



CONNECTIONS

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

President's Letter

When Kristan sent me an email reminding me about the President's Letter, she was a few days later than usual. She apologized, mentioning she'd been busy and the date had sneaked up on her. Then, I completely forgot about her email for a couple of days and, when she followed up, I had to tell her that I was going to be very busy that day and was not sure when I'd be able to fit it in.

Am I making excuses? Well, possibly, in a backhanded way. But, mainly, this reminded me about something that seems to be a bigger issue in the summer for me: keeping focused. And, judging by communication with my writer friends, my critique partners, and my Book Rx customers, I'm not the only one who experiences this syndrome.

I can hear you groaning and thinking to yourself, *What does she have to distract her? She lives alone, and writes full time. I've got a spouse, a full-time job, and a houseful of kids who are out of school for the summer to distract me.*

I hear you, and you're proving my point. If I, with my relatively baggage-free life, have a hard time keeping focus in the summer, I'm amazed any of you get a sentence on the page!

No matter how busy we are, however, we need to keep writing. If you're like me, it's the only way to keep the electricity turned on, the gas tank full, and the shelves stocked with cat food. But, even if you don't have to write to earn your keep, there are other reasons to hang on to your focus, and I'm not just talking about being ready to pitch at the National Convention later this month, to get your proposal in by the date you promised your agent, or to meet whatever other external and self-imposed deadlines you may have.

I'm talking about writing because you are a writer, and *writers write*. When the distractions and obligations around you seem overwhelming, writing is the thing that will save your sanity! For a writer, sitting down at the keyboard or putting the pen to paper can pull you away from the world like nothing else can.

Oops, there's that groaning again. *I don't need to be reminded that I need to keep my focus. What I need to know is HOW to do it!* I'm sorry to inform you that I don't have the magic formula. If I did, I'd be Nora Roberts. ☺ But I do have a few tricks, from myself and other writers, that I'll share with you.

Give yourself permission to write almost nothing. I wish I knew the source of this quote because, if I did, I'd give the author credit. She (I think it was a she) said that often, when the writer doesn't feel as if he or she has enough time to write that chapter today, they don't bother to write at all. Rather than waiting until you have time to meet your ambition writing goal, she suggested this approach:

If you don't have time to write a chapter, write a scene. If you don't have time to write a scene, write a page. If you don't have time to write a page, write a paragraph. If you don't have time to write a paragraph, write a sentence. If you don't have time to write a sentence, WRITE A WORD. And, after you've written that word, tell yourself "I wrote today." I love this because, if you give yourself permission to sit down and write JUST ONE WORD, you won't stop there. For most of us, the act of *sitting down to write* spurs us to continue after word #1.

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NEXT MEETING:
Chapter Picnic, July 10th
Chez Toni

See page 2 for details.

REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE
Resuming August 14th
Holiday Inn, North Haven

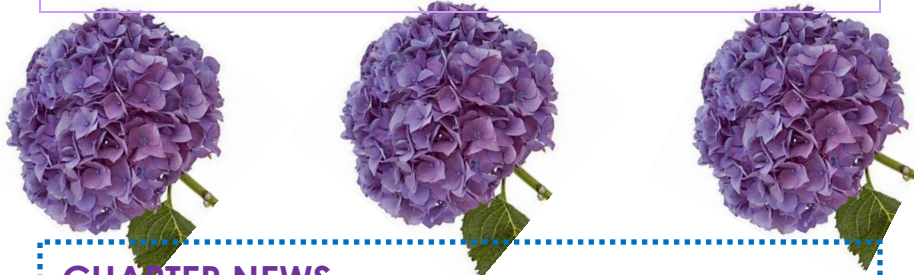
Critique Group: 9:30
General Meeting: 10:45-11:15
Craft Corner
Lunch
Speaker 12:45
Hands-On Workshop
(after the speaker)

CALENDAR

July 10th...Picnic at Toni's! Head to Toni's adorable house on Crystal Lake in Ellington for a chapter picnic. Time: 11:00 AM until we drop...the chapter will provide a grill, hotdogs, hamburgers, ice, plates, utensils, cups, napkins and non-alcoholic beverages. Y'all can bring side dishes, desserts, alcoholic beverages, anything you'd like to grill, extra chairs, folding tables and your bathing suit, as well as canopies or pop-ups for shade, or shelter if it looks like it might rain. You're also welcome to bring kayaks, paddles, floats, inner tubes, life preservers. Toni has a canoe and a small sail boat, and her house is about eight feet from the water with a dock and a very nice swimming area. **PARKING** is at a premium! There are a few spaces in front of Toni's house, and a few cars can park along West Shore Road, but Toni has made arrangements with a nearby business, Crystal Lake Self Storage, to use their parking lot. Drop your stuff off at Toni's, then get directions to the parking lot. **Guests** are welcome, but **young children** should not attend. We are an adult group, there will be alcohol present, and the party area is very close to both the road and the lake. **For directions**, visit www.CTRWA.org. And **PLEASE RSVP!**

PLEASE NOTE: CTRWA will now be meeting at the Holiday Inn, North Haven. Directions are on the website.

August 14th...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.



CHAPTER NEWS

COMING NOVEMBER 20th — The great Margie Lawson will present her acclaimed workshop **EMPOWERING CHARACTERS' EMOTIONS**. This workshop is **FREE** to all chapter volunteers, repaying all your good karma. Not a volunteer yet? Don't worry. We'll find something for you to do!

2011 Fiction Fest Update. Our conference is going to be incredible next spring! Not only is La Eloisa our keynote speaker...we've hand-picked workshops from top-rate authors, and of course, we'll host some powerhouse agents and editors. May 14, 2011...mark your calendars now.

MEMBER NEWS

Rhonda Lane finished her very first manuscript! Congratulations, Rhonda, on that mega-achievement, and here's to many more "the ends". **Huntley Fitzpatrick**, newly signed with the Jane Retrosen Agency, is working on revisions as well as a follow-up book for her first. Good luck, Huntley!...**Paula Robinson** is plugging away on her first draft—hang in there, Paula! Congratulations to **Karlee Etter**, whose daughter is getting married this month!...**Kristan Higgins** finished her seventh ro-co, *My One & Only*. Always the best feeling. Kristan was very warmly received by about 90 librarians at a standing-room-only panel discussion at the American Library Association National Conference in Washington, D.C.... **Jennifer Fusco and Katherine McNulty** are taking an online class together entitled *Beyond Research: Stronger POV & Effective Use of Detail* Presented by Author Carrie Lofty. **Marian Lanouette** has been working with her mentor, the lovely and talented **Thea Devine**, and reports that the input has been "invaluable." Glad to hear it, Marian! That's what the mentorship program is for....**Monica Spence** will be attending the Seton Hill University Alumni Retreat for the grads of the Writing Popular Fiction MA/ MFA programs. Monica's also in the midst of a PhD program at Lancaster University (England). She's currently working on her PhD thesis and a contemporary romance. **Ellie Sullo** is happy to report that *Menopause Murder (Number Two)*, *Harem*, is in the hopper--all edits and proofing done, and will be released on August 1. Congratulations, Ellie!...**Bob Bonitz's** short story has grown to 38,000 words and though Bob keeps trying to put the final polish on it, the dang thing keeps suggesting new plot twists. Let it ride, Bob! ...**Noelle Brunelle** contributed to a panel overview for this years Human Factors and Ergonomics Annual Meeting... title of the paper is "Teaching the Future Human Factors and Ergonomics Professionals to Solve Practical Problems," and it was accepted last week for publication in September. Congratulations, Noelle!...**Linda Avellar** attended the Bucks County RWA Hook 'Em with the First Page workshop today. It was a long drive, but totally worth it—Linda had interest from two agents!...**Karen Pinco** is pleased to announce that revision pass #1 is **DONE** but adds, "Of course, thanks to Kelly and Shaunee, there now needs to be a (quickish) revision pass #2. But I worship the ground my critique group walks on." Which is, of course, how it should be.

Member of the Month...your intrepid newsletter editor, Kristan Higgins

Due to a recent deadline, the lure of vacation and a sizable brain blip, your intrepid and forgetful newsletter editor failed to ask anyone to be member of the month. She found herself on Cape Cod in a house without wifi on July 30th with no member of the month, then realized, heck, she was a member, and since time was of the essence, decided to interview herself. Sorry for the lameness, folks. Will do better in the future!

Tell us about what you're working on now.
I just finished revising my seventh ro-co, entitled *My One & Only*, and sent it off to my agent. Currently, I'm fleshing out an idea for Book #8. There is no rest for the wicked, I've heard.

What's the next major step you need to take in your writing?
Well...things are going very well indeed, but I'd love to hit one or two of the big lists—*USA Today* or *NYT*. I think the major step I need to take as a writer is to branch out into writing in third person with two points of view, but I don't see that happening for a couple of books, since I'm always on deadline and don't feel I have the time to hone that skill.

What have been some of the highs of your romance writing thus far?
Getting the call, of course...getting that box of advance copies...meeting other writers. Meeting readers. Winning the RITA was thrilling, of course! This summer has given me a new high—my daughter, now 14, is reading my books. *All I Ever Wanted* is her favorite so far. Seeing my kid with my book in her hand and a smile on her face...that's pretty special.

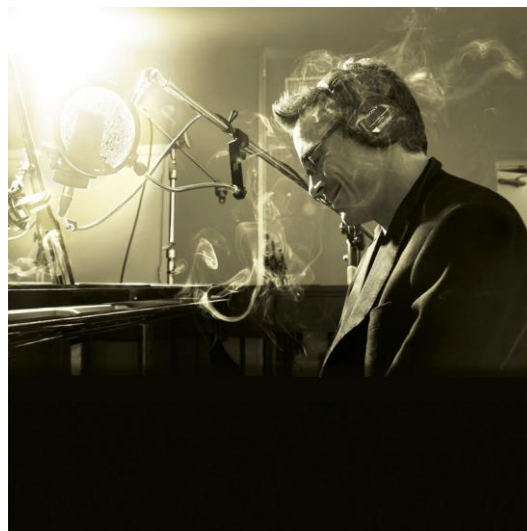
What are some good books you've read lately?
I hadn't read much during revisions, and then up here on vacation, I've binged—*Ravishing in Red* by Madeline Hunter (A+); *The Honk and Holler Opening Soon* by Billie Letts (A); *Angry Housewives Eating Bonbons* (B); *Thin, Rich, Pretty* by Beth Garbison (B+).

Favorite authors and why?
Elinor Lipman, for her kind, wry, insightful writing style and fabulous sense of humor; Steve King, for making my heart beat in abject terror; Monica McInerney, for her evocative descriptions and razor-like insights on family dynamics.

Favorite Connecticut restaurant?
McIrish is a great cook, so when we go out to dinner, the restaurant has to have great ambience or incredible food. I love Max's Steakhouse in Hartford, since it has both. Lorenzo's in West Haven has the best Italian food in the

state; Esca in Middletown has very good food and better martinis. Perk on Main in Durham is my favorite place for breakfast, along with Me & McGee's in Haddam.

If you could cast your current hero or heroine, who'd get the call?
For this most recent book, I'd have to cast Robert Downey Jr. for the hero. When I was first thinking of the story, I dreamed that he was Nick, so who am I to argue with my subconscious? My heroine is, for the first time ever, drop-dead gorgeous but has a very sharp tongue and a bad attitude. I guess I'd pick Charlize Theron. She's such a good actress, and dang it! Even without eyebrows, she's gorgeous!



This is from My One & Only—Harper is en route to a wedding in Glacier National Park. She is maid of honor; her ex-husband, Nick, is best man. They haven't seen each other in 12 years.

The driver in front of me had not moved an inch. We were on a sharp curve, too, so passing would definitely be inadvisable, not that I'd seen many other cars. Should I try it? I tapped the horn again. Nothing. No grizzly bear, no elk, no goat. "Come on," I groaned. The sooner this weekend started, the sooner I could get back to normal. The driver didn't move. Stroke? Heart attack? Flashback to the Civil War? I leaned on the horn again — alas, it was a rather friendly-sounding horn, as the rental was Japanese. Give me a good old fashioned Detroit-made blare any day.

"Come on, Florence!" I yelled out the window. "Can you please move it?"

The driver of the car extended an arm out the window. And a finger.

My hands slid off the steering wheel.

It was a male arm...and finger. And I knew that arm...and finger.

10 Things Every Writer Should Know

by C.J. Redwine



1. Finish a book. Stop starting every shiny new idea and find the discipline to type one idea all the way through to The End. It won't be perfect. It probably won't ever be published. But what you'll learn about yourself and the process will be invaluable and every subsequent lesson on craft will make a lot more sense.
2. Don't be so eager to share your work with others. It's important to protect the creative process. Staying away from too much outside input until you're sure of the story and the characters is a good idea. Write until you're sure of the story and THEN invite critiques from CPs. And if you're posting chapters of your work willy-nilly online, stop. Editors are leery about selling a book when much of it has already been offered for free.
3. Less talk, more typing. There are many ways to network with other writers. I agree that can be an important resource. However, many newer writers spend more time talking about writing than actually writing. Write more. Talk about it less.
4. Read. Reading within your genre gives you a firm grasp of the genre and what's already been done. Reading outside your genre gives you inspiration for new ideas you could bring to the table. Read.
5. Linger. Set the scene. Explore the emotions. Record the sensory detail. Don't be in such a hurry to get from point A to point B that you neglect to deliver the entire scope of the scene to your reader. If you don't know how to linger without filling your pages with exposition--fill your pages with exposition. You can revise later.
6. Understand that writing is largely about revising. Revising is often harder than writing the first draft. Your novel won't be perfect the first time around. It doesn't matter. What you didn't learn about craft by finishing your first draft, you'll learn by revising.
7. No book is ever perfect. There's always something you can change. There are no perfect books, but there are excellent books and the trick is knowing when you've hit that level and can let it rest.
8. Some books won't ever be published but you should write them anyway. I know you think the book you're writing NOW is the one. You may be right. Then again, you may be wrong. It doesn't matter. What matters is pushing yourself to write the very best book you can and then surprising yourself with how much better you can make it through revising. No finished draft is ever a wasted endeavor.
9. Self-doubt comes with the territory. All of us share one thing in common--we worry that we won't measure up. We worry that we will. We worry that no agent/editor/reader will snatch up our book and when they do, we worry they won't like it. When they do, we worry our next one will bomb instead. You can't get rid of every shred of doubt and you don't need to. The trick is to answer the doubt with action. Keep your head down and write. Take praise and criticism

with as much humility and wisdom as you can and then write some more.

10. Interest and inspiration start books. Fetermination, perseverance, and stubbornness finish them. If you're waiting for your "Muse" to return before you discipline yourself to write, you won't finish your book. If you want life to slow down, your schedule to clear, or the people around you to suddenly come to their senses and support your passion before you make the commitment to finish your book, you won't finish. Finishing a book takes giving up sleep, turning down invitations, and refusing to watch tv so you can write instead. Finishing a book means writing a scene that refuses to go smoothly even though you'd rather do just about anything else. If you want to turn your writing from hobby to career, find the determination, perseverance and stubbornness to finish a book.

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C.J. Redwine is repped by Holly Root of Waxman Literary Agency and teaches online writing workshops. For more info, go to <http://queryworkshop.blogspot.com>

This article first appeared in the June 2010 issue of Love Notes, the newsletter of Music City Romance Writers

Gerard Butler Grammar Quiz

Which of these is correct?

- A) Its so nice to have Gerard take his shirt off in a movie.
- B) It's even better if he wears a kilt.
- C) The movie, its actors and script were pointless, at least until Gerard Butler had that love scene.

Ah...it was a trick question. B and C are both correct. When one uses an apostrophe, it's to indicate that a letter is missing or to designate possession (Kristan, Gerard's wife) In the case of "it's" the missing letter is the "I" in "is." "Its" (no apostrophe) indicates ownership.

The kilt, its fasteners having melted in my laser-hot stare, fell to the floor. "It's getting steamy in here," I murmured. "Tis," Gerard breathed.

Note the apostrophe in front of "'tis"—because I deleted the letter "I" from the implied word "It."



Thanks, Gerard! You're the best, baby! And what exactly are you wearing under that leather kilt?

What To Do Next

By Coral Smith Saxe

LIKE MOST OF you, I have a very busy life. I have a set number of hours each week during which I can sit down to write with no (okay, with minimal) interruptions. I'm always looking for ways to get the creative fires going quickly, so that I don't spend those few hours gnashing my teeth at a blank computer screen. What follows is some of what I've been calling my What to Do Next List. You could say it's a resource for plotting, or you could call it a brainstorming technique.

1) Okay, let's get right down to it: write a love scene. How far will your characters go? What emotions do they bring to the scene? How does it change them?

2) Write an argument or confrontation. Who is it between? What is the main issue? Are they saying what they really want to say? What is at stake for each character if they win or lose the argument?

3) Describe a location. What are your characters doing there? What does it mean to them? Is it old, new, familiar, strange? Why are they there?

4) Go Shopping! What kind of things would your characters buy? Can they afford them? Will they buy gifts for other people? Is there one, small, precious thing that they must have? Do they shop at Saks or Salvation Army?

5) Go to a wedding. Whose wedding? Who's there? Where is it held? Does it go smoothly? What hopes and fears do the characters have? What rituals have the most meaning for them? Will someone step in and refuse to forever hold his peace?

6) Take your characters on a picnic.

7) Give them a moment of fear for their lives.

8) Show them giving or receiving something unexpected.

9) Invited some children or small animals. Rodents, perhaps?

10) Introduce a rival.

11) Stage a rebellion. Does someone want to kick over the traces and run free? Does this rebellion have a cause? Is it personal or political?

12) Let them betray one another. Or seem to.

13) Write the ending. It's nice to know where you're going to arrive at the end of your journey. It's like getting a Christmas gift in July.

14) Create a home for your characters. Is it messy or neat? Opulent or shabby? In the city or the country? Castle or cabin? Full of precious memories or stark and new? Crowded or empty? Dark or sunny?

15) Write a scene around a costume. Where and when would they wear this outfit? How will people react? Is it a disguise? Will it entice or repel?

16) Write a scene set in a famous place or go where you always wanted to go. Take your characters walking in the Tuilleries, riding on Pall Mall, dancing at Almack's,

swimming in Lake Geneva, rock-climbing in Yosemite, strolling on Boston Common, driving over the Rockies – and find out how it feels to be there for your characters.

17) Write a scene around an object or props. Two engagement rings. A family bible. A bottle of cheap champagne, a bird cage, three umbrellas, a stolen letter, a bouquet of ragweed, a coffin, a chunk of fool's gold, burnt biscuits, a photograph, a partridge in a pear tree. Who has this object? Who wants it? Who wants to get rid of it? Does it have magical properties? Sentimental value?

18) Show your characters in the hands of their enemies.

19) Show them in the bosom of their families.

20) Find a secret place where your heroine/hero goes to get away.

21) Order Chinese food – would they get plain chowmein or shark's fin soup?

22) Recall their first kiss.

23) Take your characters out for the evening – to a restaurant, a brothel, a formal dinner, a stuffy political ceremony, a square dance, an auction. Do they mingle, yawn, make a scene, spill the soup, create a sensation, make an impassioned speech, rile an enemy, break a few hearts, steal the silver, make love in the coat closet, get lost in the garden, go into labor, or challenge someone to a duel? Special occasions often bring out the unexpected.

24) Show your characters at work. What tools do they use? Is it physical or mental labor? Who do they work with? Do they love their job? Who's the boss? Is it creative, menial, solitary, artistic, dangerous, boring, meaningful, dishonorable, or death-defying? Show their daily routine. What would happen if the routine were disrupted?

25) Introduce somebody famous.

26) Make them sick. Or wounded. Are they passive and accepting, ornery or stubborn, optimistic or pessimistic? Will a miracle be necessary? Is there a doctor in the house/woods/galaxy?

27) Sue somebody. Arrest them. Take them all to court. Take them all to court. What happens there?

28) Or, take them all to court. Who is the monarch? What happens at the palace?

29) Spend the holidays with your characters. Does it bring up conflicts, heal old wounds, bore your characters silly? Do they eat or drink too much?

30) When all else fails, kill somebody off.

31) When all else fails, have a baby.

And that's it. One for every day of the month. The act of writing requires a leap of faith. I hope I've given you some good jumping-off spots.

This article was re-published in the May issue of Midwest Muse, newsletter of Midwest Fiction Writers.

How to be an Excellent Hooker

by C.J. Redwine

NO, NOT THAT kind of hooker. I don't give that kind of knowledge out for free. I'm talking about how to hook an agent, an editor, and ultimately, a reader.

Before we can talk about what a hook is, we need to talk about what a hook is not.

A hook is not an introduction of every single character in your novel. Hero, heroine, and villain if you have one—that's it. You want the heart of the book. Leave the discovery of the other organs to your delighted reader.

A hook is not a blow by blow explanation of every major plot point. That way lies Query Death. You want the spine—the conflict that hurtles your heroine into peril in chapter one and escalates until she finally changes/acts/does the unthinkable and comes out a winner on your last page.

A hook is not a formal, business-y sounding paragraph sandwiched between the rest of the stuff in your query. Your hook is your query. If you don't grab an agent with your hook, the rest won't matter anyway.

Now, let's look at what a hook is.

A hook is a two to three paragraph blurb that captures both the conflict and the Voice of your manuscript.

Sound simple? If so, please take a moment to slap some sense into yourself, and we'll continue. Condensing your 90k novel of fabulosity into a two-three paragraph blurb is tough. Most of us stink at it the first few times we try it. But, like any other area of craft, practice really does make perfect.

How do you write a two-three paragraph blurb capturing the conflict and Voice of your manuscript?

Forget the two-three paragraph thing. Really. I know I just said it, but it's like the Code on Pirates of the Caribbean. It's more like guidelines. You should feel free to break your hook up. Keep your query to one page, but mimic the pacing and Voice of your novel.

Throw your pre-conceived notions of business writing out the window. Seriously. Yes, a query letter is a business communication and you're going to keep a business-letter framework by having proper headers, salutations, and a nice tidy paragraph with your writing background and the word count and genre of your manuscript, but that's where the resemblance ends. Why? Because novel writing is art. Publishing is art meets business. Query letters have to be a successful marriage of both as well. Nothing kills the excitement and Voice of a hook like trying to make it sound business-y.

Understand your novel's basic conflict. Remember when I said you wanted to only include the spine of the book? A simple formula to help you identify your novel's basic conflict is this: A must do B to avoid or accomplish C but D is a huge problem. Fill in the blanks to this and you have your conflict. This is NOT your hook. This is a starting place.

Understand the Voice of your novel. My novel is dark

urban fantasy written in a quasi-chick lit voice. Guess what? My hook reveals a dark urban fantasy and is written in a quasi-chick lit voice. My MC's personality comes through. Identify your novel's voice and write the hook accordingly. If you're having trouble understanding how to make the connection, grab five or six books in your genre and read the backs for some inspiration.

Write your hook. Introduce your main characters, set up the conflict, and give us the stakes in either a question (Will Angela throw caution—and her reputation—out the window to rescue Jack before the vampires turn him into one of their own?) or a statement (Angela must throw caution—and her reputation—out the window to rescue Jack before the vampires turn him into one of their own.).

Get Feedback. Grab two people who haven't read your book, and see if they'd buy the book based on the query. Or, do a quick search online to find sources of professional feedback.

Writing an excellent hook takes perseverance, but when the end result is an agent's or editor's interest, the blood, sweat, and multiple revisions you poured into it are worth it. Happy hooking!

C.J. Redwine is repped by Holly Root of Waxman Literary Agency and teaches online query writing workshops. For more info, go to <http://queryworkshop.blogspot.com>



Characterization Tips

To flesh out a character, don't forget to pay attention to the details. For example...

What's the physical feature the character is most noted for? What are some physical mannerisms? Any special sayings or mottos? What are his or her guilty pleasures? Secret binge foods? Bad habits? Way of dressing? Favorite article of clothing? What makes your character laugh or cry? What color is the character's bedroom? Does your character like children? Animals? Crowds? The great outdoors? On a perfect day off, what would your character do? Watch on TV? Read? What does this character notice in the opposite sex? Does your character have siblings? How does birth order affect his or her personality? Why did the character's last relationship fail? Does your character have a pet? What kind? Why that one? What's your character's secret weakness? What's the one thing he or she just won't stand for?

The Perils of Being Published—Distractions

by Gerry Bartlett

WRITERS WRITE. I got that bit of wisdom at an RWA workshop years ago. I posted it where I could see it, took it to heart, even beat myself up when I didn't do it. Hah! I wish all I had to do was write now that I'm published.

I had a book out this past month, I'm working on a book due next month. But forget actually writing the novel. Oh, no. I'm in promo mode. Seems I'm pressured to do whatever I can to make this new release a success. Define success. Well, the numbers sold have to impress somebody. Namely, the publisher. The key time in publisher world is the first week the book hits the shelves. But the first month is also important. Because in this economy booksellers don't reorder. If they get your book in the first place, they want to see it move. If it sells fast? Great. Maybe they'll order your next one. If it languishes on the shelf? Good luck talking them into taking another with your name on it.

So how do you stimulate early sales? It's anyone's guess. The publisher does exactly zilch for the great unwashed known as the midlist (that's me and 95% of authors). Nora gets publicity. So do the other *New York Times* bestsellers. Me? Nada. So I post on Myspace and Facebook. I send out a newsletter to the fans who have emailed me for the past three years since I started the series. And I embark on a blog tour. Oh, yes, I'm writing. Blogs. And each one has to be unique, interesting and in my hilarious voice while promoting my book in a not-too-crass and obvious way. I blog about paranormal trends, I blog about alpha heroes, I blog about light versus dark books. You name it, I blog it to death. Does this take time? You bet. I think I've blogged enough. But wait. I have a book coming out in Germany (love those euros) so I write an article for a German magazine. Will this ever end? Oh, no. What about AmazonConnect? Yep, better update that puppy. And my website. And then there's the fan site. So I start a column of Glory's fashion tips. That'll get some action. And maybe a sale or two.

Or two? Who said that quote about being nibbled to death by ducks? That's what this feels like. I beg my friends and cohorts in my RWA chapters to come by and post on these blogs because there's nothing worse than holding a chat and nobody wants to talk to you. I feel like I'm out in Never Never Land. Spitting in the wind. Are there any more clichés I can call on? Anyway, you get it. I'm in full-on promo mode. I stalk readers in my local B&N and Borders, dragging them to look at my book. If they like funny paranormals, try this. Oh, so what if they just wanted a cookbook. TRY THIS!!!!

Sorry, got a little carried away there. Because I want another contract and these numbers will determine if I get one. Did you think once published you had it made? Have you been reading these columns? You NEVER have it made. But I promise to climb off the ledge. The month ended. REAL VAMPIRES HATE THEIR THIGHS made the Barnes

& Nobles and Borders romance trade paperback bestseller list--#7 and #10 respectively. It also was one of the top 100 romance paperbacks for the first week it was out. So mission accomplished. My editor was pleased. My agent didn't dump me. I am out of promo mode and can go back to my real writing now. Which is a tremendous relief. Oh, how I love my vampires. Next I'll start thinking up a new series. No way can I just relax and lie on a beach somewhere. Writers write, don't you know.

Gerry Bartlett is the national bestselling author of the Real Vampires series from Berkley Publishing. This article first appeared in the March 2010 issue of In Print!, the newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA.

The wildly successful and wicked fun exercise at our May meeting led to some very interesting connections. Kathy Albert volunteered to share hers. The boldfaced words are the prompts; what follows is Kathy's way of weaving them together. Thanks, Kathy!

There she was, Amy Gerstein, over by the pool kissing my father. What a tramp! I don't know how my mother puts up with it. I glanced over my shoulder only to see Eloise running towards the beach house. How I hated family vacations! **Eloise was my half sister, but everyone thought she was my cousin.** My skank of a father had slept with slutty auntie of which Eloise was the product of. I had overheard them talking, while on one of our dreaded family vacations. Aunt Amy was crying and dear old Dad was hugging her. She said she was pregnant and he agreed to be the godfather. Poor Uncle Herb. He was so clueless. **The way Uncle Herb defrosted the refrigerator** was probably the way he had to deal with Aunt Amy. She was ice cold in her affections towards him, but was a wet, sloppy mess when my father was around. I had seen Uncle Herb naked once and it really frightened me. I had walked in on him while he was taking a shower. I had never seen a grown up one before. It reminded me of **a crooked umbrella.** I told one of my gay friends about it. He laughed and said that "Uncle Herb" probably wasn't circumcised. While still waiting outside the door, I heard him going to the bathroom. It reminded me of **the sound of a garden hose.** Just like when I used to fill the plastic doggie pool. It was a loud, forceful, determined spray. How can anyone pee that much?



Pointless But Fun

What's your favorite summertime treat?

Anything served at the concession stand on Island Beach (one of the islands off of Greenwich) from June till September. — Bill Clark

Iced coffee. Iced tea. Gazpacho. Ciao Bella Blood Orange Sorbet. I could go on and on. Summer is my favorite season so anything that happens here is a treat.—Huntley Fitzpatrick

Iced coffee, lots of half and half, a little whipped cream on top, maybe some shaved chocolate. It's what passes for lunch around here. For me, anyway. —Kristan Higgins

My favorite summer treat is ice cream from We-Lik-it. They make the best ice cream in the NE, as far as I am concerned. —Paula Robinson

Definitely swimming every day in my backyard pool. I totally can relax in water, which feeds my brain and probes my subconscious which adds to my writing energy. I'm counting on that inspiring the middle section of Book Four in my Menopause Murder series--in between picking tomatoes, cooking zucchini (*et al*) in all its wondrous forms, etc., during the months ahead! — Ellie Sullo

CTRWA Board Members

Toni Andrews, President
toni@toniandrews.com

Shaunee Cole,
VP/Programming Director
shaunee@comcast.com

**Karen Pinco, Secretary/
Membership Director**
kpinco@gmail.com

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jmp3274@gmail.net

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janmessina@comcast.net

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Give your permission to write something terrible. In Anne Lamott's iconic book on writing, *Bird by Bird*, there's a chapter entitled *Shitty First Drafts*. Writers tend to be perfectionists, and hate putting anything on the page that they aren't proud of. But, in the words of Nora Roberts, "The only thing you can't fix is a blank page."

Use a timer. Sometimes I get out the kitchen timer and set it to six minutes. Yup, six. I figure I can handle almost anything for six minutes. I write as much as I can, as fast as I can, until the bell dings. And, you know what? Usually, it's kind of like that writing one word thing--when the bell dings, it startles me, because somewhere in the last five and a half minutes, I got absorbed. I was *writing*.

If you want to take the timer method to the extreme, check out a fabulous website called *Dr. Wicked's Write or Die*. You set yourself a word count and a time goal (I usually do 200 words in 10 minutes). You start typing and, if you pause for too long, the site punishes you with annoying sounds like a baby crying, fingernails on a chalkboard or, most frightening of all, Hansen singing *Oom-Bop* (shudder).

Get an Alpha-Smart or a similar device. This is a keyboard emulator, which means it stores keystrokes. It doesn't boot up, connect with the internet, or require you to create, name, and save files. It runs for 700 hours on 3 AA batteries. This means that when those Siren Songs of Summer call you to the beach, the lake, or the kid's soccer practice, you can take it with you and not worry about finding an electrical outlet or a place shady enough to view your laptop screen. You can use it while waiting in the car or while watching the kids splash in the pool. I've even stuck mine in a giant Ziploc baggie and taken it kayaking.

Have a great summer, and I look forward to seeing you at the summer picnic, the RWA National Conference, or our next meeting.

Toni Andrews, President, CTRWA

"You're gonna need a bigger boat."

—Sheriff Brody upon sighting his nemesis in the movie *Jaws*.



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