens next. Some first pages draw a reader in quietly, softly...others are fast, full of hooks and action or dread and suspense.”

Dissecting a tiny section of a book for a specific “thing” helps, she says. “I need to apply myself to endings...I’ll suggest that for our next one!”

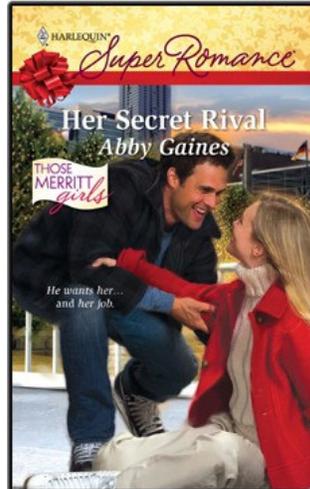
Bonnie’s retreat group are all multi-published authors and the name of the game is to study and learn. They lug along favorite craft books and pore over them, trying to define problems they’re encountering. Bonnie was actually at the retreat when I got in touch with her about this

article. And the focus of the current retreat? “We’re after the elusive “high concept” definition to see if it applies to our newest ideas,” she says.

Megan Hatfield’s local chapter had a retreat this summer. Everyone brought magazines (glue sticks, poster boards and scissors were provided) and made collages for their current books, or for motivational purposes,” all while gossiping and nattering on, of course,” Meagan says.

Ann Macela’s critique group starts off every meeting with one member giving a short presentation on a craft topic of her choosing. It’s a concentrated look at a single aspect of writing, and it can range all over the place, from beginnings to ending to overused words. “One of the best was when [we looked at] how one word or one detail can make the scene come alive for the reader.”

Linda Gerber’s writing group’s retreat will be held at a beach house in Florida this year (hooray for re-



tired parents leaving their house open!). Her group, Creative Support, has officially been together for seven years though some members have known each other longer. “We’re online friends scattered across the country from New York to California, so sadly we don’t see each other regularly, though we do talk online every day,” Linda says. “We are in various stages of our writing journey, some agented, some published and some on the cusp of both.”

The group’s retreats are usually a long weekend someplace secluded or at least removed from the everyday. Each of the five members prepares a mini workshop to present to the group. The workshops are on craft, “typically something that we feel like we have just mastered, or something we need to work on. It’s as much for the benefit of the presenter as the presentees,” Linda says.

The weekend schedule includes a set time to go over each writers’ WIP, to brainstorm, hash out characterization or plot, etc. “Since we crit each other’s work regularly, we already know a lot about the WIPs anyway and this gives us a chance to dig deeper,” Linda says.

They talk craft over dinner and take long walks on the beach and read snippets of their WIP, as well as scheduling solitary time to WRITE.

Natalie Damschroder claims her local chapter, Central Pennsylvania Romance Writers, has the best retreat ever. The annual All About Me writers retreat is held in May at the Rhodes Grove Camp and Conference Center for four days, Thursday through Sunday, or whatever portion people can attend. The conference center provides three meals a day and hotel room-style accommodations on a large property that has hiking trails and benches, swings and tables outdoors. Indoors are conference rooms, a comfortable lobby, a kitchenette, and private rooms where attendees spread out and write all weekend.

“We call it All About Me because we have NO responsibilities,” Natalie says. “The very best thing about it is that we don’t have to cook or clean up or take care of anyone else. There’s no TV or phones (though there is a good cell phone signal for those who need to be accessible for families), and the first couple of years there wasn’t even Internet access. (I’m glad there’s free wireless now because two years ago, day one of the retreat, I got the email from my agent that she wanted to call me, which she did the next

day, and offered me representation, and how much better can it be to get that call surrounded by your writing friends?).”

The chapter experimented early on with organized programs, but found they didn’t work well.

“Occasionally someone will offer a short workshop on mind-mapping or something, and small groups will get together for critiquing and brainstorming, but we end up doing a lot of that at meals.”

The retreat is very informal—some people almost never come out of their rooms, others socialize a little more, but everyone gets tons done, sometimes a month’s worth in four days. “We set personal goals for how many pages we want to write or whatever, and we are free to pursue those goals with no distractions and no guilt,” Natalie says. “For some people, it’s the only writing they get done all year.”

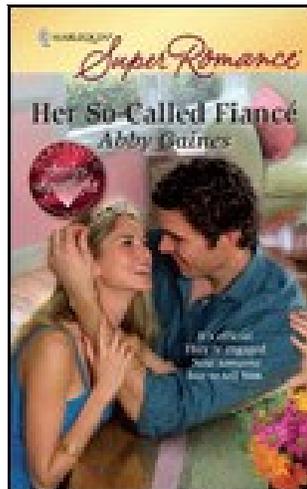
It’s not all work and no play, however. Participants receive welcome packs containing a variety of writing supplies and other essentials. There are also goody bags allocated through a prize draw, with attendees qualifying for draw entries by meeting their writing milestones.

There are excursions—a Friday night drinks outing—for those who like to get out and about, and Saturday night is game night. Over the years, they’ve played Romance Jeopardy (trivia about the industry), Romance Wheel of Fortune (more like hangman, with members’ book titles), Romance Family Feud (with questions and categories based on the industry) and Romance Deal or No Deal. “We have lame-o prizes and everyone gets a prize, but the point is to have us all in a room, loving each other and having a blast, celebrating ourselves and our passion for writing,” Natalie says. “Well, really, that’s the point of the whole retreat, I guess!”

Just writing about all these retreats has made me want to go an round up my dearest writing buddies and run away with them. We could all do with scheduling this kind of activity on a regular basis.

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*Abby Gaines writes for SuperRomance and Harlequin NASCAR. Her latest release is **Her Secret Rival** (Superromance Nov 09), the second in her **Those Merritt Girls** series. Visit her at www.abbygaines.com*



Do you have a Best Celler in you? by Clover Autrey

We've all seen them, the kids and young adults who can thumb out text messages and emoticons with the rapid fire and accuracy of a semi-automatic. Cell phones have ridden in pockets, purses, and backpacks of anyone in their twenties since before they had a driver's license so is it any wonder that the texting generation would utilize cell phones to create novels?

It took off in Japan when *Maho no i-rando*, a Web site that designs homepages, saw the potential of creating a program that allowed bloggers writing novels on their blogs to upload their works in progress and let readers make comments. The first serialized cell phone novels were born and exploded as a sub-genre. Several cell phone novels went on to be republished in hardcover and dominated the Japanese best sellers list.

So what exactly is a cell phone novel? These text novels come in short bursts day by day--sometimes several times a day--as serialized chapters downloaded to a subscriber's mobile phone or computer. Each chapter ranges in length from 100 or so words to around 500 words and with many now being written on Twitter, the 140 word length chapter has increased in popularity.

Writers and readers interchange and garner feedback on their works free of charge at community forums. Textnovel.com is a popular site, which runs contests partnered with Dorchester Publishing Company. Many text novelists write their chapters on their cell phones and then upload them immediately to the forum they've signed up with where the chapters then go out to cell phones as a text message to readers who have subscribed to their stories. Instant gratification for writer and reader both. There are also a multitude of sites where completed cell phone novels can be downloaded for approximately \$10.

With such a limited space within a text message and with practically anyone being able to write text novels, there are arguments about literary quality, and lack of sensory and descriptive detail. However, as with any medium, those offerings that rise to the top showcase a new kind of literary art conveyed in just a few short edgy lines. In writing classes it's often stressed that you should make every scene count. This is no more truer than in crafting a small chapter of a very limited word count and still be able to hold a reader's attention until the next text comes

through.

Can Cell Phone Noveling really propel you to the Best Seller list? According to the watch list from Tohan, a major book distributor in Japan, a high school senior named Rin wrote a novel on her cell phone while commuting to work, landing Number 5 on the best-selling list after her text novel *If You* was published in print and sold more than 400,000 copies.

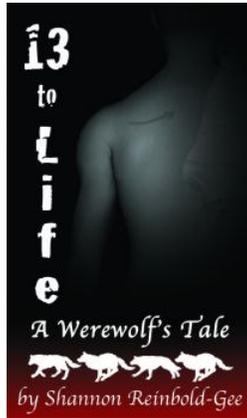
A fellow RWA® member, Saoirse Redgrave's cell phone novel *13 to Life: A Werewolf's Tale* was picked up by St. Martin's Press in a 3 book deal after taking first place in the 2008 Textnovel contest. She spoke candidly about her experience with writing a cell phone novel. "I don't

carry a cell phone frequently--I'm often on my little farmstead where the signal's poor. I don't fit the standard for cell phone authors in Japan. I'll be 37 in October, happily married and living far from anything anyone would consider a city. And my books are not thinly disguised autobiographies because although I used my narrator Jess as a bit of a way to deal with my mother's early death, I've never met a werewolf...that I know of."

13 to Life: A Werewolf's Tale was written as a cell phone novel in 5 short weeks. Says Redgrave, "You know that cell phone novels are amazingly brief--closer to screen plays in some ways, I think. I had been doggedly (hey, it's a werewolf story ;-)) working on fleshing out *13 to Life*. It was little more than a story skeleton that won, in retrospect."

Though Redgrave says the heart of the novel remains the same, she had to take it from a 50 page text novel to 350 pages to get it ready for St. Martin's. The first book is scheduled for release in 2010 under the name Shannon Delany. Visit her at <http://13toLife.us> for a closer look at *13 to Life: A Werewolf's Tale*.

In the United States, cell phone novels are barely stepping out of the gate and unless you become wildly popular or are a contest winner, the immediate compensation will most likely be more along the lines of building a strong technology savvy fan base, interacting with readers and other writers, and enjoying learning a new outlet for your writing creativity. I do have to warn you though: cell phone noveling is addictive. Got a few minutes to spare with your mobile phone handy? Go on. Whip out a chapter or two.



Why So Long From “Sale” to “Shelf” by Terri Garey

A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Publishing Process

When I got an offer on my first book in October of 2005, I was stunned to hear my agent very calmly tell me that it wouldn't be published for two years. “*Two years?*” I asked, incredulous, thinking maybe I'd heard her wrong, but no. She then explained about publishing schedules and “slots,” which was an entirely new concept to me. It was then that I realized I was entering a whole new phase of my career, one where everybody but me seemed to know the ropes, and that it was time I educated myself on the publishing process.

So I joined PAN[®] and went to a lot of industry specific workshops. I asked questions of my agent and of other authors. I did my best to understand the complex and mysterious world I found myself in. This workshop covers everything I wish I'd known back then. I've by no means learned everything, and my experiences will differ from others in the industry, but I think many of the overall concepts remain the same.

PART I: Preliminaries leading up to a sale factors to be considered

You, or your agent, has submitted a manuscript to an editor and she's expressed an interest (yay!) but it's not a sure thing just yet. Unless your work went straight to a Senior Editor, it's probably being passed up the editor food chain for approval. What will greatly help your chances with any publishing house is if you've given your editor a reason to 1) LOVE the manuscript, and 2) a way to MARKET the manuscript. She's your advocate within the publishing house and probably very busy--make it easy on her by giving her reasons to push your book:

Website and or blog, aka “platform”

Personal relevance (haunted house, degrees in a related field)

Are you active in RWA[®] or writing communities?

Written any articles?

So the Senior Editor agrees and the offer is made. Offer is weighed based on dollars, publisher support in the form of co-op to bookstores, incentive bonuses, and the publisher schedule.

When a one book deal becomes a two book deal--can you do it?

Size of advance is crucial, but not in the way you may think. A bigger advance can actually hurt you in the long run if your sales don't live up to it.

Advances. An advance, as I'm sure most of you know, is the amount of money a publisher pays you up front for your book. For mass market paperbacks the amount

can be anywhere from \$1,000 to \$100,000. Though a high advance is unusual it's not unheard of and comes with a lot of pressure, both to you as the author and to your publisher. A rough estimate average advance for a non-Harlequin book is usually in the \$5,000 to \$15,000 range. Every publisher has what's known as a “discretionary limit” which is the amount your editor, depending on her level within the company, is allowed to offer you before having to go before a review board to get more money.

Once you've gone before that review board, and had a higher advance approved, every person on that review board is now responsible for how well your book does. How does this translate? Mainly in more promotion (more ads, more special displays, more end caps, more tradeshows). They've got to justify and earn back that big advance. The only way they can do it is to sell more books. Bottom line, the bigger your advance, the more promotion your publisher is going to give you. Promotion is expensive, and the budget for it is small, so if you're in the average advance range, don't expect too much.

Royalties. Brace yourselves here, because if the publisher did their job right, you may never see a penny in royalties, unless your book does better than expected. You don't make any royalties until you've “earned out” your advance, meaning your publisher has been paid back for what they gave you up front (that's why it's called an advance). Before making an offer on your book, someone did an estimated Profit and Loss statement, which is pretty much guesswork on the publisher's part, even though it's “informed” guesswork. Basically, they sat down and looked at books they'd already published that were similar to yours and saw what the numbers were for those books. Then they thought about how many books they'd actually have to print to earn back whatever advance they're willing to pay, added in wild cards like your “platform,” your editor's enthusiasm, the quality of your book, how much they love it, and the possible orders they might get from buyers. In some ways it's very simple--the higher your advance, the more books you need to sell to get to the point where you've “earned out” your advance. In other ways it's just very complicated guesswork.

On top of all that, there's an ugly little phrase called “reserves against returns.” Your publisher can hold back a portion of any royalties you may earn for a certain time period, just in case your book

continued on page 14

Why So Long From “Sale” to “Shelf” by Terri Garey

continued from page 13

doesn't sell as well as they'd hoped. You see, there's a big difference between your publisher selling your books to the big chain stores, and the chain stores selling your books to the public. Unlike other merchandise stores, bookstores are allowed to return unsold books for a refund. Bookstores usually have three months that they'll keep your books on the shelves. After that time, they're allowed to “strip” the front cover and return it to the publisher for credit. So, while it may look like you've sold 10,000 copies, you didn't actually “sell” until someone walks to the register and purchases.

Print runs. Having a 40,000 print run sounds great, but what's important is how many are sold, not printed. Publishers expect 50% of what's printed to be returned. If after twelve months your “sell-through” is higher than 50%, you're doing well. Higher than 75% you're doing great! Actual sell-through numbers aren't known for about a year, which can often make negotiations for your next book a bit more difficult. Publishers are the only ones who know those numbers, and while the honor system says they should be sharing with your agent, it doesn't necessarily work that way.

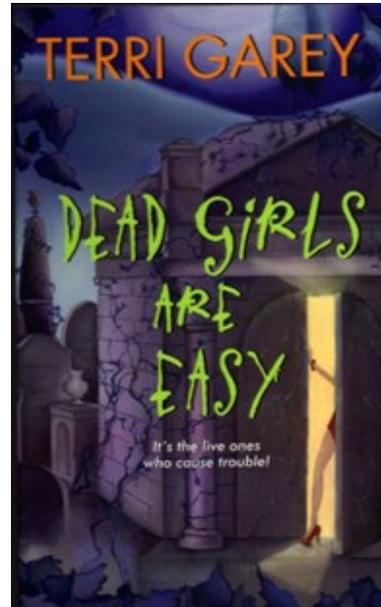
So how does an author make any money? “How does an author make any money?” Remember, the advance is yours. You can always earn royalties. You can introduce readers to your back list.

Look at Janet Evanovich--ten books under her belt by the time she hit it big, and now her old books, like *Grand Finale*, are being reissued and hitting the NYT list immediately. She plugged along until she created a solid reader base, and created her own demand. Patience and hard work can pay off.

PART II: Sold!! The editing process and related deadlines begin

Revisions. You may get lucky and sell your book “as is” with no suggested revisions, but that's rare for a brand-new novelist in the world of mass market paperback. In a more common scenario, your editor has a set timeframe (specified within your contract) to read the first draft and make her suggestions, and you have a set timeframe (specified within your contract) to complete those revisions. She may want a second round of revisions, even a third. Revisions can be tough and often more time-consuming than writing the original content! My first revision letter was nine pages long--I'm proud to say I got that down to three as of the last book! As frustrating and time-consuming as those revisions may be, keep in mind that it's probably the most valuable feedback you'll ever receive. It comes from an expert who loves your book (your editor) at a time you need it

the most (which is right before the world reads your book). Try not to get frustrated. Call your editor if



you're confused. Brainstorm with her if necessary. She's no longer a mythical creature, she's your partner.

Here's an example: in my last revision letter, my editor suggested cutting a scene she felt didn't cast the heroine in the best light. I, on the other hand, not only loved that scene, but felt it was crucial to the overall

ending and in resolving her internal conflict. I agonized over it for days--how could I possibly cut that scene? And then I realized that it wasn't the scene itself that was the problem, it was that I hadn't truly fleshed out throughout the remainder of the book why the scene was so important. So I called my editor, explained the situation, and how I could fix it. To which she said, “okay.” Days of agony, reduced to one minute of conversation and an “okay.”

Copy edits: You've revised the body of your manuscript to both you and your editor's satisfaction and now it's time for the nit picky stuff. Your editor now sends the manuscript to a copy editor, who is basically a freelance person whose job it is to make sure you've used a semi-colon instead of a colon, an ellipses instead of an em-dash, used “lay” instead of “lie,” gotten your punctuation correct, have been consistent in your facts from book to book. They may give you recommendations and/or opinions on things from--I kid you not--whether men were circumcised in the Regency era, whether champagne flutes existed in the Victorian era, or whether a certain type of kindling was used in the Scottish highlands. Copy edits can drive you nuts, quite frankly, because you do occasionally get a copy editor who, much like a contest judge, will try to rewrite your sentences for you. Your manuscript may be covered in what appears to be seemingly meaningless red

scribbles that are actually proofreading marks, and you'll have to decipher them. The good news is that you get to use a great little word called "stet," which means "leave as is," or you double-check your own facts and find--with great gnashing of teeth--that they were right all along.

Page proofs: Thought the nit picky stuff was done? Think again. Once your copy edits are finished and returned to your editor, someone has to make all those changes on the page and typeset everything into actual book format. Then, before it goes to print, it's going to come back to you one more time, so you can make sure the typesetter did *their* job properly. This is your last chance to look for typos, missing pages, mis-numbered pages, etc. The cool part is that your baby is almost finished, the bad part is that you're probably so sick of going over the book inch by inch that you might miss something yourself.

Each round of this revision process comes with its own set of deadlines, and those deadlines are the first thing an editor has to consider when scheduling your book's publication date. The amount of revisions needed and her confidence in your skill to do them in a timely matter will determine the in-house schedule for art, sales, marketing, the copy editor, and the proof editor. Deadlines are important. When not met, it causes a ripple effect down the line. If you feel you're not going to be able to meet a deadline, **say so**, either through your agent or by speaking to your editor directly. Nobody wants to let anybody down, but this is a case where honesty is appreciated. If there's any wiggle room in the schedule, your editor will know about it. And if there isn't, she can reschedule your release for a later date.

A Word About Editors. Whether you and your editor bond over mojitos and become best buds. Or whether your relationship remains purely professional, it's important to remember that you have now become a *team* with one goal in mind: making your book the best it can be. It's not "her vs. you." It's "her *and* you." Her reputation is on the line as well as yours. She's the one who plucked you out of the crowd and said, "I love your book!" But she may also be the one to say, "Let's make it better!" or "No, it's not quite good enough yet." Pick your battles carefully and be open-minded to her suggestions. A good editor is not out to change

your writing style--that's what she liked about your book to begin with--she's only out to make it *better*.

Promo-wise, *do* communicate with her, but *don't* overwhelm her with every little detail of your new career. If you have a television interview, a radio interview, a feature in the local newspaper. Tell her, or tell your agent so she can tell her--those are things the marketing department loves to hear and may help you in terms of an additional boost in terms of bookstore placement.

On the other hand, if you're guest blogging on a friend's site, doing a book signing, holding a contest? You may be excited, but these are not the type of things your editor needs to know. Other than in the most general of ways. Let's face it, in this day and age, you're expected to do a great deal of your own marketing: website, blog, guest blogging, building a mailing list, etc. Do whatever you can to get your name out there. Toot your own horn as much as possible, but only toot hers when it's something she can use in house to promote you as an author.

Bottom line: respect her time. You're not her only author and your book is not her only book.

A Word About the Book. Here's a shocker--or at least it was to me--even though I keep referring to it as "your book." But it's no longer exclusively your book. You sold it, remember? It belongs to the publishing house now, not you. You still have creative control of the writing itself, because you are, after all, the writer--editors edit, they don't write. They still need you to do your "creative thing" to make it all work, so do your best to concentrate on the *writing* and let the publishing house do its job, which is getting your book into the hands of readers.

When all is said and done, you're going to be surprised to find out how little control you have from here on out.

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The rest of Terri's article will appear in the November Special Elections Edition of the *Heart to Heart*.

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Terri Garey writes paranormal romance for Avon, and is a two-time RITA[®] finalist and the winner of the 2008 RITA[®] for Best First Book, as well as the winner of the 2008 PRISM Award. Visit her on the web at <http://www.harpercollins.com/TerriGarey>.

But it's no longer exclusively your book. You sold it, remember?



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Featuring: Margie Lawson, Agent Cori Deyoe, and Agent Melissa Jeglinski

Why did we name our conference the NT Two Step?
There are two sides to writing: business and craft.
Come hone your craft and network with other writers.

Visit the NT website for specific details and how to register.

