



# CONNECTIONS

the newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association  
Romance Writers of America, Region One, Chapter One



## President's Letter

Plan B

“Life is what happens when you are making other plans.”

RECENTLY, A SERIES of totally unrelated events have conspired to remind me that, no matter how carefully you plan your path, or how sure you are of your direction, life has a way of throwing your road map out the window. During a rain storm. Into a ditch filled with crocodiles.

Not all of these recent circumstances have been my own, nor have all of them affected me directly. But, even when I was not in the metaphorical boxing ring, I found myself in a front row seat. And, the clear lesson is this: Flexibility is good.

The RWA National Conference is, for me, a time to catch up with my fellow writers. One afternoon, I had the opportunity to chat with two friends of mine. Both were people I got to know when I was wading my way through my very first manuscript. When I first met them, each had just gotten her first contract. Both had two-book deals with the same major publisher, for two different lines. At early writers' events, these two were always together, laughing and joking about published author-ish things. They were friendly, but I definitely wasn't in their club. I felt like a junior high school geek staring at the cool kids, wishing someone would tell me the secret handshake.

Then, almost simultaneously, things changed for my two friends. The publisher dropped the lines for which they were writing. Each writer was working on a sequel which she had every expectation of selling, sequels which were suddenly without a home.

Now, a couple of years later, they are in very different places. Writer A hasn't sold a thing since she got the bad news from her publisher. She feels this is the fault of the changing market—the books she likes to write just aren't selling anymore, which is totally unfair. She's bitter and angry and, she admitted, not really writing now. She's dropped out of her local chapter, and is considering leaving RWA entirely.

Writer B, on the other hand, has switched to a totally different genre. She said that she was, at first, intimidated at the idea of writing something so different than what she'd done before. But, since she had no intention of quitting writing, she decided to buy some books in the new genre and see how she felt about them. She was still uncertain, but gave it a shot. When she'd written her new manuscript, she contacted her old editor and asked her for a referral to an acquiring editor for the new line.

And ended up with a three-book deal.

I've seen this over and over recently. One friend, when asked what he wanted to do about a disastrous personal situation, replied, “Go back in time and make different choices.” Not to be unsympathetic, but I'm pretty sure that ship has sailed.

On the other hand, another friend recently told me, “I ought to write a thank you letter to [the person who disappointed me]. It forced me to open my eyes to new possibilities.”

In writing, as in life, it's a good idea to be flexible. This doesn't mean giving up on your dreams. Having a “Plan B” doesn't have to mean choosing a new destination, but it does mean that, occasionally, you have to be willing to try a different route. One way or another, you'll get there.

~ Toni

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**NEXT MEETING:**  
**August 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Building an Online  
Community**

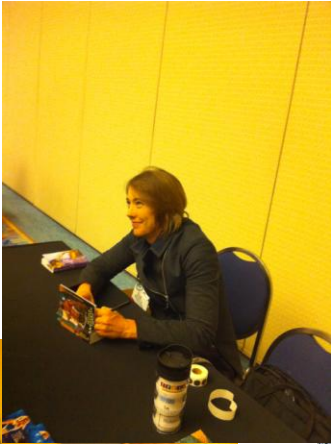
**See page 2 for details.**

## REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE Holiday Inn, North Haven

Critique Group: 9:30  
General Meeting: 10:45-11:15  
Craft Corner  
Lunch  
Speaker 12:45  
Hands-On Workshop  
(after the speaker)

See page 2 for more details.

A good time was had by all at this years RWA National!



RWA's nicest member, our own Doc Jess, at the signing.



Showing the love! Barb and Shaanee, Barb and Gail.



Dirty joke contest at chapter dinner. It's pretty clear who won. Toni, you're filthy, and we love it!



The beautiful people! Jen Fusco and Karen Pinco

Why, yes, Shaanee IS working on her revisions as she waits in line for a signing!



The happiest of moments.



Kristan at the signing.



Higgins in Jumbotron...eep!



Some chick we picked up in the bar.



Karen, Shaanee & Paula at the Literacy Signing: \$62,000 raised!



Paula and Rita: a preview of coming attractions, when Paula will win one of her own. Lovely gathering after the awards ...and Kristan's agent picked up the tab!



The odds were 10:1 that Higgins wouldn't do it...

## CALENDAR

**August 14<sup>th</sup>...Corrina Lawson: Building an Online Community.** This workshop focuses on what kind of community might be most suited for your personality, which internet format might be the best for the size of your community, how to tend your community, and how to prepare ahead of time for problems that will arise with the success of your community.

Craft Corner—The art of the guest blog with guest blogger supreme Susan Hanniford Crowley.

After Lunch Program—Every thing You Wanted to Know About Your Character with Kristan Higgins. Hands-on workshop for developing every aspect of your character’s life so that readers feel your hero or heroine is an old friend.

September 11...Details are still being nailed down, but we hope to have Thomas C. Hart, B.S., M.S. Captain South Windsor Police service, as our speaker. Tom handles hostage negotiations, and works with SWAT. Now how cool would that be? Check the website for updates; we’ll post the information as soon as we have it.

## CHAPTER NEWS...PLEASE NOTE!

Effective immediately, we’re saying a fond farewell to the Four Points Sheraton in Meriden and relocating to the **Holiday Inn in North Haven**. Directions are on the website, [www.ctrwa.org](http://www.ctrwa.org). The move was made due to a variety of reasons, which Toni will doubtlessly cover in her report at the August meeting.

## Question of the Month

What have you learned about writing while working on your latest manuscript?

The book I just turned in, *STORM KISSED* (Keepers #6, June ’11), taught me that while reunion romances rock, I need to be careful not to get too caught up in the where-when-why-how of their previous relationship. The story I’m telling is the one about who they are **\*now\*** and why they’re perfect for each other **\*today\***. —Jessica Andersen

This last book taught me that the true richness of my characters can only be found by writing several hundred pages of a first draft. Alas. —Kristan Higgins

I’ve been learning is that it’s never finished until it’s finished. Perhaps until I get bored with it, which isn’t happening just yet;

*continued on page 8*

## MEMBER NEWS

**Gail Chianese** is plugging away at her first manuscript and reports it’s coming along nicely....**Bob Bonitz** sent off a partial to The Wild Rose Press and is waiting to hear back. Good luck, Bob!...**Monica Spence** is waiting to hear back on several full manuscripts that were recently requested. She recently attended the Writing Popular Fiction program at Seton Hall University and is working on the novel required for her PhD... From **Paula Sharon**, currently at work on a new project: “When you pants your way through a 100,000 word novel, the revisions seem insurmountable. So I decided that I would plot, do all of my character sketches and research before I dug in. I spent four hours working scene by scene, chapter by chapter, until I’d plotted out thirty seven chapters of a YA novel.” Sounds like a great start, Paula!...**Rhonda Lane** is taking Alexandra Sokoloff’s online course “Screenwriting Tricks for Authors” through Celtic Hearts Romance and finds it helps her with structuring her novel....**Peter “The Unstoppable” Andrews** is pleased to announce that his YA novel, *Dream Crafters*, has advanced to the finals of the prestigious Molly Award—is there no contest our guy can’t win? Good luck on the results, Pete! We’re sure a contract is just a matter of time. And just in case you hadn’t heard, **your intrepid newsletter editor** brought home a Rita. ☺



### A Girl Could Get Used to This...

*No, seriously! They were working! Sure, it may look like they’re lounging around on Joy’s boat, sipping wine on a gorgeous summer day, but...well, okay, they were lounging and sipping. But also working!*

## Member of the Month...the prolific Susan Hanniford Crowley

*Always willing to share her writing experiences and wisdom, ever-generous and supportive of her chapter mates, Susan took a few minutes to update us on her burgeoning career.*

Tell us about what you're working on now.  
I'm working on a couple of things. I'm about to send a finished requested mythology romance to Tease Publishing LLC. It's a novella called Poseidon's Catch. I've also started working the rewrite of my grand dragon romance epic--to be titled. And I'm taking a workshop with The Fantasy, Futuristic and Paranormal Special Interest Chapter of RWA called The Ultimate Packaging for Your Product – Logline, Premise, Query Letter and Synopsis. I'm taking that to improve my written pitches.

What's the next major step you need to take in your writing?  
I need to become better at business and design a business plan. There are too many things in the business end of publishing and contracts that I'm weak on. I also need to learn a good promotion plan. I learned the hard way that my blog tour was too much for me to do in too short a time. I'm exhausted and sleeping the rest of today.

What have been some of the highs of your romance writing thus far?  
I love being published by Tease Publishing LLC. I love working with an editor. I love being in CTRWA.

What are some good books you've read lately?  
Dead and Gone by Charlaine Harris. It's part of the Sookie Stackhouse series. You know me. I love paranormal. Anyone who adores Vampire Eric in "True Blood" will love this book. He's a real yum whether on tv or on the page!

Favorite authors and why?  
A.C. Mason is a new urban fantasy author with heavy romantic elements. I love her work. It's always riveting and surprising. Charlaine Harris with her Sookie Stackhouse series. She really knows how to work the action in her books.



Favorite Connecticut restaurant?  
Japanica in Middletown. I love getting a sushi lunch there.

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

Hmm, that's tough. My current hero is Poseidon --Keanu Reeves. For my vampire hero David who is the most popular among fans --Orlando Bloom. As for my current heroine(s)--I think they should pick an unknown off the street.



A frenzy of faces and almost nude dancing bodies filled their view. "Cancun is having a bacchanal?" Poseidon stared wide-eyed at the wet, barely clad beauties.

Apollo drooled. "This one. Posei, pick this one. I'll go with you."

The view kept changing. In a sea of faces, Poseidon saw one small delicate face. Then she was gone, lost in an ocean of sprawling, celebrating, feasting humanity.

From *Poseidon's Catch* by Susan Hanniford Rowley

# Wine, Whine, Wonderment & Work

How a successful critique group came into being, how it works and why these three CTRWA members can't do without it.

by Shaunee Cole, Kel Morse and Karen Pinco

**THE THREE MUSKETEERS.** The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. The X-Men. Hellboy and his entourage. The '80 Winter Olympic Hockey team. What do all of these have in common? Why yes, they are superheroes who get to wear fabulous outfits, but they also tell each other when they suck and pat each other on the ass when they don't. They are, in a sense, critique partners.

We've have been asked why ours works so well. Besides drinking copious amounts of wine, there are a few steps which need to be followed.

## Step One—Formation

This is a misnomer. Like all step self-help groups, Step One is not joining a group. Step One is actually knowing, and admitting, that you need help. We all need help, it's what kind of help we need and where we get it that makes all the difference.

*Kel*— Due to brain leakage and a touch of ADD, I really can't remember how I hooked up with Shaunee and Kpinc. I remember someone...it's vague, but it definitely was a person who suggested I work with them and not some disembodied voice rambling through my thoughts. So we e-mailed, picked a day and met.

*Karen*—Shaunee and I were at the CTRWA meeting when we all talked about where we were in our writing (dare I say) career. Shaunee and I figured out we needed a crit group. I liked her writing, she liked mine. Shaunee suggested adding Kelly — same stage, good writing, and fun.

*Shaunee*—Well, it was possibly fall, definitely a Saturday because I was at a CTRWA meeting. Possibly it was sunny outside. Next thing I know, Karen and I were in the parking lot and we'd made plans to recruit Kel and meet up the following week. There is a key factor which is essential to a successful crit group. Okay, I lied, there are several factors, but the most important are chemistry and ability.

*Kel*— It's bizarre when you look at us. You have a single Jamaican American graphic designer who writes Urban Fantasy. A mother of two with a Ph.D. in Biology currently on hiatus from her university job who writes turn of the century American romance, and then there's me. Married, no kids, three jobs who writes romantic comedy, women's fiction and historicals. We do more asking and prompting than actual nitpicking, as the asking and prompting makes us nitpick ourselves. Our differences makes each session enjoyable since we're not reading something so close to what we ourselves wrote. We're close enough in literary ability that it's more of an equal playing ground rather than a lean-on-me situation.

*Karen*—Proximity was a factor. We started on neutral

territory (Starbucks) then as we gelled, our meetings moved to my house and Kel's house. Critting Shaunee and Kel's work gets me out of my own head and I always learn something from working on their stories that I can apply to my own. Shaunee has an amazing flow and artistry with words that brings her 'world' alive, Kel whips out snappy lines that make me laugh out loud.

*Shaunee*—Our proximity is certainly convenient, but I was really intent on moving my writing career to the next level. I wanted to gain skill, but it was equally important to me that I consciously devote as much time to writing as I did to any day job. This is what I wanted to do for a living—what I *want* to do. Kel and Karen are right there with me.—This kind of commitment is an essential component of our chemistry—come hell or high water, we meet and we work whether that be pushing someone (me) through a major block or suggesting new plot twists. When we get together we make something happen.

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## Gerard Butler Grammar Quiz

*Affect vs. Effect*

Which of the following is correct?

- A) The affect that Gerard Butler has on women and gay men is undeniable.
- B) I was deeply effected by the way Gerard tore off his shirt.
- C) The effect of Gerard's kiss was that I slipped him some Rohypnol and dragged him off to Vegas for a quicky wedding.



The answer is, of course, C. *Effect* is a noun, as in "cause and effect." *Affect* is a verb. *Gerard's smoky blue eyes affect us chicks. The effect of those eyes is devastating. True! So true!*

Whine, Wine, *continued from previous page*

### Step Two— Establishing Parameters

With any good critique group rules need to be in place, but also there needs to be enough flexibility to change rules. Even Commandments are broken from time to time. Where one rule works for one crit group, it may not work for yours. Your crit group might not need to demand weekly submissions of consecutive material, but your crit group does need to be honest No breaking Commandment 9 “Thou shalt not lie.” And in some form or fashion your crit group needs to meet regularly. Every week, even when all three of us can't meet, at least two get together.

*Kel*— Flexibility is key. With our hectic schedules and the unexpected popping into make life that much more interesting, people need to be flexible and *really* be okay with that. It's one thing to say you're okay and another to actually be okay. Remember, honesty is key. Crit groups are just another relationship; for that relationship to work you need to respect each other but tell it like it is. That sounds like Dr. Phil. Call people out on bad writing or a premise that just wouldn't happen. If one week a member says they can't submit because they're stuck, devote their crit time to brainstorming. Or maybe someone needs help with a query letter. Or maybe someone's just burnt out and needs a glass of wine and a glass of Whine. Crit partners get to criticize writing, not the way someone writes, and there's a huge difference there.

*Karen*—Oh, we flex. Bend over backwards if necessary. But we manage to meet about once every week. Start to go into withdrawal if we don't. Consecutive material? Ha! Read the material over only once then move on? Ha! So long as it's been worked on, we'll look it over again. Brainstorming? All three of us have dark, twisty minds that feed off of each other. And we're always honest—kind, but honest. We let each other know when something's not working—and when it is.

*Shaunee*—Honesty for sure and, not to beat a dead horse, commitment. We work on new material, old material and what-was-I-thinking-when-I-wrote-this? material. We work on synopses, queries, pitches, ideas and thoughts. We gripe, bitch and moan about writing and anything else that's giving us angina. AND we *always* get together. Tell me what I need to hear and make critting a standard appointment, those rules are carved in stone. Once you get a rhythm going, everything else is negotiable.

### Step Three—Why?

Ah, the grand question in life. Why are we here? I am therefore I do? Or I do therefore I am? I'm a writer therefore I write or I write therefore I'm a writer? At this point one of my crit partners would tell me not to insert another line saying the same thing because the reader gets it.

*Kel*— I haven't been published yet. That's a big answer to "Why" right there. Recently I whipped out an historical I wrote over a year ago and have been giving it to the group in

bits and pieces to chew on while I work on a current idea. It's amazing what nine months with the group has done for my writing. I'm better for knowing them, for having their eyes to see where mine are blind. My rejection letters from long ago, from before I joined CTRWA were bits of form letters. My most recent ones, sent from some of the same people I queried with different material, were mini critiques praising me for this or that, but yes, inevitably still rejecting me. An editor got past page one, past chapter one, through the requested whole manuscript to tell me they wanted what the hero does for a living changed. I love my crit buddies!

“When we get together we make something happen.”

*Karen*—Why? Because you can get too close to your own writing. Can't see what's wrong, or right. I get feedback on both from Kel and Shaunee. Their different backgrounds/lives/writing styles provide me with perspective on my own writing. One of my favorite nights was when Kel and Shaunee started to argue about what my hero would or wouldn't have done. Their comments have stiffened the spine of my heroine and alphaed up my hero. The whole novel is so much better now. Without my crit group, I probably would have stuck a fork in my eye trying to revise. Better in an agent's POV? Well, queries are mere days away....

*Shaunee*—Why? Because I can't seem to help it. Even after a horrendous rejection, when all I can think of doing is eating a metric ton of contraband carbs covered in cheese and bacon, and pairing it with a brooding Cabernet, an idea or line of dialogue will come to me, making me itch until I do something about it. So I gotta write, right? Nothing's saying I gotta be crappy at it or lazy about it or that there isn't more for me to learn and a space for me to grow.

Because even though what we do is solitary, we still need society, companionship, encouragement and sometimes a serious kick in the ass. Who are you going to rely on to do this for you? You? Not with the temptations of reality TV and cleaning bent on luring you down the primrose path.

Because if writing is an itch then a crit group is the best calamine lotion money can buy. Here ends the lesson.

*Jealous of these three? Don't be! Make your own crit group...come to the CTRWA general crit session a few times, get a feel for your fellow members and ask around. A good crit partner or group is essential in the writing process. Don't be shy about trying to get one.*

## Burnout

by B.K. Reeves

I BELIEVE THAT sooner or later, every successful professional writer suffers from burnout. What happens when an author is burned out? It's very simple. We wake up one morning and our sole ambition is to laze in bed all day. The last thing we want to do is write.

Force of habit rules here. Burned out gal plops her butt in the chair (BIC) facing her computer. She pulls up a game of solitaire. Playing games might relax her enough to write. My favorite delaying tactic is to check my email. I answer all my messages, some of them twice. I write to my family and to others I need to contact and some I don't.

Make no mistake. This is not writer's block. We know our story; some of us have already written our synopsis. So we know what to write; we just don't feel like doing it. The first time this happened to me, I was scared spitless.

What causes burnout? Who knows? Maybe our brain rebels and refuses to produce for a while. One consolation: Burnout is a temporary condition. Trust me. Burnout does not, I repeat not, last forever or very long. Whatever the cause, learn to deal with it. Keep assuring yourself the burnout will pass. Word of advice: Call your editor (who doesn't believe in burnout) and tell her anything but the truth. Say you have to go in for emergency surgery. Or you must travel to West Texas to take care of your ailing mother. She will believe this because she knows you're tight with your mom. Say your house was struck by lightning and your files are all fried. Say you've lost your flash drives and can't find your backup files.

What you have going for you is the fact that for years you have faithfully met your deadlines. That pristine track record will carry you through the horrors of burnout.

Decide what you're going to do. Leaving town isn't the answer; running away won't cure burnout or anything else. Grasping at straws, you remember that written into every novelist's contract is a nasty little clause stating she must offer her publisher first refusal of her next book. Is this the solution? Distract your editor with a proposal you know she will turn down. Every writer has an early novel or two in her files that is bad, bad, bad. This delaying action could give you time to recover from your burnout.

Another method that might work is simply to write through the darned thing, just keep pounding the keys. Don't worry. The words don't have to make sense. Ignoring burnout and trusting that it might go away sounds like a Pollyanna thing to do. Wait a minute. Wasn't she the girl who always looked on the positive side of life? She was and so am I.

Burnout has knocked me off my feet before and I've always survived. I will survive this time, too.

*See more of BK online at [www.bkreeves.com](http://www.bkreeves.com).  
This article first appeared in the July 2010 issue of In Print!,  
the monthly newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA.*

## Chapter One and All Her Charms

By Kristan Higgins

CHAPTER ONE: THE first impression, the most important chapter of your book. It's what makes the agent read on, what interests the editor, what makes the shopper at Barnes & Noble toss your book in her basket.

So what must you include in Chapter One to grab the attention of the agent/editor/reader?

**A great opening line.** Take a look at some of these humdingers...

Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized when as caught up in her charms as the Tarleton twins were. (*Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell).

The great fish moved silently through the night water. (*Jaws* by Peter Benchley).

I've never been sure I'm fully human (*Beg for Mercy* by Toni Andrews).

The opening line grabs your reader and makes them keep reading. It matters. Make it revealing, memorable, funny or terrifying, or beautiful...whatever the tone is for the rest of your book.

**An interesting main character whom we meet immediately.**

We're sympathetic with him/her because he/she's funny/likable/powerful/tragic/ in danger. And we see this immediately...or we should. Your setting might be beautiful, your plot may be labyrinthine, your love scenes smokin', but if we don't care about the main character, none of that other stuff matters.

**An obvious outer conflict.**

Finding a boyfriend before New Year's Eve; saving the child from the kidnappers; capturing the clever thieves who just stole the Declaration of Independence...this outer goal is the structure of the book. Your heroine or hero has been called to adventure, and the inner growth will be showcased during the adventure. So we need to know what that adventure entails.

**An immediate inner conflict.**

Why will it be so hard for your hero or heroine to resolve the outer conflict? What character flaw must she overcome to get the job done? Your main character lacks something or needs something, and we immediately know what it is, even if he or she doesn't. Bridget Jones needs to love and accept herself before she can find real love. Scarlett O'Hara is a shallow, self-absorbed twit who's about to discover that the world doesn't revolve around her. What does your character lack? Love? Money? Redemption? Purpose? Acceptance? Whatever it is, it's got to be apparent in Chapter One. The protagonist is about to embark on a journey...and we have to know why.

**A reason for starting at this point.**

Why does *Gone with the Wind* start with Scarlett and the Tarleton twins? Because here, Margaret Mitchell shows

*continued next page*

# Congratulations! Now What?

by Diana Cosby

MANY PEOPLE CHASE their dreams, and along the way, through hard work and perseverance, some achieve their goals. When this happens, it's an amazing time. This event should be celebrated and savored as you can never replace that 'first time' magic when it happens in your life.

But, once you achieve your dream, what now? Do you have a plan of action prepared? A budget? Will your strategy and marketing be time intensive? Do you understand how the business end of whatever goal you are pursuing works? What about industry contacts = networking?

Far from trying to worry or deter anyone from striving to achieve their dream, my questions are to instill a shot of reality into the dream-focused mind. It's easy to become caught up on that idea of being a rising star. Realistically, once you achieve your goal, the magic wand that keeps that dream alive is you, and once again, sustained by your hard work, business savvy and perseverance. To help you, here are some tips:

1. Learn from the pros: Why reinvent the wheel: Select people who have achieved the dream you're targeting. Take notes on what they're doing, read what they say when they are interviewed, or if possible, talk to them. If someone has a solid game plan in the area of expertise you're shooting for, tailor their plan of action to your strengths.

2. Budget: As with anything, there's a cost to keeping your dream alive. Gather expense information through whatever sources available and understand the monetary layout you are facing once your dream is a reality. Custom the expenses to fit your budget. If you need a credit card, to incorporate, or have other business end ideas, before your dream arrives is the best time to research and understand exactly what you'll need to have in place when that special moment arrives.

3. Time management: Once you sell, the demand for your time escalates, and the proportion depends on the needs of your dream and you. In addition to basic dream survival, there are options to appear on blogs, radio, TV, you can write articles, choose on-line networking and numerous other venues. It's important to manage your time wisely, to choose projects best relate to your strengths. Example: If you enjoy teaching, give workshops, on-line classes or talk at public venues.

4. Networking: I can't express how ultra-important solid networking is. A good business contact can make all of the difference in the world. Be sincere in cultivating relationships. And, if you can, help someone else out.

The best defense in any situation, including your dreams, is a solid offense. So, start now to plan for your success. Then, the day your dream comes true, rather than being reactive and flounder, open your tailored plan and soar.

*A retired Navy Chief, Diana claims her years of living in Europe drew her to write in the medieval time frame. His Conquest is to be released in November 2010.*

*This article was published in the December 2009 issue of Novel Ideas, Newsletter of the Virginia Romance Writers.*

## Chapter One, *continued*

Scarlett's power, her place in the world, her effect on others, her goal, her conflict, her motivation and her nemesis. Life is about to change for dear Miss Scarlett, but we have to understand who she was before this change. Make sure your book starts in the right place. Generally speaking, the starting point is just before the call to adventure — the event that invites your character to change her life.

### **A strong voice.**

Voice is arguably the most important quality in your entire book. Your story has been done before, punkin. It's your voice that's completely yours. If Chapter One doesn't show off your voice, chances are, the rest of the book will feel pretty flat, too. But no one's going to read the rest of the book without a great voice that really shines in Chapter One.

### **What Not to Have in Chapter One**

#### **Back story.**

*As the bull charged and James ran for his very life, he remembered another day, another bull...the screaming, his mother's trampled bonnet. Ah, yes, he could smell the scent of manure like it was yesterday...Nah. Sure, you have a great backstory, and that's what's made the hero or heroine the tortured, screwed up mess you love, but DON'T TELL US ABOUT IT NOW! Just show us the tortured, screwed up mess. The lure of discovery will keep us reading — so if you nullify any suspense by blurting out everything, you've taken away our motivation to discover.*

#### **Instant compatibility.**

No, no, no. Instant attraction, sure. But not compatibility. We want there to be a build-up. We want gradually increasing intimacy, rising stakes and escalating emotional connection. We want it to be hard for these two people to get together. So if they're obviously meant to be together in Chapter One and no one has anything to overcome, well...um...where's your plot? These characters of yours, they lack something they can only find in the other. And that finding is going to take some work.

#### **Too much detail in any one area.**

Go easy on the crazy brother, the beautiful house, the collection of salt shakers, the obsession with Derek Jeter. Mention them, sure, show how these are all parts of the heroine's life, but don't drown out the conflict and the character. There are plenty of pages in the coming chapters to enrich the plot. Don't do it in Chapter One.

Chapter One is an invitation to your potential reader. It's the "come on in and stay for a while" chapter. If your book really hits its stride around page 60, you've got a problem, because if Chapter One doesn't charm/intrigue/fascinate, chances are no one's going to make it to page 60. So give the reader a reason to pull up a chair and spend a few hours of her life with your book.



*continued from page 3*

more and more images of scenes continue to unfold, pulling me right along. —Zsuzsa Simandy

How phrasing, using the correct words, can drag the reader in or push her away. Who'd a thunk it?— Monica Spence

I learned to keep writing, and to keep working on the story. If you reach what you think is a dead end, or it isn't working, do something else for a little while. —Marie Roy

That what I initially pictured isn't always where the story goes. —Gail Chianese

I can always write a better book, and with every book I'm getting better. —Susan Hanniford Crowley

It's easy to write yourself into a corner, if you haven't done a plot outline. I guess plotting is probably a very good thing vs. letting your "muse" or mood guide your direction. Now my lead character is wandering aimlessly through life ... just waiting for something to happen to change her current situation. Prince Charming still hasn't shown up and probably never will (at this rate). —Kathy Albert

I learned with Thea's (Devine's) guidance how important the 1st ten pages of you manuscript are. It is what grabs the editors and publishers attention so they will request more. I have been rewriting mine and I'm thrilled with how a few changes can bring a story to life. Love the mentor program. —Marion Lanouette



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