

Subject:

June 2014 Newsletter

Countdown to Nationals.

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Letter from the President

My husband was reading an article on screen plays when he asked, "Did you know you should start out and leave a scene with twenty to thirty unanswered questions?"

Scrunching my forehead, I told him I didn't know that, thinking, "That's weird, how are you supposed to do that?" Then within hours we watched the pilot for a new show called Believe. From the teaser commercials we didn't know anything about it except that there is a little blond girl with some sort of powers who is somehow vital to the world as a whole.

Now don't worry about spoilers since the show has been cancelled already.

So the first scene begins with the little blond girl, Bo, singing songs with I assume her

parents, driving down a dark road in a mini van. Except Bo calls these “parents” by their first names. Another car hits them, flipping the van and the woman of that car gets out, swaying, and makes her way to the overturned van, crying and visibly upset that she caused an accident. When she sees that mom and Bo are no longer in the van, she pulls out a gun and shoots the dad. She then tracks the girl and mom and is about to shoot the mom figure when a bunch of do-gooders show up to help with the accident and the woman backs off.

At this point, I know absolutely nothing. No back story or explanations have been given, but boy-oh-boy do I have questions.

Who is Bo? What’s so special about her? Are those her parents? If not, who are they? How did they know to get Bo out of the van to run? Who is the woman after her and why?

It goes right into the next scene with a priest going into a jail cell to give last rites to a man who is going to be executed within minutes. The dead man walking (Tate) shouts that he’s innocent. The priest says he can get him out of there if Tate will agree to do something for a little girl that only he can do. Tate agrees and a special unit goes into action and breaks him out.

What? I still have no idea what’s going on. Who is Tate? Is he really a murderer? Was he framed? Is he a liar? Why is he so special that the unit needs him? Who is the priest guy? What is the unit? Are they good guys or bad buys?

Less than ten minutes in and I literally know nothing. But am I hooked? You betcha. I have to keep watching to know the answers. It’s human nature and a little bit of ego to see if what I’m guessing is right.

But that got me thinking about my own openings. Am I layering question upon question? I don’t think I have been. I’ve been focused on making sure I’m getting all my goals, conflicts, and motivations in place. I’m placing in snippets of who the characters are, where they are from, and clues about where the plot will go, but...questions? I’m supposed to be laying down a trail of questions?

I feel like Heidi Klum in that shampoo commercial where she says, “All this time, we’ve been working on the wrong end of hair!”

Heck, yeah, I want to keep readers on the edge of their seats with anticipation. I want them so curious they have to keep reading. I want them to feel satisfied when they're right or I want them to think I'm utterly brilliant when they are surprised.

Ugh, all this time I've been working on the wrong end of GMC. Okay, back to the plotting notebook. My new technique: In this scene, what questions do I want my readers to ask?

As always, merry writing and have a wonderful summer. For those who will be traveling over the next couple of months, have fun, be safe, we'll miss you and will be glad to see you upon your return.

Take care,

Clover Autrey
NTRWA President

Upcoming June Meeting:

Jen FitzGerald and Intrigue Author Angi Morgan

Jen is going to share the most common issues she comes across when copy editing.

Angi will talk about creating your personalized book signing kit.

Getting to Know Our Members:

Question: What's your writing process? Minimum number of words/pages a day?

Writing sprints?etc.

D'Ann Burrow: I always write the end of the book (final chapter, big climax) first - I like to know where I'm going and make sure I know who's in the scene. These moments might change a little as the book progresses, but I use them as a guide to make sure I'm not getting too far off of my intended destination.

I'm not a big outliner. I have "big" moments mapped out before I get started, but I don't plan all the book prior to getting started. (The language arts teacher in me cringes at that admission....brainstorming, outlining, prewriting....yeah - not so much for me.)

I don't have a per day goal set. My schedule varies a lot from day to day, so I try to just take the opportunity to write while I can. I tend to work best in 90 minute to 2 hour chunks.

I LOVE doing book in a week. I've done several with KOD, and they really seem to help me get a book either started off or finished off. I don't think I've ever REALLY finished an entire "bare bones" book during the week, but they've been lifesavers when I've invested the time. I don't think I could constantly work at that speed, though.

I do have a few habits when I write. I have a playlist of music for each book, but some songs transfer from one to another (my daughter fondly refers to them as my emo-writing-soundtrack). I also really like candles. I have different scents for different books. I know, kind of odd. And I chew gum. It does tend to drive my family a bit insane...apparently I chew LOUDLY when I'm writing an intense scene, but the gum chewing helps me focus (and I can shut the doors to my office).

Pitch Anxiety

By Carolina Montague

Okay, you've lived with your book for the past several months or years, but now you have to condense it, craft it, and shape it into nifty little sound bites, nuggets, and a high-concept

juicy summary so you can sell it to a publisher or obtain an agent. Or maybe you have to do all this because you are indie-published and are going to Romantic Times Booklovers Convention, and will be talking to fans about your latest release. Wherever you fit into the changing landscape of publishing, at some time you will need to have those sound bites, nuggets, and high-concept summaries ready for your audience. All of these summaries, based on the time it takes to convey them, come under the term “pitch.”

The dictionary has many definitions of the word *pitch*. It can refer to a hue, pitch black. But it's most common definition is to throw, hurl, toss, or fling. It always felt that way to me, no matter how it was packaged. It felt unnatural. It felt violent.

Some people can do this, and do it well. I've watched and learned a lot over the years in San Francisco Area RWA pitch sessions guided by Lynn Hanna, Alice Gaines, and Jasmine Haynes.

Types of Pitches

There are three basic flavors of the pitch.

Elevator pitch: The elevator pitch is a condensation of your book into one to two sentences, which is about how long it takes for an elevator to get from one floor to another. At RWA National, before you venture out of your hotel room to the conference rooms, it's good to have this ready in case an editor or agent is riding in the elevator with you. It's also good to have ready at Romantic Times Book-lovers Convention in case someone who is a big fan of your sub-genre, but doesn't know your books yet, happens to be next to you in the elevator.

Dinner-table pitch: A slightly longer version of your pitch is for when you meet and greet people at lunch, dinner, or between sessions at a conference. If you manage to sit at a table next to an editor or an agent, this longer version will allow you to make contact and summarize your book succinctly, though this can be longer than the one or two sentences of the elevator pitch, but still short, so they don't feel overwhelmed by it, and can enjoy their lunch.

Classic pitch: The classic pitch is for the sessions at a conference where editors and agents have donated their time to listen to authors describe their books. You usually have five to ten minutes for this one, and there is a flow to it, a give and take, where the agent or editor can ask questions about your book. This allows you to demonstrate your author's voice. For the indie-published or authors not seeking representation or publishers, unless you are already a name brand like Nora Roberts, it's probably a good idea to have this ready for your latest book, so you can chat with folks about your work. The classic pitch is also a good marketing tool. In *52 Ways to Sell More Books*, author Penny Sansevieri points out that the pitch can be used “to promote yourself to the media, or to book a speaking event, or to pitch a blogger.”

The pitch is not just for getting your book published. It is more and more a tool for promoting your books.

The Psychology of Pitching

Still, even though I know all this, I *totally suck* at all the forms of pitching. It took me a long time to become even halfway decent at pitching my books. I had to work really hard to not cringe as I tried to explain the complex plots of my long-ass books and even the shorter books with simpler plots were hard to convey because I would trip myself up. For example, at an editor and agent meeting at RWA National, I pitched what would become my eventual release, *Sacred Guardian*. I launched into my high-concept spiel, and then the summary, which I'd carefully timed to get as much of the story into the short time allowed as possible. But I got nervous, ended up just describing the first half of the book and rushed to the conclusion. They asked for a synopsis and a partial, out of pity.

I made all the mistakes in the book. I tried to tie my book in to a “high-concept trend,” for example, “City of Angels meets Riddick.” Mystery writer Merry Jones advises against this, though she suggests that you “help the agent place the book on a mental shelf,” which in my case, would have been, “A Knight in Shining Armor meets The Time Travelers Wife.” Merry Jones also says, “Don't ramble.” Her advice came way too late for me.

My complete and utter failure at this didn't make sense to me, because I had my “job talk,” my “lunch talk” and my “elevator speech” all ready when I went on the job market for a professional job after I completed my doctorate.

What is it about writing fiction that had me stumbling over the plot and characters? I knew them just as well as I knew the results I'd found in my study of job stress, burnout, and conflict between work and family roles among men and women working in high tech industries. Why was it that I could give the short, medium, and long versions of a 200-page dissertation, but could not for the life of me condense my 400-page medieval paranormal? Sure, I'd lived with the research and writing of the dissertation longer, but come on! I had to defend my work, methodology, and results to an often hostile group of faculty. I managed to do that and even got job offers. In the three types of pitches, I didn't even have to defend my characters or my plot. Or did I?

Let's see, body language when pitching—hunched over, almost hyper-ventilating. Yep, defensive behavior. So what was I defending?

It was simple. For some people, books are like babies. If you're not sure if you fit into this category, try this: imagine yourself summarizing a film you really like to someone you strike up a conversation with on public transit. Not hard, right? Now imagine the same scenario, expect you are summarizing your latest book. If you find yourself floundering or cringing in the latter scenario, you may need distance from your creation so you can be objective, yet enthusiastic.

Cures for Pitch Anxiety

I looked at all kinds of pitches— people who were really good at it and people like me who had difficulty pitching my babies out into the ether where they could be dissected and rejected. I came to the conclusion that in my case, I needed that combination of distance and passion.

There are many ways to do this. I like to report on personal experience in Promotion Posse, so I'll just list some and tell you what I found that worked best for me.

One way to break through "pitch anxiety" is to write down your story, but limit yourself to two paragraphs. What does the hero want and fear?

What does the heroine want and fear? What comes between the hero and what he wants? What comes between the heroine and what she wants? This is the same type of exercise you do for a back-cover blurb, so it is a really good thing to do anyway.

Now, consider your audience. What does your book offer to them? Is it a story of love and redemption? Betrayal and forgiveness? Penny Sansevieri suggests making a list of at least ten things your book offers readers.

Finally, the best way I found to overcome pitch anxiety was to write that back-cover blurb, pepper it with juicy nuggets from scenes that bring out what the book would offer to an audience, and practice it until it becomes second nature. It's the same thing a therapist recommended to me when I had difficulty driving on the freeway over bridges. He said "I want you to go on the freeway at 2 AM and drive over and back again at least five times." This was before going over the bridge became so expensive, but it worked!

So, practice, practice, practice. It's really good to practice at SFA-RWA meetings. It's a safe place to talk about your books. Also, take advantage of pitch sessions when they are offered. Have pitch sessions with your critique group. It's a really fabulous way to get feedback and tweak your promo-pitches because your critique partners know your book.

So, over time I did these things. Pitching a completed book became second nature (I can't do this for a work-in-progress). I noticed this when I flew to Florida recently and found myself giving elevator pitches at the airport waiting for the flight, meet-and-greet lunch pitches on the plane, and finally, a spirited pitch of *Sacred Guardian* at a gathering of Bible studies octogenarians at my father's church. The only problem was that I'd brought only one copy with me. I sold it to the woman who wanted to read it first and they are still passing it around.

Resources

Sansevieri, P. *52 Ways to Sell More Books*. www.amazon.com/52-Ways-Sell-More-Books/dp/1604947187

Jones, M. *How to Pitch Agents at a Writers Conference*. www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents/how-to-pitch-agents-at-a-writers-conference

CAROLINA MONTAGUE is the author of several works of paranormal romance.

The following article first appeared in the May 2014 issue of *Heart of the Bay*, the newsletter of the San Francisco Area chapter of RWA. Permission is granted to RWA chapters to reprint or forward this article with proper credit to the author and chapter.

Getting to Know Our Members:

Question: What's your writing process? Minimum number of words/pages a day?
Writing sprints?etc.

Angi Morgan: My best writing days are completely non-distracted. I try to reach 2,000 good words a day, and not beat myself up on the days I can't. I jump into a chat room and my slave-driving writing mates keep sprints going, pushing me to write more than I normally putz around accomplishing. We sprint...even if revising or working on promo. We encourage each other even to take breaks. It's better than being in an office...no pantyhose.

Sell More Books with Your Promise of the Experience

By Ezra Barany w/a Liz Adams

Nearly all book sales are caused by word of mouth. What about books that aren't well-known? How can you sell your novel if no one's talking about it?

Many authors think that as long as they write a good story, readers will buy their book. The reality is that if a browsing reader has never heard of your book before, they may stumble upon your book but they won't buy it unless you give them a strong promise of the experience they can expect to have. Readers don't buy books based on the storyline (though they incorrectly believe they do). Readers buy books because they fall in love with the idea of the experience they can expect to have. How can you convey your book's promise of the experience?

Cover

There's a good reason the phrase "don't judge a book by its cover" came into being. Everyone does it. Since people judge a book by its cover, demonstrate the emotional experience your story evokes with the cover's image.

Is your book a romance? Convey the intimacy. Is your book a horror story? Convey the fear. Is your book a thriller? Convey the danger. Evoke a strong visceral response with your cover image. A good publisher will ask you what experience your novel generates so that they can match that experience with their cover image and font.

I know a brilliant writer whose small press publisher took his coming-of-age action novel set in the Gold Rush and pasted a landscape painting on the cover. Since I design book covers for myself, my wife, and our clients, he asked me what I thought of the cover. I told him that the cover promised me I'd be reading about the peaceful life of a mountain. He huffed his annoyance at his publisher and stormed away. If that should happen to you, if your publisher doesn't deliver on providing an effective book cover, the good news is that you both want the same thing: more book sales. So talk to your publisher in terms of how to trigger more book sales and they'll likely listen to your ideas on changing the book cover.

Title

More often than not, I see titles that promise nothing or just confuse me. Often, the name of the protagonist is the book title. If a novel were called *Rose Walker*, would that be a book about someone who walks roses? Doubtful. More likely, the book is about a woman named Rose Walker. Who cares?

If you're locked into wanting a specific title that, unfortunately, doesn't convey any experience, that's fine. You can evoke the experience in the subtitle. I titled my latest book *36 Righteous: A Serial Killer's Hit List*. By itself, "36 Righteous" doesn't convey much. The subtitle, "A Serial Killer's Hit List," does. In fact, I met an ultra-Orthodox Jew on the bus and I told him the full title. He knew the Jewish legend of the thirty-six righteous, so he scowled and said, "If the thirty-six righteous are killed, God will destroy the Earth." For him, not only did my title convey the experience, but it also conveyed the storyline. A book will likely sell better if the promise of the experience is conveyed in the title.

Yes, there are exceptions. Thousands of books out there don't have titles that evoke the experience. *Harry Potter*? A lousy title. *The Hobbit*? Doesn't tell me anything (what's a hobbit?). *The Hunger Games*? That just confuses me (who has fun being hungry?). My guess is people bought those books because their friends kept raving about how great the books were. The books sold because of word-of-mouth praise, not because of their titles.

Imagine a woman whose son is a fantasy reader. If she stumbled upon a book she had never heard of before called *Harry Potter* and another book called *Wizard School for Kids: A Boy's Adventure*, which book do you think she'd buy for her son? My advice? Convey the experience in your title. Don't hope to be the exception.

Book Descriptions and Book Trailers

Too often I see book descriptions and book trailer videos that show the storyline. That's fine later on, but at the top of the book description or at the beginning of the book trailer,

I'm not interested in the storyline. I'm not interested in hearing about how Rose Walker is a young woman who, when Philip Conner writes her love notes, must choose between him or her career as a CFO of a cattle company in Arizona.

Instead, start by conveying the promise of the experience. How? I prefer to deliver the high concept pitch. The high concept pitch compares your novel to popular stories or movies, swiftly conveying the experience. The high concept pitch for my first book, *The Torah Codes*, is "a Jewish version of *The Da Vinci Code*." The *Rose Walker* story? Instead of starting with the storyline, I think it would be more powerful to start by saying the novel *Rose Walker* is "Sleepless in Seattle with cowboys."

You've Promised, Now Deliver

As an author of erotic fairy tales, I've had issues with delivering on my promise. For example, my erotic version of Goldilocks, *Goldie's Locks and the Three Men*, has a title that promises the experience of a foursome between Goldie and three buff guys. But I didn't want to have a foursome in the story because, in my opinion, group sex strips away the intimacy and relationship arc the characters can have. To deal with this, I made the cover show Goldie with just one man, not three.

In my mind, the cover image helped with promising the experience of intimacy, but I knew there would still be readers expecting a four-some. My solution? I had my character Goldie discover a girlie magazine which featured a series of photos showing a woman dressed as Goldilocks having sex with three men dressed as bears. The protagonist Goldie describes her reaction to each picture, imagining what a foursome might be like, but knowing she could never truly enjoy such a thing. There. My protagonist could continue having meaningful relationships, and the readers who hoped for a foursome got that, too.

The Stronger the Better

You already desire to trigger a strong emotion with your novel. Perhaps you want your readers to hold their splitting sides, or snag some tissues, or grip their seat, or lock their windows. Whatever your book does to the reader, see if you can trigger that same degree of emotion with your cover, title, and book description. If you can, you've promised the reader what she can expect, and if she likes what she's feeling, she'll reach out for more by clicking the "buy" button.

EZRA BARANY is the author of the bestselling novel, The Torah Codes. His alter ego, LIZ ADAMS, writes erotica based on fairy tales, the most recent of which is the bestseller Goldie's Locks and the Three Men.

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Getting to Know Our Members:

Question: What's your writing process? Minimum number of words/pages a day?
Writing sprints?etc.

Clover Autrey: I write every weekday (weekends are free) at least an hour. Sometimes I can get in as much as three hours, but that's rare. I don't sprint or chat with anyone. I write straight through a book in order from beginning to end (which has already been heavily plotted) and only then do I go back and edit. I also write long hand so my first edit happens as I type.

A Note from the Newsletter Editor:

Please note photos included in the newsletter are provided by the members. Any photos you'd like to include can be sent to newsletter@ntrwa.org. It is at the discretion of the newsletter editor as to which photos will be included in the newsletter. Thank you.

May 2014 Meeting Minutes:

CALL TO ORDER:

A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on Saturday, May 17, 2014 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The President and Secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 10:34 a. m. The minutes for the April meeting were tabled for corrections. Approval will occur online.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President: Clover Autrey reported:

- Requesting volunteers for our contests, The Carolyn and Great Expectations.

President-Elect: Angi Morgan was not present:

- No Report

Secretary: Lisa Fenley reported:

- Marsha West will send corrections needed for April minutes.

Treasurer: Jen FitzGerald reported:

- The Treasurer's report was presented and filed for audit.

Program Director: Lara Lacombe was not present. Clover Autrey reported:

- Today's program is about author SWAG.

Membership Director: Gina Nelson reported:

- 66 members to date.
- Guests at meeting:
 - Sheila Curlin

Communications Director: Kim Miller reported:

- Send information / articles for inclusion in the newsletter to newsletter@NTRWA.org by May 28.

Website Director:

COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:

PAN Liaison: Chrissy Szarek reported:

- Presented pencils to:

PRO Liaison: Jeanne Guzman was not present:

Great Expectations: Angi Morgan was not present:

Carolyn Contest: Jen FitzGerald reported:

- No report.

Hospitality: Michelle Welsh reported:

- No report.

Audio Librarian: Debra Owens was not present:

Writing Incentives: Christine Crocker was not present. Clover Autrey reported:

- Distributed writing incentives.

Texas Two-Step: Lara Lacombe was not present:

- Signing at the Southlake Barnes and Noble rescheduled for June 14.

Bylaws: Angi Morgan was not present:

- No Report

Spotlights: Regina Richards reported:

- Robin Nelson is our spotlight for May.

Unfinished Business:

- No unfinished business to report.
-

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Our mailing address is:

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

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