

KEYNOTES



The newsletter of the Romance Writers of America / New York City Chapter #6 SUMMER 2021

NEXT CHAPTER MEETING: SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 12-3pm

AGENDA

12:00 pm – Chapter Business Meeting

12:30 pm – Author of the Month: Jean Joachim

12:45 pm – Round Robin

**1:00 pm – How to write an LGBTQ
Romance Panel**

SPEAKERS:



Catherine Maiorisi is an accidental romance writer. Until she wrote a short story to create the backstory for the love interest in her NYPD Detective Chiara Corelli mysteries, Catherine had never read any romance and hadn't considered writing it. To her surprise, "The

Fan Club" turned out to be a romance and was included in the Best Lesbian Romance of 2014 edited by Radclyffe. Since then Catherine has published four lesbian romance novels--*Matters of the Heart*, *No One But You*, *Ready for Love* and *Taking a Chance on Love*—and four romance short stories. *The Disappearance of Lindy James*, a family drama coming November 2021, takes the characters in *Taking a Chance on Love* beyond the HEA. Catherine is an active member of Sisters in Crime, Mystery Writers of America and The Golden Crown Literary Society.

Visit Catherine on Facebook as Catherine Maiorisi, on Twitter at @CathMaiorisi and on her website www.catherinemaiorisi.com.



Jodi Payne takes herself way too seriously and has been known to randomly break out in song. Her men are imperfect but genuine, stubborn but likable, often kinky, and frequently their own

worst enemies. They are characters you can't help but fall in love with while they stumble along the path to their happily ever after. For those looking to get on her good side, Jodi's addictions include nonfat lattes, Malbec and tequila any way you pour it.

Find Jodi Payne at <https://jodipayne.net/>



USA Today Bestselling **Author V.L. Locey** - Penning LGBTQ hockey romance that skates into sinful pleasures.

V.L. Locey loves worn jeans, yoga, belly laughs, Dr. Who/Torchwood, walking, reading and writing lusty tales, Greek mythology, the New York Rangers, comic books, and coffee. (Not necessarily in that order.) She shares her life with her husband, her daughter, one dog, two cats, a flock of assorted goofy domestic fowl, and one Jersey steer.

When not writing spicy romances, she enjoys spending her day with her menagerie in the rolling hills of Pennsylvania with a cup of fresh java in hand. Find V.L. Locey at <http://vllocey.com/>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**By Ursula Renée**

**Writing Your Story**

Publishing is a business and like any other business that wants to succeed, it works hard to produce projects consumers want. Besides picking manuscripts that capture the reader's attention, publishers review the sales trends of books similar to the project they are interested in. They also run pro-forma acquisition profit & loss projections for each project to decide if it makes financial sense.

Because of the publishing industry's tendency to focus on genres and subjects that have a proven audience, some authors prefer to write what is currently hot. However, it can take a traditional publisher eighteen to twenty-four months to release a book. By that time, what was popular when an author finished writing the manuscript may no longer be in high demand.

So, how is one expected to get their foot in the door when trends come and go? Stop following the trends, write the book of your heart, then worry about a publisher.

I realize my answer will not sit well with someone hoping to make a quick buck as an author, but it is important to face the facts about publishing. For every author who gets a seven-figure advance, there are hundreds more who get five-figure advances or less.

I recommend authors pursue a writing career because they had stories inside them they want to share. It is those stories that should be written.

Once you have completed your manuscript and polished to the best of your ability, there are numerous venues to use to get a book to readers.

Gone are the days in which we were at the mercy of the big publishers. Nowadays, there are plenty of small presses who will explore subjects the major publishers are not willing to tackle. If one editor does not enjoy a particular storyline, it does not mean no one will.

Authors can also consider self-publishing.

Years ago, self-publishing was considered the avenue only terrible authors explored. However, it is now considered another option for authors willing to put in the time and effort necessary to get their stories to readers.

During an interview, the late E. Lynn Harris told me he decided to self-publish his first book when he could not find a publisher. Determined to get his book into the hands of readers, he sold his books in beauty salons. The growing interest in his works caught the attention of a publisher, who would eventually offer him a contract.

Therefore, it is not always important to follow the trends. If you write the book of your heart and you write it well, you will find an audience.

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 mid-twentieth century, when people began challenging society's conventions and expressing their individuality.



FROM THE EDITOR**ROSE A. JACOBS**

As the warm weather comes underway, flowers aren't the only things blooming. So is our renowned sense of hope. With more people vaccinated for Covid-19, the end of the pandemic feels closer than ever, and we at RWA/NYC are so excited about getting back to normal and resuming in-person events. In this issue, we discuss the importance of joining a critique group, of writing to your heart's desire (not the market's), and how to write two books at once. Don't forget to mark your calendars for some exciting events happening at RWA/NYC. Happy reading and happy Summer!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS**June 16, 2021 (Wed)**

Q&A Editor Series with Stephanie Doig,
Editor, ADORES, Carina Press/Harlequin

June 21, 2021 (Mon)

RWA/NYC's Virtual Author Reading

July 10, 2021 (Sat)

Chapter Meeting & Panel:
Writing a good Romantic Comedy

July 21, 2021 (Wed)

Q&A with Kat Kerr, Agent,
Donald Maass Literary Agency

August 7, 2021 (Sat)

Chapter Meeting & Panel:
Thrills and Chills! Romantic Suspense

**A Virtual Reading:
A ROMANTIC HAPPY HOUR**

JUNE 21, 2021 @ 7pm

**Join us for a fun-filled evening with our
talented roster:**

Catherine Stine
L.G. O'Connor
Blue Saffire
Shirley Hailstock



MEMBER NEWS

Roma Cordon's debut novel, **HOW TO BEWITCH A HIGHLANDER**, will be released in 2022 by Publisher, CamCatbooks.com



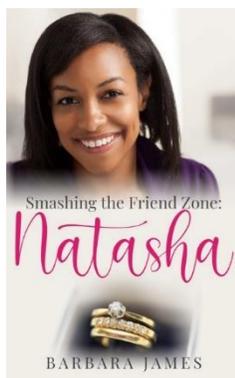
CONTESTS

Rose A. Jacobs, Stiletto Contest FINALIST, Contemporary Romance Long category

Jean Joachim, Holt Medallion FINALIST, Erotic Romance Category

Shirley Hailstock, Holt Medallion FINALIST, Novella Category

BOOK BIRTHDAY



**SMASHING THE FRIEND ZONE:
NATASHA**
By **Barbara James**

NYC BIG APPLE CONTEST

Get your manuscripts ready and submit to our yearly **Big Apple Contest!**

Opens: **July 1, 2021**

We are so excited to announce that Heather Howland, Co-Founder and Senior Editor at Entangled Publishing is our final judge.



About Heather Howland:

After years of editing in the legal, industrial, and technical sectors, Heather packed up her desk and dove into her true passion: fiction. As the co-founder of Entangled, she helped launch the careers of multiple *NYT* and *USA Today* bestsellers. Several of her own authors have hit both lists, garnered starred reviews, and received many contest nods, including the RITA® and Vivian. With her love of psychology and screenwriting, she focuses on creating compelling character arcs and cinematic storylines. The key to her editorial heart? An amazing commercial-literary voice. You can now find this city girl from NorCal's bustling and diverse Bay Area wandering around the wilds of Oregon with her firefighter husband, two neurodiverse sons, and their fluffle of rabbits, trying not to have an anxiety attack because things up here are *too quiet*.

INDUSTRY NEWS

**SUMMER RETREAT**

Recharge your creative well at RWA's Summer Retreat taking place at Gaylord Opryland Resort, July 14-17.

Visit www.rwa.org, under Events, for more details.

CONFERENCE

Taking place virtually in November due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic concerns.

Visit www.rwa.org, under Events, for more details.

**POWER UP SESSIONS**

A new program featuring a series of 45-min Zoom meetings that accelerate professional development and education in two separate tracks: PAN or PRO. Although each track is targeted to specific communities, both are open to either community.

To register, go to www.rwa.org, under Events, for more details.

Things to know about PAN/PRO

- PAN: Published Author Network.
- PRO: Writers who have completed a Romance Fiction manuscript but have not published in Romance Fiction.
- All members published in romance and whose book(s) are available for commercial sale can apply for PAN.
- Eligibility for PAN means the member is no longer eligible to be part of the PRO community.

PEN TO PAPER**Guide to Romance Writing**

A comprehensive seven-month writing program for unpublished romance writers. The program consists of three levels, each level taking a total of eight weeks to complete. It will run annually.

Application period for participants opens June 28 and closes July 26.

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 winners during a virtual Awards Ceremony taking place on July 31st. Names of winners will be posted on the RWA website, Twitter and Facebook, #RWAVivian.

Good luck to all finalists!

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

UPCOMING CLASS

Deep Dive: Realistic Marketing in 2021 with Xyla Turner

Date: 6/19/2021

Cost: \$15.00

Visit www.rwa.org, under Resources, for more details.



THE WRITE CORNER

My Wonderful Experience with RWA/NYC's Critique Group

by **Barbara James**

Although we have experienced many losses during the pandemic, I have blogged in the past about the one development which I have come to enjoy--the shift to our on-line virtual lives. It's not that I didn't enjoy seeing everyone the first Saturday each month at the TRS building in New York City, but sometimes meetings can be inconvenient or even conflict with prior commitments.

Once the pandemic erupted and we began meeting virtually, I was able to attend more events. For example, I could finally join the critique group, something I'd always longed to do. Prior to the pandemic, I could never make the in-person monthly meetings that took place in New York City from 5:30-8:30, since the commute would have been challenging.

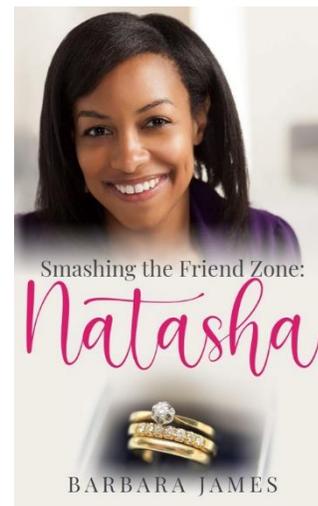
There are seven of us in the group. Our submissions can be no longer than twenty pages, 12 point, double spaced. We post them to our group's Google Docs folder by the first Monday in the month, typically right after the chapter meeting on the first Saturday. We then meet virtually over Zoom the second Monday in the month from 5:30-8:30. We socialize for the first half hour then begin discussing each of our submissions pursuant to a prearranged schedule of twenty-minute increments.

Once we begin discussing a submission, we pull it up onto our screens, if someone hasn't done a share screen of it for the group. This twenty-page requirement meeting means that I have to be careful about the length of my chapters. Each submission consists of two chapters on average, for an average count of 6,000 words.

Working with the critique group has made me more disciplined, and for that I'm thankful. This type of revising is a long process, without question, in that I'm only revising twenty pages per month. But it feels very thorough. After I meet with the critique group, I revise those twenty pages then I take what I learned from that session and use the information in revising the next round of twenty pages. I'm often revising right up until the following month's deadline, and that is a good thing. Revisions can only make the writing better.

If you are considering joining a critique group, I highly recommend RWA/NYC's group. The monthly word count is doable, plus the feedback is excellent. And don't forget that commute! I smile when I think about the few steps it takes to get to the computer from wherever I might be in the apartment.

Barbara James has been a member of RWA-NYC since the summer of 2017. She writes sweet and inspirational romances. You can find her at: www.barbarajames.net.



THE WRITE CORNER

Don't Take It Personally**by Ursula Renee**

You developed characters who are closer to you than your best friends; created a world that is so real, you'd swear you vacationed there; and devised a plot that holds the reader's interest from start to finish. Confident that your novel is ready to make its debut, you write a query letter, attach the manuscript then submit it to the editor of your dreams.

After weeks of functioning with one eye on your inbox, you spy a message amongst the many notes that fill your box. Anxious to read the terms of your contract, you open the link, only to find that it is not the message you have been hoping for.

As you read "I regret, I'm going to pass," you wonder, who the hell does she think she is. Obviously, the editor doesn't know what she's talking about, 'cause let's face it, if she knew anything, she'd be a *New York Times* Bestseller Author.

You may also question your future as a writer; wondering whether you have what it takes to get ahead. Maybe you'll consider taking your mother's advice, abandon your little hobby and devote your energy to more serious pursuits.

It is all right to feel angry and disappointed. They are valid emotions. However, you should not let those emotions control you.

Step back and take a day or two to regroup. During this time, you should do something extra special for yourself (i.e. indulge in your favorite comfort food or take the evening off and watch a favorite movie).

During this time, remember that you are not a failure. There are many people who talk, plan and wish, but never do. That is not you. You completed a manuscript, which is a major accomplishment.

After a few days, go back and reread the letter the editor sent. If you were lucky to get a personalized letter, review any suggestions that she made that could help you polish your manuscript. You may not agree with all the suggestions, but it is worth giving them some consideration.

Do not contact the editor and give her a piece of your mind. It is unprofessional and childish. Though we have seen stories of people who have fought back, there are few who have done so and come out on top.

Also, unless the editor specifically asks you to make corrections and resubmit, do not send her the manuscript again. She's already read it once and made up her mind. Do not turn into a stalker. Move on.

Though a rejection of your manuscript may feel like an attack against you, do not take it personally and do not give up. Remember, what one editor may not like, another may love. Very few authors have made it big on the first try. Many faced years of rejections before they found the person who was willing to work with them.

Therefore, review your manuscript and then send it out again and, if you have to, again, until you find the person who believes in your work as much as you do.

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 mid-twentieth century, when people began challenging society's conventions and expressing their individuality.



THE WRITE CORNER

What's a Critique?**by Julie Pitzel**

**This article first appeared in the June 2019 issue of InPrint! the monthly newsletter of Houston Bay Area RWA. Permission granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA chapters with proper credit to author and chapter.*

A critique includes criticism.

I thought that was self-evident, but I was mistaken.

At a recent event, my husband and I signed up to take part in critique sessions with local published authors. We would get ten minutes to present a few pages and have those pages critiqued. We've participated in these sessions before and it's fun and informative to get professional strangers' opinions.

I was assigned to the Saturday session. The two authors who were on the panel enjoyed my short story. They pointed out things that worked and they pointed out things I could do to improve the story. Normal critique behavior.

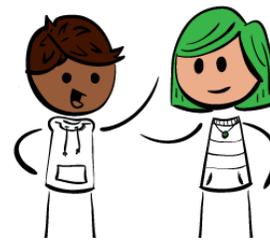
My husband was assigned to the Sunday session. Unfortunately, the moderator of that session seemed to think everyone was there to form a critique group rather than to get a few pages reviewed by professionals. He had participants introduce themselves, and rather than strictly the professionals providing a critique, he invited everyone to give input. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it takes more time. So rather than presenting a few pages and getting experienced feedback, participants in this session only had time to present one page each and received feedback from a handful of writers with varying degrees of skill. *Not* what we signed up for.

And then the kicker.

As the first critique began, the moderator stopped the proceedings and told everyone to only say nice things about the work presented. Only. Nice. Things. That's not how critiques work (see my opening statement).

The act of critiquing involves providing judgement on someone else's work. Without judgement, without pointing out the flaws, it's not a critique, it's praise.

Don't get me wrong, I am not against praise. Most of us, especially when we started out, needed someone to read our scratchings and declare them good. It didn't matter if we knew they were reading some of the worst dreck ever spilled onto a sheet of paper. It didn't matter that we eventually edited that work until only a single sentence remained unchanged (sorta). It was a balm to our self-image to have our work pronounced wonderful. But while positive feedback and encouragement is important, Aunt Tilly's exclamation that my story is "beautiful and just perfect" doesn't do much to improve my writing.



And that is why we subject our writing to critiques. At least that's why I take part. I know that I'm blind to my words. I know that my setting has a low ceiling, is filled with smoke haze, and smells of sweat and camel dung. But sometimes I need a critique partner's questions, comments, and criticism to realize that I haven't painted that picture for the reader.

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What's a Critique?...

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That isn't to say that a critique should be a list of flaws. A review that says the premise is infantile, the characters are too-stupid-to-live, and a beginning ESL student has better grammar also misses the point. Critiques like that are not only mean, they do nothing to help us improve our writing. There's no reason for feedback to be cruel or to attack the writer. I can only imagine the number of writers--or other artists--who've stopped creating due to hostile critiques. I bet most of us know at least one.



Critiques should be a combination of positive and negative points. Really helpful critiques include a bit of explanation. Instead of simply "You should change your opening line," which may be good advice, adding "because..." with reasons and suggestions transforms that good advice to advice that can be applied to other writing. The thing is, providing those reasons and suggestions forces us to think about why that opening didn't work. And then we're also teaching ourselves, or relearning a forgotten lesson. Critiques, when done well, are a way for both the writer and the reviewer to improve their craft.

To reiterate, critiques include criticism. If you are unable to accept criticism, you are missing out on an opportunity to improve your weaknesses; you're also missing the chance to truly see what you're doing well.

Because no matter how much we like Aunt Tilly's praise, we know she also praises the dog for taking his morning poo.

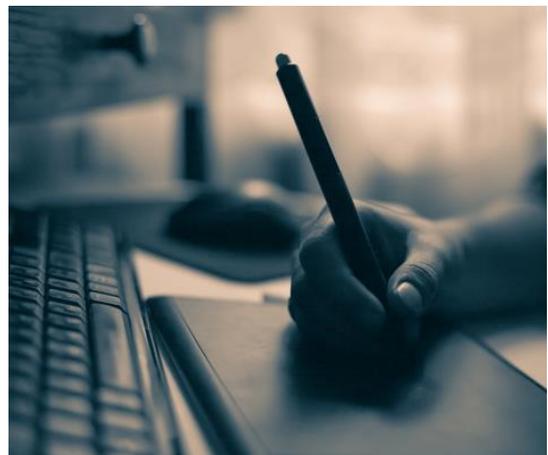
KINDER, MORE HELPFUL ALTERNATIVES TO THE MEAN REVIEW

I like how your plot is shaping, but I'm not sure there's enough conflict to carry a full length novel. You may want to add a line hinting at the deeper conflict to come.

You've done a good job of fleshing out your character without drowning us in backstory. However, she needs a stronger motivation for her actions at the end of chapter one. As it's written the risk is too great for limited payout.

I've removed a number of unnecessary commas, and added a few that were missing. You may want to check out Strunk & White's *Elements of Style*, or run your pages through a program like Grammarly to get a better handle on which grammar rules you're breaking.

Julie writes paranormal fiction from a geodesic dome south of Houston with her husband and a pair of cats.



THE WRITE CORNER

Writing Two Books At Once

by Jean Joachim

I didn't start out to write two books at once. It just happened. Usually very linear, I always focused on writing one story at a time. I was writing one story when another one popped into my head. The characters refused to leave until I wrote their story. I gave in.

What a disaster! I kept getting sidetracked from one to the other and ended up losing focus on both. I vowed never to do that again. Hah! Somebody forgot to tell my characters.

The pandemic shot my writing schedule to smithereens. Again, a new story took over, shoving the current story aside. When I completed the new one, I went back to the other. It took a couple of weeks before I hit my stride.

This year, I had the same thing happen. But this time there was a difference—the stories were in different genres. Again, I gave in and tackled both stories. This time, it worked! Here's why:

- 1) The stories were completely different genres: one historical and one contemporary.
- 2) One story was a sequel, and the other was brand new.
- 3) I divided up my goal number of words. If I wanted to have 3,000 words at the end of the day, I did 1,500 on one story and 1,500 on the other.
- 4) If one story was stronger, I did more words on that story planning to pick up the slack on the other story on another day.

This method eliminated pressure to write 3,000 words on only one story and one of my major writing hurdles: middle book boredom. My interest lags when I hit the middle of any book I'm writing. Writing two stories at once, when

I lost interest in one, I switched to the other. Later, I re-focused my attention on the neglected story, and made up for lost time.

Bouncing back and forth from story to story kept my interest piqued. My writing flowed well. I was eager to tackle each story and move from one world to another. It was fun, and I eliminated the pressure to do a full 3,000 words on one story.

While attempting this I decided not to pressure myself into any hard-and-fast rules, but to let the work flow and to go with whatever worked. Allowing myself to ease into and out of each story without being disappointed or discouraged with my word count helped to keep this crazy effort on track.

Although in six-weeks time, I only have half of each book written, at the end of another six weeks, I will have two books for the editor instead of one.



Will I do this again? Yes, in fact, I'm planning to do it as soon as these books are finished. Keeping an open mind helps me stay productive. Writing under pressure doesn't work for me, but I'm surprised to say that writing two books at once does.

Jean Joachim is an award-winning, USA Today best-selling romance author whose books have hit the Amazon Top 100 list in the U.S. and abroad since 2012. She writes sports romance, small town romance, big city romance, and romantic suspense. A music lover, especially classical, she's married, has two grown sons and lives in New York City. Find her books on her website: www.jeanjoachimbooks.com



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

As of January 2021, RWA/NYC hosts 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? We welcome all writing and publishing subjects.

Send your good news to

keynoteseditor@gmail.com

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

rwanycblogginginthebigapple.blogspot.com/

Twitter (@RWANYC) and

Facebook

www.facebook.com/RWANYC/

“The greatest part of an author's time is spent reading in order to write.” – Samuel Johnson

