



# Connections

the official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

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

## President's Letter

November 2008

The other day I was at the beach near the Thimble Islands. The water was up onto the road in some parts and over the stonewall in others. Wow. That was odd. It hadn't even rained in days. Well, I found out it was three feet higher than normal because of the full moon. I was fascinated. Imagine a full moon being able to have Stony Creek water lap at the pavement?

I figured I could use this analogy to relate to our writing.

What the heck was I thinking? I've got nothing. Our writing doesn't relate to the moon—or, wait, how about this? The moon pulls at everything on earth. The earth keeps everything in its place except the water. Thus the tides. In and out. In and out.

Maybe our writing is like a tide. Like some outside force (or the infamous muse if you will) has control over our writing. We write, then we can't. Then we do, then we can't. If you know me, you know I don't believe in writer's block. If someone had a tragedy in life, then yes, that will definitely affect us and our writing. But the everyday "I just don't feel the muse," is not acceptable—to me, anyway.

We have to just write. Just sit down and write. Remember Nora Roberts once said, "You can fix anything except a blank page."

Very good point. We should all take it to heart and not let ourselves procrastinate from writing. You'll be amazed at what good stuff comes out when you force yourself to just sit down and do it. Don't let the tides keep you away from your computer!

Now I have to confess I "took off" this week from writing (yes, after being on vacation for two weeks in Europe!) and got hooked on watching movies on HBO. Dramas. I usually only watched comedies or romances. Well, I overdosed on dramas, maybe I'll be onto action packed (can you say muscle bound hunks) next week...or, I will put my butt back in the chair and write. I'll keep my tide at an all-time high.

I'm banking on the writing.

— Lori

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**"The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity."**

**— Amelia Earhart**

## NEXT MEETING

**Four Points Sheraton, Meriden, CT**

**November 8, 11:00**

**Medical Realism in Fiction with Karen Laugel, M.D.**

(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.

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

November 8...Medical Realism in Fiction with Karen Laugel, M.D.  
Pediatrician Karen Laugel discusses the importance of medical accuracy 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](mailto:kllaugel@aol.com)

November 10-14... "After the Call" PRO Boot Camp with Kristan Higgins  
Wondering what happens between getting the call and your book's release date? Will your book go to auction? What are line edits? What will be on your cover? RITA-award winner (and CTRWA's own) Kristan Higgins will conduct this three-part lecture online. This is for RWA PRO members only. Check out the RWA website for more information.

December 13...Holiday Party/New Officers Sworn In  
Stick around for some holiday cheer and hear what the new year has in store!

### In case you missed it...

Thea Devine, our most-published author and fabulous font of information on how new authors are acquired, gave a fascinating presentation on mistakes made in submission. If you'd like a copy of her handout, please see Marie Roy.

## CHAPTER NEWS

### Elections

The candidates for the 2009 CTRWA Board are

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

Please make sure you vote, both in this election and the other!

### Connections Contest

The contest is coming! And guess what? It's all electronic. That's right...no more schlepping manuscripts around, no more red pens. We'll need everyone's help for this HUGE fundraiser for our chapter. The money earned will go toward bringing in great speakers, a free, all-day workshop for CTRWA members and organizing a dynamic, informative conference. So prepare to judge, and we promise...you won't have to read nearly as many entries as last year. So thanks in advance for your help!

## MEMBER NEWS

**Toni Andrews** is hosting a cable-access TV show, *So Many Books*, and guess who her first guest will be? CTRWA President, **Lori Avocato!** More details to come, but how cool!... New member **Shaunee Cole** reports that she is steadily working, which of course is the smartest thing any of us can do, so well done, Shaunee!... Congratulations to **Pat Grasso** for her 5-cup review from *Coffee Time Romance* on *Enticing the Prince*, saying it was one of the best books she's read this year. Wow!... **Kristan Higgins** is pleased to report she's finished the first draft of her fifth novel and is in the blissful "Oh my God, what will I write next?" phase. ... **Cassy Pickard** is burning the midnight oil to revise (for the last time...no, really) her suspense novel and get it out to the agents who are starting to harrass her for it... **Karen Pinco** has begun her second novel — excellent news, Karen! We learn so much from those first books, don't we? ... **Lindsay Downs** is working on line edits for his short story and writing two more military stories...and **Bob Bonitz** sent out fifty pages to Mary Sue Seymour this month... **Marie Roy** is completing edits on her story *Stormbound* and learning MovieMaker and PowerPoint. Sounds great, Marie... **Sandra Karakoosh** just returned from safari in Zimbabwe and Botswana and says, "Great trip! Many plots for future novels, exciting animal encounters, and fantastically, handsome South African young men." So glad you enjoyed, Sandra!

Great to see new members **Laurie Nichols and Marge Reynolds!** We're very pleased to have you. And we hope to see much more of **Shaunee Cole and Erin Hunter**, who showed up at last month's meeting. Shaunee writes urban fantasy/paranormal; Erin is a contemporary chick-lit/women's lit type, and both are very welcome.

*From the little acorn did the mighty oak grow.*



## Member Profile...Karen Laugel

*Originally from Minnesota and still retaining a bit of those lovely rounded vowels, Karen's a graduate of University of Nebraska and Howard University Medical School, where she met her husband over a cadaver...sigh! She's also the proud mother two sons and a daughter — her son Ryan is a Naval Academy graduate, Marine Corps second lieutenant, now serving our country in Iraq; daughter Allison is a senior at Yale and fluent in Spanish, French and Turkish; and son Weston, a junior in high school and newly licensed driver.*

### Tell us about your day job.

I am a full-time pediatrician in Stratford, CT. I started my practice twenty years ago, which means I am now seeing the children of some of my original patients. (*No, I couldn't be that old!*) I am married with three children of my own; a college graduate, a college senior, and one a junior in high school (confirming that 'yes, I am that old').

### What are you working on right now?

I am working on two new pieces. The first, "Hit and Run," is the second novel in an amateur detective mystery series about a pediatrician (surprise!) whose medical partner is comatose following a hit and run accident. While trying to find the malevolent driver, the pediatrician uncovers the evil secrets of a naturopath who runs a home school network as a front for an anti-vaccine scheme. (Hmmm...)

The second piece, "Who Gets The Dog?," is a novel about a family on the precipice of dissolution. With their eldest son deployed to Iraq, their daughter a newly diagnosed anorexic, and the father emotionally distant, the mother struggles to hold her family together. Delaying her decision to divorce is her quandary about who would get custody of their annoying but emotionally dependent, cocker spaniel.

### Why and when did you start writing?

I started writing five years ago when one of my medical partners encouraged me to attend a 'medical fiction writing for physicians' conference and I won first prize in their novel excerpt competition. That recognition, and the fact that my practice feeds me an unlimited supply of fictional (and non-fictional) material about interpersonal relations on a daily basis, have encouraged me to continue writing.

### Why did you join CTRWA? What are you looking for in the chapter?

I joined CTRWA for the camaraderie of a community of writers.

### Favorite authors and why?

The following authors are some of my favorites because of their ability to immerse the reader in human experience with captivating characters and marvelous prose: Margaret Atwood for "Cat's Eye" and "Blind Assassin"; Leif Enger for "Peace Like a River"; Graham Greene for "The Heart of the Matter"; Kent Haruf for "Plainsong" and "Eventide." Chang-Rae Lee for "Gesture Life"; Cormac McCarthy for "All the Pretty Horses" and "No Country for Old Men"; Elizabeth Strout for "Olive Kitteridge"

### Favorite CT restaurant, food, drink?

Anything on the menu at "Pacifico's" in New Haven and "Biagio's" in Stratford; my 'favorites' because of their exquisite food as well their artistic presentation.

### What did you learn from Amazon's Breakthrough Novel contest?

In April 2008, my first novel, "Ring of Lies," reached the finalists level in Amazon's 2008 Breakthrough Novel Contest. Excerpts from contestants' manuscripts were posted online for readers from all over the world to evaluate, comment, and vote on. At the contest's conclusion, Penguin published the manuscript that placed first. I was thrilled to place in the Top Ten out of 5,000 entries.

Most writers create in such a vacuum, devoid of the reader's viewpoint. This contest enabled me to receive hundreds of readers' reviews. For a new writer, that was invaluable. I also received a thoughtful review from *Publisher's Weekly*, which included this shining comment about my work: "The fiction is well paced and crafted, and its rapid succession of suspenseful moments makes this a hard book to put down."

However, Amazon and Penguin had another agenda for their joint contest, and that was to showcase their editors. I would have welcomed thoughtful, constructive criticism, but that was apparently not their intent. Imagine all of the Penguin editors equating their 'Amazon Editor' positions as equivalent to being judges on the board of "American Idol." They were now in the celebrity spotlight, and this was their chance to be 'Simon.'

And so, I received slashing reviews like this one from Penguin Editor John Freeman, "All mysteries need villains, but Laugel badly overplays this one, using flashbacks from Sorensen's bullied childhood to drive home her familiarity with aggressive behavior. As the book careens toward a ridiculous conclusion, Bruce becomes a Freddy Krueger-like zombie who just will not die...."

I wondered what Freeman thought of the 4,990 manuscripts that did not make it to Amazon's Top Ten?

As a new writer, I had been desperately seeking readers' feedback, and through the Amazon contest that is what I received; but I had hoped the critiques would be more constructive. Most writers receive negative reviews in the privacy of their own home, but thanks to Amazon, my negative reviews will remain posted on the Internet for what I believe will be an eternity.

After the contest, I suffered a month of writer's paralysis. When I was finally able to turn the Penguin editors' negativity into positive energy, I dragged myself back to the keyboard and started working on my next novel, with particular attention to improving my plot and character development.

Not surprisingly, my new villain is modeled after a Penguin editor.

If your husband and your child were drowning before your eyes, and you could only save one, whom would you reach out and grab?

— from Karen's work-in-progress

## 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, and that's what we're talking about here) a man and a woman, with an ending that makes you feel that the relationship is good to go for a long time in the future.

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 if that's the case, 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 or I'm really going to be unhappy. 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. Since they paid for a book with those expectations in mind, that's a problem.

The other way works better. (A straight 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.*

## The Best Villains Going

By Kristan Higgins

ARE YOUR BAD guys feeling a little clichéd? A little stereotypical, perhaps? The following list contains some of the most interesting and frightening villains in film or literature. Be inspired!

Hannibal Lecter. He was fascinating because he was brilliant *and* brutal. His insights into the heroine and her quarry told the audience more than anything else in the film. An interesting trivia note...Anthony Hopkins does not blink in any frame of the movie.

Annie Wilkes. Being writers, of course we're going to be freaked out by Annie. She was so nice at first, wasn't she? And she *really* loved Paul's books...

Count Dracula. Why is he one of the best? Sheer coolness. He's rich, he's popular with the ladies, he's a monster. Unrepentant and hungry...yet kind of sexy, too.

The Shark. *The Shark*. You know...the one who ruined the beach



for you forevermore. Once you're in his element, you are powerless. Mommy!

Alex Forrest (from *Fatal Attraction*). Bunny boiler. Enough said.

The Wicked Witch of the West. Dorothy kills her sister, has perfect skin, an amazing voice and great shoes. The WW of the W is jealous, and she wants revenge. And why not? Talk about sympathetic motivation!

Iago. Literature's first sociopath, he torments his best friend, spreads lies and rumors like a presidential candidate who's down 10 points the week before the election. We never know why he does it...when questioned, Iago simply refuses to answer.

When writing a villain, the same basic tenets of hero-writing are true. Give them depth. Not a blind spot, perhaps, but a *kind* spot, some glimmer of humanity that makes him or her multidimensional. When you've got a villain with depth and duality, you've got a nemesis worthy of your hero or heroine's struggle.

## Gearing up for the Golden Heart

By Loretta Ellingsworth

DO YOU WANT to be among the winners in 2009? Now is the time to consider the steps to the Golden Heart.

The Golden Heart Contest is for manuscripts written by unpublished RWA members that in the opinion of the contest judges, could be publishable in the current marketplace. The final round of the contest is judged by acquiring editors from romance publishing houses. Not every Golden Heart Contest winner is published, but many are.

For the first step you need to have a manuscript that is strong enough to be competitive. Don't self censor your work by saying mine wouldn't be good enough. Is it good enough to send to an editor? Then it's good enough to enter the Golden Heart.

For the second step your manuscript has to be presented in a professional manner. This is not the time to decide that a handwriting style font is your best form of self expression, nor is it the time to shape your type into hearts or sailing ships, although having your pages printed to look like hearts may inspire you, it doesn't do anything for judges who have to read a lot of manuscripts fast for the story and not for artistic presentation.

For the third step you need a strong story that will sustain itself in a manuscript of over 40,000 words (at least 160 double spaced pages). The fourth step is to read the Golden Heart Contest rules when they're published in a few weeks and mark your calendar with the contest deadline date.

The fifth step is to get the manuscript ready, both the synopsis and partial you'll be asked to send in first, and then the rest of the finished manuscript so that you can send that when requested. Finish the manuscript. This is not the time to say, "So sorry, I've only got half." Having half a manuscript for the contest is like having half a row boat when the rains come.

Each year the Golden Heart receives over 1000 entries. The membership, according to the website, is now around 9,500 members. This year could be the year of record breaking entries. You don't want to be trampled in the final few hours as everyone rushes to get their entries in. You don't want to have a manuscript you think is ready only to have your critique group ask, "Where's the romance?" Get an early start. Use the days between now and the contest deadline to give your manuscript its best professional polish. Be in contention to be one of the 100 Golden Heart Finalists in July 2009. When your family asks, "Why would you want to go to Washington, DC, in hot muggy July?" be ready to say, "I could win the contest!"

*Loretta Ellingsworth is editor of The Writer's Pulse, newsletter of the Maryland Romance Writers. The rest of the month she writes contemporary stories because she hates research. This article was first used in the July 2008 issue of The Writer's Pulses.*



## Can You Really Write a Novel in Two Months?

by Robin Weaver

ABOUT A YEAR ago, I saw this awesome course on the web: "Complete Your Novel in 8 Weeks." I thought, how cool is this?

Knowing the cost would be tax deductible, I promptly signed up. Okay, I realized you have to actually make money to take a deduction, but that didn't deter me. Here's what happened:

Week One: These are the instructions I received (seriously): Decide how long you want your novel to be (i.e., word count). Divide your word count by eight (for the number of words you must write each week). Divide your "words required each week" by the number of days you will be writing each week.

Write that number of words each writing day.

Hello? Were they freakin' serious? I didn't need a math course—I was a computer science major, for binary sake. I started to think maybe the course was a mistake. More specifically, I thought my PayPal contribution was a major mistake.

Week Two: My Neo-Nazi instructor emailed me and asked me why I hadn't completed my assignments.

What was she talking about? I'd written my 2,000 words per day and emailed her to attest that I'd done so. She responded to my complaint, "...you're supposed to tell me how you feel before and after you write." I work for a large corporation with an extensive Human Resources department and even they've stopped that touchy-feely crap. I got it, though. It wasn't just a math class, I'd signed up for a math and psychology class. I felt a little better about my PayPal donation (NOT).

Week Three: I was supposed to take a character from my book and talk to him/her everyday. Ugh, why didn't I talk to Ghandi and Edgar Allan Poe while I was at it? Here's the kicker: the instructor required me to speak aloud. My husband overheard me and wanted to know the location of all our important papers. He also insisted that I not drive or operate heavy machinery. I tried to explain my bargain to him. After all, I was getting a math course, a psychology course, and several imaginary friends, all for one low price. Could I shop or what? My husband wasn't convinced. "You paid for that?" he asked.

Week Four: I cheated. On Tuesday, I wrote a short story instead of completing my assigned word count on my novel. The Writing Himmler told me I'd sunk to self-doubting behavior. Huh? I thought I'd been typing. She insisted I deviated from my writing schedule because I lacked confidence. My tremendous idea was just self-delusional and the 3,500 words I'd penned were irrelevant. I found the instructor's picture on

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# A Reader's Guide To Character Names

by Hilda Lindner Knepp

I RECENTLY SPENT several days reading *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* by Harper Lee to my daughter. We read a chapter every night before she went to bed. Once again, I was swept away by Lee's brilliance. Not only did she write a perfect book, she gave us fitting names for each and every character. Take Scout, the narrator of the story. What better nickname for a hot headed little tomboy more at home in overalls than dresses? Even her real names, Jean Louise, suited the woman I imagined she became.

And what about Atticus Finch? Atticus manages to sound exactly like the name of a respected, small town attorney from the Deep South who tries to fight the bigotry so common to the place and time when he defends a black man from the charge of raping a white woman. While researching names of literary characters for this column, I learned that Lee took the name Atticus from the Roman philosopher, Titus Pomponius Atticus, a man who never took sides in arguments.

Another author who gets it with names is Janet Evanovich. Ranger, Joe, Vinnie, Lula, Punky Balog - you may not remember Punky but he was a minor character in *TO THE NINES*. Punky Balog "had an ass like Winnie the Pooh - big and fat and furry." What else would you name a loser who moons Stephanie with his Pooh butt from the window in his second story apartment? If there's a better name for this man, I don't know it. Then there's Albert Kloughn, who eventually married Valerie, sister of Stephanie. Care to guess his occupation? I'll help you out with this one, although it's obvious. He's an accountant. Other favorite names from the series are Salvatore "Sally" Sweet, a cross dressing rock singer (what else?), Shirley the Whiner, who is Stephanie's cousin and wife of Eddie Gazarra, a cop who works with Joe Morelli, and Dickie Orr, playboy ex husband of Stephanie, a lawyer who cheats on everything.

I just read the latest book by Sandra Brown, entitled *SMOKE SCREEN*. I admit I wasn't crazy about the hero's first name Raley. It didn't tell me anything about him and I found myself wondering how to pronounce it. Was it "Rally" like rally round the flag? Or maybe "Raleigh", as in Sir Walter. Then again, perhaps it was closer to "Railey", rhymes with Bailey. Maybe it's a Texas name, since Ms. Brown is from Texas and still lives there. Wherever the name came from, I spent most of the book brooding over it.

Regencies showcase a variety of unusual names. While I understand the time period and setting call for "different", I prefer unique but not too different. For example, in *SLIGHTLY SINFUL* by Mary Balogh, we have Lord Alleyn Bedwyn. Frankly, I can't embrace the excess of ys in this fellow's name. Allen, or Allan, would have worked much better for me. Another example is Gervase Ashford, Earl of Rosthorn, from *SLIGHTLY TEMPTED*, another book by Ms. Balogh. Is his first name pronounced with a hard or soft "g"? If it's soft, I'll have to pass. The name seems too effeminate for a manly man. Finally, from one of Ms. Balogh's older books, we have a hero named Geraint Penderyn. I've tried to

imagine the heroine sighing his name in the throes of passion but I can't, or should I say caint? I give much credit to Ms. Balogh for writing such good books that the names usually don't ruin my reading enjoyment.

My advice on picking names for the characters in your soon to be classic? Don't make the reader ponder over the pronunciation. If you must use a name that is rare or foreign, maybe have another character mispronounce it so the character whose name it is can correct them. Use a census to select historical names, preferably from the country in which you set your book. Choose a name that says something about the character, either their personality, nationality or whatever. Remember that names in the U.S. are often regional. When I hear the name Clay or Clint, I think western. When I hear the name DuPont, I think Rhode Island. What about Pete Strezewski? Sounds like Pittsburgh or Youngstown or Chicago to me.

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*Novel in Eight Weeks, continued from previous page*

the web and used it for dart practice.

Week Five: Lady Hitler wanted a plot outline. We were (presumably) 5/8ths done with our novel and NOW she wanted a plot outline?

Week Six: I juggled deadlines at work, finishing my income taxes, and completing my word count without missing 'American Idol' or 'House.' I thought I'd achieved a karmic state of efficiency, but my family insisted I'd reached a new level of whacko—just because I put my Online-Word-Count-Demon instructor in my novel and killed her off. So not fair.

Week Seven: One more week to go, and get this, I'd almost finished with my novel. Who-da-thunk-it?

Moral of this tale: I actually did complete my novel in eight weeks—then took another year editing it. If you need motivation, this type of course might actually inspire you. Otherwise, there are NO short-cuts.

*Robin Weaver works as a systems engineer for a large technical company and writes to remain sane. Although it isn't clear how the 'sanity thing' is working out, she has recently completed her fifth novel.*

*This article ran in the May 2008 issue of The Final Draft, the newsletter of Carolina Romance Writers in Charlotte, NC.*

# Being a Good Guest – Blogger, That Is

by Susan Lyons



WHETHER OR NOT you have your own blog, there are advantages to guest blogging. It's a relatively easy way to promote your name and brand. Here are some tips to help you make the most of the experience.

- Find out the host site's guidelines: content (e.g., will they send interview questions, ask you to blog about your book, or ask you to blog on a topic relevant to their audience?); length; format and technical specs; images (e.g., book covers, your photo); and when they need to receive your post.
- Read recent posts to see the tone, subjects, the target audience, and which posts attract the most comments. Your post should be a good fit for the site and audience, and not repeat a recent topic.
- Write your post in a voice that reflects you as a person and as a writer. Be professional and relatively open. Share things like your writing process and your views on your topic, but be wary of sharing personal details.
- Write so as to encourage readers to comment. Some posts end with a direct question and others are simply so intriguing they elicit comments.
- Know your goals. Most likely, you want readers to visit your website. So, whatever your topic, try to work in some information about your books and/or your writing process, and include the link to your website and personal blog, if you have one.
- Come up with a catchy title.
- If the host site allows prizes, consider offering an autographed copy of one of your books or another appropriate give-away.
- Inform your loops that you're guest blogging. Tell them the

topic, give them the link, and encourage them to visit. It's good promotion for you and for the host site.

- On the day your blog is posted, visit frequently and respond to comments. It shows you value the comments and the opportunity to interact. It's also additional positive exposure for you.
- If you track website statistics that tell you when people visited and where they came from, then check your website stats after you've guest blogged. If you got an increase in traffic, that's one factor to consider when deciding whether to guest blog at that particular site again. However, it's only one factor. There's also the name (brand) recognition/repetition factor. Even if people don't visit your website this time, they may remember your name. Once they've seen your name several times, they may visit your site and/or buy your book.
- Incorporate guest blogging in your career plan. You should have a career plan that includes both writing and promotion. Guest blogging is one of numerous promotional tools. It's free but it's also time-consuming and generally doesn't reach a huge audience. Use it effectively, but don't do spend so much time guest blogging that it distracts you from writing the next book or working on other promotional activities that might be more effective.

*Susan Lyons is a member of GVC. She writes sexy romance that's intense, passionate, heartwarming and fun. She doesn't have her own blog but participates regularly in group blogs with PASIC, Novelists Inc., and Aphrodisia Authors, as well as guest blogging on other sites when they're kind enough to invite her. This article ran in the September 2008 issue of Spotlight, the Greater Vancouver chapter's newsletter.*

## Is It Hot or Just Me? by Kate Fink

THE LOVE SCENE: The common angst of romance writers, especially if you're seated on the steamier side of the aisle. It's hard enough to bring two passionate characters together in a way that rings true, but then add to the mix, What will my mother think of me when she reads this?

If your Mom's a beta reader, you second guess every syllable of that Early Draft Lovin'. Or you rip out and eat the three juicy sections of the WIP before handing it to Mom. "Don't worry about the page numbering, Mom. Software's on the fritz. (Cuh!) Could I have some water and a toothpick?"

Maybe you're brave and serve up the whole enchilada. We're all adults, right? Sure. You hear nothing for two weeks. Then Mom says, "So, darling, I hear writers write what they know... You sure know A LOT more than I thought you did." (Translation: You're going to H-ll. No, wait. You're already there because...)

"And Daddy wants to know, what is an 'Indy Grab'?"

Feel the wince? This conversation is saved for Sunday dinner with all your siblings and their spouses sniggering around the dining room table. Okay, my family's very supportive, but I give them so much material. The punch lines

spurt out quicker than the red wine.

And, my friends, I know you have tales too.

So let's end the misery now. Let's all agree to stop writing love scenes. (Huh?! I heard you. Before you fling this issue against the opposing wall, listen.)

Write powerful action scenes instead. Yes, the action can be sex, but you need a heavy dose of conflict with it. Characters don't get physical because it's Page 105. If there is no emotional push and pull to the scene, then just fade to black. Fun is fun. But this is about craft.

Your 3-D characters have personal goals at the beginning of the love scene—even goals they're not aware of yet—that cause conflict. Now poke around a little at their weaknesses, and let the sparks fly!

Every action scene is about characters in conflict—direct and indirect, internal and external. Why? Because it causes a change in discernment; characters learn more about each other and themselves.

*continued next page*

## Pointless But Fun

### What's your favorite Thanksgiving food?

Stuffing cooked until it's crusty on top. I never stuff the bird. I just cook it in the same oven with the bird. — Terry Diaz

Does wine count? If so, Piping Shrike, Australian Shiraz. Big, lush, chewy, yum!!!! — Shaunce Cole

Mashed turnips. I know, I know, it's freakish, but I only eat them once a year, and I just love them. I'm the only one. — Kristan Higgins

Turkey TV dinner. Especially the microwave kind. — Lindsay Downs, easily pleased male.

Turnips. I love them! Don't laugh. They have to have gravy on them and be served with cranberry sauce. — Lori Avocato

All those side dishes and casseroles you get no other time: Green beans with crunch onions, butternut squash (NOT the kind with marshmallows), mashed turnips. — Toni Andrews

Stuffing with gravy. — Karen Pinco

My late mother's stuffing with a dollop of gravy. I haven't had good stuffing since she passed away. — Pat Grasso

Pumpkin pie with real whipped cream. — Joy Smith

The drumstick, as long as it's juicy and tender and surrounded by gravy and mashed potatoes. — Marie Roy



Beautiful Aurelia, I've come here with a view of asking you to marriage me. I know I seems an insane person - because I hardly knows you - but sometimes things are so transparency, they don't need evidential proof.

Jamie, attempting to speak Portuguese, to Aurelia in *Love Actually*

Character names, *continued from page 6*

One last request. I may have mentioned this in a previous column but please avoid naming the maid or the dog in your book "Hilda". It's been done before and it's "sniff" not at all original.

After finishing her day job as a librarian, Hilda stalks the corridors of her own odd mind in search of words for the romances she writes. With a husband, child, two cats, an elderly dog, and an even more elderly mother in the household, Hilda only occasionally gets the chance to place those words on paper. She remains confident publication is in her future, no doubt posthumously.

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Is It Hot, *continued from previous page*

This in turn shifts their goals and shows character growth.

No editor is going to buy your story because your characters found a new way to Fandango. But all editors want to acquire well-crafted books with action scenes that have emotional zing, propel character arcs, and drive plot threads.

Kate is the tape librarian for the Los Angeles Romance Authors and writes contemporary romance.

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