



# Connections

the official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

Connecticut Chapter, Romance Writers of America, Chapter 1, Region 1

## President's Letter

December 18, 2007

I GUESS I should say, "Happy New Year" to all. Okay, I said it. Then I'm assuming I should say, "Start out the new year with a resolution." But, that sounds clichéd, and I'm a writer trained to avoid clichés. And no way in heck am I going to go the "lose weight this year" route. You're all on your own for that one.

So, while I sit here in Disney World (temp 74 degrees and NO snow!), I am writing to all of you to say, "set yourself attainable goals this year." Don't get hung up on writing a book. A book! An entire book! What a daunting task! Instead, set a goal that you know you can reach like, "I'm going to do a chapter a month this year. Or a page a day or ten pages a day or week or whatever is ATTAINABLE for you. Seems like we're cheating? Maybe. Who cares? It's our goal and when you meet it, you'll feel that sense of accomplishment and it'll get your lazy muse in gear for 2008 and publication! And for Heaven's sake, don't compare your goals to anyone else's. They are yours and yours alone. What Suzie Writer can do may be pages more than Lori Avocato, but so what! Lori has to do her own thing just as all of you do too.

Well, I'm keeping this short since the sun is out and there's a poolside chair with my name on it beckoning me!

I do wish all of you the best year of your lives. I wish you all the best health. I wish you all the best of your writing careers too!

Lori Avocato

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Letter .....	1
Calendar .....	2
Board Members.....	3
<b>COMMUNITY</b>	
Member News .....	2
Chapter Notes.....	2
Member Profile .....	3
<b>CAREER</b>	
Get a Platform.....	4
A Word About Rejection.....	6
The Truth About Query Letters .....	7
<b>CRAFT</b>	
Time Off for Creativity .....	5
Resolutions for the Writer .....	5

## NEXT MEETING

**January 12**

**11 a.m.**

**Lori Avocato Takes  
Your Questions**

MONTHLY MEETINGS of the CTRWA are held at the Holiday Inn in North Haven. Non-members are welcome to observe a meeting before joining. Meetings begin at 11:00 a.m. with a speaker or workshop at 12:00. PYOW lunch follows at Houlihan's. Take I-91 to exit 12 and bear right at the end of the exit ramp. The Holiday Inn is 2 blocks north on the left.

## CALENDAR

### JANUARY 12...LORI AVOCATO ANSWERS ALL

Or at least she'll try, so bring your questions. From the craft of writing to what happens after the call to questions about the business end of writing fiction, Lori will do her best to shed light on any subject you have. Take advantage of Lori's long career in writing and find out what lies ahead for you.

### FEBRUARY 9...THE RETURN OF JESSICA SPEART

Back by popular demand, the fascinating and brilliant Jessica Speart will discuss how she took what she knew, faked the rest and ended up with a dazzling career as a fiction writer. The author of the acclaimed Rachel Porter series, Jessica's career spans a stint on *One Life to Live* as an evil nurse, writer for *Omni Magazine*, the *New York Times* and many other publications, to acclaimed fiction writer. Don't miss this one, guys!

## CHAPTER NOTES

### For Those In Search of Critiques/Feedback/Opinions

A reminder that our meeting room is available to CTRWA members until 6 p.m. each month. Anyone interested in getting some feedback on their WIPs is strongly encouraged to contact other members, exchange excerpts and use the room to discuss your writing.

### THE CONTEST IS COMING! THE CONTEST IS COMING!

Keep an eye out for more information on CTRWA's contest, which judges the first thirty pages of an uncontracted novel. Members are strongly urged to enter...sales have been made as a result of this contest, so polish up those manuscripts. You're also strongly encouraged — even begged — to volunteer to judge (any category you're not entering). This is a great fundraiser for the chapter, and a wonderful way to see what else is being submitted. Categories are contemporary; historical; futuristic/sci-fi/fantasy; paranormal/time travel.

### CONFERENCE

Leslie Waigner, Editor at Large at Harlequin's single title division (including HQN, Luna and Mira Books) will be a guest at our annual conference. She is the author of *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies* and acclaimed "book doctor" for hundreds of grateful clients. You want to network? This is the place to start, gang.

### LISTENING LIBRARY

Previous workshops are now available on CD, thanks to Lindsay Downs. Check out our website, [www.ctrwa.org](http://www.ctrwa.org), to see the available titles.

## MEMBER NEWS

By January 2008, **Shirley Webb** will have read her children's book to over 4,700 children in the last four years. Magnificent, Shirley! She's also been busy with author visits in Connecticut, a lovely holiday party courtesy of the CT Press Club at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich. Upcoming events will have well over a *thousand* children enjoying Shirley's wonderful stories. She leaves for Mississippi to visit libraries and schools in that area armed with book donations from many fellow romance writers. But wait, there's more! Shirley is writing a historical novel about Jefferson and Varina Davis. The Jefferson Davis Foundation has agreed to put a page in this book with their seal of approval. And in her spare time, Shirley is working on her new novel, *Echo of a Dream*. You're making the rest of us look pretty lazy, Shirley...Congratulations to **Joy Smith**, whose novel, *Burden of Promise*, has finaled in the Golden Palm Contest of Florida RWA! Go, Joy! We'll be rooting for you. **Lindsay Downs** has joined the ranks of millions on MySpace. Visit his page at <http://www.myspace.com/lindsaydowns01>. **Marie Roy** contracted with Dark Eden Press for a trilogy of short stories titled *Live The Fantasy* -- Release date February 1, 2008. This will make a great Valentine's read, folks...**Lori Avocato** went to her favorite place, Disney World, in December, nourishing her inner child...**Kristan Higgins** just got the title of her fourth book. *TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE* will be out in February 2009, and marks the first time Kristan's gotten to name her own book! Yippee! **Kathryn Smith** has signed another contract for historicals with Avon. After her last vampire book, she will be returning to straight historicals, which Kate is looking forward to. She's also just sold two books to Germany for translation. Look for Kate in two anthologies this year: *Weddings from Hell* and *Let the Night Begin*, as well as a romantic urban fantasy in *Before I Wake*. Zounds, Kate! You've been busy!

## MEMBER PROFILE: Cassy Pickard

*Cassy Pickard, mother of two, happily married to her architect husband for more than 25 years, lives in a house overlooking a lake in Guilford with her two Golden Retrievers. Sounds like the perfect place to write, doesn't it? Cassy is the proud owner of an RN degree, a master's in nursing, an MBA and a Ph.D in health care research methodology. Before retiring and turning her considerable intellect to creative writing, Cassy was the Associate dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor at the Yale School of Nursing. Good golly!*

Cassy, you come from an academic background, carry more degrees than most of us have hairs on our heads...does it help your writing to have been in academia for so long?

Hardly. It's probably an impediment. All of my prior publications are written to a set formula dictated by the journal. That's just the way it is. Now, I have the total freedom to get myself into trouble.

You're the mother of two daughters. How does this influence your writing in terms of heroines, heroes and, of course, love scenes?

I read somewhere that you need to write love scenes as if your mother were dead. Well, I watched my daughter blush when she looked over one of my chapters. I can't imagine trying to write as if my daughters were dead--not good imagery. But, I will say they both have been surprised that their mom actually knew about all that stuff.

What are you working on right now?

I'm in the middle of a new project. My husband and I were in Italy a few months ago. After Jon left for home, I stayed on in Rome by myself to research the actual setting for this book. It was grand fun to be walking the streets and thinking, "Well, the motorcycle could come from there and nearly run her over here." And so on. I found the apartment building my protagonist lives in, ate in the trattoria where she'll be having a glass of wine, and drove into the outskirts to see where she'll be fleeing from the bad guys. We go to Italy frequently. I thought it was now time to make this the setting for my next manuscript.

Any embarrassing trivia you care to share about yourself?

Yikes! The list is so long I'd hate to bore everyone. There was the time I told Lyle Lovett I'd never heard of him. He took it with good humor.

Food you must have while writing?

Well, food is an odd thing for me. I'm not a chocolate lover. Sorry folks. After about 6 pm, it'd probably be a glass of wine. Before that, maybe carrots. Don't hate me. You can tell by looking at me this isn't a

diet thing.

Best book you've read lately? Why did you love it?

Oh, gracious. Well, I'm working my way through Steven Pinker's book called, "The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature." It's a wonderful look at the use of words. I find myself thinking about it as I outside where I work. The birds fly in and out at record speeds, snagging a mere kernel. I figure if they can work that hard for less than a bite, I have my work cut out for me, a struggle to pick just the right verb.

Anything that works particularly well to get your fingers on the keyboard?

Birds. I have many bird feeders in my yard. I love them. This year I attached with suction cups two tiny feeders to the window just outside where I work. The birds fly in and out at record speeds, snagging a mere kernel. I figure if they can work that hard for less than a bite, I have my work cut out for me.

### CTRWA 2007 Board Members

Lori Avocato

*President*

Lavocato@cox.net

Marie Roy

*Vice President / Director*

*of Programming*

marie-roy@sbcglobal.net

Susan Rowley

*Secretary / Membership Coordinator*

suzie7rowley@yahoo.com

Theresa Diaz

*Director of Publicity*

TBDiaz36FD@sbcglobal.net

Janet Messina

*Treasurer*

janmessina@comcast.net

Kristan Higgins

*Newsletter Editor*

k.higgins@snet.net

## Stop Writing...Go Get a Platform

By Lauri Brett

STOP WRITING? OKAY, I'm talking to you, the writer of a well-written, well-edited product ready for the marketplace. We aren't talking about writing here, or revising, or editing, or polishing. Stop doing those things for a minute.

Instead, think about this question: What's your platform? Do you know? Have you discussed this with your current agent? Do you have an agent? If not, you might need to spend some time developing your platform.

So what exactly is a platform? According to the professionals at the conference, a platform will reflect your commitment to the genre of your endeavor and move you away from a perception of you as an amateur.

According to two panels I attended at the Winter Words Writer's Conference in Fairfield, CT this December — *you should have a platform*. Lucy Hedrick, author of several How-To books ([www.lucyhedrick.com](http://www.lucyhedrick.com)) believes this to be an essential missing link in the steps that distinguish the published writer from the one still endlessly submitting query letters. Although Hedrick's specialty is non-fiction, she declared that agents and editors also look for platforms in an aspiring fiction writer.

But wait a second. Your fingers are near to bleeding from the honing you've done on your manuscript; the writing is crystal clear and so are your characters. Your plot gathers steam like a locomotive and your love scenes are so hot they'd melt Hans Christian's little tin soldier all over again. Why do you need a platform? Won't the *work* speak for itself?

Apparently not. Agents and editors are frequently too busy to actually *read* your work, declared Marcela Landres, a former editor at Simon and Schuster in New York. Marcela, presenter of *How Editors Think* at the Winter Words Conference. She stated that while she was an editor in New York, she did a lot of *listening* while at the office. When possible, she did *actual reading* at home in the evenings. She implied that, to people who *listen* 'about' work rather than actually *read* work (editors), hearing from the agent that a writer is already credentialed in his subject (see example of these below), helped ease the chill of anonymity that as-yet-unpublished writers face.

Don't have a platform yet? If you are an unpublished author hoping to query or submit work to an agent at any point, Marcela and Lucy suggest you start working on your platform now. (Remember that movie: '40 Year Old Virgin?' You don't

want to query or submit to an agent or publisher looking like one). Marcela suggested writers put themselves in the shoes of the agent or editor to whom they are submitting a manuscript: what kinds of information will convince them you are an individual to take a chance on?

Below is an imaginary, unpublished-in-fiction writer's platform. This writer — Joe, we'll call him — wrote a steamy, jungle-set paranormal fiction that features an urban-raised man, born with a mysterious lizard's tail, searching for the truth of his roots.

- Joe has won writing contests sponsored by RWA, Writer's Digest, or other publications
- He is a member of a national writer's organization, like RWA or Mystery Writers of America
- He edits a newsletter of an online romance journal, or, he contributes pieces to a monthly romance/relationship column in a local paper
- He edits a newsletter called Creature Heat, or frequently writes non-fiction articles about unusual lizard-species
- His former partner, a best-selling author of lizard-centered fiction, is willing to provide a quote that may be used on the book's jacket

Finally, Marcella believes that the aspiration towards perfection in writing leads many writers to remain isolated and hold onto the unrealistic expectation: *once it is perfect, it will find publication*. Many writers "aspire to be on par with writers such as James Joyce when the reality is that in order to get published you only need to be as good as James Patterson." She states it is often this aspiration that keeps writers glued to their computer chairs, rather than packing their luggage and heading towards a buffet of networking at a conference. Marcela encourages unpublished writers to embrace networking as a fact of the publishing business. Like Animal Planet, she advises us to *get out there*.

*Lauri Brett writes crime fiction with romantic elements. She lives in Fairfield County with her husband and twin sons.*

Never are voices so beautiful as on a winter's evening, when dusk almost hides the body, and they seem to issue from nothingness with a note of intimacy seldom heard by day.

Night & Day  
by Virginia Woolf



## Time Off to Build Creativity

By Joya Fields

MAKE TIME TO write every day and you'll become a better writer. That's what we're told at every conference and workshop. And there's no doubt about it-the more you write, the better you get at it. But what happens when you get a little burned out or run out of ideas? Taking a day off from writing (gasp!) will help you come back to the keyboard rejuvenated and ready to work.

Whether it's a guilty conscience that makes you work harder after a break, or the fact that a vacation day energizes you, isn't important. What's important is that it works. There are at least three ways to take a 'mental writing day'. They're not all the same, but they have the same end result-a renewed love of writing, higher energy and more creativity pouring onto the page.

**Get Stuff Done Day.** This might not seem like a day off. Well, because it isn't. Taking a few hours to get work done around the house is not exactly a vacation. Try it anyway. Clean out closets or refrigerator, rake the yard, reorganize the kitchen drawers...all those chores you want to do but don't have time for in a usual day. If these 'to do' items are hanging over your head every time you go to your computer to write, getting them out of the way will help de-clutter your mind. There's also something about doing ordinary chores, the pure rote movements and mindlessness of them, that lets our subconscious talk to us. It's said that Einstein got some of his best ideas while simply brushing his teeth. You'll be amazed at the story ideas and 'ah ha' moments you can have during simple

tasks.

**Fun Day.** Julia Cameron in "The Artist's Way" calls this an 'artist date'. Do something you love, by yourself. It can be anything from taking a long hike, touring a museum, getting a manicure/pedicure, lunch out at your favorite spot or playing the piano for hours on end. Find something that makes you happy and do it. No matter how silly it is. By yourself. It's your treat to you and you deserve it. Watch what happens over the next few days when a happier, more relaxed you sits down to write.

**Do Nothing Day.** This is probably the hardest indulgence of them all. As a writer, you need to be motivated and disciplined in your craft or you won't get published, won't get paid. But give yourself permission to be lazy for a while. Lie around, listen to your favorite music, take a nap or luxuriate in a nice long bubble bath. You'll thank yourself the next day. Give yourself a break. Write tomorrow. For today, take it easy. The hardest part will probably be a guilty conscience. But settle that little workaholic voice in your head with the knowledge that tomorrow you'll come back twice as strong, twice as creative because you took time off.

*Joya Fields has been making up stories for as long as she can remember. Over 40 of her stories and articles have been published in magazines and newspapers. Visit her website at [www.joyafields.com](http://www.joyafields.com)*

*This article first appeared in the December 2007 issue of The Writer's Pulse, newsletter of Maryland Romance Writers.*

## New Year's Resolutions for the Writer

1. Come up with an idea for a brand new novel.
2. Finish that manuscript you've been almost done with for months.
3. Decide that you love revisions and get them done.
4. Write an article about your experiences or what you've learned that's been really helpful to you.
5. Read more.
6. Buy a book by someone you know.
7. Take a class.
8. Make a list of your goals for the year. Not necessarily "Make a sale," since you can't guarantee that, but something along the lines of "Submit to a major publisher" or "Talk to an agent face to face."
9. Come up with a realistic number of hours a week for writing and stick to it. No excuses, you.
10. Set a number of minutes you'll spend chatting on line and don't exceed that number.
11. Remember why you started writing in the first place. You love it, silly.

## A Word About Rejection

By C.L. Wilson

REJECTION SUCKS. NONE of us wants to be rejected. None of us like to be rejected. It doesn't matter whether you're published or not. Rejection still sucks.

I've been in the rejection cycle. I know how depressing it can be. Rejection can make you doubt yourself, your story, your skill. But not all rejections are created equal.

Rejections can happen for many reasons:

*You've written a book that, while a good read, doesn't have that "break out" appeal editors want from a new writer.* In other words, the editor is having a hard time trying to identify a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) that the editor can use to position and market your book. That USP needs to be something that will make potential readers pick up a new author (you) rather than the familiar author who writes a similar type of story.

This may be the perfect time to set that book aside and write something else. After a little more seasoning, consider coming back to your other manuscript to see if you can up the "oomph" factor or create a USP for your book. Alternatively, take a good, hard look at the book and see if you can possibly tweak the "hook" or add more "hooks" to help up the appeal and salability of the book

*"You've written an amazing Elizabethan romance. I love the story, love the characters, love your writing. Unfortunately Elizabethan romances aren't selling. Everyone is busy reading regency romances.*

These kind of rejections can be the hardest to take. The book is good enough to snag an editor but the market appeal just isn't there. Or, NY doesn't think it is. What do you do? Well, you can set the book aside until the market changes (which it eventually will). Or you can try to revise your story to set it in a more appealing time frame – but this will typically mean a complete rewrite.

*"Dear author, thank you so much for submitting your contemporary werewolf romance, Love at First Bite. Unfortunately it's just not right for us at this time. Good luck placing it elsewhere."*

Okay, standard slush rejection. You can get this for any number of reasons. Maybe the plot didn't work for the editor, maybe the story didn't fit within the guidelines of what the publisher is looking for, maybe the original requesting editor left the company and mass rejections went out just to clear her desk. Or it could mean the book really isn't ready to be published. If you get more than several rejections of this type, consider re-evaluating your work.

*"Dear Jane, thank you so much for submitting your Egyptian mummy romance to ABC Publishing. I really enjoyed your story. Your characters are well developed, your writing is clean and engaging, the plot is appealing. Unfortunately, the story still isn't quite strong enough for us. Jane, I do hope you will consider revising and resubmitting. Your story is very strong up until page 204 where the subplot seems to fall apart. (yada yada for 2 more pages of suggested changes).*

This is not a rejection. This is a revision request. If you agree with the changes the editor is suggesting, make them and resubmit to that editor.

There are many other kinds of rejection you may receive. Not all of them mean your story is bad, or your writing needs work. Sometimes, problems are easily fixed. Sometimes you have a good project but the market for it just isn't there. Sometimes, rejections really do mean the work isn't ready for prime time.

But one thing is certain, published or unpublished, bestselling or midlist, rejection is something all writers face at one time or another. Whatever you do, don't let rejection stop you from following your dreams. You will never realize your dreams if you don't pursue them.

*C.L. Wilson is an award winning debut author whose first two books, Lord of the Fading Lands and Lady of Light and Shadows, are being released back-to-back in October and November 2007 as lead titles of Dorchester Publishing's Leisure Books imprint.*



*Connections is published monthly by CTRWA. Nothing may be reproduced without giving credit to CTRWA and the author*

## The Truth About Query Letters

By Kristan Higgins

ADMIT IT. The words “query letter” make your bowels churn. You break into a cold sweat. You jerk from sleep at night. You should. *It’s the most important thing you’ll ever write. Make it perfect. You have one chance.* Hey, no pressure. Piece a’ cake. You have three paragraphs and about 200 words to make an impression, represent and summarize the tone, plot and main characters of your book, and pass yourself off as someone who has the cajones to make it in the writing business. Why worry?

I have a lot of experience with query letters. I wrote three drafts of mine, back in the day when I was young and innocent. The first one was a little...long. Sure, it all fit on one page (because I used 9 point type). I started in a professional (that is, stultifying) manner... Dear Ms. Smith, I hope that you will be interested in my completed 100,000 word novel...

I went on to describe the book in detail. That took a paragraph. Then, I continued to describe the book in detail. That took another. Then I compared my book to some other romantic comedies... *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, for example, and Jennifer Crusie’s *Welcome to Temptation*. I was subtle, though... I didn’t come out and say it was as good as those; I just dropped a couple of names, that’s all. Subliminal suggestion... clever, don’t you think?

Then, in paragraph four, I summed up my writing experience, starting from my first job in museum public relations to how I left advertising after the birth of my daughter. I talked about my decision to write fiction and how hardworking I was, how attentive to detail, how quickly I turned projects around. (I’m boring myself just remembering all this stuff.) Eventually, I signed off with all the pleasantries. I also enclosed the synopsis and first three chapters, because they all said they wanted that in the submission guidelines.

To be honest, that query letter wasn’t really that bad, just a little long. My sentences were well constructed, my vocabulary quite advanced. The grammar was perfect, the format immaculate. I sat back and waited to hear from the twenty agents I queried.

Within days, I heard. Alas, I heard. Those poor quality, generic rejection letters... *not right for our needs at this time... Due to the high volume of queries we received, we are unable to respond... While I found your book etc., etc... keep in mind that publishing is a subjective yadda yadda ding dong.*

My well constructed, grammatically flawless query letter yielded me not one single request for more. All that paper, all those stamps, all those trips to the post office. Nothing. To tell you the truth, I was quite sure that in more than one instance, not a page of my manuscript had

been read. Quite a few agencies answered simply by silence.

Well, despite the fact that I was batting 0 for 20, I had a lot of confidence in my book. I decided to write another query letter and try a different style. I bumped up the type to 11 points. Pared down my work experience. Squashed down my summary. Instead of sending those first thirty pages, the five page synopsis, I’d make them ask for it (and thence, be able to write “Requested Material” on the envelopes), avoiding the dreaded slush pile. I enclosed a postcard on which the agent could simply check what she wanted me to send... first three chapters and a synopsis, first 50 pages and a synopsis, whole manuscript. I also left a space for comments.

That letter got me two requests for two partials out of twelve tries. Better than batting .000, but not exactly Hall of Fame material. By the way, one agent commented — “Simply have no time to pursue.” The rest sent those standard rejection letters, or, in more cases, nothing at all. One sent me a rejection *a year and a half* after I sent the letter.

Battered but not broken, I looked again at my book. It was a good book. I knew this. It had to be the system... I just didn’t believe that anyone was actually reading my stuff. If I could just someone’s eyes on my manuscript, I *knew* at least some of them would want it.

I was right. Here’s how I found out.

I spent about a week finding e-mail addresses for various agents, many of whom I’d already queried. This time, I took a “take no prisoners,” do-or-die approach. This is how it went.

*Dear Ms. X:*

*When a woman’s in love with her sister’s husband, how far will she go to avoid the truth? In the case of Millie Barnes, the plan is complete denial. In fact, she convinces herself that she’s in love with someone else entirely. Millie takes all the pent-up misery of an impossible love and hones it into a laser beam of obsession on hapless Joe Carpenter.*

*I am an award-winning copywriter and editor with more than twelve years of experience. My most recent work has been as a book and arts reviewer for a regional magazine. I’ve been a member of the RWA for one year. STALKING JOE is my first novel. If you’d like to see a partial, please let me know.*

One line hook; very brief summary of main character’s conflict; my writing credentials; sign off. That was it.

Within hours, three agents had asked to send a partial. Within a week, seven more. The first agent who responded contacted me a week after I’d sent the partial and requested the full. Two weeks after that, she let me know how much she liked it. Told me she was passing it up the food chain to the name on the door. Told me to expect an offer very soon.

*continued next page*

## *The Truth About Query Letters, continued*

Six weeks after sending my e-query, I had signed a contract with an agent who represents multiple *New York Times* bestselling authors, has swanky offices in Rockefeller Plaza and takes me out for three-hour lunches at fancy restaurants where the waiters call me *Bellissima*. Not only did she sell my first book, she got me a two-book deal, then another. I love her.

And it wasn't just my agent responded to this letter. Out of the thirty agents I queried by e-mail, nineteen asked to see partials. I was batting .613! Many of those asked to see the full, but to tell the truth, I had already signed with my agent by the time most got around to it. And here's the thing. Many who requested a partial had already rejected me in those first two rounds.

My agent has 60 authors on her list, give or take, and she treats us like royalty. In addition to getting us contracts, negotiating print runs, foreign rights, film rights, going to conferences, holding authors' hands and shmoozing editors, she receives 300 queries a week. I'm going to say that again. She gets 300 queries *every week*. Do I blame her for not ever getting through her slush pile to my unsolicited submission? Not a bit. It's the way things are, no more, no less.

So how can you get your query letter read, have your material requested? Here are a few guidelines...

**Use e-mail.** There's no hard and fast rule on this; it's just what worked best for me. It's awfully easy for someone to hit "reply." It takes more effort and time to type in someone's e-mail address or worse, have to send them a snail-mail letter. Obviously, if an agent says "no e-mail queries," you should listen, but otherwise, give it a shot.

**Make the letter perfect.** Well, yes. You have to. With 300 queries a week, a typo, a grammatical error, a ridiculous claim (Nora Roberts but better) simply gives an agent or editor a good reason to hit the delete button. Get it proofread by someone who knows what she's doing.

**NEVER send anything without it being requested.** Never. Not a synopsis, not 5 pages, nothing. It must be requested if you want it to be read before your death. Unsolicited material goes into the slush pile. The interns read it, eventually. Honestly, this can take up to a year.

**Make your query letter SHORT.** *Nothing* needs to be explained in full. Nothing. It simply has to be well written and

grab the interest of the person reading it.

**Do NOT be modest.** Make your book and yourself sound fantastic. The query letter is all about you in the sense that if you can't summarize your book into a couple of sentences, what kind of writer are you? If you have some credentials that add strength to your book, state them in the strongest language possible. This is not showing off; it's merely the truth.

**Do NOT follow up with questions as to whether they got it, read it, want it.** Listen. If they want it, you'll be the first to know. Really. If an agent is excited by your work, she's going to tell you as soon as possible. If you keep dropping her reminders, you're just gumming up the works. If you haven't heard in a month or two, assume she hasn't gotten around to rejecting you yet. Maybe you'll be pleasantly surprised later, but assume the worst and move on.

**Do NOT take it personally.** The rejection of your work might have nothing to do with its quality. Really. Timing, market, budget...these are things we writers are blissfully unaware of, and if someone rejects your book, it might not be because it's a bad book. Quite the contrary.

**KEEP WRITING.** Then again, there's always the chance that your book might need some work. Doesn't mean it's not good...maybe it's just not good *enough*. If no one wants your book, stick it in a drawer and move on. Write something else. You write because you love to, correct? Do you want to spend the rest of your life getting this one book published? You want to write, to create, to lose yourself in your characters. Do it. Every day you sit at the keyboard and create something, you're becoming a better writer.

The submitting system is very flawed. Agents and publishers want to find new, exciting authors. They do. But there just aren't enough hours in the day to read everything they're sent. Step out of the pack a little bit. Make your efforts effective, concise, brief. Be aware that this is a business, not a conduit for making your personal dreams come true. And when you've written your good book, don't let that amazing accomplishment become lost in the maze of submitting. You've written a book. You're taking steps to become published. That's really something to be proud of.

Looking at his face she guessed he was in his late twenties. Seeing his lips Allie had only one thought, they were created to be kissed. Just thinking about wanting to kiss him turned her face flushed with embarrassment.

From CTRWA member Lindsay Downs's current work-in-progress, *The Trial of Three*

