

KEYNOTES

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

AUGUST 2015

NEXT CHAPTER MEETING: SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

TRS, 40 Exchange Place, 12 noon

TOPIC: 7 STEPS TO CREDIBLE CHARACTER CONFLICT

SPEAKER: Briana MacPerry



Briana MacWilliam, MPS, ATR-BC, LCAT will be giving a Presentation on Seven Steps to Credible Character Conflict. Ms. MacWilliam, writing as Briana MacPerry, is the acquisitions editor for RWA/NYC's Keynotes newsletter, a thesis research and writing professor at Pratt Institute, has participated in two writer-in-residency programs at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, and currently has a manuscript under consideration with Carina Press. She is also a clinical art therapist with nine years experience, and the proud mother of a rambunctious, four-year-old redhead. When she isn't posting on her community blog or trudging through revisions, you can find her dreaming about character conflict.

PLUS! EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT RWA15!

Kate McMurray will be moderating a discussion of RWA15, exploring what participants learned and establishing writing goals for the future.

(Photo album on page 6.)



**NEXT CHAPTER MEETING
SEPTEMBER 12**

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2015 CHAPTER CALENDAR

Jul 11	Aug 1	Sep 12
Oct 3	Nov 7	Dec 5

KEYNOTES DEADLINE

Send articles to keynoteseditor@gmail.com by the 15th of the month. All articles must be typed and up to 500 words.

We welcome all subjects!

**RWA/NYC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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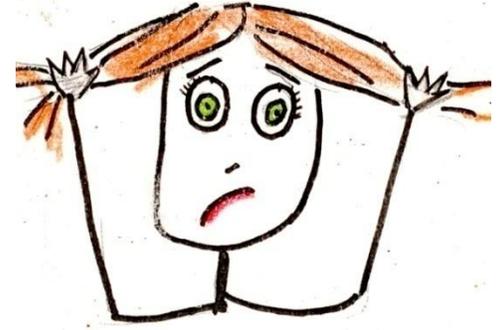
ATTENTION: The Board welcomes all comments/suggestions/etc. Please send emails to info@rwanyc.com.

MEETING INFO: 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.

RWA/NYC

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:
WHY DO I PUT MYSELF THROUGH THIS?
BY URSULA RENÉE**



My road to getting published started with the desire to write the type of book I wanted to read. I quickly learned that desire does not always produce results.

For years I struggled with writer's block, not having enough time in the day, the need to do more research, and a number of other excuses I used to justify my inability to complete my novel. I continued to struggle to get the words on paper until I finally told myself enough is enough; people were not impressed when I said I was writing a book; they wanted to see the book.

Once I completed my novel, I was faced with the task of editing the work to make it the best it could be. It was during this process that I learned a hard lesson – I did not know how to write. Yes, I had learned in elementary school how to create sentences with nouns and verbs. And, I had been taught how to put several of them together to form a paragraph. However, my English teachers failed to discuss goals, motivation and conflict; talking heads; and head hopping. They also bypassed the lessons on creating sexual tension and writing a love scene that moved the story forward.

When I finally had a polished novel, I sent out manuscripts then waited for weeks only to get back letters that basically said, "I'm sorry but I'm going to have to pass." It did not matter how much the editor praised my writing or how gentle she was, each rejection cut a bit into my heart.

Once my manuscript was accepted for publication, there were several more rounds of edits to get through. At the same time I had to consider the best marketing strategies that would get my novel into the right hands. So, with everything an author must face, why would someone choose to pursue a writing career? Is the money and fame that comes with being an author?

While it is nice to be paid to do what I love, I realize that the chances of me getting rich are slim. Most authors will not be offered multi-million dollar contracts. A few may earn enough to quit their other jobs so they can write full-time. Many, however, must maintain their other jobs in order to support themselves.

I write because I enjoy creating characters and the worlds they live in. I also like helping them achieve their goals and find their happily-ever-after.

At some point, every author should sit down and contemplate her reason for pursuing a writing career. Is it for the love of the craft? Does she want to be rich? Is she looking for the recognition of her talent? There are no wrong or right answers. However, considering her motives can help her determine the goals she wants to achieve.♥

Thanks to the support and encouragement of the members of RWA/NYC, Ursula's debut novel, SWEET JAZZ, was published in September 2014. As President of RWA/NYC, Ursula wants to offer the same encouragement and guidance to other RWA members. Visit her at www.ursularenee.com.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



Marisa D'Vari
Sheila Powers

**CHAPTER MINUTES: JULY MEETING
BY SECRETARY SHIRLEY KELLY**

Board Members Present:

President Ursula Renée Shand
Vice Presidents Kate McMurray and
Vanessa Peters
Secretary Shirley Kelly

Committee Members Present:

Newsletter BrianaMacPerry
Publicity MichaelMolloy
Retreat/Outings/Website Ursula
Renée Shand

Present/Past Board Members Not Present:

Treasurer Tamara Lynch
Past President Maria Ferrer

Members Present: 17

President Ursula Renée Shand welcomed everyone at 12:22. She said the topic for the meeting will be conferences, including the RWA National Conference and others.

Members, Barbara Bent, Lena Hart, and Sofia Tate will lead the discussion.

After Secretary Shirley Kelly said she had to make a change to the June General Meeting Minutes (In reference to accepting the April GMM, the name Theresa Minambres will replace the name Maria Ferrer), Vice President Kate McMurray made a motion to accept them and Briana MacPerry seconded the motion.

Ursula announced upcoming events. The Golden Apple Awards will be September 17th; the Brooklyn Book Festival will be September 20th; the Writer's Retreat will be the weekend of October 24th.

Ursula said we have approximately \$8,200 in the bank.

Shirley said we have 91 members.

Kate said the GAA will be held on September 17th at Woodrow's, a pub in Tribeca, from 6-8p.m. We'll have a private room and an open bar and food. Evites will be going out soon to members. She asked for a volunteer to help her check addresses for the agents and editors, and to help get their invitations ready for mailing.



Vice President Vanessa Peters said the Kathryn Hayes “When Sparks Fly” contest opened June 1st. It will close to submissions on August 31st. She asked the members to tweet links for the contest and post on their Facebook pages and other social media sites. It’s already been announced in RWR. The final judge is Esi Sogah. First prize is \$75. Vanessa asked for anyone who is traditionally published to volunteer to be a judge for the first round, which will take place in September.

Ursula said Maria has a few more Blog Tours planned.

The critique group is now meeting on Wednesday night during the month from 6-8p.m. Anyone who wants to join the Critique Loop should contact her.

Briana said the topic for the August issue of Keynotes will be “Get It Sold”. She’s looking for articles on synopsis writing, query writing, and on what works/advice on marketing and social networking sites.

Michael said the Romance Festival was a success despite the rain. He said Carol Ward, the Director of the Morris Jumel Mansion, was very happy with the turnout. He said the Brooklyn Book Festival will be on September 20th at the Kings County Courthouse from 1-6p.m. Eight members will be able to reserve a 2-hour time slot. Price TBD. Only the members who pay for a time slot will be able to display their books/postcards, and offer swag. Information regarding the event will be on the website and in Keynotes.

Ursula said anyone should let her know if they need to be listed in the Members Only Section of the website, or if they need corrections made to their link.

Vanessa handed out Chapter pins. Ursula suggested members wear them at the Conferences.

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

After the Round Robin, Ursula asked for submissions for our donation to the Silent Auction being held at the RWA Conference. She needs all books/swag by July 17th.♥



CELEBRATING ROMANCE & RWA'S 35th ANNIVERSARY!

RWA National held its 35th Anniversary and Annual Conference at the Marriott Marquis in our backyard. (This was their 3rd conference in New York!) Over 1200 romance writers, editors, agents and other industry professionals attended. There were workshops, editor/agent appointments, booksignings, etc. It was a great time to catch up with old friends and make new ones. A good time was had by all and we have the pictures to prove it!



Photos (L-R): President Ursula Renee with a cover model. HubbaHubba. New and old friends enjoying a meal. Maria Ferrer & Addison Fox. Kate McMurray and Alyssa Cole.

Photos: Multicultural Panel discussion with (front row) Lena Heart, K.M. Jackson, FalguniKathori & Alyssa Cole. Audience and RWA/NYC members wore their "We need diverse Romance" shirts in support.



Photos bottom (L-R): Maria Ferrer, KitsyKlaire, Vanessa Peters and Ursula Renee. Newsletter Editor Briana MacPerry with Barbara McVey. *Publishers' Weekly* blogger extraordinaire.

Photos (R): Alexis, Ursula, Vanessa, Charmaine, Zoraida, Tanya & Maria.

Below: Kate, Alexis, Stacey. Michael & Ursula. Breakfast with Barbara Freethy. Briana & Kristan Higgins. FanGirl!



The Awards Ceremony

Top photo: Maria, Tanya, Michael, Charmaine, Falguni, Kwana, Kate, Teresa, Ursula.



"They like me. They really like me."

Photos (L-R): Award goodies; Tanya practicing for her RITA win in 2019.

CONQUERING HIGH CONCEPT: RWA15 WORKSHOP REVIEW

BY BRIANA MACPERRY



Of all the workshops I attended at the National Conference this year (RWA15), I was the most excited about the "Conquering High Concept" workshop. It was a panel including Avon Books Senior Editor, May Chen, and best-selling historical authors Sophie Jordan and Sarah McLean.

The workshop was presented more as a discussion and Q & A, which was entertaining to watch and really displayed the creative genius of these three individuals, as they played off of one another's totally "whacky" and "bonkers" ideas. Sarah McLean was particularly animated, which is probably why attendees were spilling out of the door during her subsequent workshop, "Mastering the Art of Great Conflict," the next morning.

I have a few criticisms, however. While you certainly felt as if you were in the room with great genius, you left feeling as though you'd been window shopping for an hour; able to see the precious knowledge beyond the glass, but still unable to grasp it.

There was a lot of discussion about *why* high concept works and what it *does*, but not necessarily about *what* it is, or *how* to identify it. There was also a lot of comparing "high concept" to "tropes" but not a lot of clarifying the difference between the two.

Still, I had a successful pitch session with an agent after taking the workshop. And what better measure of success could there be? Here's the gist of what I learned (and figured out on my own).

What is a high concept pitch?

In a nutshell, a high concept pitch slams 1-3 archetypes together, in an unusual way. As Sarah McClean said, "It's the most obvious solution that no one has ever come up with." Here's what high concept does and why it works:

- High concept stimulates your most raw, natural self...
- By tapping into popularly held concepts and ideas...
- And then mashing these ideas together, with a twist...
- Thus, embedding conflict in the story premise.
-

The most useful aspects of the workshop were when the panel would rapidly fire off examples of high concept pitches. Here are a few discussed:

Trueblood: "Vampires exist, and everyone knows it."



Why does it work? Because vampires are typically understood to be these mysterious and dangerous creatures lurking in the dark, behind the scenes, but what if they were out in the open, in everyday life?

Game of Thrones: "Five Kings, one throne, winter is coming."

Why does it work? With the implication of kings competing, we already know this is headed somewhere majestic, epic, and catastrophic. The concept of winter alludes to not only impending, uncontrollable doom, but the anticipation of it.

Sarah McLean also offered the high concept for her newest book: "Celebrity gossip in the 1820's; think Solange Knowles punching Jay-Z, in a Regency."

Why does it work? All criticisms aside, this pitch is pretty genius. It plays on our obsession with celebrity but puts us into a different time period, which could have hilarious and highly conflictual results.

Though this was not clearly stated in the workshop, it appeared through the progression of Q & A, that high concept—while it is not a trope—has a close relationship with tropes.

What are tropes?

Tropes are story telling devices and conventions that can apply to characterization, plot structure, motifs, setting, and many more. Go to tvtropes.org and you will find hundreds of them. It's worth it, because tropes are helpful in framing your high concept pitch.

A few examples of tropes offered in the workshop were:

- Lovers to friends
- Enemies to lovers
- Secret baby
- Marriage of convenience
- Love at first sight
-

The panel also offered a template for how to structure your high concept pitch:

"(State the trope); think (commonly understood female archetype or character) meets (commonly understood male archetype or character), except/in/but... (add weird twist)."

This was perhaps the most useful tool, for me. By the end of the panel discussion, I had developed a high concept pitch for my paranormal manuscript that I happened to be pitching the next day:

"An enemies to lovers story; think Russell Crowe in the *Gladiator* meets Kate Beckinsdale in *Underworld*, except...she's a dragon."

Why does it work? We already know the entire progression of the story arch *and* both characters' major conflicts. The hero will be an honorable, salt-of-the-earth, warrior out for revenge on the heroine. And the heroine will be a misunderstood, self-sacrificing, bad-ass with a



heart of gold on a mission to protect her people. The twist is on the paranormal element, which is a digression from the original vampire trope, but it stays close enough so we have a not-too vague concept of the setting and external conflicts for this story.

When I shared the above with the panel, May Chen gave me the thumbs up, stating, "Is that YA? Cuz I could sell the shit out of that."

Unfortunately, it's not YA, but the agent I pitched to on Friday, felt it was still worth a read, and asked me to pitch a second manuscript as well (fingers crossed she likes them).

All in all, I would say RWA15's "Conquering High Concept" workshop--while a little meandering--was informative and extremely helpful. And if I've learned anything from my RWA15 experience, pitching high concept works!♥

For several years, Briana MacPerry has practiced as a Licensed and Board Certified Creative Arts Therapist in New York City, working predominantly with traumatized women and addiction. To learn more, please visit her blog at www.brianamacperry.wordpress.com, or follow her on twitter @macperrytweets.

**RECAP: LADY JANE'S SALON® WELCOME BACK TO THE BIG APPLE, #RWA15 !
BY HOPE TARR, SALON CO-FOUNDER**

On **Tuesday, July 21st 7-9:30pm** at **Madame X**, we at Lady Jane's Salon® welcomed the 35th annual Romance Writers of America® national conference *back* to New York City. I say "back" because we've helped kick off the RWA conference once before, in 2011.

I'm happy to report that this July's Salon "Welcome Back to the Big Apple, #RWA15!" Salon did not disappoint! Our Soho loft venue at Madame X was packed to the gills—standing room only—with more than seventy-five attendees, an eclectic mix of out-of-towners experiencing the Salon for the first time and native New Yorkers, including several RWA NYC chapter members.

In honor of the very special occasion, we expanded our program by an extra half hour to make room for readings by *seven* guest authors: Sonali Dev, Dahlia Adler, Carrie Lomax, Laura K. Curtis, Nancy Scanlon, Regina Kyle, and Hope Tarr (yes, me!). A plethora of





great raffle prizes donated by current and past guests helped round out the fun, raising additional, much-appreciated monies for our house charity, Women in Need.

Regardless of whether or not you were able to make the July event, please take two ticks and check out my fun, behind-the-scenes Lady Jane's Salon® Author Roundtable exclusively for Romance at Random. As is the case every month, July's guests answered my Same Five Questions (plus a few fun factoids) with wit and aplomb. Some of their answers may surprise you; others will inspire you; and all are certain to prompt a smile.

<http://romanceatrandom.com/lady-janes-salon-author-roundtable-welcome-back-to-the-big-apple-rwa15/>

And do join us this month, **Monday, August 3rd** when our guests will be Lisa Fox, Sara Brookes, Joanna Shupe, and Jeannie Moon. Once again, we'll have great raffle prizes, including gift cards donated by Audible and ARCs of *THE BOLLYWOOD BRIDE* by Sonali Dev. The fun starts 7pm at Madame X!♥

*Lady Jane's Salon® co-founder, **Hope Tarr** is the author of twenty-five historical and contemporary romance novels, including **Operation Cinderella**, optioned by 20th Century Fox, and **Irish Eyes**, an historical women's fiction saga set in Gilded through Jazz Age NYC. Hope's books have been translated into 30 languages including, most recently, Slovene! Hope writes a regular monthly feature column for Romance at Random in which she poses her Same Five Questions to each month's Lady Jane's guest authors. Prior to launching her writing career, she earned a Master's Degree in Developmental Psychology and a Ph.D. in Education, both from the Catholic University of America. She lives in Manhattan with her real-life romance hero and their rescue cats. Find her online at www.HopeTarr.com, www.Facebook.com/HopeC.Tarr, http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/254454.Hope_Tarr, <http://www.pinterest.com/HopeTarr>, www.instagram.com/HopeCTarr and www.twitter.com/HopeTarr.*

*Launched February 2009 by Hope Tarr, Leanna Renee Hieber, Maya Rodale, and Ron Hogan, **Lady Jane's Salon®** is New York City's first—and still only—monthly reading series devoted to the romance novel. Currently there are five satellite Lady Jane's Salon® satellites across the country, all of which donate their net proceeds to a 501c(3) charity; the NYC Salon supports Win. The Salon has been featured in numerous local, regional, and national publications, most recently The New York Post. Unless otherwise noted, Lady Jane's meets on the first Monday of the month, 7-9 pm at Madame X (94 West Houston Street in Soho). Your \$5 admission supports an annual donation to Win. Find LJS online at www.LadyJaneSalonNYC.com, <http://www.facebook.com/LadyJanesSalon> & <http://twitter.com/LadyJanesSalon>.*

THOUGHTS ON RWA15



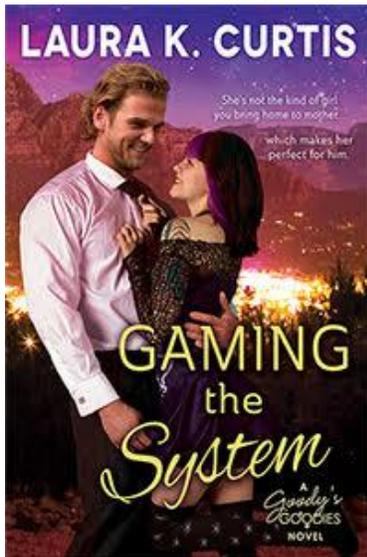
I learned many things at the RWA Conference, but the most important thing I learned at this conference is that RWA members are all on a journey as authors and by helping each other we make getting to that destination easier.♥

---ZoraidaCepedes w/a Mercedes Cruz



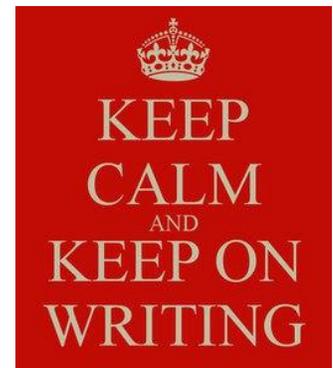
Zoraida at the First Timers' Orientation

MEMBER ON THE SHELF



GAMING THE SYSTEM
(A Goody's Goodies Novel)
by Laura k. Curtis
BookEnds

*She's not the kind of girl
you bring home to mother...
Which makes her perfect for him!*



WRITING MARATHON: AUGUST 29

Our monthly Writing Marathon will be held on Saturday, August 29, from 12-3pm at the CitiCorp Building, Atrium Lobby, at 53rd Street & Lexington Avenue. Note that there are no electrical outlets so plan accordingly. Bring your own snacks and beverage; though there is a Barnes & Noble in the building and other eateries in the neighborhood. Until then, Happy Writing!♥

2015 GOLDEN APPLE AWARD WINNERS

Join us on **September 17** for **RWA/NYC's Golden Apple Awards**, when we will honor our GAA winners. Our reception will take place at Woodrow's, 43 Murray Street, Downtown. Stay tune for more info. This year's winners are:

Lifetime Achievement Award
Thea Divine

Publisher of the Year
Carina Press

Editor of the Year
Kristine Swartz, Berkley

Agent of the Year
Kimberly Whalen, Trident Media Group

Media Source of the Year
HEA/USA Today

Librarian of the Year
Jaqueline Woolcott, NYPL

Author of the Year
Jeanine McAdam

**EVENTS CALENDAR**

August 1 -- Chapter Meeting

August 3 -- Lady Jane's Salon

August 18-21 -- BDSM Writers Con

August 29 -- Writing Marathon

August 31 -- Deadline to enter

When Sparks Fly Contest

September 17 -- Golden Apple Awards

October 23-25 -- Fall Chapter Retreat

WHEN SPARKS FLY CONTEST
BY VANESSA PETERS

LAST CALL!

The New York City Chapter is accepting contest submissions through August 31st.

Fee: RWA Members \$25, Non-members \$30
Deadline August 31, 2015

Eligibility: The contest is open to anyone not publish or not contracted to publish in a novella or full length novel as of August 2, 2015. Self-published authors are welcomed to enter.

Entry: No longer than 20 pages, and must include a 2-page synopsis(not judged). The entry should exemplify the theme of "When Sparks Fly," in a scene showing the moment when sparks ignite and the attraction between the hero and heroine becomes undeniable. Entries must be received as either .doc or .rtf (Rich Text Format) files only. Electronic entries only.

Categories: No categories. All genres of romance including erotica and LGBT are accepted.

Judges(1st Round): Traditionally Published Authors
 Final Judge: Editor EsiSogah with Kensington Publishing
 Top Prize: \$75

Please visit the RWA NYC website www.rwanyc.com for more details. For any questions please contact contest coordinator, Vanessa Peters at rwanyccontest@gmail.com Good luck!♥



BE PRO!**BY MARIA COX**



Hello fellow writers, I'm pleased to announce my new appointment: RWA/NYC's PRO Liaison.

I am very excited at the prospect of having more members join PRO, I hope you are also. Think of this, becoming PRO will not only help you fulfill your responsibilities as general member (as it pertains to 2014-2015 RWA's revised guidelines), but becoming PRO will also help boost your writing career.

How you may ask? Well, in becoming PRO you are one step closer to earning your PAN eligibility...that's great motivation, don't you think?

Now, let me share with you a few things about PRO as presented in myRWA:

About PRO

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.

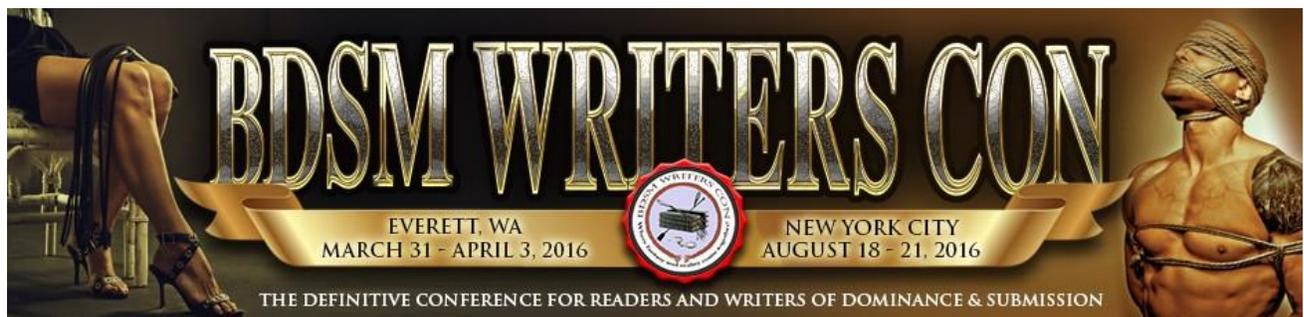
To help members reach the next level, PRO focuses on the business side of writing rather than craft. This program is available to any active General or Honorary member who: (1) is not PAN-eligible and (2) has one complete original work of romance fiction of at least 20,000 words, or multiple complete original works of romance fiction which combine for a total of at least 20,000 words. (Revised guidelines, April 2015)

How to Join PRO

To be eligible to join the PRO community, RWA members must submit an application and a digital copy of the qualifying work(s) to the RWA Office.

Questions:

If you're interested in becoming PRO and/or would like more information, you can e-Mail me at maria@mywritingden.net. ♥



*Our theme this month is
GET IT SOLD!*

**ASK ALICE: HOW DO I GET MY BOOK SOLD TO AN AGENT OR EDITOR?
BY ALICE ORR**



Answer: Build a platform and brag about it. The thing an agent or editor wants to know most about your work these days – besides that you’ve written a marketable story – is that you can accomplish most of that marketing yourself. Where you let them know that is in the Platform Segment of your project proposal.

I’m not going to get into the how-to’s of building a marketing platform. Most of you know a lot about that already and if you don’t you’re well on your way to finding out. What I am getting into is how you pitch that marketing platform in your book proposal. The best way I can think of to do that is by example.

Specifically, an example from my own work. I’m an indie writer now so I won’t be submitting my work to agents and editors any time soon. But just suppose I was to do that for the book I’ve recently launched – A YEAR OF SUMMER SHADOWS. Here’s how I might pitch my personal marketing platform in my proposal.

HOW ALICE WILL PROMOTE THIS PROJECT.

On a page of her Website dedicated to A YEAR OF SUMMER SHADOWS. [Add your URL.]

On her Blog – <http://www.aliceorrbooks.com/blog/>. [This gets them to see your blog.]

As Guest Blogger at Appropriate Blog Sites. [Research & mention high traffic sites.]

On Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/aliceorrwriter>. [Linked to your website & blog.]

On Twitter – <http://www.twitter.com/AliceOrrBooks>. [Also linked to your site & blog.]

With her Writing & Publishing Workshops... where participants say –

“No matter how many times I hear you speak, it seems like the first. You are outstanding.”

“You did it again. You helped me tremendously.”

“You are the greatest, pushing me when I felt I couldn’t go on, encouraging me.”

“I’ve learned so much from you... I wouldn’t have missed it for anything.”

A Sampling of Alice’s Recent Public Appearance Itinerary Includes...

New York City, Saratoga Springs NY, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut. Additional venues are still being booked. [Do presentations of your own. They’re great for visibility.]

You’ll change the details of course to fit your own personal platform. Whatever you do to make yourself and your work visible to the public should be listed here. This segment of your proposal template will grow as your platform grows. For example – I hope to add Goodreads to my platform as soon as I figure out what in heaven’s name I’m supposed to do there.

You should notice that I'm bragging here. Especially with the segment quoting what participants have said about my workshops. I pass out Evaluation Surveys at every workshop to gather such quotes. You need to find ways to brag about yourself. Maybe testimonials can work for you to somehow. The point is this. Modesty is totally inappropriate here. Brag away.

Don't forget the links to your online presence – your website – your Facebook and Twitter accounts – any site you can link to that toots your horn loudly and well. Brainstorm these along with the rest of what should be included to convince an agent or editor you can get the word out about your work. I assure you from experience they're all waiting eagerly to learn that.

P.S. Make sure they are active links – when the agent or editor clicks on them she goes to that place online. You'll probably be submitting by email and live links will work for you there. So – may I repeat – Brag Away. Be the loudest and boldest rooster in the barnyard. Show them your very best marketing self on your very best marketing day. If you've been hiding your light under a bushel it's time to pull that basket off and Shine – Shine – Shine.♥

A YEAR OF SUMMER SHADOWS – Riverton Road Romantic Suspense Series Book #2 – is available on Amazon. The eBook version of Book #1, A WRONG WAY HOME, is FREE. These are Alice's 12th and 13th novel, and she's crowing about them everywhere she can. Visit Alice at www.aliceorrbooks.com.

AFTER THE FIRST BOOK: FOLLOW THROUGH

BY KATE MCMURRAY



I was extremely fortunate to have had the first book I ever submitted accepted by the first publisher I submitted to.

To be fair, I had done my research. I'm the sort of Type A, who can't do anything without exploring all facets of it. So, basically, this is what happened: I determined at the beginning of 2009 that I was done playing at being a writer and it was time to get serious and actually finish and submit something. So I wrote a novel in three months, sent it to some friends to read and critique, and revised based on feedback.

In the meantime, I was researching publishers who took unsolicited manuscripts, because this book was a gay romance, and I knew the mainstream New York publishers weren't taking those (yet). I picked Loose Id because they had a good reputation and I'd read pretty much their whole gay romance catalog, so I knew what quality of book they were producing. It helped that one of my beta readers was friendly with one of the owners, which had no influence on whether or not I got accepted, but did give me some insight into how the company worked. Satisfied I was making a good choice and that the novel was as good as I could make it, I sent off a query.

Well, that sounds breezy. I probably spent an entire week reading everything I could find on query letters and how to write an effective one. The formula is basically a personalized greeting (*Dear Ms. Smith NOT To Whom It May Concern*) followed by a 2-paragraph hook-y book description (like on

the back of a book), a paragraph describing the genre and length/word count, and a paragraph with a super brief bio that including my writing credentials, which to that date had been mostly some blogging and a brief dalliance with an online literary magazine that had, like, six readers.

At the time, Loose Id only wanted the first three chapters with the query, which I fudged a little to include this one scene in which the heroes indulge in some hanky-panky in a men's room stall. Since Loose Id is an erotic romance publisher, I'm pretty sure my editor bought the book based entirely on this scene. Well, I know she did, because she said as much when she requested the full manuscript.

I was at work when I got the acceptance email. It was all I could do to keep from cartwheeling around the office. Anyway, the first novel sold, so I got to work on the next one. I figured, hey, hard part's done. I'm in. No need to worry about rejection anymore.



I was so naïve.

My second effort was a novella I wrote in response to an open call for an anthology with a different publisher. I thought I had it in the bag. In my little bio at the bottom of the query letter, I could say, "published author." Alas, the story was rejected. On my birthday.

I was genuinely surprised. The editor sent me a very sweet personalized rejection explaining she liked my writing and my voice but the story was not a good fit for the anthology. So, you know, that was not the worst rejection ever, but it was still a rejection.

The thing with rejection is that it's not the end. It's never the end. It's a "this story is not a great fit for me" but that doesn't mean it's not a good fit for somebody else. (That's really not just editor slang for "it sucks." I mean, yeah, I'm sure editors see a lot of queries that are genuinely terrible, but oftentimes, "It's not a good fit for me," means just that, that the editor doesn't connect with it or doesn't edit books like yours.) So I hunkered down and revised the novella. I hunted around for publishers whose books I had read who were accepting novellas. At the time, it was pretty much just Dreamspinner Press. They accepted the novella, and I was back in business.

In those early years, I submitted novels and short stories to a few different places and a few of those projects were rejected. My second novel was a revise-and-resubmit. A short story I still really love was flat-out rejected and still sits unpublished on my hard drive.

It's easy to get discouraged. A rejection makes you feel like your work isn't good enough, and it's enough to make some writers quit. I've known people who got revise-and-resubmit letters that sent them into an apoplexy of self-doubt and inertia.

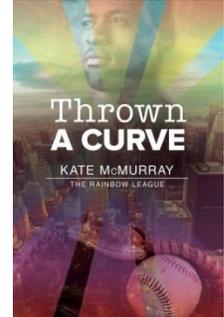
I took the revise-and-resubmit at face value, figured the novel had a few problems, and got to work revising it right away. I wound up rewriting the entire second half of that novel, giving it a stronger plot and a more satisfying resolution. Sure enough, my editor loved the rewrite.

I think, then, the key to success is to follow through. If you want to finish a novel and publish it... do that. Don't let rejections derail you. I still get rejections (filtered through my agent, though, which softens the blow, I will admit). But one editor's "not for me" is another editor's catnip. My previous

rejections were also opportunities, even the form ones, because it forced me to take a closer look at the story and figure out what wasn't working. Then I fixed those issues and sent the book to a new publisher.

So don't give up! Follow through! You'll never get published if you don't submit anywhere. A rejection is not necessarily a door slammed in your face. Keep writing, improving your craft, and submitting and you'll find success.♥

RWA/NYC VP 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. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. Visit her at www.katemcmurray.com.



EDITING YOUR WAY TO SUPER SPECIAL

BY ANNA DEPALO



Having just turned in a manuscript for publication, I've been giving editing a lot of thought. Also, it's been said that what takes a manuscript from good to great is that last two percent, so editing is a crucial and not-to-be-shortchanged final step.

Everyone, of course, has a different process. This is meant to be a non-exhaustive list of what works for me at the end (items that can be dealt with by a simple global search for specific letter combinations, words, or phrases).

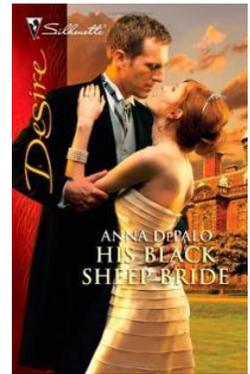
1. Check for -ly adverbs and eliminate many, if not most, of them.
2. Search for qualifiers that weaken or are unnecessary; *maybe, probably, some, somewhat, perhaps, quite, almost, very, kind of, sort of, and just* are some of the culprits.
3. Find overused "crutch" words—for example, *still, then, since, however, and until*. Use a thesaurus to discover some substitutes.
4. Search proper nouns and make sure they are spelled and capitalized consistently.
5. Find words with two spellings and use only one (the preferred one): toward/towards, backward/backwards, etc.
6. Eliminate phrases that add wordiness: *tried to, attempted to*, etc. Rephrase the sentence if necessary.

7. Remove passive voice sentences such as *there was* or *it was* (although it may not be possible or even preferable to eradicate all of them).
8. Check for places that unnecessarily insert the character into the story and therefore distance the reader; *realized*, *believed*, and *thought* are some of the bad guys. So, for example, instead of saying *she realized she'd hurt him*, say *she'd hurt him*.

If you don't know your writing pitfalls or have forgotten them, then editing software such as ProWritingAid.com and AutoCrit.com may be useful to you. I admit that I've bought neither tool to analyze a whole manuscript. But even using the free versions available for a short excerpt has been helpful to me because they revealed problems that often repeated throughout my manuscript.

Lastly, how do you know when to stop editing? When you find yourself changing something, changing it back on the next read, and then contemplating switching again, it's probably time to *stop* and turn in the manuscript so someone else—such as an editor—can take a look. You've probably reached the point where reasonable people can disagree about the better wording.♥

Anna DePalo is the USA Today best-selling author of a dozen romance novels. Her series about the Serengetti family will debut from Harlequin Desire in 2016. You can find Anna online at www.annadepalo.com, www.facebook.com/anna.depaloauthor, www.facebook.com/AnnaDePaloBooks and twitter.com/Anna_DePalo.



WHAT'S IN A QUERY? EVERYTHING AND NOTHING

BY LAURA K. CURTIS



When I tell people that I've never written a query that didn't result in a request for pages, they can't believe it. When I tell them I ever sent out three (or six if you count the random assignments I was given to pitch to at conferences) queries, they are shocked.

But here's the thing: I researched before I sent out my original set of queries. I looked not only at who *represented* what (which you can generally find on websites) but who *sold* what (which you can find out on Publishers Marketplace). I don't care if an agent loves historical romance, if every sale she's ever made is paranormal, she is probably not going to have the right set of contacts.

Because I belong to RWA, MWA, and Sisters in Crime, I am involved in a lot of discussions about queries. And I can also say that any query I've ever edited for someone has also resulted in a request for pages.

Your query is a super-important piece of writing. If you're looking for an agent or editor, it may be the only piece of writing the people you want to take you on ever see. If you're self-publishing, think of it as your cover copy—it's the thing that's going to make readers pick up your book.

A query letter has some basic pieces, but the one most people get wrong is the part that is like cover copy, the part that hooks an agent or editor and makes them want to find out more. Because that's the trick—it's not a synopsis that gives away everything in your book, it's just a taste, a tease, a tempt.

This section needs to have three things and virtually nothing else:

1. Setting
2. What keeps the characters apart
3. What keeps the characters together



I've included *setting* here because setting often has bearing on not only the goals and conflicts, but also on the subgenre. Someone who is looking for a small-town contemporary romance is not looking for an urban werewolf romance. You don't need to describe the setting, just let me know where and when this takes place. The one exception to this is paranormal: in paranormal, you need a bit more world background. If your world has demons crawling up from the sewers, I need to know whether people are aware of them or not. Your world is a character, and it needs the bones sketched in.

What *keeps the characters* apart is vital, but I don't have to know the details. For example, "When Molly's fiancé left her for his paralegal, she decided to stick with battery-operated boyfriends for the rest of her life." Fine. I don't need more. I don't need her ex's name or any of the details of their breakup. I don't need to know that her father also left her mother—it will add character depth in the story, but it doesn't need to be in the query. But let's put Molly somewhere:

When Molly France's fiancé left her for his paralegal, she moved out of his Seattle apartment and back to the home where she grew up on Vashon Island with a chip on her shoulder and a suitcase full of battery-operated boyfriends to remind her not to trust any man. The old farmhouse, however, is in a bad way, and if she intends to use it as a home base for her new app-designing business, it's going to need a lot of work. [OK, it's not elegant, but I am making up as I go along, here.]

Now we have to give her a guy. He can either want her or not. Doesn't matter, because her trust issues are enough to keep them apart.

Patrick Green has been trying to get off Vashon Island forever. Carpentry is all he knows, and saving sufficient funds to get a business off the ground in the city isn't easy.

OK. Now, look, these two have nothing in common except that they live on the same island. If I am reading along in your query, I can see the conflict, but I don't see any reason why he wouldn't just ignore her completely, or why she wouldn't just hole up in the farmhouse and nurse her wounds while looking for a job.

So we need to get them together, and *keep them together*. So...

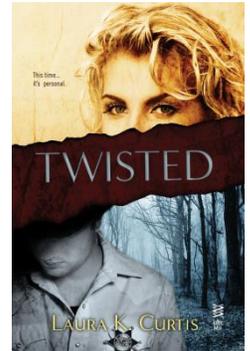
Patrick Green has been trying to get off Vashon Island forever. Carpentry is all he knows, and saving sufficient funds to get a business off the ground in the city isn't easy. When Molly first hires him to work on her house, all he sees is a path of dollar signs leading to freedom. But as passion flares

between them he faces a difficult decision: will he give up the future he's always wanted for the woman he's beginning to love?

OK, like I said, it's rough. But see how it sets up the situation without too many details? I don't need to know that Molly has been working out of her boyfriend's apartment in downtown Seattle for three years. I don't need to know that Patrick's parents died when he was nineteen and he's had to take care of his siblings until this year. I don't need the *flesh* of the story, just the bones. The bit that makes me go "yeah, let me see whether I want to read a few pages and see if I like the author's voice and style."

This is NOT a particularly good query, as far as I am concerned. Because it sounds to me as if the story is a bit empty. That's because I haven't written it yet and I am a pantsner so I can't write a query until after I've at least started the story. Anyway, if you're editing your own query, check and see whether you've hit those three points...and good luck!♥

Laura K. Curtis has three romantic suspense novels and one contemporary romance, none of which her mother thinks are as good as THE SPESHEL DOG. This article was first posted on her blog in June 2014. Visit Laura at www.laurakcurtis.com.



FOUR SUCCESSFUL TIPS FOR #PITMAD

BY BRIANA MACPERRY

#PitMad



Recently, I had the pleasure of participating in Brenda Drake's #PitMad event, which is a pitch party on Twitter, where writers tweet a 140 character pitch for their completed, polished, unpublished manuscripts. Subsequent to this event, I signed up to receive notifications on her blog and basically got a free month-long tutorial on how to write the perfect query letter; she would post at least 4 queries per week from published and unpublished authors, with comments and revisions by agents and editors. This month she has moved on to posting revisions for authors' first pages. If you learn nothing else from reading this article, *follow Brenda Drake's blog*.

Admittedly, while keeping up with the stream of unending tweets and timing my pitches just right was probably one of the most anxiety-provoking experiences of my life, it was also a most fruitful one. I posted pitches for four unpublished manuscripts, three of which were requested, and one of which is now under consideration with Carina Press and World Weaver Press.

There were four things I learned throughout this experience:

- 1. Get to the point.** Start with your standard log line or elevator pitch. How would you describe the conflict of your story in one line? But *don't* stop there.
- 2. Capture the feeling.** And make it visual. Think of the scene in your book that best exemplifies the crux of the conflict. The one-line pitch is more than just encapsulating the "hot premise" of your story, it's using words to conjure images and the feelings attached to those images.

3. Amp up voice. I would suggest delivering your one-liner as if you *are* the main character, either in first person, or limited third person. If your MS is written in this style, even better, if it isn't, do it anyway (#4 will tell you why).

4. Consider the context. Social media has evolved into an endless stream of personal narratives. Twitter has developed its own language with hashtags and other shorthand methods of relaying information. The more intimate your pitch feels to the character and his/her story while honoring the context in which the pitch is delivered, the more it will stand out to an agent or editor. Why? Because it not only shows you know how to identify the crux of your story, but that you know how to deliver it effectively, within the very frameworks those agents and editors will be using to promote it.

Here are the pitches editors and agents *favorited*, in which I applied all four of these tips:

#PitMad #PR "I just had to fall for the dragon-shifting freedom-fighter who killed my sister. Gun to her head, do I kill her or kiss her?"

#PitMad #PR "As a dragon-shifter, I should escape. But would Caleb kiss me before putting one between my eyes? Adios mio. Si, por favor."

#PitMad #PR Dumb=Letting a creepy classmate unbind my witchy powers for a test. Dumber= Falling for the sexy bastard. #TrustNoOne #FML

#PitMad #R What happens when a romance writer gives up on love? Scrapping the ideal for sexual prowess, will this single mom miss her chance?

Here are pitches that were *retweeted* by other participants:

#PitMad #PR As a dragon-shifter, I could escape. But would Caleb kiss me before putting one between my eyes? Tsk. Tsk. I taught him better.

#PitMad #PR Bummer=Having your witchy powers bound as a kid. Scary=The creepy guy that unleashed them. Scarier= Loving him. #FML

#PitMad #R From sadists to startup guys single mom explores online dating,BDSM&sex parties, with a mobile app,biting wit, &authority issues.

I hope these tips are helpful to you, and if you want to learn more about #PitMad, check out Brenda Drake's blog at www.Brenda-Drake.com.♥

For several years, Briana MacPerry has practiced as a Licensed and Board Certified Creative Arts Therapist in New York City, working predominantly with traumatized women and addiction. To learn more, please visit her blog at www.brianamacperry.wordpress.com, or follow her on twitter @macperrytweets.



**HELLO AND WELCOME TO MY WRITING DEN!©
MOTIVATION, WHERE ART THOU?
BY MARIA COX**



Welcome to My Writing Den!

In a perfect world all writers would get eight hours of restful sleep, would never suffer writer's block, and would never be in a lousy mood. Likewise, no writer would ever be awakened at night by a sick child or a pet, or ever have a fight with a spouse.

I don't think too many of us live in that perfect world, I certainly don't... Two nights ago I slept funny and my back is hurting me. These past few weeks I've missed the gym more times than I care to admit. And, despite my best efforts at watching everything I eat, I still can't lose those darn ten pounds! ...in short, I'm a bit grumpy.

So, how do you motivate yourself to write when you really don't feel like it? *Me?* I have a few tricks, and I bet some of you do, too.

Let me share a few...

--Reward yourself.

I cannot sit at a computer and write for long periods of time. So, I set up writing spurts which helps to not only boost word count, but also helps with motivation.

For me, 10-15 minutes of fast writing is a fair measure. And, once I've reached the 10-15 minute mark, I reward myself, I get up, stretch, refill my coffee cup, check email. Then, I begin another 10-15 minute writing spurt; rinse, repeat.

Whatever you do be sure to choose the reward that works best for you and your lifestyle. This will keep you motivated throughout the writing spurt process.

-- Go for a walk.

Staring at a computer screen triggers anxiety that may keep you locked out of your 'writing brain' for hours, days, weeks even. As writers continue to focus on work (writing), they become more and more anxious and thus less able to write.

Regular exercise has been shown as an effective way to decrease levels of stress and increase your overall happiness. Going for a walk can have meditative properties, too; as the focus on movement and breath is similar to meditation.

--Write, no matter what.

Saturdays and Sundays I get up early, shower, put on presentable clothes, then I sit at my computer and write, or edit, or research, something. I don't allow the thought of it being a weekend to prevent me from writing. See, when I act and dress the part of a person who has important things to do it helps me to get in a disciplined state of mind.

My deepest motivation? I want to make a living as a writer. So, if my goal of being a full-time fiction writer is to ever to materialize, I have to work harder than the average writer out there. I have to be willing to commit as much of my free time as possible to perfecting my craft. And, in time, I'll be able to reap the rewards of such unwavering dedication.

Here's to all the writers out there living the dream and to those who are following close behind ☺♥

Maria Cox is a PRO member of Romance Writers of America, she is also the past President of the Phoenix Writers Club. Maria has been writing stories since she was a young girl. She picked up her first romance novel when she was just eleven years old and has loved the genre ever since. Maria writes sensual romance, stories that showcase strong, sassy, and sexy characters. When not writing fiction, Maria works as a technical writer. She lives in Queens, New York. Please visit her site www.mywritingden.net and/or follow her on Twitter.



BUTTON UP!

Swag from RWA15

Did you miss the goody room at National? Don't worry. There will be plenty of swag at Saturday's Chapter Meeting for all to share.

THE GIDDY GRAMMARIAN: CONFUSION REIGNS
BY LISBETH ENG



All right, I confess. Even the Giddy Grammarian must sometimes double-check the spellings of these frequently confused words:

Discreet means having or showing discernment or good judgment, while **discrete** means individually distinct or constituting a separate entity.

- “I trust you will be discreet and not discuss this with anyone.”
- “The decedent’s will established discrete trusts for each of his children.”

As an adjective, **principal** refers to the quality of being most important, consequential, influential or chief. As a noun it denotes the person in charge of a school or an entity, or an amount of money that is lent to someone and that can earn interest. The noun **principle** is a moral rule or belief that helps one distinguish right from wrong.

- “The Dutch Prime Minister is one of the principal backers of stringent fiscal policy.”
- “The firm’s principals signed the loan agreement, which stipulated that the principal be paid off within five years.”
- “Though she could easily have gotten away with it, she refused to accept the money as a matter of principle.”

Compliment and **complement** are often confused. The former is a remark that says something good about someone or something, while the latter refers to something that completes something else or makes it better.

- “He complimented all of the ladies on their attire.”
- “The new carpet complemented the furnishings in the living room.”

That which is **stationary** stands still. **Stationery**, on the other hand, is writing paper, driven to near-extinction by the ascendancy of electronic communications.

- “I plan to buy a stationary bicycle so I can exercise while watching TV.”
- “After nearly fifty years in business, the “mom-and-pop” stationery store was forced to close when an Office Depot opened in the neighborhood.”

The noun **council** refers to an advisory, deliberative, or legislative body. As a verb, **counsel** means to give advice to someone, while the noun **counsel** is the advice that is given.

- “The town council voted to grant the funds necessary to open a new branch of the public library.”

- “The history teacher counseled her students to review primary sources before forming an opinion on the causes of the Civil War.”
- “My father’s counsel was to be honest and fair-minded.”

Lastly, I’ll review the word used in the title of this column, **reign**, and the two words with which it is sometimes confused: **rein** and **rain**. **Rain**, of course, is water falling from the sky. As a noun, **reign** refers to a period of time when a ruler is in power or to the state of dominance or influence. The verb **reign** means possessing or exercising power, influence or sovereignty. **Rein**, also a verb and a noun, refers to the act of or the apparatus for controlling a horse. It can also be used figuratively as a means of restraint or control or the act of exercising that control.

- “The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.” (We’ll deal with plain and plane another day.)
- “Queen Elizabeth II has reigned for over sixty years. Throughout her reign, however, Parliament has held the reins of government.”
- “Provoked to the limits of self-control, Sarah fought to rein in her unruly emotions.”♥

Lisbeth Eng works as a Compliance Officer in the financial industry by day and writes historical romance by night. She holds a bachelor's degree in English, and speaks a smattering of German, Italian and French. Please visit her at www.lisbetheng.com.

FREE PROMOTION!



Keynotes is a FREE Promotion Opportunity.

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Deadline: the 15th of every month. Take advantage of us!♥

THE END

Are you participating in RWA National’s THE END challenge? Let President Ursula Renée know. This is a one way to prove you are seriously pursuing a writing career. Happy Writing!♥