



Connections

The official newsletter of the Connecticut Romance Writers Association

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

President's Letter Free Your Mind

March 2009

At this past National conference, I had the luck to meet the legendary author Sharon Sala, author of over a billion books (or something close to it). I asked her for some advice for a person just getting started out. Her answer? Don't be afraid to learn new things, because whatever you're doing now, you'll have to change.

Very interesting advice. And true! Maybe the type of book we love to write is just not selling. Or we're not quite there yet...we might have great instincts, but something's missing. That first sale hasn't been made. We haven't broken into the big time. Even if things *are* going well, eventually, all writers will have to shift gears. Imprints fold. Contracts are not renewed. Editors leave. New ideas might seem as good as the old ones.

Jane Ann Krentz tells the story of how her career slowly tanked. Her print runs diminished, her reviews sucked. Finally, she decided to reinvent herself in a different genre. She was so blacklisted at the time that her agent wouldn't reveal her real name until after the contract was signed. But Ms. Krentz did it. She learned, she persevered, she changed. (She's Amanda Quick, by the way).

New York Times bestselling author Susan Mallery listens to every workshop she can get her hands on. When she'd written more than fifty books, she decided to get her master's in commercial fiction. She's completely willing to open her mind up to new ways of thinking about her plots, her characters, her craft. She wasn't afraid to learn.

We ask our characters to grow and change, to leave their comfort zone and reach for something bigger. I'm guessing we should ask ourselves to do the same thing.

In the movie *The Matrix*, Morpheus (a classic mentor if ever there was one) tells Neo to leap across a vast space fifty stories above the street. Like all heroes, Neo doubts. Full of uncertainty, he fails the test and crashes down to the pavement. Ouch. But when he opens his mind to a new way of thinking and heeds Morpheus's advice — "Free your mind" — not only does Neo leap...he flies. Literally soars into the sky. It's incredibly cool.

So free *your* mind, and see where you can go.

~ Kristan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Letter	1
Calendar.....	2
Board Members	2

COMMUNITY

Member News.....	2
Chapter Notes.....	2
Member Interview.....	3

CAREER

Romance Writing 101	7
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CRAFT

Heroscopes.....	3
Hero, Heroine and Author...	4
TIPS AND TRICKS	5
Travel as Inspiration.....	6

NEXT MEETING

March 13: 10:30 a.m.

John Flynn and Friends:

Expert Panel of Connecticut Law Enforcement Officials

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.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Do you celebrate St. Patrick's Day? If so, how?

Paula isn't Irish but tries to remember to wear something green on St. Patrick's day out of respect for those die hard, happy-go-lucky, beer drinking Irishman who insist on celebrating the eradication of snakes from Ireland. **Kelly** has a party at her house for her husband's fire dept., complete with overnight accommodations for those who celebrate too much. **Lindsay** is half Irish, but denies he's Irish on that day alone and has a beer (but not green beer). Bob sometimes wears green and his wife used to march in the NYC St. Patty's day parade. **Theresa** only celebrates by enjoying the happy people wearing green.

MEMBER NEWS

Paula is entering her first writing contest and revising/polishing her entry and synopsis. **Kelly** started another story line. **Karen P.** queried her second novel and received a request for the full. **Patricia** reports *Enticing The Prince* is a finalist in NEC's Bean Pot Contest for published authors. **Kristan** reports *Just One of the Guys* was chosen as Best Book of 2008 in the Women's Fiction/Chick Lit category by the readers at All About Romance as well as a finalist in the New England RWA Bean Pot Contest. *Too Good To Be True* hit the top fifty in romances sold on BookScan, Amazon and Barnes & Noble, with a BookList review calling it "Cheeky, cute and satisfying, Higgins's romance is perfect entertainment for a girl's night in." Accolades aside, Kristan is in her usual sweaty distress over her next book, which she just started writing after a month of avoidance. **Bob** also has great news, read about it in his latest interview.

CHAPTER NOTES

THE CONFERENCE IS THIS MAY!

Save the Date: **May 2, 2009**

Connecticut Fiction Fest

One day only at the Four Points Sheraton Inn; Meriden, Connecticut

CALENDAR: Save the Dates!

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

March 27-28: New England Chapter Conference

April 12: Karen Laugel:
Medical Realism in Fiction

May 2: *Connecticut Fiction Fest*

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Member Interview: Bob Bonitz

Bob just received some amazing news! Read on to find out all about the recent events in his writing life.

So you have some pretty big news. What just happened?

I just signed my first contract with an epublisher. When I feel like I'm just slogging through my novel and I'm hip deep in mud, I take breaks by writing short stories for a day or two. The latest one just sold. The contract is longer than the story.

Can you tell us a little bit about the story?

This is my first venture into erotica, but that wasn't by design. Currently titled THE DATE, it's about two folks who dated in high school and meet again years later. She kept him at arms length in school, but he won't allow that now. The love scene had to be graphic to make the story work. There's also a twist at the end that developed as I wrote, so I guess this one was a pantsner.

How did your non-writer family and friends react?

Everyone was pleased that I sold it, but a couple of my daughters are not sure they'll read it. My grandkids have been banned from reading it until they're older. By me. Actually, I wasn't sure if it would be considered erotica, but when I asked Marie Roy for her opinion, she sent me the names of epubs that deal in erotica. Since one of them bought it I guess it is.

What are you working on right now?

As I said, I was hip deep in mud it seemed to me. Things have improved; I've completed what I think is a pretty good draft of my book. I'm playing with titles now, one being TWICE LOVED, ONCE DEAD, the other being LIPSTICK, or some variation thereof. The latter would be because the killer puts lipstick on his victims. That exercise is a stall though. My next step is a spoken read through, and a real effort to hone in on the sections that my subconscious knows need work. Wherever I stand on that I'll be pitching it at NEC and our conference.

When did you join CTRWA? How has it helped?

I've been a member a year and a half. It seems like longer than that because it's been a whirlwind of new experiences and learning. I spent twelve years struggling on my own and it could have been far less if I had known and joined this group. Everyone is helpful, technically, artistically and

support-wise. I can't think of any other folks I'd rather call my friends.

Plans for the future?

That's easy. I have three books in my head and partially on paper. One romantic suspense, seven chapters written. One contemporary something, plot unclear as yet. And one historical, set in the early 1900's. That began as a literary novel, but I couldn't finish it. No happy ending possible the way it had gone. Now, I'll convert it to romance, using pieces of the original writing. Other than that, I guess I have writer's block.

Heroscopes: The Pisces Heroine

by Bonnie Staring

She's earned the Oscar for best supporting role.

Born between February 19 and March 20, the Pisces heroine is the emotional barometer of the Zodiac. When those around her are happy, she's happy – and the same is true when bad things happen to the people she cares about. This fabulous woman easily loses herself in trying to make everything right for everyone else when she should be going after her dreams.

Oh, don't cry for her, Argentina. The Pisces heroine has an uncanny intuitive ability and she does well when she "goes with her gut." This is a woman who doesn't suffer fools well, and she can spot a Florida swampland salesperson from a mile away. In business, she prefers a role where she's not the leader, but able to contribute her brilliant ideas and emotional insight – preferably in the arts and entertainment industry.

A Pisces woman is meant to be wooed. She's charming, mysterious and has a cautious way about her that brings out a man's protective nature. Successful dates for her include laughter, adventure and romance, perhaps in a corner booth at a comedy club or getting your palms read at the Psychic Expo. Famous Pisces heroines include Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Goodall, Elizabeth Taylor and Tammy Faye Bakker.

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

From the March 2009 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers.

The Hero, The Heroine and The Author – or When Three is a Crowd

by Janette Kenny

Writers play God from that first blip of a premise to the last word of a story they've written. We create people, we give them names and foibles and hopes and dreams. We devise situations that test them on all levels, and we don't make it easy for them. We build a world for them to play out their drama that can be anything from a variance of a location that is past or present or future, to a world that lies somewhere beyond our wildest imaginings.

We write their script, though we often let them ad lib. We make them hungry, heroic and horny. We hold power over their lives, and it's so tempting to abuse it.

Just as we've given these story people goals, motivations and conflicts, we must also remember it's their story we're telling—not ours. Sounds easy. But it's tempting for the writer to put themselves in their characters' shoes and do what they'd do or want to do in a similar situation.

It's their world

We imbue our characters with enough good traits to make them heroic then load them down with ample baggage in the way of back-story. We place them into impossible situations and demand they triumph over adversity to find happy ever after.

There's a good deal of psychiatry that goes into the make-up of our story people and it's to an author's advantage to know how your characters will act when faced with adversity. An alpha male and a beta male will react differently to: a rival's challenge, a woman in tears or deep trouble, and being proved wrong. The latter is damned hard for an alpha man to even admit to.

The same holds true for the heroines. The character will come off as false: if her life experience is limited and she suddenly turns worldly, or the virginal heroine switches from sheltered and naïve to aggressive and experienced, or the woman crippled by terror becomes a kick-ass avenger without warning.

Though it's often tempting to resolve story

obstacles in a manner that doesn't extend beyond our comfort zones, every goal that's met must be true to character. And for the most part, a romance novel isn't the place for the author to get on their personal soapbox unless they've given a character those same beliefs from the beginning.

Shut up and let them talk

Generally speaking, men are not verbose and women are chatty. Whether you stick with that simplification or do a switch, just stay consistent.

One big mistake I've seen in unpublished works is that all the characters sound alike. Just like in real life, every character has a voice and mind that's unique. If an author really does their job well, the reader will be able to differentiate between the main characters just by the way they talk. If the writers need tags to tell who's talking, then either the characters need much more developing, or the writer needs to stop over-directing the dialogue and let it flow naturally from the characters and their situations.

Sudden change of heart

All through the story the hero has been close-mouthed, arrogant, or had issues that relate back to his past traumatic event. Then he has this sudden change of heart and professes his love, apologizes profusely, and/or goes into a dissertation regaling the heroine's attributes and her importance in his life.

In other words, the author has turned Mr. Arrogant into Mr. Sensitive. He's been reborn for the sake of the romance plot, and then returns to his dominating self to vanquish the bad guy and save the day. While it's expected that the hero grow and change and of course fall in love with the heroine and realize life just isn't the same without her in it, he's not going to come off as real if the author does a sudden character change for the romance plot.

The all-seeing, all-knowing narrator god

The reader is deeply immersed in the POV of the main character and the story is progressing at a page-turning pace. Then the author morphs into narrator mode by tediously describing the setting, or intrudes on the action with something on the lines of ten years from now Jack would be thankful he took

Cont'd on page 6

TIPS AND TRICKS to Researching Online

by Sienna Condy

How do you find valid research sources on a net inundated with information? Try these quick tips and tricks!

1. Check Google. I know you're probably already doing this, but are you using the technology the best possible way? Google's advanced search options allow you to search within a particular site or domain. Need primary documents? Try searching .edu and .gov sites. Need to find that pesky article you read on your favorite site that keeps alluding you?
Type in the domain::

Advanced Google Search:

http://www.google.com/advanced_search?hl=en

2. The Library of Congress can be a researcher's best friend. The LoC has gone through a massive effort to put everything from historic newspapers and classic prints to period music and dance examples online with their digital collections. Need information from another country? Check out the International Collections to access the Global Gateway!

LoC Digital Collections :

<http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html>

<http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch%3Fdigital.html>

3. Google Books has caused a lot of controversy among writers recently, but it can also be an excellent source for doing period research. What better way to learn about the Victorians than by reading the books they wrote on the subject?

Google Books:

<http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=wp>

<<http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=wp>>

4. Do you have a favorite author who writes FBI thrillers, too? Then, check her site! This can't be said enough. A lot of authors share at least part of

their research online. Thanks authors!

Some authors with great online research:

Gaelen Foley: <http://www.gaelenfoley.com/index-06history.html>

<<http://www.gaelenfoley.com/index%3F06history.html>>

Michele Sinclair: <http://www.michelesinclair.com/>

Charlotte Dillon:

<http://www.charlottedillon.com/ResearchLinks.html>

5. Need a description for a four-poster bed or a floor plan for a Regency home? Try finding someone who's selling it. The best floor plan I ever found for a Regency manor was one I discovered on an English realtor's site. The wallpaper won't be accurate, but if you're trying to find where the door to the garden was or get a feel for the type of furniture, sellers can be a font of information on period pieces. And the best part? They almost always have pictures of what they're selling posted online!
6. Always remember that if all else fails, you can always ask for help. Chapter members can be a great source of information, and you should always check your local library as many have an Ask a Librarian feature.

PLCH Ask a Librarian:

<http://www.cincinnati.library.org/services/askalibrarian.asp>

Before she started on her path to publication, Sienna Condy spent a lot of time in libraries—working. Now, she uses the knowledge she gained between the shelves to write sexy, sassy Victorian romances. Sienna writes under the pseudonym Evelyn Trent. Visit her at www.evelyntrent.blogspot.com.

This article first appeared in the February issue of UnderCover, the electronic newsletter of the Ohio Valley Romance Writers of America, Ann Warner, Editor.

Travel as Inspiration

by Denise Patrick

Inspiration comes from everywhere. As an avid observer, I soak up everything around me. People watching takes on a whole new meaning when you're a writer and, if you're like me, you notice everything: speech, mannerisms, hair, eyes, walk, etc. If I get close enough, I sometimes get a whiff of perfume or cologne. I love it all.

As a writer of historicals, however, I love to travel. If I can't travel back in time to experience first hand the time period, I can do the next best thing and experience it as best I can today. My current destination of choice is Germany and Austria. It wasn't enough to have lived there, I still love going back and soaking up all the history all over again. With our kids both in college, my husband and I recently began to travel more and the first place we returned to was Germany. Three years ago, we made our first trip back in 20 years.

Although the accommodations were modern, our stay at this hotel in Regensburg was the inspiration for a grand country seat in a Regency I'm currently working on. The breakfast room was elaborately decorated and I sat and soaked up the atmosphere of a 19th century drawing room, eagerly replacing the mundane tables and chairs with sofas, settees, chairs, and a pianoforte.

Walking the cobblestone streets and strolling through the parks and museums was delightful. Tuning out the modern traffic or moving off the beaten path to avoid it allowed me to imagine what life might have been like when horses were the mode of transportation and women wore much more elaborate clothing.

I spent hours in the City Museum studying the history of the city and looking at furnishings, clothing, toys, and more from bygone eras. When I was finished there, I toured the local palace and its sumptuous gardens, and all the cathedrals, churches, and chapels I could find. After that I moved to the bookstores - and bought more books than I should have. My husband is probably relieved that, while I will study an antique and browse antique stores, I don't collect them. But the details I notice in all of these things provide me with perspective.

All in all, a trip to Germany is exactly my ideal of a romantic vacation, even if the romance is the story I eventually write using all the information I gather.

Denise spends her days researching and writing laws, her nights researching and writing historical romance, and a couple of weeks each year doing on-site research in Europe. She hasn't made it to England yet because she hasn't finished exploring her two favorite countries - Germany and Austria. You can find Denise on the web at www.denisepatrickauthor.com.

From the Utah RWA's February Newsletter.

Cont'd from page 4

this chance on love. Or they switch to omniscient to tell us a snippet of information that the POV character can't possibly know. This type of author intrusion yanks the reader out of the story so fast they get a whiplash.

It's jarring when a character acts out of character or the author becomes visible in the story. If the author veers from the characters' true self to direct the action in a way that's not in character, the reader will spot it right off. Whenever a reader is pulled out of a story, they may put the book down and not pick it up again. They may be so disillusioned they'll never try that author again.

In today's fiction, it's all about the characters and their story. Let them tell their story without interference, and keep the author visible on the cover, and jacket flap or inside promo and brief bio.

Janette Kenny, a member of Heartland Romance Writers - HeRA, writes historical Western romances for Kensington Publishing, and sexy contemporary romances for Mills & Boon Modern/Harlequin Presents. Visit her at www.jankenny.com <<http://www.jankenny.com/>> for details on her backlist as well as her upcoming 2009 releases.

This article first appeared in the February 2009 issue of HeRA's Writers Journal newsletter of the Missouri Heartland Romance Writers chapter of RWA.

Romance Writing 101 Roundtable – January 2009 by Susan Lyons

My two home Chapters, Vancouver Island and Greater Vancouver, hold informal half hour Q&A sessions ahead of each meeting, where less experienced members can ask questions of more experienced ones. Here are some of the topics that were discussed at the January 2009 sessions.

Note: The answers are “quick and dirty,” not comprehensive. As with any writing advice, they are opinions, not gospel truth. For more information, check the following sources:

*The archives of *Romance Writers Report* articles, which can be accessed by RWA members at www.rwanational.org. *RWA conference CDs, which are available from your Chapter library.

*Your Chapter loop. Feel free to ask writing-related questions.

*Online courses offered through RWA Chapters.

Q: How can I ensure my grammar and basic writing skills are good?

A: A great reference is Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*. Or consult a school English text. If you still have concerns, find someone (colleague or paid editor) who will copy-edit your work, and learn from what they do. Don't submit work until it is polished. Even if you're a wonderful storyteller, errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. will prevent your story from coming across. Also, it is assumed that a writer should be competent at these skills, and it is not the editor's job to fix their work.

Q: What if the “rules” say one thing, and the publisher’s guidelines say something different?

A: If you're submitting to a publisher, always check for their submission guidelines and follow them, whether you agree with them or not.

Q: What if the publisher’s lead author does something in their writing style that I’ve heard is “wrong”?

A: There are very few absolute wrongs and rights, but in general, if you're trying to break into the commercial fiction market (as compared to literary fiction), you're safest to stick to a relatively conventional style. Well-

established authors have more flexibility. For example, some bestselling authors have head-hopping (or ping-ponging) POV, but generally that's not going to work for a new author. One person mentioned a bestselling author's work where italics are used for sentences such as, “/He had an awfully cute butt, she thought/.” Don't try that one yourself. Having a distinctive voice is a good thing. Being eccentric when it comes to basic grammar is not.

Q: How do I find the nerve to show my work to others?

A: If you want to be published, that means people (thousands of them!) will be reading your work. So, get over your issues with it. Yes, that's easier said than done but, seriously, you do have to get over it. You might want to start with a contest run by a different RWA Chapter, where you'll be anonymous. Build up your courage and look for constructive critique partners in your local Chapter or an online Chapter. When you're asking for a critique, let the critiquer know what you're looking for. For example, you may have just started a book and want to know if, in general, the characters and story line resonate with the reader. Or you may have finished and made ten editing passes and you're now ready to submit, and you want a final, very nit-picky read. Those will be two very different critiques.

Q: How do I know when my work is finished?

A: When you've done the best job you can at the time. This means not just writing the story, but editing it, probably several times. Take a look for books, RWA workshops and articles that discuss the editing process. You may also want to get feedback from others (e.g., through contests and/or critique groups). As a final step, it's good to read your work out loud. You're guaranteed to find more things that need fixing. If, after that, you're happy with your work, then it's ready. You can fine-tune for years, but that won't necessarily improve your book, and in fact sometimes you can harm it by dulling the freshness and vitality.

Q: How long should chapters be, particularly when I'm submitting a partial or entering a contest that calls for the first three chapters?

A: In general, there's no fixed length that's desirable for chapters. Check the line/imprint you're targeting and

see what other authors do. Some lines may have fairly standard chapter lengths; others may have a lot of variety. In general, concentrate on telling your story effectively. Think about when you want to change scenes and points of view. A chapter break can be an effective time to change points of view, or to change to a different time and place. Consider what story points and hooks you want to end on. You would like the reader to turn the page to the next chapter. The third chapter should end on a significant jumping off point (hook), especially when you're submitting a partial. You want the editor/agent/judge to be dying to know what happens next.

Q: When should I insert a spacer between paragraphs?

A: Typically, use a spacer for a break between scenes – where time and/or location change. Occasionally you'll see a spacer when point of view changes within a scene, but in general this isn't recommended. Instead, make the new POV clear in the first sentence of the new section (e.g., use the POV character's name and couple it with an internal thought only that person could have). When you're inserting a spacer, it's often a good idea to insert something like * * * *, not simply extra space. If the extra space falls at the bottom of the page, it could get lost. The publisher, when doing copy-edits, will decide whether to leave the asterisks in, or to substitute blank space, according to their house style.

Q: Do I use American or English spelling?

A: If you're submitting to a US publisher, use US spelling. If you're submitting to a UK publisher, use UK spelling. In Microsoft Word, you can highlight your entire document and set the language (it's under Tools, Language, Set Language in Word 2003). If the document was in one language and you then change to another, you will also want to re-set the spell-checker (in Word 2003, go to Tool, Options, Spelling & Grammar, and click on Recheck Document).

Q: I've heard that in order for a book to qualify as a "romance" in RWA terms, it must be at least 30% romance. Is that true?

A: No. RWA doesn't have any strict formula. Always check their Policies and Procedures and contest guidelines to see the current rules. If you're submitting to the Golden Heart, make sure that the romance is a significant component of your book. If you've sold your

first book and are applying for published author recognition (or you're entering the RITA), and you and your publisher classify the book as a romance, a novel with strong romantic elements, a romantic suspense, a paranormal romance, a young adult romance, etc., RWA likely won't question this. When in doubt, contact the RWA office for clarification.

Q: What's the difference between erotic romance and erotica, and between erotic romance and romance?

A: Erotica is in essence about the protagonist's sexual journey. The story and the character arc relate to the sexual journey. There may or may not be a romance or romances, and may or may not be a happy romantic ending. Erotic romance is in essence a romance and has all the elements of romance including a happy romantic ending. As compared to a non-erotic romance, there are usually more sex scenes and they are longer and more explicit, and the language is graphic. Often in non-erotic romance, the heroine and hero fall in love, or are in the process of falling in love, before they become sexually intimate. In an erotic romance, it's often the other way around – i.e., they connect sexually first, then love grows between them.

Q: What's the difference between women's fiction and romance?

A: Women's fiction is about the protagonist's journey and character arc. It may include a romance or romances as a minor or major theme, but in essence the story is one person's journey. Romance is about two people's journey as they fall in love, struggle with external and internal conflicts, and earn a happy romantic ending. Unfortunately, publishers don't always label the books clearly – e.g., a book that's really women's fiction may be labeled romance if the publisher believes it will achieve greater sales, yet readers may be dissatisfied if there isn't sufficient romance for them, or there isn't a happy romantic ending. Writers don't usually have any say in how the publisher classifies their books.

*Susan Lyons is the Romance Writing 101 Roundtable coordinator for GVC-RWA and VIC-RWA.
www.susanlyons.ca.*

This article appeared in the February 2009 edition of Tide Lines, the newsletter of the Vancouver Island Chapter of RWA.