

HEART TO HEART

JENNY HUTTON

Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas



Those of us who attended the 2008 conference were privileged to meet Harlequin Mills & Boon editor Jenny Hutton. While she was most gracious with her time, there are still those questions that plague many of us, and those that maybe we were too scared to ask. Thankfully, Jenny has stopped by to answer some of those queries that are continually pondered!

We all know that wait times vary considerably when it comes to submissions, but when is the correct time to

query? Let's say a writer has a requested partial or full with the London office, and they have received a reply acknowledging the manuscript has been received. Is it appropriate to query for an update after 3, 4, 6 months, or are we best to just sit tight and wait?

We pride ourselves on reading everything sent to us – agented or un-agented! We try to respond to submissions in 14-16 weeks. This can sometimes depend on how busy we are, but reading everything that comes in is very important to us. If you haven't heard in that time then there's no harm in giving the office a call or email submissions@hmb.co.uk

Once a manuscript, partial or full, is received, what's the process? Is it most likely an editorial assistant will be the first to pluck it from the slush pile?

contd page 4

In this issue...

1. Meet the editor:
Jenny Hutton
2. RWNZ contacts
Editors' Desk
3. President Pat
5. E-publishing Part IV
by **Angela James**
6. Maxine Sullivan
by **Soraya Nicholas**
8. Book Chat
by **Sue Knight**
9. Helen Bianchin
by **Maxine Sullivan**
11. NZ Recruitment
by **Sue Knight**
12. Point of View
by **Anna Campbell**
14. Member successes
and Releases
15. Jan Colley
by **Soraya Nicholas**
17. Story Collages
by **Soraya Nicholas**
18. International News &
Contests
19. RWNZ regional news
20. The Naked Writer

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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.

To join RWNZ's critique partner register, run jointly with RW Australia, email the coordinator Rachel Robinson on rachelrobinson@dodo.com.au

EDITORS' DESK

This month's H2H is packed full of interesting interviews and articles. We were lucky enough to have Mills & Boon editor Jenny Hutton stop by to answer editorial questions; authors Maxine Sullivan and Jan Colley were kind enough to talk about their writing lives; and as usual there is a great selection of articles to read.

You may notice that the newsletter has a slightly different feel to it than usual. We have reduced the amount of space for the International Contests, mainly because we felt a mention and a link to find out more was sufficient, rather than going into great detail over 2 pages. In doing this, we now have extra room for craft articles. The New Releases page has also changed, in light of more authors with new releases and once again a need for more space!

And finally, we would like to say a huge thank you to Sue Knight, who helped put together the last 3 issues!

Happy Writing

Soraya & Suzanne

PS In very exciting news, Suzanne is off to the EPPIE awards in Las Vegas this month! Her first book, *Beneath the Surface*, has been nominated for an award. Let's all cross our fingers and toes ☺ Soraya.

RWNZ CONTEST SCHEDULE 2009

Entry forms for RWNZ contests will no longer be available as an insert in the newsletter. Entry forms can be accessed on the RWNZ website, from the relevant coordinator or from Ellie Huse: elliehuse@yahoo.com

CHAPTER SHORT STORY CONTEST 2009 - Closing Date: 27 March 2009

Final Judge: Julie Redlich, Fiction Editor, Woman's Day
Enter: 1500-word short story. Theme is open but story must be a contemporary romance.
Up to 3 entries by same author will be accepted.
Eligibility: Published and non-published writers. (Entrants must be current financial members of RWNZ.)
Entry Fee: \$NZ20 (NZ entrants); \$A20 (Australian entrants)
Coordinator: Adèle Gautier - abby@abbygaines.com

GREAT BEGINNINGS CONTEST 2009 - Closing Date: 24 April 2009

Final Judge: Kimberley Young, Senior Editor, Mills & Boon, London
Enter: Up to first 25 pages plus 2-page synopsis. Up to 2 entries by same author will be accepted.
Eligibility: Published and non-published writers. (Entrants must be current financial members of RWNZ.)
Entry Fee: \$NZ20 (NZ entrants); \$A20 (Australian entrants). Coordinator: Sue MacKay - ismackay@ts.co.nz

STRICTLY SINGLE CONTEST 2009 - Closing Date: 25 September 2009

PRESIDENT PAT



Welcome

Firstly, a message for all our Australian members. On behalf of the Executive and all our members I would like to extend our deepest sympathy to you and your friends/loved ones for the terrible disaster that has befallen your country. A bushfire is something so horrific that I cannot imagine – nor do I want to – what it must be like to see it racing towards you and knowing you can't do anything to stop it.

If there is anything – no matter how big or small - that any of us can do for you please do not hesitate to contact me and I will pass the message on, or try and arrange some solution.

EXECUTIVE UPDATE

I am sad to announce that because of work pressures Cathy Sneyd has had to resign as Publicity Officer. The Executive would like to thank Cathy for the work she has done for us during her time on the Executive. Stepping into the breach, and we thank her wholeheartedly, is Sue Knight. Sue has been working with the Executive on a recruitment poster and ideas for recruiting more members. Welcome, Sue! We hope you will enjoy the challenges of the position. Karen Browning is stepping down for a few months as Secretary as she prepares for the birth of her baby. But she will be back again in September. Stepping in to help us out over this time is Sally Rigby – former Secretary of RWNZ. Thank you, Sally, for agreeing to do this for us.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

The Conference Committee is keen to co-opt a few willing members to help with some of the tasks in the lead-up to Conference 09. As this would be mainly in the week leading up to conference, the tasks are probably better suited to Auckland members. These are the areas where help is needed:

- Helping to stuff the goodie bags – this usually happens on the Thursday afternoon before conference – 20th August this year.
- Looking after the second hand book stall. This involves running the book stall during conference, ie: making sure that it is kept stocked up with books and that there is enough change available. (This job could be done by any member who is attending conference.)
- Selling raffle tickets at the Friday night cocktail party, 21st August, 2009.

If you are willing to help, or even have a couple of hours free on Thursday, please email me at rwnzpresident@xtra.co.nz.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

As a new RWNZ initiative, we are keen to establish Special Interest Groups within our membership. We envisage these SIGs being genre-specific (eg Medicals, Historicals, Young Adult, etc) and running as online forums in a similar way to our main "loop", though with a far narrower focus. Each SIG will have its own coordinator to oversee the growth and functionality of the group. As a member of a SIG (and, of course, you could belong to several!) you will have stronger links with same-genre writers and greater access to genre-specific information/assistance.

Are you interested in forming a Special Interest Group under the auspices of RWNZ? If you are, this is the procedure you need to go through:

1. Ask on the main RWNZ loop for expressions of interest.
2. Get permission from the Executive to form the group and state who is going to be the moderator.
3. Talk as an email group for a couple of days until it starts getting unwieldy
4. Begin a Yahoo group. Make sure you use RWNZ in the title, because these groups should come under RWNZ's supervision, eg: Rwnz_????? group
5. Make sure your home page states up-front that a pre-requisite for membership of the group is to be a member of RWNZ. Provide the URL for people to follow to our website.
6. Set up the group so that only members of your SIG have access to the special interest files and archives (otherwise anyone can view them).

Gracie Stanners has already set up a SIG for suspense/paranormal writers. If you are interested in joining this group please contact Gracie.

Well that's all from me.

Pat Snellgrove, President

Jenny Hutton cont.

Submissions come into the office everyday via mail and now, excitingly, via email submissions@hmb.co.uk. They are logged on the database and then given to the editor on the rota that day. Each day is a different editor!

How common are revision requests, or requests to see more work? Should a writer be heartened if she receives a request for revisions in the mail?

We receive thousands of submissions a year, so if an editor has seen something that they like in your voice, writing or story then you can take this as a heartening sign. However, it is never a guarantee of publication.

Always remember it takes discipline, dedication and determination to write for Mills & Boon. Don't be discouraged by rejection letters, learn from the advice and try again. And again.

The term "voice" is constantly used in relation to an editor or agent being interested in a writer's work. Is it true that "voice" is what makes a writer and their story stand out, or is it as much voice as the storyline itself?

There are no hard and fast rules about voice or storyline but in each series we are looking for new authors who can bring their unique touch to the series.

Good romance fiction should deliver the feel-good factor by engaging the reader's emotions allowing her to escape into the story. It's a talent to be able to transport a reader into a new world, introduce them to new people and invite them to share in probably the most beguiling, complex emotion in the world – falling in love!

Stories include a central developing romantic relationship and a satisfying ending, but in every case the journey is always different, depending upon the characters and their emotional conflicts, as well as the author's unique voice.

It's not about emulating what you have read before but seeing how you can twist and turn the conventions of the genre to bring your fresh spin to the mix – that's what will make you stand out from the rest.

What advice do you have for writers targeting a Mills & Boon line edited by the London office?

The romance market changes rapidly. There are always new trends and series emerging alongside more traditional themes and styles, for this reason it's so important for writers to keep reading current titles as these provide the best examples of what readers are looking for. Editors are buying what readers are reading!

Are you still actively looking for new authors and what would you like to see more of?

We are actively seeking new writers for all of our series. Guidelines can be found at eHarlequin.com or they can be requested via post.

When it comes to writing for Mills & Boon, first things first, know your characters! Be in love with your hero from the first page and be able to step into your heroine's shoes, see the world through her eyes; think about generating an intensely exciting emotional conflict; train your ear for dialogue and use it to define your characters and add pace to your story. Research your background, but don't describe all, use it to support your characters, their motivations and their developing romance. Write from the heart and above all use your own voice.

Jenny, thank you so much for taking the time to answer our questions! Your time and knowledge is very much appreciated. Those of us who pitched to you at the conference are ever hopeful you might one day become our editor!

Conference 2009 Romantic Retreat

August 21st – 23rd

Guest speakers:

Melissa Jeglinski – agent with The Knight Agency

Mary Jo Putney - an award-winning author of around 30 historical fantasies.

Cocktail Party: 'Leather and Lace'

Awards Dinner: 'Touch of Fantasy'

E-Publishing Part IV

by Angela James of Samhain Publishing

YMMV: Your Mileage May Vary

Think of this as the interlude between informative articles, the public service announcement, the after school special with a meaningful message (remember those?)...well, you get the picture. I'm taking a break from discussing epubublishing and finding the epubublisher right for you to share one of my favourite internet acronyms and one pertinent to both life in general and publishing: YMMV—Your mileage may vary.

Publishing is like everything else in life, from the weighty matters to the not-so-life altering: political candidates, Coke or Pepsi, the chicken or the egg, Burger King or McDonalds? No matter how much information you gather, how many opinions you get from people you respect, and no matter the thorough research you do, in the end, what publisher you choose and whether you're happy with them is an entirely subjective and individual thing (and I should note, this pertains not just to epubublishers, though that's what the scope of my series of articles addresses, but also traditional publishers, small publishers, agents, etc.)

Not only that, but what makes up each publisher—how they operate, the people who run it, their marketing plan, payment schedule—will vary in importance for each author. To use politics as an example again, in the same way it might be a deal breaker for you if your candidate cheated on his wife, but the next person could not care less, one author might only want a publisher who pays monthly and refuse to consider all others, while another will consider twice a year just fine. The last point is one that's more difficult to articulate. From a publisher's point of view, I think it's also important to remember that there are two sides to every "story" and you will rarely get the publisher's side. Quite frankly, I don't think there's any graceful way for a publisher to go public to counter grievances or accusations of wrongdoing, and so some things are better left unsaid. But that leaves authors who are researching for the right publisher in a tough position: reading between the lines to determine if a publisher acted badly towards an author.

Speaking bluntly, because I think honesty is needed in an industry where people are too often afraid to be honest: sometimes things happen, that get reported as bad behavior or marks against a publisher, when they're things that simply happen in publishing: editors and authors don't always mesh, edits aren't always to an author's liking and contracts get cancelled for any variety of reasons. This is actually key to what I'm saying because just as your mileage may vary on what's important to you in a publisher, your mileage may also vary for agreeing or disagreeing with the reason an author may dislike a publisher.

As a point of clarity, I'm not saying that there aren't legitimate complaints about publishers because heck yeah, there are. I don't think any are perfect and some are decidedly not so perfect. But it's to say that some things need to be measured against perception.

In the end, it is up to each author to take the information they collect, assimilate it through the filter of other authors' experiences and beliefs, and make a decision that they are comfortable with and can live with in their publishing career—not based on what will make others happy. No matter what you choose, no two authors' experiences will be exactly the same. Everyone's mileage will, inevitably, vary.

Welcome to our New Members

Tracy Annenburg, Wellington
Sheila Marks, Auckland
Sue Webb, QLD Australia
Erica Hayes, ACT Australia
Tracey O'Hara, ACT Australia
Netta Newbound, Waihi
Gay Johnson, Auckland

MAXINE SULLIVAN

Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas



Maxine, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us!

For those of us who don't know your story, tell us about your road to publication. I'm told it was a long one!

I've been writing forever. Actually, it's well over 20 years because I have a rejection slip from Mills and Boon dated 1986. But I was writing even before that, though back then I had no idea I should keep records so I could talk about it twenty years later. ☺

As to what made me start, it's my mother's fault. Yes, she willingly takes the blame for this. She's an avid romance reader, who got me hooked on all those early romances back in the seventies. I can still see those covers and remember my favourite authors, and how excited I was when it was time for a new supply of books to be released.

How did you sell? Relive that moment with us, how did it feel and how did it all happen?

I decided to enter the eHarlequin Desire logline contest, where I submitted a couple of sentences about my story and won the chance with 9 others to do an online pitch to the senior editor of Desire, Melissa Jeglinski. So I did an online pitch to Melissa on 9th January 2006. She asked a couple of questions about the manuscript and said to send her the full, which I did on 16th January.

Not quite two weeks later I was sitting down having my first cup of coffee, reading through the writing digests, when I got an email from my agent saying that she hoped I got her email before going to work and to please call her. I

froze. I told my husband and he said to get on the phone. I said I couldn't and that it was probably a rejection anyway. Talk about fear of success!

I bit the bullet and picked up the phone. My agent said she had some good news for me - that Melissa had called her and she loved my manuscript and wanted to buy it. I was stunned, then I said I had to tell my husband. I threw open the study door to tell him but he was already waiting on the other side and had heard me talking. So we were laughing and talking and I was saying I couldn't believe it. I'm not one to scream and shout but you can bet I was happy, if not a little numb.

Then my agent and I got down to the details of the sale. I had some minor revisions to do first, but thankfully the senior editor was interested in a second manuscript, and also in a third one that I hadn't completed at the time. Those three manuscripts ended up being the "Australian Millionaires" miniseries.

Had you always targeted Desire, or similar lines?

I'd always aimed at M&B in London, but if that manuscript was rejected I'd then try the American markets. Somewhere along the line, I started taking records of my submissions and my records show that I had been sending manuscripts to Desire since 1993. By the way, one of those manuscripts was rejected by a new editor, Melissa Jeglinski. If only I'd known 13 years later that same editor would buy my book and become my very own editor!

What are you working on at the moment?

I was offered a new contract to write 3 Desires this year, and I'm working on the first book right now. It's a book that's part of an Outback Babies series with two other Australian authors.

The life of a published author – is it as great as you had imagined it would be? Are you living your dream writing romance all day?

Being published is far better than I imagined – and far harder – but I wouldn't change it for the world. As for living my dream, yes, I'm doing that but not all day. Unfortunately I still have to work at a full time job outside the home, but hopefully one day I'll be able to give it up and just write.

Tell us about your writing routine . . . do you aim for a set number of words/pages each day?

My own handsome hero isn't a millionaire, so as I mentioned before, I have to work outside the home. But I've been doing that for over twenty years anyway, and I'm used to juggling work, home life, and writing. Of course, now I'm published I have deadlines which make it harder to juggle everything.

I generally get up at 6.30am, if not before. I allow myself time to have a cup of coffee at the computer to catch up on any emails from my editor, and to read through other email traffic. At 7.45 I head off to work and come home around 5pm. Thankfully, I work close by so I don't have to travel far. Then it's dinner and a walk at the beach with hubby, and a quick power nap before I get to writing until about 10pm. Luckily my 2 sons are grown and independent, and so is my husband. ☺ Actually if it wasn't for him I wouldn't have as much time to write as I do. He helps out tremendously.

My main writing time is on the weekends, but I still write most nights, going over scenes, research or catching up with emails. Some nights I might only get a few paragraphs written. On the weekends I get quite a few pages done. Though I can be a fairly fast writer, I usually give myself about five months to write a book because I just have so much else going on in my life.

Some authors “cast” their hero and heroine with photos of celebrities. Is this something you do to help visualise your characters?

I'm a sucker for classic characters so in my mind my heroes are always tall, dark and handsome and my heroines are usually blonde and stunningly beautiful. Photographs of celebrities tend to make me think of their unheroic qualities at times, so I don't like to use those. But because the production department requires that I send in pictures of how I see my characters, I'm starting to lean more and more towards finding the pictures early and using them as a visual aid.

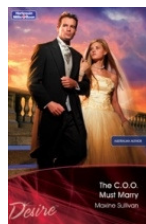
What advice would you give to un-published authors?

Believe in yourself and in your stories and don't ever let anyone take that faith away from you. And whether you get enough rejections to kill a tree or not, it doesn't mean that you can't write or that your stories don't have value. But also be prepared and know that most writers need to pay some sort of dues first and accept that's the way of the universe. So take that time and learn all you can about publishing and the writing itself. It will come in handy one day.

Tell us about your latest release. What can we expect?

My latest Silhouette Desire series is a trilogy about three brothers whose wealthy father insists his sons must marry to carry on the family name. **The C.O.O. Must Marry** is the second book in the Valente series.

What would compel millionaire playboy Nick Valente to marry a woman he hadn't seen in years? Blackmail, of course. To keep his family home, Nick must marry the woman of his father's choosing: Sasha Blake, a long-ago flame. Sasha had been barely out of her teens, but there had been nothing immature about her then—or his desire for her. Now she would be his wife and Nick would be free to make love to her. But there was one nagging question in his mind... He knew his reasons for agreeing to this marriage... what were hers?



Maxine's March release, The C.O.O. Must Marry, is available now!

Book Chat *by Sue Knight*

SIN AND SYNTAX – HOW TO CRAFT wickedly EFFECTIVE PROSE written by **Constance Hale**, author of *Wired Style* and current managing editor of *Health* magazine, US.

The irresistible Title tempts you to take the book off the shelf.

The Cover Blurb lures you in.

"For the writer or wannabe, *Sin and Syntax* is an urgently needed, updated, and hip guide to modern language and writing."

-Jon Katz

"This new grammar book is. . . light-years ahead of what you'd read in eight-grade English: With vivid, contemporary examples of what to do and what not to do, it's fun to read." -*Observer*.

The Foreword entices you on.

"Oh, the sentence! The shuddering, sinuous, piquant, incandescent, delicate, delirious, sulking, strident possibilities of it all! A sentence can loll à l'odalisque, zap, implore, insist, soar or simply lay out the facts....In any book you handle, sentences abound. Here, in *Sin and Syntax*, they strut their stuff in all their guises and moods.

Chapter by chapter, Constance Hale's book is about the rigours and romance of sentences, and sharpening one's senses in the reading and making of them. It shows how a sentence comes together through the dance of words, how one sentence follows another in an effective piece of prose. Here you will see parts of speech in action, make tracks with parallel structure, catch a coquettish phrase at its arc, or curl up with a curvaceous clause.

Here you will learn to handle the bones of writing, to articulate a skeleton before it's dressed and adorned and sets out to stir up its chosen mischief."

- Karen Elizabeth Gordon

The Introduction whets your appetite.

Constance Hale explains her book 'plays with dynamic tensions in language.'

"Forget school-marmish rules. Forget grammar as it was drilled and grilled in grade school. Rest assured, you'll get your grammar here, on the theory that it's better to know rules than to stay clueless. This book will show you how to avoid bone-head mistakes, but, more importantly, it'll show you how to make some sinful mischief.

We'll also summon the spirit of renegades who ignore taboos and make the language sing, from Shakespeare to Mark Twain to Chuck D. We'll wallow with Walt Whitman . . . We'll look at English as a robust, swarthy tongue, capable of surviving tumult and thriving on innovation."

Hales offers five new principles of prose:

- Relish every word
- Be simple, but go deep
- Take risks
- Seek beauty
- Find the right pitch

Discussion on Words, Sentences and Music (how voice, lyricism, melody, and rhythm give prose its mystery and poetry) is covered in individual chapters broken into four sections:

The **Bones** section is the grammar sermonette.

The **Flesh** section contains the lesson on writing.

The **Cardinal Sins** section catalogues true transgressions and sets you straight.

The **Carnal Pleasures** section contains playful, riotous, sometimes subversive pieces of writing, and shows how breaking the rules can lead to breakthrough prose.

The Contents Page reveals a full and rich menu.

Consume at your leisure all the elements of grammar served with a tempting array of wonderful writing.

A small taster: **computer error messages written as haiku.**

Printer not ready

Could be a fatal error.

Have a pen handy? -Pat Davis

This site has been moved.

We'd tell you where, but then we'd

have to delete you.

-Charles Matthews

Yesterday it worked

Today it is not working

Windows is like that

-Margaret Segall

Finally, the Epilogue dismisses you to write wickedly .

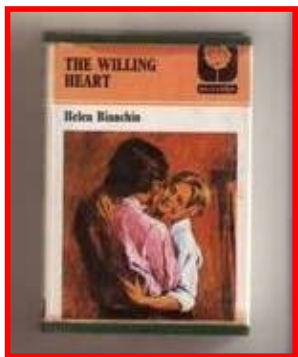
Ernest Hemingway once advised prose artists to "Write hard and clear about what hurts."

It's good advice.

But to follow it, you must stop reading.

HELEN BIANCHIN – “Then and Now”

Interviewed by Maxine Sullivan



Helen Bianchin's romance novels have been taken to heart by romance readers all over the world. She is the Australian and New Zealand doyen of 56 Harlequin Mills and Boon books, and is a much-loved and

respected writer by many romance writers everywhere. In this interview Helen tells Silhouette Desire author, Maxine Sullivan, how it was back then, and what has changed since.

Maxine: Helen, tell us about your introduction to romance novels?

Helen: I started reading Mills and Boon as a teenager at the local library attached to the news agency. When I was finally able to afford them, I knew when they were due in the shops and I'd be there waiting at the newsagency to pour over them and select which ones to buy. I think there were 8 or 10 M&B's released each month in the '70's. Those were the days when there was only one line!

Maxine: What made you decide to write a romance?

Helen: I was an only child, a dreamer and a romantic with a very vivid imagination. I loved to read, and it was only after marriage and living in Australia that I wrote many letters home and to friends. One of those friends loved my anecdotes of my life married to an Italian tobacco share farmer, and suggested I should write a book.

Maxine: Tell us about the journey to selling your first book?

Helen: I had my first book accepted in September 1974, and it was published in June 1975. The title was "The Willing Heart" whose authenticity owed much to my own experience as an Italian tobacco grower's wife. In real life, my husband was a sharefarmer and we were poor. Of course an M&B hero couldn't be poor, so in the book he owned the farm, was rich etc!

Maxine: Who was your first editor? And how did you communicate with her? Was there a Harlequin Sydney office to support their authors like there is now?

Helen: Alan Boon guided me through my first three books, followed by Frances Whitehead. There was a Sydney office, and a representative in Auckland, New Zealand. But minimum staff, and nothing at all like there is today.

Maxine: How did you get it so right when there were minimal guidelines?

Helen: I had no idea what the publisher wanted, for the guidelines in the '70's were limited to one page. I loved to read, especially romance, and I simply wrote the book I'd most like to read ... as a reader. The first attempt was deemed too short, the second too long with too much extraneous detail. I made it with the third attempt!

Maxine: Did you know any other writers back then?

Helen: I was very fortunate to be introduced to Essie Summers via letter, and we corresponded until she retired. As Essie lived in Napier at the time, and I resided in Auckland, it was many years before we met in person, but Essie kindly introduced me via letter to Gloria Bevan, who also resided in Auckland, and we met every few months for lunch. In the late '70's Robyn Donald was in Auckland, looked me up in the

telephone book and we met the same day. We kept in touch and continue to do so, meeting up whenever we can at conferences, or during holidays.

Maxine: Did you get to keep any of your titles back then? What about now?

Helen: Authors were encouraged to provide their own titles until the late '80's, when marketing decided the titles should reflect the theme of the book. Hence, there was "Mistress by Contract", "The Greek Bridegroom" etc. In recent times, the titles have become even more specific ... a recent release is titled "The Martinez Marriage Revenge" ... indicating the hero is Spanish, the plot involves marriage and the focus is revenge!

Maxine: What's the biggest difference in writing romances back then and now?

Helen: When I began writing, there was only one line. Today there are many beneath the Harlequin Mills & Boon umbrella. Consequently

it's very important to write within each specific line. Presents focuses on glamour, sophistication and wealth ... intense sensuality and passion. Therefore, it's important for the author to deliver and meet readership expectation. A Presents is different to a Blaze. A Sweet Romance is not a Desire.

Maxine: And now for the fun question, Helen. What did you spend your first advance on?☺

Helen: Would you believe an aged second-hand Landrover for my husband!

Thank you, Helen. It's been an absolute pleasure talking to you and I wish you many more years of writing such fabulous romances. Note: A list of all Helen's books are available at <http://www.romancewiki.com>

*Maxine Sullivan's second Silhouette Desire in her Valente series, **The C.O.O. Must Marry**, is available in NZ/Australia now. <http://www.maxinesullivan.com>*

Stuck in a Writing Rut? Five ideas to get your groove back!

- ✚ Change of location . . . head to a coffee shop or relocate outside.
- ✚ Try writing longhand, even just for a few pages.
- ✚ Read a book by one of your favourite authors or watch a good old romance movie . . .
- ✚ Skip ahead . . . why not try writing the end if you're stuck in the middle?
- ✚ Take the day off, do something fun & don't think about writing for at least 24hours . . . we all need a break sometimes!

RWNZ Recruitment Part One

By Sue Knight

So how did others find their way here? I asked and replies grouped into five categories: the Internet; writing workshops; published articles; posters and word of mouth.

THE INTERNET – A WINNER FOR NEWER MEMBERS

I was looking online for a decent writing course to do, found one on a tropical island being run by Ann Gracie, googled her and found her e-mail address. And later on discovered she was the PRESIDENT of Romance Writers Australia!!! (LOL!) She then suggested RWNZ (which I'm embarrassed to say I'd never heard of) and so I joined. **Karen Browning**

I'd just finished my first ever ms and been convinced by a friend to 'do' something with it instead of sticking it in a drawer. I was a mum of two preschoolers and stuck at home, so I went online to search for writing-related competitions and found the Clendon Award. Since a prerequisite of entering the Clendon is to be a member of RWNZ, I joined up and went to my very first meeting in February of 2004. To be honest, if I'd just found RWNZ on the web I'd never have joined because I was convinced at that stage that I wasn't writing romance and RWNZ wouldn't be the right place for me! And even though the Clendon is for a 'romance' ms, I really only entered it because I had this finished ms and the evaluation sheets the first round readers gave each entry sounded very appealing. I was just desperate for feedback from people other than my husband and best friend, and the Clendon seemed a good place to start. Of course I soon found out I WAS writing romance (LOL) so RWNZ was definitely the place for me. And the rest -- as they say after only being a RWNZ member for a year and then being co-opted to the conference committee for 3 subsequent years -- is history. **Maree Anderson**

WRITING WORKSHOPS

I attended a Southern Writers Workshop in Picton a few years back. One of the speakers was Pat Snellgrove and one of the ladies I got speaking to was Giovanna Lee. Once Giovanna found out I was writing historical romance, she gave me all the good goss, of course! I signed up almost immediately after that! **Iona Jones**

I attended a talk at our local community centre, given by Susan Napier. When I could get over the awestruck factor of actually being in the same room as one of my favourite authors I got some great tips from her. One of the best was the contact details for RWNZ. It took me a year to actually drum up the courage to contact Jean, who was so absolutely lovely and friendly and the rest, as they say, is history! **Yvonne Lindsay**

PUBLISHED ARTICLES

I first read about RWNZ in the RWAustralia Hearts Talk magazine - I was actually looking at the contest page and saw a mention of the Second Chance competition. **Kylie**

I read about it in the local paper way, way, way ago when it was to be the very first ever conference in that motel in Otahuhu . . . Anyway - I've only missed one since because I very quickly became hooked - this was a group of writers, talking about writing, and learning about writing, and being fun and friendly. It was amazing! There was and still is no real writers' gathering in NZ including all the practical help even today. It's the highlight of my year. I always meet up with friendly faces and learn heaps - it's relevant no matter what writing you do! And it always invigorates me to get back into writing - gives me that shove I need. I am proud to say I have made many amazing friends through my participation in this group - and I don't even write romance! **Clare Scott** (*who writes great books for children. Sue*)

POSTERS

I got recruited when I walked past the notice board in the Auckland City Public Library one winter morning and the lurid pink poster covered in love-hearts (advertising the conference 2004 - the Donald Maas one) caught my eye. I decided it wouldn't hurt to just join and see what I thought and was a bit too shy to actually come to that conference, but have been to all the subsequent ones. **Shirley Megget**

WORD OF MOUTH

I got recruited by one of our customers! Philip and I have a curtain and blind installation business (which is why I wear such sensible shoes and have shoulder muscles to die for...) We were installing a pretty Roman blind in a study, and I noticed a writer's yearbook on our customer's bookcase. We got chatting, and she said she was a member of RWNZ, and I said "Who are they?" and she gave me the link.... The rest is history. Funny thing is I never saw or heard of her again - but each time we drive past her house I think of her with great fondness because she got me into something wonderful. **Kris Pearson**

GETTING INTIMATE WITH POINT OF VIEW

By Anna Campbell

I love playing with point of view. It's one of the fun bits of writing a romance novel!

Firstly, what is point of view? It's the eyes you use to tell the story. It's the person you filter the events of the novel through.

Novels like the classics often use omniscient point of view which I like to think of as the 'God' format. This is where the author sees all and knows all and can pop into everyone's head to give the reader a quick idea of what's going on in a character's thoughts.

The benefit of this is you get that whole world effect that someone like Dickens achieves. The downside is you run the risk of not developing a particular emotional intimacy with any character as you're always dashing off to see the world through another set of eyes.

Omniscient point of view is still used these days but sparingly. I think of it as a wide-panning camera shot that sets up the scene and then of course, you can zoom in to get the close-up. Used sparingly, it can be a highly effective way to begin a chapter or a scene. Used too much, it can make your book seem old-fashioned and lacking in emotional punch.

Still popular is first-person point of view, 'I' books. Chick lit and women's fiction have a great fondness for first-person point of view although I've read many romances, especially gothics, that also use this technique.

With first person point of view, you can play games with things like unreliable narrator that keep the reader guessing. *Wuthering Heights*, for example, is a sequence of first person narratives and every single one of those narrators doesn't understand the full story. All of this adds very effectively to the story's unsettling, dark atmosphere.

The principal benefit of first-person point of view is you develop extreme emotional intimacy with the person telling the story. One downside is readers can become tired of that one character's voice unless that character is very engaging. Another

downside is you view all the other characters from the outside. You don't go into anyone else's head.

The majority of romances, in fact most books these days, are written in third-person point of view (he/she). The writer picks one character or a couple of characters through whom to tell the story. With most romances, including mine, the viewpoint characters are the hero and the heroine. Sometimes the villain or a major secondary character will become the point of view character. Unlike omniscient point of view, the narrators in third-person point of view can only know what that character knows at that stage of the story. So unreliable narrator games also come into the equation.

Most romances take third-person point of view one step further and are written in what I'd term very close focus point of view. This can also be called deep point of view. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that this close focus point of view is one of the reasons romances are popular across the world.

This technique brings you really close to the character, concentrating on their reactions, their emotions. If it's done well, the reader feels like there's no filter between them and the character's actions and feelings in the story. You get that intense intimacy you experience with first-person point of view combined with the ability to move into other viewpoints that you get in third-person. The reading experience becomes intense, vivid, as though the reader were experiencing the events of the story with the viewpoint character. It's an amazingly powerful technique.

Most aspiring writers have heard the term 'head-hopping' and the general consensus is it's a bad thing. Head-hopping is when the point of view character alternates quickly or across a large number of characters – omniscient point of view often uses head-hopping but as I said, the effect can be rather old-fashioned.

I've judged contest entries where the point of view character changes from paragraph to paragraph, even from line to line. Sometimes the problem is that the reader becomes confused about whose

eyes they're viewing events through. But that's not the greatest danger. The greatest danger is that with lots of viewpoint characters or this whiplash effect of changing viewpoint characters, the reader never develops that intimate relationship with the lead characters and never gains that intense experience of living through the story with them. So you've missed your chance to create a page-turning, compelling romance that delivers a huge emotional wallop. The story may be great, the characters may be interesting, but the reader will experience the whole thing from a distance.

My advice for anyone wanting to use deep point of view in a romance is to limit how many characters tell your story. I'd strongly recommend just hero and heroine, maybe villain if that's the only way you can get essential information across or you think this builds suspense. I'd also recommend staying in each viewpoint for an extended period. Some people say for the whole scene. I don't necessarily subscribe to that, but stay in one head long enough for the reader to feel they are intimate with the character.

Whose point of view should you use for a particular moment? The general consensus is that the point of view character should be the person with the most at stake. Another technique is to pick the character who gets the surprise when the information conveyed in the scene is revealed, especially if it's information the reader doesn't yet have. This puts the reader and the character on the same footing and builds intimacy.

Often in my books, the characters have equal stakes in a particular scene. What do you do then? In that case, I'd go for the most dramatic option or for the option that gives the reader the most new information. In a love scene, I may choose a point of view character who hasn't yet had the chance to express their feelings/reactions in a similar moment. So the first love scene may be in the hero's point of view. The reader wants to know how the heroine feels so the next love scene will be in her point of view.

What techniques can you use to achieve close focus point of view? One is to concentrate very much on the character's sensations, thoughts and emotions. How does that character react to something that's been said or done? How does that character feel in any given moment? Use the senses – ALL of them, not just the visual. Use memory. Give us a strong impression of what it's like to be inside that person's skin.

Another technique is to limit filter words like "he thought" or "she felt". Close point of view reflection is presented as dialogue with the flavour of speech. So if the character curses, the patterns of his thoughts should include cursing. Use other techniques you'd use with speech, like fragments or colloquialisms.

Effective internal monologues use words the character would in speech:

He thought she was beautiful. This puts the reader at a distance.

By all that was holy, she was lovely. The reader instantly hears the cadence of the character's speech.

Yet another trick is to use imagery that relates specifically to him or her. To give you an example, in *Untouched*, Matthew, the Marquess of Sheene, is a botanist so he uses a lot of plant and horticultural language. The more specific you can make a character's internal dialogue, the more the reader will feel they're inhabiting their head.

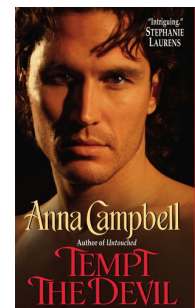
Use point of view to play games with your reader. This is when it becomes really fun! Your reader is in the box seat when it comes to knowing what's going on with the story. The hero may be going through agonies because he thinks the heroine doesn't love him. The reader knows better. The heroine may completely misunderstand something the hero does. The reader knows better.

You can also use point of view to keep your reader turning the page in a fever to find out what happens next. When your hero, in his point of view, declares his love at the end of a chapter, the reader will immediately rush to read the next page because of course, your reader wants to know how the heroine reacts to this important moment in the story.

Skilful use of point of view is a really powerful technique for drawing out suspense and creating a compelling story that will keep your reader sitting up past midnight to finish the story. And isn't that just what we want?

Come on! Use point of view to get us really intimate with the men and women in your stories! Your readers will be clamouring for more!

Anna's latest release, *Tempt the Devil*, is available now from Avon.



MEMBER SUCCESSES

New Release Spotlight



Zombie Queen of Newbury High (Puffin, US) by **Amanda Ashby**

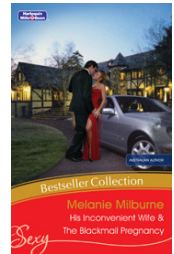
Mia is blissfully happy. She is dating super hot football god Rob, and he actually asked her to prom! Enter Samantha—cheerleading goddess and miss popularity—who starts making a move for Rob. With prom in a few days, Mia needs to act fast. So she turns to her best friend, Candice, and decides to do a love spell on Rob. Unfortunately, she ends up inflicting a zombie virus onto her whole class, making herself their leader! At first she is flattered that everyone is treating her like a queen. But then zombie hunter hottie Chase explains they are actually fattening her up, because in a few days, Mia will be the first course in their new diet. She's sure she and Chase can figure something out, but she suggests that no one wear white to prom, because things could get very messy.

His Inconvenient Wife and **The Blackmail Pregnancy** by **Melanie Milburne**

Sebastian's Tail (Penguin Books) by **Judy Lawn** - a children's Picture Book

Touch of the Demon (The Wild Rose Press) by **Christina Phillips** -
erotic/paranormal 13th March 2009

Danger, Word Games! by **Yvonne Eve Walus** writing as **Eve Summers**



Sold

Nikki Beynon, who won this year's Great Beginnings Contest has been offered a two-book contract by Kimberley Young for **Harlequin Romance**.

Yvonne Eve Walus writing as **Eve Summers** - **Red Rose Publishing** has accepted **Fiji on Fire**, **Fiji on Ice** and **Safe Sex Inc**

Norah Hansen has sold **A Spirited Exchange** to **Red Rose Publishing**. Her 40th contracted title!

Jane Beckenham has just been offered her tenth book contract. A novella titled **To Kiss an Angel**.

Competitions

RT Reviewers Choice Nominees:

First Series Romance - His Mistress by Arrangement - Natalie Anderson

Harlequin Presents - Accidental Mistress - Susan Napier

Harlequin Nascar - Teaming Up - Abby Gaines

Harlequin Super Romance - Second-Chance Family - Karina Bliss

Paranormal Action Adventure Romance - Hostage to Pleasure - Nalini Singh

Paranormal Romantic Suspense - Blind Instinct - Fiona Brand

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

JAN COLLEY

On writing, her call story & her latest release



Silhouette Desire author Jan Colley stops by to chat with Soraya. Thanks so much Jan!

Unpublished writers are obsessed with finding out about call stories (or at least I am!). Take us back in time . . . how did you sell your first book?

My first completed ms finalled in the Clendon of 2003, was sent to New York and Leslie Wainger passed it on to Desire. In December, Melissa Jeglinski rejected it but she had a couple of nice things to say, most importantly that she would like to see something else. I didn't send my second ms because that was not a Desire but I started another story. I was working hard to get the first two polished

up for the Emma Darcy award when Lynne Kokshoorn, bless her, reminded me at the eleventh hour of the logline pitch contest for Desire. I scribbled something off with about half an hour to spare and incredibly finalled. How could this be? I am so long-winded it isn't true! (Maybe it was because I rather cynically added New Zealand after my name on the entry in the hope that it would jog Melissa's memory...) Disaster struck when I was unable to get into the chat room for the pitch and they replaced me, but I stayed up all night and finally sneaked in somehow just as they were about to start and MJ kindly allowed me to pitch. She requested the full, asked what the title was and I hurriedly said Trophy Wives, even though I'd entered it in the EDA as High Stakes at Summerhill (bleagh!). That remains the only title so far I have been allowed to keep. About two weeks after I'd sent the ms off, I got a very comprehensive revision letter by mail. I got to work and about two months after that, I was busily polishing it for the Clendon, staying up till all hours. One morning, the phone went at 7am. A very young-sounding, pleasant American voice told me that she wanted to buy my book and that they were celebrating in New York because I was the first new author they'd bought at Desire in a couple of years. Naturally I blurted it out to all and sundry and then endured several nervous days wondering if I'd dreamed the call, until I received the confirmation email.

Your latest release, Friday Night Mistress, is out now. Tell us the background behind the book. What's the story about and how did you come to write it?

Friday Night Mistress is out this month in the States, here and Australia in April. It is the first of a two book contract about two Kiwi brothers, Nick and Adam Thorne. For months, I had been tormented by Strauss music in my head from morning till night, so I figured I was meant to write a ball story. I sent off what I called my Great Gatsby idea. Sadly it didn't fly, but the editor and I wrangled something from the ashes. I did stage a ball in Friday Night Mistress but only as an aside – the real Strauss bonanza comes in Adam's story, set in England and Vienna. Friday Night Mistress is set in Wellington and the Sounds and concerns the love affair of the children of two most bitter enemies.

Oh, and the good news is that since I finished the Vienna book, the Strauss music has subsided – except for the occasional Sunday afternoon when the house is empty.

Last year, you worked on the Diamonds Down Under continuity with some other fantastic New Zealand and Australian authors. The writing process is usually quite isolated – how different and/or difficult was it having to link your stories together and work as a team of writers?

It was extremely difficult! Luckily, they were a bunch of the nicest women you could ever meet. I'd worked on an editor-led continuity previously and that was a piece of cake compared to Diamonds. Every single detail had to be rigorously tested to make sure it complied with each author's vision; not just physical and geographical - there were several entire family histories to work out and to try to remember to stick to throughout the series. I think the email tally between us surpassed 5000 – and it's still going! The blog was fun, if a bit taxing for a computer dunce like myself, but the others were very patient and supportive. The whole thing took a lot longer than it probably should have, but I am very proud of the end result - I think we all are. I loved all of our characters. They were like family for such a long time. The settings were special to each of us. And the subject matter – diamonds – was especially fun to research.

Are you a pantsner or a plotter? What is the writing process from start to finish like for you?

Hmm, I really think I am a plotter, but the very word 'pantsner' conjures up chaos in my mind and that is certainly how I work. I am ashamed of myself for not having honed a more organised approach to writing by now. I allow my insecurities to eat me up. I am lazy and messy and so easily distracted. To be perfectly honest, if I hadn't fluked that logline, I doubt I would ever survive the submitting-rejection-revision- rejection-submitting etc that our more worthy RWNZers subject themselves to. I refuse to tell you what my process is like (hah! You already know, Soraya!) in case I send the tender among you screaming for the hills and swearing off writing forever. Let's just say I don't know how I do what I do and sometimes it doesn't come off at all. Sometimes I wonder if I can carry on. Occasionally I love writing so much it hurts. There are a lot of highs and lows for someone so insecure and I probably shouldn't even consider doing this for a living. Then again, it's the best job I ever had!

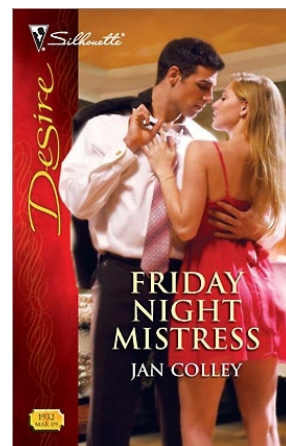
Desire stories seem to have changed rather a lot in the last year or two. What makes a great Desire story now?

Wish I knew! Desire has changed a lot but it sells very well. Perhaps in these troubled economic times, escapism fiction will become even more popular. Desire used to be character-driven but is now more conflict-driven. Plotting is a real challenge. The uber-rich, take-charge alpha male goes without question, and glitzy glamorous settings are a must. They seem quite open to NZ/Australian settings, and I have noticed a tiny shift to European locations of late. There is a lot of emphasis on packaging/title, so the more hooks and keywords you can include in your synopsis, the better the editor will like it. Melissa Jeglinski once described Desire as being a 'guilty pleasure.' Like watching the afternoon soap operas – you know you shouldn't but you just can't resist...

If you could pick a hero (with the exception of your husband of course!) who would it be? And before you say him, I have first dibs on Hugh Jackman!

Being twice your age, Soraya, my heroes aren't looking that flash these days, but in their time, they beat any of the whipper-snappers around these days. If I could choose one, it would be Redford. Or Newman. Especially Redford. He brings something to every role that just gets me. Searching for a face to hinge your book on can be time-consuming but never unpleasant! So far, I have based my heroes on a guy I knew at high school, kiwi actor Charles Mesure, an Ezibuy catalogue!! Quinn (Diamonds) I found off the L'Oréal for Men site, yum. Gabriel Aubrey and the gorgeous Enrique Palacios, supermodels both followed, but to me, all of them have Redford blood running through their veins. For my next story, (she said hopefully) I found a neat pic of Chris Noth (Sex in the City). He is lovely to watch on the screen but doesn't often take a great photo so this pic is a keeper. Fingers crossed he has his day!

Jan's latest release, Friday Night Mistress, is available now in the USA, and here in April.



STORY COLLAGES & CHARACTER CASTING

by Soraya Nicholas

One of the worst things I ever did was discover the blog phenomena. I was always so disciplined, taking a break from work to write my wip, diligently tapping away into my laptop, never being distracted by the internet. I blame wireless broadband! But the one good thing about spending hours trawling blogs was coming across the idea of casting characters. It had never occurred to me to find images of my hero and heroine! Of course that led to a new addiction in the form of google images!

Without a doubt I can attribute my obsession with casting characters to Harlequin Romance author Ally Blake. If you haven't seen her blog, it's worth a visit (www.allyblake.blogspot.com). There, she posts her story collages, which are rather comprehensive. Mine are no where near that fancy, but they do now have an important role to play when it comes to creating my stories. I scour magazines and google names to cast my characters, who may end up being based on a celebrity or simply a pretty face from a commercial. Then, I search appropriate magazines for other inspiration. In one of my stories, set in the Australian Outback, I needed a visual imprint of the house and setting. Needless to say, I probably became the only young female regularly requesting a copy of the RM Williams Outback magazine at our local Paper Plus! But I did find the images I needed, and it certainly helped me plot and write the manuscript.

Aside from the fact that my husband teases me about cutting out pictures and pasting them in pretty collages, character casting has become a crucial step in my writing. Yes, it's fun, but it also helps you to stay "within" a story. For instance, when I have a busy working week, it might mean that I don't work on my wip at all for up to 10 days. But when I do, I can stare at my collage, think about the story, and fall straight back into the "world" of my characters.

Every writer has their own favourite famous faces to cast, and in fact I sometimes use the same photo for more than one story. This happens where I find a particularly strong male face, or in the case of my latest story, the heroine has a son, and in my mind he looks like another boy that featured in an earlier manuscript.

My Top 5 Heroes . .

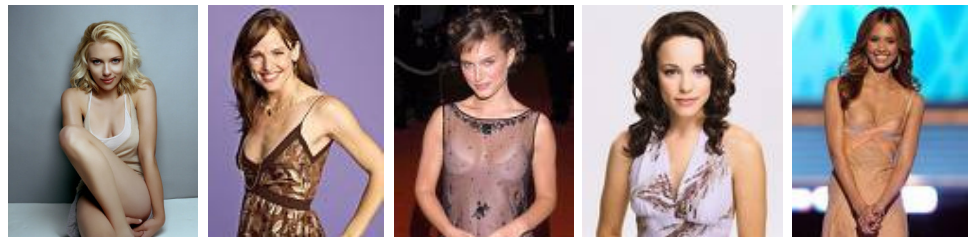
Gerard Butler
Hugh Jackman
Eric Dane
Aaron Jeffrey



Okay, I know I said 5 but who needs five when you've got these guys around for inspiration! These men are perfect for my kind of hero, because they are strong male types – classic good looks but real blokes nonetheless. The photo of Eric Dane has been my most inspirational to date ☺ and I know I will use that image again for a rugged horseman in my next wip. And Gerard Butler . . . anyone who has seen P.S. I Love You will understand. I almost want to write a story with a sexy Irish man in it just so I can dream about him all day.

My Top 5 Heroines . .

Scarlett Johansson
Rachel McAdams
Natalie Portman
Jennifer Garner
Jessica Alba



Why these ladies? Because they are look young, fresh and strong . . . exactly as I like my heroine to be! So there's my opinion on casting characters and story collaging. Get out the scissors and cut out some pictures, or if you are computer savvy then try to collage on screen. Whatever you do, give it a go and see if it helps you create a world of characters and places for your next story.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Compiled by Patrika Salmon, with a contribution from Cynthia Sterling

Love Stories Magazine

Poetry - Wanted the best of love poetry. Payment is US\$50 - \$75 for World Rights.

Details: <http://www.newlovestories.com/poems.html>

Short Stories - Wanted, original, unpublished love stories.

Details: website: <http://www.newlovestories.com>; guidelines: <http://www.newlovestories.com/submissions.html>

Gold Dust Magazine.

This British biannual literary magazine welcomes short stories.

Details: <http://www.golddustmagazine.co.uk>; e-mail subs from the website.

longandshortreviews.com

'Are you a multi-published or a brand new author in the Romantic Fiction genre? Do you have a book being released

'The Long and the Short of It' and 'Whipped Cream', the story zines, are looking for short (approx. 1,000 words) stories. Details: website: <http://www.longandshortreviews.com/>

Shades of Romance, USA

This bi-monthly magazine caters specifically to the readers and writers of multi-cultural romance and fiction. Details: <http://www.sormag.com/guide.html>

'Every Day Fiction' is an online literary magazine. The editors seek good readable fiction from 50 to 1000 words.

Details: Website: <http://www.everydayfiction.com>;

Guidelines: <http://www.everydayfiction.com/submit-story/>

'Short Story of the Month' is another new zine looking for stories. Submit stories of 600 to 2,000 words, in any genre.

Details: <http://www.shortstoryofthemonth.com>;

Kensington

Kensington Books has a new address as of now: 119 West 40th Street, New York, New York 10018.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEST NEWS

Submitted by Lisa Elkind-Gardiner, aka Lisa Whitefern

The Smoky Mountain Romance Writers

Deadline - April 17, 2009; Cost - \$21.00 (US funds)

Website - <http://www.smrw.org/laurie.htm>

Tampa Bay Area Romance Authors Contest

Deadline - May 1st, 2009; Cost - \$25.00 (U.S. funds)

Website - <http://www.tararwa.com/contest.php>

Writer's Digest Self-Published Book Awards

Deadline - Postmark by May 1, 2009; Cost - \$100 Prize - \$3000

Website - <http://www.wordhustler.com/contests/tag/romance>

Annual Writer's Digest Short Story Competition

Deadline - Postmark by May 15, 2009 (Late entry is June 1, 2009; fees apply)

Fee-\$20 for the first manuscript \$15 for each additional manuscript

Website-<http://www.writersdigest.com/annual/>

Writers of the Future

Deadline - Postmark by midnight June 31, 2009. Fee - Free and writer retains all rights

Website - <http://www.writersofthefuture.com/rules.htm>

www.romancewriters.co.nz

March 2009

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: ginnysuckling@xtra.co.nz

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

WAIKATO, BAY OF PLENTY & KING
COUNTRY – Liz Heywood
email: liz.heywood@gmail.com
phone: (09) 2351404

WELLINGTON – Ellie Huse
email: elliehuse@yahoo.com



Don't see your region listed here? If you're interested in helping to start a local RWNZ group in your area, please contact RWNZ president Pat Snellgrove via email rwnzpresident@xtra.co.nz or our membership secretary Rachel Collins on rachel_collins@xtra.co.nz

AUCKLAND

We had a great turnout for the first meeting of the year and made plans for the 2009 programmed. On March 7th we will be meeting at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion at 12.30 p.m. Corner of Mt Albert and Mt Eden Roads. This month's workshop will be run by Helen Kirkman and Maree Anderson on Ways to Spark our Inspiration.

WAIKATO/BAY OF PLENTY/KING COUNTRY

We had our Christmas meeting at Gaylene Atkins home in early December. That was a wonderful weekend, with sleepovers for a lot of us, and day visitors as well. Jenny Yates gave a wonderful workshop on Cutting, Liz Heywood gave a workshop on Dialogue, we had exercises, and writing exercises on the Saturday afternoon. In the evening we sipped wine, read, and told jokes. As usual the food was wonderful and Gaylene's hospitality was exceptional. Our first meeting for the year will be on Feb 21st at Angela Bethell's home, with a workshop on characterisation by Gracie Stanners.

The March 21st meeting will be held at Leigh Leslie's home in Te Awamutu at 12noon. Everyone welcome. Please bring a plate.

WELLINGTON

Our first meeting for the year was well-attended. Louise has left us to live in Whangarei, but Sally came back from America, so our little band is still going strong. A 'round the circle' chat meant that everyone had a few minutes to speak about their current work. It sounds like several Clendon entries are almost finished, and Joan has taken up collaging. Our exercise following on from Cathy's December workshop produced a number of synopses which were read and commented on.

Our challenge for March is this: write the back-cover blurb for one of your novels. Make us really want to read your story (whether it exists or not.) You have up to 100 words to play with. Our next meeting will be at 1 pm, Saturday March 7th at Ellie's, 135 Milne Drive, Paraparaumu. All welcome.

NELSON

Valentine's Day was a perfect day for our February meeting and our hostess, Annika, provided heart-shaped cocoa biscuits and a heart-shaped cake topped with strawberries. Along with Jacqui's sponge cake and plenty of bubbly we had a LOVE-ly afternoon. We read one another our 'Love at First Sight' stories and then settled down to watch the DVD 'Mama Mia'. Good fun!

The next meeting will be held on Saturday the 14th of March at 2pm. Venue to be advised later. Contact Cherie on 548 6070.

CHRISTCHURCH

A few of us met for a DVD get-together and thoroughly enjoyed *27 Dresses* as recommended on the Harlequin Special Edition Podcast – a classic example of a romance movie.

We also enjoyed a lovely summer afternoon at the end of January when Karen presented her excellent Margie Lawson inspired Workshop on EDITS. Then with the aid of trifle and cream we worked out our programme for the year.

Here's The Plan for 2009

- First Tuesday of each month - Movie Night
- Second Sunday of each month - Writing Chat and Critique Workshop
- One Full Day Workshop with guest speakers - Sunday 17th May
~ details next month ~ out of town members welcome

For local info contact sueknight@ihug.co.nz

THE NAKED WRITER

Baring all in the world of romance and writing



Things in RWNZ are getting quite exciting, as you'll be aware from reading other areas of this newsletter. The setting up of small groups is a great move that the Executive is really enthused about. It shouldn't detract from the main NZRomance loop but instead brings together members with a common focus, eg suspense, paranormal, historical, e-pub etc to start their own small group to share resources. At this point I think there is only the one group started. However, I should say that any group is only as good as the people who contribute, whether it be share a query experience, ask a question, offer helpful advice, or pass on information that may be of interest. And while I'm plugging things – a plug for the Auckland Chapter – Frances has planned a fabulous year of speakers so check out the Chapter page of Heart to Heart each month. Auckland meetings are held the first Saturday of the month at Three Kings Tennis Pavilion and with the local speakers - many of them published - lined up, it's like getting a mini conference for free – or at least, the cost of a gold coin to help pay the rent! I know I'm going to try to get to as many meetings as I can this year.

By the time you read this, the long list in the Emerald Awards of Romance Writers of Australia should be announced, so best of luck to those who made the cut. Surely there are bound to be a few RWNZers in that lot. And also as you read this, those who are entering the Clendon will have sent in or are in the process of sending in their manuscripts. One of the best things about contests that published writers have attested to, is that they offer you a chance to write to a deadline which is hard when you're not published and aren't penalized for skipping a day or a week, or in my case, months. Good practice for when you're published and you can't just brush off a day's writing because coffee and a good goss with the gal pals sounds fun.

If you have entered the RWAmerica Golden

Heart, the must-see event will be following the action live on author Judy Fennell's blog. I wasn't an entrant last year but heard about the website and checked it throughout the day to see who'd finalised. It's a heck of a lot of fun spotting the familiar names who come up. It should be some time around the end of March so if you're as fascinated by it all as I am, keep a watch. As soon as anyone gets the call to say they've in, they hopefully email Judy Fennell, or their friends do, so she keeps a track of who's got the call, so you can watch the slots fill up and hope you're still going to get the call. Still, there's always next year..... Judy Fennell's blog is: <http://judifennell.wordpress.com/>

Jane Porter is with child. Her baby, a boy she is calling Mac on her blog, will be born in early May. She writes regularly about it at www.janeporter.com. The Papa is boyfriend, Ty. I should say long time boyfriend, as I met him (ie I nodded at him in a lift or something but that constitutes a meeting, right?) at the RWA Melbourne conference back in 2005. Jane, who turns 45 this year, has two boys from her marriage to her first husband, the chappie who came out with her when she was a speaker at our Conference several years back. FYI my cousin who is nearly 46 is with child, too. Just thought I'd throw that in. About time more RWNZers had babies, I reckon. Heck, do a Natalie Anderson, someone, and have twins. Or triplets, even. That'd be cool.

Finally, the subject of perseverance, a subject dear to a writer's heart... At a sales convention the manager said to his firm's sales force, "Did the Wright brothers ever quit?" "No," they responded. "Did Charles Lindburg ever quit?" "No" they shouted. "Did Lance Armstrong ever quit?" "No," they bellowed. "Did Thorndike McQuester ever quit?" There was a long silence until a salesperson said, "Who's Thorndike McQuester? No-one's heard of him." The sales manager snapped back, "Darn right you haven't. Because he *quit*." The word for the month – no Thorndike McQuesters in RWNZ, please.