



Hearts Talk

Beeliar, WA

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R♥BY Winners

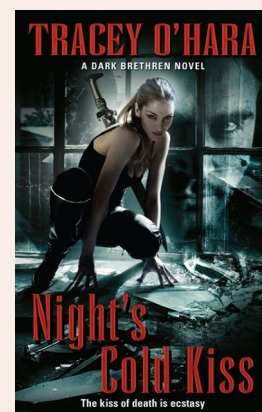
Tracey O'Hara & Sophia James

Beverley Eikli chats with two stars of down under romance, Sophia James and Tracey O'Hara, winners of 2010 Romantic Book of the Year (R♥BY) Awards in the Long Romance and Romantic Elements categories respectively.

Huge congratulations, Tracey, on winning the R♥BY Mainstream with Romantic Elements category with *Night's Cold Kiss*. Can you tell us a little about the book, please? What was your main inspiration for the plot and how did your characters and world evolve?

Thank you for the congratulations, though I am still finding it hard to actually believe it all happened. Every now and then I just have to touch my trophy to make sure it's real, but I'm extremely honoured and humbled by it.

(Continued p6)



Congratulations, Sophia, on winning the R♥BY long romance with *Mistletoe Magic*. Can you please tell us a little about the book and your inspiration for writing it?

I'd love to answer some questions and thank you for even thinking of me. It's a treat to be able to speak about my own writing journey and my books.

Mistletoe Magic was a book Linda Fildew had asked me to write as a Christmas special. It was strange having constraints on me when writing it because as Christmas is a time of joy and family and happiness I knew I had to get this into the story.

(Continued p7)



"Give your characters flaws, test those flaws, force them to change. At the book's end they should be able to do something they couldn't at the start."

Bronwyn Jameson



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For all current details & registration forms for 2011 national conference in Melbourne see: www.romanceaustralia.com

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All deadlines, entry forms and sample score sheets are at www.romanceaustralia.com in the members only section (you will need a password), or in the Files section of the RWA Contest Alert yahoo group.

For contest entry forms via mail, send request with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: RWA Contests, 20 Waller Crescent, Campbell ACT 2612

To join Contest Alert, RWA's email alert for contest entrants, go to au.groups.yahoo.com/group/RWAContestAlert/ click on the 'join this group' in the right hand corner and follow the instructions.

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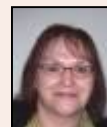
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December: Sagittarius Nov 22—Dec 21

Sagittarius – positive, versatile, eager, ambitious.
Famous Sagittarians – JFK, Louisa May Alcott, Winston Churchill, Jane Austen, Steven Spielberg.

Happy Birthday Sagittarius. Apparently this sign is blessed with an ability to never worry. It seems that people born under the ninth sign of the zodiac just don't waste their days worrying and people love being around them for their positive attitude. Obviously this doesn't apply to those Sagittarians who chose writing as a career. ☺

So.... December had rocked around again. As I write this there's tinsel in the shops and fake snow being sprayed around with wild abandon. The end of the year is nigh.

Have you achieved your writing goals for the year? Did you sell/submit/finish a book, enter a comp, join a crit group? Did you attend a conference or a roadshow? Read a how-to book or go on a writers retreat? How many words did you write? Including the ones you deleted. ☺ Its surprising when you look back, just what you do achieve in 365 days.

It is my great pleasure to announce the appointment of

AJ Macpherson as our new Hearts Talk editor. AJ, who has extensive editorial experience, will take the helm in January. I look forward to seeing the magazine evolve. We've also appointed a new web mistress—Kerrie Ptolemy. Kerrie comes to us with a twenty year background in IT and a more recent involvement in our web team. We welcome Kerrie and look forward very much to working with her.



The classy *Here to Eternity* logo debuted on the website a few weeks ago. Honed by your busy conference committee and once again produced by Kiki Lon, I think we can all agree it's stunning. Got an idea for a workshop for Melbourne? You have until December 10 to email them to:

conference@romanceaustralia.com

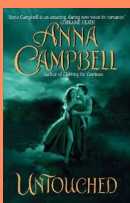
The Little Gems – our romantic short story comp – opens on Dec 24th. This year's theme gem is Garnet. For the first time prize money is being offered so if writing short is your forte, consider entering. Congratulations to those who've finaled in the STALL, the Selling Synopsis and the High Five competitions. Good luck to you all as you await the final results.

For those of you who celebrate it, I wish you all a Merry Christmas. And to all, have a happy and safe holiday.

Until next month I wish you worry-free writing and may the muse be with you.

AA

Volunteer of the Month!



Jane Beckenham: Contest judge. Jane wins a copy of *Untouched* by **Anna Campbell**.

Congratulations, Jane, and **Thank You!**



CLOSING SOON: 2011 Conference Workshop Proposals

If you're intending to submit a proposal for a workshop, panel or other breakout session at RWA's 20th conference, FROM HERE TO ETERNITY, you'd best get your skates on.

Submissions close on December 10.

Email to Speaker Liaison, Bronwyn Jameson, at conference@romanceaustralia.com.

Full details can be found on P7 of November's Hearts Talk or on the Romance Australia website. www.romanceaustralia.com/conference_melbourne.html



Credible Villains

Villainy, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder.

By Sandy Curtis

Just as readers judge a hero or heroine by their thoughts and actions, so will they judge a villain. The writer has to ensure their villain is credible, so readers believe that what that person does, and why they do it, is not only possible and probable, but logical given the personality and background created.

Determine the degree of 'badness' your villain needs to have in order to be a credible force against your hero/heroine. The stronger your h/h, the stronger your villain will need to be to battle against them. But be careful – readers are not usually willing to suspend their disbelief very far or often. Exceptions are fans of Matthew Reilly's books as their belief in the laws of physics is often wholly suspended in the name of exciting entertainment. (If you prefer a movie analogy, think the *Die Hard* series.)

Villains are also judged by other characters, and in doing so give readers a deeper insight into their persona. And don't forget a villain's thoughts are a wonderful way for the reader to see what makes him or her tick.

A lot of books and movies have featured psychopaths as villains. In his non-fiction books *Touched by the Devil* and *Working with Monsters*, criminal psychologist and profiler Dr John Clarke offers chilling insights into criminal psychopaths and 'white collar' psychopaths. He describes these as "people who lack a conscience, who live in their own complex world where society's rules are broken at will."

Psychopaths feel no empathy or sympathy for the pain and suffering of others, and though they may disguise this through feigned responses, they are often portrayed as one or two-dimensional characters in books and movies for this reason.

Although writers have successfully created memorable psychopaths in their books (think Hannibal Lector), I prefer to create villains whose motivations stem from reasons other than a personality or mental disorder, characters whose motivations and actions are completely believable, characters so authentic they feel real to the reader.

A villain may be a fanatic – someone so totally focused on their goal (which they believe to

be worthwhile to the extent that lives and property of others don't matter) that they will suppress their morals and emotions so that goal will be

achieved. The writer needs to give this type of villain an Achilles Heel, a weakness that cracks the veneer of obsession - perhaps a child, a beloved friend, or even a pet that they care more about than the people they willingly crush in order to reach their goal.

Although my books often have more than one villain, the main villain is always someone with the intelligence, cunning and tenacity that gives him or her the capability to battle the h/h and win (not that I allow that to happen ☺). A weak or mediocre villain would not be a fitting antagonist for a true h/h. I go into as much depth in creating the character of

my villain as I do for my hero and heroine. I know them intimately and know how they will react in any situation.

Motivation is the most important thing to be considered when creating a villain. The reader wants to know what has happened to the villain that drives them to take revenge, to steal the gold, to kill the hero/heroine etc.

Fantasy author Rowena Cory Daniells says, "For me a villain must have two things, a motivation so powerful that they feel anything they do is justified and the chutzpah to carry it off."

"In *The Last T'En* trilogy, Reothe was introduced as the villain. But was he really a villain? He'd sworn to kill General Tulkhan because the general invaded his kingdom. He'd been betrothed to Imoshen before General Tulkhan claimed her to cement his right to rule. And Reothe truly loved Imoshen. As someone righting an injustice, Reothe felt his actions were justified. If he had to kill a few innocents in a guerrilla attack, surely that was a lesser evil than Tulkhan marching across the known world and killing hundreds of thousands? By the end of the trilogy, I wanted the reader to be equally torn between Reothe and Tulkhan.

"In the *Chronicles of King Rolan's Kin* the real villain is Lord Cobalt, although the reader and the characters don't realise this until halfway



Motivation is the most important thing to be considered when creating a villain.

through the first book. He's the kind of villain who is so plausible the other characters don't see his hidden agenda until too late."

Like your hero and heroine, your villain must have strengths and weaknesses and have a journey to complete. They must be actively trying to thwart the hero's/heroine's goals in order to obtain their own goals. This creates strong external conflict.

Although you don't necessarily want the reader to empathise with your villain, you do want them to be interested in them. You want your reader to care for your hero and heroine, but they must also be terrified by your villain, or frustrated that they can't figure out who the villain is or why they are opposing your h/h. In my second novel, *Black Ice*, it was obvious to the reader that Brett was trying to kill Daniel, the hero, but all the instructions to Brett were made by a mystery caller to his mobile phone, and it's only at the end of the book that the real villain, the one who has manipulated Brett all along, is exposed. There is no viciousness in Brett and although he is weak, he shows some backbone when he refuses to kill Daniel's daughter. The real villain is willing to kill anyone to accomplish their goal.

Villains come in all shapes, sizes, sexes, and depths of villainy, but they are also determined by the genre of the story. The type of villain normally found in a crime novel would be out of place in a sweet romance where one would expect the villain, if there was one, to be no more than a nosy neighbour or someone who keeps the hero and heroine apart.

In my recently completed women's fiction manuscript, *Murder, Mayhem & Menopause*, the villain is inept and half-hearted about what he has set himself to do. I have created him this way not because my heroine is weak, but because the villain is at a point in his life where he is realising that not only does crime not pay, but he isn't very good at it.

Historical romance author Sara Bennett believes "a villain needs to have some humanity, some reasons behind why he *is* the villain and not the hero. In my most recent book, *A Most Sinful Proposal*, the villain, Augustus Von Hautt, believes he is the hero's half brother and that he was abandoned by his real family. Now he is determined to steal the hero's glory by finding the lost rose they are both seeking. Then, when he sees the hero has fallen in love, he plans to steal

his lady-love too.

"But there is another side to Von Hautt. He doesn't consider himself a bad man. In his eyes he's a man wronged and he wants to revenge himself. During one of his scenes, in which he remembers his mother's treatment of him and the misery of his childhood, my editor told me she felt almost sorry for him. She understood why he was the man he was, and although she didn't condone what he was doing she now saw him as a multi-facetted person rather than a two-dimensional baddie."

The last word on villains goes to historical romance author Anne Gracie:

"When considering the character and role of a villain, you need to first decide on his/her purpose in the story. If you're writing a fairly simple tale of good and evil, if the villain does not really tap into the main character's journey, and is an excuse for action rather than part of the path to enlightenment, then by all means go for the over-the-top, teeth-gnashing, classic evil baddie—they

can be a lot of fun and it's wonderfully satisfying to see him get his comeuppance.

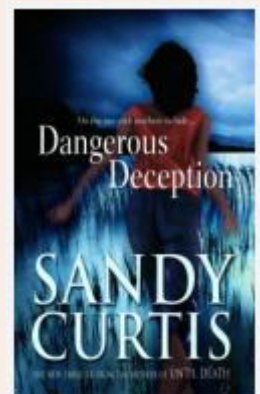
"However to make a villain really convincing and threatening, you can't play to the clichés. He won't arrive on the page wearing a "VILLAIN" sign and gnashing his teeth evilly. An obvious villain — an ugly great brute who roars around the place biting the heads off babies, is not nearly as memorable or scary as the villain who is smooth, clever, subtle, and unexpected. A good villain will surprise me, take me unawares — they'll do or say or think something that will cause my heart to leap or my blood to freeze.

"Real villains don't think of themselves as villains at all, let alone pantomime cardboard cut-out villains. He or she will be a unique individual character, complex, deeply flawed and yet frighteningly human. A great villain thinks they're heroic in some sort of twisted way—and that's the scary part."

Two of Sandy's romantic suspense novels have been R♥BY finalists and she's hoping her gorgeous hero in *Murder, Mayhem and Menopause* will also appeal to readers. For updates see www.sandycurtis.com



Villains come in all shapes, sizes, sexes, and depths of villainy...

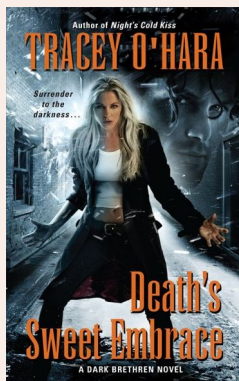


ROBY Winners

(Continued from page 1)

Tracey O'Hara & Sophia James

Tracey O'Hara



Night's Cold Kiss is about a "vampire" hunter and a vampire and a whole lot of other stuff. Although in my world they aren't your run of the mill undead vampires people are used to reading about—they are very much alive and a different race. And the "vampire" hunter isn't the run of the mill destined-to-be-a-hunter either—she very much chooses her own vocation.

The main inspiration for the book was an idea. What if the hunter was being hunted? And that is how it started. There is a strong attraction between my hero and heroine, yet my book also has a lot of action, adventure, intrigue and mystery in it.

The world evolved very organically – almost like the world has always existed, and I am just an outsider looking in and discovering it. My husband gave me the best description (well the one I think is the best) in that it is a quick, fast-paced book with a lot just simmering below the

surface that keeps you thinking long after you stop reading. Isn't he a gem?

What do you love most about *Night's Cold Kiss*? And about writing paranormals?

Gosh—what do I love most about *Night's Cold Kiss*—you may as well ask me what I like most about one of my kids. I guess the best thing I like about *NCK* is that it is written, and I will never have to write that particular book again.

I like writing paranormals because they give me a licence and freedom to create something that is totally mine (though some critics may disagree). I make my own rules, this is my world and these are my creations. I am a god in my world to play with. Plus I love playing on the dark side.

How many books had you written before, both published and pre-published, and have you always written paranormals?

My writing journey began in 2004 when I started researching my family history. I had never even had the urge or desire to write until then. My first attempt at writing a novel was an Australian Colonial saga which has half a first draft and absolutely no craft in it. But one day I will go back and finish it.

NCK was my second attempt and my first completed novel,

though it did go through quite a few drafts to get to the version that was finally published. Apart from *NCK*, I have now written the next in the *Dark Brethren*:

Death's Sweet Embrace, which

will be released on January 25th in the US.

I've also written three short stories – all of which have found publishing spots. My first appeared in the Emerald Little Gems Anthology and the two others I sold to Harlequin M&B Spice Briefs for online publication, which are published under the pen name of Tracie Sommers.

You have a full-time job other than writing. How do you fit writing into your schedule around everything else in your hectic life and can you tell us something about your routine?

Good question. I'm still trying to find that balance. I work in a full time IT position and I feel I write full time too. It's all about time management and learning to live on very little sleep. I work during the day, and write at night while my husband is at work. My children are grown, so they can take care of themselves.

What are you working on now, and what are your plans for the future?

I am currently working on the third book in the *Dark Brethren* series. After that I'm still a little unsure at this point. I guess I'll just have to wait and see what happens next. But one thing is for sure – I will definitely be writing and I definitely don't have any shortage of story ideas.

Tracey's next release is *Death's Sweet Embrace* which will hit down under shelves in April 2011. You can find her at:

www.traceyohara.com and at:
www.traciesommers.com
supernaturalunderground.blogspot.com



Sophia James



Then I wondered how a person who felt marginalised and isolated might feel to be dragged into enjoying Christmas by a woman who expended a great deal of energy into making the festival perfect.

Lilly was just lovely to write. I have a friend who is a well known designer in New Zealand and also very stylish and fashionable, and so the heroine was loosely based on her which made it such fun to write.

Your second book, *Ashblane's Lady*, was a finalist in the 2008 R♥BY. How did you feel when you'd heard you'd won with *Mistletoe Magic*?

I came to the Australian conference when *Ashblane's Lady* was a finalist and so even though I was not there this time I kind of knew what would be happening etc. I twittered all night just to see how the evening was unfolding and then was so amazed when my name came up as the winner of the long romance. I thought maybe I was seeing things and so asked my husband next to me in bed to tell me if that was my name mentioned as a winner. (By this time it was about one o'clock in NZ) It was such an amazing feeling to know I had won a R♥BY because I have always loved the prize with its little blush pink cut glass edges and it looks great in my book display.

Could you please tell us a little about your

writing journey?

I have always written in my life... sometimes lots and sometimes not so much but never nothing. I put my first finished book into the Clendon Award and won that and after a lot of revisions I was offered a 2 book contract with Harlequin Historical. I've had two more 3 book contracts and now a 4 book contract and Linda Fildew has always been my wonderful editor.

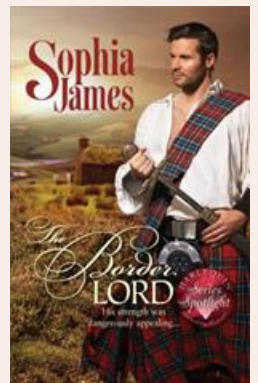
What is your writing routine? Do you write full time?

My routine is nothing like anyone else's I ever speak to because basically I don't really have one at all. I think a lot and often I don't write anything down for weeks. Then all of a sudden something will gel and I am away writing, probably to have another few long glitches on the journey because I never really plot, but I do try to know quite a bit about my characters before I begin. I have tried to be more organised but have found this just stops me writing altogether, so I trust in what will be now, and never worry about it. I am a full time writer though I am also a guide for art tours to Italy and France twice a year with my husband.

You have a new book coming out soon. Can you tell us a little bit, please, about *Cristo's* story?

Cristo's story comes out in UK and USA in June 2011. Its title is *One Illicit Night* and it is the third book in a trilogy about the three Wellingham brothers, Asher, Taris and Cristo. The story begins when the naked heroine is roughly placed upon the hero's bed. Needless to say this one illicit night colours the whole book. I do have an excerpt of the story on my website www.sophiajames.net if anyone is interested in reading it.

Sophia's current release is *One Unashamed Night*. You can visit her at: www.sophiajames.net



STOP PRESS: Conference Survey Closes Dec 6

To ensure that the 2011 and future conferences meet the needs of as many members as possible, RWA has commissioned a membership survey. You may have received an email with details. If not, or if you put it aside for "later", be sure to:

1. Find the survey at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/conf2011
2. Complete by: December 6
3. Mark your calendar: Aug 11-14, 2011





Remembering Mary Ann

By Hilary Weisser

I first saw Mary Ann Stresau on television in 1986. I was crossing my living room one morning when I saw two ladies talking about romance writing on

one of the morning shows—they were Mary Ann and Ann Kelleher. I was excited; I'd worked as a journalist and wanted to be a writer. I contacted Mary Ann, I'd run conferences on other topics so I suggested that we run a Romance Writers' Conference. From these conferences Romance Writers of Australia was born.

Mary Ann was a real American, although she became an Australian. She had that Yankee attitude to life, 'I can do that'. She and her husband Dick, a scientist, sailed to Australia on a sailboat leaving Boston in 1976 and arriving in Australia in 1981.

They first sailed down the east coast of the US, stopping at the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the West Indies, Panama, Galapagos, French Polynesia, Samoa, Fiji and finally Australia, where they lived on the boat at the Berry's Bay marina in Waverton, with their cat, for the next 15 years.

After Dick achieved great success in his field, they moved to an apartment overlooking the water they'd lived on so long. When you visited the boat Mary Ann made you feel that it was an exciting way to live although I now suspect it was probably as difficult as living in a caravan.

The Mills and Boon's editor at Chatswood was an enormous help when we started our conferences. He provided the names and contacts with Australia's most successful Romance Writers and later Luigi Bonomi came out from M&B London. He was a great inspiration.

We also linked up with Harlequin and met many good editors from the US. Despite her American background Mary Ann was very determined that our organisation should be the Romance Writers of Australia not just a branch of the Romance Writers of America.

We had no trouble getting great speakers. Although very successful these writers proved to be generous and giving in their attitudes to beginning writers. They were frank about the way they'd started and the skills they'd learned on the way.

It was exciting to meet Valerie Parv and heartening to learn that she had her start writing very practical stuff on plumbing and learned her craft, the only way you can, by writing. Marion Lennox surprised us when she said that in thinking about her heroine she thought of

someone her mother-in-law would like! Another very encouraging thing to hear from the conference was that some romance writers were so successful that their husbands gave up work to manage the business affairs of the writing wife.

Before this conference we had no idea Australian writers could do so well; we'd heard they were dirt poor and needed grants from the Arts Council to survive.

One of the most exciting talks was given by Frank Brennan, the husband of Emma Darcy and part of their writing partnership. He told us that his wife was a high school teacher and he was a pharmacist when they started their great career.

As a result of the conferences, romance writing courses, given by Mary Ann and myself, were started at TAFEs and Community Colleges. She would also take the time to look at her friends' manuscripts and give considered criticism and encouragement. A romance writing group had been started earlier by Mary Ann and Ann Kelleher at the Burwood Community Centre. After the first conference, others were started around Australia. There is no doubt that a writing group that gives honest but supportive criticism to its members is one of the best ways of learning to write and the RWA was probably the first association of writers to start these groups.

Mary Ann sent a romance novel to Harlequin and got encouragement and suggestions from the editor. When she re-submitted it six months later it was rejected, another editor had taken over. I had a similar experience with Mills & Boon, when I got a rejection with suggestions on my partial I got depressed. Neither of us knew at that time that a personal rejection letter is very encouraging.

In her personal life Mary Ann showed her great spirit when she went to California to give bone marrow to her sister who was very ill. She also showed great courage in the terrible illness from which she suffered in the last years of her life. She was never miserable with her friends. If you rang up and she was feeling rotten she'd say, "Can't talk." She never wanted you to listen to her miseries.

I realized when she died that I was always happy to see her or hear from her. She rang all her friends in the week before she died and she spoke to me the day before. We promised each we'd have lunch together soon. I had no idea she would die the next day. You could honestly say about Mary Ann, she was alive all the time she was alive. A great way to live.

Editor note: RWA is indebted to Mary Ann and her fellow founding members—Lynne Wilding, Mary Ann Stresau, Hilary Weisser, Ann Kelleher, Enisa Hasic, Dale Hoffman, Margaret Morton & Nerina Hilliard.

To Market, To Market

by Anna Campbell

Recently I was in the Romance Writers of Australia tent at the Brisbane Writers Festival where I was enthusiastically distributing bookmarks for my latest release, *My Reckless Surrender*. That yellow cover with the girl ALMOST wearing that beautiful gown really is eye-catching. Thank you, Avon Art Department!

There were some RWA members in the tent and my bookmark frenzy prompted a discussion on what marketing materials I've found most effective since I sold in 2006. Michelle invited me to share my thoughts in an article—so here it is, with the proviso that all of this is based completely on personal experience.

When you sell a book, news goes out far and wide and debut authors are inundated with firms wanting to design and print marketing material. It's hard to keep your head and remember you can't spend money willy nilly. Well, you can, but you'll be living on baked beans for the rest of the year!

Because I'm wildly in love with stationery (seriously, a visit to Officeworks sends me into heavenly transports), I went a little wild when I was first published. Luckily, it was mainly with Vistaprint who have the advantage of being reasonably priced and reliable. As part of my marketing push for *Claiming The Courtesan* and *Untouched*, I ordered business cards and various magnets and postcards. I also had sticky notes and notepads printed with website details and a picture of a Scottish castle. In hindsight, I suspect it would have been more effective to pay the bit extra to upload my covers for use on marketing materials. I printed desk calendars with beautiful landscapes and used them as prizes through my website and on blogs.

None of this was a waste of time. But each choice had drawbacks (except the business cards – Vistaprint is still a great place to get cards done cheaply). My feeling is that people liked the postcards, then threw them away as they were of no further use once you'd said, "What a pretty picture." The sticky notes and notepads were useful to get my name out there but they're expensive. I still have some on hand for charity auctions, etc., but the

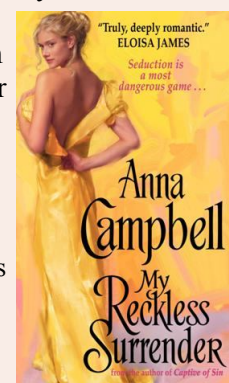
unit cost would prohibit me ordering them again. One of the upsides of a generic scene on the sticky notes and notepads is that they don't date with new releases. Magnets are great but are heavy and can be expensive to post—especially larger sizes or larger quantities. The calendars were fun and a special offer (although postage can add up—Vistaprint is a European site) and I would consider doing them again. I know people loved them and each page had my website address and logline on it. Twelve continuous months reinforcing the Anna Campbell brand isn't a bad thing!

With my third book, *Tempt The Devil*, and every book since, I've had bookmarks designed based on the artwork for each individual cover. On a friend's recommendation, I used Su at Earthly Charms but you'll find a plethora of good design firms out there. The bookmarks proved so popular, for *Tempt The Devil*, I ended up placing three more orders; for *Captive Of Sin*, I placed a much larger order originally and ended up re-ordering; for *My Reckless Surrender*, my most recent release, I placed a huge order and have been delighted with the response. For printing, I used Printing for Less, a U.S. company. They won't ship to Australia but I now have a casually employed American assistant, Kim of Author's Best Friend, so they shipped everything to her for distribution.

The overwhelming advantage of a bookmark is that people often keep them, unlike postcards. Because I only write a book a year, it's worthwhile doing one for each release, but I've seen effective general information on bookmarks (several covers or information about an author).

So here are my recommendations (I emphasise this is purely a personal view!). You need business cards with website information, contact details and your most recent release. Bookmarks are very much worth doing. Anything else can be useful but keep a strict eye on your budget.

Anna Campbell's most recent Avon historical romance is *My Reckless Surrender*. Her next release is *Midnight's Wild Passion* in May 2011. Please visit her website for excerpts, contests and latest news: www.annacampbell.info



Relevant websites:

Vistaprint www.vistaprint.com.au

Print for Less www.printingforless.com

Earthly Charms www.EarthlyCharms.com

Author's Best Friend www.romanceauthorsbestfriend.com

Dear Auntie Fi,

I have recently completed a manuscript and am keen to move to the next step. The advice I have been given so far is that I find a Literary Agent, or that I send an introductory letter/synopsis to a relevant publisher and 'hope for the best/ plan for the worst'.

Is this good advice? If so, how and where do I find an appropriate Agent for Sweet Romance stories?

*Inspired Newbie**Dear Auntie Fi,*

I love your column, witty and wise. How does one find a decent AGENT. There is a lot of information about how to write a book but none on finding an agent, once it is finished.

Frustrated in Adelaide

Dear Ladies,

Two questions about agents in a month deserve an answer!

I'll open with, if you are targeting Harlequin or Mills and Boon you technically don't need an agent. Although more and more authors dealing with the New York and Toronto offices (Desire, Intrigue, etc) seem to have an agent. However, all submissions are read, unlike some other publishing houses which will only read agented material.

So the first thing is to work out **where** in the publishing world your book belongs. If you are writing a Single Title Romance then an agent is required. Match your agent to the country of the publishing house...e.g. Australian Publisher = Australian Agent. US publisher = US Agent. If you are targeting the US then joining RWAmerica and accessing their list of agents is a great place to start.

I have been through the time consuming agent hunt for a different project but as newly minted, **Berkley Sensation author, Kylie**

Griffin has just done it, I asked her to share her process which was spookily similar to mine...start a spreadsheet! Now, over to Kylie...

"I took the methodical approach to finding an agent. I constructed a Top 20 list of names based on my copious notes of research. A great place to start is Agent Query. (<http://www.agentquery.com/>) The site lists a huge number of agents, their genre preferences, some bio information about them/their sales and contact details.

Next, I visited their websites for more information about them, any other agents at the agency, their clients, their sales/deals/books and what services they offered. I scanned their blogs (if they had one) to "get a feel" for what they were like. I googled their names to see what interviews and other information came up about them.

Sometimes I went back several years to see how they'd developed or grown in the business. I checked each one out on Query Tracker, Publishers Marketplace; Predators and Editors.

Essentially I made mini-portfolios on each of them - agent's name, contact details, genres represented, clients, sales, other interesting information - and what each agency had to offer. I made notes on my impressions of them if I'd seen or met them at conferences.

I also drew up a list of what I wanted in an agent. The qualities I felt were important to me, things like communication, passionate about my work, willing to help hands-on with the manuscript rather than just do the "business" side of things, interested in a career rather than just a deal, we had to "connect" and feel comfortable with each other.

Ask Auntie Fi...

Based on this list, I prioritized my Top 20 list from "dream agent/agency" on down.

I queried in batches of 5 starting with a mix of the top ten and bottom ten on my Top 20 list—saved my Top 5 for later. I kept another simple database on who I'd queried, with what (eg. QL & 3 chapters, QL & 5 pages etc), and then dated when a request or rejection came in, if they requested, what they'd asked for—a partial or a full.

When I received a rejection I made a comment on whether it was a standard rejection, semi-personal or personal with encouraging feedback. In the cases of getting feedback of any sort I reworked my query letter or made a note that this agent was "interested and made personal comments". This helped me in my second and third cycle of queries.

My first offer of representation came directly after the RWA Awards dinner. We talked briefly about my work, her agency and ended with her handing me her card asking to see my work. Over the next several weeks the other offers came from my email queries.

I requested phone calls and during them I asked a few questions and made more notes. What made me decide to go with Elaine Spencer from The Knight Agency? My personal criteria list in what I wanted

Letter From the Editor

I've been your friendly neighbourhood Hearts Talk Editor for just over two years, but the time has come for me to move on.

Your new editor will be **AJ Macpherson** who has extensive experience in similar roles. Also, until recently, AJ was the RWA registrar, so many of you will have met her in that capacity. She now brings her organisational skills, her attention to detail, her savvy and her shining personality to Hearts Talk.

Welcome AJ!

I'd like to thank Team Hearts Talk: all 28 members of the current team, plus those who've worked on Hearts Talk but left during the past two years, and a special mention for Cath Evans, my deputy editor.

I've appreciated your dedication and standards of excellence, and have loved getting to know you all. (I particularly appreciated that all your work made me look good!)

Also, I'd like to thank the authors and members who've provided articles and content over the past twenty eight issues. I've been

blown away by the talent and wisdom in our organisation.

Finally I need to thank the RWA executive committee—the present one and the past three committees—who've given fabulous direction and support during my tenure.

It's been a great experience—fun, rewarding and I've met so many new friends!

Rachel Bailey
Hearts Talk Editor
Sept 08—Dec 10



Your Questions Answered

by **Fiona Lowe**

Ask Auntie Fi... continued

in an agent. Communication was at the top followed by "passionate about my work", hands-on rather than business orientated only, career as opposed to deal orientated, and that elusive-to-define "connection" element.

In our phone call I felt we really, really, really connected with each other—she was friendly, professional, informative, upfront and open, easy to talk to about anything but most importantly passionate about my work.

Yes, reputation goes a long way but I looked at how they could help me long term as I developed my career as an author. What I liked about TKA was the "family/teamwork" impression I received about the agents and the agency, and it's something that they extend to their

clients.

Don't settle for "just any agent". Even if one, or six offers representation doesn't mean they're right for you. The temptation to jump at and sign with the first agent who offers you representation is almost overwhelming.

Only accept their offer if they're the one that meets your needs based on the research you've done. Don't compromise on what you want. You need someone who's as passionate about your work as you are. I hope sharing my personal experiences with you has given you some insights and maybe some ideas on how you're going to tackle your "agent hunt".

Good luck and get researching! ☺

Thanks Kylie!! Ladies, I think you have an amazingly detailed answer

so go forth, start your spreadsheet and commence your 'hunt.'

Write On!

Auntie Fi xx

Remember, if you have a niggling question you've been too scared to ask anywhere else, send it in to:
AskAuntieFi@romanceaustralia.com

and Fiona or one of her fellow aunts might choose yours for the column!

But before you submit, be aware that when we ask for advice, we don't always get what we want to hear, and that's okay because with advice, you take what you want from it and leave the rest.

And don't forget to give yourself a pseudonym like those above! ☺



**The profession of book writing
makes horse racing seem like a solid, stable business.**

**John Steinbeck,
Accepting Nobel Prize, 1962**

Three Ps and a Few Right Angles

by Terri Green



Lying down, standing up, on the kitchen table, stopped at a set of lights, I've tried it all and come to the same conclusion. When it comes to the physical task of writing, the following equation rules:

Writing = Sitting.

Lots of sitting. Sitting with pen in hand or fingers on keyboard, word after word, hour after hour, day after day.

And yet...too much sitting is a pain in the butt. Ditto, pain in the neck, back, shoulders, head, (insert whichever is applicable). That's when writing = sitting becomes the equation of misery. So what to do? You don't want to have to stop writing but you do want to avoid pain so you need to learn to **work smart not hard**.

Smart does not have to be difficult or complicated. Complicated stuff just takes up too much brain space. So, I've come up with something simple...

a checklist I call The Rule of 3 Ps.

The 3 Ps are:

- 1) Posture
- 2) Position
- 3) Pauses

It's a quick check list to run through whenever you sit down to write, a check list like the ones pilots use so that they don't forget important little things and fly into a big bad hill. In this case, a big bad writer's block called Pain.

Repeat after me.

Posture. Position. Pauses.

Write it on a sticky note and pin it where it hits you in the eyes. *Posture* involves checking what your body is up to (but please, you don't have to share this information with a friend). *Position* refers to all the external 'stuff' you write with, keyboard, screen, desk, chair, pen, etc. (which is a simple way of saying 'ergonomics'). *Pauses* involve giving your body a break at regular intervals to keep the nagging aches away. Sorry. Pausing to feed the chocolate habit doesn't count

unless you stretch or move while consuming said chocolate. I can go on about all three Ps for hours (and I will in subsequent articles/blogs) however for now we'll concentrate on posture, more specifically, computer sitting posture.

First let's talk muscle tone. Are you a floppy or a stiffy? (I can't claim full credit for that line. It's a favourite saying of another physio, Anna-Louise Bouvier). Most people are somewhere in between or have elements of both floppiness and stiffness when it comes to muscle

tone, although I've never met a man who would admit to being a floppy despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Floppies tend to sag and slump. Stiffies tend to be more rigid and sit more erect. No surprises there. Floppies need more support and propping up. Stiffies need to spend more time on loosening up and stretching. Your underlying muscle tone is one influence on your posture but there are a whole host of

other things which have an impact at any given moment, such as muscle strength, general fitness, time of day, fatigue, emotional state and the physical environment. Posture is also influenced by plain old habit. People tend to do what they've always done unless they make a conscious effort to change it.

So what is 'good' posture and 'bad' posture and was your mother right when she made you pull your shoulders back and stick your training bra out and does it matter? The answer, in a nutshell is yes. Posture does matter and boobs should lead the way.

Certain sitting postures put less load and strain on your muscles and joints, others load them up a whole lot more. Here is a short list of the features of 'good' and 'bad' sitting posture with accompanying photos to illustrate variations on this theme. Like most things in life, you can get away with being a little bad for a short amount of time and being good is hard to sustain for very long without support. However, being 'bad' all the time will eventually land you in trouble.

GOOD computer sitting posture.

- ✓ Muscles relaxed
- ✓ Trunk slightly reclined back

- ✓ Buttocks to the back of the chair
- ✓ Lumbar area well supported
- ✓ Head and shoulders centred over hips
- ✓ Shoulders relaxed
- ✓ Arms close to body
- ✓ Feet on floor or footrest (whole foot not just toes)
- ✓ Eyes focused straight ahead
- ✓ Right angles- at ankles, knees, hips, elbows. I don't know who first called ninety degrees a right angle but they sure did get it right.

BAD computer sitting posture

- × Low back slumped
- × Upper back flexed
- × Chin poking forward
- × Head tilting up or down
- × Head twisted or tilted to side
- × Shoulders hitched or hunched
- × Shoulders rounded
- × Arm/s held away from body
- × Trunk twisted
- × Legs crossed or sitting on one foot
- × Prolonged awkward posture or repetitive movement

The forward poking head posture is particularly troublesome and can lead to neck pain and headaches. For every 2-3 centimetres your head moves forward the load on your neck and shoulders doubles! Good lumbar support is vital because if you get this right it helps keep the rest of your body lined up nicely.

Take a look at the photos then take a look at yourself sitting at your workstation. Try and feel what your body is doing, the tension spots, where the angles are uncomfortable and compare it to the ideal. Is your

posture more 'relaxed-horse rider' or more 'teenage-boy-on-PlayStation'? Being *aware* of your posture is the first step toward improving it.

Sometimes it is hard to feel what your own body is doing especially if you have been stuck in abnormal postures for a long time. Abnormal can start to feel normal. You may need some external feedback, just like an athlete consulting a coach who uses video to guide their posture and performance. I used to have my computer in a spare room with a big mirrored wardrobe. Every time I turned around...EEEEK! I was confronted with my own slumping. That mirror was a huge incentive to straighten up my act.

To get a better idea of your own sitting posture you can try these ideas.

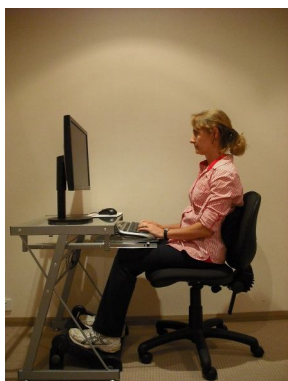
- Check your sitting posture from side-on in a mirror
- Get a friend or family member to check your alignment for you.
- Take a photo – a candid one is better (unless you are having a very very bad hair day).
- Get a professional assessment – of course I would suggest a physiotherapist but any trained health professional such as a physio, chiropractor or osteopath can pinpoint your postural strengths and weaknesses and give you some strategies to improve them.

More tips next time and if you want a better look at the pictures check out my blog. It's called <http://bodywrite.blogspot.com/> and I will reprint these articles plus add lots of other tips and have a bit of a rant over time.

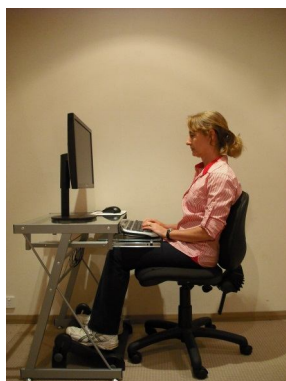
That's all for now. It's time for another P.

P for Pause (and you thought I meant something else.)

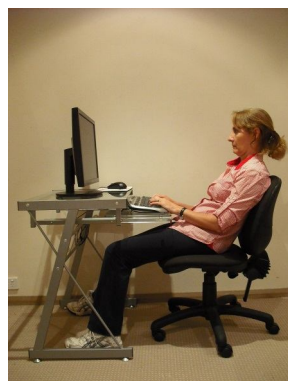
Performing my shut-down checklist now.
Stretch. Walk. Kettle.



1: Meerkat (good).



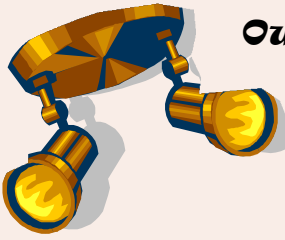
2: Good Posture.



3: The Playstation Pose.



4: The Slouching Turtle



Our Member Spotlight is on full beam over

Melissa Smith

Not only does NSW-based Melissa Smith write romance, she's the current RWA groups' Liaison Officer, so if you ever wanted to join a face-to-face group, or wondered how to go about setting one up, or had any queries whatsoever to do with groups, then Melissa is your woman. Contact her at GroupLiaison@gmail.com.

Read on to find out what she does and how she writes when she's not immersed in her liaison role.

What genre or category line do you mainly write in and what attracted you to this one?

My first love is M&B Romance (sweet) but have taken a few misguided forays into Modern Heat. Soon discovered there is only so long the dreaded 'lurve' scene can be put off! In a perfect world would also be writing Western romance.

How long have you been a member of RWA?

Plucked up the courage and joined in 2007. Most liberating thing ever did. ☺

Where do you live?

Play traffic controller to four kids, three dogs and one pony, on a small farm outside of a regional NSW town.

What drew you to the RWA group liaison role?

Know firsthand how hard it is to write in isolation (whether geographical or social) so wanted to help RWA bridge the tyranny of distance in some small way.



What kinds of jobs have you held? Any that really stood out, either good or bad? What was your very first job?

Currently have the best job in the world – being a mum ☺. In another life was a teacher/counsellor. First job was working in a summer camp in North Carolina, America. Decades later still haven't perfected the art of understanding the southern drawl!

Do you belong to a critique group? If so, is it face-to-face or online?

Am fortunate to have three incredibly talented (and patient) on-line critique partners - Alli, Mel and Rach. (Hugs) Was also very lucky to have been a member of the wonderful on-line Claytons Critique Group. (Big wave)

Are there any novels that you read over again because you liked them so much? Any that really stuck in your mind?

It goes without saying the iconic *Pride and Prejudice* sits at the top of my list. My childhood favourite, Elyne Mitchell's *Silver Brumby* series, also takes pride of place on my bookshelf alongside every Western Louis L'Amour ever wrote.

If you could be any other author who would you be and why? Would you want to meet him or her?

Too many to list—admire each and every one who can capture the magic of words on paper.

You're nine years old and dreaming of what you want to be when you grow up. The answer is...?

At nine was reading books by torchlight and scribbling stories that I put under my pillow for safekeeping, only for them to all end up in the wash. Definite sign of what was to come—waning eyesight, more scribbled stories and loads of washing with four kids!

How many manuscripts have you written?

Well...there are the finished ones and the not so finished ones... Officially finished would be three.

Do you have any writing rituals when you write?

Thanks to the kids, I have discovered iTunes so will have music on (artist depends on what scene writing) and again in a perfect world would have the ritual of taking phone off hook, locking office door and having beside me one of those Tim Tam packets which never empty.

Anything else you'd like to mention?

Would just like to thank RWA for being the supportive, dedicated and fabulous organization it is!

If you know a member you would like to see spotlighted, email us their name at

editor@romanceaustralia.com

Send your news and releases to: HTgoodnews@romanceaustralia.com by the 15th of the previous month. Please note that new releases will only be featured once, so authors may choose whether that's their Australian, overseas, digital or print release.

Member News

THE CALLS:

Noela Cowell w/a Laura O'Connell sold *African Heart* to Even Before Publishing (Wombat Books). Apr '11 release.

Tamara Gill has sold *To Sin With Scandal*, a regency erotic Naughty Nibble to Noble Romance Publishing.

Kylie Griffin, represented by Elaine Spencer (Knight Agency), signed a 3 book deal with Berkley Publishing.

THE WINS:

Anna Campbell's *Tempt The Devil* won the Heart of Denver Romance Writers Aspen Gold Award: Best Historical of 2010.

Leah Clapton w/a Leah Ashton won the Mills & Boon New Voices contest—first prize an iPad and publication.

Bec Sampson won the Heart of Denver Romance Writers Molly contest in the contemporary category.

THE FINALS:

Susanna Rogers is a finalist with two entries in the Valley of the Sun Hot Prospects Contest.

Bec Sampson's YA finalised in the MARA Fiction from the Heartland contest.

Anne Whitfield is a finalist in the EPIC Awards 2011 with her contemporary *Hooked On You*.

THE SALES:

Shona Husk sold her novella *Kissing Phoenix* to Ellora's Cave, and a fantasy short story *The Skull Jeweller's Apprentice* to Andromeda Spaceways Inflight magazine.

Fiona Lowe sold *The Boomerang Bride* (w/t), a contemporary romance to Carina Press Aug 2011.

Janni Nell sold her second Allegra Fairweather book to Carina Press.

Christina Phillips's *Enslaved*, the third book in her Forbidden series, has sold to Berkley Heat.

THE MISC:

Janni Nell's first book: *Allegra Fairweather, Paranormal Investigator* has been released as an audio book.

ROMANTIC TIMES AWARD 2010 NOMINEES:

Anna Campbell *My Reckless Surrender*

Anna Cleary *Wedding Night With A Stranger*

Robyn Donald *Rich, Ruthless And Secretly Royal*

Tina Duncan *Da Silva's Mistress*

Kelly Hunter *Exposed: Misbehaving With The Magnate*

Stephanie Laurens *The Elusive Bride*

Nicola Marsh *Marriage: For Business Or Pleasure*

Nalini Singh *Play Of Passion*

Nalini Singh *Bonds Of Justice*

Nalini Singh *Archangel's Kiss*



Jess Anastasi
SANCTUARY
Noble Romance

Member New Releases



Emily May
THE UNMASKING OF A LADY
HMB Summer Blockbuster 2010



Maree Anderson
FROM THE ASHES
Red Sage



Heather C Brown
BITE HERE
Noble Romance



Sandra Hyatt
MISTLETOE MAGIC
Silhouette Desire



Nicola Marsh
ONE INDIAN SUMMER
HMB Specials



Lindsay Armstrong
THE SOCIALITE AND THE CATTLE KING
HMB Sexy



Jess Dee
RAISING THE STAKES
Samhain



Giulietta Jones
LONESOME BRIDE
The Wild Rose Press



Anne Oliver
WHEN HE WAS BAD
HMB Sexy



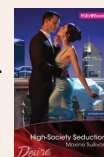
Helen Bianchin
PUBLIC MARRIAGE, PRIVATE SECRETS
HMB Summer Blockbuster 2010



Michelle Douglas
CHRISTMAS AT CANDLEBARK FARM
HMB Sweet



Fiona Lowe
THE MOST MAGICAL GIFT OF ALL
HMB Medical



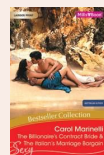
Maxine Sullivan
HIGH SOCIETY SEDUCTION
Silhouette Desire



Heather C Brown
NO CHOICE BUT LOVE
Ellora's Cave



Lisa Heidke
CLAUDIA'S BIG BREAK
Allen & Unwin



Carol Marinelli
THE BILLIONAIRE'S CONTRACT BRIDE / THE ITALIAN'S MARRIAGE BARGAIN
HMB Bestseller



Annie West
PASSION, PURITY AND THE PRINCE
HMB Sexy

Send your events to: HTevents@romanceaustralia.com by the 15th of the month prior to your event.

In Person Events

(Costings Code: M-member. MC-Member concession. NM-Non-members)

@ Friday 10 December

ASA Building your Online Presence

Michael Cairns

When: 10:00am--4:30pm

Where: Sydney Mechanics' School of the Arts,
280 Pitt Street, Sydney

Cost: \$100 M, \$232 NM

Booking deadline: Thursday 2 December

FMI + Bookings: [www.asauthors.org/scripts/](http://www.asauthors.org/scripts/cgiip.exe/WService=ASP0016/ccms.r?pageid=10332)

[cgiip.exe/WService=ASP0016/ccms.r?](http://www.asauthors.org/scripts/cgiip.exe/WService=ASP0016/ccms.r?pageid=10332)

[pageid=10332](http://www.asauthors.org/scripts/cgiip.exe/WService=ASP0016/ccms.r?pageid=10332) OR phone Emma on (02) 9318 0877

OR emma@asauthors.org

Cost: \$120 M, \$110 MC, \$170 NM

Booking deadline: Monday 3 January, 2011

FMI + Bookings:

<http://vwc.org.au/what-s-on/event/summer-school-summer-seduction/> OR (03) 9094 7855

@ Tuesday 18 January, 2011

Summer School: Novel Writing - Things I Wish I'd Known ~ Sonia Orchard

When: 10:00am--4:00pm

Where: Victorian Writers' Centre

Cost: \$120 M, \$110 MC, \$170 NM

Booking deadline: Monday 3 January, 2011

FMI + Bookings: <http://vwc.org.au/what-s-on/event/summer-school-novel-writing-things-i-wish-id-known/> OR (03) 9094 7855

@ Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 December

Everything you need to know about Publishing

Jude McGee, Nicola O'Shea & Others

When: 10:00am--4:00pm

Where: NSW Writers' Centre

Cost: \$165 M, \$190 MC, \$270 NM

FMI + Bookings: www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/

@ Saturdays 22 January to 26 February, 2011

Writers Café ~ Carol Lefevre

When: 9:30am--12:30pm

Where: SA Writers' Centre & Cafes

Cost: \$330

FMI + Bookings: carol@carollefevre.com

OR https://secure.sawc.org.au/events/2011/2011-01-22-writers_cafe.pdf

@ Monday 17 January, 2011

Summer School: Summer Seduction

Marion Lennox

When: 10:00am--4:00pm

Where: Victorian Writers' Centre

Online Events

@ Wednesday December 8 for 6 weeks

Romance Writing Secrets

Learn the secrets of writing romance novels that get publishers excited.

Lori Wilde

Cost: \$195 (AUD)

FMI + Bookings:

[http://www.ed2go.com/chisholm/online_course/rws/detail/Romance_Writing_Secrets.html?](http://www.ed2go.com/chisholm/online_course/rws/detail/Romance_Writing_Secrets.html?SearchTerms=romance)

[SearchTerms=romance](http://www.ed2go.com/chisholm/online_course/rws/detail/Romance_Writing_Secrets.html?SearchTerms=romance)



Julie Rowe, a 2006 Golden Heart double finalist, moderates the Announce Online

Writing Classes list.

The Announce Online Writing Classes list notifies subscribers of around 25 to 35 workshops available each month. Most tutorials are sponsored by Romance Writers of America chapters, but on occasion other reputable teachers are handpicked too. Interested?

Subscribe by sending an e-mail to

Announceonlinewritingclasses-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Contests!



2011 Contest Dates

Little Gems (theme Garnet)

Opens:
25 Dec 2010
Closes: 4 Feb 2011

Little Gems Cover Contest

Now Open
Deadline:
11 Feb 2011

Valerie Parv Award

Opens:
25 Feb 2011
Closes:
8 April 2011

First Kiss

Opens:
31 Dec 2010
Closes:
11 Feb 2011

Further details about contests and entry forms can be found on the RWA website
<http://www.romanceaustralia.com/contests.html>

STALI

Many congratulations to the finalists:

Christine Taylor
Diane Curran
Jo McAlister
Natalie Hatch
Rachael Blair
Suzanne Webb

Their entries will be ranked by Final Judge Dianne Moggy of Harlequin.

CONTEST FINALISTS



High Five

Finalists for the High Five Contest...

There was a tie for the 6th place so we have seven finalists this year. Congratulations to the following:

Angela Whitton
Bernice Greenham
Jackie Coates
Jenny McGregor
Jo Dixon

Melissa Dark (writing as Emmy Dark)
Rachael Blair

Their entries have been sent to Sally Williamson of Harlequin Mills and Boon for ranking.



2010 VALERIE PARV AWARD REPORT

Contest Manager Pam Collings



A number of changes occurred in the Valerie Parv Award for 2010: We went to word count, dropped the multiple entries from 3 to 2, introduced email entries and email judging, had 2 co-ordinators – 1 for category and 1 for single title. Along with this we introduced a revamped entry form which included an extensive set of instructions for entrants to follow. Kylie and I believe all these changes made a smoother and enjoyable competition for everyone and we hope the entrants agree. It certainly saw a great reduction in questions coming through, especially repetitive ones and those that did come through have resulted in some updating of the procedures to try to clarify those particular points.

We received 67 entries, a little down on last year but probably due to some of the changes introduced. Email entries were widely embraced by both entrants and judges and so we saved quite a few trees by using this method, not to mention the added benefit of having the maximum amount of time to get entries in and judged. Genres were fairly widely spread with examples from pretty much every sub-genre although the sexy element seemed to head the field.

Judges were pretty unanimous in their opinion of the high standard of entries this year. This high standard resulted in seven finalists, rather than six as we could not split sixth and seventh placings.

Some criticisms that did come through were a lack of proofreading and attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation. Even though this competition is not designed to mirror the submission process to publishers, we urge future entrants to treat this competition as if you are submitting to a publisher and make your work as perfect as you can get it. Draft, redraft and draft again and then proofread it to within an inch of its life, employing anyone you can to help you with this. By doing this you will make your entry as easy as possible to read which is always good for the judges. Some judges also pointed out that some entries had slabs of back story that was not necessary or used clichéd romance elements or plots. Always try for a fresh angle, that's what an editor will be looking for and that's what the judges seek too.

The judges were all very positive and constructive with their comments – thank you judges, without you there would be no competitions to run.

Kylie and I are stepping down as VPA co-ordinators this year. We would like to thank all the entrants from the last 2 years and judges too, as well as Lis for her understanding and patience. I would also like to thank Valerie Parv for her generosity in judging the final 6 (or 7, as this year).

Erica Hayes is stepping in to be VPA co-ordinator for 2011. Thank you in advance, Erica, for all your hard work and for so generously volunteering for yet another responsibility.

Happy Christmas & Happy Mango Trifle



It's December. Aagh! How did that happen? I'm not ready for December madness. I'm sure we missed out a couple of

months this year. I have things to do, stuff to sort, deadlines.

But it's Christmas so I need to stop.

I stop because Christmas is part of who I am.

As a romance writer I write dreams. I tap into a load of sensuous pleasure every time I sit down to write, and that well of pleasure needs feeding. Christmas does it nicely.

For I love it all. I may complain, I may even sound slightly hysterical, but don't believe me for a moment. I'm in love, from the time I set up my Christmas tree to the time I sadly give the tail end of the ham bone to the dog. Christmas is the excuse to do all the things I love. I dip my finger into the Christmas pud mix. I play with twinkly lights. I wear flashy earrings. I go round to an elderly neighbor and stick a sneaky anonymous gift in her letter box at midnight. I plan gifts. I have secrets. I drink egg nog on Christmas morning. I sing carols at the top of my lungs to an empty house. (Funny how it clears so fast.) I stuff myself to the gills with far too much of far too much.

I soak it up. Loving, laughing, living, giving. It's all the reasons I'm a romance writer wrapped up in one tinsel-tied package.

So as a romance writer, my advice to you is to enjoy your holiday season. Do stop and soak it in because if you let it, it can feed the well of love and laughter and silliness and joy for the next twelve months. And as a token of my friendship, as my thank you for putting up with my waffle for the last twelve months, and especially for all the people who've helped me with my column, here's my over-the-top gift to you.

Mango trifle. Stuff of Life.

Make it in a glass bowl 'cos it looks really pretty. A BIG glass bowl.

Recipe:

Layer of cake and lemon butter—the original recipe says Swiss Roll made with lemon butter made the day before but who has time to make a Swiss Roll especially, and I'd eat it anyway, so I buy supermarket sponge, slice one layer in half and make a lemon butter sponge sandwich to line the bottom of the bowl. If I'm only making a smallish trifle I make lamingtons with the leftovers or say Happy Christmas to my bird table.

Sprinkle cake with sherry or orange juice.

Layer of custard. If you're using custard powder (and I do) 500 ml full cream milk with extra dollop of cream :-)) plus 1 tsp vanilla. I almost double the amount of custard powder the pkt says. Sometimes this makes it a bit thick but you can always thin it down with a bit more milk before it cools. Cool the custard with a bit of clingwrap over the surface to stop skin forming. Don't put onto cake until it's cool.

Layer of lemon jelly. Since I started making this they've started selling mango jelly and I keep looking at it thinking it'd be more sensible but lemon's such a pretty colour and tastes yummy and I'm not game to mess with a whole trifle by experimenting. So it's lemon until someone else tries the mango and tells me it's better. Make a packet up, leave to cool until almost set - just quivery, then pour over custard. Leave to set fully.

1st Layer of mangoes - when I chop my mangoes, I reserve the good slices for top layer, crappy bits for bottom layer and I get to chew the pips :-)) The more decadent the occasion, the more mangoes.

Thick layer of whipped cream, slightly sweetened, plus a bit of vanilla. I use thickened cream rather than pure cream 'cos otherwise it just gets too rich.

More mangoes, nicely sliced this time, to look pretty. Done.

You can make this really big. It feeds a crowd, and I've caught grown men in my refrigerator at three in the morning having third helpings. Oh, and it keeps beautifully, it even gets better for making the day before if you can keep the aforementioned night feeders away from it.

So there you are. Happy Christmas to all.

With love from Marion

Information on markets is sourced from websites and other publications and reported in good faith. RWA Inc. does not investigate the information hereafter and cannot be held responsible for its accuracy and recommends readers verify names and addresses before submitting.

Sources: Publishers Lunch, Publishers Weekly, Dear Author, Cynthia Sterling, Preditors and Editors.

At Simon & Schuster, **Kate Ankofski** has been promoted to associate editor. Elsewhere in the company, **Meredith Wahl-Jones** moves over to the Free Press as a publicist, after working as an associate publicist at Scribner.

Brenda Copeland has joined St. Martin's as an executive editor. For the past five years she has been executive editor at Hyperion, and prior to that worked at Pocket Books and Atria.

The new Editorial Director at **Samhain Publishing** is Heather Osborn, who has acted most recently as head of Tor Romance. "Heather has a well-deserved reputation in the industry as a first-class editor," said Christina Brashear, Director of Samhain Publishing. "Her wealth of experience makes her the perfect person to lead our team through the evolving digital landscape."

"I have long admired Christina Brashear for her professionalism and sense of business and am looking forward to diving back into the world of digital-first publishing," Heather Osborn stated.

Call for submission at **Carina Press**: Carina is currently actively seeking submissions of novellas, 15-40k. Any genre/sub genre will be considered, erotica, science fiction, fantasy and everything in between, in both romance and non-romance. Note: at this time they are not accepting YA submissions. Executive Editor, Angela James, stated that this is an open call, no end date specified. Full length stories are still being looked at as always, but the company would like to fill out its catalogue of longer books with some quicker reads.

You can read editor profiles, including what kind of books they are interested in at Carina's facebook page, and you can read their submission guidelines at their website www.carinapress.com

Aspen Mountain Press has a new imprint called **Aurora Regency Historical**. They are actively seeking new historical and traditional regency

romances. They are open to new authors and established authors with a backlist they are considering publishing in e-format. For more on their guidelines head to www.auroraregency.com

Spotlight on Harlequin/Silhouette

Harlequin has announced that beginning in Spring 2011 (US), all Harlequin and Silhouette lines will carry the Harlequin imprint. No announcements of editorial changes have yet been made. This has been presented as an attempt to strengthen the brand by having all books under the one imprint.

Different editors look for different things across Harlequin, depending on the lines they represent. **Blaze** Senior Editor Brenda Chin goes for a "witty, irreverent voice". She looks for a strong voice and fresh stories that still sit within the miniseries frameworks they use at Blaze, such as *Wrong Bed* and *Forbidden Fantasies*.

Senior Editor Tina James with **Love Inspired Suspense** and **Love Inspired Historical** talked about wanting prolific authors who can stand out by writing new and creative twists that still fit the line. She gave the example of a suspense author who, rather than just writing about cops, wrote about a stunt pilot, a jewel thief, and other unusual heroes and heroines.

Silhouette Desire's Senior Editor Stacy Boyd likes three things in an author: 1) a willingness to revise, 2) adaptability in her writing and 3) a knowledge of the line she's targeting. As a new author, you may be asked to work with your editor to revise before your manuscript is accepted.

Tara Gavin spoke about **Harlequin Nocturne** and **Nocturne Bites**. The editors for this line like books that hold the chance for a miniseries or spin offs. They like stories that are unpredictable, with surprising twists. A good way to break into the Nocturne line is to write for Nocturne Bites. The e-stories they publish are 15,000 words long.

Harlequin editors actively seek new authors through the numerous contests they run. Linda Fildew, Sr. Editor at **Harlequin Mills and Boon**, is responsible for **Harlequin Romance**, **Harlequin Historical** and **Mills and Boon Historical**. She often finds authors through contests and encourages authors to enter them, particularly the Golden Heart. They like to take chances on different historical periods with their historical romance lines. Jenny Hutton, editor of **Harlequin Presents**, has also found new authors through Harlequin sponsored contests such as the I Heart Presents contest in 2009.

You do not have to have an agent to write for Harlequin. Editors welcome submissions and read all manuscripts. Find guidelines for all the Harlequin category romance lines on their website at www.eharlequin.com

Recently **Dorchester** announced its plan to move from mass market publishing to a digital first model. They are still accepting submissions, and this was announced in this column. However, there have been some recent claims from Dorchester authors that they are not receiving royalties due them from the company, and that the publishing house is selling books after the rights have been reverted to the author. This publisher has been **flagged** on preditors and editors 'not recommended' list.

Update on Dorchester: as we go to print, Dorchester has a new CEO, and has made other changes. Excerpt from a letter to their authors, reprinted at <http://ereads.com/> "In addition to Mr. Robert Anthony's appointment, the imminent revamping of our Web site and release of Winter 2010 titles, our old printer and warehouse, Offset Paperback Manufacturers, has agreed to once again distribute single-copy sales of our inventory. What this means to you: · Your fans will be able to buy your books. All of your mass-market paperback books that were in stock before the August 7 shutdown are back in stock."

The Last Word

with Christina Phillips



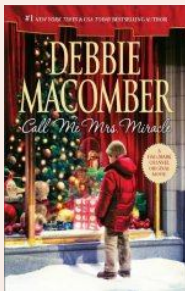
Snippets & buzz
from the front lines



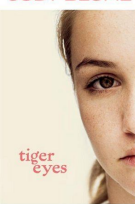
Macomber Moves Publisher

Debbie Macomber's long standing relationship with Harlequin has come to an end. Plans have been announced for the bestselling writer, who began her career writing category romance, to move to Ballantine, a division of Random House.

Harlequin will continue to publish Macomber's backlist and has four titles set for release in 2011.



JUDY BLUME

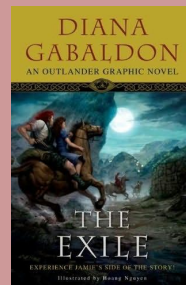


Tiger Eyes, the beloved **Judy Blume** young adult novel, is heading to the big screen, and the author has a hand in the adaptation. Blume wrote the screenplay with her son Lawrence Blume, who also is directing. The Hollywood Reporter <http://tinyurl.com/2fhtllg>

Outlander News

Ballantine is set to release *The Exile: An Outlander Graphic Novel*, based on **Diana Gabaldon's** much loved Outlander series.

The seventh Outlander installment, *Echo in the Bone*, debuted at #2 on the *New York Times* list in June.



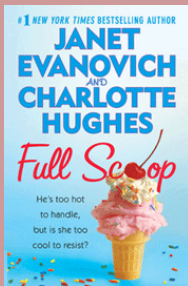
Nathan Bransford has left the agenting world to work at the tech news/review site CNET. His popular blog and forums will continue. <http://tinyurl.com/24kz74u>

A BABY, ACTUALLY

Lionsgate is set to adapt the bestselling pregnancy bible, *What To Expect When You're Expecting*, and intend to give it the Love, Actually treatment with a series of intertwining vignettes.

PopWatch <http://tinyurl.com/26v8e62>

ONE FOR THE MONEY



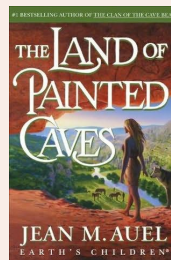
Janet Evanovich, named by Forbes as one of the top 10 bestselling authors of the year, is looking to partner with

lesser known co-authors. Galley Cat has the details on exactly what type of co-authors she's looking for:

<http://tinyurl.com/27pnycf>

Earth's Children series to continue?

Next March's *THE LAND OF PAINTED CAVES* was supposed to be Jean M Auel's sixth and final book in her Earth's Children series. But the 74-year-old author believes the story is not yet finished, and she intends to keep on writing. Publishers Lunch



MORE HARRY POTTER?

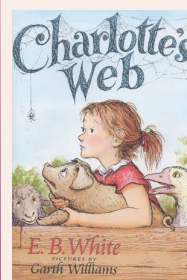
During a recent interview with Oprah Winfrey, J.K. Rowling revealed Michael Jackson offered to make *Harry Potter* into a musical. She also said that, if she wanted, she could definitely write more books in the series. Galley Cat <http://tinyurl.com/2cwwd3gn>

J.K. Rowling recently made the news for being the first winner of the 500,000 kroner (approximately \$75,000) Hans Christian Andersen Literature Award. The Guardian <http://bit.ly/cpYm8C>

THE KINGMAKERS' DAUGHTERS

Philippa Gregory, author of *The Other Boleyn Girl* has signed a three book deal with Touchstone and Simon & Schuster, continuing her series about the women in the War of the Roses. Galley Cat

<http://tinyurl.com/2czzofc>

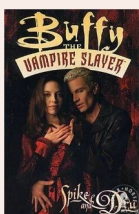


Garth Williams' original graphite-and-ink cover for the E.B. White classic, *Charlotte's Web* sold for \$155k at auction.

Altogether, 17 bids were made via internet, phone, and mail on the Heritage Auctions item. Galley Cat <http://tinyurl.com/25tf6jp>

Romance Column

Sarah Wendell, the co-creator of the Smart Bitches, Trashy Books romance blog, has joined *Kirkus Reviews* as a columnist. She will talk about romance novels and take request for readers' recommendations. Galley Cat <http://tinyurl.com/2acdwwg>



James Marsters, aka Spike from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, has written a comic for Dark Horse Publications entitled *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Spike and Dru*. He also narrates Jim Butcher's fantasy mystery series, *The Dresden Files*.



Thanks to Eleni Konstantine for cheez.