

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

SPRING 2021

~THE LUCK OF THE ROMANTICS~



Next Chapter Meeting:

SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 12-3pm

AGENDA

12:00 pm – Chapter Business Meeting

12:30 pm – Author of the Month: Michael Molloy

12:45 pm – Round Robin

1:00 pm - MARKETING PANEL: The Selling of Romance Books

Speakers: Marissa Sangiacomo, Assistant Director of Marketing, St. Martin's

DJ Desmyter, Senior Marketing Manager, St. Martin's

Moderator: Jean Joachim, Chapter Treasurer



Marissa Sangiacomo is an Assistant Director of Marketing at St. Martin's Publishing Group and leads the marketing efforts for Nora Roberts/J. D. Robb and the SMP Romance program, which is home to beloved and bestselling authors Suzanne Enoch, Kerrigan Byrne, Lora Leigh, Donna Grant, Casey McQuiston, and more. She also develops and executes major campaigns for authors such as Rob Bell, Lili Reinhart, and Rachel Hawkins. When she's not working, Marissa is fond of catching the latest episode of *Grey's Anatomy* and taking Buzzfeed quizzes to determine which potato best describes her life. Follow her on Instagram at @riss4x.



DJ DeSmyter is a senior marketing manager at St. Martin's Publishing Group where he develops and executes campaigns across a variety of romance, young adult, and non-fiction titles, including RED, WHITE & ROYAL BLUE, THE TRUTH ABOUT MAGIC, and WICKED SAINTS. When he's not working or reading, he can be found wandering New York City with his camera in hand or making a list of names for his future cat. Follow him on Twitter & Instagram at @lifeinfiction.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE By Ursula Renée



You're Not Alone

Many people have claimed that writing is a solitary activity. For unless you are collaborating

with another author, you spend hours by yourself, banging away on a keyboard, scribbling in a notebook or dictating your words into a recorder. But, after a recent reflection, I realized just how much others are needed to help authors thrive.

I initially joined Romance Writers of America in 2009, because I thought it would look good on my writing resume. Editors and agents would know I was serious because I belonged to a writing organization that had members throughout the United States and other countries.

For two years I handed my money to the organization and utilized the resources on their website. But the editors were not falling over themselves to offer me a deal simply because I listed RWA on my website. I was beginning to feel there had to be more to the organization than a list of approved publishers and articles that would help improve my writing.

Deciding the answer may be with my local chapter, I attended my first RWA/NYC meeting in January 2011. The warm welcome I received from the chapter's president and the inspiration I got from listening to the other authors convinced me to join that afternoon.

For the next five years, I was an active member. I attended the monthly chapter meetings, brunches and events, walking away from each one with a desire to go home and write. The members encouraged me to submit my manuscripts and offered shoulders to cry on when I got rejections. And they celebrated with me when I got my first contract.

Unfortunately, a personal tragedy in 2016 and several more in 2017 forced me to step back from the organization. I continued to pay dues and attend the conferences, but I could no longer pull myself out of bed for the monthly chapter meetings. During this time, I was also having problems writing. I would start a novel, only to lose interest by chapter two. Plans to spend the weekend writing would result in only one hundred new words added to the manuscript. These words would be deleted the following weekend for being uninspiring drivel.

It did not occur to me until I stepped in as chapter president in March 2020 that my inability to write stemmed from my self-imposed exile from RWA/NYC. While I was away, I was not getting the monthly support from the other members. There was no one encouraging me to write, lending their ear when I had to gripe or cheering me on when I had good news to share.

Yes, I had family, friends and co-workers I could talk to. However, because they had not been in my shoes, they could not understand the joys and pains of being an author.

Only another writer can understand the frustration of not being able to come up with the right words, the dreaded edits that were waiting to be tackled, and the heartbreak of not hearing back from an editor. So, while authors may need those hours of alone time to get the words on paper, never discount the value of having writing buddies who will be by your side during your journey to getting published.

Ursula Renée is the President of RWA/NYC. She crafts stories with diverse characters who must question their beliefs to find their happily-ever-after. She prefers the early to midtwentieth century, when people began challenging society's conventions and expressing their individuality.

RWA/NYC #6

FROM THE EDITOR ROSE A. JACOBS



In this month's Keynotes newsletter, we focus on the theme of luck. Many authors have attributed their publishing successes to luck, however luck works when it meets preparation. How are you preparing your best story before releasing it to the world? Are you indiepublishing for the first time? Check out Michael J. Molloy's piece on what that process looked like. Are you thinking of writing a series? Anna DePalo talks about what writing a series entails. And if you want some tips on staying writer focused, check out my piece as well. Luck is only half the battle. Read on and mark your calendars for the special events happening at RWA/NYC. Happy reading!

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 17, 2021 (Wed)

Q&A with Rhonda Penders, The Wild Rose Press, on their new platform BOOK GEMS.

April 3, 2021 (Sat)

Chapter Meeting & Panel:

Wolves, Witches and Demons, Oh My! Speakers: Catherine Stine & Maria Vale **Author of the Month: Anna DePalo**

April 21, 2021 (Wed)

Q&A with Sourcebooks' Senior Editor, Deb Werksman

May 1, 2021 (Sat)
SPECIAL PROGRAM
Stay tuned!





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A big and warm Welcome to our two new members!

Alicia Aarons



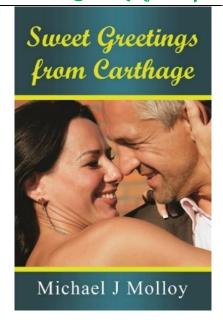
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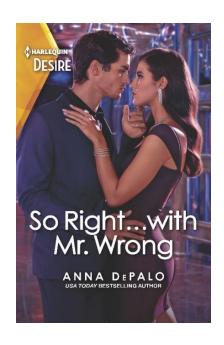
CONTEST WINS: Kathy Strobos

1st Place Winner, Hudson Valley RWA 2020 contest for PARTNER PURSUIT 3rd Place 2020 Windy City RWA, Four Seasons Contest for IS THIS FOR REAL?

NEW BOOK RELEASES



SWEET GREETINGS FROM CARTHAGE By Michael J Molloy



SO RIGHT...WITH MR. WRONG By Anna DePalo



Are you getting the most out of your RWA membership? Have you joined critique groups? Attended workshops? RAMP? Support group?

"I'm doing the NJ chapter JeRoWriMo challenge and getting a lot out of that." –Roni Denholtz

"The advice and support I receive from this NYC chapter is tremendous; the friendships are priceless. I'm on a couple of the Forums from National, but the Chapter is where I find my inspiration and reward." – Maria Ferrer

"As a fairly new member, I believe I am reaping the rewards from not only belonging to RWA but a few local chapters as well. Last year, I participated in a blind critique with the NY chapter and found it most worthwhile. This year, I participated in NJ Romance Writer's JeRoWriMo writing challenge and along the way I've participating in workshops and other wonderful opportunities. Above all, I've loved getting to know the vast array of talented members from RWA and its chapters and thus find it most useful. It's a wonderful organization. — Rose A. Jacobs

INDUSTRY NEWS



RAMP!

The Romance Writers of America's mentorship program announced their list of mentees on February 9th. Congratulations to all!

RAMP connects experienced self-published and traditional author mentors with mentees who are unpublished as well as self-published or traditional authors whose career needs a boost. Visit www.rwa.org, under Awards and Programs, for more details.

Vivian Contest

The Vivian recognizes excellence in romance writing and showcases author talent and creativity. The 2021 Vivian Contest will announce its finalists on April 14, 2021. Good luck to all who have submitted.

Visit www.rwa.org, under Awards and Programs, for more details.



Sweet Writings from Brooklyn by Michael J. Molloy

This month culminates the end of a long journey for my latest contemporary romance novel SWEET GREETINGS FROM CARTHAGE as it will debut through Amazon Publishing. But the road was pockmarked with potholes, detours and speed bumps.

I wanted so much to get the book traditionally published like my previous two. Unfortunately, I fell in disfavor with literary agents and publishers alike, although I have a lot of company in that regard. While many (particularly the agents) did not give a lucid explanation for their rejections, there were quite a few that loved the premise—they just felt it wasn't firmed up enough to join their inclusive cadre of novels. But there were a few that pointed out to me, a few glitches that required work. Well, I took their suggestions to heart and spent a great deal of time revamping the story to meet their expectations.

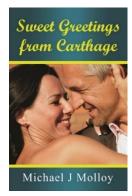
Then I got to thinking. Do I really want to jump back into the pool and wait for a publisher to throw me a life preserver? That involved more time, something I could ill afford. My heroine is based on a woman of my age that died back in 2015 as a result of Alzheimer's. I incorporated her and her surviving mother and two daughters in the story with the obvious changing of names. It's her mother, now in her eighties, that I needed to fast-track the book. The story is my present to her mother to remember her by.

For those considering indie publishing as Maria Ferrer smartly phrases it, I would advise you to choose wisely. I selected Amazon Publishing and I've been more than satisfied with them. My contact reaches out to me almost daily on updates and the progression.

He also allowed me to make fourteen minor corrections at no extra cost. Plus, I learned from a fellow writer that she is also happy with Amazon as they distribute your monthly royalties like clockwork. Although I would endorse Amazon, I still strongly suggest for you to confer with other writers who have gone this route and key on their wisdom and experience.

I have not abandoned the idea of publishing traditionally. In fact, I hope to do so with my current WIP *ALLISON*, *BROKEN*, a contemporary novel with romantic elements, that way. But indie publishing is a good recourse, so long as the story is well-written. If it's a great piece, then let the world know of it now!

SWEET GREETINGS FROM CARTHAGE will soon be available through Amazon, Smashwords and Barnes & Noble, although only through Amazon will you be able to get the book in paperback. Happy reading and keep on writing!



Michael J. Molloy has two traditionally published books, both through Gypsy Shadow Publishing. One is a contemporary romance novel entitled THE DIAMOND MAN. The second is a suspense novel called SADISTIC PATTERN, which was

voted as a top-five book by Apple iTunes in April, 2019. A graduate of St. John's University, he is a father of three and currently lives in Brooklyn. You can visit his Facebook Author Page

(www.facebook.com/molloyauthor), website (www.molloyauthor.com) and follow him on Twitter (www.twitter.com/AuthorMJM) where he has a follower base of over 3,300.

Writing Series

by Anna DePalo

To series or not to series? Today it is not even a question. Romance series—interconnected books—are everywhere, rather than being the exception that they once were. And for good reason: there's hardly a better way to hook readers than to have a follow-up book set in the same world.

I've written several series. I'm just wrapping up the Serenghetti Brothers with SO RIGHT...WITH MR. WRONG. I was first published with another four-book series, The Whittakers. And in the interval, I squeezed in a trilogy—the Aristocratic Grooms—about three female friends, a duke, an earl and a marquess. I've also written books as part of several publisher-generated series with other authors. I even participated in a series dreamed up by authors themselves and centered on some rich guys timesharing a house on Lake Tahoe. In fact, I have only one true standalone book.

There's more than one way to write a series. The connection between the books can be a place/town (Robin Carr's VIRGIN RIVER), a family (Bella Andre's Sullivan series), a set of friends (Tessa Bailey's Hot & Hammered books), etc. Increasingly common is an overall plot arc for the series—think Julia Quinn's Bridgerton books, which keep you guessing about the identity of Lady Whistledown from one novel to the next. The faster that an author can bring out the next installment in a series, usually the better from a reader's perspective.

Writing a series also has its challenges—and publishing the books relatively close together is just one. The other issue is keeping the facts straight. Marie Force has said that she rereads books before publishing the next installment—

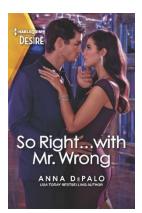
just to be sure there aren't inconsistencies. I think anything more than three or four books necessitates a true series "bible." Not too long ago, *Bustle* ran an article about Lillie Applegarth, who gets paid to put together series bibles for bestselling authors like Beverly Jenkins:

https://www.bustle.com/p/this-woman-creates-romance-series-bibles-for-a-living-19309473.

There are also many how-to resources on the Internet for those wanting a do-it-yourself approach. One good one is:

https://heartbreathings.com/how-to-create-a-series-bible-how-to-plan-write-a-series-4/.

And if the idea of a series bible is daunting, then anything that will help you keep track of facts will do. For example, by the third or fourth book, I usually do a search-and-find of previous books for keywords such as characters names and places. Then I cut and paste important passages from those books into a file in my novel-writing software (I use Scrivener) and print it out. The takeaway is: writers have an annoying habit of forgetting what they shouldn't—but if you write something down, you don't have to remember anything!



Anna DePalo's next book, SO RIGHT...WITH MR. WRONG, will be published in print and electronically in April 2021. She's thrilled to be published in multiple languages around the world, in audio, and as manga comics. She lives with her husband, son

and daughter (+ several goldfish) in New York. You can find her online at www.annadepalo.com.

Tips For Writing The Comedy Set Piece

by Kathy Strobos

In WRITING THE ROMANTIC COMEDY, Billy Mernit writes, "What a set piece has come to mean in movieland is the thing everyone talks about when they've seen the movie." Id. at 276.

Some tips for writing the comedy set piece are: (1) develop a Comic Premise OR take an ordinary circumstance and make everything go wrong; (2) force an emotional turning point; and (3) be emotionally vulnerable. The comedy will come from readers recognizing the truth of the scene.

For a comic premise, think of *Spy*, with Melissa McCarthy (the desk-bound CIA analyst becomes the 007 spy). The comic premise should provoke ideas of funny scenes. So, start with the comic premise, but then follow the character. "Once you introduce the comic premise, you need to trust that the characters—their wants, needs and fears will create more than enough action and plot to keep the narrative rolling along." THE COMIC HERO'S JOURNEY, by Steve Kaplan at p. 68.

Or take an ordinary circumstance and make everything end in disaster. "He must leave in worse shape than he was when he went in." SCENE & STRUCTURE, by Jack M. Bickham, at p. 27. If you think of the movie *The Out of Towners* with Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn, it's a trip to New York gone awry.

Two ways to think of comic premises are: (1) Fish out of Water (*Legally Blonde*); and (2) Comic Opposites. For comic opposites, ask "who could give this comic character the worst possible time?" *THE COMIC TOOLBOX* by John Vorhaus at p. 52.



In *Bringing Up Baby*, you have workaholic paleontologist Cary Grant paired with funloving, free-spirited socialite Katharine Hepburn. In *When Harry Met Sally*, "I began with Harry, based on Rob. And because Harry was bleak and depressed, it followed absolutely that Sally would be cheerful and chirpy and relentlessly, pointlessly, unrealistically, idiotically optimistic." WHEN HARRY MET SALLY by Nora Ephron, at p. X.

Billy Mernit describes a set piece as an "inspired collision between character and circumstance. Consciously comb your story for potential set-piece situations. Explore the world you've created and see what's there to tap into." WRITING THE ROMANTIC COMEDY, p. 279. I brainstorm ideas related to the character and the world.

Set pieces should force an emotional turning point and be tied to a plot point. In *Always Be My Maybe*, Sasha realizes her boyfriend Kevin is a jerk and goes home with Marcus.

So, play with the world you've created and find its comic possibility. I can't wait to read it!

Kathy Strobos is a writer living in New York City. Her first manuscript PARTNER PURSUIT was the winner of the Hudson Valley RWA's 2020 25-4-25 contest. Her second manuscript IS THIS FOR REAL? placed third in the 2020 Windy City RWA Four Seasons Contest for mainstream fiction with a central romance. If you like romcoms, please check out her blog at www.kathystrobos.com.

Five Tips for Being a Fabulous Critique Group Participant by Kate Courtright

Receiving feedback on our writing and thinking critically about other writers' work is a great way to learn how to improve our stories. What better way to do that than to participate in a critique group? As with so many things, the more you put in, the more you'll get out. Here are five tips for being a fabulous critique group participant.

- Show up consistently. When you commit
 to showing up, you discipline yourself to
 produce regular work, build trust and
 comradery with other participants, and
 become invested in the stories of your
 fellow writers.
- 2. **Follow submission guidelines.** For the critique group I co-lead with Candace Lucas, we ask participants to submit up to 20 double-spaced, paginated pages to a shared Google Drive folder one week in advance of the monthly meeting. This provides ample time for participants to read submissions, assures that everyone is submitting roughly the same amount of material, and makes it easier to follow along when discussing the story.
- 3. **Read the work of your fellow** participants. Spend time reading and thinking about the work of your fellow writers. A critique group will thrive when all participants fully engage.
- 4. **Provide honest, constructive, encouraging feedback.** When critiquing others' work, point out what is working well: a sentence you love, a

scene that made you laugh or cry, dialogue that sparkles. And with gentleness, identify areas for improvement: clunky dialogue, a scene that doesn't advance the plot, or places where you felt confused or bored. Remember, the most constructive criticism is the kind that leaves a writer feeling hopeful, encouraged, and committed to putting in the hard work to make their stories come alive.

5. **Listen bravely.** When we share our stories, we're sharing some of the most vulnerable parts of ourselves. What we most want to hear is that our story is perfect exactly like it is. It takes courage to ask for honest feedback on our precious creations. Remember what you've already done to get to this point: written your submission, shared it, and provided your own honest, constructive, encouraging feedback on your fellow writers' work. Now, lower your defenses and listen bravely. You don't have to change anything you don't want to. It's your story. But you might discover ways to make the reader love your hero as much as you do, heighten the suspense, or eliminate something unintentionally offensive. And if your fellow writers tell you how much they love your dialogue, or that the scene that cracked you up cracked them up too, or that they're looking forward to reading more of your story, make sure you value that honest, constructive, encouraging feedback too!



Kate Courtright is the author of two short love stories, Pinkie and Fire Boy, and several novels in progress.

Staying motivated during a pandemic: Three Tips

by Rose A. Jacobs

Ever since the pandemic of 2020 hit and moved my husband's job and my kids' schoolwork home full-time, finding the opportunity to write without being interrupted has been a daily challenge. As a family, we've come a long way with adjusting to each other's space and respect for one's time. But as someone who once needed complete silence to work, I had to evolve quickly if I wanted to keep my writer skills sharpened. Here are three tips on how I stayed focused during the pandemic.

- 1. Writing sprints. Invaluable to any author, sprints help accomplish two things at once: getting words down and connecting with other writers. When the pandemic struck, I was studying for my Masters' degree at Seton Hill University and in the interest of remaining positive and united, the professors began hosting sprints over zoom. It's now a permanent event for both students and alumni alike and I still love attending any chance I get. Of course, graduate school groups aren't the only way to sprint. If you belong to the RWA/NYC chapter, they also host sprints on their Facebook page every Wednesday night. And if you don't enjoy groups, then grab your critique partner or writer buddy and establish a schedule you both agree on. It's amazing how much writing you'll get done with one or more hour a week of sprinting.
- 2. **Word count goals.** This past February, I joined the NJ Romance Writers' JeRoWriMo writing challenge of 30k

words in 28 days. I knew I wouldn't make it based on my full schedule, but I did it anyway and gained 10k new words written! Until JeRoWriMo, I hadn't realized how little new words I was producing per month. But just like a resume, accomplishments are much more effective if you can quantify them. Don't let the end of your manuscript be your only threshold of success because as most know, a novel is not a quick project to complete. You will need the little rewards along the way and setting word count goals is one easy and useful method to stay motivated.

3. **Virtual Author Events.** A key element in my growth as a writer this year ironically was due to the pandemic that brought about virtual events and an otherwise bleak year turned out to be immersive and educational. For example, each week I attended a video book club where authors such as Alyssa Cole, Sarah MacLean and Jennifer Ryan, to name but a few, spoke about their latest novels, discussed writing tips, and answered questions from the audience. Each interview was informative and helped me stay focused on my writing. Sometimes all it takes is a quote from an author you admire to get you back into the game. Julia Quinn, author of the *Bridgerton* series that inspired the Netflix original show stated that, "I much prefer having written to actually writing." Although this produces a chuckle, it's reassuring to know that even the most successful of authors acknowledge how challenging writing can be on a daily basis.

Rose A. Jacobs holds an MFA in Writing Popular Fiction. She writes contemporary romance. You can connect with her on Facebook (<u>roseajacobsauthor</u>) and Twitter @Rose_A_Jacobs.

Why I Will Stay in RWA

by Gerry Bartlett

*This article was used in the February 2020 issue of Happily Ever After. Permission granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA chapters with proper credit to author and chapter.

I joined RWA in the early nineties. West Houston was my first chapter in this area. I drove an hour to get there. I was blown away by the presence of famous authors who belonged and who came to the meetings. Let me name drop-Christina Dodd, Susan Wiggs, Barbara Dawson Smith and, of course, Heather MacAllister. Heather still comes. I love that loyalty. Anyway, I sat in the audience, rubbing shoulders with these bestselling authors and finding out that they were nice people (By the way, nice is not a bad four-letter word). They freely answered questions and Christina even gave me a cover quote for my first (and only) historical novel.

I attended every month. I was at a meeting when Julie Kenner came from Austin and talked about the success of her Soccer Mom Demon Hunters series. I got up the nerve to ask about her agent at the break. No, I didn't ask her to mention me, a newbie, to that agent (that is a no, no-don't do it!). I just wanted to know who to query because I had started writing a light paranormal myself and thought her agent might like it enough to offer representation. I had queried many, many agents by then with no luck. That was in 2005 and I have had that agent ever since. I was too ignorant to know that Kim was a VP at the top agency in New York. She sold my book on proposal in three weeks and I am still writing the Real Vampires series. What an amazing piece of networking!

Yes, things have changed since then. In 2020, much publishing is on the Internet. Which has created a tremendous learning curve for all of us. But there is still plenty we can learn from

experienced authors. Sitting at home and trolling the Internet might lead you to articles that help, but do you trust everything you read? I sure don't. I belong to two chapters in Houston now and have made lifelong friends in RWA. When I attend a meeting, I soak up the good feeling of being surrounded by people who understand what I go through when I start a new book, finish one, or stare endlessly at a blank screen. We all angst over the same things-sagging sales, dwindling returns on investments and lack of interest in a once best-selling series or genre. We can ask each other questions and maybe get answers that will give us a lightbulb moment.

Of course I have heard hundreds of workshops on craft. Yet, I still attend when one is offered. If you close your mind to learning, you are closing your mind to growth. Look for the gold nugget buried in the familiar. I usually find one. Then find someone to discuss it with. We are there, those old-timers who have heard it all before. We are eager to talk, to listen, to share. I sure don't know all the answers. This new world is as puzzling to me as it is to you. I've tried switching genres, indy publishing and working with a traditional house. Want to know if those strategies worked? Ask me. You can also get on a loop that isn't filled with negativity and ask your question. Someone with the right experience might be available to help you through a story problem or a nightmare publishing one. That's networking. But you might have to stick with RWA and your local chapter to get it.

I learned all I needed to know by paying my dues and hanging around here for decades. Now I'm willing to pay it forward. Are you?





Chapter Meetings

On the first Saturday of each month (except when that Saturday falls during a holiday weekend) we have a chapter meeting to update the membership on our state and upcoming events. We also offer each attendee a chance to share their news during the Round Robin. Finally, we have guest speakers who offer tips on craft, marketing, etc. In the past, we have also invited editors, agents and booksellers to speak about the industry.

RWA/NYC Members Only Q&A

On the third Wednesday of the month, we invite industry professionals for a one-hour RWA/NYC Members Only Q&A.

Weekly Writing Sprints

To encourage members to write, we offer a Wednesday evening writing sprint. These are hosted by Michael Molloy on the chapter Facebook page. If you are not a member of our Facebook group, please email rwanycweb@gmail.com.

Critique Partner

We have created a critique partner spreadsheet to help members find someone to work with one on one. If you would like to be added to the spreadsheet or review the members looking for partners, please fill out the form in the Members Only section of the website. If you forgot the password, please email Ursula Renee president@rwanyc.com.

Monthly Critique Meetings

Starting January 2021, RWA/NYC will have monthly critique meetings for members to receive and offer constructive feedback on

works-in-progress. The instructions, date and time will be posted on the chapter's forum.

Writers Support Group

Between the ever-changing publishing industry, finding the right words to put on paper and dealing with our audience, writing is not an easy profession. RWA/NYC has formed a support group to give members a chance to discuss problems they may have in the industry; air grievances or find a shoulder to cry on. The gatherings are informal. The dates and times will be posted on the RWA/NYC forum and on the chapter's Facebook page.

Contests

Yearly BIG APPLE contest.

Keynotes Newsletter

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

Send your good news to **keynoteseditor@gmail.com**

We welcome all writing and publishing subjects. Articles will also be published on the Chapter Blog for DOUBLE the promotion! Published quarterly.

Social Media

Opportunities to be featured on the chapter blog

(http://rwanycblogginginthebigapple.blogspot.com/) Twitter (@RWANYC) and Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/RWANYC/).

"I am a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it." — Thomas Jefferson

