



Connections

The official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

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

President's Letter

January 2009

It's All About You, Baby

Hello! It's a privilege to be starting my first term as president. Barack and I have been on the phone for hours, swapping notes, and we both think it will be a great year.

In looking at the material Lori passed onto me, I came across the mission statement of RWA, and CTRWA. In a nutshell, the sole purpose of CTRWA is to help you get published and, once you are, to advance your writing career. The group exists for one reason...to help you as a writer. Toward that end, the new board is working on a few programs. So read on, chapter mates, read on!

Critique Group. A few months ago, CTRWA began a crit/brainstorming group. RWA chapters that offer regular, constructive and supportive critique groups have the most published authors, too. Seeing how people react to your writing is an invaluable tool, so look for the notice on the CTRWA e-mail bulletin board and drop in. We'll be meeting at 9:30 before each meeting.

Mentoring Program. Have questions but feel a little shy? Not to worry...we're starting a mentoring program in which newbies will be "adopted" for a month by a published author. This will be your chance to ask questions, no matter how dopey you think they might be, and get advice from someone who's been there. Sign up at the next meeting, and we'll get you started.

Published Author Support. Sometimes we tend to forget that getting The Call isn't the end of the journey — it's just the beginning. Our chapter has quite a few published authors, and even more who are on the brink. What can you do? Buy members' books (of course!); show up at book signings; review online at Amazon and Barnes & Noble; suggest a fellow author's book for your book club; blog about someone's new release. Put out some good karma. What goes around, comes around.

In addition to these new programs, we're putting together a fantastic one-day conference this year with a choice of compelling workshops, great speakers, agents, editors and the chance to network and learn a ton about the industry and craft of writing. Toni Andrews has been at work for months already, and I know you're going to be thrilled.

CTRWA is all about you, after all. The only way to get the most you can from membership is to show up, speak up and sign up. Each of you has so much to offer, and each of you has dozens of fellow members, ready to support your goals. Remember, this chapter exists to support your goals, your hopes, your career. Don't be shy!

Happy writing!

~ Kristan Higgins

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NEXT MEETING

January 10: 10:30 a.m.
Marie Force and Kristan Higgins: Plotting vs. Pantsing

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 10:30 a.m. with a speaker or workshop at 11:00. PYOW lunch follows. See our website (www.ctrwa.org) for more information and directions.

MEMBER NEWS

Pat Grasso reports that ENTICING THE PRINCE (November 08) received 5 hearts from The Romance Studio. The reviewer said (among other nice things) "What an amazing story! An explosive opening scene...." Night Owl Romance gave ENTICING THE PRINCE a 4.5 hearts and a Reviewer's Top Pick. PLEASURING THE PRINCE (April 06) sold to The Netherlands. She's been invited to speak at the Methuen Library (Methuen, MA) in February and a Bow Baker Library (New Hampshire) in April. And in March, she'll be giving a workshop at NEC conference "Marrying Plot and Emotion".

Kristan Higgins is going to be interviewed in the February edition of Romantic Times to coincide with the release of TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. A short piece will be in the February edition of Simply Books, Harlequin's magazine for devoted readers, with a circulation of 200,000.

Marie Roy is cleaning, organizing, and generally creating a space more suitable for writing because clutter is interfering with her ability to focus on writing projects. She's taking a Feng Shui approach and trying to generate areas of positive energy. Hopefully, this will get me into the right mind frame to refocus on my projects. One of my latest projects is that I'm working with 13 members of my online writing group where we are all writing 15K stories. The genre is paranormal (vampire romances.) This is an off shoot of the Erotic Romance Workshop Group. Also, I'm working on the sequel to DEADLY SECRETS and hope to have that ready for submission soon after 2009 begins (found at Noble Romance Publishing <http://www.nobleromance.com>).

When asked: "How do you get back into writing after the holidays?"

Pat Grasso never stopped writing because I'm late on my deadline and I don't get any more money until I finish the book.

Kristan Higgins tries to take a break at the holidays and between books. I like to clean my office to get into the fresh start frame of mind. Look at pictures of men who remind me of my new hero (I believe 'ogling' is the literary term...). Do a little stream of consciousness typing. Figured it worked for William Faulkner, it can work for me.

Joy Smith uses the holidays to gain a fresh perspective. After re-reading a WIP, she usually begins with edits or revisions.

CHAPTER NOTES

CRITIQUE GROUP

For Those In Search of Critiques/Feedback/Opinions, our critique group meets at 9:30 in the conference room before our meeting each month. Anyone interested in getting some feedback on their WIPs is strongly encouraged to contact other members, exchange excerpts and use the room to discuss your writing.

THE CONTEST IS COMING! THE CONTEST IS COMING!

Keep an eye out for more information on CTRWA's contest, which judges the first fifty pages of an uncontracted novel. Members are strongly urged to enter...sales have been made as a result of this contest, so polish up those manuscripts.

CTRWA 2008 Board Members

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How Can I Be A Better Chapter Member?

by Carla Swafford

1.Attend the general meetings. It's surprising how much information is passed around at chapter meetings. One type of information I'm writing about is market updates like "My critique partner told me her agent is looking for a paranormal with munchkins." And there you sit with a book about munchkins everyone told you would never sale. And Published Authors, this is very important. Your chapter can eventually die if you do not attend. Why you ask? Well, new members will look around and if all they see are pre-published writers, they'll believe there's no hope of ever becoming published and won't come again. But if they meet attending published authors, they'll be encouraged to keep trying. I've seen it happen.

2.Attend programs. How often do we hear about the importance of networking? Sure you can go to the National conference every year but that's only once a year. What about that certain editor, agent or author who comes to your chapter to speak or give a workshop? Did you know for every person you meet and make a good impression on, they will remember you when you sale and need a quote blurb, a favor, or another sale. And the side benefit is you might learn something new.

3.Volunteer for small jobs and posts. I'm talking about those positions or jobs that have nothing to do with being a board member. This is maybe bringing a door prize for the next meeting or helping by cleaning up after a large program. It's amazing how people leave and say, "Oh, they have plenty of volunteers" and only three or four will remain to do the dirty job. While we all know if everyone pitched in, we'll go home quicker or the program would be bigger or the set up would be more professional looking. Plus you'll be surprised what will come to their mind when they have to make a decision to buy your book or not.

Speaking of being surprised, I'm always astonished when we have a problem with getting a volunteer for PAN Liaison. My goodness people! By being PAN Liaison, you have a better reason than most to correspond with that certain successful experienced author to the newest author in the business who can still remember how she did it. In my chapter, those people include Linda Howard, Debra Webb, Kelley St. John, Laura Hayden, Peggy Webb, Paula Graves and so

many more. They're all awesome.

See, all those small jobs/posts are important.

4.Volunteer for the big jobs including board

positions. Okay being a board member is a hard decision to make. I understand completely. I've been membership chair, vice president and president along with PAN liaison, newsletter editor, webmistress, luncheon chairperson, conference chairperson, contest coordinator and been on numerous committees and all that was over a five year period. I can assure you every position has its ups and downs, but most of them were wonderful ups. You're missing getting your name out there and they were all great networking opportunities.

I'm sure I've missed a few other ways to be a better chapter member, but those are the most obvious to me. I joined RWA in 1993 and it took me nine years to run out of reasons in not going to meetings. Then I started attending them, and I can tell you, now a few editors and agents know me on sight and my writing has improved tremendously. I've been told by my critique partners, I'm on the cusp of getting published and I must say I agree with them. And that confidence came from attending chapter meetings, learning everything I could, and making those types of contacts.

Carla Swafford is a member of Southern Magic, Heart of Dixie, and Gulf Coast Romance Writers.

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The following article was first used in the November issue of Magic Moments, the newsletter of Southern Magic, Birmingham, AL. Permission to use with proper credits granted to sister RWA chapters.

CALENDAR: Save the Dates!

Jan 10: Marie Force and Kristan Higgins:
Plotting vs. Pantsing: Can't We All Just Get Along?

February 14: Nikoo & Jim Goldrick (AKA Jan Coffey):
Collaborative Writing as a Couple

March 13: John Flynn and Friends:
Expert Panel of Connecticut Law Enforcement Officials

April 12: Karen Laugel:
Medical Realism in Fiction



Let's Get Emotional

By Linda Ford

Romance readers read for the emotional experience. At least that's what I believe, which leaves the author with the burden of fulfilling the promise for an emotional read.

"Emotions lead us to more believable plot twist and turns, enhance dramatic tension, help to illustrate themes. In short, they inform every aspect of our fiction." Ann Hood in *Creating Character Emotions*. "The best fiction takes characters through not just an external journey, but an emotional journey too." Ah. So she agrees with me.

I find it a challenging responsibility—this delivery of a satisfying emotional journey. How is it possible? "One of the things I've learned is the ability to let go and not hold back at the emotional level," says Theresa Bodwell from Montana who writes for Kensington. "I realize the reason people enjoy books about people is because we can relate to their emotions." Yikes. Not only is it a challenge but a burden. Should I fail the chances the reader will return are slim. How do I get the emotions on the page?

"Write like yourself," says Ann Hood, which is good advice but only takes me so far. What if I'm not writing characters who act and react like me? How do I portray them honestly and accurately?

Again from Theresa Bodwell; "The key is capturing those human emotions and the only way I know to do that is to put myself out there. It's hard because most writers are observers, but I'm learning you have to—in many ways, like an actor—be the character. You have to put yourself into the character." And Ann Hood takes us a step further when she says, "Separate life from fiction. In a story a writer must ask more of emotions. ..why, what does it say about the character? What does it reveal?"

Ways to do it wrong (according to Ann Hood):

1. Clichés—search for fresh language.
2. Lack of specificity—you know the character feels something. But what? So rather than dig deeper, we resort to nonspecific emotions and hope the

reader fills in the blanks. "Think of concrete details as emotional traffic signs, leading the reader to the right place." Ann Hood

3. Ambiguity—label an emotion rather than explore it. Sometimes we fear or don't trust our own experience. We ignore what it really feels like to be sad or in love.
4. Not trusting your characters—lack of consistency—for example going from sorrow to joy without working through the stages. Or making them too consistent so they aren't honest. Example a Pollyanna cheerful person who never admits to discouragement, anger, jealousy. It isn't real. Ann Hood says, "Characters should have a range of emotions to give them depth and complexity."

But I need more. I need concrete ways to guide me in writing emotions.

I've collected a few. Here they are.

Lessons I've learned on how to portray emotions:

1. Understand the mechanics and don't be shy about using them.

For this I refer to the writing guru Dwight Swain in his must-have book, *Techniques of a Selling Writer*. And also the very good explanation of this by Randy Ingermanson at:

<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/art/scene.php>

They teach the magic of MRUs to form the basis of emotional satisfaction. MRUs you ask? That's short for Motivational Reaction Units. Get the book or go to the website for a concise explanation but in really short form it's; the character sees or hears something, he then feels something, does something in the way of reflex action, thinks something, then says something or does something deliberate.

Cont'd page 8.

Longevity in the 1800s

by Kate Bridges

If you're writing historical novels, do you ever wonder about your character's lifespan? In my Westerns, I often include characters with a wide variety of ages. Once, a reader asked if it was accurate that one of them would have lived to be a senior. I answered yes, because this is where statistics come in.

Sadly, up until the mid 1800s in America and England, nearly half of all children died before the age of ten. Nearly half. Childhood diseases such as measles, diphtheria (a deadly membrane that grows over the throat) and scarlet fever took many lives. Tuberculosis was another killer. Statistics vary slightly by region and time period, but the average lifespan for the early part of the century was roughly forty.

However, once a person got beyond childhood, these diseases weren't usually fatal. So, let's look at statistics. If one person lived until they were 4 years old and another lived till they were 76, the average lifespan of these two people would be 40. Or if one person lived till they were 1 and another till they were 80, their average lifespan would be 40, as well. You get the idea...the average

lifespan, statistically, doesn't give a true picture of what that society looked like back then. It does not mean that people over the age of 40 were scarce. What it means is that half the population was wiped out in childhood.

Fortunately, after the 1850s, people started to understand the connection between germs and disease. Soaps and disinfectants came into common use. Public sanitation, such as garbage collection and water treatment, began in New York City. The average lifespan increased dramatically in the latter half of the century. And later, with the development of vaccines, most children's lives were remarkably spared.

So if you're a writer, go ahead and put that interesting older couple in your novel. They'll add depth and authenticity to your work.

Award winning author Kate Bridges writes sexy historicals set in the Canadian and American West. Before becoming a full time writer, Kate was a pediatric intensive care nurse. Watch for WANTED IN ALASKA, coming from Harlequin Historicals in February 2009! For an excerpt, visit www.katebridges.com.

The following article appeared in the January 2009 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

Heroscopes: The Capricorn Heroine

by Bonnie Staring

She knows her limits—and yours too.

Born between December 22 and January 19, the Capricorn heroine is the most ambitious of all signs in the Zodiac. Whether she appears in a novella or 500-page classic, she has patience, determination and an ability to focus that could burn a hole through the forehead of anyone who stands in her way. Even in a snowstorm.

More organized than Martha Stewart's linen cupboards, the Capricorn woman finds it almost impossible to trust others to finish what she's started. For her, the word delegate sounds a lot like detonate. Whether it's a plot to take over the world, a PowerPoint presentation or a load of laundry, she'll be the one offering to "take care of it" while everyone else is itching to leave. And if people seem to be itching too much, you can count on her to refer them to a good dermatologist.

This fabulous woman lives and breathes long term. While she may appear indifferent, she's hoping that Mr. Right is right around the corner. Great dates for her must be conservative in cost yet sublime in sentiment, such as a school play, lunch at a cozy bistro or a walk under the stars. Famous Capricorn heroines include Judith Kranz, Lady Bird Johnson, Elizabeth Arden and Dolly Parton.

Bonnie Staring is a comedic triple threat (writer, performer, coupon user). Her articles regularly appear in a variety of magazines and she conducts workshops on creativity and discovering your inner superhero. See what else Bonnie's been up to at www.bonniestaring.com

Dealing With Rejection

By Allison Knight

First, let me state emphatically, I don't have a degree in Psychology, I'm not any kind of doctor and I don't profess to be. I can't explain why rejection hurts, but I know it does. I've been writing and being rejected now for twenty years. I do know something about how it feels to be rejected. So, why do I keep writing, knowing there's a chance the novel won't find a home?

Knowing my work might not be accepted, what do I do to keep myself in my computer chair, my brain playing with yet another set of characters? I remember something another author told me years ago. He'd gotten so many rejections he feared he would have to quit writing and get a "regular job" to feed his family. If Dutch Leonard could get that many rejections then who am I to complain.

I remind myself the editor doesn't know me from Adam and it's not me that he or she is rejecting. I console myself with reiterating all the reasons why the editor might not want my work. One reason for rejection might be that he or she just bought a story similar to mine. Or it truly doesn't fit with the books for that particular line because the publisher is going in a different direction. Maybe that particular genre is dying in the market place. Then it is possible the company may be constrained by money issues and can't buy anything more for the several months. Those books by big names garner huge advances and they don't often pay out.

It also possible that he or she has a hundred and fifty manuscripts on the desk and my first page doesn't strike any interest.

Then of course there are fun reasons about which to speculate. Like, my hero sounds like her ex and she hates him. Or she had a fight with her partner, husband or mother that morning and she is going to reject everything. Maybe it's a bad hair day,

or whatever transportation system the editor uses has failed. Or his editor-in-chief just told him if he can't start picking some best sellers, he's history!

Unless the editor comments about why he or she isn't interested, rather than the usual "it doesn't fit", I'll try somewhere else. I make it a rule that unless at least two editors criticize the same aspect of my writing, I won't make any changes to the manuscript.

So, I continue to write, remembering my first book was rejected by just about everyone. After multiple rejections, I took fiction writing courses, I read books on writing, and then I rewrote and rewrote before I resubmitted to those same publishers. The editor who originally rejected the novel bought it and two more at the same time.

The lesson to be learned is simple and it isn't hard to understand. So here it is. If you don't submit your work to publishing companies, you can't get published. If they don't see your work, they can't buy it. Of course, rejection is part of the process. So, don't yell with frustration, or worse, shed any tears if your proposal reappears in your mail box with a letter saying thanks but no thanks. Hey, it's not you they are rejecting, even though it feels like it. Dust off the proposal. Reprint it if it needs a fresh look and send it out again. Who knows, the next editor may love it.

Visit Allison at <http://www.allisonknight.com>. Look for her book *Heartsong* now in trade paperback and *A Treasure for Sara* coming in March 2009. *Sara* is Allison's fourteenth book.

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Keeping the Boss Happy

By Tami Cowden

Ask many aspiring writers why they want to write, and you can expect more than one to answer "I want to be my own boss."

And why not? After all, being your own boss offers lots of advantages. You can choose your own hours. Work in cutoffs, or even nothing at all. Never go to another time-wasting meeting. Say goodbye to surly customers. Best of all, put an end to supervisors breathing down your neck.

That's the way I saw it. I couldn't wait to kiss that day job goodbye, and be my own boss. But then it occurred to me that when it comes to my writing, I've always been my own boss. And for me, like for many of us, that creates a problem.

I wasn't a very good boss.

Nope. I was a boss who routinely shrugged off work left undone. A boss who didn't complain about projects left uncompleted. A boss who accepted excuses for a lack of progress – excuses about family commitments or even work needed for another job. I was even a boss who never said a word when the ONLY employee didn't even show up for work at the appointed time.

Now, if that boss had been working for anyone other than herself, management would fire this sorry excuse for a supervisor and get a boss with some backbone, because otherwise, the business is going nowhere.

And so I realized, that in my writing career, I am management. So I needed to be a boss with backbone.

My first thought when I came to that conclusion was that it was not that I was a spineless boss. It was just that employee me really did have other commitments. I worked at a day job full time and my family needed that income. And I had kids, meals to cook, errands to run, a house to clean, etc. And that's why I couldn't write a chapter a day like I said I would.

Well, the truth is, those were very good explanations. But I was still a lousy boss. Not because I didn't ream myself new one for failing to

meet my quota. No, I was a lousy boss because as a boss I had unrealistic expectations my employee could not possibly meet. An employee with fulltime commitments elsewhere should not be hired for fulltime devotion to writing.

So should I have fired myself? As employee, boss or both? Nope. Because fulltime commitments elsewhere did not mean I couldn't still sign on for this writing gig. People moonlight; I could, too. But instead of expecting myself to write 40 hours per week, every week, I needed to work out a new employment agreement. I needed a reasonable schedule I could meet while also meeting my other obligations.

So I asked myself a pertinent question – what could I devote to my writing career? I took a good hard look at my schedule and decided what could work for me. I decide to measure my productivity in hours spent writing. I did not worry about the times other writers work or the quantity other writers produce – I was negotiating a deal with my boss, not with anyone else's.

And then I committed to look at this job like I would any other. I started giving the boss "me" the respect I showed my "day job" boss. I started meeting my writing boss' expectations.

Now, when I am tempted to slack off from the writing—take a mental health day, watch TV, or work on stuff for my other job—I ask myself whether I would abandon my responsibilities in my "day job" in the same way for the same reason? If so, OK. But if not, I punched in at work.

And I started showing results. Since I renegotiated that deal, then, I've sold articles, short stories, and a romance novel. Life happens, and I had to renegotiate now and again, even take a hiatus. But I manage to keep making my boss proud.

*Tami Cowden is the award-winning author of romantic fiction and nonfiction advice for writers, including *Cruising for Love*, and *The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes and Heroines*. She writes a lot in her day job as an appellate lawyer, but she still works for that writing boss, too.*

*This article was published in the May-June 2008 issue of *Sandscripts*, the Cactus Rose RWA Chapter.*

EXAMPLE: (This is a very basic scene meant for illustration only and not meant to be the basis of any critiquing.)

The dog barked. (Hears something)

Her mouth went dry. (Feels something). Her hand jerked to the knife at her side. (Reflex action).

Wait. It was only old man Ford returning home after a night on the town. (Thought). She edged the knife back in its case. (Deliberate action).

"Not yet," she murmured to her companion. (Speech).

2. Another mechanical tool—name the emotion and give it a visceral action.

Ex: cold fingers of panic gripped his stomach

3. Revisit your own past.

"If you render character emotion effectively and honestly, there is the question your readers will ask. How did you know?" Ann Hood. Take notes when things are happening or that have happened in your life. Everything is fodder for your stories. Remember what it was like to feel rejection. As children, our emotions are often closer to the surface, more real, more memorable. Drop back into your memories and recall those events both good and bad. The excitement of Christmas, the anticipation of summer vacation, the disappointment of the first year you got nothing but clothes for Christmas. (Yes, it is still fresh in my mind.) Use these emotions.

4. Show, don't tell. Remember the power of suggestion. "Nothing is wrong," she insisted as her fingers plucked threads from the end of her scarf and balled them into a knot. (See how we get a picture of something she isn't admitting through a bit of showing.)
5. Indirect action—chopping wood until the pile is as big as a garage can illustrate frustration or anger or even grief. Set the stage then use it.

6. I've found it especially helpful and extremely difficult to connect with my own reactions. It's taken some serious concentration mostly, I suppose, because as a mother I have learned to ignore how I feel and get on with care giving but I've learned how powerful it can be when I stop and listen and identify what I'm feeling when my character is suffering, or experiencing great joy. Is my chest tight? Do I feel like my lungs are about to explode? Is my throat so tight I can't even swallow? I've found a new level of authenticity by paying attention to my own reactions.
7. Tie your emotions into the setting and character career.

I've written several books set in the Depression Era. Think lots of dust and wind and searing heat. Think how that can be used to reflect emotions. 'Anger swept through her with the besmirching nature of the endless dust-laden wind.' Look for details that can be used. Then remember to flip them. Dust and driving wind for negative emotions can become a warm breeze for a positive emotion.

This list is by no means all-inclusive. I'm sure you've a few tricks or mechanical tools of your own. (Why not write an article and share them with us?)

Writing emotions is hard but satisfying to both the reader and the author so pay attention to ways YOU can make it better. And have fun.

Emotional, Feel-Good Romance
<http://www.donnaalward.com>

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