

The Love Knot

Newsletter of the Ottawa Romance Writers' Association



March 2011

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"My mother drew a distinction between achievement and success. She said that achievement is the knowledge that you have studied and worked hard and done the best that is in you. Success is being praised by others, and that's nice too, but not as important or satisfying. Always aim for achievement and forget success." - Helen Hayes

While I heartily agree with the definition and importance of achievement, I do wonder if Mama Hayes understated the importance of success. Success – or praise as she defined it – is surely one of the strongest motivators. Without success as one of our goals would we keep staggering up after each rejection, keep writing and keep submitting? I'm still working on the achievement part, but far in the distance is a pinpoint of light illuminating success. I hope to reach it one day as I am sure all of you harbour the same hope.

REPORT ON FEBRUARY'S MEETING

Fifteen members attended February's meeting. The Registrar, Aileen Latulippe, reported that as of that time 27 members had renewed their membership. A disappointing number, but as of today (February 28) the number has increased to 32. Members can still renew between now and our March 6 meeting either by contacting Aileen directly at aileen@storm.ca or in person at the meeting. The budget proposal as presented to members was passed. A copy of the proposal is in the file section of the ORWA Chat Loop.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued)

In January, members voted to hold meetings in July and August. Karen Smock has kindly agreed to produce the two additional issues of the Love Knot. Thank you, Karen. We are delighted to be able to welcome Molly O'Keefe to Ottawa in July. She will present her workshop "Getting Past The Hook". We have slotted a brainstorming session for August and will need input from you, the members, as to how to structure the session and suggestions as to what topics you would like to brainstorm. Rob Fleck gave us a very enjoyable and fascinating workshop and has offered to organize a tour of Vintage Wings (www.vintagewings.ca) located at the Gatineau airport, where some amazing vintage aircraft are on display, and maybe even see some of them fly. If any of you would be interested in a tour, please contact me directly at mjabel@sympatico.ca and I will arrange for it. We have been holding a book raffle at each meeting to raise funds for the Perseverance Fund. Donations of books to raffle would be much appreciated.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

We have to seriously start thinking about how to raise additional funds in order to maintain the quality workshops we have all enjoyed over the past few years. If you have any ideas as to how we could do this, please let us know. All ideas, big and small, are welcome and will be given serious consideration. We are considering adding PayPal buttons to our website to facilitate future membership renewal as well as new member applications. We would also like to add buttons for certain workshops in order to help generate revenue from non members. We will be discussing the implications of doing this at the March meeting. PayPal charges a small fee for each transaction, therefore implementation of this proposal will require a vote from members. The Executive have selected June 12, 2011 for our annual Social. Cynthia Boyko has very kindly offered to host the social at her family's cottage in Chelsea, Quebec. This year, we are inviting members to bring a guest if they wish to do so. The guest could be a spouse, partner, relative, friend or someone who is perhaps interested in joining ORWA. As we did not hold a Valentine's Brunch this year, we will be presenting the annual awards at the Social.

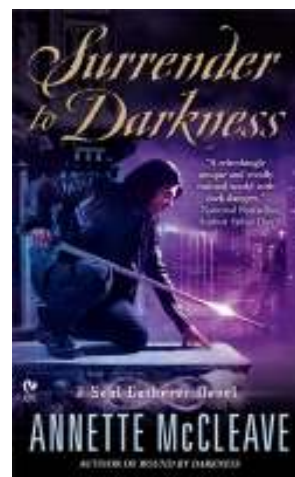
I look forward to seeing you at the March 6 meeting. Our workshop this month is a Q & A session with a panel of seven of our wonderful authors. Don't miss this great opportunity to learn how our panelists travelled the road to publication and success and the advice they have to offer as you travel your road to achievement *and* success.

Malena Abel
President

"The first chapter sells the book. The last chapter sells the next book."
Mickey Spillane

Current Releases

ANNETTE McCLEAVE
SURRENDER TO DARKNESS
NAL/Signet Eclipse
January 2011



OPAL CAREW
PLEASURE BOUND
St. Martin's Griffin
December 2010



Upcoming Releases

LINDA POITEVIN
SINS OF THE ANGELS
Ace Books
October 2011

Upcoming Workshops

March 6th – ORWA Writer's Panel Q&A

A panel of published authors will answer your questions about craft, the writing life, and the business of publication. Writers on the panel include [Reece Butler](#), [Opal Carew](#), [Debbie Mazzuca](#), [Annette McCleave](#), [Sharon Page](#), [Linda Poitevin](#), and [Allison Van Diepen](#).

April 3rd – Practice Makes Perfect Pitching Workshop with Maggie Jagger



Maggie Jagger will lead a *practice makes perfect* pitching workshop. Pitching to agents and editors is part of writing life, no need to hyperventilate over it. We will take turns pitching and hearing pitches. If you are so afraid that you don't want to come to this meeting, you can pretend to be an editor or agent and let us pitch to you. The brave will get the opportunity to pitch many times. Please prepare your pitches before the workshop begins.

[Maggie Jagger](#) is the author of three historical romances from New Concepts publishing. She was born in Yorkshire near Haworth, home of the Brontë sisters, whose books inspired her with a love of historical romance. The dark gothic phase didn't last long because she discovered Jane Austen and enjoyed the lively humor in her voice. Her character-driven plots have humor and lots of dialogue. She likes to surprise her readers and hopes to make them laugh.

Articles

The Art of a Strong Pitch

by Jessica Faust

The following article was first published on the BookEnds Literary Agency blog <http://bookendslitagency.blogspot.com/2007/06/art-of-strong-pitch-part-1.html>, and is reprinted here with permission from the author.

I was recently at a conference where I had been scheduled for roughly 50 author pitches. Yes, that's right. Fifty. Can you imagine what it must have been like for me to sit in a cold room for hours listening to author after author tell me the five-minute version of their book? Think about it. Do you really think I remembered all, if any, of those pitches?

No, I didn't. Let me tell you, there's an art to the pitch. Whether you have a scheduled pitch appointment or happen upon an agent in an elevator, there's a way to present yourself and your book that can almost guarantee that you lock yourself into an agent's memory. And there's a way that will ensure the agent forgets you before you even walk out the door.

The trick? Make friends. Make yourself stand out and be remarkable.

There are two ways I'm going to frame this. First I'm going to talk to those of you who have a pitch appointment and I'm going to give you those key secrets that agents want when getting pitched to. And then (tomorrow), I'm going to talk to those of you who run into an agent at a cocktail party, in the elevator, or are lucky enough to find yourself seated next to one at a luncheon.

Pitch Appointments

Stressful, scary, and for some reason always, always in a cold room. Pitch appointments are dreaded by authors, and you know what? By agents too. By the time I'm done I feel like I'm nothing but a means to an end, and all too often I've had to deal with the hostility of a disappointed and disgruntled author.

When it comes to pitch appointments I so often hear authors console themselves by saying that an agent has to read the book anyway (and agents and editors will often say this too). Well, I'm here to tell you that's a lie and something only the "nice people" say to make you feel better. Call me jaded or just call me mean, but the truth is that after 15 years of author appointments I know within your first three sentences whether or not it's worth my time to read more. I don't know if your book is perfect and I don't know if it's publishable, but I do know whether it's worth my time.

For those of you who haven't yet experienced an appointment with me, let me warn you: I'm not mean (at least I don't think I am) but I'm not phony either. I don't request material unless you've convinced me to request it . . . and I'm a hard sell.

So what can you do to convince me? Know your hook. If you don't know what makes your book different from everything out there that's ever been published, if you don't know what a hook is or what your hook is, then you aren't ready to pitch. Some examples of hooks I represent .

- ✓ *The Naked Earl* (the title alone is a fabulous hook), a Regency-set historical romance with steamy sex scenes and lots of humor.
- ✓ A hot, erotic romance that begins when the main characters meet for the first time in ten years at their high school reunion.
- ✓ A cozy mystery series featuring knitters/crochet/rubberstamping/etc. In doing research, I find this is still an untapped area in the cozy market.

Do you see where I'm going with this? Rarely, if ever, does the hook have anything at all to do with the story. It's that one line that makes you stand out from the crowd, that shows that your book is different. It's the one thing that makes me stand up and say, "Hey, I've never heard of that idea before."

Once your hook is out, move on to your background. What makes you qualified to write this story? What awards have you won? What else can make you remarkable?

So then what? Once you've told the agent your hook, what do you do? The most depressing thing to me is that when the pitch is made (and really, three to five sentences tops! I don't need to listen to you ramble about your book for ten minutes) and my comments are voiced, the author gets up and (sometimes) runs from the room. Why are you wasting such valuable time? This is probably one of the few times in your life when you can actually talk, uninterrupted, with an agent. Use it! Ask her questions about herself, the agency, the business, the market, something that's been bugging you from an earlier panel. In other words, if your hook didn't do it, find another way to make yourself remarkable.

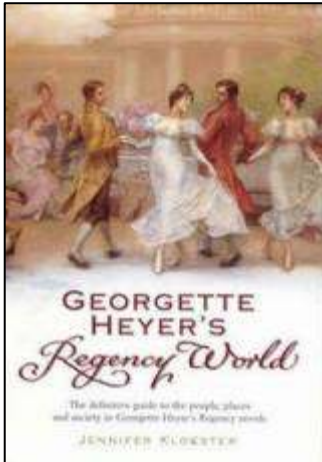
If it wasn't this book it might be the next. And again, I appreciate it if someone treats me like a human rather than a pitch machine and will appreciate you more if you've made a personal connection with me.

Jessica Faust is the owner of and a literary agent with BookEnds Literary Agency. You can read her blog at <http://bookendslitagency.blogspot.com>.



Five New Additions to the ORWA Book Library thanks to librarian Aileen Latulippe

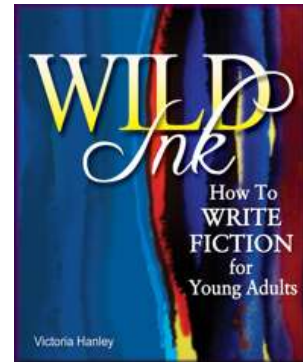
Take advantage of the resources available to you as an ORWA member, including these five new books in our library!



Georgette Heyer's Regency World

by Jennifer Kloester
with illustrations by Graeme Ivandale

Wild Ink: How to Write Fiction for Young Adults by Victoria Hanley (reserved)



Writing Great Books for Young Adults: Everything You Need to Know, From Crafting the Idea to Landing a Publishing Deal
by Regina L. Brooks

The Writer's Brainstorming Kit - Thinking in New Directions (includes 50 cards) by Pam McCutcheon & Michael Waite



Goal, Motivation & Conflict
The Building Blocks of Good Fiction
by Debra Dixon (replacement for lost book)

For a complete list of books in our library, see the Members only section of the ORWA website (after logging on). Have a book suggestion? Let Aileen know!



Connections & Caveats

Dancing a Book from Creation to Consumer

by Virna DePaul

The following article first appeared in the Promotion Posse column in the February 2011 issue of Heart of the Bay, the San Francisco RWA newsletter. Karin Ohlson, Editor.

As an author whose debut paranormal romantic suspense novel launches in three months, I've been fully immersed in the marketing fray for a while now: social networking, giveaways, contests, mugs and t-shirts, etc. Even so, now's the time I'm supposed to step things up even more. But just how high am I supposed to step? And exactly what can I really affect in terms of my book's success?



I started wondering if I should try to pump up pre-order sales to positively affect my print run, or make a personal connection with my publisher's sales team, or even contact national book chains to pimp my book to their book buyers. I did some research and spoke to some industry professionals, including Borders Book Buyer Sue Grimshaw and my awesome agent Holly Root.

What I discovered is that an author's marketing efforts, no matter how well-intentioned, should steer clear of the corporate level. Publishers and book buyers engage in an intricate dance after a book is acquired, and an author's attempt to cut into this dance in hopes of manipulating a book's success is not just a waste of time but strongly discouraged. Instead, an author is best served focusing promotional efforts on reaching the people who will actually hold her books after they're printed, and drive her sales—individual booksellers and readers.

One way to view a book's journey from creation to consumer is to look at the key players in the chain of production:

- ☺ Author
- ☺ Agent (Most Often)
- ☺ Publisher
- ☺ Sales Team
- ☺ Book Buyers (buyers for Borders, Amazon, B&N, etc.)
- ☺ **Booksellers (individual stores/general managers)**
- ☺ **Readers**

It is in these last two categories that an author should focus promotion efforts. Why? Because unless you've already made a huge name for yourself or have a unique platform, who you are and how talented you are isn't going to affect the Publisher's, Sales Team's, or Book Buyer's bottom line. (And if you have that huge name or platform, you can bet those entities already know it and you don't have to tell them.) They operate within a corporate environment based on insider knowledge, financial concerns, trends, and predictions that are not only fluid but completely outside an author's control.

Publisher

After a publisher acquires a book, its editorial team works on making the book the best it can be (which includes writing up cover copy for the back of the book, and gathering info to inform and inspire the art department). Yes, an author will probably have opinions and (hopefully) be asked for input about cover copy and cover art. If she's not asked and she has concerns, she should definitely voice them. Ultimately, however, there comes a point where the author should trust her publishing team's expertise about what will make her book sell.

Publisher's Sales Team

During this time, the publisher's Sales Team will start telling Book Buyers about its upcoming releases. The Sales Team will rely on its knowledge of each Book Buyer's needs and it will present books with an understanding of how that particular type book has sold for the retailer in the past (ex: "it's a solid entry in a category that performs very well") or how it is predicted to sell in the near future ("this is going to be a huge success and you should be aggressive in your acquisition"). Although the publisher will later provide Book Buyers a catalog of upcoming releases, the primary way a Book Buyer learns about an individual book is through the Sales Team.

Based on information/responses gathered from the Book Buyers, the Sales Team will often come up with a projected or "announced" print run. Obviously, the more Book Buyers that express a willingness to order or push a book, the bigger the announced print run will be. However, this is not the publisher's final print run and Book Buyers don't make their actual orders until 4-6 weeks before the book is released. Interestingly, the announced print run may itself impact a Book Buyer's decision about how many books to buy or not. Co-op may be discussed if it hasn't been already. (Co-op is money a publisher pays a Book Buyer for advantageous placement of a book, such as on tables at the front of the store or on a specific tier on a book aisle end cap. Co-op is usually dependent on larger print runs and a correlating excitement/long term plan for the book. Co-op, however, is not legally binding. A Book Buyer can change its mind about Co-op at any time as it only gets money once a book is placed in its store.)

Book Buyer

The Book Buyer makes a final order for a book, called a "sell in." Occasionally a bookstore will not buy a particular book (which is called "getting skipped") for a variety of reasons, including slow sales or high inventory of a particular genre. It is important to evaluate information regarding print runs, sales, and

"skips" in the context of what is happening during the same time period with other like authors. An agent will be able to give an author this type of information and perspective.

After the Sales Team obtains final orders from Book Buyers, the publisher will calculate the final print run.

Booksellers and Readers

The most important relationships an author can foster are those with individual booksellers and readers. The key is establishing a connection that is both intimate enough to fulfill a reader's needs so they continue to buy an author's books, but distant enough to maintain an author's personal sense of privacy and creative autonomy. Far easier said than done.

It is important to make connections in a human, social way, rather than as a strategic marketing plan, which will readily be identified for exactly what it is. Most booksellers are readers, and if they like you or your book, they will talk you up to other readers. They might even special order your book even if their corporate office didn't buy the book for national distribution.

A reader can positively connect with an author on several levels:

- She can be moved by an author's work.
- She can relate to or admire the author.
- She can understand the author's job and the publishing world better.
- She can, through interaction with the author, rediscover something she'd experienced in the author's work, whether tangible or intangible.
- She can benefit in unexpected ways because of the author, such as feeling inspired to make positive changes in her life or learning how to write herself.
- She can provide feedback or other assistance to an author.

Here are some things an author can do to achieve these connections:

- ✓ Write stories your targeted readers will enjoy, which means creating an intriguing world, empathetic characters, and touching on themes relevant to your readers' lives.
- ✓ Don't confuse your readers—make it obvious what they can expect from you and your stories.
- ✓ Make your stories and yourself easy to find via a professional online presence.
- ✓ Respond to your readers when they attempt to contact you.
- ✓ Engage readers via different methods: contact info on your website, email, social networking, blogs, forums, online chats, video chats, telephone conferencing, etc.
- ✓ Be willing to talk about yourself and your stories, provide frequent updates, and ask others to spread the word.

- ✓ Listen. Use Google Alerts to find discussions on the Internet about you or your books or issues your readers might be interested in. Join these discussions.
- ✓ Engage your readers by taking an interest in them and their opinions, both as it relates to your writing and apart from it.
- ✓ Provide reading group materials to encourage discussion about your books.
- ✓ Connect with and help other writers whose readers might also be your readers.
- ✓ Be authentic and honest.
- ✓ Show your face; go where your readers are.
- ✓ Don't always seek them out but sometimes let them come to you.
- ✓ Consider reader feedback but stay true to your own creative needs and need for privacy.
- ✓ Reward readers through freebies, giveaways and contests.

As indicated above, Publishers, Sales Teams, and Book Buyers engage at a corporate level and author intrusion into this process is not advised. The last thing a sales representative from a publisher wants is an individual author trying to work around her in a misguided effort to "help" with sales.

Of course, there are always exceptions. What might be a predicted disaster might end up a rare success. However, while self-promotion is important, an author has to prioritize her time in order to market contracted books while at the same time continuing to write new ones.

As Author Garrison Keillor said, "One reads books in order to gain the privilege of living more than one life." Authors write to give this experience to readers, but also to experience it themselves. Promotion is often an author's least favorite responsibility. It helps to know an author can't do it all and that it's actually counterproductive to try. Instead, an author should focus her energy on what she can truly impact and what she loves most about writing—creating her story and helping it get into the hands of readers who'll appreciate it.

Virna DePaul is a former criminal prosecutor who left law to pursue publication in romantic suspense and paranormal suspense. In March 2009, she set out to write a "big book, high concept, same but different" series. In November 2009, she got her first deal, selling the first two books of that series to Berkley. She serves as President for the Black Diamond RWA chapter. www.virnadepaul.com



Seeing the Thunder Where Do Our Ideas Come From?

by Lina Gardner

The following article was published in the February 2011 issue of Mainly Romance, the newsletter of the Maine Chapter of RWA, Mimi Bosarge, editor.

If you're an author you know one of the most common questions asked is where do your ideas come from?

How do you answer? Where do your ideas originate?



Creativity is as mysterious and incomprehensible as Dark Matter. In fact, brilliant minds like Einstein and Goedel have contemplated the connections between intuition, intelligence and insight in connection to mathematics. This multi-sensory ability is even mentioned in the Bible in the Book of Exodus as "Seeing the Thunder."

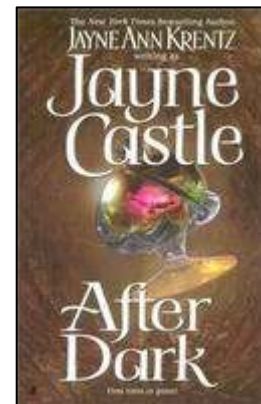
With this interesting topic in mind, I asked two lovely ladies and NYT Best-selling authors where their ideas come from...

Jayne Ann Krentz:

"The ideas simply come. I think it's the nature of the way a writer's brain works. Getting the ideas down on paper is the only way to get them out of my head. The problem is not coming up with ideas; the problem is choosing the best ones."

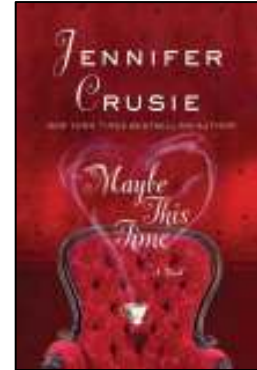
In response to my question about using amber in the Harmony series (which I LOVE)... under the pseudonym Jayne Castle... The amber thing was a stray factoid stuck in my memory banks from some long ago science class. As you mentioned, I was looking for a substance that had value and power but in this case I also wanted it to tie into the psychic elements of my Harmony series. I had a vague recollection that amber had certain electrical properties (it will hold a charge for a short time) and that it also has a long association with metaphysics. I verified those stray facts and then ran with them,

If the amber thing hadn't worked well, I would have used a crystal of some kind because crystals are associated with physics and computers and also with metaphysics. Either way, I just wanted a substance that had both scientific and metaphysical associations."



Jennifer Crusie:

"Lina, I don't know where I get my ideas. They just show up. I do know that the idea for my latest solo novel was something I thought of back in 1985 when I was working on my MA, the idea that somebody should do a feminist version of *The Turn of the Screw* and rescue that governess. Twenty-five years later, I wrote *Maybe This Time*, which pays homage to *The Turn of the Screw*, but is about something else entirely; it changed as I thought about it all those years and then it changed again as I was writing it. Sometimes different ideas start to stick together--the idea of a heroine who's a medium and a hero who's a magician, that appeals to me right now--and sometimes I get the itch to try something new--like a short mystery series--but none of the ideas really get traction until the heroine starts talking in my head, not just as an idea but as a living, breathing character. I had a great idea, about a con man and a woman who had two personalities (deliberately, she wasn't nuts) but I couldn't get that one to work, either, because she wouldn't talk to me and her younger sister kept hogging the space in my head. Finally I thought, "Well, maybe it's the sister's story since she won't shut up," and then everything started moving.



That was *Faking It*. I had another great idea about a traditional heroine in an untraditional world, a woman who liked to cook and clean and sew, a born homemaker, but I could never get her to come alive, no matter what I did. Charlotte. Charlotte was a good woman, but she never showed up. I finally had to give up on her completely because she wouldn't talk to me. But my last two heroines have baked like crazy, so maybe that's where she went. The good news about ideas is that there's a million of them, so it's more a matter of which one takes root in your brain and insists to be written than it is of thinking one up. Mine always take root about half way through the current book I'm working on. Then I can do a lot of the discovery stuff while I'm rewriting the current book, things like finding songs for the soundtrack in my head and making the collage. I get a lot of my ideas from the collage; that's where the story idea changes into a story most of the time. But where the original idea comes from? Most of the time, it just shows up and says, "Hi," and there we are."

For those of us who are lucky enough to see the thunder — maybe — the source of our ideas, just like creativity, should remain a mystery.

Lina Gardiner

www.linagardiner.com



What I've Learned From Copy Editors

by Tanya Michaels

The following article was first published in the winter 2010 issue of The Galley, the bimonthly newsletter of Georgia Romance Writers. Marilyn Baron, Editor.

A published book has many fingerprints on it. Before it sells, critique partners or agents may give input; after it's contracted, your editor will have notes and suggestions. Although publishing houses differ in size and staff structure, many use separate copy editors who look at the manuscript after one or two rounds of edits and revisions have already been completed. Here are some things I've learned from these unsung heroes:

1. Make a calendar for the story. When I'm writing, I think in terms of turning points, not dates. I know the key scenes, but I'm not necessarily paying attention to what day they happen on which was reflected in margin notes like "Isn't it Sunday? Wouldn't the bank be closed?" and "Why does your hero keep referring to their dinner "last night" when that was a week ago?" and "It's been Wednesday for three days straight. Is that some kind of intentional Groundhog Day homage?" Now, I print out monthly calendar grids for the month/year in which the story takes place and scribble brief reminders in the squares. It's a way for me to stay loosely organized since I don't do that full-on charts, graphs and colored pens plotting.

2. I am more Southern than I thought. I grew up in a military family and we moved around a LOT. I don't have much of an accent when I speak and wouldn't have said I had one when I write, especially compared to other Southern writers. But when compared to editors in Canada and New York... I have used regional terms or events that confused editors and expressions that would not translate well in foreign editions which, trust me, you want. While I'm not telling you to alter your voice, especially if writing "Southern" is your brand, be aware that some things that sound natural to your ear won't to someone else's. And if a sentence or reference can confuse one person, especially a professional editor, it's bound to confuse other readers. Sprinkling in a touch of regional dialect or local inside jokes can be good world-building, but not at the expense of clarity and not to the point of becoming parody.

3. We all have favorite words and phrases. My seven-year-old daughter uses "actually" in every other sentence. My son begins all explanations with "The thing is," I can identify catch-phrases for almost all of my close friends and many of my favorite fictional characters. It can be effective to use repeated wording/phraseology throughout a book (e.g. the recurring theme of "Lucy never backed down from a dare" in Goddess of the Hunt, a wonderful historical romance by Tessa Dare.) Such repetition has to be a deliberate choice, though, lest your characters end up all sounding alike or all sounding like you. And you have to understand that while there's nothing inherently wrong with the word "just," if it's the nineteenth time you've used

it in a paragraph, there's a problem (Tanya, this means you.) Do you remember the Seurat painting in Ferris Bueller's Day Off, the pixelated one that captures Cameron's attention? If we overuse words and phrases, they start to jump out, causing readers to fixate more on those small storytelling dots instead of the much larger picture. Obviously, none of these details are going to take the place of a great story, strong voice, or memorable characters, but fixing small flaws like these before someone else points them out makes you look good and saves you editing time that can be put to better use writing your next great story with a strong voice and memorable characters.

Three-time RITA finalist Tanya Michaels is an award-winning author for Harlequin American Romance and a Region 3 director on the RWA board. Her next books include His Valentine's Surprise (Feb. 2011) and the Hill Country Heroes miniseries.



Interview with Amanda Bergeron, Assistant Ed., HarperCollins

The following article first appeared in the February 2011 issue of the Maryland Vixen Report, the monthly newsletter of Maryland Romance Writers.

Q: What makes a submission stand out?

A: Strong writing, a fresh story idea and an engaging voice. As editors we're looking for projects our audience wants to read, and if a submission provides a solid reading experience, well, that goes a long way toward the first step!

Q: What are the common mistakes beginning writers make?

A: I've found that new writers often rely too heavily on external plot as the driving force of the story. A great hook is absolutely key, but remember engaging characters, well-developed tension and steamy chemistry are what keep a romance reader coming back for more. Another area I always look at is dialogue: great dialogue is so hard to come by. In submissions, I often see a) too much explained through characters' speech and b) multiple characters who all share the same voice and speech patterns.

Q: Does format REALLY matter? (compared, for instance, to the dogma of contests!)

A: Honestly, we really just need a double-spaced word doc. Don't spend time fretting over the merits of Arial vs. Times New Roman or any other legible font. As long as it's easy to read and the margins aren't insanely small or large we probably won't even notice the formatting.

Q: What's your #1 reason for rejecting a submission?

A: To do my job to the best of my ability I need to be excited and passionate about a manuscript--or at least the potential for what it could become. Ultimately, if I don't fall in love with the voice, the writing, the story etc, then I'm not going to be the best editor for that book. It's that simple! Q: How should we read and interpret the rejection letter? A: Unless you receive what feels very obviously like a form letter, pay attention to what the editor is saying because he or she has thought about it. If the letter says "this is just not right for me" then take that at face value, not much you can do. But if the letter gives any editorial feedback, it's worth considering. This is especially important if you receive a handful of letters that all point to the same areas. Look for those common threads. Keep in mind: if an editor wants to see a project again he or she will almost always say so. And whatever you do, don't immediately respond to a rejection with "Well, I have this OTHER project. Can I send it?" unless the editor indicated he or she may like to see future work or is in love with your writing. If this is the case for me, I make sure to specifically state that request.

Q: What advice do you have for writers who are about to submit for the first time?

A: Do your research! Read submission guidelines ahead of time. See which house is a good fit for you pay attention to the type of books they are currently putting out. As you craft your query letter, consider the nut of your story, and think of that letter as back cover copy. If you're in a book store browsing, what grabs your attention when reading a back cover? Know the market you're going for, and understand which authors have already succeeded there and why.

Q: How important do you think critique groups are for pre-published writers? Pubbed writers?

A: From what I can tell, everyone has a unique writing process that works for them. That said, whether it's a critique group/partner, RWA chapter etc, it's important for writers to engage with other writers professionally. As with any job getting feedback, "training" opportunities, or finding a sounding board are all such important elements for helping with advancement in this case honing your craft and positioning your work.

Q:What are the hot new trends in romance?

A:We've all read the articles about how romance readers are some of the biggest ebook buyers out there. I think we're going to see much more on that front, which is actually super exciting. EBooks mean a whole new way of thinking about publishing and story telling. It can give more flexibility across the board. Subgenre-wise we continue to see paranormals doing really well, and with YA being such a hot market I imagine we'll see more of what's working there work for us too (Dystopia, for example). I think readers are looking for innovation, and it will be our job to give that to them.

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Make 'Em Scream: How to Write Amazing Suspense Editors Will Buy

Hilary Sares in a National Workshop CD #13-014

Reviewed by Becky Gilbert

The following was originally printed in the February 2011 edition of Romantic Reflections, the newsletter of the Bucks County Romance Writers.

Hilary spoke about contemporary thrillers, not horror or paranormal genres. She believes that the reason women buy suspense has to do with the hero, the villain and the heroine. Women want men who tend to be lone wolves, powerful, sure of themselves, highly sensual and with a past, which often has something to do with the law. They (hero and villain) are about action -- but the hero is likely to have a "bad boy" past while the villain, who can't be sexier than the hero, has a strong sense of menace that makes him attractive. The heroine used to be clueless and couldn't take care of herself, but now she is likely to be a lone wolf, too, and can almost everything the hero does (except she can't show him up a lot or make him look like a clueless fool).

There are three dynamics of a suspense novel:

- 1. Tame the wolf (at least a little)**
- 2. Rescue me (even though the heroine is capable and doesn't want to be saved by the hero)**
- 3. Tea for two (there must be a growing sense of intimacy between H & h despite the growing menace of the villain).**

There must be no "filler" in a thriller -- it's all about pacing of the book. All action throughout the book converges on a point. The reader wants action above all -- she wants to be swept away and motion forward is more important than plot points.

Readers need an element of violence, so get creative with the gruesome. The heroine has to be afraid of the villain who can hurt her physically and the hero who can hurt her emotionally.

If you suspect your book is dragging, read it by chapters backwards. Look for exposition, which clogs action. Also cut repetition of any kind.

The villain doesn't change much at all because he exists to radiate menace (read the newspapers to find evil ideas for your villain). He does unspeakable things to his henchmen so you know what can happen to the H & h. Don't overdo foreign accents, but make him strong and sensual. Your hero and heroine change more -- but don't make your heroine love the hero right away. Romantic suspense always has a sexual subtext. Keep your heroine believable (in her



age group, what technology would she use?) Women like to read about fights between strong men though they wouldn't like it if their husbands brawled.

Readers today are used to "jump cuts" -- so use line breaks in your text (skip two lines) and though you can change POV frequently now, don't head-hop within a scene.

Female villains are not as scary. They don't carry the same sense of menace or charge as a more powerful man who can rape, etc. And the heroine needs to know she's in danger that's growing -- which can't be left until the end of the book because it will make the story not intense enough to be entertaining.

Prologues are as "in" as matching shoes and handbag. The italics they are written in set them apart and are distancing and old-fashioned.

Write the best book you can and let the editor figure out your genre. Don't worry where your book will fit on shelves. Editors are looking for something original, will put books where they will sell best.

In your cover letter, write what makes your book exciting and original. Check your work to make sure your nouns and verbs carry your writing (more than one adverb per page is too many). Start your book with a moment that has power for the reader. Emotion, fear and sex are paramount. All stories are about people and how they react -- get right to it -- don't fall in love with your own words. Make something BIG happen at the end of your story, even though it's hard to shock people anymore. Your query letter should tantalize, not tell everything -- create mood and atmosphere (unless you are a category writer then tell all in your letter). You can be scary and scare yourself if you remember that one person's psychological dominance over another is frightening. Hilary says that editors have short attention spans: if the first 5 pages look good, they will skip to chapter 2 to make sure you didn't start the book in the wrong place.

Though the workshop was mainly about what an editor would look for, Hilary's points about not using exposition (slows down the writing) and what the audience is looking for in a suspense novel (the thrill of being up close to "menace") were well-taken and will help to make your readers find your suspense stories amazing.



The Good, The Bad. The Query.

by Patty Blount

The following article first appeared in the February 2011 edition of ShoreLines, the newsletter of the Long Island Romance Writers, Jeannie Moon-Kliphuis, editor.

Ah, Query Hell.

If you're an unpublished author, you know exactly what Query Hell is. It's where souls in search of agent representation languish for what seems like forever, sweating, obsessing, even beating ourselves senseless with draft after draft of - dare I say it? - The Dreaded Query Letter. So common is this torture, there are twice as many Google hits for query hell than for query letters. For many authors, including me, writing the novel was easier than writing the query.

I had over thirty versions of the query letter for my latest project. Thirty! *gasps* I still break out in hives whenever I open that Word document. Why, why is it so difficult to distill our beloved opuses (opi?) down to a few paragraphs? Clearly, it's because of that old saying - you only get once chance to make a first impression. The query letter is that first impression and ours is just one of the hundreds that cross an agent's desk.

Talk about pressure.

How do you write the perfect query letter, the one that will ultimately seduce your Dream Agent? Trust me, after thirty attempts, I've learned there's no such thing as the perfect query. At some point, you have to stop and let a few leave the nest with your fingers crossed.

While perfection may be an unattainable ideal, there is nevertheless a whole plethora of widely-accepted query do's and don'ts. I won't bore you with those. Do the research.

Chuck Sambuchino's blog, [Guide to Literary Agents](#), has great query letter advice including letters that worked.

Agent Janet Reid's Query Shark site tears apart query letter samples, highlighting what works and what doesn't in actually submitted examples.

Former agent Nathan Bransford has a fill-in-the-blanks query letter template on his blog. You may even discover your favorite writer's query letter somewhere online.

When you're well-armed with the basics, give it a shot yourself and then, seek feedback - lots and lots of feedback. I tweeted for help and found several writers willing to review a few of my drafts. I took a class offered online by Writer's Digest magazine. I registered for yalitchat.org's Query Kick-Around Group. I printed out the whole thirty-version file and met a writer pal for breakfast one morning where we red-lined a pile of them. I started to see a pattern of what worked and didn't work in my drafts. One particular issue came up repeatedly: I wasn't nailing the right voice in my query.

I toiled over the voice issue without success until a twitter pal suggested I break a query rule and write it in first person. Even though a first-person POV query is almost a universal don't, the exercise did help me nail the right voice and I even let that version - along with a few others - out into the wild a few times. Not surprisingly, the first person version failed. However, another version started getting requests for partials. So that's the version I began using exclusively, tweaking it to meet each agent's submission requirements where appropriate.

And then, I got The Call. *dances* Proving it's just a matter of finding what works.

Patty Blount is a technical writer by day and a writes YA fiction by night. She has recently emerged from query hell with an agent of her very own. Visit her blog at <<http://patriciablount.wordpress.com>> patriciablount.wordpress.com or you can follow her on Twitter @pattyblount.

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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 by the 20th of the month.

Thank you!

Karen Smock, Editor



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