



Connections

the official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

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

President's Letter

September, to me, has always been the beginning of the year. Must be because school starts back and summer was always a "lazy" time for me. Okay, maybe not lazy, but I took a lot more time off to spend with my kids—that is until they got to the age when they didn't *want* to spend time with me. I'm thinking that was around age 13.

Now they are both off to college—and my writing time will kick back into gear. I actually look forward to September as kind of a "revival" time.

Even if you don't have the school issue, take advantage of the vibrant weather, our meetings restarting, and get gung-ho about your writing!

We have a fantastic opportunity once again to talk with editor, Trish Owens, from The Wild Rose Press. To add a cherry to our sundae, *three* of our members have recently sold to The Wild Rose Press! Lindsay Downs, Kim Peterson (Zaniewski) and *moi*. You'll hear from Trish on how to submit and have the fantastic opportunity to ask questions. We're very fortunate to live in an area where an editor can come talk to us.

Hope you all can make the meeting!

— Lori Avocato

"In this age, which believes that there is a short cut to everything, the greatest lesson to be learned is that the most difficult way is, in the long run, the easiest."

— Henry Miller

NEXT MEETING — NEW LOCATION!

Four Points Sheraton, Meriden, CT

September 13, 11:00

Editor Trish Owens Demystifies the Submission Process

(see page 2 for more information)

SPECIAL OFFER

Trish is also willing to look at query letters and the first 5 pages of their manuscript to critique and give insight on what works and how the piece can be improved. E-mail her your excerpt at wildrosetrish@aol.com.

MONTHLY MEETINGS of the CTRWA are held at the Four Points Sheraton in Meriden. 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMUNITY

President's Letter.....	1
Calendar.....	2
Member News	2
Member Releases	2
Member Profile	3
Board Members	8
Pointless but Fun.....	8

CAREER

Staying Motivated.....	4
You Know You're a Writer.....	4
Romance or Women's Fiction?.....	6

CRAFT

The Sagging Middle	5
Strong Enough Conflict.....	7
Synopsis Mistakes	8



TO THE FOUR POINTS SHERATON MERIDEN, CT

From I-91 South: Take Exit 17. Bear right onto East Main Street. Turn left at the light. From there, turn right onto Pomeroy Avenue at the second light. The hotel is half a mile down on the right.

From I-91 North: Take Exit 16, turning right onto East Main Street. At the first light, turn right onto Pomeroy Avenue. The hotel is half a mile down on the right.

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 13...The Inside Skinny

Editor Trish Owens of Wild Rose Press will discuss the ins and outs of e-publishing--how to submit, what editors look for, and what the steps are after getting that contract! Trish has been an editor with The Wild Rose Press for over a year and loves a good romance to read. She lives outside of New Haven on a small farm with 2 cows, 2 cats, 1 dog, 2 kids, and a husband.

SEPTEMBER 14...BOOK SIGNING AT BORDERS IN MERIDEN

Kristan Higgins will be signing copies of *Just One of the Guys* at 1:00 and would love to see a friendly face or three...

OCTOBER 11...The Divine Miss Devine

Mega-published CTRWA author Thea Devine speaks! Author of more than 18 novels, Thea has achieved legendary status in the romance community...and not just as an author. Thea is also a manuscript reader, and her insight into the world of publishing is vast and valuable. Don't miss this chance to talk with the elusive and talented Miss D.!

OCTOBER 24-26...NEW JERSEY RWA CONFERENCE

A huge conference with many publishing professionals, Put Your Heart in a Book has a great reputation for attracting big-name authors and publishing powerhouses. If you're not already signed up, consider going.

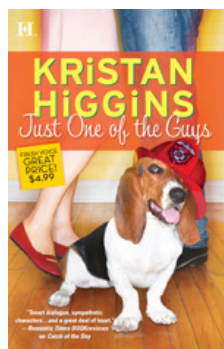
November 8...Medical Realism in Fiction with

Karen Laugel, M.D.

Pediatrician Karen Laugel works and lives in Connecticut and is a CTRWA member with a pet peeve — medical mistakes in fiction. Make sure your details are correct in sickness and in health (and in death, of course!). If you have specific questions, please e-mail Karen directly: kllaugel@aol.com

RECENT MEMBER RELEASES

Just One of the Guys
by Kristan Higgins
August 2008, HQN Books



Four Play
by Collette Thomas
(better known in these parts as Marie Roy)
September 18, 2008,
Forbidden Publications.



MEMBER NEWS

FIRST SALES! Congratulations to **Kim Peterson** and **Lindsay Downs** for making their first fiction sales to the Wild Rose Press! Lindsay sold "Somewhere in North Africa," a World War II story...Kim, writing as Kimberly Allan, sold Truths Unveiled, an inspirational. Well done, you two!

Kristan Higgins, your intrepid editor, brought home the RITA statue from the RWA National Conference in San Francisco! *Catch of the Day* won for best single title contemporary romance in a field of eight. Still a little dazed with the dark-horse victory, Kristan finds herself staring at the shiny little statue for far too long each morning. Kristan will go on her very first book tour this September and is once again fretting over what to wear. Her first book, *Fools Rush In*, was recently translated into Dutch as *Verleiden in 10 Stappen*, and *Fools and Catch* have both been reprinted. Hooray!... **Patricia Grasso** reports that *Enticing The Prince*, her November 2008 release, received a 5 star review from Detra Fitch at Huntress Reviews who said, "The best part, in my humble opinion, is the spectacular ending. No peeking." *To Tame A Duke* (2001) will be published in Portuguese.... **Lori Avocado** sold *Makeshift Family* to Wild Rose Press, a Christmas story and one that has sold three times. Lori also signed with a new agent, Holly Root of the Waxman Agency.... Workaholic and grandmother extraordinaire **Marie Roy**, writing as Collette Thomas, has had a busy summer... *Appetite for Lust* and *Live the Fantasy*, two erotic romances, are scheduled for release at Forbidden Publications. Also look for *A Catering Affair*, an erotic romantic comedy, coming to Forbidden Publications. *Sex Toys and Naughty Boys* has been contracted with Noble Romance (Marie reports the research for it was fun and very informative!) *Stormbound* (written under Marie A. Roy), a straight contemporary romance has been contracted with Aspen Mountain Press.... Still crazy (about each other) after all these years, **Cassy Pickard** and hubby Jon celebrated their anniversary in high style at Petit St. Vincent. Best wishes, lovebirds!... **Joy Smith** has been asked to update *The Perfect First Mate*, her nonfiction book, for a reprint. Congrats, Joy! And Sandra Karakoosh's paintings continue to win accolades. *Beach Day* won the Taft Award at the Watertown Art League show this summer.

Member Profile...Raeleen D'Agostino

No stranger to writing, psychologist Raeleen D'Agostino specializes in helping people achieve their goals...and her own is to be published in fiction (see her bio on page 4. Relatively new to CTRWA, Raeleen took a few minutes to answer some questions for us.

Tell us about your day job/family/present situation.

My main goal right now is to become a published novelist, so I spend most of time reading and trying to improve my writing. I love the creativity that fiction affords me, in letting me invent the personalities of my characters. While I still teach psychology at Quinnipiac University on a part-time basis (this semester Personality Theories!), I also continue to deliver self-help/improvement seminars and courses, and write in this area, too. My non-fiction emphasis has always been about bringing psychology outside of the walls of academia and making it useable for anyone who wants to make improvements in their lives. You don't have to be a university student or in psychotherapy to benefit from psychology's solid self-help techniques.

What are you working on right now?

After having complete 3 fiction manuscripts over the summer (2 romance and 1 women's fiction), I am now working hard on revising them, finding a new agent, and eventually getting them published.

Why and when did you start writing?

I started writing over 30 years ago when I first became enamoured with the short story. Back then I devoured authors like Chekov, Dostoyevsky, Ring Lardner, and others. Then I wrote about twenty of them before my first one was accepted in CT Artist literary magazine. It was called "The American", and was about an elderly man who after many years of living in the U.S., went back to his birthplace in Italy, where he was reunited with his sister. What he discovered, however, was that he couldn't stay. There was no pay upon publication, but back then, who cared?!

Why did you join CTRWA and what are you looking for in the chapter?

I joined because I wanted to transition into writing fiction, and I noticed there are so many wonderful accomplished fiction writers in this group! It seemed like a perfect place to get motivation and share ideas and in general become immersed in the process of novel writing. The bonus for me was discovering how genuine and welcoming the members of CTRWA were to me!

Who are your favorite authors and why?

I always get inspiration, for example from the writings of Florence Scovel Shinn; hope from Shakti Gawain's *Creative Visualization* (and oldie but goodie); and motivation from Stephen King's *On Writing*; to name just a few. With respect to fiction, I love the classics and

reread them for the sheer exquisiteness of some of their writing techniques. JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, for instance, makes first person narrative seem effortless, and so real that you feel the emotional torment on a guttural level—and even the upset stomachs--- of the protagonist, Holden Caulfield. John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is such a short simple story, but elegant in the way it entwines the zeitgeist seamlessly with the storyline; giving you a real depth of understanding for the Depression era. In a more contemporary vein I enjoy Nora Roberts early romances for her descriptive technique, Janet Evanovich for her characteristic combination light humor and mystery, Debbie Macomber for her ability to plot women's fiction, Jodi Piccoult for her social consciousness, Elizabeth Berg for her ability to find triumph in everyday events, etc. I just love and admire good writing.

Favorite CT restaurant?

The outdoor dining atmosphere of Sage in Chester is beautiful because of the on site scenic waterfall; Sakura Garden Japanese Restaurant in Hamden has delicious food as well as a beautiful interior, and a tiny place without any special decoration inside or out but with the best food ever, is The Terrace (NY Times rated this best Thai restaurant and I can see why). Italian of course, I cook at home!

Any celeb you'd cast for your current hero/heroine?

I love Kim Cattrall from *Sex in the City* (my heroines are all past their twenties, and I think Kim is a wonderful example of ageless beauty and sensuality). Also, I have to confess Mr. Big (Chris gorgeous Noth) would make a great hero in my latest novel, *Beach Dance*.



It was a bone-chilling January night in the deserted shoreline town of Brazenwood. Moonlight sliced in through the front windows of the cottage like sheets of silver ice, setting aglow the black and eggplant floor tiles. Grace Roberts had polished this floor on her hands and knees just this morning, with a tattered tee shirt and a canister of Johnson and Johnson wax. Now she grinned at the way it sparkled, as the night's light danced hypnotically across it. Buffing a dark floor to a mirror finish, like any laborious chore, could be oddly enough...soothing; an invitation to lose yourself in the mechanics of mindless repetition just long enough to notice that maybe not every moment of life has to be about heartache.

From *Beach Dance*, Raeleen's work-in-progress

If You Want to Stay Motivated, Set Achievable Goals

by Raeleen D'Agostino, Ph.D.

MOTIVATION IS ESSENTIAL for reaching any of the goals we set out to achieve in life. In fact, psychologists define the very term "goal" as "the target of motivated behavior." In plain English, a goal is something we feel stimulated enough to work towards achieving. When motivation wanes, goals are much harder to attain.

As romance novelists, we can all relate to those times when our impetus to actually sit down and write takes a back seat to tackling other tasks on our "to do" lists. But one simple way to keep writing motivation strong and thus increase the likelihood of getting our books completed is to increase what renowned cognitive behaviorist Albert Bandura referred to as *self-efficacy* -- the conviction that you have what it takes to be successful in performing the individual behaviors required to reach your overall goal.

Self-efficacy has a direct effect on goal achievement motivation. The more self-efficacy you have, the greater the possibility you will achieve your goal. There are several ways to acquire self-efficacy. One way is to accumulate personal performance accomplishments in the area you want to succeed in. In other words, success leads to more success.

So how do we get the cycle started? By setting small, achievable goals. The goal of finishing a book is as nebulous and distant a goal as is saying you want to lose fifty pounds. People fail all the time at weight loss, because they don't break their long term goal in to more achievable immediate behaviors. Would-be writers do the same thing. I can't count the number of times people tell me that one of their goals is to publish a book. Often, when I dig deeper, I find that setting a small daily writing goal is something they hadn't even considered a means to realizing their dream of being a published author. Even if the goal is to write only one paragraph a day—motivation feeds off

small consistent accomplishments and gradually becomes powerful enough to bring you to the finish line.

The trouble with goals like to writing a book or losing fifty pounds is that neither acknowledges the specific behaviors required to actually attain them. Cutting out dessert after supper each day is one of the small tangible behaviors one can do on a daily basis, and once that is successfully accomplished, the motivation to engage in other weight-loss behaviors begins to snowball. The same is true with writing. Always start by deconstructing the big overall goal—finishing your book — into the small individual behaviors that comprise it. Breaking your long term (distal) goal, into proximal, or mini subgoals (e.g., completing on paragraph, one page, one scene, etc.) will afford you the experience of tangible success, which in turn increases self-efficacy and also the motivation required to go the long haul to a completed manuscript.

*Dr. D'Agostino, adjunct psychology professor at Quinnipiac University, is a fulltime freelance writer, self-help expert/consultant, international speaker, and author of several non-fiction books, including **Living la Dolce Vita** (Sourcebooks), which has been published in several languages and chosen as a book club selection for OSIA (Order of the Sons and Daughters of Italy in America). She has been interviewed on many national radio and TV shows, including A&E's Breakfast with the Arts, and her articles have been published in Psychology Today and the Chicago Tribune, among others. Raeleen's work has been quoted in Family Circle, First for Women, Mind Body Spirit and other print media. She is currently writing romance fiction, and following her own goal-setting advice. You can visit her writing blog at www.raeleendagostino.com*

You Know You're a Writer When...

by Kate Bridges

HAVE YOU EVER tried to explain to your friends or significant other what it's like to be a writer? Can anyone else possibly understand the headache of yet another revision, or "I've got three main characters whose names all start with F," than a fellow scribbler? You know you're cursed—blessed—to be a lifelong writer if the following signs apply to you...

- 10) You're breathless at the sight of your thesaurus.
- 9) Even brochures in the doctor's office are interesting research to you now.
- 8) You love or hate movies on a whole new level.
- 7) Your partner wants to give you an extra special birthday present. You get the choice of a romantic dinner and night out on the town, or to upgrade the hard drive on your computer. You choose the hard drive and a sandwich.

- 6) Those painful childhood memories are suddenly very valuable. You wish you had *more* painful memories to draw upon.
- 5) You spend more time deciding on the names of your characters than you did on your own children.
- 4) You look forward to grocery shopping for the social interaction.
- 3) When you enter the home of a new acquaintance, you feel strangely suspicious if there are no books in sight.
- 2) You enjoy starting hypothetical arguments with your partner—the what if scenarios. "If I died tomorrow, how soon would you begin dating someone new?"
- 1) You're thrilled to discover the word 'infection' was in use in 1875!

*Kate Bridges loves the writing life. She drove her husband crazy with hypothetical questions while writing **KLONDIKE FEVER** (Apr 08-Harlequin Historicals). Visit her website at www.katebridges.com. This article first appeared in the August 2008 issue of romANTICS, newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers.*

Avoiding the Sagging Middle

By Vicki Hinze

Dear Vicki: My critique partners recently told me—very politely—that my book has a "sagging middle." What, exactly, is a sagging middle? I know it's not good, so how do I avoid having one?

When you start writing a story, you begin in this fireball burst of enthusiasm. You usually know the beginning and end. It's how to get from beginning to end that stumps you—what actually happens. That's the middle. And if you're not careful, it'll sag under the weight of the story.

Sag?

Along about the end of Chapter Three, that fireball fizzles to a flame, and it hits the writer that now comes the work. The initial enthusiasm dies out and, when it does, unless the writer gets fired up, s/he fails to sustain the conflicts or to move the story forward to its logical conclusion. Now, no writer wants that. It's hard to write an uninspired middle that lacks direction and purpose, and it's even harder to read one. So how do we writers avoid it?

It helps us to think of the book as a bridge. The on-ramp to it is the story's beginning. That's where the main characters, their goals, motivations, and conflicts are introduced. The middle of the story is the bridge itself. Your job as a writer is to get the people on the bridge and keep them there until the end of the story—the off-ramp.

Now, picture this bridge as one of those rope and slat jobs that crosses an expanse in the jungle. Below the bridge is a raging river.

In the middle of the book, if you fail to:

- Offer new insights to a character,
- Move the plot along,
- Logically lead the reader from one slat to another, you're

putting too much weight on each rope. What happens to over-stressed ropes?

Like over stressed people, the ropes start to snap and unravel.

You can't keep everyone on the bridge or get them successfully off the bridge with snapping, unraveling ropes. Your bridge's middle sags, and you dump everyone in the river.

Often the middle of a novel sags because the writer has not created sufficient conflict to sustain the story. Remember, conflict is the story's spine. It creates motivation in the characters not only to act, but to act now. Conflict creates immediacy, evokes strong emotions—and it often offers new perspectives that deepen the existing conflict or create a new conflict.

An example. In *True Lies*, a husband believes his wife is having an affair. She doesn't know he's a spy. So he's living a secret life. But that alone isn't enough to sustain a lengthy conflict. In a set-up to expose his wife's infidelity, the husband anonymously hears his legal-assistant wife say just once, she wants to take a risk, to accomplish something out of the ordinary. Something not boring.

Knowing his wife is less than satisfied with her life, the husband sets out to give her the thrill of an adventure. That deepens the conflict.

And when enemies of the spy attack the husband and wife, that

conflict twists and deepens further. The adventure turns real—and the costs of failure are higher.

The complications just keep on coming. They build logically and rationally one upon the other. In each step, we see character growth and change. We see less reluctance to act and more active engagement because the characters' motivations keep growing stronger. We see the plot driven by the choices the characters make.

By adding depth and dimension to these conflicts, we move the characters steadily across the bridge toward the off-ramp. The middle doesn't sag because its slats are constantly shored up by movement: plot twists, change in the characters, their motivations, and their growth.

Often when writers feel the middle fizzle, they'll delete conflicts. In short, don't do it. Instead, beef up the existing conflicts by inserting further complications, new bits of information that the characters learn, which alters their perspective and gives them a different view. Information that compels them to continue on in their journey across the bridge.

Make each obstacle the characters face more difficult—a greater challenge—than the last one encountered. Make the consequences of each obstacle more difficult for the characters to swallow than those in the last challenge. Otherwise, the smaller challenges seem inconsequential compared to what the characters have already encountered. That diffuses tension.

Tension should steadily increase from the beginning of the novel through to its end. So if you're dealing with a sagging middle, you need to get on the bridge with your characters and mix it up. Create some conflicts, some new and compelling information that changes the way the characters see their situations. Strengthen, not delete, the existing conflicts, and maybe even add a new one.

During an interview recently, a radio host told me that he was taught in creative writing to put his characters in a tree and throw rocks at them, and in my book, I'd thrown boulders. There's a reason for that. Boulders are a lot harder to dodge than rocks. You've got to deal with them.

Dealing with them is difficult. That difficulty produces challenges in both the external and the internal conflicts; and challenging internal and external conflicts, which should mirror or echo each other, assures writers that our middles will not sag. We will have sufficient conflict to sustain the spine of our novel and to get our characters safely across the bridge.

True Lies, a husband believes his wife is having an affair. She doesn't know he's a spy. So he's living a secret life. But that alone isn't enough to sustain a lengthy conflict. In a set-up to expose his wife's infidelity, the husband anonymously

Romance, Women's Fiction, or Both?

By Susan Law

FIRST, A DISCLAIMER: the following is the opinion of the author. She cautions you to remember that, while she has many, many opinions, she really knows nothing. I wrote twelve romances. I never had any doubts that that's exactly what they were: romances. And then I published two women's fiction titles. I know this because that's what my editor told me, and because it says FICTION, and nothing else, on the spine. Sometimes the difference between women's fiction and romance is simply that. . . what a publisher sticks on the spine, and how marketing thinks they can best sell a book.

To me a romance is, by definition, women's fiction: a book that's primarily about a woman's story, and the topics and themes that are of interest to women. But a romance is also first and foremost the story of a relationship, the growth and development of a love bond between (at least in mainstream romance) a man and a woman, with an ending that makes you feel that the relationship is good to go for a long time.

Women's fiction can be broader than that. Maybe the other relationships in the book (with a child, a friend, a mother, a man who's not necessarily the one the protagonist ends up with) carry as much weight as the love relationship. Or perhaps the book ends in a way in which, although it's satisfying, a commitment to a love relationship is absent or uncertain. The book is primarily her story, rather than their story. It might be a really romantic book, but it's still not a straight romance. Reader expectations matter. A lot. If a menu promises me chocolate, and I order chocolate, you better bring me chocolate. Doesn't matter how tasty what you serve me is; it's not what I'm expecting, and not what I'm in the mood for. So a book that's not really a romance but gets published like one just the same, that looks like one and is titled like one, is simply not going to meet a reader's expectations. The other way works better. (A straight

continued next page

Sagging Middle, continued from previous page

hears his legal-assistant wife say just once, she wants to take a risk, to accomplish something out of the ordinary. Something not boring.

Knowing his wife is less than satisfied with her life, the husband sets out to give her the thrill of an adventure. That deepens the conflict.

And when enemies of the spy attack the husband and wife, that conflict twists and deepens further. The adventure turns real—and the costs of failure are higher.

The complications just keep on coming. They build logically and rationally one upon the other. In each step, we see character growth and change. We see less reluctance to act and more active engagement because the characters motivations keep growing stronger. We see the plot driven by the choices the characters make.

By adding depth and dimension to these conflicts, we move the characters steadily across the bridge toward the off-ramp. The middle doesn't sag because its slats are constantly shored up by movement: plot twists, change in the characters, their motivations, and their growth.

Often when writers feel the middle fizzle, they'll delete conflicts. In short, don't do it. Instead, beef up the existing conflicts by inserting further complications, new bits of information that the characters learn, which alters their perspective and gives them a different view. Information that compels them to continue on in their journey across the bridge.

Make each obstacle the characters face more difficult—a greater challenge—than the last one encountered. Make the

consequences of each obstacle more difficult for the characters to swallow than those in the last challenge. Otherwise, the smaller challenges seem inconsequential compared to what the characters have already encountered. That diffuses tension.

Tension should steadily increase from the beginning of the novel through to its end. So if you're dealing with a sagging middle, you need to get on the bridge with your characters and mix it up. Create some conflicts, some new and compelling information that changes the way the characters see their situations. Strengthen, not delete, the existing conflicts, and maybe even add a new one.

During an interview recently, a radio host told me that he was taught in creative writing to put his characters in a tree and throw rocks at them, and in my book, I'd thrown boulders. There's a reason for that. Boulders are a lot harder to dodge than rocks. You've got to deal with them.

Dealing with them is difficult. That difficulty produces challenges in both the external and the internal conflicts; and challenging internal and external conflicts, which should mirror or echo each other, assures writers that our middles will not sag. We will have sufficient conflict to sustain the spine of our novel and to get our characters safely across the bridge.

Vicki Hinze is an award-winning author of 22 romantic suspense and military romantic suspense novels. Her latest release is Her Perfect Life, from Silhouette Signature. Visit her website at www.vickihinze.com.

This article first appeared in the Summer 2008 issue of The Galleon, the newsletter of the Ancient City Romance Authors, St. Augustine, FL.

Is Your Internal Conflict Strong Enough?

By Carrie Lewis

WHAT IS INTERNAL conflict? How does a writer know she has real internal conflict and not just external conflict? On the surface the difference seems easy to spot. External conflict is what happens to the character. Internal conflict is all about the character's emotional and psychological tension, her insecurities, vulnerabilities and fears. Internal conflict is the driving force behind the character arc.

How do you know if you have genuine internal conflict? And if you do, how do you know if it is strong enough to keep an editor—and a reader—engrossed? Here are three quick tests to evaluate the internal conflict and ensure it has a strong enough foundation to span the length of a book:

1. The Magnet Test

The hero and heroine can't want to be together—not at the beginning of the book. In fact, they should desperately want to avoid one another. That other person, though likely attractive, has to be emotionally risky for them. This is because the other person challenges some weakness or vulnerability in them. To protect this weakness, each character should want to avoid the other person. Having said that, the writer usually then thrusts an external conflict upon them that forces them together. Think *Dirty Dancing*. Did Baby and Johnny want to be thrust together? No. He is the opposite of what she thought she wanted (a man like her father). And she is the opposite of what he values in a woman (she is a sheltered rich kid.) But they are thrust together because of their values (both wanting to help out Penny). Push them physically together, and each tries to repel the other. Push, repel. Until eventually, the magnets flip and they are able to see that their differences are not as vast as they had assumed. From this new standpoint they are able to build a relationship based on mutual respect and acceptance. This works in other genres too. Think *Tango and Cash*. Same idea without the romantic feelings—uh, I think.

1. Deserted Island Test

You have plotted out the internal and external conflicts. Now take your main characters and strand them on a desert island. Is the conflict between them still there? Is it just as strong, if not stronger because they are now external-distraction free? Or did all their problems vanish without the pressure of the villain, interfering families, job pressures, etc? For true inner conflict, the character's inner demons, fears and insecurities should not be changed by this isolation. For a pair of people (whether a romantic pair or a platonic buddy pair) their issues with themselves and with each other should not be lessened at all by this isolation on an island away from society at large. Think *Six Days, Seven Nights*. Did isolation help Harrison Ford and Anne Heche's characters instantly get along? Not a chance.

1. The Grown-Up Conversation Test

If your main characters just sat down and talked through the issues between them, could they resolve the problems and live happily ever after? If so, then you do not have actual conflict between them. Two genuinely conflicted characters who sit down to discuss their issues at the beginning of the story should end in a stalemate, and at an increased level of tension and frustration. Pick any hot topic where people's beliefs and values are involved (such as religion, politics or any other taboo topic) and think about two people on opposite ends of the debate spectrum. Is someone who is a devout Catholic likely to suddenly convert to Islam or become a Buddhist just because of a few hours chatting over tea? This is what true conflict should look like. Fears and insecurities are based in emotion and thus often not factually-based. In fiction, it takes facing them to make them go away, not talking about them. Think *The Ref* with Dennis Leary and Kevin Spacey. Did the talking out the issues help Spacey's character and his wife? No, it only made it worse. Action forced them to grow as individuals and then be able to come to an understanding with one another.

In a nutshell: if the hero and/or heroine want to be around the other person, you have a problem. If you take out all the plot action and there is nothing keeping them apart, you have a problem. If you force them to sit and talk honestly and there is nothing standing in their way at this point, you have a problem.

Internal conflict is what drives character growth. Start with a weakness, find the one potential mate who will irritate that weakness (in a positive, growth-inspiring way) and force them together. If you do this, it won't matter if tie them up and point a gun at their heads (seriously, watch *The Ref* because the writer tried it), they won't resolve their issues without some serious soul-searching and character growth.

Romance or Women's Fiction? *continued from page 6*

romance that's published as women's fiction.) Because a romance does meet the expectations of a reader of women's fiction. There are many reasons a publisher might do this. The book might be a little long, and this is a publisher that's pretty strict about length in their romance program. It might be there's something about the writer – her background, her topic and themes, her writing style – that the publisher feels might also appeal to non-romance readers, readers who wouldn't routinely browse the romance section. It might be that the author's already selling a lot of books in romance and they feel that, in order to grow, she has to reach out to those non-romance readers.

It's helpful to keep reader expectations in mind when you're writing. But it's more of a continuum than a strict line between romance and women's fiction, and which side you fall on probably is as much your publisher's decision as yours, because it's as much about selling a book as writing it. And it has nothing at all to do with my opinion. Even though everything should have to do with my opinion.

This article appeared in the July 2008 issue of Midwest Muse, newsletter for Midwest Fiction Writers.

Carrie Lewis, writing as Carrie Lowen (www.carrielowen.com) is the PRO Chair of the TRW and the PRO Co-Chair of FTHR.W.

This article first appeared in the September 2008 issue of romANTICS, newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers.

Pointless But Fun

What are your goals for the month?

1- Finish the edit on 'Somewhere in North Africa' for my editor at The Wild Rose Press'. 2- Get 10,000 word written on a new full that I pitched and the agents wants the first 3 chapters and proposal. Better to write more then less. 3- Finish the medical short story. 4- Send the Western short to Highland Press. If I get it back from my critique partner in time. — Lindsay Downs

My goal for September is to finish the first half of "Desiring The Highlander", especially since the whole book is due in November. — Pat Grasso

Rewrite some chapters of my latest suspense novel. — Sandra Karakoosh

1) Finish the current set of revisions on my wip. 2) Attend Roberta Isleib's, Hallie Ephron's, and Susan Hubbard's writing workshop, Seascape, to learn as much as possible. 3) Attend the Women's Fiction Festival in Matera, Italy, to meet, learn, and get my ongoing Italian fix. — Cassy Pickard

My September goal is to finish overhauling Burden or Promise (now called Pledge of the Eagle). — Joy Smith

Once the children are at school, it's time to take all my summer research and rough plot outlines and start novel number two. — Karen Pinco

My September goal is to complete the romantic suspense novel I started in May. Almost there and having fun with it. — Bob Bonitz

I actually completed three manuscripts over the summer--2 romance and 1 women's fiction-- and I'm in the process of looking for a new agent. My writing goal for Sept is to revise and polish what I have and try to get published. — Raeleen D'Agostino



"You just remember who you are. You're the Bulldog of Bergen, and the Pride of New Jersey, you're everybody's hope, and the kids' hero, and you are the champion of my heart, James J. Braddock."

Mae Braddock to her husband, moments before the title fight, in *Cinderella Man*.
Sigh.

CTRWA 2008 Board Members

Lori Avocato, President
Lavocato@cox.net

Marie Roy, VP/Programming Director
marie-roy@sbcglobal.net

Susan Rowley, Secretary/
Membership Director
suzie7rowley@yahoo.com

Theresa Diaz, Publicity Director
TBDiaz36FD@sbcglobal.net

Janet Messina, Treasurer
janmessina@comcast.net

Kristan Higgins, Newsletter Editor
k.higgins@snet.net

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

Common Synopsis Mistakes

We all dread writing them, but they're a necessary evil in fiction writing. A few common mistakes...

Too much emphasis on the beginning of the story. Don't kill an editor with the set-up. It's important, but so's the rest of the book.

Inconsistent tone. Writing a romantic comedy? The synopsis should sound, er...funny. Like the book. Voice matters, even in a synopsis.

Announcements. "The conflict is..." or "which makes her feel really bad."

No emotion. In summarizing, we often take a "just the facts" tone. A certain action happens. Then another. Then something else. Leading to the end. The synopsis, like everything you write, shows your skill as a writer. Don't make it dull!

Too much detail. Stick with the main flaw and strength of your main characters. Focus on the five or so major turning points and how this plays into those flaws.

Not enough answers. The synopsis, unlike a pitch or query letter, has to tell the whole story, right up to the resolution.

Characters are dull. Maybe not in your book, but in the synopsis, they feel flat. Make sure you show what they want, why, and how that's going to be hard to get.