

Connections

February 2012

The Newsletter of The Connecticut Chapter of Romance Writers of America

Region One, Chapter One

Vice President's Letter

Welcome to February, the month of Love. Bah-humbug! Yes, you heard me right; I admit I'm not a fan of Valentine's Day. "What?" you exclaim, "But you're a romance writer, how can you be against V-day?" Yes, I am a romance writer (and proud of it), but why do we only take one day of the year to celebrate love?

For that matter, why do we only celebrate/acknowledge the big accomplishments/mile stones in life? It's all the little steps which lead to the final goal. I propose we make 2012 the year we find something, no matter how small, to celebrate every day.

If you truly only took one day out of the year to show your love, you wouldn't have very many people in your life to share it with. Think about it. Would you really want to be around someone who never acknowledges the small things you do for them?

So here are my kudos to you for writing that sentence, paragraph, page, chapter or manuscript; for facing your fears and entering the contest, sharing your work, querying an agent or editor; for giving a critique or helping a friend work out a plot problem; coming to a CTRWA meeting or supporting your fellow members with your kind and supportive comments on the loops and kudos to our new members for joining CTRWA.

Remember you can't get from point A to Z without hitting all the little stops on the way. Enjoy each moment; it makes the taste of victory long-lasting and sweet.

Gail Chianese
Vice President, CTRWA

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Next Meeting

February 11, 2012

Sarah Humphreys

The "WOW" Factor

Jamie Schmidt &

Jane Haertel

Push to PRO

Regular Meeting Schedule

Critique Group: 9:30

Business Meeting: 11:00

Speaker: 1:00

Member News:

Kristan Higgins has started a new book and...gasp!...didn't even finish her outline first (hangs head in shame). . . . and **Linda Avellar** finally got a website up and running with IT help from her kids. Stop by and visit her at www.lindaavellar.com. Linda is also excited to report that she took **first place** in the mainstream category of Florida RWA's Golden Palm Contest. Congratulations Linda!!

Allan Cooper didn't do much writing during holiday time, but now that January's here, the boy is 'back in business' and working on a short story. He is looking forward to the meeting on the 14th. Good writing Allan! It's still not late to sign up - **Peter Andrews** will be teaching "How to Write FAST" online for Yosemite Romance Writers starting February 3 (see

<http://www.yosemiteromancewriters.com/id33.html>). He'll teach the same course face-to-face at Westchester Community College starting March 26. He'll also be teaching "Write Flash Fiction!" at WCC starting on April 16. (He'll be at their Valhalla campus. See the WCC spring catalogue at http://www.sunywcc.edu/continuing_ed/welcome/cont_ed_welcome.htm). . . . **Kate Rothwell** writing as Summer Devon had a new release January 17. This is her fifth historical m/m romance co-written with Bonnie Dee. <http://summerdevon.com>



Calendar

March 10: **Lori Avacato** presents – *Suspense with Humor*. Talking all things haunted, our craft corner topic will be, *Researching Haunted Places*, presented by **Julie Griffin**. Got plot problems? Then don't miss **Peter Andrews'** Bonus session: *Solving Plot Problems*.

April 14: We have a special guest - **Julia Quinn!!** Julia will present her workshop - *Dialogue: It's More than What You Say*. In the afternoon, *Q&A with Julia*.

May 12: Yes, folks it's not as far away as you think. Polish up those manuscripts for **CT Fiction Fest 2012**.

Member of the Month:

Tell us about what you're working on now.

I'm working on a cozy mystery set in the world of pro-wrestling entertainment, an erotic novel in the style of the movie "Love Actually," and a young adult steampunk novel set during the American Civil War.

What's the next major step you need to take in your writing?

A publishing contract! I'm waiting to hear from a top publisher for my paranormal romance and the big six for my urban fantasy.

What's the hardest part of the writing process for you?

It has to be getting started. I will do anything to procrastinate putting my butt in the chair. Lately, I've had to set appointments with myself to write.

What's your favorite part of the writing process?

Getting lost in the world and hearing my characters voices in my head.

Any quirks or special talents you'd like to share?

I've been knitting since I was 12 years-old, but my favorite thing to make is a garter stitch scarf. You'll see me knitting at RWA meetings on gigantor size 35 needles and double yarn.

Have you been given any great advice on writing fiction, or do you have any to impart?

A few years ago, I would collect every writing book ever published. Stephen King's "On Writing," and Anne Lamott's "Bird by Bird" are my favorites. And I friend of mine said to me, "It's time to stop reading about writing and start writing."

Who are some of your favorite authors and why?

Karen Marie Moning, for her Fever series, because she made a Mary Sue heroine that I absolutely hated into a bad girl/kick ass character that kept me reading. The way McKayla changed throughout the series and how the tension kept ratcheting up in all the books was fantastic – and a torture when you had to wait a year between releases. Anne Bishop, for her Black Jewel series, because she makes characters that become your friends and family. I still haven't forgiven her for the Jaenelle/Surreal thing. Ilona Andrews, for her Kate Daniels series, because of the page turning – got to know what happens next action.

Best CT restaurant in your humble opinion?

I have to preface this by saying, my favorite restaurant is anyone where I don't have to cook or clean up. So I'm easily satisfied. However, I will drive the hour to West Farms Mall for P.F. Chang's fried green beans and wonton soup. I will mortgage my house for the chicken pad thai at Guilford's Som Siam's. I used to love



Roomba's in New Haven, but they closed. I like high tea at Celtica in New Haven, their Bewley's tea and scones are to die for. And the Turkish apple tea and baklava at the Istanbul Café in New Haven are also yummy enough to be included in my favorites.

If you could cast your current hero or heroine, who'd get the call?

Hoo Boy! I guess Joanie Laurer for Patrice/Valkyrie. And Ron Jeremy for El Toro.



Excerpt from *Dark Match*:

"Don't worry, you're time is coming. I can feel it." Viking rubbed his chest. "Or maybe I shouldn't have had that burrito for lunch."

Patrice rolled her eyes at him and peeked out of the curtains again. This time, she saw Anya Trent, the USW announcer, in the center of the ring dressed in a smart business suit.

"Here we go," Patrice said.

"Vayas Con Dios, you two. I'm going to take a dump," El Toro said.

Nome Du Plume

By Lissa Trevor

While my first novel, an urban fantasy, was shopping around, my agent asked me what else I was working on. I told her I had a young adult that wasn't finished and an erotic ménage novel that needed some spit (ahem) and polish before I'd hand it over. She told me to get a move on and I did.

I decided to use a pen name for the reason that I do have an urban fantasy book coming out in the future and didn't want to cause any confusion. But I can't keep a secret, so I pretty much told my friends and family that there was a very good chance that the erotic novel would be published before the urban fantasy. While the reactions were varied, to my endeavor one thing was universal. No one liked my pen name.

Zenoibe Dahl.

Zenoibe, after Niobe from the Matrix and Queen Zenobia of Syria.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zenobia>

And Dahl, after Roald Dahl, author of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and James and the Giant Peach – two of my favorite children's books. I also wanted to call all my fans, Dahlings!

The deciding factor was my agent going, "You sure you want to go with that name? It's a little confusing."

So I became Lissa Trevor, smut writer extraordinaire. Well, actually at the moment pretty ordinaire, but I've got potential.

As I was finalizing the last draft, I was looking for final beta readers and trying to find out who would be too offended or embarrassed to read this really racy, explicit book. My husband would read a scene and I would be like, "Does F/F bondage scene work? It needs to be sexy not just porn." And he'd say, "I don't know. I think I'm going to have to read this again a few more times." I would follow up that with, "Oh no! It's confusing." Then I realized he was being funny.

My first big detracting moment came when my cousin said to me in disgust, "What would your Grandparents say if they knew you were doing this?"

My first thought went to the '80's musical Chess when Florence rounds off on Freddie and belts it out as only

as only Judy Kuhn can, "You know that there's nothing I've ever done that (they'd) be ashamed of in my whole life! Why'd you have to do this to me?"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jB07PIXap0>

But then I thought about the question. My Grandmother would shrug and say, "Are you happy? Then that's all that matters." My Grandfather would want to know why the urban fantasy book wouldn't be published first because, after all, it was the first one I submitted. I would explain to him how the big publishing companies usually take at least a year from acceptance to publishing, whereas the epubshers turn around a bit quicker. He would then use a racial slur and a salty epithet to describe the industry, mostly because every other word out of his mouth was either a racial slur or a salty epithet. Then the conversation would go as follows:

"Lissa, I don't get it. Why are you publishing a dirty book?"

"Money."

"How much money?"

"Enough to pay some bills every month."

"People will pay for that?"

"Yup."

"And it's not illegal?"

"Nope."

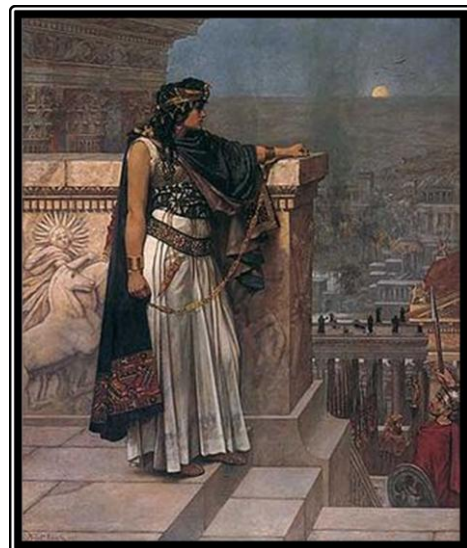
"Are you sure you're going to get paid for it?"

"Yup."

"Then epithet it. Good for you."

Although he'd probably agree with my agent that Zenoibe was too hard to spell.

Lissa Trevor is a busty, 6 foot redhead who writes smutty, smutty sex and drinks pink champagne even though it clashes with her hair. She still would like to call her followers Dahlings! Because it reminds her of Zsa Zsa Gabor.



Three Quick and Easy Tips for Punching Up Your Fiction

By Cheryl Alldredge (aka Charlie Allden)

Remember that old saying; the devil is in the details? I like to twist it a bit and say, when it comes to writing, the strength is in the details. Here are three quick techniques that focus on the fine points of writing to give your work more impact.

Focus description on significant details!

Not all details are created equal and not everything in your story needs to be described. Focus your powers of description on things that are important to your story: the significant details. What makes a detail significant?

Any detail that is integral to the plot must be shared. If a letter opener on the hero's desk is going to be a weapon later in the story, then you'd better show it to us in that earlier scene where he's sitting in his office. However, we probably don't need a detailed description of the bookcase, the chair, the...you get the point.

Another type of significant detail is one that shows the reader something about the character or his situation. If the suit Mr. Zucker wears to church has a discreet patch at one elbow, we know his family is probably struggling financially. Sometimes these types of details are more subtle or symbolic. If the scene that introduces Mary Jane shows her standing barefoot amidst the broken glass spread across the kitchen floor, it becomes significant that she is barefoot and subconsciously we will pick up on the fact that this character is vulnerable.

Eradicate filter words!

Filter words put distance between the reader and the character. Words like saw and felt remind the reader that they are reading a story rather than experiencing it. For example:

Basic: He felt the wind on his cheeks. Stronger: The wind stung his cheeks.

The stronger sentence provides more sensual detail and lets the reader feel what the character is feeling.

And that leads to my next tip...

Use stronger verbs!

There are hundreds of thousands of words in the English language but most of us use only in the low tens of thousands on a regular basis. Look at only verbs and the number we use regularly drops dramatically. Common verbs like look, walk, stand, sit are overused in our fiction. They also do little to illustrate or color the action. Does this mean you should pull up a thesaurus and replace them all with synonyms? No. Don't replace them with any synonym. Replace them with a better verb.

Basic: He stood up.

Stronger: He jolted out of his seat.

The second version of the line above is stronger because it shows us that the "he" is either in a hurry, startled, or anxious. "Jolted" provides more information.

If there isn't a better choice, stick with the more common word. It's better for the verb to add nothing than to distract the reader or detract from the other strong writing around it. "He jolted out of his seat" would make little sense if he then limped to the fridge for another beer.

Putting these three quick techniques to work is sure to punch up your prose, because the strength of your writing is in the details!

Cheryl is a fan of love, adventure, and happily ever afters. Her short novel, Ladybugs and Fireflies is out now from Highland Press. She blogs about writing, Florida, and books at www.cherylalldredge.wordpress.com and about all things SciFi at www.smartgirlsscifi.wordpress.com.

The following article appeared in the Winter 2011 issue of Coastal Connections, the newsletter of the First Coast Romance Writers.



How TV taught me to write a Synopsis

By Carrie De Simas

Each year I help judge my chapter's contest entries. It's a great way to help my chapter raise money, but also a great way to learn a few things myself because it's often way harder to evaluate my own work, than to spot the errors in someone else's.

One of the hardest parts of contest entries, and submissions in general, seems to be the synopsis. There is the mistaken impression out there that the synopsis is a short story version of the full manuscript. Not true. It's also not a teaser or a back-of-the-book blurb.

Part of the problem writers have such a hard time with the synopsis is that it is counter-intuitive for us. We are taught to **show** and **not tell**. But the synopsis demands that we do just the opposite. Think of a kid recapping a movie. They don't build up to the suspenseful moments, they lay it all out upfront. They **tell** you what happened, holding nothing back. That is, in a nutshell, what a synopsis should do.

Since synopses tend to be most writers' Achilles' Heel, I have put together a how-to list based on Hollywood and TV:

1. **CHARACTERS:** *"Some people count, some people don't."* (Robbie in *Dirty Dancing*) Only name the essential characters in your synopsis. Most publishers only want the details of the main characters (hero, heroine, villain) with maybe a line or two dedicated to any essential secondary characters.

2. **PLOT:** *"Just the facts Ma'am."* (Sergeant Friday in *Dragnet*) Only give the essentials in the synopsis. Save the quirky scenes and interesting factoids for the actual manuscript. Just give the bare bones, including the hero's journey plot-points that apply, the main characters and their basic character arcs, any major twists or surprises, big black moment, and resolution.

3. **CONFLICT:** *"That's twelve levels of suck, that's what that is."* (George in *Dead Like Me*) The key to the synopsis is to tell what the internal and external conflict is for each main character, and the rising stakes that lead them to the big black moment, and eventual resolution. Tell how you really make your character work for their growth, tell how you make them suffer, and tell how they eventually learn and evolve.

4. **BACKSTORY:** *"You got me monologuing!"* (Syndrome in *The Incredibles*) If you have woven the backstory, conflict and character growth through the manuscript in a gradual and subtle way it will become apparent in the synopsis because you will be able to tell us the GMC (goal, motivation and conflict) of each scene/chapter in one or two quick sentences. This will mean that you won't have to have a lengthy explanation at the end of the synopsis (or a scene in your book) where the hero/heroine, or most commonly, the villain has to go on and on for paragraphs or pages to explain themselves. You see this a lot in mediocre television and film where the villain has the hero and could just kill him, but instead takes a few minutes to explain his brilliant treachery, thereby allowing the hero to come up with a new plan, break free of the bonds, attack and then defeat the villain.

5. **DETAILS:** *"Not the hair! Never the hair!"* (Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) Keep the synopsis tight and simple by avoiding details and descriptions of characters, setting, etc. An easy trick is to search the synopsis for adjectives and adverbs. There shouldn't be many in the synopsis at all, except perhaps to highlight the main characters' key traits and emphasize key moments in the book. Even then though, try to keep it simple and use strong nouns and verbs to convey your point. Follow these basic tips and you will have a synopsis ready to sell your book, and an agent or editor who will thank you.

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.

The following article was first published in the August 2008 issue of romANTICS, and is reprinted by permission in the January 2012 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

It's All the Elves' Fault

By Morgan Ashbury

There are all different kinds of talents that people possess, and some of them leave me in awe. The one I'm thinking of at the moment is the talent to keep a spotlessly tidy house. Yes, that most certainly is a talent and, sadly, not mine. Not even a whisper of it do I possess.

I've been to peoples' houses where everything is so pristine you could eat off the floor. Not a speck of dust is visible, no cobweb can be found. Not a crumb mars the perfection of the perfectly clean, shiny surfaces and not a paper, or a pen, or a candy wrapper can be found out of place on any table, chair or ottoman.

How do they do it? I spend time cleaning and tidying. I do! I vacuum and I dust, I sweep and I put things away. I wash the dishes (by hand because, pity me, I have no dishwasher and never have had one). I wipe the counters and the stove, the fridge, and the freezer. Once a week I also do that with bleach in the water!

And my house looks...okay, but pretty far from immaculate.

My brother, on the other hand, is a very fastidious fellow. His house is always very near perfect. It's just a natural state of being for him and it always has been. Very intimidating when he's coming to dinner, let me tell you.

He's ten years my senior. I recall a lecture he gave me when I was around 8 or 9, on "the seven places where clothes are allowed to be". They were: hanger, dresser drawer, body, laundry hamper, laundry machines, clothes line, and ironing basket.

Yes, that lecture took place a long time ago, in the last century. I don't know if many people have ironing baskets any more. I know I don't have one.

I have tried to be more conscientious about my housekeeping. Theoretically it should be easier now than it was when I was raising my kids because in those days it was four against one (I was the one). Now it's only one against one most of the time. Of course, I'm older now, and not nearly as mobile as I used to be. Neither does my stamina take me as far as once it did.

Do you know what I think? I think there are evil little invisible elves that creep in when I'm not looking. They dirty dishes, and leave stuff lying about. They create dust elephants, cobwebs, and general disorder in the blink of an

eye. They also spread their invisibility. I think I am done cleaning, so I sit down, and then I see what I've missed.

And when my grandchildren are here, why then, those darn elves work twice as hard!

I tried to think when was I last really successful at getting my house to a level of cleanliness that not only felt good but lasted for a few days. And I remembered it was the year that the RT convention was in Pittsburgh.

My beloved and our daughter left for the Caribbean, and when I came home from taking them to the airport, I cleaned my house.

I was alone for a few days, and didn't need to repeat the process as it was quite easily maintained. I cooked, I ate, I did all the things that normally take place here. And the house stayed spic and span.

My good friend came from far away, and she stayed over two nights. And still, the general orderliness of tidy took but a few moments to accomplish. Then we left for the convention. Of course, when I got home, my husband had returned and, come to think of it, the first thing I did after I unpacked was clean the house which somehow had returned to its usual state of chaos.

I haven't been fortunate enough to visit again that place of Nirvana where all around me stays neat and tidy. But then, I've not spent any days alone here, either.

Hmm. I wonder if this is a clue?

Morgan has been a writer since she could pick up a pen. Now writing full time from her home in Southern Ontario, Canada, Morgan has 16 erotic-romance e-novels to her credit, and is published with Siren-Bookstrand Publishing. She lives with her husband of over thirty years, David, two cats with attitude and a dog with no dignity. You can see Morgan's work at <http://www.bookstrand.com/authors/morganashbury>.

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