

# KEYNOTES



The newsletter of the Romance Writers of America / New York City Chapter #6 MAY 2017

**MAY 13 BRUNCH**  
SATURDAY, MAY 13, 12 NOON  
JOHN SULLIVAN'S BAR & GRILL  
\*\*\*MEMBERS ONLY\*\*\*

**Brunch**  
*Brunch*

**210 WEST 35<sup>TH</sup> STREET**  
(TRAINS: ALL TRAINS TO 34<sup>TH</sup> STREET; OFF 7<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE)



## GUEST SPEAKER: MELISSA SINGER

Melissa Ann Singer has worked at Tor/Forge for more than thirty years. Before that, she spent several years at the Berkley Publishing Group. She is currently a Senior Editor and Manager of Editorial Operations, which means that in addition to editing, she builds procedures and does other things that keep the editorial department functioning. Primarily an editor of category fiction, she has edited in practically every genre, from western to romantic suspense and from horror to science fiction and fantasy. A native of NYC, she lives in a small apartment with a large cat and has a daughter at university.

**FEE = \$35** Pay online by Friday, May 12 on the RWA/NYC website: [www.rwanyc.com](http://www.rwanyc.com).

AT THE DOOR. Members may pay at the door, BUT you must let Kate know you are coming by Friday, so she can add you to restaurant count. Email her at [kate@katemcmurray.com](mailto:kate@katemcmurray.com).

## CONTEST NEWS!

Per Contest Chair,  
Vice President LaQuette:  
The Kathryn Hayes "When Sparks Fly"  
Contest will be open for entries in  
July 2017. She is looking for judges.  
If interested, email her at  
[Laquette@novelsbylaquette.com](mailto:Laquette@novelsbylaquette.com).






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**THANK YOU!**

To Our Contributing Writers  
 Alexis Daria, Anna DePalo, Maria Ferrer,  
 Kate McMurray, Harper Miller,  
 Joan Ramirez, JN Welsh

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**2017 CHAPTER CALENDAR**


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Jan 7 Feb 4 Mar 4 Apr 1 May 13 Jun 3  
 Jul 8 Aug 5 Sep 9 Oct 7 Nov 4 Dec 2

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**MEETING INFORMATION**


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RWA/NYC meets the first Saturday of each month. Meetings are held at TRS, 40 Exchange Place, NYC. 12 noon. Membership is at the discretion of the Board. Annual dues are \$40. Make all checks payable to RWA/NYC. There will be a \$20 fee on returned checks.

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**JUNE THEME**


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**IT'S RAINING MEN**

Tell us about your Hero. Why should we love him? What makes him a hero? What makes an antihero? Do villains have any fun?

**PLUS!** We welcome articles on all topics, book reviews, conference notes, etc., etc.

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**KEYNOTES DEADLINE**


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Send articles to [keynoteseditor@gmail.com](mailto:keynoteseditor@gmail.com) by the **15th of the month**. All articles must be typed and up to 500 words. Send pictures as attachments; not in article.

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**RWA/NYC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**


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President: Kate McMurray  
 Vice President/Events: Stacey Agdern  
 Vice President/Contest: LaQuette  
 Secretary: Jennifer Welsh  
 Treasurer: Maria Cox  
 Past President: Ursula Renée

**LIAISONS & COMMITTEES**

Keynotes Editor: Ursula Renée  
 PRO Liaisons: Alexis Daria  
 PAN Liaison: Mageela Troche  
 Blog/Social Media: Maria Ferrer  
 Craft Loop: Isabo Kelly  
 Critique Group: Ursula Renée  
 Publicity: Maria Cox, Jean Joachim,  
 Michael Molloy  
 Website: Ursula Renée

**ATTENTION:** The Board welcomes all comments/suggestions/etc. Please send emails to [info@rwanyc.com](mailto:info@rwanyc.com).

**RWA/NYC**, PO Box 3722,  
 Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163  
[www.rwanyc.com](http://www.rwanyc.com)  
[info@rwanyc.com](mailto:info@rwanyc.com)  
[rwanycblogginginthebigapple.blogspot.com](http://rwanycblogginginthebigapple.blogspot.com)



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**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

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Jodi Payne  
Fran Cassano  
Jean Moses  
Jennifer Gracen

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**CHAPTER MINUTES: APRIL  
BY SECRETARY JENNIFER WELSH**

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Vice President LaQuette called the General meeting to order at 12:10 PM

President Kate McMurray called for approval of the February 2017 Chapter meeting minutes. Maria Cox made a motion to accept. Jennifer Welsh seconded the motion.

**Treasurer's Report:** Maria Cox reported that the chapter has 105 members and \$5981.32 in the bank.

**Golden Apples:** Nominations are still being accepted and the deadline has been extended to the April 5th. Categories for nominations are: Lifetime Agent, Media Source, Editor, Author, Agent, and Publisher

**Kathryn Hayes "When Sparks Fly" Contest:** The board confirmed LaQuette's proposal for a new RWA/NYC Contest. LaQuette is organizing the RWR magazine ad and additional social media collateral and forms to push to members to help get the word out. Ursula will create a web page for participants. The tentative contest schedule for entries is as follows: open for entries in July, contest closes in August/September and final judging will occur around October. The winner(s) will be announced before the end of the year in December. For those who would like to participate in judging, reach out to [Laquette@novelsbylaquette.com](mailto:Laquette@novelsbylaquette.com).

**New Secretary Announcement:** New secretary will be Jennifer Welsh.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS***Newsletter and Websites*

- April theme is Wonder Woman for Keynotes. Articles due by April 15th.

*Publicity*

- RWA/NYC night Lady Jane's July 3rd. Four member slots are available.
- Brooklyn Book Festival – Michael Molloy is organizing. Table and volunteer discussions start in July for the September festival
- Jean proposed compiling a list of publicity outlets to general meeting members. She will organize
- Romance Festival at Morris Jumel may be retired this year—no one to take ownership of it this year.

**May Brunch:** Stacy found a new location for the May 14th brunch. John Sullivan's on 35th Street (menu to follow for vegetarian options).

Round Robin begins. Speakers Tere Michaels and Rayna Vause present.

Chapter meeting adjourned at 12:42pm♥



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### **ABOUT PAN (PUBLISHED AUTHOR NETWORK)**

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The purpose of the Published Authors Network (PAN) is to establish within the RWA framework a network of communication and support to effectively promote and protect the interests of published romance authors; to open channels of communication between those romance authors and other publishing industry professionals; and to encourage professionalism on all levels and in all relationships within the publishing industry.

To be eligible for General PAN Membership: RWA General or Honorary members in good standing should have earned at least \$1,000 on a single novel or novella that meets the definition of Romance Fiction.

To be eligible for Provisional PAN Membership: RWA General or Honorary members in good standing should have: (1) contracted for the publication of a novel or novella for an advance of at least \$1,000, but said work is not yet commercially available ("Option One"); or (2) published a novel or novella, but not yet earned \$1,000 ("Option Two"). Works offered through Predatory Publishing companies shall not qualify.♥

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### **About PRO**

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The purpose of the PRO Community of Practice is to establish within RWA a network of communication and support to effectively promote and protect the interests of romance writers in the areas between manuscript completion and PAN eligibility.

To help members reach the next level, PRO focuses on the business side of writing rather than craft. This program is available to any active General or Honorary member who: (1) is not PAN-eligible and (2) has one complete original work of romance fiction of at least 20,000 words, or multiple complete original works of romance fiction which combine for a total of at least 20,000 words.♥



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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: THE DEFINITION OF ROMANCE  
BY KATE MCMURRAY**

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There was recently an article on the Book Riot website arguing in favor of romance novels without happy endings. I read it and thought, “But happy endings are the *one* requirement!”

RWA’s definition of romance is pretty loose. A romance novel must have a central romance story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. Most readers interpret the latter as the romantic couple (or ménage, etc.) ending up together.

But that still gives writers a massive amount of room to tell stories. Characters can fall in love in Regency or Medieval England, in 1920s New York, in the Wild West, in China, in India, in Africa, in South America, in the future, in space, in some imaginary place. These characters can be rich or poor or somewhere in between, they can have a whole host of interesting jobs, they can solve crime or make scientific discoveries or save the universe. Romance heroes and heroines can have any background, can be Irish or African American or Japanese; they can be vampires or cat shifters or aliens; they can be Christian or Jewish or Buddhist or atheist. The characters can be a man and a woman, a man and a man, a woman and a woman, they can be trans or asexual, or there could be three people, or seven, who all fall in love with each other. They can express their love physically behind closed doors, explicitly on the page, or not until they’re married.

The only limit to what happens in a romance novel is that there must be a love story at its heart and we need that happy ending (or at least a happy for now). Otherwise, the only limit is what your imagination can cook up.

So why do we periodically get these think pieces arguing that *literally* the one thing that defines romance as a genre should not hold true?

The author of the Book Riot piece argued that the happy ending, while satisfying, does not always reflect reality. Sure, that’s true. In real life, some great romances end in divorce or death. But love stories with unhappy endings can be found aplenty in the literary fiction section of the bookstore. Why would one argue for *romance* to change?

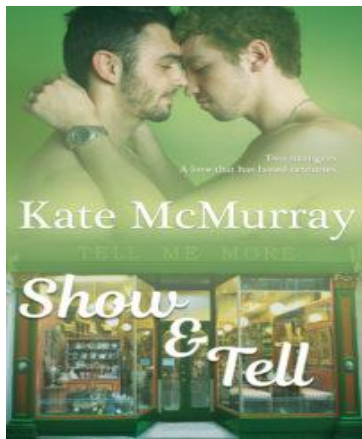
Romance authors on Twitter had theories. For example, sometimes these think pieces about romance novels not requiring happy endings come from authors who write lit fic but want romance money, so they try to argue that the book they’ve written belongs on the romance shelf where the hungry readers buy books, even if the book doesn’t technically fit the definition. Or you get an author who assumes all romance is trite and formulaic and argues their new, edgy approach to the genre—an unhappy ending, how revolutionary!—is going to change everything.

But we as romance readers know that the genre is rich and full of talented authors. Let’s keep that as a given. Because romance has two requirements: central love story, happy ending. And that’s it.

We romance readers and writers know, the guarantee of a happy ending is not a spoiler. For us, it's about the journey, not the destination, right? And given all the room that still gives to tell stories, if you can't fit a romance into those wide boundaries, you're the one lacking in creativity, not the genre.

I am all for pushing genre boundaries. But if you took the whodunit plot out of a mystery, what are you left with? If you took the suspense out of a thriller? If you took paranormal elements out of urban fantasy? Genres have parameters for a reason. They help readers find the books they want to read, mainly. And for a lot of romance readers, the happy ending is what they want. They want the hope, to believe that everything will work out.

Consider this: writers have been publishing novels with gay characters since the early twentieth century (at least!) but until fairly recently, the characters in those books met with unhappy endings. Even through the eighties, AIDS was a prominent theme. In the last 10–15 years, with the ballooning popularity of gay romance, these characters are finally getting happy endings, and we're sending a different message to readers. This is true of romances involving people of color as well. What we're saying is: You deserve happiness, not tragedy. You deserve love. And great things are possible.



So why would you rip that rug out from under the romance genre? Damon Suede often calls romance “the literature of hope.” If you want to read or write books that don't have happy endings, that's great, but those novels are not genre romance. The core of romance is hope.

*Kate McMurray is an award-winning author of gay romance and an unabashed romance fan. When she's not writing, she works as a nonfiction editor, dabbles in various crafts, and is maybe a tiny bit obsessed with baseball. She has served as President of Rainbow Romance Writers, the LGBT romance chapter of Romance Writers of America; and as Vice President of RWA/NYC. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. Visit her at [www.katemcmurray.com](http://www.katemcmurray.com).*

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## FREE PUBLICITY!

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Have a new book out? Entered and won a contest? Have an interesting topic, research, tips you want to share? An event, book, conference you'd like to review?

Keynotes is a FREE Promotion Opportunity. We welcome all subjects.

Send in your articles, news, book covers, reviews, etc., to [keynoteseditor@gmail.com](mailto:keynoteseditor@gmail.com). Articles will also be published on the Chapter Blog for DOUBLE the promotion!

Deadline: the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month. Take advantage of us!♥

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**A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN**  
**BY ANNA DEPALO**

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*This is a new monthly feature. Members are invited to share their writing room with us.*



I won't say I was looking for a room of one's own. No, my aim was loftier: a room with a view. After more than ten years of writing, I thought I deserved it!

A short history: As a recent law school grad and sleep-deprived big firm associate, I used the kitchen table in the Brooklyn apartment I shared with a roommate. At least it was sundrenched, being on the top floor. Then I moved to my own Brooklyn apartment. Alas, I never found the time to get the moving boxes out of the spare bedroom and convert it to a true office... Because enter stage right, Mr. Right, aka the boyfriend, fiancé and soon-to-be husband. We proceed to shoehorn two people into a Manhattan apartment smaller than Kim Kardashian's closet. I do my part by downsizing my "office" to a computer carrel. Baby #1 arrives soon after I become a published author. So back to Brooklyn we go...except the spare bedroom is now the nursery. I hunker down, writing on a computer in a corner of the master bedroom during naptime and whenever I have a sitter. Baby # 2 means the desktop gets placed on top of the beermaking half-fridge used for my husband's artisanal hobby (despite the fact that *I* was the one born and raised in Brooklyn, *he* went all native on me).

Finally, the happy ending: a move to the ‘burbs where, miraculously, the house comes with a drafty but well-lit sunroom. No door, so I’m forced to shoot dangerous looks at anyone coming my way. I also need to share the space with the family bikes since we don’t have a garage. I get a space heater for the winter months.

Along the way, I’ve learned a few things. I need sun. It helps to lift the spirits. No space is perfect...and sometimes you need to get out of it in order to be productive. I wish I could hang more inspirational art (framed book covers!) but I have a wall of windows. Sometimes a view can be too distracting (“here comes the mailman!”). I wish I could say this space was only used for writing (a cue to the psyche that it’s time to put down some words), but it’s not. I’m still lusting after a chaise lounge (so Victorian! even though I write contemporaries). Still, just like there’s rarely if ever a perfect writing day, and you shouldn’t wait for the muse, there’s no perfect writing space, and you shouldn’t wait for it. Just do it. Write.♥



*Anna DePalo is the USA Today best-selling author of more than a dozen romance novels. Her next book, HOLLYWOOD BABY AFFAIR, the second in The Serengetti Brothers series, will be released in June 2017 by Harlequin. The first book, SECOND CHANCE WITH THE CEO, received a starred review from Library Journal and won the NECRWA Readers’ Choice Award. You can find Anna online at [www.annadepalo.com](http://www.annadepalo.com), where you can sign up for her newsletter, [www.facebook.com/anna.depaloauthor](http://www.facebook.com/anna.depaloauthor), [www.facebook.com/AnnaDePaloBooks](http://www.facebook.com/AnnaDePaloBooks) and [twitter.com/Anna\\_DePalo](http://twitter.com/Anna_DePalo).*





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**MEMBER NEWS**

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**Ladies' Night!! Rebecca Brooks, Kay Blake** (new member), **LaQuette** and **JN Welsh** read at April's Lady Jane's Salon. See photo album.

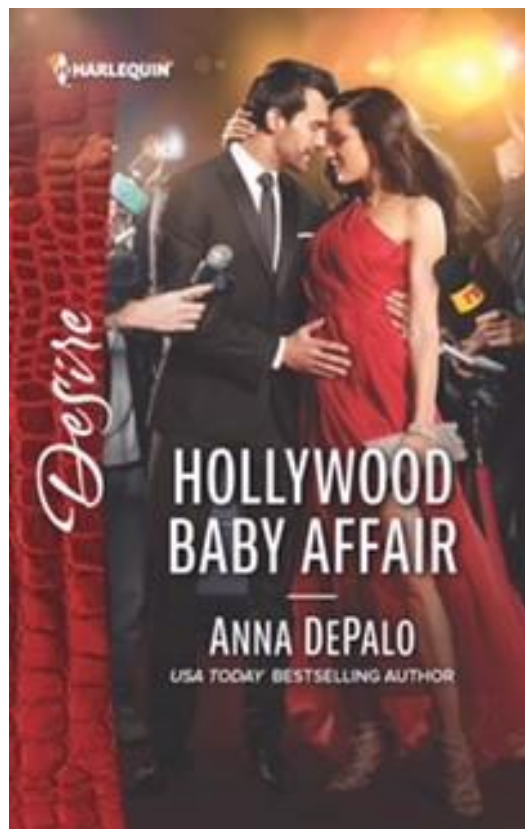
Congratulations to **Alexis Daria!** Her novel, TAKE THE LEAD, is a Golden Heart Finalist.

**Anna DePalo's** SECOND CHANCE WITH THE CEO won First Place in the Short Contemporary category of the NECRWA Readers' Choice Awards. AND, her second book in The Serengetti Brothers series, HOLLYWOOD BABY AFFAIR, will be out in June from Harlequin Desire.♥

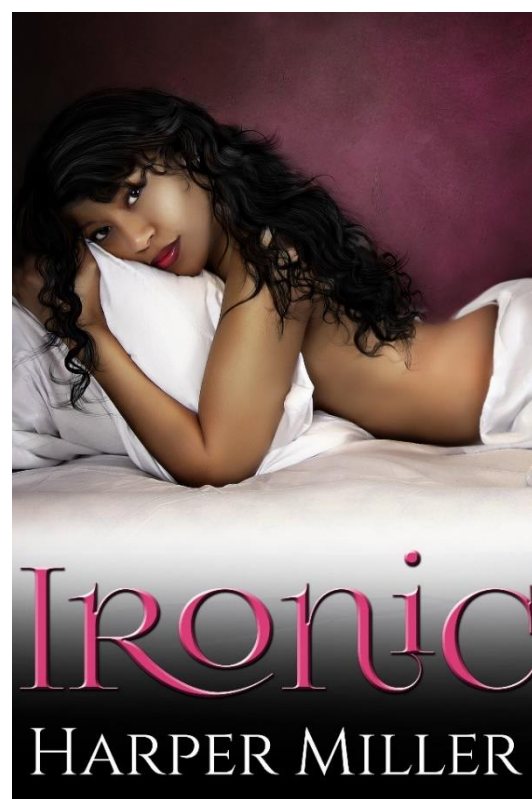
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**MEMBERS ON THE SHELF**

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**HOLLYWOOD BABY AFFAIR**  
by Anna DePalo  
Harlequin Desire

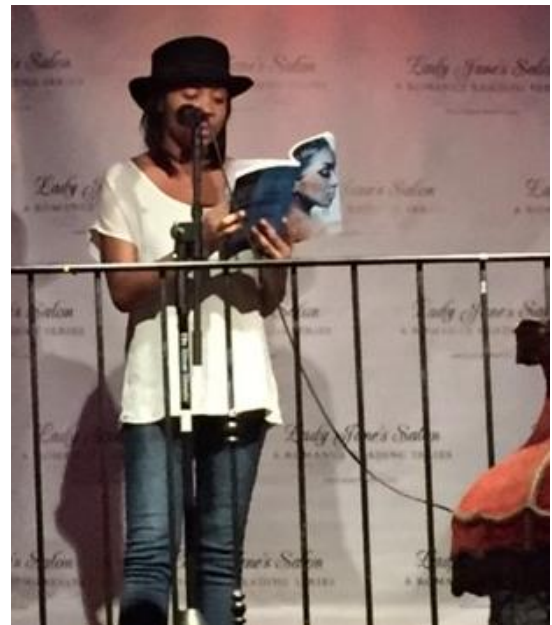


**IRONIC**  
by Harper Miller

**RWA/NYC AT LADY JANE'S SALON PHOTO ALBUM**

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Congrats to authors Rebecca Brooks, JN Welsh, Kay Blake and LaQuette who read at April's Lady Jane's Salon gathering at Madame X.♥



## MONTHLY THEME: WONDER WOMEN

*This month our members are Celebrating Heroines aka Wonder Women.*



WE ARE ALL WONDERWOMEN!



## CELEBRATING HEROINES

BY JOAN RAMIREZ



### What makes a strong heroine?

It's only my opinion, but I think a strong heroine is one who, like a tree in a storm, knows how to bend with the wind and remain standing after it passes. No matter what happens in her life, particularly with the matters of the heart, she moves forward with her life.

### How can a heroine evolve?

A heroine should move from being co-dependent on her partner and wishy washy to a strong woman who knows what she wants in life and how to achieve her goals, both personal and professional.

### What attracts us to the strong heroine?

We admire her courage in the face of adversity and cheer her on through same. We also worry that she will achieve her goals. Men find strong heroines sexy because they are not shrinking violets who cling to a man's arm. They know how to make a man feel like a man without being needy. ♥

*Joan Ramirez has published three nonfiction books and is at work on her first romance novel. She is also an ESL and Special Ed teacher and hopes to start her own enterprise consulting in both fields.*



## GODDESS ARCHETYPES IN ROMANCE BY ALEXIS DARIA

It's no secret that I love Wonder Woman. She's a kickass warrior princess goddess Amazon superhero--need I go on? She isn't a damsel in distress, and she holds her own among all the dudes in Justice League. What makes her really strong, though, is her depth of compassion for humanity. She feels, deeply. Wonder Woman shows us there's power in vulnerability, and being a woman is not a weakness.

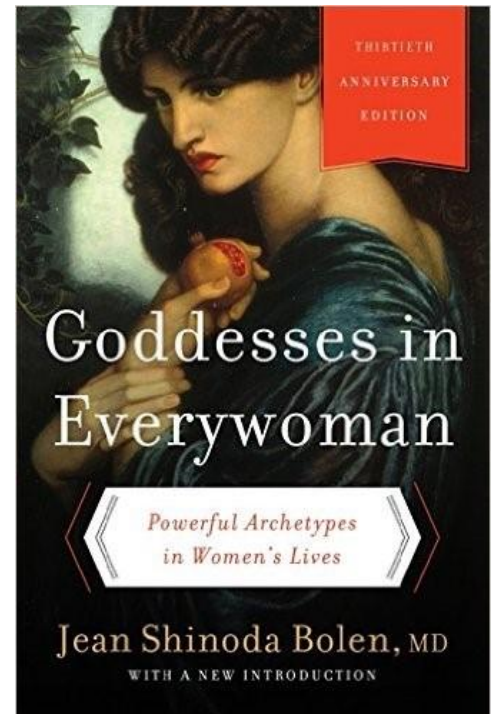
A few years ago, I read *GODDESSES IN EVERYWOMAN: POWERFUL ARCHETYPES IN WOMEN'S LIVES* by Jean Shinoda Bolen. It discusses female archetypes using Greek mythology, and talks about how women embody these archetypes at different points in their lives. I've been interested in mythology since I was a kid, so this was fascinating stuff.

When I sat down to outline a trilogy of books based on Greek goddess archetypes, I had to go deeper. I studied the Athena archetype--not just her strengths, but her weaknesses, too. Athena, goddess of wisdom, craft, and war, was a Strong Female Character™, *but* she also supported the patriarchy. Unlike Wonder Woman, Athena didn't understand or value feelings. If I was going to write a character derived from the Athena archetype, this journey had to be part of her arc. She was going to have to learn to feel, to empathize, to be compassionate. She was going to have to remove her armor, open up, and let herself be seen.

This character, Min (short for Minerva, Athena's Roman name), isn't Wonder Woman. Not yet, anyway. She hasn't done the work to open up. Her armor is her cold demeanor, her sword is her intelligence and willingness to work for her cause, and her shield is her defensive manner and sharp tongue. I had to pair her with a man who was strong, but sensitive. Braydon's divorced, and he comes from a big family--he's felt the full gamut of emotions, and he helps Min experience it for herself. Eventually, Min forms deep connections not only with Braydon, but with the other two female protagonists in the trilogy, Venus and Diana. The ability to feel deeply and be vulnerable is a superpower in and of itself, regardless of whether one has flight, bullet-proof gauntlets, or a lasso of truth. My hope is that through these stories, readers will also recognize and value their own superpowers, and expand the female archetypes society has defined for us.♥



*Golden Heart® finalist Alexis Daria's debut contemporary romance will be released in 2017 from SMP Swerve. On Sunday evenings, Alexis co-hosts #RWchat, a weekly Twitter chat for romance writers. She also serves as PRO Liaison for the New York City chapter of RWA, and Municipal Liaison for the NYC region of National Novel Writing Month. You can find her on Twitter at @alexisdaria, and follow her blog creativestaycation.com.*



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## HEROINES REMEMBERED

### BY MARIA FERRER

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Here are some of the heroines that I have fallen in love with over time. They're smart, resourceful, determined and in the end, they win their freedom, their independence and the hero!

#### **Aislinn, THE WOLF AND THE DOVE** by Kathleen Woodiwiss

A prisoner in her own home, she stubbornly refuses to submit to her conqueror and instead conquers him and wins his heart.

#### **Scarlett, GONE WITH THE WIND** by Margaret Mitchell

Can we say, Bitch?! She's selfish, self-absorbed but she is strong and loyal to Tara, to her Ashley and sometimes to Rhett.

#### **Ginny, SWEET SAVAGE LOVE** by Rosemary Rogers

A sweet virgin who grows up fast and learned to go after what she wanted, even if it was that western rogue who stole her virginity.

#### **Elizabeth Bennet, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE** by Jane Austen

She won our hearts with her spunk and her realistic view of the marriage mart. And, we loved her loyalty to her family and her going toe to toe with the hunky Mr. Darcy. Zombies notwithstanding!

#### **Ms. Celie, THE COLOR PURPLE** by Alice Walker

She was raped by her stepfather, her children stolen, and sold into marriage with an abusive husband, but Celie is a survivor. She struggled, she kept her faith, she survived and in the end, she triumphed.

#### **Lady Ana Cubillas, CONQUISTADORA** by Esmeralda Santiago

A pampered Lady of the Spanish Court, she convinces her husband to travel to Puerto Rico to take over the family plantation. There she thrives as she embraces the land, the people and her true destiny.

#### **Lt. Eve Dallas, IN DEATH series** by J.D. Robb (aka Nora Roberts)

A no-nonsense futuristic police woman who has seen the horrors of what one person can do to another, but she stands for the dead and is not ashamed to admit that sometimes she needs a shoulder to lean on, especially her sexy billionaire husband's.♥

*Maria Ferrer enjoys reading about strong women who are loyal and smart and can be true bitches when the need arises. Thank Goodness there are plenty of these heroines to read about and to write about. She hopes readers will say the same about the heroines in her stories.*





## 8 TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR HEROINE UNFORGETTABLE RAELA SCHOENHERR.

**\*\*REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF SEEKERVILLE BLOG.\*\***

In a crowded market where readers often say their biggest problem is having too many good books in their TBR piles, it can be hard to create a heroine who stands out. As an acquisitions editor, I see a lot of proposals and manuscripts and can attest to the number of stories where the heroine is fine but not particularly memorable. So, based on what I've learned from the manuscripts that cross my desk as well as my own reading,

I've put together some tips for making your heroine one of the hard-to-forget ones!

**1. Real flaws.** The rest of this list is in no particular order, but I had to put this tip at number one. I've said elsewhere that likability is important in main characters, but I think we can do a disservice when we push this too hard. There's a balance between making your heroine someone a reader wants to spend her reading hours with and making her someone who's so perfect the reader leaves the story discouraged at how imperfect she herself is in comparison. And, if we're being honest, that type of heroine can be just plain uninteresting to read about. Also, the journey a heroine takes throughout the course of a book has nowhere to go if she starts out almost perfect on page 1. And frankly, some of the most memorable heroines are either solidly in the unlikeable camp (*GONE WITH THE WIND'S* Scarlett O'Hara) or at least start out that way (*REDEEMING LOVE'S* Angel).

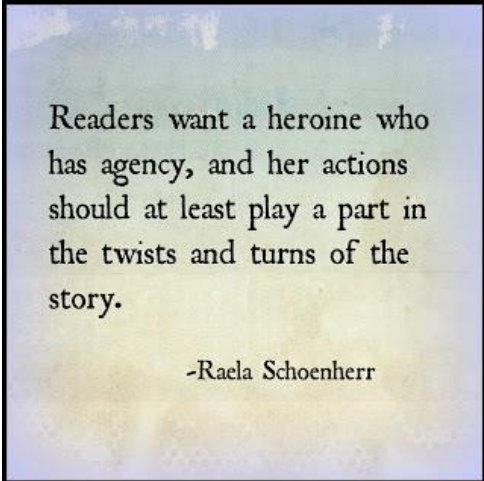
Crafting a multi-dimensional heroine isn't like answering the job interview question "What is your greatest weakness?" Don't be afraid to give her room to grow! Here are some examples where a heroine's "flaw" doesn't feel very flawed: clumsiness (You wouldn't believe how often this is the heroine's primary defect!); Forgetfulness; Caring too much; Independence. That being said, there are times when a talented author has taken one of these character traits and made it feel unique and fresh. But consider yourself forewarned that these can often feel clichéd to avid readers.

**2. Proactive rather than reactive.** Another way to phrase this would be to make sure that your heroine is not just a victim of circumstances and other people. One thing I see more often than I'd like is a heroine whose conflicts all stem from other people's actions. A heroine who merely reacts instead of acting and causing things to happen is much less compelling and can even feel superfluous to the plot. Readers want a heroine who has agency, and her actions should at least play a part in the twists and turns of the story.

**3. Complicated emotions.** If I asked any men to chime in on this, they'd swiftly agree that women and their emotions can be impossible to understand. And I think most women would agree that we have a hard time understanding our own emotions sometimes! However, it's surprising how black and white the emotions of fictional women can be in some stories. I don't think I'm alone in preferring to read about characters who struggle with and are torn between varying emotions.

As the author, it's easy to have such a clear understanding of how the character is feeling and why at any given time that this shows up on the page in a way that doesn't feel true to life. In reality, people often aren't able to instantly and clearly articulate what they are feeling, why they feel that way, and what needs to happen for them to feel differently. It's good for the author to know, but be aware of how realistic it is for your heroine to have the same clear understanding at that point in your story.

**4. Compelling platonic relationships.** As I was thinking through some of my favorite books and heroines, I found myself noticing how many of the heroines were equally memorable for their relationships with their friends, family, or antagonists as for their romances. In stories that are primarily a romance, there are times I find myself continually wondering where the heroine's friends and family are because there's hardly any attention paid to relationships other than the one with the hero. Not all heroines are going to have lots of friends and family—maybe her conflict is that she's mostly on her own in the world—but hopefully at some point in the course of the story she'll develop more than just one relationship that helps to flesh out the world of the story and add color to her personal arc. Some of the most interesting heroines to read about are the ones whose lives are multi-layered and who are juggling more than one kind of relationship. This remains true with books that aren't a romance, as well. Whatever the heroine's primary relationship in the story is, make sure to give her meaningful relationships beyond that main one.



Readers want a heroine who has agency, and her actions should at least play a part in the twists and turns of the story.

-Raela Schoenherr

**5. Sense of humor.** Although the overall tone of many books is not supposed to be funny, a heroine with a sense of humor can go a long way in making her unforgettable to readers. And a sense of humor can manifest itself in a heroine in many different ways. Some authors love writing slapstick, but others are great at creating heroines who deliver killer one-liners. Some heroines have the driest of wits and other heroines have a self-awareness of either themselves or the situation they're in that can crack readers up. There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to humor, but giving your heroine a sense of humor that fits her character, her story, and your writing style is one way to keep her in your readers' top ten list.

**6. More than just skin-deep characterization.** Sometimes an author can rely too heavily on superficial descriptors to give readers an idea of what type of person the heroine is. Some examples: hair color, name, apparel, accent.

These are important details to determine, obviously, and they do go a long way in painting the picture of what a heroine is like. However, authors should be careful not to use superficial details as a crutch. For example, I often see red hair as a fallback way of showing a heroine is feisty or not caring about fashion to show that a heroine is a tomboy. Since these are stereotypes, they're inherently going to make a character less memorable. If you do decide to match a character's description to a traditional stereotype, you'll need to be creative in making the heroine stand out from, for example, all the other British-accented female characters out there who are also stuffy and proper. If you really want to make a character unforgettable, flip a stereotype on its head and make the heroine contradict what readers are conditioned to expect.

**7. Failure.** Don't be afraid to let the heroine fail. A heroine who makes a decision that creates conflict for her that doesn't work out perfectly will certainly stand out in the slush pile. It's a hard balance because most of us want to close the last page of the book and feel happy about where we left the heroine. However, there are too many times when a heroine makes a mistake or is experiencing

conflict that never truly jeopardizes her ultimate goal and she ends the story still getting everything she wanted all along. There are ways to make happy endings that aren't predictable if you are willing to get creative and put in the time to develop a story that takes some surprising but more fulfilling turns. And even if you're writing the kind of book where the ending is non-negotiable (the mystery is solved, the characters fall in love, the villain is defeated), you can get your readers to that pre-determined end in an unpredictable way that leaves them remembering your book long after they've finished.

**8. Go for the unexpected.** My last tip is simply to go for the unexpected! Perhaps this is a cop out tip because this has pretty much been the theme of all of my other tips. But when you're brainstorming your next story, I encourage you to think about the rules of your genre and the common denominators in the books you loved and the books you didn't love. Where can you take those rules and commonalities and spin them in a new way when it comes to your heroine?

- In the type of story you write, who would normally be the typical heroine? Instead of writing that character's story, choose someone else in that world whose story wouldn't usually be the focus. For example, in the book *LONGBOURN*, the author tells the story of a servant in the house of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*'S Bennets rather than telling Lizzie's story.
- Have your heroine make a big sacrifice for something or someone and have it backfire on her rather than magically work out the way she wanted.
- Give her a goal or a purpose that is unique. Use the setting and the time period in a way that is integrally tied to that goal or purpose. If your heroine's motivation is love or saving her business or protecting her family, how could you approach it in a way that would make it different from other heroines with the same motivation?
- Have your heroine choose or do the exact opposite of what the readers will want at that point in the story. Or rather, what the readers think they want. I think we've all had a moment in a story where a character does precisely what we didn't want them to do and yet the author skillfully manages to completely change our minds by the end of the book.♥

*Raela Schoenherr is a fiction acquisitions editor and has been with Bethany House Publishers since 2008. A graduate of Bethel University, she makes her home in Minneapolis, MN and is active on Twitter at @raelaschoenherr.*





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**WINTER FELL...****BY HARPER MILLER**

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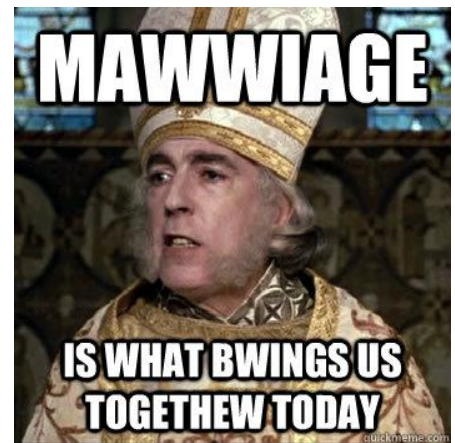
Well, I dusted off my online dating profile for my favorite site, excited about my dating prospects for winter. Maybe a message would lead to charming correspondence and a snuggle bunny to help me through the long, cold winter nights. I got heat all right. Hot messes. Men who left me wondering why I even bothered keeping this account active, although I only log on if I've received a message.

It might seem like I'm being overly dramatic, but the dating pool in NYC is tragically bad. So bad that some of the messages I receive make me want to gouge my eyes out with a spork.

Today is my parents' fifty-first wedding anniversary. FIFTY-ONE! Nowadays, couples are lucky if they can make it to the five-year mark. We're just not as patient as we used to be, I suppose. It's like everyone is Prince Humperdink and rushing the priest through the ceremony so they can smash.

Online dating was built for hookups.

Okay, I'm not going to blame *all* my dating faux pas on technology, but I think online dating has ruined the courtship aspect of a relationship in many ways. It was supposed to be a space for socially awkward men to be brave enough to approach women. Like *Revenge of the Nerds*, all the shy and unpolished men would win in the end. The woman would get an intelligent guy who was also a great conversationalist and highly erotic sex fiend *\*schwing\**, and the guy would get the attractive down-to-earth woman he had lusted after.



Well, that version of online dating works for some people.

In the digital age of dating, no one wants to "work for it." People seem to be overly stimulated and not in a good way. Apps like Tinder give users dating ADD. They can't concentrate on what's in front of them. Instead, they're swiping right to the next best thing. And you know what? I'm not alone in my assessment. I'm currently reading *MODERN ROMANCE* by Aziz Ansari, and he conducted research with a team of sociologists that supports my argument. We are not dating like our parents or our grandparent's generation. Things were much simpler then.

I'm old school. I love the getting-to-know-you phase of dating. To me, it's the best part! I'm a cool gal to have as a girlfriend, but unfortunately, the universe continuously sends commitment-phobes my way. Boo universe, boo.

Now? Dating in the technological age should earn you a spot on the Olympic team because it requires some serious conditioning.

It offers you many choices, but it's also highly competitive. Not to mention, the choices offered aren't always comprised of the best potential suitors. Choices are nice, but what is the good in having options if the majority aren't worthwhile?

This is a question that makes me wonder if it's possible to find love in a city where you can get a date in less time than it takes for a pizza to be delivered to your apartment? Again, convenience is nice, but quality is usually sacrificed. If you want a pizza in five minutes, it's going to be a pretty crappy pizza. I don't want a date in five minutes! I don't want a crappy pizza, either. GIVE ME QUALITY DAMMIT ... AND EXTRA CHEESE!

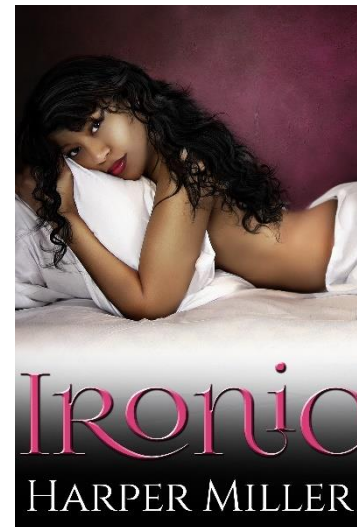
I'm a romantic at heart. Meet-cutes are what dreams are made of, but in NYC, rarely do I hear great stories of couples meeting at the grocery store while reaching for the same melon. Or a chance run in at the library while slaving away over dissertation research. Or on a subway platform after a late night of clubbing with friends. I miss those stories. I used to hear a lot of those stories, but within my circle they're now hard to come by. Most of my friends are married, and you know how they met their partners? Online.

Kudos to them for finding love! But I do wonder if they all make it to the fifty-one-year mark. Is that kind of love even sustainable for my generation?

With technological advances come major headaches. Online dating might not be *my* jam, but I keep holding out hope that when I'm fifty-one, I'll meet some gorgeous thirty-three-year-old stud who bumps into me, causing me to drop my handbag and all of the contents spill out. He bends to help me collect my belongings and doesn't scrunch his nose up at my stash of black cohosh (I kindly explain it's for hot flashes because menopause is a mf'er). The reason he bumped into me? He was focused on getting the perfect shot of Venus de Milo and didn't see me standing there, nor I him. You see, he's a photographer on assignment for *National Geographic* but had some down time, so he traveled to Paris before heading to his assignment in Peru. Oh, the setting is gonna be the Louvre. You'd better believe my cute-meet is going to be in the most romantic city in the world.

Hey, I may not have gotten my snuggle bunny this winter, but at least I still have one heck of an imagination. Besides, Spring is here. Maybe my Mister Right has been in hibernation. We shall see. ♥

*Harper Miller is a thirty-something native New Yorker. She's traveled the world and lived in a variety of places but always finds her way back to the Big Apple. A lackluster love life leaves time to explore new interests; for Harper it is writing. THE SWEETEST TABOO: AN UNCONVENTIONAL ROMANCE is her debut novel. In her mind, the perfect Alpha male possesses intellect, humor, and a kinky streak that rivals the size of California. When she isn't writing, Harper utilizes her graduate degree in the field of medical research. She enjoys fitness-related activities, drinking copious amounts of wine, and going on bad dates. Harper may have sworn off online dating, but she loves writing about couples who connect via this medium. If you're interested in erotic short stories, give the Kinky Connect Chronicles a whirl. All stories in the series are standalones.*





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**FROM THE PRO LIAISON: ALEXIS DARIA**

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**CHAPTER CONTESTS**

In March, I received The Call, which led to an agent, which led to a two-book deal with a major publisher. While I had been querying for exactly a year and a day, it was NOLA Stars' Suzannah Contest that kicked off the flurry of activity. I know some people question the value of RWA chapter contests, but I think they're a great way to receive feedback, gain recognition, and put your work in front of acquiring agents and editors.

**Feedback**

If you don't have close writing buddies or critique partners, or you want an unbiased opinion, most chapter contests offer feedback via scoresheets and comments from their first round judges. Judges are usually comprised of chapter members, PRO or PAN members, and sometimes even librarians or other industry professionals. Regardless, they're all romance readers, and they'll give you unbiased feedback on your pages.

**Recognition**

While contest wins don't directly translate into book sales, it's pretty nice to be able to list "winner" on your website. And if you're querying, it's a cool thing to add to your bio paragraph. Some contests also offer cash prizes or trophies.

**Requests**

Many chapter contests have acquiring agents and editors as final round judges. Some of these contests don't get a ton of entries, so if your first pages are really strong and you see an agent or editor listed on the chapter website that you'd like to get your work in front of, consider entering. If they like it, they'll send a request through the contest coordinators. (Even if you've already queried that person or received a request through a pitch event, final judges *have* to read the contest entries they get, and they sometimes get to those before the slush pile.)

I had a great experience with the 2016 Suzannah contest. Here's how the Northern Louisiana chapter describes it on their site:

*The Suzannah is different from most other writers' contests in that published authors and unpublished writers all compete against one another in a single pool of entries without categories. ... Why would we do such a thing? Because this format allows published authors to anonymously test the waters in a new genre. It also gives unpublished writers the experience and prestige of having their writing judged as in the 'real world' against already established authors—just the way it is on an editor's desk!*

Your book doesn't even have to be finished. Their website says, "Go ahead. Try out a new idea on us. Or dig that old manuscript out from under the bed, give it a dusting and send it in."  
(<http://nolastars.com/contest/>)

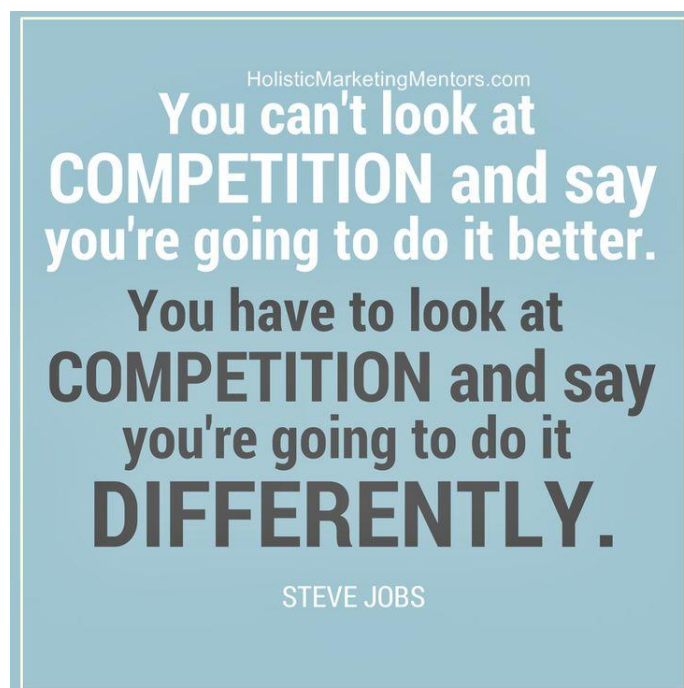
When I entered TAKE THE LEAD, I only had three chapters written. Luckily, by the time I found out I was a finalist, I had completed the first draft. The feedback I received from the scoresheets was useful in revising my chapters before I sent them in for the final round, and for making my query pages stronger. Of the six final judges, I received requests from four. Two had already requested pages from other pitch events, but it was the contest that really got their eyes on my work. Three of the four made offers, and I ultimately won the contest's grand prize. (Not gonna lie, the trophy is pretty sweet, even though it has the older title engraved on it.)

While I didn't accept the offers that came through this contest, the Suzannah was instrumental in helping me sign with my agent and get a book deal. The contest coordinators and chapter president have stayed in contact, cheering me on. And now I'm a big advocate for RWA chapter contests.

By contrast, I entered a different novel in a few contests last year. The feedback showed me I was pitching the book all wrong, and helped me decide it needed another revision pass.

If you know what you want out of them, chapter contests can be a great way to help you advance your goals and put your work out there. Make sure to check out RWA-NYC's own Kathryn Hayes "When Sparks Fly" Contest, coming soon!♥

*Golden Heart® finalist Alexis Daria's debut contemporary romance will be released in 2017 from SMP Swerve. On Sunday evenings, Alexis co-hosts #RWchat, a weekly Twitter chat for romance writers. She also serves as PRO Liaison for the New York City chapter of RWA, and Municipal Liaison for the NYC region of National Novel Writing Month. You can find her on Twitter at @alexisdaria, and follow her blog creativestaycation.com.*





## CREATING A MAILING LIST

BY TYORA MOODY

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### Why is it so important to build a mailing list?

Email marketing is a valuable part of your book marketing plan. No matter how many social media fans or followers you have, you want the ability to reach out to them in a direct way outside of social media. Don't get caught up in the idea that social media is the only way to market. With all the email a person receives in her or his inbox, when they give permission to add their email address to your list, that's a great endorsement of trust in your author brand.

*They want to know more about your books! Woo-hoo!*

### Select a Mailing List Provider

The first step in this process involves selecting a mailing list provider. In order to not overwhelm yourself with capturing emails, it's best to automate the process. A mailing list provider will provide tools to capture the information you need via a form. At a minimum, you want to capture the first and/or last name along with the email. The shorter the form, the more likely people will be willing to fill it out. People may become leery if you start asking for too much information, like a snail mail address.

The process should include a way for the subscriber to confirm their email address. Upon confirmation, the email address is stored in a database. This database can be split into various lists. For example, I write both fiction and nonfiction. In order to not send nonfiction book updates to my mystery and suspense readers who may not be interested, I have separate lists.

Here is an example of my most recent **Inside the Toolkit Newsletter**.

<http://theliteraryentrepreneur.com/inside-toolkit-winter-2017-edition/>

You will notice on the right side of my website

(<http://theliteraryentrepreneur.com/>) I have a subscription box (see image).

Some popular mailing list platforms are:

- Aweber - <http://www.aweber.com/>
- Constant Contact - <http://www.constantcontact.com/>
- Mailchimp - <http://mailchimp.com/> (I use this one)
- Your Mailing List Provider - <http://www.ymlp.com/>

### A Few Rules

Try not to get caught up in the "quantity" game. It's important that your mailing list have subscribers who really want to be on your list. It's okay that the list is small. You always have room to grow. Here are a few rules.

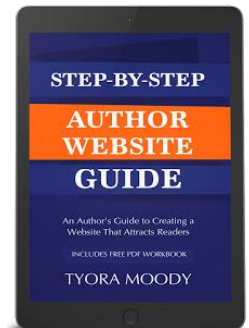
1. You want to make sure the email addresses you are capturing are via a **double opt-in process** that allows the subscriber to confirm their subscription via email.

2. **Never just add email addresses to your list without permission.** You don't want to be labeled a spammer.

## Ways to Build Your List

### 1-Make it Easy

Subscription boxes are usually added in a highly visible place on your **author website** and blog. Most of the time these areas would be near the top or in a sidebar. If you have a blog, you may want to consider adding a subscription box at the bottom of your blog posts. Wordpress has plugins that can do this automatically.



I believe an author website is the **center of their online presence**. It's your official home on the internet. The website is where an author would update readers about their books, consider hosting a blog and most importantly, **a place to capture reader's emails**. I recently released the *Step-by-Step Author Website Guide*, which is available as an ebook and a planner size paperback.

### 2-Offer a FREE Incentive

If you offer some type of feature, like free chapters, video or audio, people are usually more willing to add their email to your list in **exchange for a freebie**.

In fact, over the last few years a marketing strategy called "content upgrades" have become popular. You could write a blog post that includes a free offering like a checklist, cheat sheet or worksheet related to your blog post for readers to download in exchange for their email. It's important that you're offering something of value. You can view examples at:

<http://theliteraryentrepreneur.com/category/freebies/>

If you don't want to get into the techie part of where and how to offer a download, check out services like Selz.com or Gumroad.com. You can store your incentive and offer it for free versus placing a price on it. These services will keep a record of the emails.

### 3-Create a Contest

When hosting a contest, some authors may opt for the LIKE on their Facebook page or a follow on Twitter. A stronger option would be to have one of the requirements be to add subscribers to your mailing list. You should be very clear that entering the contest means you are subscribing to the newsletter. Using the double opt-in will help by having participants "confirm" their entry or email address.

### 4-Share the Sign-up Link

You can also include a sign-up link in your email (include in your signature) or post to social media to capture emails. Since social media offers options for visual content, you can create a nice graphic that encourages why a reader should consider subscribing to your list. Using a visual also is a great way to share any free incentives you may have like an exclusive chapter of your upcoming release or even a free short story.

### 5-Share Your Newsletter

I keep an archive of my newsletters on my website. A few days after I release a newsletter, I will add it my blog. It makes great blog content and also encourages more sign-ups via social media.

### 6-Sign-up Sheet at Offline Events

I have collected many emails simply by placing a sign-up sheet on my book table. The most important part of this process is to clearly state to those who signed up that they are being added to a mailing list. This will be a manual task to add emails. You may want to still send a confirmation email. This may help avoid adding any bad emails. I can't always read people's handwriting. I can barely read my own sometimes.

### What to Send Subscribers

Of course, after you build your list, you want to must plan to keep in touch with the subscribers. That has been my struggle over the years because you don't want to only show up in a subscriber's inbox to sell them a book. Emails to subscribers could be:

**1- Consistent Newsletter:** Many authors do a monthly or quarterly newsletters. This is an opportunity to share a personal side with you as well as may direct readers back to your website for new information they missed.

**2-Announcement Alert or Eblast:** You may use this opportunity to share about your upcoming book release, a blog tour, an upcoming radio interview, a book festival, a book signing invite, etc

**3-Blog Posts:** If you blog, you may want subscribers to receive your new blog posts immediately upon publishing. This is probably the more automated way of utilizing an email list. WordPress.com/WordPress.org and Blogger.com offer ways for your blog readers to subscribe to your blog posts. The key to building a list is so you can create a loyal group of readers interested in updates about your latest book release. This is pretty crucial to future sales.♥

*Tyora Moody is the author of Soul-Searching Suspense books which include the Reed Family Novellas, Eugeena Patterson Mysteries, Serena Manchester Series, and the Victory Gospel Series. As a literary-focused entrepreneur, she has assisted countless authors with developing an online presence via her design and marketing company, Tywebbin Creations LLC. For more ways to attract readers to your book, visit The Literary Entrepreneur.*

