



NTRWA

# North Texas Romance Writers of America

## HEART TO HEART

FOUNDED MARCH 1983    CHAPTER 33, REGION 5    MARCH 2011    VOLUME 30, ISSUE 3

### RISING STAR Awards Most Pages Written

Heather Long  
325 pages

Donna Stockton  
201 pages

Shelly Bradley  
174 page

### SPUR Awards Most Pages Edited

Heather Long  
739 pages

Donna Stockton  
544 pages

Nikki Duncan  
520 pages

### EVERY WRITER NEEDS AN EDITOR



## NT'S HEATHER LONG PRESENTS A SELF-EDITING WORKSHOP MARCH 19

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### FOR AN UPDATE ON UPCOMING PROGRAMS

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER - MARSHA WEST

Our theme this year is "Keeping On." Judging from some recent posts on one of my loops, the discouragement that comes with this career is not limited to your NT president.

Realizing we're not alone in the black cloud that comes over us at the most recent rejection or ugly judge's comments is comforting. Remember, I'm a retired elementary principal. I believe you can take care of almost anything with education. One of the suggestions from our generous fellow romance writers when you hit that brick wall and can't write or wonder why you're even trying was to take a class.



While, I'm in a different place on this journey than I was six months ago, I took their advice and recently completed a NEORWA class. It was my second one from this group, and I heartily recommend you look at what they have to offer. (If you're not on the chapter events loop, you need to be. A wealth of educational opportunities awaits.) The first class was about show not tell—something I'm still working on. J Lyn Cote taught the one I just finished. She provided steps to take to insure you have enough conflict to sustain your book. She used Kathy Jacobson's conflict grid from her Novel Approach Course and Toni Cowden's basic personality types.

If you've never done an online course, you should try one. You learn not just from the instructor but also from those in the class, what they submit, and what the teacher says about their work. I worked primarily on my new book 6, which is still in the planning stages. I also did the assignments for my last book, which I'm revising. I didn't want to keep working on it, if the conflict wasn't there. I was pleasantly surprised to find it was. Now that doesn't mean it will win anything or get picked up by an agent, because we all know, or should, how subjective the business is. Still, I was encouraged to "keep on" with this book.

So one of the ways to get out of the doldrums is taking a class. Another is to go back and look at those goals we set in January. (If you missed the meeting, you can still do this. Check another section of the newsletter for specifics.)

The third thing is to be in relationship with other writers. We learn from them. We celebrate with them their good news. Yes, we even console them when that rejection comes. This career path can be a lonely and isolated one. Imagine the folks who had to "keep on" before we had computers and email. Wow. That's determination. Thank you, NT, for providing me wonderful support, encouragement, and friends.

***Success is getting up one more time than you fall down. Anonymous***

## FEBRUARY MINUTES

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on Saturday, February 19, 2010 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 10:40 a.m. The January minutes were approved as they were printed in the February newsletter.

### **OFFICER REPORTS:**

#### **President: Marsha West reported:**

For Jean, the deadline to submit items for the newsletter is Friday, February 25th.  
For Angi and Wendy, there were fifty-seven more entries for the GE contest than last year.

#### **Treasurer: Ron Campbell reported:**

The January treasurer's report was presented and will be filed for audit.  
A copy of the 2011 budget was passed out and discussed.  
The budget was approved by the membership with no second because it had Board approval.

#### **Program Director: Nikki Duncan reported:**

The schedule for NTRWA 2011 calendar was reviewed as follows:  
March – Self Editing with Heather Long  
April – Interactive Workshop  
May – Roundtable Critique  
June – Speed Pitching  
July – Synopsis Review by Victoria Chancellor  
August – E-publishing with Misa Ramirez  
September – Finding A Place in the Market with Tracey Wolf  
October – Discuss Dialogue  
November – Members retreat  
December – Christmas Party

#### **Membership: Jamie Webb reported:**

There were six visitors.  
Kay Overton (historical romance)  
Vickie Gogan (romance) & husband  
Jenny Wilson (women's fiction)  
Nikki Duncan's husband

There were two new members:

Yvonne Jocks (romantic suspense, western romance)  
Patricia (& husband)

## FEBRUARY MINUTES

### **Website: Jen FitzGerald:**

It was reported by Nikki Duncan that Jen FitzGerarld has moved the NTRWA domain under NTRWA's name with Go Daddy. Also, Jen will work on buying new hosting and move all information online to a new server.

### **COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:**

#### **PRO Liaison: Clover Autrey reported:**

PRO Reading Retreat is coming up most likely in the summer.  
Heather Long is a new PRO.

#### **Hospitality Chair: Linda Graves reported:**

Reviewed the door prizes which were a gift basket, books, 25 page critique from an editor at a publishing company and a first chapter synopsis critique from an editor at Harlequin.

#### **Writing Incentives: Roni Griffin reported:**

The beads are going away. Now magnets with words will be given out.  
Current page count requirements will remain as they are currently set.

#### **Audio Librarian: Michelle Welch reported:**

CDs from nationals can be checked out.  
A list is online of what CDs are available.

#### **Spotlight Chair: Carolyn Williamson reported:**

Angi Platt is recognized in the newsletter. Next month it will be Donna Stockton.

### **ANNOUCEMENTS:**

DARA's Dreamin' in Dallas will be held April 1st and 2nd.

Next General Meeting: 10:30 a.m. on March 19<sup>th</sup> at La Hacienda.

The business meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Submitted electronically by Sheniqua Waters

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2011 NTRWA Schedule

**March**      **Self-Editing with Heather Long:** Bring pages of your WIP for self-editing exercises. Heather will ask for specific pages from your WIP For this exercise. Any genre or WIP works.

**April**      **Tags and Pacing:** An interactive exercise to see just where we halt our pacing with introspection and detail.

**May**      **Round Table Critiques:** Have 15 pages of your WIP read and critiqued by an NT published author.

**June**      **Speed Pitching for Nationals:** Practice pitching your story to our "editors and agents of the day" to prepare for those face-to-face opportunities at conferences.

**July**      **Synopsis with Victoria Chancellor:** Get your synopsis written and polished so that manuscript is ready for post-conference submission.

**August**      **The Writer's Guide to ePublishing with Misa Ramirez:** Presentation on ePublishing ins and outs, as well as some numbers.

**September**      **Finding Your Place in the Market with Tracy Wolff**

**October**      **Dialogue: It's More Than What You Say** with **Julia Quinn:** We'll follow Julia's talk with a book signing. Non-members will be charged \$5 for this month's workshop.

**November**      **Retreat**

**December**      **Christmas Party**

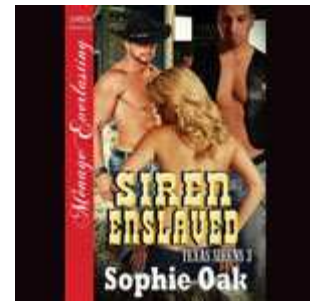
## SPOTLIGHT ON DONNA STOCKTON

BY CAROLYN WILLIAMSON

**Because naughty can be so nice.** That's the eye-catching slogan on the website of Donna Stockton (AKA Sophie Oak), who writes for Siren Publishing and has a new book out now. Read about her exciting career and how she does it.

**1. In December you wrote that you'd published five books in seven months and written nine books last year. You must write in your sleep. How do you manage to do that many?**

Some of those are books are novella length and some are category length. I tend to write roughly 3,000 words a day. I write fast and with a fair amount of accuracy. I also don't have a pesky day job. I think writing quickly comes from finding a groove.



**2. Was last year the first time you were published? How long have you been writing? How long before you got published?**

I've been writing all my life. About ten years ago, I had written a historical mainstream. I tried half-heartedly to find an agent, but I really got fired up after I had my third child. Forty was approaching, and I knew this was the time to try. I'm very impatient. I decided to go the e-publishing route. I love erotic romance and small press e-pubs are where the majority of erotic romance books are getting published. I wrote Small Town Siren, sent it to Siren Publishing because they were first on my list and nine days later I was accepted. Six months later, I had a book out, and it's been a wild ride from there.

**3. I see you write erotica or is it erotic romance? How would you define the difference?**

It's erotic romance. Erotica tends to put the heavy emphasis on sex and sexuality as journey. Some of the best writing I've ever read could be defined as literary erotica. I write the same thing everyone else here does, except the language I use is rougher and there's more of it. I write stories with happy endings. They might be on the fringe side of life - I write some bisexual and homosexual characters - but at the heart each of my stories is a tale about the deep love humans have for each other. I think the biggest mistake non-erotic romance readers make in judging erotic romance is to think it's all about the sex. It isn't. It's all about the emotion. If the sex is devoid of love and passion, then it doesn't work. I think it's safe to say that my work usually contains about 70% story and 30% love scenes.

**4. Do you tell your non-writing friends what you write? What are their reactions?**

I tell them what I write. If they have a problem with it, then they probably weren't my friends in the first place. And believe me, it's not just the non-writers. I've had a lot of writers tell me that what I write isn't worthy. You have to let it go or it will drive you crazy.

**5. You wrote that you still have the anxiety about readers liking your next book. Does it get any better?**

No. Never. Even in my best selling series books, I sit around and think that I have completely screwed up these characters that people love. It's really hard when you've built up a character for several books and suddenly have to write from that characters POV. It's scary.

**6. What kind of support do you get from your publisher?**

I'm with a small press publisher, but I'm amazed at the resources they have thrown my way. I've had ads in RT. The publisher has designed gorgeous banner ads promoting my two series. And I'm currently mapping out the town in my Nights in Bliss series because Siren Publishing is designing a website for Bliss, Colorado. It's going to lay out the town as I wrote it, and I get to put in the new content. It's going to be very interactive.

**7. Why do you include links to other authors and mention their books on your website?**

All of those writers are with my publishing house. We share the same reader base. If help them, they help me. Writers should support one another pure and simple. Also I've found that word of mouth (and this is just another type of that) is the best promo a small press author can have. I point out friends' books on Facebook when I think we have the same audience. I had bigger authors (Shayla Black) do this for me, and my career really took off. I can't begin to pay her back, so I try to pay it forward.

**8. Are you a seat of the pants writer or a plotter or a hybrid?**

I'm a plotter who ends up pantsing when the plot goes awry - and it almost always goes awry. Those mouthy characters always do something to screw up my previously pristine plot.

**9. What do you use to get you in the mood?**

I write best when listening to music and sprinting with friends. I have a couple of friends I sprint with. We get on a chat and then time ourselves. It's thirty minutes of not checking e-mail, not answering the phone, not doing anything but putting words on the page. At the end of the thirty minutes, we report our numbers. I find that after four of these, I end up with 3000 words for the day.

**10. If you were interviewed on radio or TV, what would you say if they asked you how you do your research?**

Research? Are you asking about the plot research I've done? I've written books about outlaw biker gangs, politicians, faeries and the Russian mob. That research? It's a lot of internet, books and talking to someone who knows. If you're asking about the other - I would tell them that my husband is a happy man. My accountant, on the other hand, gets confused when he sees the things I take off my taxes.

**11. How do you keep up with your family? Do they seem to resent the time you spend writing?**

I have two teens and a toddler. The teens only care that I take them places they need to go. My teen daughter and I have TV shows we watch together and talk about. I play a lot of Rock Band with my family. The toddler is a bit more difficult. She's with me most of the day, even when I'm writing. A lot of my writing time is spent writing a sentence here or there while also playing with bristle blocks. When I sprint, she's either napping or with my mom, who is a god send. I couldn't do it without my mom. As for the hubby, I raised our kids and handled the house while he worked a full time job and got his MBA. He would tell you this is my time. He couldn't be more supportive.

**12. What is your penname? Tell us about your latest book and how we can get it?**

I write as Sophie Oak. My latest book is Siren Enslaved. It's the third book in my Texas Sirens series. It's available at Siren-Bookstrand for the next three weeks, and then it will be available at all the major bookstores as an e-book. The print should be out in about three months.

## **SELF-EDITING WORKSHOP**

**BY NIKKI DUNCAN**

Polishing doesn't need expertise, but it does require the right tools. Heather Long is a multi-published author and non-fiction editor who uses these tools every day. Heather invites you to a working writer's workshop where you will apply these same tools and techniques to your own work in progress.

Participants should bring a work in progress with them including:

- 1st page
- 5th page
- 25th page
- 50th page
- 100th page
- Last page

In addition to those individual pages, we'll be looking at the first 10 to 25 pages of a manuscript.

Heather will also give away two 25 page critiques during the workshop.



This article was first published in MORWA's February 2011 Edition of the Rumpled Sheets.

## **FIRST PAGE OF YOUR NOVEL**

**BY KAREN HUDGINS**

Writing a first page for a new novel is often a formidable task for a writer. Understandable, as the first page has a purpose and role like no other in the book, and is as significant as a baby's first steps. For one thing, it's a unique time and way for putting an author's best foot forward through showcasing their voice to readers, to tantalize (hook), raise questions, and simply promise readers they're sliding into a good read. Much can happen at first-sight—on the surface, between the lines, or subliminally. So there's much to do and consider. These notes should help writers reach their goal: creating a fab first page!

It's easy to see that no two first pages are alike. Yet, there are some universal elements expected by readers and are inherent to story structure. Initially, everyone needs oriented. Keeping it simple, paying attention to readability and interest, works well for ushering readers into a story. Offer something familiar to readers, easy to recognize or identify with, or to gain a foothold. Then, once they're on-board by page two, blast them into fantasy. At first, have characters engage in an action that has to do with his her social context, fits the genre and the situation, and what's to come. For more orientation, it's important to clue the reader into location and the time. Are they reading an historical or contemporary, and does the story unfold in Wyoming, or in space? For stronger openings authors should avoid cliché openings like the weather, or long descriptions, information dumps, or gimmicks that are obvious hooks meant for shock value and little else.

If opening with dialogue, authors ought to give it punch, intrigue, because readers don't know the characters yet. It's just too soon, and they have no sympathy for them. Introduce likable characters in an easy-to-understand situation/moment...one that shows there are things at stake here, things can get worse, and they're worth worrying about. Reveal character attitude and/or emotion for "pull power."

At least hint at a conflict on the first page. There are countless conflicts, but what's this one? And we all know--no conflict, no book. The most effective, admirable first pages also reflect the underlying story theme or question. They could open a can of worms that gets closed by the end, making a story circle--in addition to character arc for growth, change, and realism. A seed planted on page one.

Content and writing style on the first page sets the tone and mood for the story. Good pacing for the opening scene is crucial. Starting at the right place is crucial. Save background or details for weaving later into the story.

Remember, we start with something compelling going on, or is about to happen.

Sometimes an author believes they have what they want or need as the opening, then later discover what they really have is paragraph two or three. Nothing says they can't add more material later for a better, solid opening. It's all legal.

Plant a sense of immediacy; vary sentence structures, offer narrative and dialogue for visual appeal. The book cover, the title, the back cover blurb are all "warm-ups" for Page One that intentionally scoops up readers and takes them to page two, and so on. If it's done well, is strong, on the beam with solid good writing and an understanding of how the beginnings of novels tick, first pages can rock. Good ones sell good books. That's why so much emphasis is put on them, and contests are built to honor the best. Not easy, but an author can tweak page one throughout writing the book, if that's what it takes. So relax, sort of.

A suggested exercise is to survey first pages of books at the bookstore or library or in your e-reader. Doing this reaps a volume of instant comparisons and examples, soon patterns even emerge, and a sense of why editors are acquiring those books. After all, books are the best teachers.

Prologues are another kind of opening. Prologues work for two reasons: Time gap exists and scene holds critical info to the story, or there's a critical part of the backstory that's plot relevant, which reader needs to know up front. Everything else weakens the work, and authors risk them not being read at all.

Writing first pages are indeed a challenge, but they are the best, built-in opportunity for gaining readerships. So studying them, writing them wisely, and appreciating them are all part of an author's job. Strive for the strongest beginnings and reap the early benefits by page two...and beyond. First impressions are lasting, every time, every book. Make them count.

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Karen Hudgins continues to write contemporary romantic fiction and has produced five published novels since 2001. She's a mom, holds a B.S. degree, and joined MORWA in 1992. Karen also dabbles in digital photography, particularly liking nature. She works part-time for a university and lives with her husband, dog and cat. Visit Karen at [www.karenhudgins.com](http://www.karenhudgins.com) and her publisher at [www.wingsepress.com](http://www.wingsepress.com).

## REASON'S NOT TO MISS THIS MONTH'S MEETING!!!

This is your friendly, neighborhood Hospitality Chair wanting to let you know what goodies we will have available for our March, 2011 meeting. Besides having our own editing guru, **Heather Long** leading us through (much needed by me) self-editing, we will again have some wonderful door prizes. But before I go any further, I must make an apology. I was so excited about the critiques at the meeting that I totally forgot to mention our on going items. We still have available for your personal Chapter Support, our own 'Happy Tails' T-shirts (\$12 for short sleeve and \$15 for long sleeve). Also we have a few professional badge holders still available for \$10 each. If I forget to mention them again, someone throw a chip at me and remind me. J

REMEMBER, we offer a special on door prize tickets (**6 tickets for \$5**). You might want to purchase a couple of these. Besides a nice gift basket, I have received permission to offer two more professional critiques! The first is another *twenty-five page critique* from **GYPSY SHADOW PUBLISHING** (<http://www.gypsyshadow.com>), a young but rapidly growing publishing house. The second is another *first chapter and synopsis critique* from **HARLEQUIN** (<http://www.eharlequin.com>). I think most everyone is familiar with them... A wonderful way to get a professional critique and hopefully hook a publisher.

So rob your piggy banks and hurry to our meeting for the best seats. Be ready to learn from the Mistress of Edits, Heather Long, and to win, win, win!

(Secret note: A little birdy whispered to me that Heather might have something to sweeten the door prizes as well!)

Also, I'm looking forward to offering more awesome door prizes in our future meetings. Some have already been set up (Woo Hoo!) If you have any suggestions or donations (critique, sponsor a workshop, books, etc.) for the gift baskets or have a potential contact for a professional publisher or editor that might be willing to help our cause (Having every NTRWA member published or contracted by 2012), please contact Linda Graves at [linda@lindagraves.com](mailto:linda@lindagraves.com).

See ya March 19!



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**NTRWA MONTHLY MEETING  
THIRD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH  
DOORS OPEN @ 10 A.M.  
LA HACIENDA RANCH  
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COLLEYVILLE, TX**

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