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Stick to it and crank up the music.



Founded March 1983

Chapter 33, Region 5

March 2015

Volume 34, Issue 3

Letter from the President

STICK-TO-IT-NESS

Music has always been inspirational to me. It gets me in a great mood, pulls me out of a funk (do people still say funk?), calms me when I'm driving (try getting angry to John Denver). My friend Sarah Cannon (writing as [Lauren Canan](#)), just published her first book with Harlequin Desire. We recently celebrated by having a her first joint book signing (with Lara Lacombe). Before we went inside, I played a song >> ***I'M ON TOP OF THE WORLD*** by *Imagine Dragons* << which has come to mean a lot to me.

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There's a particular verse that applies to both mine and Sarah's careers.

*I've tried to cut these corners
Try to take the easy way out
I kept on falling short of something
I coulda gave up then but
Then again I couldn't have 'cause
I've traveled all this way for something*

Sarah and I started in this crazy writing business about the same time. We both tried to give up and walk away. But there was no way around it. We are writers.

WE. ARE. WRITERS.

You began this journey and you've traveled all this way for something. It might be the first book, finding a publisher, getting over a bad review, or just getting through the middle of the latest book you're writing. But you don't give up. You stick with it. 'CAUSE...

*'Cause I'm on top of the world, 'ay
I'm on top of the world, 'ay
Waiting on this for a while now
Paying my dues to the dirt
I've been waiting to smile, 'ay
Been holding it in for a while, 'ay
Take you with me if I can
Been dreaming of this since a child
I'm on top of the world.*

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So here's a special SHOUT OUT to Sarah for her fifteen years of **STICK-TO-IT-NESS**. So proud of you, my friend.

~Angi

Upcoming March 21st Meeting:

Kim Farbisz, the owner of Coaching 2 Win, Topic: The Mental Game: Performing Your Best When It Matters Most

What is the Mental Game? It is the self-coaching that you do every day. It is all of the things you tell yourself about your capabilities, performance, worthiness, etc. It can make the difference between being scattered, insecure, and vulnerable; or pulled together, confident and in control. It helps people perform their best when it matters most.

Come to the March 21st meeting and learn how to mentally prepare yourself for success each and every day. Specifically, the learning objectives are:

- How to be accountable to yourself
- The importance of focus and what to focus on
- The success versus failure dichotomy and how to use it to propel yourself upward
- How to use competitiveness to create win-win situations
- A mental exercise you can do that will put you in a successful state of mind every time

How is your mental game? Could it use a pep talk and some training? If so, come listen to

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Business Coach and Consultant, KIM TAPISZ at the March meeting. Come polish up your mental game and be able to perform your best when it matters most!

MEMBER NEWS

The West Texas Watchmen -- Angi Morgan's series about West Texas from Harlequin Intrigue releases January, February & March. **THE CATTLEMAN** was #25 on the Trade Paperback Publisher's Weekly list.



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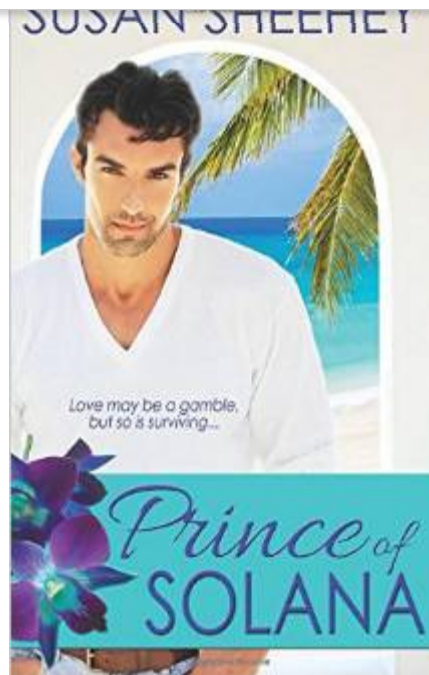
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usan Sheehey - New release, *Prince of Solana*, now for sale.



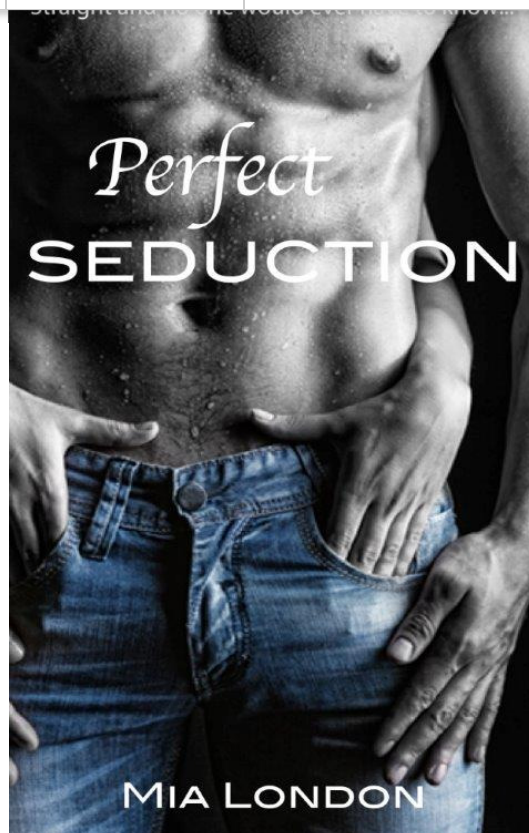
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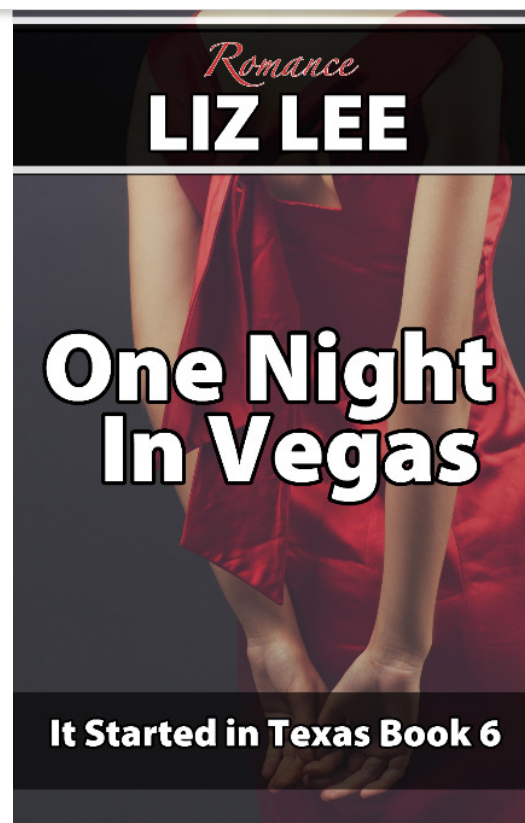
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Mia London - Two-book series is out (or in preorder). Book 1 is live on BN and Amazon, and Book 2 is in preorder.

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Liz Lee - *One Night In Vegas*, the last book in *It Started in Texas*, a steamy romance series, debuted Feb. 28.



Lara Lacombe - Sold a book to Harlequin Romantic Suspense. It's Book 3 in the upcoming *Coltons of Texas* series.

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DID YOU KNOW

by Angi Morgan

We're sending a big Texas THANK YOU to an amazing trio this month. Two past presidents and our PAN Liaison. Thanks **Jen FitzGerald**, for jumping in once again to pull off the CAROLYN contest. Did you know her son is now serving in the Navy?
CONGRATULATIONS!

Clover Autrey is neck deep in the contest, too. Her life is always full of challenges, she's amazing. Did you know you can find her inspirational president columns on our [website](#)?

NT's very very lucky to have **Chrissy Szarek** around. We award jumbo pencils for each sale by an author. Did you know that they stopped manufacturing JUMBO pencils? Chrissy went above and beyond finding more for NT.

I hope you'll send these amazing ladies a line to share your thanks or a note of encouragement to brighten their days. Jen: jen@stormsedge.com; Clover: cloverautrey@gmail.com & Chrissy: caszarek@hotmail.com

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media is important to a writer's world. Complete the social media form <http://ntrwagreatexpectations.blogspot.com/p/ntrwa-social-media-form.html> and get connected with other NT members.

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Let us know if you have a # (hashtag) specific to promoting North Texas authors. Share other hashtags on our loop or with the hashtags below.

#TXauthors

#ntrwa-gecontest

#dara-ntrwa-pals

Interesting Articles on the Web:

<http://www.novelrocket.com/2015/03/be-careful-out-there-cyber-security.html>

This article was first used in the Sacramento Valley Rose RWA March/April 2015 Newsletter. Rights are granted by the author for circulation to other RWA chapters.

Writers Write

by Allison Brennan, SVR Member

When I was thirteen I wrote a fan letter to Stephen King and told him I wanted to be a writer when I grew up. He sent me a postcard that said, "If you want to be a writer, write."

I didn't quite get it at the age of thirteen, but now I certainly understand what he meant. Writers write. It doesn't matter if you're ten, thirteen, thirty or fifty, writer's write.

Because writer's *write*, we fear writer's block. There's this *thing* out there—this evil, insidious monster—named Writer's Block. It's terrifying. It's cruel. It can destroy our confidence, kill our muse, stop our fingers from flying across the keyboard.

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Do you want to write or don't you? If your answer is "yes, but," then here's a small editing tip: what you're doing is using six letters and two words to say "no." And that's fine. Just don't kid yourself as to what "yes, but" means. -- John Scalzi

The thing with the menacing Writer's Block is that it's a fictitious monster, like Shadowman or the Boogeyman or the psychopathic clown who lives in the sewer. We give life to this monster when we fear it. That means because we *think* that Writer's Block is in fact something that exists and can destroy us, it grows in power until it does in fact exist.

My kids used to watch this show called *Veggie Tales* which had singing and dancing vegetables who taught a moral lesson. One of the episodes was called "The Rumor Weed" and it was about this tiny plant that grew every time someone gossiped or spread a rumor. The plant grew and grew until the city was destroyed.

Writer's Block behaves exactly like the Rumor Weed. Every time you fear, doubt, think you *can't* do something, Writer's Block grows and becomes more real, and soon you *can't* write and, de facto, have through your fear created a real life Writer's Block. It's as if Poe's *Cask of Amontillado* separates you from your story. A real, physical prison.

The first thing you need to do to destroy Writer's Block is understand *why* you're not writing.

The number one reason you are not writing is not because of writer's block. It's not because you plotted your book or didn't plot your book. The number one reason you are not writing is because of fear.

You can explain it any way you want, but FEAR is the great de-motivator.

To paraphrase Steven Pressfield in his *THE WAR OF ART*:

Resistance is invisible, internal, insidious, impersonal. It is the enemy within. Everyone experiences resistance.

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In essence, Resistance *feeds* on fear.

Don't lie to yourself. Don't make up excuses. If you want to write, write. If you don't want to write, don't write. Never blame anyone but yourself, because *no one on this planet cares whether you are published except you.*

There are a hundreds of thousands people who say they're writing a book. Will they finish? 99% won't. Don't be one of the masses. And of the 1% who *do* finish, most won't show it to anyone, or edit it, or do what it takes to turn a ho-hum manuscript into a sellable story.

If writing is as much a part of you as breathing, then write. If you'd rather be gardening or watching television or saving the world, by all means *do it.*

Do you want to write?

If the answer is "YES!" then don't let Writer's Block into your life. If the answer is "Yes, but..." take a deep breath, find out what's demoralizing you, and conquer it. Or find something else to do.

William Goldman said, "The easiest thing to do is not to write."

Think about that. It's *easy* to not write. It's *easy* to blame not writing on the monstrous Writer's Block. Then it's not your fault, right?

But it is your fault. You let that monster into your life. You helped it grow from a small, niggling fear into a terrifying prison.

But there are times when you sit down to write and can't think of anything to say. I can share advice from a hundred writers ... like Nora Roberts who says, "*I can fix a written page; I can't fix a blank one.*"

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Or Margaret Atwood who said, *"If I waited for perfection, I'd never write a word."*

Or James Thurber who said, *"Don't get it right, just get it written."*

Fear is powerful. And the fear that you're writing crap can stop the most talented writers dead in their tracks.

It's happened to me. It's probably happened to nearly every writer out there. Self-doubt is rooted in fear, and an author's worst enemy. I've always been critical of my writing, I've always been afraid that what I'm writing isn't good enough, that I'll never get better, but I never doubted that I could write. I don't believe in writer's block as an insurmountable wall, but instead an excuse not to write.

Doubt isn't writer's block. Doubt is much, much worse.

"You let self-doubt get a hold of you, it'll kill your work dead. You'll stop in the middle of a project, then print the manuscript out for the sole purpose of urinating on its pages before glumly eating them." – Chuck Wendig

Every writer doubts. It's par for the course, not just of writers but most artists. Not just of artists, but most human beings. We are creatures of doubt.

2010 started a series of changes in my career. First, I left the agent I'd had since the beginning of my career. I went on an agent hunt ... and the first three agents I contacted rejected me. My supernatural thriller series failed in a pretty spectacular way. Then, I saw the writing on the wall with my publisher—my gut told me I needed to leave. I changed houses in 2011—fortunately on my own terms—landing with an editor who had a fabulous reputation and I was excited to be working with.

Except. After seventeen books with the same editorial team, I didn't know if I could write for someone else. I had developed some lazy habits—such as sending my editor my rough

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draft, confident that I'd have time for revisions. I realized I shouldn't do this to my new editor, that I needed to write a perfect book. I desperately wanted to hit the book out of the ballpark. I wanted it to be the best book I'd ever written. It *had* to be the best book I'd ever written.

That's when I killed my creativity.

Every scene was agony. I wrote and rewrote the opening dozens of times and hated every word. Not only was the story imperfect, it was total and complete garbage.

Delete. Start over. Again, and again, and again.

As my deadline neared, the story suffered. I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know how I was going to tie up all these threads, even in a crappy draft. I'd resigned myself to submit a rough draft because I no longer had time to finish and edit before I sent the book to my editor. I wrote every day, and night, for hours—sometimes staring at the computer so long I lost track of time. I easily wrote 5,000 words a day, but most of them I deleted the next day or a week later. I edited as I went, thinking my book would be clean. I ended up scrapping most of it. If I added up every word I wrote, I wouldn't be surprised if I wrote over a million words to create this 100,000 word novel.

No one can write a clean, perfect book. Convinced that I had to, I'd put an impossible goal in front of me. Every day I opened the file was another day I saw myself as a failure because the book was not perfect. I second-guessed every story decision I made.

In the middle of all this, my last book with Ballantine came out. It was orphaned. They printed far fewer copies than my previous books. They forgot to print a burst on the cover to inform readers there was a bonus novella inside; it didn't get on the shelves in stores when it was supposed to, and sales fell because it wasn't widely available. I couldn't write anything worth saving during that release week.

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Before I sold my first book, I remember writing for the sheer joy of writing. I loved telling stories, and didn't care whether they sounded good or whether scenes worked, I just wrote the stories as they came to me. My first four books never sold, nor should they have, but each one gave me many hours of pleasure in their creation.

I had somehow lost that. The doubt, the panic, the fear had landed, and no inspirational motivator could bring it back. I wanted to throttle Steven Pressfield or burn my dog-eared copy of his book.

"That's the horrible thing about self-doubt: it convinces us that our own failure is inevitable, an unavoidable recourse based on our own screaming lack of talent. But failure isn't inevitable, and in fact failure is created by a fear of failure and by our certain uncertainty we possess about our own ability to succeed. Writers engineer their own failure with such grace and elegance it's almost impressive. Remember: failure is not a foregone conclusion." – Chuck Wendig

As Pressfield says in *THE WAR OF ART*:

"The amateur believes he must first overcome his fear; then he can do his work. The professional knows that fear can never be overcome. He knows there is no such thing as a fearless warrior or a dread-free artist."

If being a dread-filled artist is a good thing, then I'm probably the best damn artist out there. Laurie Halse Anderson said on her blog that *"the Demons of Doubt will always sit on your shoulders. Sorry. It's a law of writing physics. You cannot banish them, but you can defang them."*

Which goes perfectly with Chuck Wendig's advice on *how* to defang the Doubt Demons:

"You mustn't be seduced by the callous whispers of the doubting monster at your back. To survive as a writer you must wheel on the beast, your sharpened pen at hand. Then you must spear him to the earth."

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I don't know if understanding why the Doubt Demons invaded my muse actually fixes the problem, because the doubt is still there. Yet, I finished SILENCE. I turned in an imperfect book. I cried. My editor gave me notes and I fixed the book. It was the hardest book I've ever written – not because it was the best book or the most complex story, but because I had set myself up for failure before I even typed the first word.

Since SILENCED was published in April of 2012, I've written nine books and five novellas. None of them were as hard as that book, but none of them have been easy. Some, however, are easier than others. Every day is a writing day. I cherish the good writing days and chalk up the bad days as a learning experience.

Yes, I still doubt. Yes, there are some days I find it harder to write than others. But I write every day because if I don't, I give the Doubt Demon, the Writer's Block, fuel to grow and stifle me.

Over the years, I've learned a few tricks to help me get out of that cycle of destruction.

First and foremost, I'll repeat what James Thurber said. *"Don't get it right, just get it written."*

Editing is your friend. Editing is your *best* friend. No one writes a perfect first draft, and to believe that you can sets you up for failure and disappointment. Get the story down. Know that you will be able to fix any plot holes, poor word choices, repetition, bad grammar. No one publishes their first draft. If they do, they are a fool.

When I get stuck, nine times out of ten it's because I'm forcing my characters to do something they would not do. I don't plot—I'm an organic writer—but sometimes I get this idea in my head of a great scene and I'm trying to write *toward* that great scene, forcing my characters and situations into an unnatural position. Then ... I'm stuck, because my subconscious knows that I'm not letting the story move along its natural course.

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What do I do? I re-read everything I've written and try hard not to think about the so-called perfect scene. I look at where my characters went "out of character" and then I edit. I let the characters drive the story. Sometimes I still get that scene I envision, just in a different way than I imagined.

"I've often said that there's no such thing as writer's block; the problem is idea block. When I find myself frozen--whether I'm working on a brief passage in a novel or brainstorming about an entire book--it's usually because I'm trying to shoehorn an idea into the passage or story where it has no place." -- Jeffery Deaver

Sometimes we need to step back from our story and characters and re-fuel our stubborn muse. (My muse is a bitch, but I love her anyway.)

Go to Starbucks or a bar. Bring pen and paper or your laptop. Watch people or eavesdrop for a few minutes, then write one scene based on your observations. Make up anything you want, but write a complete scene—beginning, middle, and end . . . with a cliffhanger.

Go to an art museum or art festival. The first piece of work you are drawn to, take a picture (if they allow it. If they don't, sneak a picture anyway but don't tell them I told you to do it!) Put that picture on your computer and write a poem, scene, short story, or even one sentence focused on the EMOTION of the art.

Read a favorite book. Watch a favorite movie. Leave the house and go to the theater. See a movie or a stage play or maybe a concert. Immerse yourself in another story and maybe you'll see your own story in a different light.

Choose your own story. Take a familiar story (like Cinderella, the Wizard of Oz, Star Wars, etc.) and when the protagonist has to make a choice, have her make a *different* choice, and write down what happens.

Think outside the box. Don't write what you think should happen – shake things up for your

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Characters:

Remember to have fun. Writing is hard work. Don't think that just because it's not easy that you're no good or that you're stuck. Remember why you love to write, and find ways to bring the joy back into writing.

Don't listen to everyone all the time. There is a time to listen and a time to shut the door. Shut the door because sometimes, all those voices can create Writer's Block. Barbara Kingsolver said, *"Close the door. Write with no one looking over your shoulder. Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It's the one and only thing you have to offer."*

Write daily. Even if it's only 100 words or thirty minutes a day. Make it a habit to write every day. The more you sit down to write, the more you will write. If writing daily is impossible—and I mean truly impossible—then write consistently. If you can only write on the weekends because of a career or family, take six hours on the weekend and schedule in your writing time. Make your writing time sacred.

Ultimately, you are your own worst enemy. Writers write. If you're a writer ... sit down. Pick up a pen or turn on the computer. And start writing.

This article is a combination of a speech to the Houston Romance Writers in February 2015 and Allison's "No Plotters Allowed" workshop presented to several chapters, including the national Romance Writers of America conference.

Allison Brennan is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of 25 romantic thrillers and numerous short stories. Allison currently writes the Lucy Kincaid romantic suspense series and the Max Revere investigative reporter mysteries. Her upcoming releases include *COMPULSION* (4.7.15) and *BEST LAID PLANS* (8.4.15). She lives in Northern California with her husband, five children, and numerous pets. Visit her at allisonbrennan.com.

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The following article first appeared in the March 2015 issue of In Print!, the monthly newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA. Permission granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA chapters with proper credit to author and chapter.

Judging the Golden Heart or Why Every Writer Needs a Good Editor

By Julie Glover

Judge the Golden Heart? Sure, I thought. Why not?

So I signed up as a volunteer judge for this RWA National contest for unpublished writers. The judging procedure is different from chapter-run contests, with no place for comments or critique. Rather, judges read entries, then answer three questions:

1. Is the love story the main focus of the book?
2. Is the resolution of the romance emotionally satisfying and optimistic?
3. How do you rate this book? (From 1 to 10, including decimals.)

I received my five entries and started reading the partial manuscripts. The variation in quality was startling. One entry was nowhere near ready, and the author needed to learn more craft. One entry was excellent and felt ready to be sent out. Then, there were three in between—all promising authors, but their stories simply were not there yet.

These three entries contained some beautiful lines, character or setting description, and good story ideas. But the problems in each should have been caught by a good critique partner or quality editor. Which makes me wonder if these writers pursued that—editing, I mean.

Through this experience, I saw for myself what I've heard again and again from literary

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agents. You can tell in the first several pages if the author is worth working with. You immediately sense whether they've invested in learning craft, in writing and rewriting until the manuscript sparkles, in getting critique and correction so the story flows.

And grammar? I can't imagine a few errors in a terrific story sinking your manuscript's chances with an agent or publisher, but a large number of errors communicates you don't care about your reader's experience enough to make it flow. It's flat-out distracting to read through a manuscript that doesn't even bother to get commas in the right place. It's difficult to digest the story itself when you're choking through too many fixable mistakes.

Every writer needs a good editor.

My heart cracked a little with the entries that could have been much better with more extensive or deeper, or perhaps any, editing. Being a copy editor as well as a writer, I so wanted to correct errors in the stories myself and send them back with comments and encouragement. My message would have been: "Keep honing your wonderful writing talent, and find a good editor!"

How do you find such an editor? Easier said than done, of course. But cull from your writing chapter and online critique groups, tag up with someone through social media who seems to match your style, ask around and hire a professional editor, or check your local college for proofreaders who advertise their services.

Put your manuscript in front of others' eyes and get their feedback. And make sure at least one of the people who looks at your novel is a super-savvy, English-obsessed, language-lovin' grammar geek. Don't expect all that editing will occur after your book is sold, because you might never reach that point if your story is mired with mistakes.

We writers do the hard work to make our readers' experience as smooth as possible. Since we can't catch everything ourselves, write your best, search for quality editing, then send your work out—confident your story shines like gold.

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raised on Nancy Drew and Laura Ingalls Wilder, Julie Glover spent much of her childhood and beyond making up stories in her head. One day, she decided to write them down. Julie now writes young adult fiction and lives with her husband, two sons, and a geriatric cat in Friendswood, Texas.

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@nrwa.org. It is at the discretion of the newsletter editor as to which photos will be included in the newsletter. Thank you.

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February 2015 meeting minutes.

CALL TO ORDER:

A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on Saturday, February 21, 2015 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The President and the Secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 10:47 a.m. The minutes for the December 13, 2014 meeting and the January 17, 2015 meeting minutes were approved.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President: Angi Morgan reported:

- Presented Dakota Byrd with the Rising Star Award for writing the most words for an unpublished author for 2014.
- Audra Lewandowski asked members to send their social media links to her so that we can share information.
- Online voting results:
 - May meeting will reschedule to the second Saturday. (Reschedule due to RT Conference.)
 - Texas Two Step will be a one day conference with a minimal fee for members (cost of lunch). First Saturday in April 2016. We need a coordinator for the event.

President-Elect: Suzan Butler reported:

- No report.

Secretary: Lisa Fenley reported:

- Minutes approved and filed for audit.

Treasurer: Jen FitzGerald reported:

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

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

- Today's program-Tex Thompson: The Comma Sutra: A Better Punctuation Guide to Spicing Up Your Text Life
- March 21, 2015 ~ Kim Farbisz, the owner of Coaching 2 Win ~ The Mental Game: Performing Your Best When It Matters Most
- April 18, 2015 ~ Melissa Cutler ~ Dr. Strangelove: or, How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love Writing Synopses

[Subscribe](#)[Share ▼](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)[RSS](#)**Membership Director: Gina Nelson reported.**

- 76 Members to date. New members: Liz Larson and Liz Webb
- Guests at meeting: Tex Thompson (the speaker), Stephanie Williams, Chris Weiler-Allen, Larry Enmon, Sally Felt, Christi Doporto, Tammy O'Quinn
- Please renew your membership for 2015—20 members have renewed to date.

Communications Director: Kim Miller reported:

- Send information / articles / photos for inclusion in the newsletter to newsletter@NTRWA.org by February 28, 2015.

Website Director:**COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:****PAN Liaison: Chrissy Szarek reported:**

- Pencils presented to members present:
 - Cindy Dees: *Fever Zone*
 - Suzan Butler: *The Sport of Romance*
- Ally Broadfield made PAN.

PRO Liaison: Dakota Byrd reported.

- No report.

Great Expectations: Lisa Fenley reported:

- 130 entries (one entry went under contract and the author decided to pull both of her entries. She donated her entry fees to our chapter fund, however.)
- \$3255 in gross proceeds. Net proceeds TBD--will be less PayPal fees and \$450 in first place prize monies.
- Congratulations to our finalists, especially our own Sidney Bristol.
- All entries are with the final judges. We'll have certificates for all to sign at the March meeting.

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- 115 entries to date. Down 13 from last year.
- Mainstream with Romantic Elements, Young Adult, and Series Action / Adventure categories did not make. Six categories made.
- 2460 gross, \$1729.24 net.

Hospitality: Michelle Welsh reported:

- Need donations of writer's critiques to use as raffle items.

Audio Librarian: Debra Owens was not present:

- No Report

Writing Incentives: Christine Crocker reported:

- Presented her report.
 - Pages written / edited:
 - Top 5 Most written:
 - Suzan Butler pages written 139
 - Angi Morgan pages written 105
 - Christine Crocker pages written 80
 - Tammara Webber pages written 90
 - Chrissy Szarek pages written 68
 - Top 5 Most edited:
 - Cindy Dees pages edited 1000
 - Suzan Butler pages edited 472
 - Chrissy Szarek pages edited 247
 - Carolyn Williamson pages edited 200
 - Angi Morgan pages edited 180
 - Requested: Dakota Shain Byrd, a YA LGBT Urban Fantasy retelling of the The Little Mermaid (currently untitled)
 - Rejection: Dakota Shain Byrd, The Black Night Rave
 - Sold / Published a Book: Tammara Webber: Sweet (to Verus in Brazil; The Sport of Romance: Suzan Butler; Fever Zone: Cindy Dees

Bylaws: Angi Morgan reported:

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- Jamie Wesley is our spotlight for February.

Unfinished Business:

- No unfinished business to report.

New Business:

- Angi Morgan's *The Cattleman* was #25 on Publisher's Weekly Trade Paperback.
- Attending Houston's Author Bash next weekend: Chrissy Szarek and Angi Morgan.
- Regina Richards completed Margie Lawson's Master Immersion Class in Colorado.

Email questions, comments, or articles to newsletter@ntrwa.org.

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