



Connections

the official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

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

President's Letter

Well our new location at The Four Points Sheraton in Meriden seemed to be a success for the September meeting. The room was lovely and bright, the food in the restaurant delicious and the turnout fabulous! Thanks to everyone for coming.

Hopefully a lot of you will submit and *sell* to The Wild Rose Publishing House. The speaker in Sept, Trish Owens, was very helpful. Good luck to anyone who ventures out into submissiondom!

It's that time of the year for elections. No, I'm not going to get into the McCain/Obama choices, although I met Governor Palin when I was in Alaska last fall—and she really impressed me. Plus, she looks like Tina Fey from Saturday Night Live. How can we go wrong with Tina as VP?

The elections that I'm talking about are for CTRWA. The Nominating Committee has sent out the ballot and you all will get to vote in the month of November and online. Please do vote even if there is only one candidate/office.

Hopefully a lot of you are taking advantage of our proximity to NJ and attending their RWA conference. I'll be speaking at it so stop by and say "hi!" If you have an editor/agent appointment, best of luck!

With the advent of fall, I hope it brings a renewal of your writing juices and you type up bestsellers one and all!

Lori Avocato

NEXT MEETING

Four Points Sheraton, Meriden, CT

October 11, 11:00

Thea Divine Speaks!

(see page 2 for more information)

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.

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"The golden opportunity you are seeking is in yourself. It is not in your environment, it is not in luck or chance, or the help of others; it is in yourself alone."

– Orison Swett Marden

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

OCTOBER 11...The Divine Miss Thea

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

December 12...Holiday Party/New Officers Sworn In



How could I forget about you?
You're the only person I know.

— Jason Bourne, suffering from amnesia, to Marie in *The Bourne Identity* by Robert Ludlum

CHAPTER NEWS

The nominating committee has put forth the following names for the CTRWA Board for 2009. There will be a call for votes by the end of the month via e-mail; please make sure you respond promptly! The candidates are...

Kristan Higgins, President
Toni Andrews, Vice President/Programming
Karen Pinco, Newsletter Editor/Media
Lindsay Downs, Membership Secretary
Janet Messina, Treasurer
Lois Pegg, Publicity

Other nominations can be made from the floor at the October meeting. All votes are to be made to the membership secretary. Look for an announcement on the CTRWA Admin board before the end of October. Votes must be sent in BEFORE THE NOVEMBER MEETING. Thanks, guys!

MEMBER NEWS

Every writer's dream came true for **Shirley Webb** with the news that *Little Rain Cloud* will be made into a MOVIE! Red Rock Productions will be flying Shirley in to watch filming, and PBS has already picked it up. Shirley, we are so proud of you!...**Kristan Higgins** just got back from her first ever book tour, sponsored by Levy Books. This major distributor supplies books to Target, K-Mart, Walmart, Meijer, Stop & Shop, etc. Your intrepid newsletter editor was in great company, including NYT bestselling authors such as Allison Brennan, Gena Showalter, Susan Mallery and Brenda Novak. The four-day tour allowed the authors to press the flesh with hundreds of readers, and a great time was had by all...**Pat Grasso** is proud to announce that *Pleasuring the Prince* sold to Argentina; *No Decent Gentleman* sold to Spain. Her new book *Enticing the Prince* will be available November 1st. You go, Pat!...Congratulations to **Bob Bonitz**, who took ten years to finish his first manuscript and four months to finish his latest. Some learning curve, Bob!...**Terry Diaz** has received PRO status from RWA, indicating that she's completed and submitted a manuscript. Well done, Terry! ...**Lori Avocato** spoke at the Women's Fiction Festival in Matera, Italy, where **Cassy Pickard** was also in attendance, putting to good use Cassy's fluency in the native language...A million thanks to **Marie Roy** for agreeing to once again head our contest for 2009, having done such a capable job this past year. **Joy Smith** just mailed in her PRO application and is doing a final polish on *The Pledge* with plans to query agents, and also pitch at the NJ conference in Oct. A new series set in the Caribbean is being planned, and Joy is also waiting for revisions from Leslie Wainger. Makes you tired just hearing about it, doesn't it? Great work ethic, Joy!

Hello and Welcome Back!

It was great to see some new faces in with all the old friends... **Laurie and Marge Reynolds** and **Beata**, a YA aspiring author. Hello again, **Ellie Sullo and Wendy Albrecht**. We were also treated to a rare and most welcome appearance from **Kim Peterson** as she celebrated her first sale after ten years of writing, proving that persistence definitely pays off. Congratulations, Kim! Couldn't happen to a nicer person.

Member Profile...Lauri Brett

Mother of twins, previously a fine artist from New York City and now hailing from Fairfield, Lauri is notable for her funky jewelry, big heart and desire to constantly learn more about the art of writing.

Tell us about your day job.

My twin boys, now 8, were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at the age of 2 ½. I've been a soldier in that war ever since. Yet, I would still describe myself as a full time writer living in the body of a full time mom. Now there's a paranormal plot for you!

What are you working on right now?

I'm writing a contemporary women's mystery set in the 'New Vegas' (where shopping and spectacle have overwritten gambling as the main vacation occupations). *A.K.A: Dead* opens with the discovery of young woman dead in a gondola on the Venetian's Grand Canal. B-list celebrity Vanity Cream arrives to claim she's her publicity-double. My sleuth, P.T. Mackley, is a media relations 'fixer' for the LVMPD. She whisks the celebrity away from the crime scene, thus enacting a major public relations coup for the image-battered department. Soon, she's the diva of damage control as she tries to uncover the murderer on the 'QT' (finger to lips). It's a Carl Hiassen-meets-Kate White type of mystery.

Why and when did you start writing?

I was a fine artist in New York, working as a designer for my day job. Drawn to multi-media art that incorporated text, I enrolled in a short story class. I fell in love with fiction, enrolled in City College's Master's in Creative Writing program, and a year later, began my first novel and acquired an agent for a non-fiction book. By that time I was a temp - a job that supported my 'writing habit.' My book was *Take this Job and Temp It!* It's one of those stories where you pinch your fingers together and say "I was *this* close to a sale!" I literally had the agent say on the phone: "We expect to see a check for the book in a couple of weeks." Alas, the marketing department for the interested publisher decided to pass. I'm sure many good writers have drawers full of those stories. When my first novel was read by agents, same thing. Again on the phone, one said: "I loved it! I could see it as a movie!" In retrospect, I realize how thin-skinned I was. Alas, in the drawer it went, and life moved on.

Why did you join CTRWA?

Which fairy tale warns "be careful what you wish for?" I googled *CT Women Writers*, emailed Lori, and by Saturday that week had my butt in the chair at the meeting. Instead of a little critique group, I'd joined company with heavy-hitters: discussing royalty checks, choosing the cover of your book(s) and its title(s).

What are you looking for from the chapter?

The group truly helps me "keep the dream alive ... and eyes on the prize." Everyone is generous and enthusiastic in their advice and support. I hope to have my first draft completed for the New England Crimebake in November. Unlikely, though, since I've only just hit the halfway point and I live in schedule hell most days.

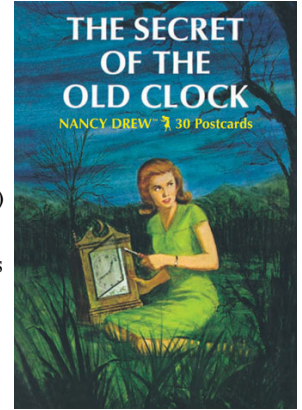
Who are your favorite authors and why?

Here's my deep CTRWA secret:

I'm more Nancy Drew in great shoes than Scarlett O'Hara with flounced skirt and heaving (exposed) bosom. My tastes in fiction are so wide ranging: I love the soap operas of Dickens and the excessive, eloquent angst of Faulkner.

My favorite book of the nineties

was Jonathan Frantzen's *The Corrections* (who?). Yet, I adore Evanovich, Kate White and Sue Grafton: chic lit! (slippery category). How's that for schizophrenic?



Favorite CT restaurant, food, drink?

Autism etiquette rule #1: Never ask parents of autistic children questions about leisure indulgences. Even if you could get out to a restaurant without your behaviorally-challenged youngsters, you'll be too broke from paying for their private services to spend, and too tired to think about food.

Any actor you'd cast as your hero or heroine?

There was a young actress who's name I didn't catch, who played an attorney under Glen Close in a misguided TV mystery mini-series: *Damage*. She would be great. Actress, activist, and mom Jenny McCarthy would be great as the B-celebrity Vanity Cream (she has a son with autism, too).

What can you say about a place that tries more than anything, to look like everything but itself? Thinking back, I might never have run away from New York to join the Circus known as Vegas, if I hadn't let myself be seduced by that snake charming married guy.

— from *A.K.A: Dead* by Lauri Brett

Agents and Editors Speak Up: Voice, Websites, and Marketing Plans...Oh My!

By Nikki Duncan

LUCIENNE DIVER, HOLLY Root, Nathan Bransford, Caren Johnson, Kim Whalen, Jim McCarthy, Heather Osborn, Chris Keeslar, and Deb Werksman were some of the industry professionals on hand at RWA Nationals in San Francisco.

RWA Nationals is always a prime opportunity to learn more about the business of publishing, including things you didn't know you didn't know. In pursuit of knowledge and understanding, I scheduled a round of interviews with agents and editors. During out appointments, we discussed a range of topics from publicity, how many books an author should expect to write a year, the definition of voice, and what authors should do for themselves prior to publication. I'll tackle a few of the answers in this article. More will come in articles over the coming months.

When asked what defines "fresh new voice", how authors can know they have it, and if it's taken into consideration before an offer for representation or a sale is made, there were answers like "it's something you know when you see it." Some didn't stop there.

Deb Werksman with Sourcebooks says that for her it isn't so much a matter of voice as it is having a story with a relatable heroine, a hero she can fall in love with, a completely and well built world (even if it isn't paranormal), and a great hook (those 2-3 sentences that sell your story).

Holly Root says voice is the number one attraction. It gives the reader an instant sense of knowing the people in the story and their world. Holly's caution to writers is to be careful not to lose that something special in the fine-tuning and polishing of the story.

Nathan Bransford, Heather Osborn, and Caren Johnson had similar viewpoints on voice. For them, voice is the telling of a story in a way that it hasn't been told before, or in a way that no one else can tell it. Caren said voice is "something that makes you sit up and say 'that's how it should have been done, they finally got it right'".

Chris Keeslar followed it up with the advice that authors play to their strengths, doing what no one else is and that you do well.

Another current 'hot topic' on chat loops seems to revolve around websites. Should a pre-published author have one? Do agents and editors use them? What should go on one? Most everyone I spoke with was of the same mind. Websites are not necessary. However, if there is a website, and an industry professional goes to check it out, they want to see contest finals or wins and small excerpts from your story, and by small they seemed to think in lines of less than a chapter. Websites are also a good place to chronicle your journey to publication, track your work, and list contests you're entering. If you're going to do one, keep it professional.

Kim Whalen says that prior to publication, in regards to her decision making process, websites make no difference. They can be built after a book is sold.

So, unless you have a remarkable platform that pertains to what you're writing, or maintaining a website is easy for you, feel free to focus your pre-publication efforts on your writing, which leads me to the question that had my interviewees really thinking.

What is one question you don't get asked that you wish you did?

First up to swing at this question was Nathan Bransford, and he hardly hesitated before answering. "What can people do to learn more about the business?" Now, I couldn't let him hand me that question without asking him to answer it. His answer was to hit the internet, check out blogging agents and editors, Publishers Marketplace, the Association of Author's Representatives, AgentQuery.com, Absolute Write, Writers Beware, and utilize RWA tools.

Nathan's answer is simple in concept, though time consuming if not managed carefully. He suggests using Google Reader to make managing the blogs easier, but his advice was given with a caveat: Don't lose sight of why you're writing and don't lose the focus on telling a great story.

Chris Keeslar gave similar advice in regards to staying focused on the writing. He says too many writers don't consider what they should focus on as an author. In expansion, he suggests that authors spend more time working out who they are and what they're writing for.

One potential way of defining what you're writing toward is to face the debate of whether or not you should have a marketing plan, or a career plan, before selling. This was another question that everyone seemed to agree on.

Marketing plans are generally worked out with an editor once a book is sold, as editors and agents are truly the people who know the shifting market, but don't discount the importance of considering a plan. Career plans are a little different as they focus on your career rather than a specific book, so they are definitely worth considering.

~ "An early [marketing] plan shows that an author has put thought into their audience and their hook." Lucienne Diver

~ "A career plan is better as it can show goals, ideas, and possible strategies on how and where you want to go." Holly Root

~ "Marketing plans can be overwhelming when authors should be thinking about their book and writing a great story." Jim McCarthy

~ "A career plan. Things to consider in a career plan are how many books a year you can write without suffering quality, what genre/sub-genre, how fast you can work, and what lifestyle do you want to have from your writing." Deb Werksman

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Stupid Comments by Contest Judges — And What I Learned From Them

By Tami Cowden

OVER THE YEARS, I entered a few contests. And I've gotten back some great feedback. I've also gotten back some feedback that made me cringe, gnash my teeth, and want to slap the judge. But I know from my own experience that judging is a time consuming business, and however silly or cruel those comments may seem to me, they represent someone's honest opinion. So I learned to look past the literal meaning of the comment, to find the heart of the judge's concern.

The silly thing the judge said... In the very first contest I entered, I received the comment back that I had wasted the judge's time. Hey, I paid my fee, so I deserved a respectful critique, however bad the entry was. And oh, it was bad – trust me! My very first effort, thrown together in a matter of days, without a clue even as to what a synopsis was, let alone things like POV, or continuity (the butler's name kept changing!). As for proofreading....

But what I learned... My innate writing talent – and yes, I do

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~ "For fiction, it can reveal an author's excitement and willingness to promote themselves and their books." Nathan Bransford

Talking with these industry professionals gave me an insight into the publishing business, but more importantly it gave me an insight into agents and editors as people. They are in this business with the goal of finding fantastic stories that demand they sit up and notice. Do yourself the favor of holding out for an agent or editor who is passionate about your story. They will be your first, and most important, fans.

Chris Keeslar is executive editor with Dorchester. www.dorchesterpub.com. Deb Werksman is an editor with Sourcebooks. www.sourcebooks.com. Heather Osborn is an editor with TOR. www.tor-forge.com. Caren Johnson is an agent with the Caren Johnson Literary Agency. www.carenjohnson.com. Holly Root is an agent with The Waxman Agency. www.waxmanagency.com. Jim McCarthy is an agent with Dystel and Goderich Literary Management. www.dystel.com. Kim Whalen is an agent with Trident Media Group. www.tridentmediagroup.com

Lucienne Diver is an agent with The Knight Agency. www.knightagency.net. Nathan Bransford is an agent with Curtis Brown Ltd. www.nathanbransford.blogspot.com.

Nikki's a member of RWA, North Texas RWA, Dallas Area Romance Authors, and is a RWA PRO. She is currently working on her fifth manuscript.

This article first appeared in the Sept 08 issue of Heart to Heart, the newsletter for North Texas RWA.

have that – was not enough to make me a successful fiction writer. Just as I had had to learn the craft of legal writing, I needed to learn the craft of fiction writing. So I embarked on a journey to learn about those mysterious items listed on the scoresheet: POV, pacing, synopsis, dialogue, setting, and so on. I don't expect that journey to ever end, but no judge since has told me I wasted her time. In revised form, that book later finalized in that same contest and others, and took first place in another.

The silly thing the judge said... A judge once spent several paragraphs telling me that I should make sure that the space following a period was consistent. She went on to assure me that a failure to do so would likely irritate an editor so much the editor would refuse to continue reading. Since I was using a proportional font (in which letters do NOT take up the same amount of space) this advice was absurd.

But what I learned... No matter how much the "rules" say proportional font is allowed, some judges will object to anything other than courier. Now, I may still use TNR in a contest when I have a reason (usually wanting to finish the entry at a specific spot), but I do so accepting the risk that a judge may score me down for it, regardless of the rules, in one fashion or another. And just on the chance that the judge may be right about editor's attitudes about spacing, I only submit in courier....

The silly thing the judge said... Indicating a sentence along the lines of "She was walking down the street," the judge admonished me for using passive voice. Uh, no, sorry Judge, that is not passive voice. "Passive voice" makes the subject of the sentence, which/who should be a doer, into someone or something to whom things are done: "The entrant was given ignorant comments by a silly judge"; "The entry was scored down by a poor grammarian."

But what I learned... While "she was walking down the street" is not an example of "passive voice," it is an example of "inactive writing." Maybe even dull, lifeless writing. I needed to get that "ing" word out of there! How much better to write "she strode down the street" or "she strolled down the avenue" or "she meandered," or "she crept" or whatever - anything other than "she was walking."

The silly thing the judge said... My very favorite comment ever received from a contest judge – the one I tell with relish whenever the subject of "lousy" judges comes up -- was the remark that I didn't seem to know very much about legal matters and should consider consulting a paralegal to bone up. Since at the time the remark was made, I had been a practicing lawyer for thirteen years, and moreover, since all of the outrageous events to which the contest judge took exception actually happened in one form or another in my own practice,

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Make Your Writing Introvert Self Into A Promotional Extrovert and Back And Forth Again

By Peggy Fielding

When I tell fellow writers who know me well, that being a silent hermit is my normal self, they practically fall over laughing shouting protests. Nevertheless, I know the inner Peggy to be a true, silent introvert.

Becoming a writer the year I returned from teaching overseas, was the decision that turned me into a grinning, joking, loudmouth. (I've even taught myself to speak in a voice that can be heard in the far reaches of a large room or auditorium, no microphone required.) Why the personality change?

I Became A Writer

Writing books requires the silent hermit in a box, sitting at another box. Selling those published books to readers requires a public persona who can promote and sell her book in an easily heard, perhaps amusing style of conversation.

So... for my career's sake, I became a laughing, sometimes shouting smart-aleck, as required. "Anything to make those sales," I admonished my timid normal self.

After years of practice, nowadays, the switch is easy and the talkative Peggy jumps out with ease whenever books or booklovers appear on the scene.

Promotion By The Author

Yep. I've learned that my collaborators and I are the only ones who really care enough about our own books to go to the trouble of arranging and executing a marketing plan for each new darling.

Promotion By The Publisher

Usually, there isn't much happening with these folks so far as promotion is concerned. Therefore, the writer must turn into the introvert and quietly lay out her marketing plan. Putting your title and your name on his list will probably be your publisher's only effort on your book's behalf. Sorry to say, unless you are already a bestselling author, it's all up to you!

Your Plan Requires Your Extrovert In Action For Much Of The Promotional Period

Your voice, your laughter, your charm, help get those on-air interviews and those signing dates, as well as other speaking engagements in front of groups who might be interested in your novel's great plot.

As the Extrovert, you must be ready to talk about your book and give out your promotional items anywhere, even at the post office, the supermarket, the library or wherever you might be tending to your daily household or family chores. Try to entertain the whole line if you're in a long queue at any of these places while handing out bookmarks or other gewgaws to your stunned audience. This works even better if you have a few prepared clever remarks memorized. Of course you will answer any of the questions that your captive audience lineup might have. Be low key but clever...no hard selling, just cheerful and fun chitchat. If they ASK where to buy the book, and they will ask, you will, of course, answer in detail.

Back And Forth, Back And Forth

Out in the parking lot you can sigh with relief and feel free to return to your normal silent introverted self. We all need some downtime and we certainly need time to mull over what we're writing at the moment.

How I Learned About My Own Ability To Mutate

At thirteen I realized my daily walk to the post office was always made head down, gaze lowered, lips silent. I knew everyone in the tiny town by sight but spoke aloud to close friends only, in school or on the street. That day I made a resolution. "I'm going to smile and speak to every single person I pass, whether I know them or not." So, I smiled and spoke, even to the old man selling shoestrings on the corner. Everyone, I mean EVERYONE, smiled at me and said something back to me...all pleasant remarks. Revelation! I was a changed girl by the time I reached the post office. I've been speaking and smiling to everyone, friend or stranger, man, woman or child, cat or dog, ever since. Promoting as a writer is just a step up from that childhood lesson.

I knew at that moment, that I could be whatever was needed - extrovert or introvert (even though I didn't know those terms then). I've been speaking and smiling to everyone, friend or stranger, man, woman or child, ever since. I've even spoken to a possum that uses the pathway in my yard. That knowledge has stood me in good stead as an introverted writer and as an extroverted promoter of my work. Back and forth, back and forth. The changeover gets easier every year.

All Writers Can Switch At Will, If We Will

I've seen my red-headed friend, Jackie King go from a quiet, hardworking writer to a lean, mean promotional machine. At the beginning of her writing career I asked her to talk about her writing. She said, "Don't ask me to do that, Peggy. I'd rather die than make a speech."

Now, she simply answers, "Okay, when and where?" Or she goes ahead and makes her own speaking engagements.

Talking about one's own book is a real incentive toward turning introverted writers into extroverted promoters I've found. All of us, as romance writers, need to realize that we must go back and forth, back and forth, for the sake of all those lovely people whom we've brought to life between the covers of our novels. Introvert writes their lives, extrovert gives those lives to our hungry public.

Peggy Fielding is author of CONFESSING FOR MONEY. She has sold a number of confessions stories as well as romance.

The following article first appeared in the June 2008 issue of Inklings, the newsletter of Romance Writers Ink (Tulsa, OK).

Avoiding the Booksigning Blues

By Lois Greiman

Once upon a time I was a young, hopeful author who dreamed of selling my first novel. I could imagine it all. I'd be a superstar and host signings with something of a circus atmosphere. Readers would line up around the block tittering with excitement as they waited to buy my latest sparkling prose. But, when I finally sold my first book back in '92 things were a little different. Book signings, it seemed, were a bit more like funerals than circuses. Sometimes there were actual tears. (But I was generally able to console the bookseller by assuring her she'd never have to have me back again.)

I'd like to say that things are different now. That after selling nearly 30 titles, my book events are joyous occasions where it's the readers who are in tears, weeping with eagerness and anticipation for just a smattering of my literary pearls. But well--not so much. However, after more than 15 years as a published author I've learned a few things. Below, please find my ten most important tidbits of hard-won knowledge. They may help you avoid what I refer to as the Booksigning Blues.

10: Bring food to share at your event--something chocolatey is always nice--or a full buffet is good too, if cash and room allow.

9: Look happy. Granted, this is not always a simple task. Hallucinogenic drugs may be helpful.

8: When you learn that (A) There's not a single copy of your book in a 90 mile radius, (B) The retailer has never heard of you, or (C) The store has gone out of business, remain upbeat. In fact, try to cash in on the seller's mistake. Guilt is our friend. i.e. "Okay, you forgot I exist. Perhaps you could order in a couple thousand copies of my next book."

7: Display a sign that declares you to be a local author. (Local is anywhere in your native country, right?) This helps

prevent customers from asking for directions to the nearest bathroom. (No guarantees on this one. People always ask where the bathroom is.)

6: Keep a store of book plates (I buy address labels by the gross) so the bookseller can paste autographed stickers into the books they neglected to order in.

5: Bring handouts. Bring lots of handouts. Distribute to anyone who seems to be breathing.

4: Bribe your friends into coming. Crowds attract crowds. I admit that I no longer have friends willing to be bribed so I have to hire shills to stand around and make me look important but c'est la vie.

3: Be accessible--talk to the people who are (A) Writing a book, (B) Want to write a book, (C) Are considering maybe someday possibly writing a book, or (D) (my personal favorite) Believe wholeheartedly that you should write their book.

2: Get off your butt. There are few things that make an author look more pathetic than sitting behind a table like a lump of lard-- believe me. So, stand up, walk around, engage people, hand out your fabulous bookmarks, and smile.

1: If you can possibly get someone to sit in on your signings and forge your signature for you, by all means, do so. I mean really, there's no reason to be more masochistic than necessary.

So--go forth my brave authors. Sell books, live long and well, prosper if you can.

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

Don't Sell Yourself Short

by Lindsay Downs

IN MAY 2008 at the CTRWA annual conference, I pitched my full story to an editor from The Wild Rose Press (TWRP). Then she asked if I had anything else. I knew she meant another full. I told her all I had was a World War II short at over 15,000 word. To my shock she asked to hear about the story. So I did a one minute, totally off the cuff pitch.

She liked it and told me to send it to the Vintage editor, Nancy Swanson. When I got home the next day, I sent it along.

A month later I got it back from her. When I saw the return e-mail, I could see in my mind, in big letters, REJECTED. Not having anything to lose, I opened the email. It was a good thing I was sitting down when I read it. She'd edited the first chapter and wanted me to use it as a template. Then the shock. After I reedited it she wanted to see it again.

After I did my re-edit, I sent it to my critique partner. While I was at the National Conference, I got it back. The story needed a little tweaking here and there. After the tweak was done I sent it, to the editor.

Monday, August 11, 2008: I got a reply. The editor wanted to send me a contract to sign on September 1 and start the final edit and necessary revisions a month later. It goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway), I agreed to the time frame she suggested. Now I counted the days until September 1st.

Except it wasn't September 1st when I got the contract. It was August 14, 2008. Along with the contract were several forms I needed, in no rush, to address. The contract was signed and in the mail the next day.

So now I'm waiting to start the revisions on the story. Once that's all done then I'll have an idea for a release date. Keep checking my website, www.lindsaydowns.com, for the story to be available. It will be in eBook format.

Pointless But Fun

What was your best Halloween costume?

My best or most memorable Halloween costume was when I dressed all in black and made a huge pumpkin mask out of orange painted cardboard. Don't ask why I remember this. It's a mystery to me! — Theresa Diaz

My favorite costume was always hobo. We would heat corks over the stove and, once cooled, smudge our faces to look dirty. We had a blast. My favorite holiday of the year is Halloween, so magical. — Pat Grasso

Halloween-yuk it's my least favorite holiday. But as to costumes, I think the best ones are the ones we used to concoct out of our parent's closets. One year, I went as my mother, wearing hair rollers and her bathrobe and slippers. — Joy Smith

My mom wasn't the type to make costumes...we were more the plastic mask types. My best costumes have been recently, when I dress up to host a Halloween party. The angel of death outfit really scared the kiddies, and what could be more fun than that? — Kristan Higgins

Stupid Comments, *continued from page 5*

I feel a certain justification in my gleeful retelling.

But what I learned... My "war stories," however true, didn't fit the popular perception of law and lawyers. My audience is not just other lawyers; I want as many people as possible to enjoy my work. I toned down some of that reality, and made it more like the popular view. (But on the other hand, the original version of that book fared in the Golden Heart. So who knows – maybe that comment was just plain silly – except it took that judge out of the story – never a good thing.)

The silly thing the judge said... My contest entry involved a heroine who pretends to be married to her veterinarian. Much of the action takes place on a cruise. The comment I received from a judge? – "My vet is a dear, dear man, but I wouldn't take a cruise with him." Well, shucks, I doubt if I would take one with my vet either. But what the judge and I would do with our real life veterinarians has nothing to do with what the heroine would do with the fictional hero vet. But what I learned... Or does it? The subtext of the comment was that this judge didn't buy the motivation I gave the heroine to go off on a cruise with a near stranger. I beefed it up; that motivation— and that revised book won the Golden Heart ultimately was published by Avalon.

The silly thing that same judge said... "Alaska would be funnier." Same judge who mad the vet comment, about the same book. That short comment appeared on the margin of the synopsis, wherein I noted the intent of the hero and heroine to head to a tropical paradise. Now, in the pages at the beginning of the story, the hero had indulged in some fantasies of the heroine clad in a bikini, with him smoothing sun block over the her body. So, right, I thought, Alaska would soooo

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fit into my book. This judge hadn't been paying attention at all. And just why does this idiot think Alaska funnier than the tropics, anyway?

But what I learned... But, hey, ha, ha, wouldn't it be funny if they really were going to Alaska, and the hero - chuckle - had just assumed they were going to the tropics? Imagine my straitlaced hero, trying so hard to be a bad boy, imagining all sorts of hi-jinks in the sand with little or no clothing, and then, snort, getting snow covered peaks and parkas. That would be pretty funny. And you know what? Not only did that seemingly off the wall comment make my book funnier, it also led seat-of-the-pants writer me to come up with several crucial plot twists I had not previously imagined. Like I said, that revised book won the Golden Heart.

The moral of my stories? Taken literally, a judge's comments may seem just too stupid to take even remotely seriously. But once the sting wears off, take another look. SOMETHING didn't work for that judge, and she has tried to explain to you. Maybe she didn't do a terrific (or tactful) job articulating the problem, but with some effort – and honesty – on your part, you probably will learn something useful even the "silliest" comment. I know have.

Award-winning author Tami Cowden teaches online writing workshops from www.tamicowden.com.

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