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June 2016

*Founded March 1983**Chapter 33, Region 5**June 2016**Volume 36, Issue 5*

Letter from the President

Please be sure and read the bylaws changes and be prepared to vote. Looking forward to seeing all of you this Saturday.

Bylaws Changes

A required reinstatement of the Chapter bylaws will be voted on within the next thirty (30) days. The bylaws were designed by Romance Writers of America and will take effect immediately upon their approval. These bylaws are required by our national organization. Our only choices being the number of officers and directors.

Discussion or questions about these changes can be addressed to the NTRWA Board of Directors via email or our discussion loop. The NTRWA board agreed that the following would be submitted:

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Section 5.2. Composition. The Board of Directors shall be composed of the Officers and Directors of the chapter. The duties and voting rights of all Officers and Directors must comply with State Law and be outlined in the chapter's policies. The total composition of the chapter's Board of Directors shall not exceed eight Officers and Directors.

Section 5.2.1. Officers. Officers of the chapter shall be the President, President-Elect, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Section 5.2.2. Directors. Directors of the chapter shall be Membership, Programs, Communications and Contest.

A url link to vote on the reinstated bylaws will be provided through email to each member.

Respectfully submitted by Angi Morgan, bylaws chairperson.

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Speaker for June:

Laura Drake
Balancing Backstory

We need backstory in our novels. It deepens our characters, illustrates who they are, and how they came to be that way. But we've all heard about 'backstory dumps,' and how they can bog down a read.

So how do you tell the reader what they need to know, without writing the parts they skip?

It's a delicate balance, requiring subtle technique. Laura will give you the tools you need to craft fully-rounded characters that your readers will love - without all the baggage.

July 16th*--Trisha Dolan--Opening the Third Eye to Creativity

August--Mary Theresa Hussey--What Editors Really Want

September --Scrivener

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The following article appeared in the October 2015 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor. It may be reused by RWA chapters with appropriate credit to the author and chapter. Permission form is on file with the editor.

TURN YOUR WRITING SPACE INTO A SPA

by Cara Lauren

If you're like me, you'll know that writing is not like boiling water. There isn't a "switch" of sorts that one can flip on and immediately draw from a reserve of best-selling creativity. However, there are some ingenious ways to transform your writing space into an oasis of peace, with minimal investment.

First and foremost, make sure your chair is comfortable. I opt for a lower back rest, which can be as simple as a towel roll or made of a therapeutic foam (Tempur-Pedic and ObusForme make terrific lumbar supports.) In a perfect world (you know, the ones your characters ultimately live in) your monitor should be at eye height and your hands at a 90 degree angle, thus ensuring an ergonomically-friendly set up.

Now for the fun part – thinking of "deep point-of-view" on a personal level...

Sight – A candle, whether it be flame-lit or battery-driven, can function as a single point of focus. It sets our intention and works as a meditative "gas pedal." I use the unscented variety, opting to incorporate this next step.

Smell – An aromatherapy nebulizer (slightly different than a diffuser, although both work well) is an amazing way to literally transform your writing space into a spa! Opt for pure oils and scents that are appealing to your "scent-ses!" A few drops are all you need.

Sound – We all have our favorite music. If you're working with electronic tunes, set a playlist for writing. I have ones for different moods. Not only is the music inspiring for storytelling, but also, when I hear a particular song, my brain knows to translate these sounds into words.

Taste – Coffee? Tea? Sparkling water? Something else? Not only is hydration crucial for functioning brain cells (leave alone all our other body parts), a special drink in a special glass or mug can have a certain significance and play a role in carving out a physical, mental or emotional writing space.

Touch – Okay, it's "sorta kinda" still sight, but I saved this one for last, as it's one of my favorite tools to evoke a particular mood. For those of us that have a second monitor, a tablet or a smart phone, log onto a site which offers a web cam of a location which is in harmony with your story. I personally have a few cams of the ocean that I prefer, and leave these images up on the screen as I write.

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And, speaking of which, happy writing! Namaste.

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Cara is based in Toronto, Canada and holds a B.A. in English Literature & Film Scriptwriting She is writing her first, feature-length novel, High Tide, an aquatic love story with strong environmental and spiritual themes. Visit her at www.CaraLauren.com for more information.

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READING TO WRITE

by Kate Freiman

It's not unusual to hear genre fiction writers declare emphatically that they *never* read in their own genre/sub-genre when they're planning and writing a book. They have their own ideas and don't want to be influenced. They don't want to accidentally plagiarize someone else's work. They don't want to feel their own work isn't as good as someone else's. They have their own voices and don't want someone else's voice to affect theirs. Or to hear genre writers say they *only* read in the sub-genres they write, because some writing guru told them to read what they like to write and write what they like to read.

And yet, if you go into any art museum, you'll find art students—gasp!—copying the masters. Hmm. Is it that these art students lack original ideas so they want to be influenced, want to copy other artists' styles? Do they want to compare their work to the venerated artists who came before them so they can feel really crappy when their own work doesn't measure up? Or are they learning to develop their own styles, their own "voices," by tracing the excellence of others' work?

Attorney and mystery writer Leslie Budewitz found this quotation that underscores my point: "A real writer learns from earlier writers the way a boy learns from an apple orchard — by stealing what he has a taste for and can carry off." — Archibald MacLeish, *On the Teaching of Writing*, in *Writing in America* 88, 90 (John Fischer & Robert B. Silvers eds., 1960). Is MacLeish advocating plagiarism? Hardly. He's saying that the way to learn to write is to try to emulate what others, whose works you like, have done. What's unsaid is, unless you copy word-for-word, you won't really be "stealing" because your own imagination, your own experiences, your own

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voice, inevitably will lead you to make the material your own. If you need further convincing, I've got one word for you: *Shakespeare*.

I write romantic fiction, but I read all kinds of genres and sub-genres as well as literary fiction and a wide (wild?) selection of non-fiction. Most of the romance writers I know are like me, eclectic as well as voracious readers, but I know there are many who only read certain romance sub-genres. And that's fair and fine and definitely a matter of personal taste to which everyone is entitled. But...

It's important to understand the parameters of whatever sub-genre you are writing: How much sensuality? How much explicit sexuality? Balance of plot to romance.

Balance of suspense or mystery to romance. Balance of paranormal elements to romance. Balance of light to dark. Length, complexity of plot and sub-plots, amount of social issues, depth of historical research, level of world-building. Levels of detail in description. Even the reading level of the writing. All these are different for the many ways we incorporate all the elements of storytelling into our chosen sub-genres, and readers have expectations we have to know and fulfill, even if we decide to nudge them a little bit out of their comfort zones. Before you can riff off the conventions of a sub-genre, you have to know what they are.

The following are some of the writers I read for more than entertainment. I read them to absorb their unique approaches to storytelling and writing, to let myself be influenced by how they create the effects they produce. I don't worry that I'm going to end up copying their styles, because I'm confident of my own voice. I don't worry that I'm going to copy their storylines, because I have my own. I'm not looking specifically for *what* they write so much as *how* they write. Sometimes, yes, indeed, I read some of these writers and make the mistake of comparing myself to them—unfavorably, of course. That's just natural. It's practically part of the job description for writers to make ourselves miserable. But then I think, I can push myself, up my game, turn that comparison into a prod to make my own writing and storytelling better.

Nora Roberts is such an obvious choice for this list. I'm always puzzled by people who—sometimes rather proudly—say they've never read one of her books. For one thing, Nora writes in so many sub-genres of romance that there really is something for just about every taste. For another, she's good. (Which, to my mind is like saying Mozart was good. I consider Nora Roberts to be the Mozart of romantic fiction.

YMMV)

I read Nora's books for the way she chooses occupations for her heroines and heroes that complement each other, giving her themes and motifs unique to each story. I read her books for the ways she works research into the narrative and dialogue without info-dumping or "You know, Bob-bing." I read her for her skill with

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dialogue and situational humor.

The most prolific storytellers write what is essentially the same story or stories over and over; the best of them manage to keep their stories fresh and different while being familiar. I read Nora Roberts for the way she has created her own personal story “formulas” or storylines. Look at her trilogies and you’ll see most of them focus on three women, often sisters or cousins, each one representing one of her personal archetypes: The (slightly mousy) Homebody, The (passionate) Artist, The (sometimes cynical) Sophisticate. My own personal archetypes are different, of course, but I find that by studying how Nora creates these “same but different” characters, I build confidence to allow myself to create my own set of “new but familiar” characters.

I read Simone St. James for the way she creates atmosphere in her gothic novels. I may not want to create the same kind of slightly foggy, slightly spooky mood, but I want to learn how she pulls the strings to set the stage. Anne Perry, too, draws her dark tone from the smog-smudged setting of late nineteenth-century London.

I read Jennifer Estep for the way she’s turned literal cartoon characters, two-dimensional Superheroes and Superheroines, into fully fleshed people with complex emotions and feelings I can relate to. I read Spencer Quinn for his use of Point of View because the protagonist of his detective series is a flunk-out from K-9 school—*Squirrel!*—who sees the world—and interprets/misinterprets clues—through his canine perspective. And, I’ll admit, the humor inherent in a dog trying to understand human activities also appeals. After binge-reading Shirley Rousseau Murphy’s Joe Grey mysteries, I was terribly disappointed that my own cats don’t speak English, never mind solve crimes.

Seanan McGuire shows me truly heroic characters engaged in sometimes bloody, sometimes delicate political and social relationships within a fantasy world in which humans are in the minority and everyone else is dangerous. Her protagonists keep their moral compasses pointed in the right direction—the one for doing the right thing—even when self may be sacrificed. Oddly enough, Patricia Cornwell and Kathy Reichs have similar protagonists, not magical changelings but a medical examiner and a forensic anthropologist who have to find their way to the truth in situations fraught with political and social pitfalls.

Patricia Cornwell is an expert at writing disconnected dialogues in which direct questions go unanswered, hidden agendas are revealed, frustrations rise with the stakes at risk. She also is an expert at minute details, probably the kind of narrative Elmore Leonard advised to leave out because readers skip it. But like Lee Child, Cornwell has a knack for incorporating technical details about subjects I know

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nothing about, so I learn something with each of her stories.

Cornwell's characters can be difficult to like, are often angry, but she makes them understandable, and when you can understand someone, you can empathize... even if you don't like them. The late Arianna Franklin was also able to make prickly characters compelling; read *The Mistress of the Art of Death* to see what I mean. Elmore Leonard was another author who makes anti-heroes compelling even as they were committing bone-chilling crimes. He painted his stories with broad strokes and broke rules left and right—a dog's POV, an alligator's POV—but everything he did brought his characters to life, whether you like them or hope never to meet their ilk in even a well-lit alley. Zoe Sharp's thrillers are driven by a protagonist who's both admirable and hard to like, but so compelling that I'm willing to deal with her rough edges.

Making unlikable or difficult characters compelling to readers is a neat trick. Sometimes, even a romantic protagonist wants to be a little on the cranky side, a little grumpy, a little bit of a prima donna, but still has to compel the reader to continue, has to make the reader care about that happy-ever-after ending. It's hard to do well and sometimes such subtleties are lost on readers (and reviewers), but as you know, every story demands that the teller be honest, even if it hurts.

For world-building, I'm in awe of Anne Bishop, of Hugh Howey, of Patricia Briggs, of Elmore Leonard, of Anne Perry, of Suzanne Collins, of Iona Andrews, of Kelley Armstrong, and of course, of Philippa Gregory. Nalini Singh's shape-shifter paranormal romances combine elaborate world-building with elemental passion, her protagonists connecting on a sudden, primal level that I want to bring out in even my contemporary protagonists. In contrast, Courtney Milan's historical romances use inspired, sparkling dialogue and social issues to bring her mismatched heroes and heroines together slowly but inexorably.

From fully-realized fantasy worlds to "real life" criminal societies, to worlds that are like our own but a little different since the werewolves and vampires came out of their closets, to historical periods that were little more than dry dates and battles, begets and beheadings, back in high school history. These authors create, borrow and adapt settings in ways that I want to learn to do even if I'm writing contemporary romances.

Authors such as Deborah Harkness and Guy Gavriel Kay, who hybridize genre fiction with literary sensibilities, whose writing is both beautiful and accessible, stretch the parameters of commercial fiction. Patricia McKillip and Robin McKinley imbue their fantasies with lovely writing that enhances, rather than distracts from, the reading of their stories. M. J. Rose is another author whose lyrical writing draws me into her stories. I'm buoyed up by the beauty of their writing and frankly envious of it, so I try

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harder to make my own writing just a bit more lyrical than contemporary romantic fiction usually is. This is something agent Donald Maass talks about in his predictions of the future of genre fiction, but I'm not a trend-chaser. I just want to make my words sing, make them tease and tickle and caress readers' ears and minds because I love how it feels when I read one of these authors who do this for me. Bill Loehfelm, for example, can be positively poetical when describing a victim of a violent death.

I love reading suspense, romantic, paranormal or just plain old thrillers, but I'm too straight-forward a thinker to comfortably plot my own suspense stories. Nevertheless, I can learn from some of the best practitioners of these sub-genres, because after all, all romances contain a bit of suspense, even if it's just the emotional kind. Linda Howard knows how to strip all of her heroines' resources and force them to survive using skills they don't know they have. And isn't that essential to the character arc we want to build for any genre hero or heroine?

Jayne Ann Krentz, who also writes as Jayne Castle and Amanda Quick, has a knack for focusing on theme that inspired me to create a workshop about using theme and motifs in genre fiction. If the theme of one of her romantic suspense, paranormal romantic suspense, historical romantic suspense or paranormal historical romantic suspense novels is trust, you can safely bet that at the crisis, either hero or heroine will have to take a leap of faith to trust the other. Jayne is another prolific romance author who has created her own archetypes as well as her own story model, giving readers "familiar but different" stories and characters. I want to learn how to do that in my own way, with my own characters and stories, because having those constants will give me the freedom to experiment and not feel that I'm writing the same story over and over. Yep, it's a paradox. So many of life's truths are.

With over two-thousand "keepers" on my shelves, I could probably go on about this for a few more pages, but I think I've made my point. Read widely and deeply of new-to-you authors and sub-genres, even ones you aren't sure you're going to like. One of the best experiences of my career as a reader was acting on a literary prize jury, reading ninety-four books in about six months. Yes, 94 books. Some of those books confirmed that, no, I'm not going to be a fan of some sub-genres, but I could still appreciate the skills—and sometimes lack thereof—of the authors. Some opened new reading possibilities by introducing me to authors and sub-genres I didn't know.

Rather than worry that you'll copy other storytellers, welcome the influences of their mastery of the writing craft. Let them encourage you to raise your own personal bar, let envy of their skills push you to up your own game. There are no original story ideas, just original voices and original ways to tell the stories that inhabit our collective consciousness. Be confident that your own voice, your own characters and story ideas will prevent you from plagiarizing while they allow you to make universal

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themes and ideas your own.

Read to write, then write your stories, your way, for readers to appreciate and other writers to envy.

Kate Freiman, an award-winning national best-selling author of romantic fiction, is the last charter member of Toronto Romance Writers. A Connecticut Yankee by birth, Kate lives in Toronto with her family. When not writing or teaching writing workshops, she enjoys cooking, gardening, playing with her cats and dogs, riding her horse, and reading almost anything so long as it offers an optimistic world view.

CONTESTS, COORDINATORS, AND CASH

Help Us Help You!

North Texas RWA's primary source of income is from our two contests: the fifteen years strong Great Expectations Contest and the younger upstart, The Carolyn Readers Choice Award.

Right now, each contest is completely coordinated by a single person, with some help from one or two others.

These two coordinators give up a lot of writing time and personal time to serve the chapter in this capacity, and while they're (mostly) happy to do it, the adage of "many hands makes light work" certainly applies to these two endeavors.

Without the income from the contests, we couldn't bring you interesting speakers like Amy Atwell on preparing for your book launch (Feb 2016) or Pam Dougherty on audio books (May 2016) or Two-Step Conference programs like Margie Lawson's Empowering Characters Emotions (Apr 2016).

With that in mind, Lisa and Jen are asking you to step forward and help in one contest (or both if there's crossover.) Some tasks are a bit more time consuming than others, but none require hours upon hours of work at any given time.

The Great Expectations needs much more help than the Carolyn, so when perusing the "help wanted" lists, please bear that in mind.

HELP WANTED: THE 2017 GREAT EXPECTATIONS CONTEST

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· **FIRST ROUND JUDGE:** If each member of the chapter judged at least one entry, it would cut down on the number of outside judges needed. Finding qualified judges who will respond in a positive, professional manner to each entry is difficult—as members of the chapter, we comprehend that our contest's reputation is forged by our judges. Each contestant receives THREE judged versions of his / her entry, with the additional requirement that at least one of the judges is a published author. If we use 2016 as an example, that means we needed a minimum of 393 entries judged. Every judge counts, even if it's only one entry.

· **JUDGE COORDINATOR:** The Judge Coordinator will provide updated judging guidelines to all first round judges and will assist in sourcing both first round and final editor judges for the contest. First Round judges should be in place by January 1, 2017. Final Editors must be in place prior to October 1, 2016. Benefits of this position: interaction with numerous industry professionals and excellent networking opportunities.

· **CATEGORY COORDINATOR (NEED THREE):** The Category Coordinators will each be responsible for three categories (we have a total of nine). The responsibilities include: entry reformatting, preparing the document for judge distribution, distributing the entries to first round judges, judge follow-up, and score verification upon the entry's return. Time frame is January 1 – February 7, 2017. Benefits of this position: enhanced software skills, interaction with contestants (many of whom go on to publish), networking opportunities, and an in depth knowledge of the financial implications of this contest to the chapter.

· **COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST:** In concert with the chapter's VP of Communications, ensure all advertising goes out as needed, contest information is distributed on all chapter loops and in the RWR, blog and website information is updated / posted, and all finalist / winner announcements post to the loops and the RWR. Benefits of this position include contact with all RWA chapter loops, blog management skills, and gaining knowledge of the advertising field. Time required is minimal and runs from August 2016 (RWR submission and initial advertising) to March 2017 (finalist and winner announcements.)

Training will be provided for all volunteer positions and will occur this summer (most likely in August 2016), so that we're ready for the 2017 Great Expectations Contest season. Please contact Lisa Fenley at FenleyGrant.Author@gmail.com if you can help.

HELP WANTED: THE 2017 CAROLYN READERS CHOICE AWARD

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ENTRY EMPRESS/CONFIRMATION QUEEN—as entries arrive, enter information into the master spreadsheet and send out pre-written confirmation emails (Nov 14 to Feb 14)

ADVERTISING ANGEL—ensure that any and all advertising (free and paid) gets done as needed (Aug 14 to Feb 14)

REMINDER DIVA—send pre-written reminders to judges once they've had a book for three weeks (Jan 14 to Apr 20)

VERIFICATION MISTRESS—compare the EmailMeForm data to the contest spreadsheet and a) verify the entered scores are correct and b) verify that the returning judge was marked ready to receive the next book; correct information pertinent to spreadsheet sorting on the original scoresheets (Jan 14 to Apr 30)

JUDGE WRANGLER—query previous judges; send confirmations; send reminders prior to books being sent out; handle contest correspondence (Oct 14 to May 14)

BLOG MOMMA—post updates as needed (at least weekly) to the contest blog (Nov 14 to May 14)

Training will be provided for all volunteer positions and can occur at the volunteer's convenience, but should probably be done prior to September so that we're ready for the 2017 Carolyn Readers Choice Award season. Please contact Jen FitzGerald at carolyn.award@ntrwa.org for more information or to volunteer.

Thanks!!!

Lisa Fenley & Jen FitzGerald

Your NT contest coordinators

SOCIAL MEDIA

The updated membership roster is available in the YahooGroups file section. It should be on the website shortly. Those who have notified us of their social media links...that information is included. We did not include phone numbers or addresses. If you'd like to contact a member, please use the provided email address.

If you'd like your information to be included, please use the Social Media update form in the members only section of our website. Please remember that information on our roster is for

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members only use and is a violation of chapter bylaws to be sold or used for profit.

<http://ntrwagreatexpectations.blogspot.com/p/ntrwa-social-media-form.html>

MINUTES from MAY

CALL TO ORDER:

A regular meeting for the North Texas Romance Writers of America (NTRWA) was held on Saturday, May 21, 2016 at the La Hacienda Restaurant in Colleyville, Texas. The Past President and the Secretary were present. The meeting was called to order at 10:44 a.m. The minutes for the April 16, 2016 meeting were approved.

OFFICER REPORTS:

President: Suzan Butler was not present. Past-President Angi Morgan reported:

- We will have an on-line vote for by-laws after the board determines the three positions to add to our elected board (a change in RWA bylaws permits these additions.)
- Lisa Fenley and Amanda McMurrey present Angi Morgan with a congratulatory gift from the chapter for making RWA PRO Mentor of the Year.

President-Elect: Kim Miller was not present:

- No Report

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- The April 16, 2016 meeting minutes were approved and filed for audit.

Treasurer: Jen FitzGerald reported:

- The Treasurer's report was presented and filed for audit.

Program Director: Amanda McMurrey reported:

- Today's Meeting:
 - **Audio Book Narration -- The Basic Questions Answered.**
Pam Dougherty will speak about Audiobooks.
- June Meeting:
 - **Laura Drake on Backstory.**

Website Director:

- If you want to post information to the website, please contact Jen FitzGerald.

COMMITTEE COORDINATOR REPORTS:**Membership Director: Angi Morgan reported:**

- No report.

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Communications Director: Audra Lewandowski reported:

- Report submitted:
 - Send information / articles / photos for inclusion in the newsletter to newsletter@NTRWA.org by May 28, 2016.
 - Social Media—please complete the profile information for your social media formats to share with the chapter.

PAN Liaison: Chrissy Szarek reported:

- Pencils to members present:
 - Gina Nelson: *The Good, The Bad, and the Guacamole*.
 - Jerrie Alexander: Fourth book in the Lost and Found series: *No Chance in Hell*.
 - Chrissy Szarek: *Fate's Call* novella and *Superior Collision*.
- RWA pins for milestones (starting at 5 books published.) Pins are \$10 apiece. Order through RWA.

PRO Liaison: Clover Autrey reported:

- If you are not a PRO member, please see Clover for application information.
- PRO membership allows you on the NT PRO loop, where training and information are provided to our chapter PRO members.

Two Step Conference: Amanda McMurrey reported:

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- Survey coming to members for feedback on this year's 2-Step Conference featuring Margie Lawson.

Great Expectations: Lisa Fenley reported:

- Report filed:
 - Winners announced 3/31/16.
 - We need volunteers to help with the 2017 contest.

Carolyn Contest: Jen FitzGerald reported:

- Report filed:
 - Contest Complete and winners announced
 - Winners' cover art is on the blog and the website. RT ad in production.
 - We need volunteers to help with the 2017 contest.

Hospitality: Faith Stencil was not present. Angi Morgan reported:

- Requested a hospitality chair for the last six months of the year.

Writing Incentives: Chrissy Szarek reported:

- Top 3 Edited Pages: Kym Roberts at 530, Amanda McMurrey at 340, Lisa Fenley at 195
- Top 3 Written Pages: Cindy Dees at 200, Jen at 78 pages, Lisa Fenley at 77

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- No Report.

Spotlights: Open Position:

- No Report.

Unfinished Business:

- No unfinished business to report.

New Business:

- No new business to report.
-

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#delish

A Note from the Newsletter Editor:

Please note photos included in the newsletter are provided by the members. Any photos you'd like to include can be sent to newsletter@ntrwa.org. It is at the discretion of the newsletter editor as to which photos will be included in the newsletter. Thank you.

Email questions, comments, or articles to newsletter@ntrwa.org.

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