

# The Love Knot

Newsletter of the Ottawa Romance Writers' Association



**FEBRUARY 2012**

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Keep smiling, keep shining  
Knowing you can always count on us,  
For sure, that's what friends are for.  
For good times and bad times  
We'll be on your side.  
That's what friends are for.*

*Lyrics from the song "That's what friends are for"  
sung by Dionne Warwick*

Our 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Valentine Brunch is next Sunday, February 5. I'm really pleased to say that registration has been brisk. For the first time we have invited members to bring a guest and you have responded. This year some husbands will join us, some new members and some prospective members. The Brunch is a wonderful opportunity to relax and have the time to socialize and get to know each other better, as well as honour members' progress and achievement during the past year. The theme this year is "Friendship". Writing can be a lonely profession and it can be hard for family to truly understand the "agony and the ecstasy" a writer goes through trying to create a work of fiction. And that's where the friends we make through ORWA come in. The help, support and advice we can count on receiving from our ORWA friends help to see us through "the good times and bad times" and we can take comfort from knowing there are others out there who understand the pleasure and pain of authorship. So although we don't have a "Friendship" award to present at the Brunch, I like to think of the Brunch as a collective award given to all members with a big "thank you" for the friendship and support you offer.

**REPORT ON OUR JANUARY MEETING**

Please join me in welcoming our newest members, Christine Krten and Shirley Alves. Christine writes historical paranormal mystery and Shirley is trying her hand at romantic comedy.

Members agreed to amend the criteria for the Audrey Jessup Volunteer Award. Previously, the award could not be given to someone who had been a recipient in the past. Now a member can receive the award more than once as long as there has been two or more years between the awards. If you haven't voted yet, please contact Teresa Wilde at her private email [teresawilde@gmail.com](mailto:teresawilde@gmail.com).

Maggie Attiwell presented the Workshop Committee's ideas for workshops in 2012. Check the ORWA website for specific details or talk to Maggie about the Pitching workshop to be held in March and the other great ideas.

A reminder that as of January 1, 2012, members can renew their ORWA membership on-line using PayPal by visiting our web site at [www.ottawaromancewriters.com](http://www.ottawaromancewriters.com). For those of you who prefer to renew by cash or cheque you can renew at the Brunch next Sunday in person, or by cheque to my address at 14 Sandwell Crescent, Kanata ON K2K 1V3.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

As mentioned in the January President's message, and it's important enough to mention again, I'd like our focus in 2012 to be on encouraging new members. We have a terrific workshop schedule in the making, we have an abundance of published authors to be proud of, and we can offer the full spectrum of education, support and social interaction. Any ideas you can come up with to help us increase our membership will be most welcome.

**AND OF COURSE, THINK ABOUT THAT LIMERICK YOU ARE GOING TO SEND ME!**

Malena Abel, President

*There was a young bard of Japan  
Whose limericks never would scan  
When they said it was so  
He replied, "Yes, I know,  
But I made a rule of always trying to get  
just as many words into the last line as  
I possibly can.*

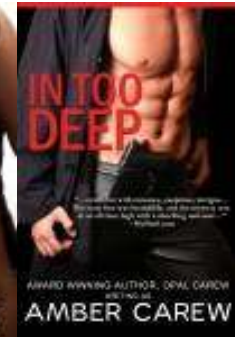
## Current Releases

**DEBBIE MAZZUCA**  
**KING OF THE ISLES**  
Kensington Books  
January 2012



**OPAL CAREW**  
**PASSION PLAY**  
Samhain Publishing  
January 2012

**OPAL CAREW**  
**THE STRANGER**  
January 2012



**AMBER CAREW**  
**IN TOO DEEP**  
December 2011

**OPAL CAREW**  
**THE MALE STRIPPER**  
December 2011



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## Upcoming Releases

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**KALLIE LANE**

**DARK ABANDON**

The Wild Rose Press  
February 2012



**COREENE CALLAHAN**

**FURY OF FIRE**

Amazon Publishing  
February 2012

**OPAL CAREW**

**INSATIABLE**

St. Martin's Press  
February 2012



**COREENE CALLAHAN**

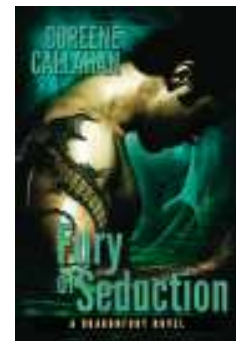
**FURY OF ICE**

Amazon Publishing  
June 2012

**OPAL CAREW**

**ILLICIT**

St. Martin's Press  
July 2012



**COREENE CALLAHAN**

**FURY OF SEDUCTION**

Amazon Publishing  
October 2012

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## Upcoming Workshops

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### February 5<sup>th</sup> Valentine's Brunch

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Place: Loch March Golf & Country Club

1755 Old Carp Road Kanata, Ontario K2K 1X7

Ticket Price: \$30.00 (includes tax and gratuity)

Cash Bar

The cut-off date for signing up for the Brunch is January 30, 2012.



### March 4<sup>th</sup> 2:00 p.m.



#### Maggie Jagger's Pitching Workshop

Pitching to agents and editors is part of writing life, no need to hyperventilate over it. We will first hone a synopsis, then we take turns pitching and hearing pitches. If you don't want to pitch, then bring the first three pages of your ms. We will first split into small groups to gently critique synopses or first pages, so bring four copies with you, double spaced.

Then we will spend an hour perfecting our verbal pitches. If you'd prefer not to pitch, join us to hear pitches and give advice. This is a fun way to get to know one another and find out what everyone is writing.

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## Articles

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### When Blue Skies Can Be the Blues

By Sandra Hickey

The December issue of RWR really spoke to me with an excellent article on depression, and a piece on one woman's experience with said disease. And dis-ease it is! The blah blues – small dark clouds skittering back and forth across the skies of our minds -- and the mother of all clouds, clinical depression, its thunderheads blotting out all sun, all warmth, all hope.

I have suffered the latter, and still deal with the former. Not to be flippant about such a debilitating ailment, but depression is no fun. It's a downer. Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone does sometimes apply. Nobody wants to rub elbows with anyone whose aura is gunmetal grey. Not everyone is a fair-weather friend, but you get the idea.

We writers of romance fiction are a diverse lot. Health issues, minor to serious, move along with us throughout our writer lives. For me, I was unprepared for depression's insidious trailer vines that curled around my writer's heart and made me my own worst enemy. I had been writing since I could hold a pen, great tales of adventure, excitement, mystery and romance, poetry and history, and – well...they were fun and I was Queen of my own castle. I knew at a young age that I would write till I died and, somewhere in there, I would be published.

Years passed. The Queen got dishpan hands from looking after her royal family. Then, \*poof\*, just like that, the King was gone. My muse must've ridden off with him, the witch. Life sucked. Still I wrote, joined RWA and my local chapter, ORWA, joined the world at large, still in progress. The years whizzed by. Work took its toll on mind and body. No-energy weeknights and weekends filled with the usual time thieves took their toll. Slowly doubt and depression, like the mighty Kraken, rising to the surface after years of being submerged, towered over me.

I was a fraud, a fraud I tell you. Didn't so-and-so author write the greatest novel of all time at her kitchen table while children frolicked at her feet? Fraudulent I, my face was in my mashed potatoes by 7 p.m. So much for night writing. "Then get up an hour or two earlier," my beast sneered. "If you really want to get published you will sacrifice your sleep. And," she threw in just for good measure, "fill all the dead space in your weeks with notebook and pencil." Never a morning person I flung myself out of bed and wrote, nevertheless. It resembled Klingon in an ancient form. My dead-space notebook filled with doodles surrounded by bits of random dialogue and 'add good stuff here' arrows, as well as quick recipes jotted in shorthand from open magazines in doctors' offices. Life was a treadmill. I dug myself deeper into my rut. "The difference between a rut and a grave," my Father would say, "is six feet."

A few months ago I finally cracked. "Sandra," my wise, good doctor said, "Be kind to yourself." With a jolt and a gulp I stared. The Desiderata flashed through my mind. Be kind to myself? Was this some New-Age mumbo jumbo? A rehashed hippie nugget carried through from the Great and Powerful Sixties, a quote from Leo Buscaglia? Be kind to myself? No other instruction. How to do this thing... I pondered long and hard.

Maybe, just maybe, I could take early retirement. It would be a trade off. I'd be poorer, but I could write and maybe supplement my pension income. Grandma Moses found her satisfaction in her advanced years. Perhaps I could too. Finally, this was the light at the end of the tunnel. And it wasn't the oncoming train.

So take heart from my story. Get the help you need, the meds you need, the therapy you need. See a spiritual advisor, a preacher, a psychologist or a shrink. Tell your best friend. There is no shame. The only shame would be to let your dream dwindle and die without a damn good fight. And, like some of our heroines, we are all just too darned kick-ass to let that happen!

*Sandra is a PRO member who grew up in the enchanted world of Mary Stewart, Victoria Holt, Phyllis Whitney and Velda Johnston. As a grown-up Sandra discovered Tolkien and she was never the same! Realizing that in order to stay in that magical place where fiction lives, she would just have to write fiction herself... With her sights set on a career in the business, Sandra has written a high fantasy, a couple of romantic adventures and is currently working on a romantic thriller. She hopes to snag an agent very soon.*



## What is Love Anyway?

By Gina Ardito

*The following article first appeared in the February 2012 issue of Footnotes, newsletter for Dunes & Dreams RWA (Eastern Long Island).*

You don't have to be a physics student to know the phrase, "Opposites attract." What a physics student understands, however, is that all matter, in its natural state, is neutral. When a negatively charged particle meets a positively charged particle, the two become one, neutralizing each other, and thus returning to their natural state of oneness (neutrality). The same can be said of people. We are attracted to our opposites (whether based on gender, spirituality, intellect, personality or any combination of these) so that we may return to our own natural state—a state of being one.

In the first stages of physical attraction, both men and women experience rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and sleeplessness due to the chemicals our bodies produce. In true love, however, our minds are just as engaged as our hormones. Men and women must be friends as well as lovers. We develop empathy, hone a sense of justice, and learn compassion by seeing the world through each other's eyes. In fact, historically, men who never cultivated female friendships were well known as tyrants: Hitler, Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung to name a few. Serial killer, Aileen Wuornos, never met a man she liked or trusted.

Another requirement for true love to exist between two people is that we must first love ourselves. Love should never be a co-dependent relationship. Love occurs when two independent people join together to absorb and reflect the best of each other. We long for emotional and spiritual growth with a partner, a goal that isn't achievable if one of the partners is insecure or emotionally stunted. When all of our needs—spiritual, emotional, and physical—are met within a relationship, we have found our soulmate.

According to author Richard Bach, "A soulmate is someone who has locks that fit our keys, and keys to fit our locks. When we feel safe enough to open the locks, our truest selves step out and we can be completely and honestly who

we are; we can be loved for who we are and not for who we're pretending to be. Each unveils the best part of the other. No matter what else goes wrong around us, with that one person we're safe in our own paradise."

As we celebrate the day dedicated to love and lovers, I'm wishing you a true soulmate to share your life!

*Gina Ardito is the current Vice President of Dunes & Dreams as well as the chapter's founder. Her third book in a series for Avalon Books, NOBODY'S PERFECT, is available February 7, 2012. A popular speaker, she has provided workshops both online and in person for many RWA chapters. For more info about Gina, her books, workshops, and helpful articles, visit her website: [www.ginaardito.com](http://www.ginaardito.com)*



## Get Back in the Mood

by Taryn Blackthorne

*The following article appeared in the Winter 2012 issue of Lovelights, the newsletter of Romance Writers of Atlantic Canada (RWAC).*

Another year has arrived and we've greeted it with hoopla and huzzah of the season. It's the afterward we have to deal with now. The following weeks or months after where things have settled back into a regular routine. The resolute of our resolutions. We have to get back into the mood, to write, to read, to work. The honeymoon of the holidays is over. So how do you avoid the Blahs that usually hit us in January, and February, sometimes even in March? Well, fear not, here are a few tricks you can use to greet the new writing year with enthusiasm AFTER the partying is done.

**1. Take time to fill the well.** I know I said to write every day, and I stand by that statement. But our imaginations can get run down. Don't forget to take a break every so often, give yourself a treat. Sometimes you have so many things you want to do, so many stories clamouring to get out and you know that you'll never get to them all that you Just. Can't. Write. Here's my advice. Don't. Go do something that gives you a glimmer to draw from. Go to a dollar store and buy a colouring book. Glue sparklies to your mirror, put a sticker on the back of your computer, play with your kids (or borrow someone else's...get permission first) or go to the park and people watch. Don't forget that it's important to play as hard as you work. If you're stuck for ideas, try The Artist's Date Book by Julia Cameron or Monica Woods' Pocket Muse books.

**2. Clean your tool box and get some new ones.** Ever given one of the men in your life new tools? Remember how their faces lit up? Your inner writer will do the same thing. There are tons of writer books out there that have excellent exercises to stretch your muscles. The Write-Brain Workbook by Bonnie Neubauer and Self-Editing for Fiction Writers by Rennie Browne and Dave King are a few standards. Check out the daily writing prompts from Judy Reeves or Writer's Digest too. All the old tools will appreciate you taking them out for a spin. But what about getting new ones? How about taking a few classes? Not

necessarily in writing either. You'd be surprised what you'll find useful in your stories.

Always been interested in archery? Give it a try. What about Reiki or throwing clay? How about a computer course or two? Go to a Zumba class or belly dancing. Most are cheap or free if you just want to pop in for a class or too. Sample a few to find something that fits. Everything can be used to help give your story that sense of authenticity, which your readers will enjoy too.

**3. Connect with your tribe.** Writing is by nature a solitary venture, but if I'm with a bunch of other writers, something buzzes along my spine and I get excited about writing again. Get together once a week with a writer buddy and have writing sprints, see who can write the most in fifteen minutes, half an hour, an hour. Don't live near anyone? Get on Twitter and try 1k in 1 hour (#1k1hr). I just started this last one and I love, love, love it! Maybe I'll see you there!

Writing is like a marriage, just because the honeymoon phase is over doesn't mean the relationship should end. It takes work to maintain your writerly self. It's part and parcel of being a professional in this business. Your stories are worth your efforts, and so are you.

*Taryn Blackthorne published her first e-novel in 2008 with Samhain Publishing. You can find her at [www.tarynblackthorne.com](http://www.tarynblackthorne.com).*



## What's Your Character's Problem?

By Deborah Hale

*The following article appeared in the Winter 2012 Issue of Lovelights, the newsletter of Romance Writers of Atlantic Canada (RWAC).*

When I start a new story, one of the first things I try to figure out about a character, before I know their hair color or even their name is what is their problem?

Figuring out your character's problem will take you a long way with your story. It's the basis for your character arc and internal conflict and quite possibly that Deep Dark Moment, too. Plus it will help readers identify with your character because he/she isn't some perfect paragon who needs to be knocked down a peg, but a flawed fellow creature with baggage, hang-ups, issues and hot-buttons...just like us!

To really make the flaw believable, I like to dig into the character's back story. Usually I try to make the flaw a part of their personality, which readers might subconsciously expect from this type of person. Since I always explore my characters' astrological signs to flesh them out, I tend to draw flaws that are common to those signs (or I pick the character's birthdate based on the flaw). So my Scorpio hero will have revenge issues. My Leo heroine may put pride before love. A Capricorn may have trouble expressing passion. The character's cultural background can play a part here, too -- a repressed British hero, for example, or a spitfire Irish heroine with a penchant for trouble.

To intensify the problem, I give the character a childhood backstory geared to play on the personality trait. Most of our baggage has roots in those impressionable early years. In my Regency novel *Bought: The Penniless Lady* my heroine Lady Artemis Dearing, has self-confidence issues iV a trait not uncommon in Virgos, who often hold themselves to an impossibly high standard. Though Artemis has blossomed into quite an attractive woman, as a child she was often unfavourably compared with her beautiful, vivacious younger sister.

I usually reinforce the problem further with a recent event that plays on the characters' deeply ingrained insecurities. I get a little impatient with a hero who thinks every woman is untrustworthy just because his mother abandoned her marriage. But if his first real love also broke his heart, I'll buy his wariness. In the case of Lady Artemis, she was courted by a man who only wanted her for the status of her connections. When her family persuaded her to refuse him, the cad revenged himself by telling her how undesirable he found her.

Did I mention that not just any flaw will work for a story hero/heroine? In a romance, it is vital that your character's flaw prevents her from forming a lasting relationship. It becomes the basis for internal conflict. For Lady Artemis, her problem prevents her from believing that her handsome, dynamic husband of convenience could possibly be attracted to her. Any overtures he makes, in spite of his own character problems, she interprets as deception or pity.

Finally, to help me shape my character arc (which often shapes my plot) I consider what growth or change the character needs in order to overcome their flaw. What Life Lesson does he or she need to learn? Lady Artemis needs to realize there are many different kinds of beauty and that she can be very attractive to a discerning man like Hadrian.

Don't start hyperventilating, pantsers! I don't always know all these things at the outset of my story -- at least I didn't for some of my earlier books. Quite a bit of it came together as the story progressed or I was able to beef it up in revisions. Now, knowing how vital it is to my stories, I try to get it straight in my mind before I start, even if it's the only thing about the story I do figure out in advance.

I hope a better understanding of character problems will leave you with one less problem when it comes to writing your romance fiction!

*Deborah Hale is a Virgo-Libra cusp who has battled her severe internal critic and tendency to procrastinate to write more than 25 romances. Her latest, Confessions of a Courtesan, will be joined in March by His Compromised Countess. Deb also has a problem with alliterative titles!*



## D.A.M.N. - A Guide to Writing

By Carrie De Simas

*The following article appeared in the February 2012 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.*

As writers we are bombarded with tips on how to structure a story. We study how to execute a killer opening and build tension to an intense black moment, and everything in between. We are pros at the jargon and can build a storyline and character arc just as precisely as an architect builds a building.

But what about the work before all that even comes into play? What about how to structure our lives so that we have the time, energy and stamina to even brainstorm about the plot, characters and chapters?

In my personal life, I follow the D.A.M.N. method of writing, a system I created that helps me stay on track.

**D: DISCIPLINE.** This is the hardest part of the writing process for me. The nose to the keyboard part. I know once I sit down to write, I could be brilliant and become the next Nora Roberts. If only I didn't have the laundry to do. If only there wasn't a special extra-long episode of Prison Break on TV. If only...Our lives are filled with so many distractions that it becomes easy to \*convince myself\* that I am conducting valuable research for my pending manuscript while I'm surfing the net, investigating the most minute details. What I have come to realize is that writing doesn't start with brilliant plots or characters, distinct writing voice, or killer verbs and dialogue—it starts with \*writing\*. Anyone \*could be\* a great writer. It is those that actually sit down and write that \*are\* the great writers. So turn off the inner editor and write. You can't edit something that has never been written.

**A: APPLIED ORGANIZATION.** This is the logistics of the writing process. Before I start a manuscript, I make sure my computer is charged and in a comfortable place. (I forsake the fancy desk and use my dining room table that overlooks the backyard and is closer to the snacks.) I have my coffee and outline ready to go. Character descriptions and arcs are done and accessible. Whatever method you use, make sure you are organized so you're not sitting

down to write blind. If that simply means somewhere comfortable and quiet to work uninterrupted, then so be it. I'm an organizational freak. I have my notes colour-coded, a white board with my GMC for each chapter written so I don't get off track, and endless post-it notes stuck to everything. Whatever your style of organization, use it and be proud.

**M: MOTIVATION.** Always have your motivation in mind. I write mine out and stick it on my computer. (In my world that means a hot pink post-it note.) I put my daily word count on it, calendar style. I know how many days of writing it will take to get a first draft. Each day I get to scratch one off, thus showing me that I am closer to my goal of completing the manuscript. My mini-motivation: write enough to scratch off one day's worth of work. My overall motivation: finish the manuscript and submit it. My long-term motivation: publishing contract so I can sit at home and write and eat bonbons for the rest of my life. (I have never known a writer to actually do this, but I believe in dreaming in Technicolor!)

**N: NEVER GIVE UP.** Writer's block is frustrating. Life, sometimes, is frustrating. Laundry, bills, jobs, family, hobbies, etc. all threaten to suck up time and energy. So do those negative self-tapes most of us run (nasty things like: you're never going to get published, you're not as good as the other writers, you're never going to be able to finish this...), especially when we are stressed, tired or frustrated. Those need to be silenced. Cliché alert: anything worth having is worth fighting for. Never give up on your dreams. Like Churchill said: \*true success is going from failure to failure without loss of momentum\*.

Whenever I get really frustrated, I mutter to myself "Damn it!" and remember that with discipline, applied organization, motivation and never giving up, I too will some day be on the shelves of my local bookstore. The same goes for anyone else brave enough and determined enough to keep at it. —

*Carrie De Simas is a member of TRW and SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators), a freelance journalist and a children's lit and fantasy fiction writer.*



## Take Care of You

By Susan Lyons

*The following article appeared in the February 2012 edition of Tide Lines, newsletter of the Vancouver Island Chapter*

You've seen all the posts on loops where writers say they're spending so much time at the computer that: (1) they're popping acetaminophen like jelly beans; (2) they have tingling in their arms and their fingers are numb; (3) their butt is expanding to ginormous proportions; or (4) all of the above.

If we can work pain free and stay moderately fit, what a huge difference that makes to our state of mind and our creativity.

Our anatomy evolved over a very long time, and it's been only an eye's blink of that time since we've become mostly sedentary. Our bodies were designed to be physically active, and most of us are anything but.

I'm a writer. What with writing, a sedentary day job, email, and all the admin, promo, and bookkeeping work that goes with running my own business, I'm probably at the computer 9-10 hours a day. I probably sit for another 3-4 hours a day—on public transit, eating meals, reading, or in front of the TV. How about you? How many hours a day do you spend sitting on your butt? And how healthy do you feel?

I'm going to share some tips I've learned over the years for staying healthy even if you live a largely computer-bound life.

CAUTION! Every body is different. What helps one person might injure another. If you try different exercises, office configurations, or treatments, ease into them and see how you feel before diving in whole-heartedly. If you have significant physical issues, consult your doctor.

Now, here are some suggestions:

- \* Stay hydrated. Drink lots of water. Caffeine dehydrates you.
- \* Get lots of sleep.
- \* Pay attention to your posture at all times.
- \* Get your eyes checked regularly.

- \* Have an ergonomic work setup that's good for your body. (Do an online search for "ergonomic desk setup.")
- \* Invest in a chair that's good for you—or try sitting on one of those large exercise/balance balls.
- \* Vary where and how you work: desk, coffee shop, laptop in the living room (maybe try a lap desk), high chair at the kitchen island.
- \* Try working standing up. Consider using a treadmill under your desk (do an online search for "treadmill desk").
- \* At least every half hour, focus for at least 30 seconds on something that's a different focal length than your computer and is relaxing (e.g., trees outside the window, a painting on your wall).
- \* At least every half hour (set a timer), get up, move around, and stretch. Alternate your desk work with activities like housework and gardening.
- \* Stretch throughout the day. Yoga is great too.
- \* Walk, swim, or cycle regularly. Aerobic is terrific, but even a 10-minute walk a couple of times a day is great. Walk whenever you can (e.g., to the grocery store), but be careful how much weight you carry, and how you carry it.
- \* Schedule regular workouts to strengthen muscles, increase flexibility, and work off stress—whether it's on the yoga mat in front of the TV or at a fitness club. If you don't know what you're doing, invest in a personal trainer to get you on the right track without hurting yourself.
- \* Do exercises for carpal tunnel and repetitive strain.
- \* Consider visiting a massage therapist, a physiotherapist, and/or a chiropractor.
- \* Use heating pads, bean bags you can warm up, or gel packs you can heat or chill.
- \* Relax in the bathtub (and Jacuzzi or hot tub if you're lucky enough to have them).

I used to pop codeine pills to cope with headaches that lasted for days, impairing my productivity and enjoyment of life, and making me irritable. Now, I rarely need to take meds. I try to do all the things I mentioned above, but two made a huge difference. The first was spending the time and money to create an ergonomic work setup. The second was finding a personal trainer who, over the course of months, gave me a progressive set of exercises and stretches to build me up and maintain me. If I stretch every day and do half an hour of her exercises 3-4 times a week, I will be pain free 80-90% of the time, which is pretty awesome.

Staying fit takes time, and it's time away from the computer. It may cost money, too. But think of how much time you lose when you're flat on your back with muscle spasms, how much money you spend on painkillers, and how much mental focus and creativity you lose when you're in pain. Good health is worth it!

*Susan Lyons, who also writes as Susan Fox, writes "emotionally compelling, sexy contemporary romance" (Publishers Weekly). Visit her website at [www.susanlyons.ca](http://www.susanlyons.ca)*



## Ten Twitter Tips for Writers with no Time to Spare

By Julie Rowe

*The following article appeared in the January edition of the Writer's Saddle, the newsletter of the Calgary (CaRWA) chapter.*

Twitter is a great social media tool. Its 140 character limit for tweets (messages) means it's quick and since others can retweet (repost) your tweets, the possible audience for those tweets can be huge.

Sounds like a win-win right?

Twitter can also suck you in and suck all the time out of your day. Here are some tips to help you use Twitter efficiently and effectively.

1. Pick a Twitter handle (screen name) so people can find you. Use your pen name, if it's taken add an underscore between your first and last name, or add the word `author' or `writer' after your name. Don't make people work to find you.
2. Put something in your description that makes it clear you're you.
3. Follow the people you want to follow you, including:
  - a. Publishing professionals (put `editor' or `agent' in the search engine).
  - b. Reviewers.
  - c. Readers (lots of avid readers put the word `reader' in their description).
  - d. Interesting folks (I follow National Geographic, The Economist and NASA's official tweet streams and often retweet their tweets).
4. Retweet other people's tweets. I make a note of who retweets me and retweet their tweets.
5. Thank people who retweet and mention you with a thank you tweet.

6. If you start a tweet with someone's Twitter handle, put a period in front of it. If you don't Twitter will assume this is a direct tweet to them and it will only show up in the tweet stream of everyone who follows BOTH of you.

7. Use hashtags whenever you can. What's a hashtag? It's a topic label that you can use to follow a conversation on twitter. Put the hashtag into the search engine and all tweets with that hashtag pop up in order. Popular writing hashtags and their definitions:

- a. #FF = Follow Friday – suggest people to follow to your followers.
- b. #WW = Writer Wednesday – suggest writers to follow to your followers.
- c. #TT = Thankful Thursday – thank your writing followers publicly.
- d. #writing, #amwriting = Tweeting about your current work in progress.
- e. #editing, #amediting = Tweeting about your editing journey.
- f. #pubtip = Tips about the publishing industry.
- g. #editreport = Editors share instructional bits from edit reports.

8. To resist the temptation to check Twitter constantly, schedule your tweets with an outside service like TweetDeck or HootSuite. These websites allow you to schedule tweets days, weeks and even months in advance. You can also use them to follow multiple tweet streams (specific lists of people and their tweets).

9. Use bit.ly or another link shortening site to make your active links to websites shorter.

10. Tweet about your book(s), but don't just post a plea for people to buy with a link, make your tweets interesting and relevant. Post tweets that are unique to your book and that catch people's attention. For example, my debut romance ICEBOUND set in Antarctica came out on Nov 14, 2011. For a month prior to the release date I posted 3 tweets a day with either interesting trivia about Antarctica or Antarctic slang with my book title and a pre-order link. Now that the book is out I continue to post trivia and slang 3 times a day with an active buy link. Here are a couple of examples:

a. Due to low humidity, high winds & lack of water fire is the biggest danger in Antarctica ICEBOUND 11/14/11 @carinapress

b. Antarctic Slang: Boomerang - flight to Antarctica that turns back before it arrives, bad weather ICEBOUND @carinapress



## MJ Fredrick and McKenna Chase: Launching 2012 with Serious Sizzle

By Juli Alexander

*The following article first appeared in the January 2012 Smoke Signals Newsletter for Smoky Mountain Romance Writers RWA.*

I've interviewed two talented authors of Indie erotic romantic fiction. MJ Fredrick and McKenna Chase, former Golden Heart finalists, share their experiences with Indie publishing and their strategies for success.

MJ, you have erotic romances out with several e-publishers in addition to your indie published titles. What are the differences between the two types of novels as far as content, length, pricing, and heat level?

They're all about the same length, though the publishers set the price for my books from Samhain and The Wild Rose Press. The books I've self-published have been historical erotic romances, and while the first one, Eye of the Beholder, is more on-par with the spiciness of my Samhain and Wild Rose books, the last two are a bit sweeter. Wild Wild Widow, I think, is probably the tamest.

McKenna, are you focusing on shorter Indie releases for your erotic romances? What is your experience with sales of these works?

All of my erotic romances are novella length. Quick, fun, sexy reads. Two of my novellas were with Wild Rose Press, but when the contract ended I pulled them and published them myself because my other erotic romances were doing so well. I haven't been disappointed. In fact, just a few weeks ago my erotic time travel romance - A TOUCH IN TIME - was nominated as a finalist by reviewers at The Romance Reviews for the \*Best Erotic Paranormal Romance - Time Travel (2011)\*.

Congratulations, McKenna!

Rate your computer literacy prior to Indie Publishing and your computer literacy now.

McKenna: I spend a ton of time on the computer and have taught myself to do things like creating my own websites, self-publishing books, designing covers, making book trailers, etc. It's trial and error and I enjoy doing it. Self-publishing isn't hard to do, just time consuming. Formatting changes when you upload your books to Amazon and Nook can be troublesome, but with patience they can be worked out fairly well.

MJ: Oh, it's about the same. My e-publishers have me pretty well trained, I think.

Have you found the need to hire a formatter for your works?

MJ: I do hire a formatter because I'm just not willing to take the time to learn. For around \$30 I can have it done for me, all formats. I've learned to book early, though! This is good because I work best with deadlines.

McKenna: No, I format all my books on my own.

Were you able to upload the books to Smashwords, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble based on instructions from those sites? Any tips or cautionary tales?

McKenna: Yes. I've uploaded to all three sites. Smashwords was the hardest of the three with more specific formatting instructions. But doing so through them taught me a lot about formatting and helped with issues I was having when uploading my books to Amazon and Nook.

MJ: My first book on Smashwords took DAYS! It had been professionally formatted, so I wasn't worried, just anxious. After that, Amazon was a breeze. HOWEVER, I did get a lot of returns on the Amazon book. Turns out I uploaded the wrong version and the formatting was messed up. It wasn't until I read one of the reviews that I realized it. I had it reformatted as a .prc and reuploaded it and the returns stopped.

What has been your most frustrating moment with Indie publishing?

MJ: Getting a check from Amazon UK in British pounds. My bank wouldn't cash it, so I ended up having to open an account with another bank and losing a chunk of the check in fees. I'd misunderstood the note when signing up for

payment on Amazon. I thought if I had direct deposit from one outlet, I'd have to choose checks for the other outlets. Bad choice! Don't do that!

Choose direct deposit for all of them.

McKenna: Other than the minor formatting issues when uploading that have to be fixed, self-publishing hasn't been frustrating at all. In fact, it's been very rewarding for me. If Indie pubs were recognized by RWA I would have been PAN eligible within 6 months of putting my books up. Money earned through self-publishing pays for my conference fees and writing needs.

What have you found to be your best promotional tool?

McKenna: Facebook has allowed me to get the word out to a lot of potential buyers. That and getting the word out to various RWA and writing related groups I belong to. I would advertise in Pixel of Ink which is huge for promoting ebooks, but they don't accept erotic romances at this point.

MJ: I was very very fortunate to have my first book get mentioned in an Amazon newsletter about a month after my release. I had been on the historical romance list and was selling pretty well, but getting mentioned on that list put my sales through the roof. I made it to number 8 on Amazon's overall best-seller list.

As far as what you have control over, I think the key is reviews. Submit your book to as many review sites as you can find who review what you write. The more reviews you have, the more likely you'll be picked up by places like Pixels of Ink. They require at least ten reviews of 4 stars or better before they'll list you.

What do you feel is the biggest challenge for the indie published author?

MJ: Getting noticed! When I started, pricing at 99 cents was a good way to get noticed, but now there are so many who do so. I think you need to get your name as many places as possible, either through ads or blog sites, any place you feel comfortable promoting.

McKenna: Getting our books reviewed. A lot of the bigger reviewers aren't accepting self-pubbed books. Although more and more reviewers are coming

around to realize that self-published books can be every bit as good as those published through traditional publishers.

Have you experienced greater success through one outlet or another?

McKenna: I've had my largest number of sales through Amazon Kindle.

MJ: Amazon is by far my best outlet. By far.

How many books are you striving to write each year?

MJ: My goal is 6 novellas out a year. I have one coming out in February, so...just five more then ;)

McKenna: My erotic romances are on hold while I work on a hick-lit series I've recently sold to Kensington under another pen name.

Note from Juli: Yes, she does mean hick-lit. I can't wait to see what that's all about!

What advice would you give someone who is considering Indie publishing?

McKenna: I have ebooks up under two other pen names. One is for young adult, the other is for contemporary romances. My erotic romances still continue to sell the best. You need to understand that certain genres might sell better than others. Go into self-publishing open minded. Don't expect to get rich (not that it wouldn't be nice to have happen). I publish each book with the mindset that any money I make is more than that story would have made sitting unpublished on my computer.

MJ: Join the yahoo group <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IndieRomanceInk/>. It's got terrific resources, advice, and a lot of the ladies have more experience. Learn as much as you can about promotion opportunities, Twitter, Facebook, all those things so that once your book is out you can capitalize on them.

Both of you have several titles available for immediate download. Can you tell me a little about them?

MJ: My historical western romance Wild Wild Widow is about a scandalous widow who's exiled from her family on a ranch in central California. There she

falls for the ranch foreman who isn't quite sure what to make of her wild ways, but falls for her all the same.

My other historical western is *In the Marshal's Arms*. Marshal Rhys Burgess always gets his man. To catch a notorious bank robber, he seeks out the man's sometimes-mistress Maddy Colby. She lives on her own on a farm that needs a lot of work. He presents himself to her as a handyman...and waits. When a snowstorm strands them alone together in the tiny cabin, Rhys needs to discover...is getting his man worth losing his woman?

My Victorian erotic romance is *Eye of the Beholder*, about a man leading a double life—one in society and one as an erotic artist. The heroine is a young society woman looking to break free, and she does it by becoming his model, never knowing the man courting her in the evenings is painting her nearly-nude body by day. What will she do when she finds out? Visit me at [www.emmajayromance.com](http://www.emmajayromance.com).

McKenna: I have several erotic romances up at Kindle, Nook and Smashwords. *A Touch in Time* (time-travel), *Leather and Lust*, *Caribbean Fantasy*, *Sweet Pleasure* (all contemporary romances), *Seduced By A Wolf* and *Her Shadow Warrior* (fantasy/paranormal romances). All of these romances are \$2.99 with the exception of *Leather And Lust* which I have listed for FREE right now at Smashwords and Nook. I've tried to get the price changed to Free on Kindle as well but from what I hear it takes a long time for them to price match. Excerpts and links are available at my website - [www.mckennachase.com](http://www.mckennachase.com) I hope you'll check them out!

Thanks to both of you for your candor, insight, and willingness to share. Sounds like I've found the perfect reads for winter. Now if I just had fire in the fireplace...

*Juli Alexander writes teen fiction. The release of \*Stirring Up Trouble\* is mere days away, January 15th. Check out [juliaalexanderauthor.com](http://juliaalexanderauthor.com) for more details.*

## Editor's Message

### Write a Love Knot Article

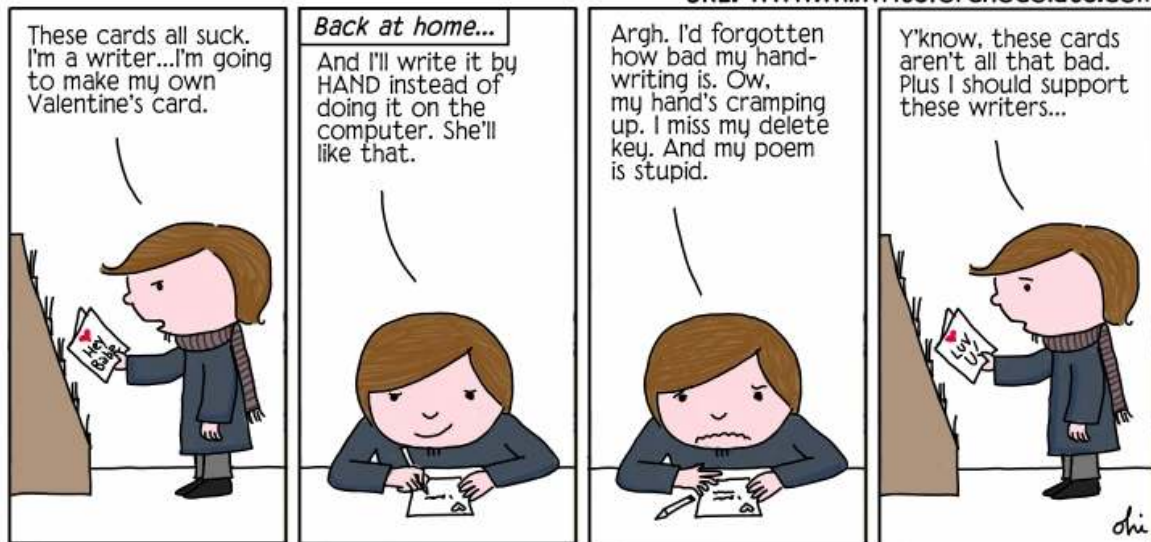
I am actively seeking article submissions from ORWA members. Since the Love Knot is electronic, there are no specific word count requirements. An article can be as long or as short as the topic requires. **Our articles are shared with all RWA chapter newsletter editors so writing an article is a good way to get free publicity.** Be sure to include a short signature line with the address for your website or blog.

If you have any articles or announcements you'd like included in our newsletter please forward them to me at [ykarenes@yahoo.ca](mailto:ykarenes@yahoo.ca) by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Thank you!

Karen Smock, Editor

URL: [www.willwriteforchocolate.com](http://www.willwriteforchocolate.com)



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