

The Love Knot

Newsletter of the Ottawa Romance Writers' Association



November 2009

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

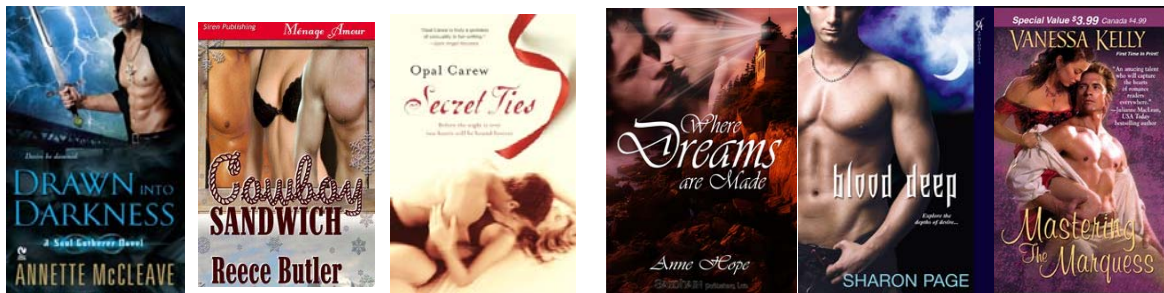
Most Canadians would probably agree that November does not rank as one of the most inspiring months of the year, weather-wise. A friend recently described it to me as "fallinter," the period of time in between fall and winter. And yet, for ORWA, November is actually an inspiring time. First, we are very pleased to officially launch ORWA's newly redesigned website. This website is the result of many hours of work and I am very grateful to everyone who helped make this happen. I hope this is an accomplishment we can all enjoy as a group for many years to come.

At the same time, November is our time to look forward to planning the 2010 year. Willing and inspired members come forward to share their time, organizational skills and enthusiasm to ensure that we have a successful and dynamic romance writers group that promotes passion and professionalism in our chosen field. At the November meeting, we will be holding elections for the board positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, confirming the non-voting Board liaisons of Workshop Coordinator, Registrar, and Newsletter Editor, and ensuring the list of volunteer positions for 2010 is filled. If you would like to volunteer for a particular position, or would like to volunteer but are unsure of what you would like to volunteer for, please contact Randy Sykes in advance of the November meeting.

Recently, I was looking at team-building quotes at work and there was one that stood out to me and I thought I would share it, because it seems so appropriate for all aspects of life, especially volunteerism. It's a quote by Stephen Covey: "Interdependent people combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success." To me, this is exactly what ORWA is all about. Many of our members have reached new levels of success in the last couple of years and I think it is a testament to the strength of our group and the extent to which the success of one is a success for us all. Volunteerism is the heart of our organization and underlines the true interdependent nature of our success as a group. I would encourage each one of you to ponder that and consider which role you can play in bringing success to our group. There are many ways, both official and unofficial, to share your knowledge and enthusiasm with the group.

Wishing you much success in your writing pursuits,
Cynthia Boyko
President

CURRENT RELEASES



REECE BUTLER, COWBOY SANDWICH was released summer 2009 by Siren-Bookstrand

OPAL CAREW, SECRET TIES was released in June 2009 by St-Martin's Press. Also available from SMP are SIX, BLUSH, SWING and TWIN FANTASIES.

ANN HOPE, WHERE DREAMS ARE MADE, was released in print in July 2009 it is also available in digital format from Samhain Publishing.

VANESSA KELLY, MASTERING THE MARQUESS is available now from Kensington Zebra.

ANNETTE MCCLEAVE, DRAWN INTO DARKNESS was released September 1st 2009 by NAL/Signet Eclipse

SHARON PAGE, BLOOD DEEP, was released May 26 from Kensington Books. Also available from Kensington are SIN, BLOOD ROSE, BLACK SILK, HOT SILK, BLOOD RED, and WILD NIGHTS. Also available is the *USA Today* bestseller THE CLUB released in February 2009 from Dell Publishing.

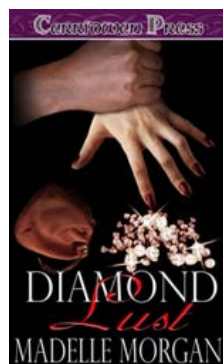
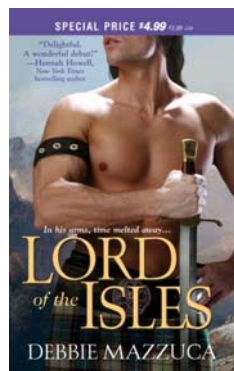
Coming Soon...

MAGGIE JAGGER, JASPER'S ANGEL, is due out November 2009 from New Concepts Publishing. PERFECT OBEDIENCE and EVERY MIDNIGHT are also available now.

LINDA POITEVIN, A Fairy Tale for Gwyn will be released from The Wild Rose Press January 2010

MADALLE MORGAN, Diamond Lust will be released from Cerredwin Press in February 2010

DEBBIE MAZZUCA, Lord of the Isles will be released from Kensington Zebra in 2010.



ACCOLADES

CHRISTINE ENTA is waiting to hear back from a publisher.

RANDY SYKES is waiting to hear back from a publisher.

KRIS WONG writing consistently

LESLEY LAURENCE is taking on-line courses

BRENDA HEALD is writing

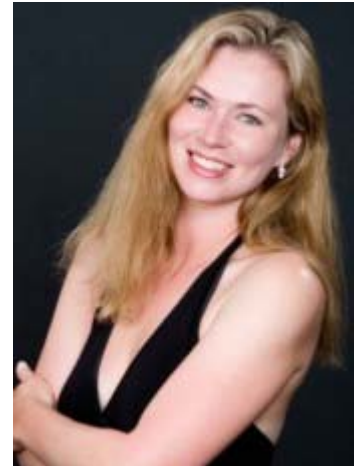
MAUREEN FISHER finished Furball Fever sent full to Kensington
ANNETTE MCCLEAVE copy edits done for book #2 starting book #3
COREENE SMITH won Toronto contest full ms. sent to Berkley editor
DEBBIE MAZUCCA edits done on book # 1 finished writing Book #2
starting proposal on book #3
SYLVIA PERRY received her second rejection
MELANIE KING entered the Linda Howard Award of Excellence
VANESSA KELLY finished edits on book #2 did Unleash Your Story for
Cystic Fibrosis in September wrote 33,000 words
LEEANN LESSARD book #2 March deadline. Finaled in the Golden Leaf.
CONNIE TOPPER signed with NY agent for both fiction and non-fiction
LOUISE CLARK had 2 requests

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

Delivering the Goods: Creating a Believable Happily Ever After
by Joanne Rock.

Want to provide fiction that has your reader sighing with satisfaction? Want to avoid an ending that seems rushed? Or are you simply having trouble wrapping up all those threads? If so, then Joanne Rock's workshop, *Delivering The Goods: Creating a Believable Happily-Ever-After*, will help you write an ending to remember.

Three-time RITA nominee, Joanne Rock is the author of over thirty romances in a variety of subgenres, including medieval historicals and steamy contemporaries. A former Golden Heart recipient, Joanne has won numerous awards for her stories. Her work has been reprinted in twenty-four countries and translated into nineteen languages.



ARTICLES

If it's November, it's National Novel Writing Month!

This article first appeared in the Fort Worth Examiner (examiner.com) by Pat Hauldren, editor of the North Texas Romance Writers Newsletter. Permission to reprint with credit. (Images can be provided upon request)



NATIONAL NOVEL
WRITING MONTH

What is National Novel Writing Month? Well, most of us call it NaNoWriMo, or just NaNo if we're in a hurry. NaNoWriMo is a month long tour de force of writing. It's a "nonprofit literary crusade that encourages aspiring novelists from all over the world to write" a novel in a month. Participants set a goal of 50,000 words and write like the dickens from November 1 to midnight November 30th.

Because of the one month window, quantity is king here, not quality. Quality is editing and that isn't allowed during NaNoWriMo. In November, type as fast as you can, as much as you can, every day. The goal of 50,000 words breaks down into 175 pages, or about 1,667 words a day minimum. It's best not to slack off the minimum and highly recommended to splurge far beyond whenever possible, because there are always "those days" that life intrudes and our focus is diverted. But persevere!

How does one participate in NaNoWriMo?

It's easy. You can do it on your own, or you can register at the official National Novel Writing Month website. Registering is free and allows you to be awarded a "badge" when you complete the 50,000 NaNoWriMo goal.

Starting November 1, you can update your word count in a box at the top of their website and post excerpts of your work for others to read. Watch your word count accumulate and your story take shape. It's really fun not to worry about editing, and just get the words down.

When you finish your 50,000 words by midnight November 30th, you can upload your novel (it may be a partial with only 50,000 words, but that's a lot!) for official verification, and be added to their Winner's Page and receive a handsome winner's certificate and web badge. The website will have step-by-step instructions on uploading your novel by mid-November.

Be sure to start from scratch. No previously written prose allowed. However, you can do some plotting, character sketching, outlining, researching, etc. You can prepare, but save the actual writing for November 1st.

There's even a NaNoWriMo handbook. Founder Chris Baty wrote *No Plot? No Problem!: A Low-Stress, High-Velocity Guide to Writing a Novel in 30 Days*. Inside this book, he spells out the secrets of writing and finishing a novel. He offers week-by-week overviews, strategies, anecdotes, and success stories from previous NaNoWriMo winners to inspire writers to complete their goal. Even if you aren't doing NaNoWriMo this year, Baty's book is a fun read.

Who participates in NaNoWriMo?

To be glib, I could say, just about every writer I know. Just about. This year, I will be participating, trying to finish the first draft of a contemporary fantasy. Last year, I wrote a science fiction dimensional travel. Most of my writer friends are participating and many of them are repeat NaNo-ers like me.

I asked around the web, on Yahoo! Groups I'm on and on Twitter and Facebook for some NaNo stories and author Toni Andrews was kind enough to reply. I know Toni from Twitter and from NYCWriters@Yahoogroups.com. Toni is the author of Beg for Mercy: Mercy Hollings, Book 1, Angel of Mercy: Mercy Hollings, Book 2, and Cry Mercy which was released June 2 this year by Mira.

Toni has been NaNoing enthusiastically since 2005. She says she loves how we use "NaNo" as a verb. She made the goal of 50,000 words 3 out of 4 years. Last year she got caught up in a non-writing project.

When I asked her if she had completed the 50k words, she said, "My '05, '06 & '07 projects all made it into published works. In fact, my May 2008 Mira Books release, Angel of Mercy, was a very lightly revised version of my '06 Nano book. Even though it was never finished, my '08 effort made it into a proposal that is currently making publisher rounds."

Toni says she's not great at rough drafts-she tends to agonize too much over early drafts when she should just be getting it on the page. NaNo helps her with that. She said, "I just got a contract for three (as yet unwritten) books from Silhouette Nocturne, and my first one is due on January 15th. I'm hoping to use Nano to get a draft done, so that I can then spend the rest of the time before the deadline revising."

Toni enjoys the "write ins", where people gather and write their novels in the company of other NaNo-ers. Sometimes, write-ins are all night affairs, but usually, write-ins meet at a local pub, library, or bookstore, socialize and write. NaNoWriMo gatherings are usually conducted by an "ML" or Meeting Liaison and you can probably find one in your area on the website.

Toni says, "It's hard to goof off when surrounded by a bunch of other people, all writing like demons." Toni would absolutely recommend NaNo WriMo to other writers.

Who are some other NaNoWriMo authors? There's a whole list on the NaNoWriMo website, but here's a few just to get you interested:

-Sara Gruen-author of Water for Elephants

- Kalanya-Nicole Price-Once Bitten, No. 1 on the Fictionwise Dark Fantasy list in Feb. 2009
- Catherine Wade-Another Time Around
- Lani Diane Rich-Time Off for Good Behavior

There's even a Young Writers Program , where participants who are 17 years old or younger have a more reasonable, yet challenging, word count goal they set for themselves. There's a chart provided where suggested word counts are broken down by grade level. These work especially well for teachers who are incorporating creative writing into their curriculum.

Are you ready to join the thousands of participants in NaNoWriMo?

Thousands, yes, thousands. In 2008, 119,301 people participated in NaNoWriMo and 21,683 "won". There are 500 official NaNoWriMo chapters around the world. Even schools got into the act, with over 500 schools K-12 participating. All totalled, over a million and a half words were officially logged in 2008.

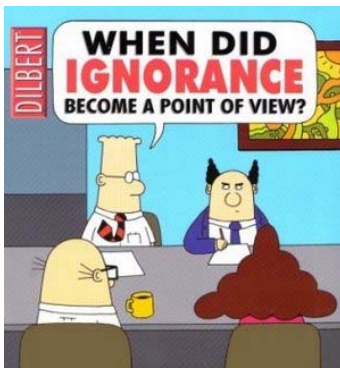
The 11th annual National Novel Writing Month is only a few days away. Are you game?

Log onto the National Novel Writing Month website or the Young Writers Program for NaNoWriMo and get started!

<http://ywp.nanowrimo.org/>

<http://www.nanowrimo.org/>

<http://toniandrews.wordpress.com/>



POV (Point of View) for Beginners **By Geri Foster**

First appeared in Yellow Rose RWA September Peddle Press Newsletter. Free to use with proper credit to author.

As a PRO member I can still remember how strange POV (Point of View) felt when I first started writing. I never realized I was “head hopping” until my critique partners brought it to my attention. Lucky for me they understood the whole process and helped me “get it”. But it wasn’t easy.

If you are like me, in the beginning I wanted to say a lot of stuff and I wanted every character to have a say. So I’d write this great scene in the heroine’s POV then I’d jump to the hero’s POV because of course, the

reader wants to know what he's thinking. Right? I didn't want to waste that great scene by staying in one POV.

The problem was my readers kept getting lost and confused. That's why you have to remain true to the rule of POV. It's like driving on the right side of the road. I know what you're thinking. Nora does it all the time. However, we aren't Nora, yet. Besides, she such a good writer, and so good at it we don't care.

The purpose of POV is to help the reader understand where they are. It's an anchor for the person reading your words. The reader needs to know who is thinking, seeing, feeling, smelling and hearing. You can only do this by getting into the main character's head. To do that your words have to reflect who's thinking, acting, smelling and feeling. Are they sad? Why? Are they scared, happy, confused, lost? All these questions are answered by using POV. What are other people around her doing? How is she reacting to that? When you are in "character", you get a unique chance to learn more about the heroine or hero and discover why they do what they do. You can also gauge other people's emotion through the main character's persecution. I suggest you stick with her until the scene is over. Let the reader know what hero might be thinking through the heroine's POV and his actions. That makes it much more interesting.

Remember, when you are in one character's head, you can't know what another character is thinking, what they see, what they feel, or what they hear. One way to stay in POV is to read your story out loud. The minute you sway to the dark side, you will catch it immediately.

So, as you go back through your manuscript look for places where one character is doing everything and the next thing you know, the other character has intruded.

Best of luck!!

Geri Foster is the editor of the Petal Press Newsletter for Yellow Rose RWA chapter. She writes Romantic Suspense and Paranormal

The History Geek's Guide to Historical Worldbuilding **by Nancy Northcott**

The following article ran in the June 2009 issue of The Final Draft, the newsletter of Carolina Romance Writers in Charlotte, NC. Permission granted to sister chapters to forward or reprint with proper credit.



Have you ever said, "I'd love to write a historical, but I don't know enough history even to start?" Do you know other writers who feel that way? If so, I'm going to let you in on a little secret we history geeks have been keeping: Historical worldbuilding is not really as hard as it looks.

It may seem intimidating, what with the clothes and the houses and the manners and the transportation and the (questionable) sanitation. The nice thing about history, though, is that experts have delved into these fields and provided handy resources for the writer who knows where to look. This article will cover references for the basic building blocks of historical worlds.

General histories of particular periods make good jumping-off points for knowing the characters' worlds. Examples would be *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* by Roy Porter, or *Our Tempestuous Day*, by Carolly Erickson (about Regency England). Studies of medieval England abound. Joseph and Frances Gies wrote a series of books about life in medieval England. Marjorie Rowling was also prolific about this period. The Gies and Rowling books come into print and go out but are readily available through libraries or used book dealers.

Biographies of rulers or other people of note during the particular period can also be very helpful for insight into their social circles, home furnishings, and even food. *The Duchess*, a biography of Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire in Georgian England, contains social detail about that period. *Bess of Hardwick: Empire Builder*, a biography of a much-married, socially prominent noblewoman, includes a wealth of information about the nobility of Elizabethan England.

Once you have a good picture of the character's world, placing the social scene in perspective becomes easier. *Elizabeth's London* and *Dr. Johnson's London*, both by Liza Picard, are readable, practical sources for everyday life in London during these periods. There are quite a few other excellent, more general sources about the city. Such books often address recreational activities and common means of transportation for people of the upper social classes. The *Writer's Digest* books about different periods are a good starting point for details about daily life but a little sketchy to be sole references.

Hugh and Marjorie Quennell wrote a series of books about daily life in different periods of British history. While the Quennell books are no longer in print, copies are available in many libraries and from online booksellers. Joseph and Frances Gies published numerous studies of life in medieval England. Emily Hendrickson's *Regency Reference Book* is a practical, comprehensive look at the ton and its practices. Dover

Publishing has wonderful books about various aspects of life in the past, from armor and weaponry to fashion. The Dorling Kindersley reference books for children often contain many helpful details.

Of course, characters need places to live. Books about castles are readily available in most libraries and online, as well as in stores. Margaret Wood's *The English Medieval House* is very informative. So are Mark Girouard's *Life in the English Country House* and *The Country House Companion*. Books about Victorian life have recently become more available, including *Inside the Victorian Home* and *What Jane Austen Ate and Dickens Knew*. These sources generally give some information about staffing these homes, too.

Characters also need wardrobes. There are many books out about fashion through the ages. Dover books recently reissued Herbert Norris' excellent books about fashion during particular periods.

Meals sometimes figure in novels. My favorite resource is Sara T. Paston-Williams' *The Art of Dining*, which has chapters on food and dining during different periods in English history. Books on daily life and housekeeping may also help in this area. So can biographies

Courtship and marriage customs turn up in books about the history of families and family law and in women's history books. Lawrence Stone wrote a number of books about family relationships and family law. There are a variety of books about women and households in particular periods and numerous books about social customs, including courtship. *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History*, by Anne Lawrence, and *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840*, by Alan MacFarlane are good examples. Again, biographies of famous women such as Bess of Hardwick and the Duchess of Devonshire usually contain useful information on courtship and marriage customs as well.

The trick to all of this is to go to a good reference, find what you need, and stop rather than obsessing over every single detail. If you're not sure what you need, you can check author Patricia Wrede's list of worldbuilding

factors, posted on the website of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America: www.sfwaweb.org/writing/worldbuilding1.htm. This comprehensive list is tailored more for fantasy writers who're building entire worlds than for authors slotting into a world that once existed. The last couple of segments, on daily and public life, however, offer categories that might spur interesting story details.

Online booksellers can provide a useful overview of what's available, but I

recommend using the local library or interlibrary loan to check out a book before purchasing it. I hesitate to trust websites unless they're maintained by universities, organizations devoted to the particular period, or people who have some credentials on the subject. Anyone can put just about anything on the web, with no one checking for accuracy.

To recap, building a historical world takes only 5 easy steps:

- 1) Become familiar with the period's general tone and issues;
- 2) Investigate the characters' social surroundings and ranks, including their recreational activities and customs for courtship;
- 3) Figure out what kind of home the characters have, a consideration that will determine the furnishings and staffing as well;
- 4) Dress the characters;
- 5) Decide whether you want to include food and, if so, what kind.

Now you're ready to start. Other questions may arise as you go, but having covered these five steps should help you know where to find the answers.

Nancy Northcott earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, cum laude, as a history major and spent a summer studying Tudor and Stuart Britain at Oxford University. A lifelong anglophile, she loves English social history and biographies. Her historical romance manuscripts have fared in the Maggie Awards, the Orange Rose, the Daphne du Maurier Awards, and the Golden Heart and have won Put Your Heart in A Book, the Emerald City Opener, and the Molly. Visit her on the web at www.nancynorthcott.com.



Show Don't Tell **By Michelle Miles**

This article first appeared in Yellow Rose RWA September Peddle Press Newsletter. Feel free to use with proper credit.

I judge a lot of contests. Seven this year to be exact with an average of five entries per contest. I can't tell you how many times I see the "telling" in stories instead of the more emotional-punch of showing. And you can tell the difference between a new writer and a seasoned writer by how they describe things and really use that "showing" to their advantage.

I'm guilty of it, too. Sometimes I just get lazy as a writer and think, "Oh, I'll go back and redo that later." ;)

Anyway. I wouldn't be rambling on about this if I wasn't going to give you some examples of telling vs. showing. Are you ready? Here we go.

These examples are from my latest, WIP (the gladiator book I'm revising).

Original:

He rounded the corner into the banquet hall and paused to take in the sights and sounds.

Revised:

He rounded the corner into the banquet hall. Faint strains of harp and lute music floated through the mingling group of men—politicians and Citizens and other dignitaries. He even spotted a few Legion soldiers.

See the difference? In the original version, he pauses to take in the sights and sounds and then it goes on with the next paragraph. But in the revised version, we actually hear and see what the character is hearing and seeing. Instead of the generic "sights and sounds".

Here's another example.

Original:

Heads turned as Elena crossed the room, making Cassius jealous.

Revised:

Heads turned as Elena crossed the room, rousing the jealousy in him with her every step. Cassius wanted to single-handedly rip out each one of their eyeballs.

I love this description – the fact that Cassius wants to rip out their eyeballs for looking at his woman cracks me up. :D

And one more.

Original:

After all they'd been through now that she obviously needed him she shoved him away, making him angry.

Revised:

After all they'd been through now that she obviously needed him she shoved him away. His rage and frustration exploded. At her. At the Emperor. At this unnerving situation they were both in.

I'm sure there are better examples than I can give you, but at least this gives you the idea of the difference.

Happy writing!

Michelle Miles is a member of Romance Writers of America® and serves as President of her local chapter as well as Treasurer of the Fantasy, Futuristic and Paranormal special

interest chapter. She writes hot contemporary and fantasy romance. For more information about her books or to sign up for her monthly newsletter, visit her website at <http://www.michellemiles.net>.

Word for the month: Click!
Vicki Batman

This article first appeared in the September issue of the DARA News the official newsletter of the Dallas Area Romance Authors. Permission is granted to forward to other sister RWA chapters. Pam Phillips, DARA Newsletter Editor



Click! - no, not the sound a frogger makes. It's the switch that goes off in your head when an idea or thought smacks. You know what I mean -- the divine moments that represent the best creative place. I know I've been hit at the oddest times.

My process is to write down the bare bones of my story then layer and layer and layer, submit for critique, and layer and layer. During the layering process, a word or phrase will -- click! -- pop in my head. Most of the time the word or phrase is perfect, better than what I'd originally written. When this happens, pure creativity is working in me.

One day, I was walking through my closet and glanced at my husband's colorful array of ties. Click! -- an idea blossomed. I grabbed a sticky note and scribbled down a couple of things. Later on, I went to my desk to write a short story, "Christmas Ties". Another time, I walked through my closet and got the idea to write my third book, Bad Dates. (Note to self: maybe move desk to closet. lol)

As I sipped drinks with DARA friends at RWA National, we began describing first dates. Click! Our innocent war stories stimulated my friend with ideas for several books. She pulled out her iPhone and began working so not to lose the thoughts whirling in her head. Cool.

I've heard if you think long and hard about some spot in your writing and then sleep on it, you will wake up with a pure thought. Click! How about that? Your creativity is at work while you're sleeping.

Do you pay attention to your clicks? Do you scurry around with pieces of paper, ticket stubs, grocery receipts with prize bits written on them? Do you send yourself texts with your ideas?

Pay close attention to the little voice in your head, the little thought that passes through, the "ah ha" moments. These clicks! could be what makes

the difference in your writing. But it won't make a difference unless it is on the page.

Keep on keeping on.

Vicki Batman has written three books, many short stories and essays. Recently she sold two of her short stories. She is currently serving as 2009 DARA President and a member of Elements, KOD, and FTHRW.



Promotion for Unpublished Authors – Why bother? by Tamara Hughes

The following article was published in the November issue of Midwest Muse, newsletter of Midwest Fiction Writers (MFW). It may be used or forwarded by RWA chapters with proper attribution to Tamara and MFW.

If I'm not published, why waste time promoting myself? Wouldn't my time be better spent writing my novel? While there is no question writing is the most important thing an author can do, two questions must be answered: Is it possible some degree of self-promotion can help me to get published? AND If I do no promotion now, will I be behind the game once I do have a book to sell?

Ultimately your voice, plot, and characters will sell the book you've been working so hard to create. And yet, this is a tough business. Getting an agent or editor's attention at times seems impossible. I admire the work of many authors who have not been able to get the notice they deserve. So what gives? What does it take to push yourself over that wall at a time when agents and editors are overwhelmed with submissions? Promoting yourself will not guarantee a sale, but could it tip the scale in your favor? If an agent sees you are serious about making writing a career through your web site and your involvement in the writing community, perhaps they would be more apt to give you a chance. Maybe, maybe not.

Recently, I was a finalist in the American Title V competition. Sponsored by the Romantic Times BOOKreviews magazine and Dorchester Publishing, this contest posted book excerpts and relied upon public voting to decide a winner. And winning meant a publishing contract. This was a high stress situation. What started out as an affirmation of my writing quickly turned into a race to learn promotion in order to get enough votes not to be eliminated from the competition. During this time, I learned a few lessons.

A web site is essential. Luckily, I had one set up mere months before the

voting started. I cringe to think if I had to put one together while the stress was eating at me. Secondly, if you would like to use blogging as a tool for promotion, getting an audience takes time and a lot of work. It's not something that can be done quickly. Lastly, networking is the name of the game. The more people you become acquainted with, the more interest that develops in you and your work. Interest that can result in votes, or sales.

I haven't sold yet, but I imagine that once the call arrives, the time crunch is on. Not only will promotion become a priority, there will be revisions and edits needed, and possibly a second book to prepare. In the months before your book is released, will you have time and energy to position yourself for optimum sales?

This is a complicated issue, and everyone needs to decide for him- or herself. Join us, November 14th, when a panel of published and unpublished authors will discuss the merits and pitfalls of promotion as well as the methods of marketing.

Tamara Hughes is an active PRO member of the Midwest Fiction Writers, a chapter of RWA. She writes historical and urban fantasy romance. If you have questions, you can contact her at www.tamarahughes.com.

Dig Deeper **By Michelle Beattie**

This article first appeared in the June edition of The Writer's Saddle, the newsletter of the Calgary chapter (CaRWA). Permission to forward granted with proper credit please!



Prior to being published, I, like many I'm sure, often wondered why I wasn't. While there were certainly better written books out there than mine, there were, in my opinion, at least also far worse. If they could get published, why couldn't I? I had done everything I could think of to make the craft better. I read constantly, I joined a critique group, joined RWA, went to a few workshops and still that contract eluded me. Why?

It was at a weekend getaway with my critique group that I finally got the answer, though it wasn't what I wanted to hear at the time. A published friend of mine critiqued my work and liked it. She said to me, "I don't know why you aren't published. I can't see any fault in your writing. My only suggestion would be to dig deeper."

That was it? Dig deeper? That was the mystery to getting published?

What did it even mean? I was so confused and I had no idea where to start. Dig deeper with my characters? With my plot? With my setting? Did it all need work? Frankly, I was disheartened. I had no idea what it meant let alone how to go about doing it. For months those two little words drove me mad. Dig deeper? Couldn't she have explained it more? Couldn't she have shown me how?

I love seeing progress. I like to say I wrote 'x' many pages at the end of a day and so I tend to write fast, always trying to get to that scene ending or chapter break as soon as possible. And it was then, as I was re-reading a scene in my third manuscript that it hit me. Yes, I wrote the scene. It had a beginning, middle and end, it had snappy dialogue and great description but it felt like I had only skimmed the surface, like a rock being skipped over a lake. The scene made sense, but it wasn't everything I'd envisioned. It needed more. And to get it, all I had to do was use what I'd already written and dig deeper. Ta da! The lightbulb went off. Months, in fact, years later, I finally understood what the heck she'd meant by dig deeper.

And that's what I did. I added more senses, more detail in the description. I tried using more similes, better metaphors. If my characters did something, I'd ask myself why and then show their rationalization for doing that action. I added more banter when needed, made my secondary characters more three-dimensional rather than just using them as plot devices. I added more emotion and depth, humour if it needed it or if it was appropriate to the characters.

That book, the one I finally 'got it' on, was the first book I ever sold and became book one of a series. I still use dig deeper when a scene isn't working. There are times, as we've all been told, when it's not where you're going that's the problem, it's where you've been and so you go back and change what was wrong. There are times the story isn't working because you've made your characters do something so out of character that it stops you dead until you fix it. But those other times when you know, when you feel it in your gut that the scene isn't working and you're not sure why, you simply need to dig deeper to make it the best it can be.

I hated those two words for the longest time and now I love them. They improved my writing, they helped me get my first contract and then the next, which was a two-book deal. Not only are they the best advice I've ever gotten but they are now the motto I live by when I'm writing and editing. Dig deeper. Two little words that made all the difference for me.

Michelle Beattie sold her first book, *What a Pirate Desires*, to Berkley Publishing in 2007. It was released in December of 2008. The sequel, *Romancing the Pirate*, will be

released September 1, 2009. You can visit her at www.michellebeattie.com



Accepting Change to Improve Your Writing by Lisa Lange

The following article appeared in the June 2009 edition of Tide Lines, newsletter of the Vancouver Island Chapter. Permission granted to reprint or forward with proper credit given. The following was originally printed in the April/May/June 2009 issue of Romancing the Prairie, newsletter of Prairie Hearts RWA #43. Permission to reprint with credit to author and newsletter.

Countless clichés and famous words-of-wisdom have been penned in attempts to quell any anxiety arising at the first sign of change. How do these little anecdotes apply to our comrades in the writing world? Can anyone make a change to improve their writing; to broaden their horizons; to open their minds, and hearts, to new ideas? Yes.

Writing articles and writing books invite writers to entertain other genres; to read, and write, outside their comfort zone. For many years, my commitment and loyalty to the romance genre went unscathed. I was a romance-story buff; be it movies or books. I turned up my nose at the mere hint of any deviation of what I considered 'straight-up' romance. Change is not the kiss of death

I met Lori Avocato (www.loriavocato.com) at a conference hosted by the Kiss of Death Chapter of RWA, and in the spirit of trying something new, I bought one of her books – a humorous, romantic mystery. /Okay/, I thought, /I'll give it a try/. (You would think my decision of reading something different was to be a life-altering experience!) With easy, breezy, funny characters, her style of writing and the lighter tone of mystery that was easy on the brain to a 'non-mystery' reader like me – well, let's just say I was hooked. My taste-buds had been teased, and I wanted more.

I happily skipped to the bookstore, and drooled over the perfectly bound pages heralding fantasies, adventures, and new experiences not previously entertained. Racing home, I fell through my door, books teetering in my arms. Flopping on the couch to catch my breath, I scanned through the up-coming-movies section on our Über-TV. Mission one, stage one, had been initiated; I was entering the forbidden zone – something different.

Changing Through Serial Killing

My recent discovery of the TV series 'Dexter' has taught me more than I realized I would learn from a show about a serial killer. True, in

twisted rationale, the main character 'is' doing good for the human race by killing only 'bad guys,' but no one knows his true identity except the viewer.

Late nights on the couch with this darling character have me dissecting, analyzing and learning about characterization. As I panicked at the merest hint of his true 'identity' being revealed, my panic reaffirmed one of the most important rules in fiction writing; make them (the reader) want to follow his or her journey in the story, even if the end of the character's journey is potentially in the electric chair (not that I want my sweetheart Dexter to end up there!)

Fellow 'closet Dexter fans' reinforce a most fundamental aspect of writing; make your readers fall in love with the character, no matter what his or her role in the story. I would have never guessed that loving a show about a serial killer (not considered socially acceptable in most circles), would teach me fundamental principles about engaging readers.

Would I have been interested in forensic-type shows previously? The mere question would have, yet again, had my nose turning up, paying homage to my loyalty to the romance genre.

Diplomatically speaking, this is not to insinuate reading only your own (favourite) genre will not foster learning, growth or development of your own writing. But would not breaking out of your shell, your comfort zone, make you see things in a different light? It's like eating soup out of a cup versus a bowl; for some reason, the same soup tastes different out of either dish. But from the cup, you notice the soup has peas, which you love, but that same soup from the bowl? You never noticed.

Creation in Change

I recently acquainted myself with JD Robb. Over the years, I have religiously read Nora Roberts' books, but veering into the alter-world of JD Robb was never a consideration. However, my new curiosity and my need/desire/craving for change drove me to read her latest, *Creation in Death* (May 2008). Description of the experiences of the victims, dialogue of the villain, and the waiting to see what will happen next had me ditching Dexter for a night or two. Maybe sick voyeurism on my part, but I think I LIKE getting into the villain's head.

Does what you read influence what you write? Numerous interviews reference the same authors known for writing in a certain genre admitting to voraciously reading a completely unrelated genre. With dramatic flair she, or he, proclaims 'ohhh, I could /'never'/ write

that.' Not that there is anything wrong with 'that,' whatever genre 'that' might be. Anything outside one's comfort zone can be scary. Some writers would agree with the notion of being influenced by what he or she reads; others would adamantly dispute that. Regardless, the fact remains, reading and experiencing other writing will always be influential in some form or another.

My interest is in writing romance and women's fiction, as well as human interest magazine articles. Could I attempt to write a sci-fi, forensic, mystery or historical story of any length? Research to those extremes is not my thing and my creativity flows in a different direction. But do I read them with fascination? Do I read as a writer or as a reader? Yes to all of the above. Do I watch Dexter as viewer or writer? Definitely both. Did I read J.D. Robb hoping to genre-hop? No, I just liked the blood, thank you. But it deepened my understanding of writing gripping fiction. Would I try to write an inspirational article? No; not because I am not religious, but it's just not my 'thing.' I like to read inspirational articles for the 'lift', but writing one – not my 'calling.'

Oceans of Change

Every genre fills a different need. Straying over to uncharted territory is void-filling fortification. You glean something different out of every genre. Whether due to sensory overload, or perhaps it's time for a break, just dive in and try something new, no matter what the reason. It's like dipping your big toe in another ocean just to say you have done it; just to see how it feels. But be prepared; you might get hooked and want to stay there.

And don't forget, just because you see an article about writing science fiction, and you are still dead-set against aliens, other galaxies and dimensions, something can always be learned and gained. Storytelling is the same no matter what genre; and not just beginnings, middles and ends. Plot, characterization, world-building – the list goes on. Reading articles about, and written by, authors of genres not of your preference can always help. Remember, they are published, so they must know 'something.' Read everything you can get your writer's-cramped little hands on.

It's Okay, You Won't Feel a Thing

Take a deep breath and jump in. It won't hurt. If you are adamant about your particular genre that you absolutely without a doubt love, try a cross-genre. Hybrids of romantic mystery, science fiction with romantic elements, romantic western, fantasy with a romantic twist, even forensics sprinkled with romance – the possibilities are never-ending. Don't write to trend – write from the heart. Write what you love. If you don't love it, your readers won't. Keep in mind even the teensiest

little toe dipping into uncharted waters won't hurt. It's okay, you won't feel a thing.

Lisa McManus Lange belongs to the Vancouver Island Chapter of Romance Writers of America (#146). With numerous published magazine articles under her belt, she is proud to have achieved typing THE END at the end of a romance novel, and is working on another – something 'different' for a change.

Editor's Message

Please send any upcoming releases, news, and articles to tammyplunkett@sympatico.ca by the 20th of November.

Have a great month full of learning and writing.
-Tammy