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January means rodeo in Ft. Worth!

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Heart to Heart

North Texas Romance Writers of America

CREATIVE CALISTHENICS BY KRISTI GOLD

Whether you're an aspiring author or a multi-published pro, at times your greatest asset -- intuition -- becomes buried beneath a relentless internal editor and/or a barrage of information on craft and technique. In January, Kristi Gold proudly presents Creative Calisthenics, a hands-on, fun and dynamic workout featuring writing exercises designed to awaken the muse and stretch the creative muscle in preparation to begin a new year. Attendees should dress comfortably, bring pen and paper, and leave their pesky internal editors at home. Modest prizes and exorbitant praise will be awarded to those willing to share their work.

As a best-selling, award-winning author, she has learned that although accolades are wonderful, the most cherished rewards come from corresponding with readers and networking with other writers, both published and aspiring. Kristi's next book, "The Mommy Makeover", Silhouette Special Edition, will hit the shelves in February 2009. Her debut Harlequin Superromance, "His Miracle Girl" (working title), will be released early 2010.



Next Meeting
January 17, 2009



PRESIDENT'S CORNER ~ JAN. 2009

by Angi Platt

Hello fellow chapter mates and welcome to 2009. For six months, I've been wondering what I'd write in this column that you couldn't find in the rest of the newsletter or by reading the website. Six long months and I still feel at a loss. Then I realized it's 2009. Good grief . . . 2009.

I've been in RWA without publishing more years than I want to admit. I've been writing longer, even though I didn't know anything about submitting back then. I've made life-long friends through this organization and hate that some have set aside their writing for other pursuits. They were good storytellers. I've struggled over the last two or three years, being on the cusp of selling. (or at least that's how an agent and many friends described it). I've had rejection letters from editors who apologized for not having a place for the book. (Now that will really depress you.)

I wondered if I should join the many storytellers who spend their time NOT torturing themselves over every word. NOT worrying if their character is growing. NOT worrying if they're persecuting two heroic fictional characters enough. I wondered if I should give up. I wondered . . . about two minutes.

Even though the writing hasn't flowed . . . Even though I allow volunteer work and family to detour my daily objective of five pages . . . Even though I fight for every word on the page . . . I'm a writer. Not just a storyteller, but a writer. The stories have to be on the page for me. I MUST get them on the page eventually. I just have to. And I will sell them one day.

So, 2009 is my year. It's my time to get that story on the page and finish projects that deserve to be finished. It can be your year too. Let's grab it together and do all we can to help ourselves further along the road to publication. ‡



PROCESS EXAMINATION #1: INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT

by Kellie Hazell

The following originally appeared in the May 2008 issue of Romance of the Desert, newsletter of the Saguaro Romance Writers, edited by Kellie Hazell.

This is the first unit in a series designed to help writers find, or better employ, the tools they use to write best.

Writers find a lot of different information about how to write, how not to write, how to outline, how to revise, how to submit, and so on. For those of us just starting out on the writing journey, we've got a lot of different suggestions from which to seek guidance. It can be frustrating to try out a new plotting technique only to realize several months later that your brain just does not work that way.

How can we shorten the time it takes to realize a given method isn't working for us? Or, better yet, how can we sift through the great advice we receive regularly from our fellow writers and find what's most likely to work for us while setting the rest aside? For some people, this comes intuitively. For the rest of us, we've got work to do. It's time to start examining our individual writing processes.

What do I mean by process examination? I monitor what writing tools I'm employing in prewriting or outlining or draft creation. I analyze what I'm doing and determine if it's producing results. Did a night of detailed outlining yield two weeks of writing avoidance? Better try some free-writing to recover. Did the free-writing yield a lot of words that were scrapped three weeks later? Time to find a less rigid outlining technique.

I'll be starting this series as if I'm beginning a new project, but you can apply these exercises to a new chapter or scene or even revisions. Next month, be ready to examine your approaches to the thinking and/or writing you do before you start the draft of a novel (or a chapter or a scene or revisions). The remaining units will cover the beginning, middle, and end of a novel and revisions. ‡

~ Kellie Hazell got sick of feeling like she wasn't writing as much as she could and devoted some time toward figuring out why. Her Process Examination series is the result.



SPOTLIGHT ON JANE BECKENHAM

By Nancy Connally

If you haven't met Jane in person, it might be because attending a monthly meeting at La Hacienda is a bit of a commute from the Land of the Long White Cloud.

Hi, Jane. Tell us about the Land of the Long White Cloud.

I live in Auckland, New Zealand, also known as Aotearoa. The nickname is Land of the Long White Cloud, which looking out my office window today is very apt!

How did a Kiwi become involved in NTRWA?

I was a contestant in one of the competitions, and then the last couple of years I have been a judge.

When did you decide you wanted to be a writer?

About ten years ago, I put my fingers to the keyboard after an online friend, also a writer, suggested it and haven't stopped writing since.

Do you remember the first romance you read, or perhaps one that encouraged you to write?

I think mostly I remember falling in love with reading historicals. The Catherine Series, where I was so shocked that I cried when something happened (won't tell what) to the hero. I was devastated. Also the Angelique series. And of course, I remember reading Barbara Cartland's regencies. My kids remember me coming home from the library with about 10 categories at a time and would just roll their eyes at mum's piles of sloppy books!

What do you write?

I write both historical/time travel and contemporary, both in category and single title length.

Is there any genre you haven't

written but would like to try?

Well, I'm not a Sci Fi writer and don't really know much about it, but I did try YA. I'm not sure it's really me. No, I think I'm really happy with my historical and contemporary, one kind of offsets the other.

Is there any particular part of the writing process you find difficult?

Plotting! I'm a pantsier who would love to plot. I do, sort of, in my own fashion, but the one thing I've really come to understand is to go with what works for now. It may not work in the next book, but heck, it works for this one so don't ruin a good thing.

Also, just yesterday I was telling author friend, Melody Knight, that I hated my current hero. He was a wimp and not doing what I wanted him to. But as I was driving to an appointment, I realized what was wrong. The heroine's job was to teach him to have fun! Not sure if it's going to make him un-wimpish, but it better!

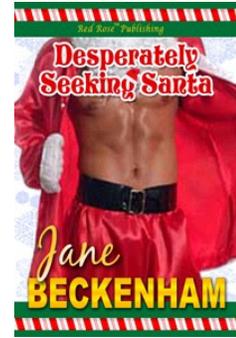
But I was trying to **write** the story, I should have realized I couldn't do this, they were wanting to tell **their** story, **their** way. Okay, where's the straight jacket. But as I said, if it works, go with it!

Are you published? Is anything you wrote due for publication this year?

Yes, I am published. I have my 9th release coming out – **Desperately Seeking Santa**. It's a contemporary, kinda sexy book, and the cover is to die for!

My list of publications are:

- **Woman of Valor** (time travel/ Beckenham)
- **Be My Valentine** (time travel/ Beckenham)
- **Always A Bridesmaid** Contempo-



rary/Beckenham)

- **Hiring Cupid** (Contemporary/Beckenham)
- **He's the One** (Contemporary/ Beckenham)
- **The Sheikh's Proposal** (Contemporary/Beckenham)
- **No Sex Necessary** (Contemporary/ Beckenham)
- **Love in Waiting** (time travel/ Beckenham)
- **Desperately Seeking Santa** (Contemporary/Beckenham)

Are you working on anything now?

I am ALWAYS working on something! I've just had a full manuscript requested by Silhouette Desire, so that's been posted off with a kiss and many prayers. I have a contemporary angel story I'm working on and a ST historical – a highwayman story – that is in progress. But it has all been held up with edits for my book, **No Sex Necessary**, going into print and the line edits for my coming release (December) of **Desperately Seeking Santa**.

What do you consider your greatest writing accomplishment?

Getting published, and perseverance, despite life chucking a few nasty blows in my direction.

Do you use pen names?

No, I write under Jane Beckenham now, though my first book was collaboration with another author, and we wrote as

(Jane Beckenham Continued on page 4)



(Jane Beckenham Continued from page 3)

Janelle Benham.

Most writers are readers. Are there books or authors you would recommend?

I love reading but have to really work hard to make time for it. I love Sophia James' historical – check out **Ashblane's Lady** (Medieval) and also **High Seas to High Society** (Regency). I also love Sandra Hill for her contemps and time travels. Love her sexy men and her great humor in writing. I like Jan Colley's Silhouette Desires and actually any Desire book.

If you could turn any book into a movie, which one would it be?

I think **Be My Valentine, Woman of Valor** – both time travels – would work beautifully in a movie. Great love stories, action, scenery, history. They've got it all. **He's the One** is another of my favorites – Cade Harper is just so darn sexy.

Who would you cast in the leading roles?

For **Valentine** – Russell Crowe, partly coz he's a kiwi, and the book is set here, but also he's got that bad boy edge. **Valor** – my hero is Israeli, so um...not sure. **He's the One** – perhaps Colin Farrell or Hugh Jackman.

How would you describe yourself in 50 words or less?

Kind, considerate, loyal, loving, hard working, nuts.

Are you a member of any other writing organizations?

Yes, I belong to the Romance Writers of New Zealand and the Romance Writers of Australia.

Thanks for the interview, Jane. One last question, do you have a website?

Yes, I do. www.janebeckenham.com ‡

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on Dec 13, 2008 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The president and secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 11:07 A.M. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as posted in the November_Newsletter.

Record Board Absences: Wendy Watson, Alley Hauldren, Gina Nelson

OFFICER REPORTS:

Treasurer: Angi Platt
Reported on balances

Program Director: Marty Tidwell
Next month's workshop will be presented by Kristy Gold. Pamela Morsi is scheduled for February. Coming soon: Judy McCoy and Catherine Gerbera.

COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:

Ways and Means: Marsha West
Gave thank you baskets to Critique volunteers.

Audio Librarian: Nikki Duncan
contact her for more information

Great Expectations Chair: Marty Tidwell
Contest entries above number received this time last year.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

July 2009 Meeting - Membership voted for meeting the second week of July with a program involving pitching and query.

NEW BUSINESS:

Elections:
President Elect—Gina Nelson
Treasurer—Chris Keniston
Secretary—Carolyn Williamson
Communications Director—Alley Hauldren
Website Director—Jen Fitzgerald
Program Director—Marty Tidwell
Membership Director—None elected.

(Minutes Continued on page 5)



JUST PUSH SEND

By **Jerrie Alexander**

Okay, so Nora Roberts said “writers write.” Somebody show me where she said “writers submit”. Don’t laugh, ‘cause I’m not joking. You can’t be as traumatized as I am right now and find anything funny about submitting your work to an agent.

Maybe I should go back to the beginning.

My wonderful critique partners and I attended The Lone Star Conference in Houston, Texas, the weekend of October 25th. We loaded the car for a ‘Girl Road Trip’ and we practiced our pitches until the world looked level. Both women had pitched to an agent once before, so they guided me through what was to come. I was in complete control. Not!

When we arrived at the conference we were each given a sealed envelope containing the day’s schedule. I excitedly opened my letter, and there it was, I would see one agent at 11:06 and the other at 11:14 Saturday morning. The rest of the day was a blur as I checked my watch every fifteen minutes. What if I froze? Forgot my name? Not to worry, I had my handy dandy name badge hanging around my neck! I remind myself I’ve stood toe to toe with the President of WalMart, joined him and other executives for meeting and spoke my mind. Nothing bad happened, so this was no big deal right?

By the time I left one building and walked to another for my agent meeting, I felt relativity sure I’d have a heart attack before entering the little room for my eight minutes. In fact, I asked the nice lady in charge of timing me where the defibrillator was, you know, just in case. When you get my age, you think about those things! I wiped my sweaty palms on my slacks and breezed into meet the agent with what I’m sure was a silly grin on my face. The rest was a blur, I have no memory of what I said, who knows I may have pitched my critique partners book, their pitch I could remember. But I survived. Both agents were super nice and gentle with me since this was my first time. They asked for my first three chapters.

The worst was over. Right? OMG! The stress had only begun. Again, the clock was ticking. I had to get off my duff and actually prepare the query letter, synopsis and make sure the three chapters were perfect and pristine.

A week later, I’m positive everything has been spit polished and ready to present. So what am I doing? Watching the cursor blink. I can’t do it! Occasionally, I think I see a tiny hand pop out from behind the send button and wave at me.

What if I missed something? I deleted the email and reread every word.

My vision is blurred, my husband leaves to play golf, (he’s not fooling me, he thinks I’m going crazy) and my critique partners are emailing me threats! This is worse than child birth. My heart pounds, my hands sweat and my left eye twitches. I need a tranquilizer, no I need a drink. Forget the drink, I’ll just mainline a quart of rye whiskey into my left arm.

My back’s against the wall, it’s time to bow up, buckle up and get it done cowgirl! There really isn’t a choice . . . I’ll never hit the ball out of the park if I don’t swing and swing and swing.

I pushed send. If you haven’t done it before, try it. It’s a heck of a rush! ‡



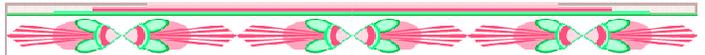
(Minutes Continued from page 4)

(Anyone interested in the position contact Angi Platt.)

Writing Awards-

Rising Star—Mary Duncanson
Shining Star—Shelley Bradley
Silver Spur—Mary Duncanson
Golden Spur—Candy Havens
Yellow Rose Award—Marty Tidwell
First Sale Pen —Mary Duncanson
Angi Platt presented outgoing President Jen Fitzgerald with gift.

The business meeting was adjourned at: 11:35am.



Thou wouldst be loved? — then let thy heart
From its present pathway part not!
Being everything which now thou art,
Be nothing which thou art not.
So with the world thy gentle ways,
Thy grace, thy more than beauty,
Shall be an endless theme of praise,
And love—a simple duty.

—Edgar Allan Poe, born January 19, 1809





BANISH SEDENTARY SEDUCTION

by Kristy Smith

Permission granted from Kristy Smith, editor of The Final Draft, the newsletter of the Carolina Romance Writers in Charlotte, NC.

One of the things that hit me at the conferences I've attended is the issue of writers' fitness. Everywhere I looked, I saw plump middles and "secretary spread". Since I've just won the BIGgest Loser at my office, and led 20 women to lost 207 pounds, I decided to make that a topic. Well not those extra love handles or jiggy bits, but easy ways to firm them up.

The simplest change would be to use an exercise ball as a chair. Sure you can't do this for eight hours, but you can swap out each hour or two. (It's a widely shared tip that office workers should get up from their desks to stretch their legs/arms and de-stress every hour.) When choosing an exercise ball, make sure to get one that is appropriate for your height. You also don't want to be too low or too high in relation to your keyboard.

So how does this help you? Using the ball can strengthen your core muscles, since you have to use them and your legs to balance yourself. (You'll also have to use those core muscles to keep your posture straight.) This won't burn a lot of calories, but it will help that saggy middle not to get saggier. For added benefit, during your hourly stretch, you can also do side-to-side twists (keeping your back straight) that will work your waistline and obliques.

If you write for five hours and do ten reps per side in five minutes, that's 100 extra exercises in the space of 25 minutes! And if you have extra time in those few minutes, you can also do

crunches/sit-ups on your ball.

When you have to get up for a water run, snack raiding excursion, or potty break, use the opportunity to do some chair squats. Pretend you're sitting in a chair with your hips back, back straight, and without your knees jutting in front of your ankles. The lower you go the more you'll work your hamstring and gluts.

Stuck at a plot point? Why not get some extra energy to break through by doing tricep extensions or bicep curls? You can use things in your office like a set of RITAs, thick reference books, or regular hand weights (a.k.a. free weights). Just be careful that you don't try to lift too many pounds at once. Three to five pounds are a good starting point.

For the tricep extensions, bend over at a 45° angle with your back straight and place your weight just in front of your arm pit. Then extend your arm backwards in a full stretch merely from straightening your elbow, then bring it back to the starting position. A good rule of thumb is 10-12 per arm and you can work both arms at once or individually. To do bicep curls, start with the back of your hand resting against your thigh and curl up, squeezing at the top. You don't have to touch your shoulder with the weight. As long as you feel your bicep contract as you curl, you're okay! Also, a good rule of thumb is not to rest your elbows on your hips, because it defeats the purpose. See you could fit 50 to 60 of these in within five hours!

Used to pacing as you plot? Why not change that to side steps or a grapevine? For side steps, simply step back and forth from left to right. For more



benefit you can also use a stretchy band to add resistance. This will work your inner and outer thigh as well as your gluts. Hold one end of the stretchy band (or handles) in each hand, then step onto the middle of the band and place your hands on your hips. Then simply step side-to-side while keeping the band taut beneath your feet as you move. Another way to do this is to tie the stretchy band around your ankles. That way your hands are free to balance.

The grapevine move will give you a little cardio as well as helping your coordination. Simply put your right foot over your left, then your left foot over your right. Just like the dance! Do either of these for minute intervals each hour (or 3 sets at a time) and you'll burn extra calories by the time you've finished your daily word count!

My favorite new fitness site is officeworkout.msn.com/ with advice from Bob Harper, from NBC's The Biggest Loser. One video is about a writer, but so far I think this video tip is the best.

Another way to curb spread is paying attention to what you put in your mouth. I keep a food journal to track what I eat. Healthier ways to snack or feed frustration are 100 calorie packs as (*Sedentary Seduction Continued on page 7*)



(Sedentary Seduction Continued from page 6)

well as low fat/low sugar alternatives. Instead of those sodas, load up on water or an H2O substitute. When you feel the need for chocolate, try my new fave—Hershey's Dark Chocolate sticks. They're 60 calories each, plus they have antioxidants! It's bad to indulge, but oh so good to give in without guilt!

With these tips (and by getting up off your keister) you can quell the seduction to be sedentary. Yes, it may take trial and error, not to mention a mindset switch, but if you want to change you can. As my sister says, "If you believe it, you can achieve it!" ‡

~ Kristy Smith is a member of RWA, Carolina Romance Writers, Heart of Carolina Romance Writers and FF&P. She's seen the fine line between published and unpublished writers' first-hand. With ten completed novels stashed in her PC, Kristy is striving to snag that elusive contract. In the meantime, she contributes non-fiction to "Alamance Woman Magazine". For more about Kristy, visit www.maseysplace.com or www.star-crossedromance.blogspot.com.

A WRITER'S TAX GUIDE

by Linda Burke

This article first appeared in the November/December edition of WORDS FROM THE HEART, the newsletter of From The Heart Romance Writers, Laurie Darcey, Editor.

This is the first article of a 6-part series written by Linda Burke, FTHRW member and a former tax law specialist with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The information provided is based on her experience and knowledge and is greatly simplified. More complex issues should be taken to a tax professional. Four assumptions are made about you for these articles. You are:

- Using the cash method of accounting.
- Using the calendar tax year.
- Not an employee, corporation, S-corporation, limited liability company, nor a partnership.
- Pursuing a writing career in order to make a profit.

Recordkeeping

For some people, this is the really dull, hard part to do. For every expense that is related to your writing, you must

keep the receipt. If you are purchasing personal items and business items at the same time, you must identify which are business-related on the receipt at the time of purchase (or as soon as you get home). If you purchase something that is really unusual, I recom-

end that you expand on why and how you used in context with your writing. You will need to keep the receipts showing how much you paid for all expenses for each tax year for at least three years from the due date of your tax return.

If you paid using a credit card, you can still deduct the amount paid even if you haven't paid the balance due on your credit card. If you only have a few expenses, then file folders or manila envelopes may be all you need in order to keep up with your receipts. Or, you could set up a notebook and tape each receipt to a separate page. After a while, you will see that your receipts start falling into certain categories.

Then you can start grouping like-kind receipts together. If you are really



organized, you can keep a running total of how much you have spent on each type of expense. In addition, if only part of the item purchased is business-related, you will need to show on the receipt the amount you are claiming for business purposes.

What Form to Complete

As a free-lance (self-employed) writer, you will complete Form 1040 Schedule C, Profit or Loss From Business.

Income

Income from your business of being a free-lance (self-employed) writer not only consists of the advances you receive, but also the royalties. If you win

(Taxes Continued on page 8)



(Taxes Continued from page 7)

a contest, the winnings from the contest are considered income.

Expenses

These are examples of some expenses a writer may have:

- Computer, software, printer.*
- Printer paper, ink, tablets, pencils, pens, markers.
- Books (paper or e-book), CDs, and/or cassette tapes on how to write.*
- Classes on writing.
- Contest entry fees.
- Membership costs in RWA and each chapter.
- Conference fees, travel expenses, and meals while in travel status.*
- Repairs to computer/printer/etc.
- Agent's fees.
- Vehicle expenses.*
- Business use of the home.*

The expenses identified with asterisks (*) will be discussed in separate articles. In addition, one article will discuss whether you have an activity-not-for-profit (hobby) or an activity-for-profit (business).

Qualified Creative Expenses

If you have expenses in the creation of your books as a free-lance (self-employed) writer that are related to your business of being a writer, you are allowed to claim these expenses annually on your income tax return. This means you get to claim the expenses paid this year on this year's income tax return instead of having to accumulate them as cost of goods sold and claim them on the tax return for the tax year your book is sold.

Education

There are two sets of rules concerning education.

- **Training for a New Career**—If you have just become interested in a writing career and realized that you really need to take some of the classes offered by the different chapters of RWA, the amounts you pay for those classes are not deductible anywhere on your federal income tax return. They are considered personal expenses.

- **Training to Improve Writing Skills**—Your career as a writer has been in place for a while, you've joined a critique group, you've submitted certain chapters to different contests, you've got a manuscript, you are hunting for or have an agent, and you are in the business of being a writer/author then you can claim the expenses for classes that are for maintaining or improving your skills. They are deductible on Form 1040, Schedule C, Profit or Loss From Business, line 27, Other expenses, as continuing professional education.

Other expenses

You can deduct the membership fees for RWA and any chapter you join since they are organizations related to your business of being a free-lance writer.

Supplies

You can deduct the cost of paper, pens, pencils, notebooks, etc. The sales tax is part of your cost for these expenses.

Repairs

You can deduct the cost of repairs to your computer or printer.

Agents Fees

You can deduct your agent's fees if they are included in the amount shown on Form 1099-MISC which the publisher sends to you. If the publisher has not included your agent's fees on the Form 1099-MISC then you cannot deduct them. ‡

~ For more information about the items discussed in this article, see the Instructions for Form 1040, U.S. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX RETURN; the Instructions for Form 1040, Schedule C, PROFIT OR LOSS FROM BUSINESS; Publication 334, TAX GUIDE FOR SMALL BUSINESS; Publication 538, ACCOUNTING PERIODS AND METHODS; and Publication 535, BUSINESS EXPENSES. Forms, instructions, and publications are located at <http://www.irs.gov>.

You will need to keep the receipts showing how much you paid for all expenses for each tax year for at least three years from the due date of your tax return.



LONGEVITY IN THE 1800S

by **Kate Bridges**

The following article appeared in the January 2009 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

If you're writing historical novels, do you ever wonder about your character's lifespan? In my Westerns, I often include characters with a wide variety of ages. Once, a reader asked if it was accurate that one of them would have lived to be a senior. I answered yes, because this is where statistics come in.

Sadly, up until the mid 1800s in America and England, nearly half of all children died before the age of ten. Nearly half. Childhood diseases such as measles, diphtheria (a deadly membrane that grows over the throat) and scarlet fever took many lives. Tuberculosis was another killer. Statistics vary slightly by region and time period, but the average lifespan for the early part of the century was roughly forty.

However, once a person got beyond childhood, these diseases weren't usually fatal. So, let's look at statistics. If one person lived until they were 4 years old and another lived till they were 76, the average lifespan of these two people would be 40. Or if one person lived till they were 1 and another till they were 80, their average lifespan would be 40, as well. You get the idea . . . the average lifespan, statistically, doesn't give a true picture of what that society looked like back then. It does not mean that people over the age of 40 were scarce. What it means is that half the population was wiped out in childhood.

Fortunately, after the 1850s, people started to understand the connection between germs and disease. Soaps and disinfectants came into common use. Public sanitation, such as garbage collection and water treatment, began in New York City. The average lifespan increased dramatically in the latter half of the century. And later, with the development of vaccines, most children's lives were remarkably spared.

So if you're a writer, go ahead and put that interesting older couple in your novel. They'll add depth and authenticity to your work. ‡

~ Award winning author Kate Bridges writes sexy historicals set in the Canadian and American West. Before becoming a full time writer, Kate was a pediatric intensive care nurse. Her novels often include medical situations. She's a regular blogger on www.petticoatsandpistols and member of the Toronto Romance Writers. Watch for **Wanted In Alaska**, coming from Harlequin Historicals in February 2008! For an excerpt, visit www.katebridges.com.

HEROSCOPES: THE CAPRICORN HEROINE

by **Bonnie Staring**



The following article will appear in the January 2009 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor.

She knows her limits—and yours too.

Born between December 22 and January 19, the Capricorn heroine is the most ambitious of all signs in the Zodiac. Whether she appears in a novella or 500-page classic, she has patience, determination and an ability to focus that could burn a hole through the forehead of anyone who stands in her way. Even in a snowstorm.

More organized than Martha Stewart's linen cupboards, the Capricorn woman finds it almost impossible to trust others to finish what she's started. For her, the word "delegate" sounds a lot like "detonate". Whether it's a plot to take over the world, a PowerPoint presentation, or a load of laundry, she'll be the one offering to "take care of it" while everyone else is itching to leave. And if people seem to be itching too much, you can count on her to refer them to a good dermatologist.

This fabulous woman lives and breathes long term. While she may appear indifferent, she's hoping that Mr. Right is right around the corner. Great dates for her must be conservative in cost yet sublime in sentiment, such as a school play, lunch at a cozy bistro, or a walk under the stars. Famous Capricorn heroines include Judith Kranz, Lady Bird Johnson, Elizabeth Arden, and Dolly Parton. ‡

Next month: The Aquarius Heroine

~ Bonnie Staring is a comedic triple threat (writer, performer, coupon user). Her articles regularly appear in a variety of magazines and she conducts workshops on creativity and discovering your inner superhero. See what else Bonnie's been up to at www.bonniestaring.com



LET'S GET EMOTIONAL

By Linda Ford

This article first appeared in the December issue of *The Writer's Saddle*, the newsletter of the Calgary Chapter (CaRWA).

Romance readers read for the emotional experience. At least that's what I believe, which leaves the author with the burden of fulfilling the promise for an emotional read.

"Emotions lead us to more believable plot twist and turns, enhance dramatic tension, help to illustrate themes. In short, they inform every aspect of our fiction." Ann Hood in **Creating Character Emotions**. "The best fiction-takes characters through not just an external journey, but an emotional journey too." Ah. So she agrees with me.

I find it a challenging responsibility—this delivery of a satisfying emotional journey. How is it possible? "One of the things I've learned is the ability to let go and not hold back at the emotional level," says Theresa Bodwell from Montana who writes for Kensington. "I realize the reason people enjoy books about people is because we can relate to their emotions." Yikes. Not only is it a challenge but a burden. Should I fail the chances the reader will return are slim. How do I get the emotions on the page?

"Write like yourself," says Ann Hood, which is good advice but only takes me so far. What if I'm not writing characters who act and react like me? How do I portray them honestly and accurately?

Again from Theresa Bodwell; "The key is capturing those human emotions and the only way I know to do that is to put myself out there. It's hard because most writers are observers, but I'm learning you have to—in many ways, like an actor—be the character. You have to put yourself into the character."

And Ann Hood takes us a step further when she says, "Separate life from fiction. In a story a writer must ask more of emotions. . . . why, what does it say about the character? What does it reveal?"

Ways to do it wrong (according to Ann Hood):

1. **Clichés**—search for fresh language.
2. **Lack of specificity**—you know the character feels something. But what? So rather than dig deeper, we resort to nonspecific emotions and hope the reader fills in the blanks. "Think of concrete details as emotional traffic signs, leading the reader to the right place." Ann Hood
3. **Ambiguity**—label an emotion rather than explore it. Sometimes we fear or don't trust our own experience. We ignore what it really feels like to be sad or in love.
4. **Not trusting your characters**—lack of consistency—for example going from sorrow to joy without working through the stages. Or making them too consistent so they aren't honest. Example: a Pollyanna cheerful person who never admits to discouragement, anger, jealousy. It isn't real. Ann Hood says, "Characters should have a range of emotions to give them depth and complexity."

But I need more. I need concrete ways to guide me in writing emotions. I've collected a few. Here they are.

Lessons I've learned on how to portray emotions:

Understand the mechanics and don't be shy about using them.

- **MRU**

For this I refer to the writing guru



Dwight Swain in his must-have book, **Techniques of a Selling Writer**. And also the very good explanation of this by Randy Ingermanson at: www.advancedfictionwriting.com/art/scene.php They teach the magic of MRUs to form the basis of emotional satisfaction.

MRUs you ask? That's short for "Motivational Reaction Units". Get the book (**Techniques of a Selling Writer**) or go to the website for a concise explanation, but in really short form it's: the character sees or hears something, he then feels something, does something in the way of reflex action, thinks something, then says something or does something deliberate.

EXAMPLE: (This is a very basic scene meant for illustration only and not meant to be the basis of any critiquing.)

The dog barked. (*Hears something*)

Her mouth went dry. (*Feels something*). Her hand jerked to the knife at her side. (*Reflex action*). Wait. It was only old man Ford returning home after a night on the town. (*Thought*) She edged the knife back in its case. (*Deliberate action*) "Not yet," she murmured to her companion. (*Speech*).

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(Writing a Novel Continued from page 10)

- Another mechanical tool—**name the emotion and give it a visceral action**

EXAMPLE: cold fingers of panic gripped his stomach

- **Revisit your own past.**

"If you render character emotion effectively and honestly, there is the question your readers will ask. How did you know?" Ann Hood. Take notes when things are happening or that have happened in your life. Everything is fodder for your stories. Remember what it was like to feel rejection. As children, our emotions are often closer to the surface, more real, more memorable. Drop back into your memories and recall those events both good and bad. The excitement of Christmas, the anticipation of summer vacation, the disappointment of the first year you got nothing but clothes for Christmas. (Yes, it is still fresh in my mind.) Use these emotions.

- **Show, don't tell.** Remember the power of suggestion. "Nothing is wrong," she insisted as her fingers plucked threads from the end of her scarf and balled them into a knot." (See how we get a picture of something she isn't admitting through a bit of showing.)
- **Indirect action**—chopping wood until the pile is as big as a garage can illustrate frustration or anger or even grief. Set the stage then use it.

I've found it especially helpful and extremely difficult to connect with my own reactions. It's taken some serious concentration mostly, I suppose, because as a mother I have learned to ignore how I feel and get on with care giving but I've learned how powerful it can be when I stop and listen and identify what I'm feeling when my character is suffering, or experiencing great joy. Is my chest tight? Do I feel like my lungs are about to explode? Is my throat so tight I can't even swallow? I've found a new level of authenticity by paying attention to my own reactions.

- **Tie your emotions into the setting and character career.**

I've written several books set in the Depression Era. Think lots of dust and wind and searing heat. Think how that can be used to reflect emotions.

"Anger swept through her with the besmirching nature of the endless dust-laden wind."

Look for details that can be used. Then remember to flip them. Dust and driving wind for negative emotions can become a warm breeze for a positive emotion.

This list is by no means all-inclusive. I'm sure you've a few tricks or mechanical tools of your own. (Why not write an article and share them with us?)

Writing emotions is hard but satisfying to both the reader and the author so pay attention to ways YOU can make it better. And have fun. ‡

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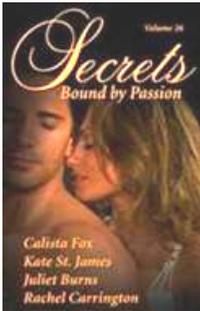
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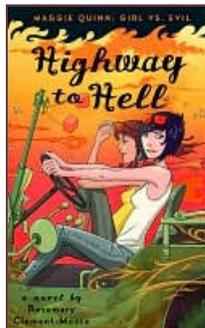
On Saturday, January 10th at 2 PM **Juliet Burns** will be signing copies of **The Spy's Surrender**—her first novella for Red Sage in Secrets Vol 26: Bound by Passion at the Barnes and Noble in Hurst, TX. Please come by!

Misa Ramirez has a review in the Feb. 2009 issue of "Romantic Times": *"This highly entertaining first-person novel launches a new series with a bang. Well written with laugh-out-loud humor and a complex mystery, this wonderful debut will have you looking forward to more books in the series. Lola is no lightweight detective, despite the chick lit feel to the book, and the balance between her personal and professional life is ideal. The tension in both romance and danger deepens expertly."*

Alley Hauldren's short story, "Galactic Peace", is published in the January 2009 issue of "Paradigm Shift: New Paradigm" edited by Topher Scott available at Lulu.com
<http://www.lulu.com/content/5541358>



Gina Lee Nelson was a recent finalist in the Lone Star Writing Competition. Her manuscript, **New Girl in Town**, placed second in the Contemporary Series category.



Rosemary Clement-Moore has some updates on her books:
~ **Highway to Hell** (Maggie Quinn book three) comes out on March 9, 2009
~ **The Splendor Falls** (not a series book, but awesome) comes out on September 8, 2009
~ **Hell Week** (Maggie Quinn book two) is reissued in paperback on September 8, 2009