

HEART TO HEART

MICHELLE STYLES

Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas

Michelle, for those members not familiar with your work, can you tell us what you write? I write passionate historical romances set in a wide variety of time periods, from Ancient Rome to Viking and Regency/Early Victorian.

Was your road to publication a long one? How many years were you writing for 'the call', and was hearing an editor say she wanted to buy your first book as good as you thought it would be?

I knew I wanted to be writer from about the time I was 12. Then when I was 14 I met a romance author who said basically to live first as life adds a richness to your writing. So for a long time, I was one of those annoying people who was going to write some day. Then in 2002, I had an attack of gall stones and ended up in hospital and knew that the some day had arrived and I became serious about my writing. I sent my first query off in October 2002, and finally sold to HMB in 2005. I did sell a couple of things to other publishers after I had submitted The Gladiator's Honour and while I was waiting for the editor's verdict. But HMB were the only ones to call as the other two publishers sent letters. And receiving The Call is absolutely wonderful. In my case, I had convinced myself that The Call only went on a Thursday. It seemed the day of the week that it always happened. So when my then editor phoned, I kept thinking I must be very close but have just slightly missed. I think I screamed when my editor said that they wanted to buy the book! And really I find myself getting just as excited every time I have a book accepted.

I personally adore Viking books, and I know you have a new Viking release out soon – The Viking's Captive Princess. But on your blog, you mention that there will be no more Viking stories from you unless readers start emailing editorial to request them! Is that because they are not deemed as popular at the moment?

Ah, the Viking time period is popular. It has always done well for HMB Historical and they are actively looking for new voices. I am just writing Regency/early Victorian at the moment and my editors think I am making a good contribution there and so they want me to concentrate on that. However, my editors are swayed by readers writing into them directly and I tend to follow editorial direction on which time period they would like. One of my great strengths apparently is that I am versatile and can bring a number of time periods to life. Also there are more publishing slots for Georgian/Regency/Victorian than there are for Unusual Historical. So if people want more Vikings from me, they will have to convince my editors who will then say in their very lovely voices – Michelle, you will write another one, won't you? Or at least a woman can dream!

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To subscribe to the RWNZ online loop, which is dedicated to the support of its writers by and for members, send a blank email to NZromance-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or contact giovanna@xtra.co.nz for information about the loop.

EDITORS' DESK

Can you believe it's almost Christmas? This is our last newsletter for the year, meaning the holiday season is just around the corner. We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to H2H this year. From those authors agreeing to be interviewed or providing craft articles, to our regular contributors, we couldn't have done it without you.

We are still actively seeking articles to publish, so please do get in touch if you have an idea or an article ready to put forward.

Let's hope that 2010 will bring many sales for RWNZ members, as well as competition successes.

See you in February, for our first issue of H2H in the New Year.

Soraya & Suzanne

AUTHORS & WRITERS OF ELTHAM DAY

RWNZ foundation member and playwright Glenda Leader of Brown's Bay will be the guest speaker at the Authors and Writers Day during Eltham's 125th anniversary on Tuesday, December 8. She will speak at the evening session after a day in which the works of about 13 writers who came from the small central Taranaki town will be on display.

NEW! RWNZ Gift Vouchers

Treat a special friend to membership of our lively organisation.

Joining fee and Heart to Heart from now until September 2010 is \$75.

Voucher and new-member pack can be sent to you to include with your card, or posted direct to your nominated recipient.

Check romancewriters.co.nz for full details.

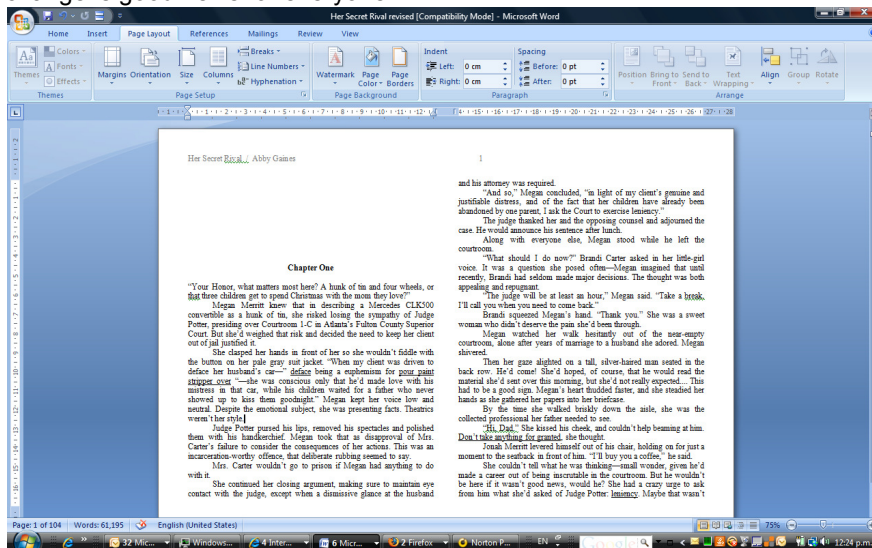
PRESIDENT ABBY

Yeehaa, it's Clendon Award time!!

Even though I'm no longer eligible to enter (another yeehaa!), I still find the Clendon Award one of the most exciting events on RWNZ's calendar. For those of you who don't know it, the Clendon is a contest for completed romance manuscripts, which makes it unique in the world (to my knowledge). You'll find an article with more details of the Clendon and why you should enter in this newsletter, plus a copy of the entry form. But I'd like to make a couple more points about the contest, too.

You'll notice this year we have changed the manuscript format to ARC format, due to popular demand. What is ARC? Basically, ARC makes your manuscript look like more like a book than a manuscript. Here's how an ARC-formatted manuscript page looks on your computer screen:

The reason why so many of you requested ARC format is that it's much cheaper to print and post, so this change is good news for everyone!



Next, a word about our new judge, Mary-Theresa Hussey, senior editor at Harlequin. I recently received an email from a member who had a valid concern that as a writer of single-title historical romance, it might not be worth her entering the Clendon, since Mary-Theresa does a lot of work in series romance and isn't known to acquire a lot of historical romance.

If you're thinking along the same lines about whatever romance genre you write, let me point out that Mary-Theresa edits authors in Mira, Luna and Harlequin Teen (all single title imprints), as well as across many of the Harlequin and Silhouette series. She was positioned

specifically as a Mira editor at a US conference she attended last year.

Most importantly, she is committed to acquiring great stories, whatever their genre. Note that our former judge, Leslie Wainger, while not acquiring much historical fiction herself, twice awarded first place in the Clendon to historical authors and forwarded their manuscripts to appropriate editors in Harlequin, who then acquired those books. And thus the careers of Sophia James (Harlequin Historicals) and Helen Kirkman (HQN single title historical author) were born....

The wonderful thing about having a judge from Harlequin is that as a publisher they cover literally all the bases in romantic and women's fiction (including, now, young adult fiction). And remember, a great story transcends its genre – I can vouch for that personally as a total non-fan of paranormal romance who loved Nalini Singh's *Slave to Sensation*. What matters is that our judging editor is committed to bringing great stories to readers, and Mary-Theresa ticks all those boxes for us!

Welcome back?

They say that old friends are the best kind, and often that's true (I like to think of my wonderful newer friends as "future old friends"!).

As you know, we're on a real campaign to boost RWNZ member numbers over the next year—with more members we can afford bigger and better conferences, more member services, and so on. One thing we're keen to do is get in touch with former RWNZ members who might have taken a break from writing, or dropped out of sight for whatever reason, and invite them back into the fold.

If you know any former RWNZ-ers who might appreciate a personal invitation and a small incentive to rejoin, please let me know their names (and ideally their snail mail addresses or at least roughly where they can be found!). Please email me on abby@abbygaines.com.

Lastly...merry Christmas!! Yes, it's that time of year again, where did 2009 go? I hope you and your families have a wonderful Christmas and summer break. RWNZ's theme for 2010 is "Make this year your writing year" (thanks to our publicity office Sue Knight for that inspired theme!). Why not start by finishing that manuscript and sending it into the Clendon Award?

Best wishes

Abby Gaines, RWNZ President

On a more serious note, the editors, in particular senior Editor Linda Fildew, are very committed to the concept of Unusual Historical and are looking for strong manuscripts in any time period. So if you have a good Viking, medieval, Australian western, Far Eastern, Egyptian that fits the Harlequin Historical guidelines, it is worth submitting. The bar is set high but it does happen. It is the first three chapters and a synopsis and you can submit via email. The short story line Undone has also expanded and is now publishing two stories per month, so they are actively looking for more stories there.

What type of story are you working on at the moment? Another delicious regency?

I am currently doing revisions on an early Victorian which is linked to Compromising Miss Milton, my May 2010 UK release. I am also working on a Regency which is going to be the start of another few books.

Do you have an average writing day? A set number of pages/words that you have to complete on a daily basis?

My writing day starts at about 6 when I answer my email etc. In theory I am suppose to write then as well but the Internet is a strong temptation. I try to write between 1,000 and 2,500 words per day. I find if I go over 3,000 my mind turns to mush. And because I am professional writer, I write every day except for Christmas. Plus then I find my muse turns up. Having daily goals works for me but I am flexible. Some days, it is about writing that single paragraph and other days the words flow like water. But I find I write better if it is around 1,000 – 2,500 words on a consistent basis.

You have just returned from a “research” trip to an exotic location. Can you tell us a little about it . . . and are these research trips regular excursions for you?!

One of the great things about writing is that you don't go on holiday, you go on research expeditions! I have just returned from Istanbul where the second book in the new series of books will be set. I wanted to investigate things like the Harem, the bazaar, Ottoman houses, and the Turkish bath and its central role in women's lives in the Ottoman Empire. The book is going to be set during the Regency period but will start in Istanbul before going to England.

When I started doing the Viking books, I went to Iceland to learn more about the Viking horses and see the Icelandic manuscripts. And I went to Rome when I was writing my Roman set books.

I have also been to Venice and Sorrento and these have added to my understanding about the Regency/Victorian period. Having been to Venice, I can now understand why various Regency aristocrats came back and found English society so lacking in life.

Your critique partner is the wonderful Donna Alward, who writes for Harlequin Romance. How long have you been critiquing with Donna, and how does it strengthen your writing?

Donna is rather wonderful, isn't she? We have been critiquing since 2004, just after I sold my first novella. We were critique partners first and became friends. She is my biggest supporter and she does spot things and call me on them. We tend to ask each other questions about aspects of the chapter, rather than offering solutions. It is one reading with remarks on the chapter when the chapter is in a rough state. And we do not argue about things but are free to ignore the advice. I often have found my editors will call me on the same things as Donna if I don't change them... So I have learnt to seriously consider what she says.

Does it help that you both write for different Harlequin lines?

When you are writing for the same line, there is a small amount of competition and it can quickly get incestuous. However, writing for different lines helps. It also helps that we both happen to love the other person's line. So Donna is a long term historical reader and I have read HR for ages.

What advice do you have for unpublished romance writers? What have you learnt on your writing journey that you would like to pass on?

The biggest mistake any writer can make is to give up and stop writing. Writers write. The urge to write shows you have talent. What you do with that talent and how you hone it is up to you. They reckon that it takes about 10,000 hours of work to master something and writing romance is no different. It is all about desire, dedication, discipline, determination and a lot of persistence. Nobody ever tattoos a big Red R on your forehead and they do not list how many times you were rejected before you finally sold on your first book. It is what you do and how you respond to rejections and revisions that determines how you will succeed. It is always about making the next story the best it can be.

And finally, tell us about your upcoming release, *The Viking's Captive Princess*!

The Viking's Captive Princess is my third Viking and while previous characters make an appearance, it is a stand alone story. Basically it tells the tale of what happens when an exiled princess takes her half-sister's place in the bed of an enemy Viking warrior because her half-sister is secretly betrothed to someone else. The blurb reads:

"No one touches my woman. She bears my mark. I claim her."

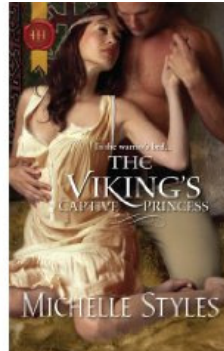
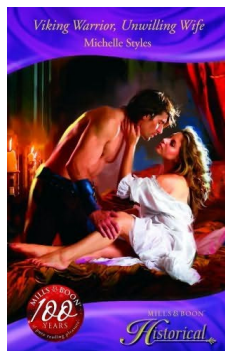
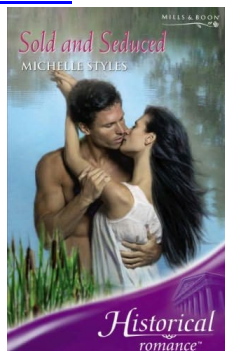
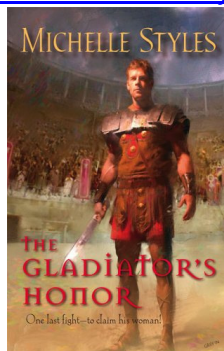
Dangerous warrior Ivar Gunnarson is a man of deeds, not words. With little time for the ideals of love, Ivar seizes what he wants – and Princess Thyre will not become the exception to his rule!

Mysterious and enchanting, Thyre rouses Ivar's desire the moment he lays eyes on her. With Viking factions engaged in a bloody feud, Thyre is yet another captive this hardened warrior conquers – but to be king of Thyre's *heart* will entail a battle he has never engaged in before...

You can read an excerpt on my website.

I was very thrilled when the Romantic Times gave *The Viking's Captive Princess* four stars and said: **Basing her love story on an ancient Viking legend, Styles spins the tale of a Viking warrior and a princess. She maintains the myth while adding sexual tension, nonstop action and spice.**

If you want to find out more about Michelle and her books, visit her website, www.michellestyle.co.uk



www.romancewriters.co.nz

December 2009

CLENDON ANNOUNCEMENT

It's almost time to enter the **2010 Clendon Award**, New Zealand's—make that the *world's*—premier romance writing contest.

It's the only contest we know of where your **whole book** is judged by every judge...and depending on how far you get in the contest, that could be up to eight judges (minimum three). What's more, all judges are romance readers, not writers—they're all loyal customers of Barbara's Books, the specialist romance bookstore run by Barbara and Peter Clendon, inventors and faithful sponsors of the Clendon Award.

The Clendon Award is open only to paid-up members of RWNZ (if you have friends who'd like to enter, now's the time for them to join!). Entrants must be unpublished, uncontracted and unaccepted for print publication or e-publication at the closing date of the competition. Published short stories up to 30,000 words, non-fiction publications, or a fiction publication more than five years previous will not affect eligibility.

Note: We have a new judging editor this year—read on for details!

So, what do you need to do?

1. Write your book—yes, the whole thing! We suggest you finish it by January, to give yourself a chance to polish it to publishable standard.
2. Look out for the entry form in this issue of *Heart to Heart*, and available soon on the www.romancewriters.co.nz website.
3. Send in your manuscript, your entry form and your \$55 entry fee by the deadline of February 26, 2010. Refer to the entry form for further details.

Why enter the Clendon Award?

- Apart from the fact it's the best romance writing contest in the world (see above!), check out how many authors have sold their first book as a direct result of or immediately after winning the Clendon: Sophia James, Frances Housden, Helen Kirkman, Bronwyn Jameson, Melissa James, Yvonne Lindsay, Karina Bliss, Abby Gaines...
- The feedback you'll receive from real readers is comprehensive and unique. Because your whole book gets read, it's not instant death if first chapters don't happen to be your strong point (though we strongly advise you to write the best first chapter you can, of course!).
- Your story can be any kind of romance: historical, contemporary, paranormal, young adult, suspense, etc., etc. For the purpose of the contest, "romance" is defined as a fictional story which has the development and resolution of a romance between a male and a female as the primary motivation of the plot. A happy ending is mandatory!! Entries deemed "not a romance" will be disqualified, so do make sure your story contains a strong romance.
- Unsure which is your best work? You can enter up to three manuscripts in the contest. Manuscript length must fall between 45,000 and 110,000 words.
- The finalist entries—at least three of them—will be sent to Mary-Theresa Hussey, at Harlequin in New York for final judging. Mary-Theresa, the editor who attended our conference this year, acquires across all the Harlequin lines. She will decide on the final placings. (N.B. finalling in or winning the contest is **not** a guarantee of publication!).
- In addition to the wonderful chance to have your book read by an editor, the winner will be awarded the coveted Clendon trophy for a year, will win \$300, and will have unlimited kudos as the Clendon winner!

Huge thanks to **Barbara and Peter Clendon** for their vision and support of the Clendon Award.

Any questions? Contact the Clendon Award coordinator, Maree Anderson, on maree@mareeanderson.com
Ready...set...go!!

NEWBIE AUTHOR

Nikki Logan (Harlequin Romance) interviewed by Kylie Griffin



A little bit about myself...

I'm a West Aussie writer working full time in a government management role. I wrote my first novel while on 6 months long-service leave because I thought I'd go spare with nothing to do for six months and because I'd always wanted to see if I could. I initially thought I'd try a fiction because it would be 'easier' than non-fiction. Bwahahahaaa... that still cracks me up. Such a novice!

Anyway ... I chose romance because I'd read a lot of them and because I specifically wanted to target a commercial genre so that I could test the potential for earning. And then I was delighted to discover how much peer support there was in Australia & NZ through the two writer associations. So I knew I'd picked the right genre.

How authors are "discovered" is as diverse as the brands of chocolate we consume. Please tell us your CALL story.

I wrote my first book in complete isolation. I seriously did not even start looking for writing support networks until I'd finished the first draft because I wanted to focus and because I had no idea what I was missing. Once I had discovered RWNZ and RWAus I started absorbing like a happy little sponge, and once I discovered the wonder of competition, I started entering like a happy little diva. Where else could I get three or four written opinions on my work and a gauge of where I sat against others in my field for about \$30? It was insanely good value (although it also takes a special brand of courage). So lots of comps for me and fortunately, a handful of finals and a couple of wins, too.

Meanwhile I was subbing my first book to any publisher who could spell romance - really naive! Mis-targetting all over the place. But... was also getting really constructive and helpful feedback from editors who were politely rejecting my work. So between that feedback, the competition feedback and everything I was learning through RWNZ and RWAus, I was getting mountains of useful info to hone my craft.

About this time I joined the RWAus Bootcamp and that just shot me to a whole new level of learning. I REALLY knew then how much I didn't know. I found a cluster of fantastic crit-partners/crit-friends in Bootcamp and then an additional one through RWAus 'Crit register'. These women were and are an amazing resource.

A year passed. Rejections flowed in (some good, some just form-letter) and I kept writing even after going back to work. Once you open the storytelling door there really is no forcing it shut again. I'd just finished book # 3 when I got the news that I'd come first in the Great Beginnings (RWNZ) with book #2 and Kimberley Young from HMB had requested a full. I sent it off. Then I quite seriously forgot about it. Enough people had read my work over the year with no real advancement, I thought this was just another one of those.

And then... an email... Kim wanted to discuss my work. It took us ten agonising days to get our planets to align but when we did she had some revision suggestions on book #2 and wanted to know if I was wedded to the line I'd subbed it for. I wasn't but I didn't have a lot of experience with the line she thought it suited.

So while I went away to read as many 'Romance' as I could download from e-harlequin, Kim went away to read my second category MS. Which she ended up preferring and sent revisions on

that story instead of the other. She asked how long I'd need for revisions and I was torn between saying a month (*and I could visualise her frowning that it could possibly take anyone so long*) or saying two weeks (*and she'd smile and think 'how sweet, she thinks she can do it in two weeks'*). So I went with three weeks, to be safe ;).

A few days after subbing the revisions -- sweating blood wondering if I'd done okay with my first ever revisions -- Kim emailed to say she wanted to call me again with a couple more questions. *Oh God, she hated it, she's going to ask me to have another go.* With the time difference it was about 10pm by the time she finally called. I'd been watching the clock since 6pm and was virtually incapable of speech by this time. She opened with the obligatory get-to-know-you small talk but I was too terrified to do more than squeak 'uh-huh', so she cut straight to the chase and said they were thrilled with the revisions and wanted to offer me a two book contract.

I turned into the obligatory dribbling-moron as I raced through disbelief, confusion and denial and then finally turned the corner into realisation, shock and delight. Kim drove the entire phone call and I retained barely a word of it. I do remember asking her 'is this just the best part of your job?' and she said it really was. And I can believe it!

I just have to ask the-chicken-or-the-egg question. What happened first – agent or an editor? How did you go about finding one/both?

Egg (editor). I accessed my editor through a competition win. She found me, in other words. Which is a bit surreal. But it really highlights something we keep reading about or hearing at conferences... the importance of voice. My editor had read two other samples of my work (neither one submitted to her, interestingly, so they do pass MS around in Richmond!) and remembered my voice when she encountered it through competition. Even though the works were vastly different, my voice stayed the same and I think it was the consistency of voice that got her attention.

What's the name of your book scheduled for release and can you tell us something about it?

My debut release (OMG, that still feels fabulous to say) is called *Lights, Camera...Kiss the Boss*. It's been moved to February 2010 (March Aust/NZ) to be part of a special promotional month. Fourteen months is a long time to wait for a writer who can't tolerate delayed gratification :)

It's a Harlequin Romance (Sweet) and is set on the rooftops of Sydney where my landscape architect heroine, Ava, battles the PR demons sent in by my young-gun lifestyle television producer hero, Dan, who is bent on commercial success.

You can read an excerpt at: www.nikkilogan.com.au

What's the most exciting thing about writing for you? The most boring?

I love getting so deeply into the zone that the words just pour straight from my subconscious. I sometimes 'hear' them for the first time as they appear on the screen. I have quite a filmic brain and so I 'see' the scenes playing out in my head and really just capture that in text form. I think that's why I'm such a dialogue heavy writer... because I trained in film and theatre and so exposition through dialogue comes quite naturally to me.

The most boring...mmmm...the laborious reads over and over rectifying watch-words. I have a lot of them (in life and in writing!) and so the most effective (but dull) way for me to find them is to 'find' every instance of every word on my ever-growing list and triage it - keep/delete/change. If my list was shorter it might be less dull :)

At the chat sessions during conferences we hear favourite authors telling us that things really change once you publish. What differences, good or OMG (oh my goodness), have you experienced since getting THE CALL?

I was surprised in my first few months as a 'published' writer at how varied the pace was. My first month was extraordinary. A million wonderful congrats emails from fellow writers or authors on my shelves welcoming me into the fold, and then loops to join filled with more of those authors and their wisdom and then a ream of 'techie' things to do straight up, the contract, heaps of editor

contact while getting settled in, signing on for HMBs online facility to input as much detail as you can about your story for the title/cover/marketing people who will do their 'thing' solely using the information provided by the author...

And then in January... silence.

Literally weeks and weeks of baffling silence. Useful -- given that I had a very short deadline in which to produce the second book in the contract -- but an unexpected and unexplained contrast to the first frenetic month.

On signing, two books felt like a monumental achievement, but one month later I was lurking on loops with authors writing their 30th, 60th, 70th title and my two little books feel pretty darned insubstantial all of a sudden. And so here the learning really begins. How to balance the creative with the business, how to develop a thick skin, how to be prolific while also working/raising kids/having a life, how not to be a needy author.

It's kind of like starting a new job and you've done all the paperwork and got your uniform etc and then you turn up on the first day and you have no desk, no induction, no idea of what you're supposed to be working on, and the boss is on annual leave. So you just find a desk and order your own stationery and scout out the tearoom and start learning what the company does and how you could contribute and hope that someone will remember to pay you come pay day. Weird, but kind of liberating.

And the other major shift... your manuscript which you birthed with much sweat and agony over months and months suddenly becomes the property of someone else. A commercial thing. A product. (Your *baby*!) You have to ask for legal permission to use your own work on your own website. And, the moment it's sold it feels a bit like yesterday's news... cos your focus is on the horizon. The next book. The next sale. And you know that the next one has to be better than the one before... Hmm... it's kind of like addictive behaviour really!!

There are OMG moments galore, though. The first contract, the first bit of PR exposure (thank you Robyn Grady!), the first blog request, the first *Heart to Heart* article :) the first cover... And I know they will just keep coming and coming until I'm writing my 60th novel...

Is there any other advice, "lightbulb" moments or comments you'd like to share about getting/being published?

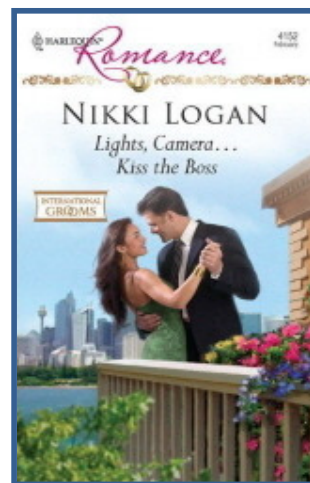
The most accurate piece of advice I've heard is that getting published is not the end-game, it's not the goal. It's only the first of a number of significant markers in a writer's career. Like a wedding day, it's just the first milestone (albeit a highly significant one). The real work starts now... building a sustainable, enduring marriage between author and publisher and, more importantly, author and reader. This is now officially work. Time to approach it more firmly like a business and less like a delightful hobby.

Also that people's reactions and responses will change once you have that big gold P stamped on your forehead. The skills or advice I had the week before I sold are the same as the week after but suddenly everyone takes them so much more seriously, puts more stock in them. You cannot (not!) buy into that.

On the other side of the fence I am just the tiniest of tadpoles in a massive and established pond filled with some really shiny, really large, really *survival-toughened* fish... that kind of keeps you humble. Just when I thought I'd progressed enough and learned enough to launch away from the safe shores of 'newbie-ism' and maybe start calling myself 'intermediate', I suddenly find myself back at square one, the novice again starting on a whole new learning curve with a much larger, baffling set of rules. It's intellectually exhausting.

But what a great problem to have!!

Thanks for your time, Nikki!



ZANA BELL

Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas



Zana, I'm so excited to be talking to you about your recent sale to Harlequin SuperRomance! Please give us all the gory details about your call story . . .

They say the call always come when you least expect it. It was 8.55am and I was in my office, due to walk into class at 9am. The phone rang and the voice on the other end said, "It's Victoria Curran here." I was so completely into work mode that I thought, "Now, where do I know that name from?" She had to elaborate, "From Harlequin". That kickstarted my heart in a way that my early morning cups of tea had not. Needless to say, when I floated into class ten minutes late with a dazed grin and told the students my news, I was forgiven instantly.

How long have you been writing for? Had SuperRomance always been of interest to you?

I've been writing off and on for years but had always seen myself as an historical writer. I tend to write in a sprawling fashion so have always been immensely impressed by category writers who could tell their story in 50 000 words. Then I read a couple of SuperRomance by Karina Bliss and Abby Gaines and felt an instant bond with the line (the great books helped!). I loved the wider parameters and these excellent authors had already blazed the way for Kiwis and NZ settings so I just followed in their footsteps.

Your first published book, *Forbidden Frontier*, was also published by Harlequin. Was it under a different imprint?

Forbidden Frontier is an Australian historical and was published by Mira. In fact, it was through this book that I discovered Romance writing. A publisher at Penguin had suggested it might be a romance so I attended the Kara School of Writing to find out if it was. It wasn't, but by the end of the weekend I was hooked on giving romance a go. Then I met the editor of Mira at one of our conferences so I always look on *Forbidden Frontier* as my honorary romance.

What next? Are you already working on another book? What are your writing goals for the coming year?

I'm hoping SuperRomance will like the next book I'm writing in the series. I've also got my fingers crossed I'll find a publisher somewhere who is willing to take a punt on New Zealand historicals. Both Australia and New Zealand have amazing histories and I'd love to write more about these countries.

Any advice for unpublished authors? What kept you going in your pre-published years?

A few years ago I became disheartened and moaned to my sister. "I don't know why I keep doing this to myself. It's hard work, I never have any time for myself, and not nearly enough for the family and then I get rejections to top it all."

She said, "Well, why don't you stop? No-one is making you do it."

I considered that for all of two seconds. What on earth would I do with myself if I wasn't writing? Housework? Gardening? What would happen to all the stories in my head?

Since then I've always known I write for myself, for the love of the process and that's my advice to anyone wanting to write. Do it for the joy of telling stories. Getting published is the cherry on top. If finding a publisher had been my primary goal, I'd have probably quit years ago.

Do you have an agent?

Alas, no. I thought it might be easier to find one after *Forbidden Frontier* was published but I was wrong. Then I thought an agent might like me after my SuperRomance was bought. Still no. They are more elusive than editors in my experience!

What is your writing process? Do you set a target for the day/week when you are working on a new story?

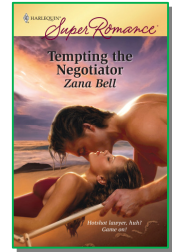
I have no process. Because I work fulltime, I write when I can – mostly weekends and holidays. It's great for writer's block because I'm in such a panic to make the most of a couple of hours, I usually turn something out. However, I'm full of good intentions to write 1000 words a day etc. Who knows, I might even get into a routine one day.

When is your book out? Tell us the blurb . . .

Tempting the Negotiator is coming out in March and the blurb goes as follows:

As soon as Sass Walker's high-powered heels hit the New Zealand ground, she knows she's out of her element. But cool and professional as any top New York lawyer should be, she's determined to get the local tree huggers onside with his company's proposed resort. Win this, and the brass ring is hers. Lose it, and, well, that's not an option, with her board seat at stake.

But here the best seats on the board are out on the surf. Nobody believes that more than freewheeling Jake Finlayson, champion surfer turned environmental hero...and leader of the opposition...and gorgeous. A dangerous and worthy opponent. To fight him and win, she'll have to loosen a button or two. Get her hair mussed. Let go and ride the wave.



And lastly, where can we find out more about you and your novels? Do you have a website?

I hope to have one up soon. I'm currently working my way through Gracie's wonderful web course which I highly recommend.

Thanks for your time Zana!

Strictly Single Competition 2009 Report

There were 24 entries in this year's Strictly Single competition. A wide range of single title sub genres were entered, from Young Adult to Historical to Dark Paranormal. I would like to congratulate the finalists (in alphabetical order):

Michelle de Rooy
Iona Jones
Sharon Kelly
Soraya Nicholas
Susy Rogers

As usual, common areas were identified by judges as "weak links". The most prolific of these was the synopsis. Synopses are not a plot by plot detailing of the story. Although it is important to indicate what happens, the development of your characters in terms of their emotional growth (and the growth of the relationship if that is a key aspect) should be paramount. There are several excellent guides for writing of synopses on the internet and Cathy Sneyd's workshop on synopses from the 2008 conference was cited by one judge as an excellent resource, should you have notes on this.

Other key points included trimming your backstory (I still recall Donald Mass at a conference: "Backstory belongs at the back"), starting in the right place with a hook that keeps the reader interested and making your dialogue natural. Also, when you are using figurative language, make sure your choice of words reflects your characters and the image you want to convey. Comparing your hero's face to a two year old screaming over a stolen toy, for example, does not make for a man we would hunger for. Finally, pertinent to this competition is the fact that some entries read more like category romances than single titles. Make sure you know what market you are targeting.

I would like to thank the judges for giving up their time to judge this contest. Many judges went the "extra mile" with detailed notes that I'm sure will be helpful to entrants revising their work.

Best of luck for the final results, which are being decided now by agent Holly Root at Waxman and editor Meredith Giordan. When going back over past competitions I have co-ordinated, it was amazing to see how many of those early finalists are now published authors. I hope the same good fortune follows this year's Strictly Single entrants.

ME, MYSELF AND I: WRITING FIRST PERSON POINT OF VIEW by Cheryl Wright

You want to write first person - it's easy, right? Anyone can do it; at least that's what everyone tells you. Not quite. First person narration is becoming more and more popular, and this is being recognised by many publishers, including some romance publishers, who are now open to submissions using this point of view (POV).

The trick is to eliminate most of those nasty "I" words that sneak into your prose unnoticed. Just because the story is being told in first person, does not forgive starting every (or every other) sentence with "I". The alternatives are endless.

For example: *I glanced at the clock.*

Becomes: *My eyes darted to the clock.*

Or: *The constant ticking drew my glance toward the clock.*

Reworded, the meaning is not lost, but that repetitive "I" is gone.

Each time you start a sentence with "I", cross it out in red, circle it, or underline it. Do this every time "I" appears on the page. You will quickly tire of this no-win game. (Here's your new mantra: nasty, nasty, nasty!)

Another shortfall many authors of first person have, is to make the reader privy to information not possessed by the narrator. As with most forms of writing, this unforgivable (and annoying) habit can definitely be perfected with practice.

An example of this could be:

Tripping as I entered the room, I landed heavily on my knees. His gentle touch was beyond anything I'd experienced before, but all eyes looked my way. I was blushing so profusely, he must have thought me insane.

Did you pick the error? The narrator cannot see herself blushing, so she can't describe it to the reader.

Imagine yourself stepping into a room. It could be a ballroom built in 1820. Notice the beautifully carved ceiling. What about those magnificent paintings, hung perfectly straight on the wall? And of course, you would have admired the chandelier; it takes centre stage above all else, with its two hundred tiny lamps and fifty crystal droplets. You did see the light bouncing off them, didn't you? Of course you did!

Did you also notice the masked man coming up behind you, a gun in his left hand, and a black bag in his right? If you did, you must be my mother. As far as I know, she's the only person in the entire universe to have eyes in the back of her head.

The lesson here, is that a first person narrator cannot see what she cannot see. What? I've still not made it clear?

The most important thing (or rule, if you prefer) with writing in first person, is to visualise yourself as the narrator. Stand in that doorway to the ballroom. Look down at your Cinderella dress (if you're a guy, you just became a transvestite – sorry!), look toward the ceiling, to your left, your right, straight ahead. If you don't see it through your human eyes, then my friend, it don't exist. (Please excuse the grammar!)

Mystery writers love this POV, simply because if the protagonist can't see it, then neither can the reader. It's a legitimate way to hide clues without actually concealing them. Until the protagonist finds them, the writer need not have any qualms about concealment.

In some ways, writing first person is akin to writing dialogue. By this I mean you don't necessarily write dialogue as it sounds in real life. First person, typically, is not written as we speak it. If we did, most sentences would start with "I". Therefore, the trick is to learn to turn the sentence about.

Instead of: *I am the happiest today that I have been for ages.*

Try: *Today I am happy, more than I have been for ages.*

Instead of: *I leaned down and picked up a perfectly rounded stone.*

Try: *The stone was perfectly rounded, and I leaned down to pick it up.*

Or: *Leaning down, I picked up a perfectly rounded stone.*

Instead of: *I was so hot, and the sweat trickled down my face.*

Try: *Sweat tricked down my face, because it was so hot.*

Or: *Sweat trickled down my face.*

Or: *The heat affected me so much that sweat trickled down my face.*

As can be seen from the above examples, substitutes do exist.

Why use first person? It can evoke a stronger emotional attachment with readers; from the first instance, the reader connects with the main protagonist. It is his/her voice, thoughts and feelings being portrayed, therefore, this is the person the reader is most likely to bond with.

First person can be an extremely powerful tool. Below are two excerpts – both are the same story, but written in two different POV's.

Omniscient POV:

Kareena spun around as movement behind her disturbed the silence. Her hands were sweaty, and her heart was beating abnormally fast as she peered into the dark interior of the room.

"I didn't mean to startle you." It was Mason's voice. Kareena wiped her damp hands on her track pants.

She turned her back to him, staring out at the ocean again. "You have a beautiful view, Mason."

"Going somewhere?" he asked casually, glancing at the bag slung over her shoulder. Mason slowly stepped toward her. "Kareena?"

She turned to face him, her bottom lip pulled in as she stared.

"Don't go -- please." He towered over her, and looked down into her sparkling eyes.

First Person POV (from Mason's POV):

She stood at the window, staring out across the sea.

Moving forward, my footsteps echoed across the room. "I didn't mean to startle you," I told her, as she turned to face me.

Kareena rubbed her hands against her clothes. Anyone else would have realised she'd be nervous, but it was the last thing on my mind.

She turned toward the water again, then spoke. "You have a beautiful view, Mason," she said.

Small talk — she was just making small talk. Did she think it would make the problem go away?

Moving next to her, I noticed her eyes sparkled with unshed tears. "Kareena, don't go."

The second piece is much more potent. The connection between reader and narrator (in this case, Mason) is substantially better than when it was told in omniscient POV. Why? With only one side of the story being told, Mason's inner thoughts come through stronger, more commanding. It elicits an emotion that the first version does not. It's more compelling, more gripping and convincing.

Next time you sit down to write, consider first person POV, and whether it might strengthen the story you are trying to tell.

About the author: Cheryl Wright is an award-winning Australian author, freelance journalist, and editor. In addition to an array of other projects, she is the owner of www.Writer2Writer.com, www.resources4writers.com, and the Writer to Writer monthly ezine for writers. Her publications include novels, non-fiction books, short stories, and articles. Visit Cheryl's website www.cheryl-wright.com

ATTENTION GRABBING BEGINNINGS

by Kylie Griffin

As writers we hear about hooking your reader from the very first sentence. But what makes for a compelling read? What makes the beginning of a book a good one? Is there a trick or particular secret to writing an attention-grabbing opening?

I've picked several opening scenes from books on my keeper shelf and I'd like to share what drew me in to each of them.

Let's start with the opening scene from NIGHT PLAY by Sherrilyn Kenyon.

"I'm so sorry, Vane. I didn't mean to get us killed like this."

Vane Kattalakis ground his teeth as he fell back from trying to pull himself up. His arms ached from the strain of lifting two hundred pounds of lean muscle up by nothing more than the bones of his wrists. Every time he got close to raising his body up to the limb over his head, his brother started talking, which broke his concentration and caused him to fall back into his dangling position.

"Don't worry, Fang. I'll get us out of this."

Somehow.

He hoped.

Wow. The hero in trouble from the outset; a life or death situation; edge of the seat stuff. And it began with a provocative line of dialogue. Active, immediate, tense, suspenseful.

What else happened when you read this? Did any questions spring to mind? They're about to be killed? Why and by whom? Vane and Fang are certainly suffering. Why protract their deaths? Could it be for revenge? And why does Vane feel it's his responsibility to get him and brother out of trouble? How's he going to get them out of this situation? What's going to happen next?

The tense situation compels you to read on and combines with the need for answers to these questions.

The next scene, from Nina Bang's A TASTE OF DARKNESS, starts from the hero's point of view.

Werewolves-furry pains in the butt.

Werecats-sneaky, whisker-twitching manipulators.

Werejerks-every freakin' loser with a were in front of its name.

Reinn hated them all. But most of all Reinn hated his job. Guardian of the Blood. What a crock.

He'd been a warrior in some form or another for most of his thousand years of existence. When he'd finally decided to walk away from that life, he'd bought a house and property in the Colorado Rockies, and then settled down to be alone. That was it. He. Wanted. To. Be. Alone. No friends, no emotional chains, no vulnerabilities.

Yeah, he was one cold bastard. But he was one cold bastard who was still alive.

Phew, that's one dark, tortured hero. More questions? No answers? Oh, didn't that happen in the last scene we read?

Take another look at the passage. Reread the first three lines. Do you detect a staccato rhythm in the descriptive phrases? Like the internal ravings of someone angry at the world. Hmm, emotional overtones.

Also note the broken structure of the sentence towards the end – He. Wanted. To. Be. Alone. Attention grabbing? You betcha. Effective. Yep.

And what about this? No friends, no emotional chains, no vulnerabilities. More strong emotion that creates a need to find out why. You've got to read on to find out more.

Not many people can handle the pain of being ripped apart, of having your limbs twisted and morphed until you are convinced your mind will shatter into a thousand tiny shards.

I can. And I'm tired of hiding my true nature so that humans can sleep better at night, convinced they're actually in control of this tiny blue-brown planet. They need to know the truth-they need to realize that they're not at the top of the food chain.

Far from it.

An unknown character's point of view begins this scene in RED by Jordan Summers. The subject matter certainly grabs your attention in the first eleven words, doesn't it? The second half of the sentence just makes you wince and wonder who this character is. Surely it can't be the hero or heroine?

The ominous overtones deepen in the second paragraph. Why is this character tired of hiding his/her true nature? Why are they hiding anyway? Is this a world that doesn't tolerate non-humans? Why do they feel the need to show humans they're not at the top of the food chain? What did they do to the character to provoke him/her out of hiding?

Hey, more questions and a need to read on to find out the answers.

They were created, not born. They were trained, not raised. They weren't meant to be free, to laugh, to play or to love. They were men and women whose souls had been forged in the fires of hell.

This brief excerpt comes from MEGAN'S MARK by Lora Leigh. The emotion that grabbed me from the start? Anticipation.

Look at the words used by the author that builds expectation and excitement from the first sentence – created, not born; trained, not raised; weren't meant; souls; forged; fires of hell. Powerful, emotive words.

The structure of the sentences is also clever. Lora could have written – They weren't born but created in a lab. Pretty boring statement. It's much stronger flipping the words around - They were created, not born. That effect continues in the next sentence - They weren't meant to be free, to laugh, to play or to love. She tells you what they weren't meant to do rather than what they did do.

It made me want to know more – so, yep, I turned the page.

In SHADOW TOUCH by Marjorie M. Lui we meet our heroine in a strange situation.

Shortly before being shot in the back with a tranquilizer dart and dumped half-dazed on a stretcher, right before being stolen from the hospital by silent men in white coats, Elena Baxter stood at the end of a dying child's bed, her hand on a small bare foot, and attempted to perform a miracle.

She was good at miracles. She had been practicing them for her entire life, and at twenty-eight years of age, had become quite proficient at the art of doing strange and wonderful things.

I don't know about you but my mind immediately said, "Hey, what?" when I read the part about being tranquilized and kidnapped. I just had to read on to find out why someone would do that.

Then I discover our heroine is a woman I can like – she's at a hospital helping a child she doesn't even know, risking exposure to use her supernatural ability to heal the child. How can we not care for her and worry when we discover she's been harmed?

What do I do? Read on.

Faith Black has been beaten, drugged and imprisoned, but none of that scared her. No, what frightened her to the core was the man confined with her. Chained to an improvised medieval rack and bare from the waist up, he lay on his back, arms over his head, his incredible chest marred by bruises and a deep laceration that extended from his left pec to his right hip.

He might have been rendered immobile, but he was in no way helpless.

His weapon, far more dangerous than the telekinesis-to her, at least-was his overpowering sexuality, a force that tugged her toward him, made her burn with need despite their grave situation.

The opening sentence in SEDUCED BY THE STORM by Sydney Croft pulls me immediately into the book. A woman in a horrible situation, suffering, possibly helpless, definitely in danger.

How's she going to get out of it? Wait a minute, she's not worried about the danger she's in, but the man chained to the rack opposite her? Is he the enemy? Hmm, she's attracted to him. He's

trouble but not the sort I was expecting. What is it about him that makes her ignore a life threatening situation?

Gotta read on.

“The King must die.”

Four single-syllable words. One by one they were nothing special. Put together? They called up all kinds of bad shit: Murder. Betrayal. Treason.

Death.

I’m a huge fan of J.R.Ward but even if I hadn’t been, this opening scene from LOVER AVENGED just grabbed me and I was skimming the words as quickly as I could to find out who, why, where and what the heck was going on.

Very sharp, short sentences. Each word carefully chosen for maximum impact. Tension and excitement. The last four one-word sentence just go from icckk, to uh-oh, gasp, and ewww. The mind is calculating scenarios and the eyes are racing down the page wanting to read more. Know more.

The illiteration of the ‘s’-sound in the first sentence is great – single syllable words. And the character has attitude – look at the phrasing of the fourth sentence – They called up all kinds of bad shit... Pretty powerful for such a short opening scene.

It was a high-pitched scream that woke Elvi. Piercing and full of terror, it ripped her from her sleep and had her moving before she was quite awake. She started up abruptly only to curse and drop back down when her head slammed into the

wooden lid of the coffin. (THE ACCIDENTAL VAMPIRE by Lyndsay Sands)

Screaming victim – seen it, read it, it’s been done before in countless books. Someone responding to the victim – yep, also been done before. Head slamming into a coffin lid to rescue the victim – say what? Didn’t that grab you? Simple but effective twist on a ho-hum situation.

So, what makes an attention grabbing beginning?

- Creating lots of questions in the readers mind that need to be answered.

- Try using dialogue to open your scene– it’s active and immediately draws the reader in

- Sentence structure – short and sharp, use of alliteration etc. (I’m no grammar guru but you can see from some of the examples what to look for when analysing your own work)

- Empathy with the character – make the reader be able to recognise or relate to them in some way

- Take a familiar situation and give it a twist

My advice - get your own keepers off the shelf, read the opening paragraphs and analyse the tools they’ve used to hook the reader. Then try out those tools with your own writing.

Give it a go and reel in those readers hook, line and sinker!

For more info about Kylie, head to www.kyliegriffin.com

THE KARA SCHOOL OF WRITING

Due to repeated requests, the Kara School of Writing is running some weekend romance writing courses in 2010! Please contact Lesley at www.editline.co.nz for further details.

The Kara School of Writing has been instrumental in the success of many published authors. A dozen past students are now writing for Harlequin, and other world-wide and New Zealand publishers.

PROOFREADING SERVICE

I am a current RWNZ member and have achieved a recent NZIBS Proofreading Diploma. This month I offer to proofread the first 3 chapters of a manuscript, and, the synopsis if required, free of charge in exchange for a letter of recommendation.

Contact: Sandra Warner

Phone: (03) 351 1345

Email: swarner@slingshot.co.nz

OFFICIAL RELEASES & MEMBER SUCCESSES

Official Releases

November New Releases

Ruthless Boss, Royal Mistress (The Royal House of Karedes) by **Natalie Anderson**

Her Baby Out of the Blue by **Alison Roberts**

Her Secret Rival by **Abby Gaines**

Defiant Mistress, Ruthless Millionaire by **Yvonne Lindsay**

(January)

Millionaire Under the Mistletoe by **Tessa Radley** (January)

Like Father, Like Son by **Karina Bliss**

The Magnates Pregnancy Proposal by **Sandra Hyatt**

Alison Roberts Bestseller Collection (January)

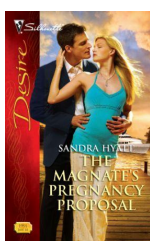
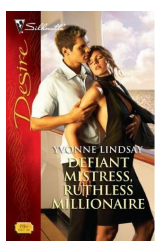
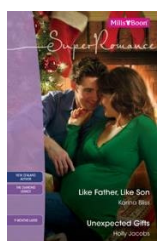
Robyn Donald Bestseller Collection (January)

Soldier of Fortune by **Shelley Munro** (Ellora's Cave)

Ritual Passion by **Cathryn Brunet** (Samhain, e-book)

How Do I Love Thee (Stories to Stir the Heart) edited by **Valerie Parv** (Allen & Unwin).

Australia's top-selling and award winning international authors bring you a unique collection of love stories, edited under the guidance of Valerie Parv.



Member Successes - Competitions and Accolades

The Lists

Nalini Singh's ANGELS BLOOD has been voted Number ONE Romance of 2009 by Amazon.com editors, and...

BLAZE OF MEMORY is to debut at #8 on the New York Times Bestseller list!

Yvonne Eve Walus's book **WILD THING** has hit the Erotic Romance Bestseller list.

Sold

Jane Beckenham has sold **A TRAITOR'S HEART** to Red Rose Publishing. (It's your lucky 13th, Jane)

Competitions

2009 Get Your Stiletto in the Door contest, Classic (judged by editor Claire Baldwin of Little Black Dress and agent Kate Schaefer Testerman of KT Literary)

2ND place **A HEAT OF THE MOMENT THING** by **Karen Browning**

3ND place **ON THE REBOUND** by **Ellis Huse**

Maree Anderson has finalised in the YA category of the Oklahoma Romance Writers "Finally A Bride" contest with her paranormal **FREAKS OF GREENFIELD HIGH**.

Please email submissions to this page to, Tyree at rocker.t@xtra.co.nz by 13th of each month.
www.romancewriters.co.nz

December 2009

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Compiled by PDR Lindsay-Salmon, aka Patrika Salmon

1. **The Short Story Radio Romance Award 2010.** The winner will have their two-part romantic fiction story recorded by Short Story Radio and win a cash prize. www.shortstoryradio.com

2. Anthologies '**Life's a Bitch**'
Looking for short stories. www.lifesabitchbooks.com

3. **The Wild Rose Press.**
Looking for submissions of quality romance. Check out their website for details. www.thewildrosepress.com

4. **Robert Hale** seeking submissions. Romance welcome. Check the website for particulars. www.halebooks.com

5. Anthology, '**Wise Woman**'
Seeking short stories about strong women. SF orientated so check the website. www.norilana.com

RWNZ Contest Schedule 2010

Clendon Award

26th February 2010

Chapter Short Story Contest

26th March

HM&B Great Beginnings

17th April

Strictly Single

17th September

INTERNATIONAL CONTEST NEWS

Compiled by Lisa Elkind-Gardiner

First Kiss 2010 Romance Writers of Australia

Deadline: Friday 12 February 2010 Enter: One scene ONLY depicting the first kiss between your hero and heroine. Scene must be 6p max. A 1/2 page set up should also be included which is judged. **Entry fee:** AU\$22 (incl of GST for entries within Australia only) each entry. Three entries per member are permitted.

<http://romanceaustralia.com/firstkiss.html>

Greater Detroit Romance Writers of America Bookseller's Best Award

Eligibility: Published authors with books of 50,000 word minimum with 2009 copyright or 1st US printing; includes e-books. **Entry Fee:** US\$27 **Deadline:** January 15 2010.

<http://www.gdrwa.org/contests.html>

Southern Magic RWA Gayle Wilson Award of Excellence

Eligibility: Published authors of novel length romance fiction by RWA approved publisher must have an original copyright date or a first printing date (North American or otherwise) of 2009.

Entry: \$20 US first book \$15 any additional books. **Deadline:** Received by Jan 15 2010.

See: <http://southernmagic.org/gaylewilsoncontest.html>

Yellow Rose RWA Winter Rose Award for Excellence in Published Romance

Enter: Novels published in 2009. 4 copies of your book. **Eligibility:** RWA PAN or PAN-eligible authors. **Deadline:** Postmark by Jan 23 2010 **Entry Fee:** US\$20

See: <http://yellowroserwa.com>

Yellow Rose contest for Unpublished RWA members also available

See: <http://yellowroserwa.com>

RWNZ NEWS AROUND THE REGIONS

Regional convenor contacts

AUCKLAND – Frances Housden
email: fhousden@xtra.co.nz

CHRISTCHURCH – Sue Knight
email: sueknight@ihug.co.nz

HAWKE'S BAY – Ginny Suckling
email: ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz

NELSON – Cherie Skinner & Sally Astridge
email: bruceastridge@aol.com or
cheriesk@hotmail.com

WAIKATO, BAY OF PLENTY & KING COUNTRY – Sarah Hamilton:
craigandsarah@clear.net.nz or Lynne Rasmussen: lyn@lynrasmussen.com

WELLINGTON – Ellie Huse
email: elliehuse@yahoo.com

OTAGO - Viv Adams, email:
whitecliffodge@xtra.co.nz



WELLINGTON

Halloween was a cracker day to have our meeting – big turnout, much noise, good news. Cassandra showed us her Happy@Work book – a compilation of her Dominion Post columns. It's an absolutely gorgeous production – and all her own work. Joan promptly bought it off her. We had a brainstorming session about conflict, and discussed the beginnings of various published books to see what grabbed us. The next meeting will be our Christmas lunch – at the earlier time of 12 o'clock on Saturday December 5th - at Joan's home, 11 Lambert Way, Paraparaumu. Watch for Ellie's emailed map.

CHRISTCHURCH

Our November Sunday Workshop was a huge success. Thanks to Karen for her superb organising, and to Kathryn, Karen and Natalie for three wonderful motivating workshops. Thanks to Hell's Pizzas for a sinfully delicious lunch, and thanks to all for friendship and fun. Watch this space for our next Sunday Workshop planned for March 2010. For info please email sueknight@ihug.co.nz

AUCKLAND

We had a great meeting in November with Nalini leading the workshop. Next month is our Christmas party, which will be at the usual time, but held at Annie Featherstone's in Birkenhead. Everyone should bring a plate, wine will be provided and come prepared to have fun. For details, please contact Frances fhousden@xtra.co.nz Date: December 5th. Be there or be Scrooge. Auckland Chapter enewsletter will contain more details.

WAIKATO/BOP/KING COUNTRY

Our October gathering saw us meeting in PioPio at The Fat Pigeon café. It was a wonderful start to the afternoon and we can highly recommend that if you are visiting or passing through PioPio (on the way to New Plymouth) that you stop and sample the food! Following a scrummy lunch we adjourned to Jenny's home where we had a workshop on Psycho drama and writing. Jenny's friend Ana Namu introduced us to a new and inventive way to get in touch with our characters and to look at our writing from a different perspective. So it was food for the tums and food for thought! Our next meeting is our final gathering for the year and will be our Christmas celebration. It starts at 10am on November the 21st and will be at Sarah's home in Hamilton.

NELSON

We had a very hands-on 'crafty' meeting this month, making decorations for a Romance Writers' Christmas tree. The tree will join a special display of themed trees held at the Christ Church Cathedral here in Nelson, from the 7th of December. It will be open to the public and we hope that it will attract a new member or two. We decorated pink and white hearts with the Romance Writers' website, romantic phrases, wedding photos, and cherubs. Pink and white lights will also be added. A Christmas potluck lunch meeting will be held at Jacqui's country home on Saturday, December the 12th @ 1pm. Detailed directions will be emailed to members before then. Everyone is asked to write a Christmas themed story of up to 500 words.

SOUTHERN REGION

Our first RWNZ meeting was brilliant. We met at Rosalie's home where we went straight to work. We chased the logic of plot and character in my WIP, discussed Brian's fantasy novel, and caught up with Rosalie and Colleen's current projects. Our next meeting is 1.30pm on Thursday the 19th of November at Rosalie's house. If you are interested in joining us please contact Viv at whitecliffodge@xtra.co.nz.

WEB SURFING

Compiled by Nalini Singh

Author **Lynn Viehl** shares and discusses her second royalty statement in relation to her NYT Bestseller "Twilight Fall": <http://tinyurl.com/yeqm7xe>

Interesting **Dear Author** article on "Shortcuts" in romance writing - ie. archetypes, conventions etc: <http://tinyurl.com/yeyb5nt>

Think vampires are new, think again! Check out this brief history of vampire stories at **Abe Books**: <http://tinyurl.com/ybf9ujv> (Link via Pimp My Novel - an excellent blog on what happens to your book after it's acquired: <http://tinyurl.com/kj83la>)

A few articles on the new Google Book Settlement:

- Publishers Weekly**: <http://tinyurl.com/yfmlt3h>
- New York Times**: <http://tinyurl.com/yja2smg>
- Resource Shelf** (links & snippets): <http://tinyurl.com/ykbkzfn>
- Podcast of panel at **World Fantasy Con**: <http://tinyurl.com/ygvwtkb>
- Dear Author**: <http://tinyurl.com/yeo6e89>
- Twitter**: search tag #gbs

Cindi Myers presents a roundup of the Ballantine/Bantam Dell spotlight at this year's RWA Conference: <http://tinyurl.com/yfwextt>

An interview with cover artist **Tony Mauro** on my own blog: <http://tinyurl.com/yjekyxt> plus a discussion by author **Meljean Brook**, where she talks about her cover artist **Cliff Nielsen** and others: <http://tinyurl.com/yf36kbk>

And last - if you're having one of *those* days, here's a website sure to make you smile: www.kittenwar.com

www.nalinisingh.com

BITS AND PIECES

Compiled by Soraya Nicholas

The next J.K. Rowling?

Rebecca James, a mother of four in Australia, just received a \$1million contract for a Young Adult novel. Her first book published by a small American publisher earned her just \$100, her second was rejected by every publisher in Australia, and her third, well, looks to be the next big thing! Publisher Allen & Unwin was about to make an offer, and that started a worldwide bidding war. Her novel, Beautiful Malice, has been sold in more than 20 countries, and will be translated into 13 languages. The \$1m is scheduled to be paid in four instalments, with British literary agency C&W taking a cut of 20%.

Did you enter the Harlequin Presents Writing Competition?
The editors at Mills & Boon in London are still frantically reading through all of the 544 entries received for their latest competition! They are hoping to find the next Modern/Modern Heat author . . . head to www.iheartpresents.com to find out more.

New Harlequin Publishing Opportunity!
Carina Press is a new e-publishing initiative launched by publishing giant Harlequin. Former Samhain editor Angela James (who came to our 2008 Conference) is at the helm. Visit www.carinapress.com for more details.