

HEART TO HEART

STEPHANIE LAURENS

Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas



Soraya Nicholas interviews international bestselling author and RWNZ keynote conference speaker for 2010, Stephanie Laurens.

Stephanie, we are so excited to have you attending our conference this year! When were you last in New Zealand?

I believe it was in the early 2000s – 2002, perhaps. I'm looking forward to catching up with everyone.

For those members who aren't familiar with your work, tell us how long you've been writing for and how you first became published.

I've been writing romances since 1989. I started writing my first romance because I literally ran out of Regency romances to read, so started to write one to entertain myself. That became my first published work, TANGLED REINS. That was the first of 8 books for Harlequin Mills & Boon. In 1996 I crossed the Atlantic and signed with Avon. Since then, I've published 33 works, all but one (a novella) with Avon/HarperCollins.

How would you describe your books?

My books are Regency-set historical romances, with either a mystery, suspense or adventure story as the secondary plot. There's always a fair amount of drama and action. Think Errol Flynn meets Jane Austen.

Why romance?

To some extent the answer is above – because that's what I love to read. I'm a voracious reader, but I read only genre fiction. I could write crime, fantasy or romance, but when I first started writing, my romance voice was the strongest, so that's what I've stuck with, because quite clearly it works.

Is being an author the job of your dreams? I read that you were a successful scientist prior to becoming an author – do you still work in that field too?

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It's hard to believe that we're already introducing our conference presenters, but August will be here before we know it! This issue we are excited to have an interview with bestselling author Stephanie Laurens, who will be in New Zealand for our conference later in the year. We also have an interview with the wonderful Anne Gracie, as well as Zana Bell, who has her debut Harlequin Superromance out soon.

It seems like this year is full of good news, with not only debut sales but also agent signings. Suzanne and I have both been busy working on our own novels, and querying agents, so here's to hoping we have some good news to share soon too!

Enjoy this issue of Heart to Heart, and as always please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to submit material for publication.

Soraya & Suzanne

RWNZ & RWAustralia Critique Partner Scheme

To join RWNZ's critique partner register, run jointly with RWAustralia, go to <http://www.romancewriters.co.nz/members/critique-partner-register.php>. Fill out the online application form and send to applycritpartners@romanceaustralia.com. Alternatively, email applycritpartners@romanceaustralia.com and ask for an application form.

PRESIDENT ABBY



Conference is coming!

I'm thrilled to be able to announce two of the fabulous speakers we have lined up for An Affair to Remember, RWNZ's 20th anniversary year conference – more announcements will follow just as soon as we get some signatures on various dotted lines...

First up, the great news is the return of Stephanie Laurens to our conference. Stephanie is not only a writer of brilliant, *New York Times*-bestselling Regency romances, she's also incredibly smart (a marine biologist by trade), charming, and a wonderful teacher. If you were lucky enough to hear her talk at our conference previously (maybe seven years ago?), you'll know what I mean. If you weren't...well, either way, you're in for a treat. For me, the highlights of Stephanie's last visit were a simple-but-brilliant tip for revising manuscripts—still one of the most useful things I've learnt in writing—and the sight of my husband almost in tears during her inspiring and touching after-dinner speech!

You can read an interview with Stephanie in this issue of *Heart to Heart*.

The other speaker we can announce now is Dianne Moggy, VP Overseas Editorial Strategy & development for Harlequin Enterprises. Again, it's been quite a few years since Dianne's last visit to our shores, but her graciousness and savvy are fresh in many memories besides mine. Dianne has a huge breadth of experience at Harlequin (but is not the least bit intimidating), and in my experience a quite amazing recall. She's a mine of information! She will be hearing pitches at the conference, and we'll have other pitching opportunities for you, too.

Look out for more speaker announcements next month, along with our conference registration form, which will also be available online.

We want to make our 20th anniversary conference really special, and to that end An Affair to Remember will be held at Rydges Hotel, downtown Auckland, August 20-22. This is a new venue for us, and in fact has just been newly refurbished. It's cool and smart and you'll be pleased to know we have a fantastic room rate for delegates' accommodation. We have exciting plans for the cocktail party, which we'll share next month, too. But as well as special, it's important for our conference to be affordable. The team is working hard to make this year's event incredible value for money. I can't wait!!

Regional Workshops

I mentioned in a recent column that we're planning some one-day romance writing workshops around the country. The aim of these is to bring some of RWNZ's published author expertise to members who may not make it to the Auckland conference. I'll be honest and admit I'm also hoping the regional workshops will give you enough of a taste for this kind of event, that you'll decide you can't go another year without coming to conference! We also want to attract new members to RWNZ – if you have friends who might be interested in joining, why not invite them to one of these reasonably priced workshops? So far we have three workshops scheduled—Hamilton on March 27, Wellington /

Kapiti on April 17, and Christchurch on May 30. You'll find more details of the Hamilton and Wellington workshops in this newsletter. Huge thanks to Kris Pearson and Giovanna Lee, and their team, for their work on the Wellington session, and to Sue Knight who's getting things revved up in Christchurch.

We hope to run workshops in other regions, too—obvious candidates are Nelson / Marlborough, Hawke's Bay and the Far North. But if you have any other ideas, or would like to get involved in helping organize a workshop in your region, please contact me.

Online Workshops

RWNZ has run online workshops sporadically in the past—many of you may not realize we have a dedicated email loop for these. We plan to ramp these up again, with workshops taught by international speakers. Because if it's online, the world is our oyster when it comes to speakers! I have some ideas, but if you know of any overseas online workshops that you'd like to see run here, your suggestions are welcome. Once again, this is an opportunity to impart world-leading expertise to our members. There will be a nominal charge for these workshops, to cover speaker fees, but you'll find them a lot cheaper than doing workshops through, say, an American writing group.

Half-Yearly Subs for New Joiners

I'm pleased to announce that from March 1, RWNZ is offering a reduced annual membership fee of \$30 for people joining the organization between March 1 and August 31. This is a significant drop on the full-year price of \$55, which has been a deterrent to people joining later in the year, who feel they're not getting their money's worth. The half-year sub only applies in those first months of membership, until the new subscription year kicks in on September 1, at which point members must renew for the full year at the full price. All members will continue to pay the \$20 one-off joining fee (except where this has been reduced as part of a special promotion, e.g. for people joining RWNZ as part of their conference registration, etc.). The updated membership form featuring the reduced sub is now available on our website.

On the downside, this year RWNZ is going to toughen up on late payers—our poor membership secretary spends months chasing down dozens of tardy renewers (me included, I must confess!). It's bad for morale, and it's bad for cash flow. So this year, we'll be providing some incentives for people to renew on time...and some disincentives for paying late! You have been warned... ☺

Other news

Two RWNZ authors have recently sold their first books! (and their second books, too, since they both scored a two-book contract). Congratulations to Bronwen Evans on her two-book deal with Kensington, and to Sue MacKay on her two-book deal with Mills & Boon Medical. It's such a buzz every time someone makes it through the publishing barrier, and we're all cheering with you two. (I'll apologise right now if there are other sales I've failed to note, since my presence on the email loop comes and goes...).

Lastly, major thanks to Kate Gordon for her hard work in boosting RWNZ's Facebook presence—read more about it in this newsletter.

So much to talk about—thanks for staying with me!

Continued from page 1

I “retired” from being a research scientist in 1993, and can honestly say I’ve never looked back, not for an instant. Being a successful author is indeed my dream career. That said, there’s a lot of it that’s not all wine and roses, but the wonderful far outweighs the difficult.

You like to write series, and it seems you have fans all over the world waiting for your new releases! Do you prefer to write connected stories?

It’s not so much what I prefer, as that it just works out that way. It’s more a function of how I think story-wise, probably because I write to entertain myself first (still) and I prefer reading connected stories, so that’s what I tend to write.

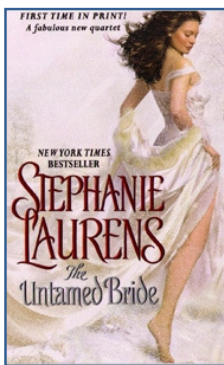
What can we expect to learn from you at our conference? Do you have any workshop topics planned?

I think my Plenary Address will be something along the lines of why readers love to read the books we write. The workshop will be titled “Writing Historical Romances Today” and will while giving a general overview, will focus on aspects that are more peculiar to the subgenre, such as background detail, and meeting reader expectations regarding love scenes.

Any advice for aspiring authors?

Write the book. Polish it until it glows. Then send it out to publishers or agents. Do not ask anyone else’s permission to write your story. Accept only the advice that makes your story or your telling better, and if you’re not sure a piece of advice does improve your work, ignore it.

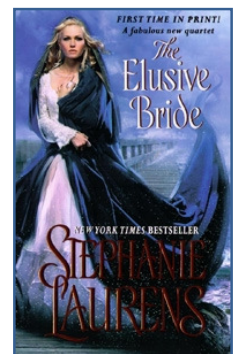
And finally, what are you working on now? What new releases do you have scheduled for this year?



2010 has been a very busy year, with the release of the second (The Elusive Bride 02/2010), third (The Brazen Bride 07/2010), and fourth and final volume (The Reckless Bride 11/2010) of the Black Cobra Quartet, following last Christmas’s release of the first volume (The Untamed Bride 11/2009). I’m just finishing the manuscript for the last volume.

Thanks so much for your time Stephanie. I know I’m speaking on behalf of all our members when I say I can’t wait to meet you in August!

www.stephanielaurens.com



Reproduced from the Jokes About Writers website. For more, head to

<http://sites.google.com/site/writersjokes/>

- A screenwriter comes home to a burned down house. His sobbing and slightly-singed wife is standing outside. “What happened, honey?” the man asks. “Oh, John, it was terrible,” she weeps. “I was cooking, the phone rang. It was your agent. Because I was on the phone, I didn’t notice the stove was on fire. It went up in seconds. Everything is gone. I nearly didn’t make it out of the house. Poor Fluffy is--” “Wait, wait. Back up a minute,” The man says. “My agent called?”
- Q. What’s the difference between publishers and terrorists?
A. You can negotiate with terrorists.

ANNE GRACIE

by Bron Evans



Anne Gracie is a past President of Romance Writers of Australia and has published more than 13 historical romance books. Her current publisher is Berkley Sensation. Anne has been a RITA finalist 3 times, has twice won the

National Readers Choice Award (USA) and won Australia's Romantic Book of the Year (RUBY) twice, the last in 2009 for the first book in the Devil Riders series, *The Stolen Princess*.

Your Devil Riders series has been very successful, which I loved by the way and is a favorite on my bookshelf along with your Perfect Rake series.

Thanks Bronwen.

Did you have an idea how many books there would be in the Devil Riders Series before you began *The Stolen Princess*, the first book in the series?

Yes, my editor wanted a male-centred series proposal, so I came up with four heroes and an idea for each story. That said, I've just written #4 of that series and it's not one I originally proposed, and I still have the 4th hero's story to write.

If so, over what period do you plan to write each book? How long does it take you to actually write the book?

I allow myself 8-9 months between books. Some books are easier to write, and sometimes life derails writing for a while.

How do you get started writing a story? Where does your inspiration come from?

I usually get an idea long before I start writing it. Sometimes a premise will pop into my head, sometimes I'll wake up with a scene or a conversation running in my brain like a movie, and I'll write it down, even though I have no idea who the people are or what the story might be. I've also been inspired by movies or TV — not the story, but an image, or something about the character, or the situation they're in. I write down all my ideas in a

notebook — I have dozens of them by now, and the best ones hang about in my head, quietly nagging at me.

How do you approach the research needed to write historical fiction?

It depends on the book — some take more research than others. I'm pretty well grounded historically in the regency era, and have a feel for the times, so that helps. If it's small research, like clothes or descriptions of places etc, I'll write XXXX in the wip and keep writing. They're things I can look up later. I research locations and use period maps and google earth to get a picture of the terrain. I use collage and pictures to help capture the flavour of the time and place — and of the story.

For my last book, *TO CATCH A BRIDE* — which is set partly in Egypt, I read a lot of journals of travellers of the period. I did the same with my second book, *TALLIE'S KNIGHT*. But research to me is fun, not work.

The most important thing is to incorporate historical research seamlessly, so the reader doesn't consciously notice it. My favourite reader compliments start, "I don't usually like historicals but I read your book and..."

Can you describe your writing process — development of characters, plotting, drafting, editing, structure of how you write? What does your book's writing folder look like?

Pretty much all the ideas and jotted notes and roughed out scene ideas are in my notebooks. The first thing I do is go through them all and put a mini sticky notes on pages about that story. That's to refresh my mind.

I have two notice boards in my study — one has chapter spaces blocked out and I put notes in them about what's happening in each chapter — some are just possibilities — it starts out pretty blank, and I shift the notes around while the story is being written. I have a map of the area, and a collage of the story.

I put the story together consecutively. I write some scenes by hand but mostly write straight onto the computer. I have no idea how many drafts I write — I'm always changing stuff. If it's a major change, like pulling chapters out and changing a plot line, I'll save a copy of the old draft, but I almost never go back to it.

My characters usually come alive on the page, and if they don't, I do writing exercises — making them

talk, or have a dispute with another character in the book until they do. I sometimes make a list of their salient character traits. At various stages in the book I have journal conversations with myself about what they want and what they're thinking and why they did that, etc.

What are your writing habits? (e.g., do you write everyday, where do you write, do you use the computer to write, do you listen to music while you write etc.)

I try to write every day, because writing is a muscle. (Emails don't count. <G>) Mornings are my best writing time, and late at night. When the book is tough, I have to force myself, and when the book's flying I can't keep away from the computer. When it's tough or I'm being super critical, I write by hand, and then type it up later, editing as I go. I write to two kinds of music — wordless music mostly, but I usually have a theme song for each book and sometimes I'll play it over and over.

In your opinion what makes a great historical hero? What makes a fabulous historical heroine? Which ONE of your main characters is your absolute favorite and why?

A great historical hero is one who readers fall in love with and never forget. He comes in all shapes and sizes and with different baggage. But by the end, he gives himself to the heroine completely and forever. A great historical heroine is one who readers really care about and barrack for all through the story. They also come in all shapes and sizes and personality types. The heroine also has to be active, not acted upon— taking action and making choices that drive the story.

A favourite? This is an impossible question for me. It's like asking which child is your favourite. I like each of them for different reasons and in different ways.

Do you do any promotion yourself and how does blogging play a role in your work schedule?

I don't do a lot of promotion. I have a website and I blog with the Word Wenches, who include some of the best historical writers around. I'm on twitter. When I have a book out I'll do a few guest blogs and I do bookplates etc. for some of the romance bookshops. I also give writing workshops. Mostly I think the best advertisement for a book is word of mouth buzz from readers.

I see Julia Quinn placed a promo comment on The Stolen Princess. Did your Publisher arrange this or do you approach other writers directly?

Julia Quinn is a fabulous person who recommended my books on her website. A reader told me about it, and I was so thrilled I thanked Julia, and told my

agent and editor, and they must have contacted Julia, because the first I knew about it was seeing it on the cover.

I did ask Stephanie Laurens when I was first published, but was very hesitant, because I hate asking for favours and I don't like to presume on a friendship. She laughed and gave me a gorgeous quote.

The romance author community is a very generous one. Eloisa James also gave me a fantastic unsolicited review after her fans had talked about my books, and Mary Jo Putney simply offered to read my next manuscript and give a quote.

Your publisher, Berkley, is based in New York. Is it difficult coordinating with a publisher who is in another country?

The hardest part is having to sound clever or interesting on the phone at 1am or crack of dawn, because my sleep times are her office hours. Otherwise it's not much different from having one anywhere else — it's all done by email.

Does your editor direct what you should write? Do they provide information on trends in the market?

No. My editor once suggested something more glamorous — maybe a princess, and I obliged — and stuck the poor princess in a rundown house — not exactly glamorous. LOL. But my editors have never told me what to write and certainly never talk about trends.

New writers often worry about trends, but I think it's risky to try to jump on band wagons —IMO you're better off writing what you have a passion for. It will add depth and authenticity to your voice that imitation can't achieve. Bandwagons pass, but a passion is like a deep, eternal well that you can always draw on.

Do critique groups/critique partners/competitions - play an important role in your journey to publication? What advantages do they give an unpublished author?

I started writing romance and had a request for a full manuscript before I even found out about romance writers' organizations. I did find some critique partners — the first group I joined tried to be madly helpful but was very destructive and most of the people who joined it gave up writing. I would have too, if I didn't have a request for a full. But after that I made two wonderful critique partners and it was very helpful. It only lasted a year — we still meet, but the others aren't writing.

I only entered one competition before being published — I sent off two copies of the completed book —one to Mills and Boon and the other to the Emma Darcy comp. I came 19th in the EDA but

M&B bought the book. It was a RITA finalist and won the National Readers' Choice Award in the USA, but didn't place in the RBY. Which goes to show that competitions can be useful, but are not the be-all and end all. Judge's tastes are always a wild card in any competition.

What do you hope your readers take away from your books?

A happy, warm, satisfied feeling.

What do you enjoy most about being a writer?

When it works and the writing sings. And hearing from readers. And seeing my books on a shelf.

What advice would you give to aspiring romance authors trying to crack the historical romance market?

Don't worry about trends and don't try to imitate anyone. It's all about characters and story and your unique individual voice.

What is the most valuable lesson you learned since you became a novelist?

Don't trawl the internet looking for reader responses.

They mess with your head. Go back to your story and your characters. They are the only thing you can control, and they matter most.

What advice would you like to share with aspiring writers today?

Follow your dreams.

Please tell us about your current projects. What can fans expect from you next?

My next book is called THE ACCIDENTAL WEDDING. It's about the Hon. Nash Renfrew who wakes in Maddy Woodford's bed with no memory. When his memory returns, he continues to play the amnesiac, because he's not ready to leave her yet.

Anne, thanks so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with us. I know your fourth book in the Devil Riders Series is due out this year. I can't wait to get my copy.

Thanks for having me.

To find out more about Anne and her books you can visit her website <http://www.annegracie.com/>

CONTESTS by Ellie Huse

THE CLENDON AWARD

Closing date – 26 February 2010

CHAPTER SHORT STORY CONTEST 2010

Final Judge: Julie Redlich, Fiction Editor, Woman's Day

- * Open to published and unpublished RWNZ members
- * Submit 1500-word contemporary romance short story
- * Up to 3 entries by same author accepted
- * Prizes: Chapter gift vouchers— 1st \$250 2nd \$150 3rd \$100
- * Entry fee (per entry): \$NZ20
- * electronic entry only in 2010
- * Entry forms and info available on RWNZ website: www.romancewriters.co.nz
- *** Opens 26 February—Closes 26 March ***



HM&B GREAT BEGINNINGS CONTEST 2010

RWNZ's annual contest for category manuscripts.

Final Judge: Kimberley Young, Senior Editor, Mills & Boon, London

- * Open to published and unpublished RWNZ members
- * Submit 20 pages plus 2-page synopsis
- * Up to 2 entries by same author accepted
- * Prizes: 1st \$300 2nd \$150 3rd \$50
- * Entry fee (per entry): \$NZ20
- * Electronic entry only in 2010
- * Entry forms available on RWNZ website: www.romancewriters.co.nz
- *** Opens 17 March—Closes 17 April ***

If you have any questions, contact Ellie Huse, Contests Coordinator at elliehuse@yahoo.com

E IS FOR EMBRACING CHANGE

by Cherie Le Clare

I may be an old trout(ess) but surely not a stick in the mud, if my excitement at the launch of the newfangled E-readers is anything to go by.

Granted, they have not hit the Nelson shops yet, nor, as far as I know, any retail centres here in New Zealand, although a variety of brands, such as Sony, Bebook and Cybook have been available to order via the internet for some time now. When Amazon tested the American market, with its launch of the Kindle E-reader, sales were so positive that their device has now also been made available world-wide.

I have much to owe the technology of web publishing as my very first success at finding a home for my debut novel was with an E-publisher. This way of presenting books to customers may have been viewed with much suspicion at first, but many mainstream publishing houses, recognizing the computer-savvy consumer demand for choice, are now increasingly offering their lists as E-books for downloading, alongside the traditional print format.

But reading a text on a screen is not as satisfying as reading words on paper, I hear you protest. In fact, I've heard little else from other writers and readers of my acquaintance. They shake their heads and fire three questions at me: What about the feel of a book in your hands? The smell of crisp, new pages? The satisfaction of owning bookshelves filled with treasured tomes?

Let me now reply with a three word rebuttal: 1: Heavy, 2: Fetish, 3: Dust. (Keep up, guys – this is the way of the short and to the point texting generation.)

All joking aside, I firmly believe that there are more advantages than disadvantages to this evolution. For example: Imagine the benefits to schoolkids' and university students' postures and spines, if, instead of lugging around piles of heavy textbooks, they can access them all on one easily portable E-reader.

And then there's the cost: E-books are cheaper than print books.

Plus privacy: The cover is not permanently on display so no-one will know what you are reading, unless you choose to tell them.

How about adjustable font size: A boon for anyone with sight problems. And audio books are available too.

One last point: They'll save a heck of a lot of trees from getting the chop.

My prediction is, that in the not-too-distant future, E-readers will become as popular, and as common as, mobile phones, embraced by both young and old alike.

At this point, you may be wondering about the future of lending libraries. My investigations confirm

that both the Nelson and Tasman District Libraries are currently considering the options of how to best provide for multi-format borrowing of books, in preparation for when access to the technology becomes more widely available in New Zealand.

Last month, I was thrilled to be almost pitched into the lap of a young tourist with an E-reader (I was trying to negotiate the unsteady floor of the rolling Cook Strait ferry) because she graciously demonstrated all the features to me and explained that she travelled a lot and the device saved her from having to cart around a weighty pile of books. I even got to hold it – and I can report that it was light, the font was easy to read on a non-glary screen, and it was virtually the same size as a paperback, only much slimmer. Looks much easier to tuck into a case or handbag.

Back in the early 90's, when I was a real estate consultant, I bought a cell phone. It was the size of a small brick, and just about as heavy, and cost me the exorbitant sum of \$800. My manager applauded my initiative in being the first salesperson in the office with one, but my colleagues, however, viewed it with utter disdain.

'It's rude to talk on that thing in someone's house,' was one of the objections I remember, along with, 'Ridiculous. You don't need one of those to do your job.'

Then, of course, it wasn't long before the price, the size, and my colleagues' resistance, had all tumbled down. And, now, just about everyone seems to own one.

The moral of this tale is, of course, that I've been through this aversion to technological gadgets before and know that change need not be as scary as it appears.

E-readers won't replace print books, they'll merely be an alternative vehicle to accessing the written word. My son's friend, who recently purchased a Kindle, sums it up with: "I read a lot more books now."

From the point of view of all writers, scribes and authors, and the future growth of the younger generation's literacy skills, that's got to be a good thing, right?

Cherie's debut historical novel, *French Kiss*, is available from 3rd March from The Wild Rose Press.

For more information about Cherie and her books, visit her on-line at www.cherieleclare.com

NEWBIE AUTHOR

Zana Bell (*Harlequin Superromance & Mira*)

interviewed by Kylie Griffin



Share a little bit about yourself and your writing.

Language is my life. I teach English to international students and migrants by day and write at night and on weekends. I've landed up being an avid Sudoku fan in my down time and I'm sure it's because I get a respite from words ☺. Of course, I love writing, I hasten to add, and really enjoy experimenting in different genres: both generally and within romance. In the end though, I think it's the research I most enjoy – writing gives me a very convenient excuse to be either nosy or obsessive.

Our readers love a good story - please tell us how you received THE CALL.

My first novel, *Forbidden Frontier*, was not a romance. It's an historical based on Charlotte Badger, NZ's and Australia's first female pirate. I tried several publishers with little success. Then one black Friday afternoon, I heard an interview on the radio with an Aussie author who had just published a book about my Charlotte. I was appalled and distraught (and very, very jealous!), suddenly seeing several years of extremely hard work evaporate. Just like that. Quite a few wines later, I decided to build a fire on the beach and give my ms a Viking farewell. A pirate would

appreciate that, I thought. However, the tide was wrong so instead I shoved the book into the proverbial bottom drawer and I turned my attention to writing romance.

It was at a romance conference in Auckland a year later that a visiting editor from Harlequin, Australia, was introduced briefly one session. Penny Martin was representing Mira but she was neither giving workshops nor taking pitches. Hitching my britches metaphorically speaking in the one hand, clutching a scone in the other, I approached her over morning tea. "You wouldn't happen to have heard about the pirate, Charlotte Badger, would you?"

I love Penny! She gave me her card and I sent her the ms forthwith. I didn't hear for ages and ages. And ages. Then, one Friday evening (see how significant Fridays are), when novels were the last thing on my mind, the phone rang. As soon as she said who it was, my heart began thudding. I don't think I really heard what she was saying. All I could suddenly see was the end of a very long, very stony road. Moral of the story?

Bottom drawers are an infinitely better option than the bonfire.

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?

I have found competitions have been invaluable for getting work in front of editors. I cannot say thanks enough to all the wonderful coordinators and judges who make these things happen. As for agents – ha! The most elusive species on the planet, I believe. I'm still looking. Anyone interested in setting up a matchmaking business to get authors and agents together?

Can you tell us about your debut/current book up for release?

Tempting the Negotiator is coming out in March and I had enormous fun writing about the clash between a Kiwi big wave surf champ out to save his precious bay from an American resort company, represented by the immaculate, i-dotting, t-crossing Sass. Surfboard vs attaché case. Surfing is a very sexy sport and the big wave surfers are especially wild. They literally risk limb and life itself just for the adrenalin rush of riding a wave as tall as a skyscraper. I loved the research that ranged from watching unbelievable documentaries of surfers hurling themselves down ginormous waves, to surfing the internet to find the perfect shoes for a New York lawyer. I finally settled on Christian Louboutin with their trademark red soles, and was excited to spot Sandra Bullock wearing a pair in *The Proposal*.

The blurb for the book 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 her 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.

Writers' tend to have strengths and weaknesses. Can you identify them? What's the most challenging thing about writing process for you and how do you strive to overcome it?

Making time to write regularly! I find the juggling of job, family, friends, study AND writing very difficult. I love them all and don't want to sacrifice anything. I write best when I get into a routine but find I'm easily bumped out of it for one reason or another. I'm also very aware of how tempted I become by the NBI (New Best Idea). Really, it's just another form of procrastination. Having deadlines, or setting them for myself, really helps. I never miss an external deadline and usually can more or less keep to the self-inflicted ones.

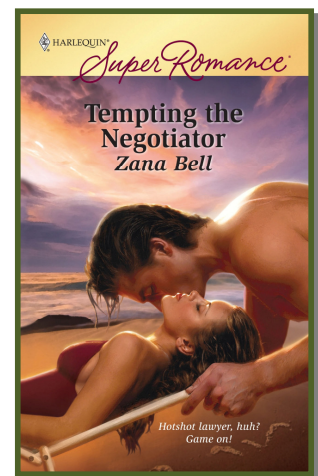
Is it fair to say being published takes you on a steep learning curve in the next stage of your career as a writer? What's something you've learnt since getting THE CALL?

I need to be a lot more organized about the business side of writing. Lacking an agent, I realise I should learn more about contracts. Lacking money, I am doing my own website (thanks Gracie and Jem and their fantastic do-it-yourself online Three Bear Method course on website building). I'm also very aware the window of opportunity for actually getting sales once the book is published is very, very small and as a newbie, it's not easy to get a name established. Fortunately, there are many wonderful people in the RWNZ and RWAUS who are will share experiences and provide excellent advice and guidance.

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

It didn't change my life! Does that sound naïve? I had thought things might be different but I haven't had the superb trajectory that someone like Nalini has had. There's a wonderful flurry of activity when the novel comes out and then it's over and you are just left with the next book waiting to be written (I know, I know, a REAL writer would have already completed the next book!). For me, there are still no guarantees that the next book will be accepted and the agents are still waving me on. Which is excellent for keeping me well and truly humble.

Zana's debut Superromance, *Tempting the Negotiator*, received a 4 Star mention in the latest issue of Romantic Times magazine. For more information about Zana and her books, head to www.zanabell.com



MINI CONFERENCES AROUND THE COUNTRY FOR 2010

Regional Workshop – Hamilton Writing Series Romance

Sandra Hyatt and Sophia James

Saturday March 27, 9am-4pm

Hamilton Central Library

9 Garden Place, Hamilton

Join *USA Today*-bestselling author Sandra Hyatt and historical author Sophia James for this all-day workshop. While the final agenda is still being scheduled, topics will include an insider's view of the different Harlequin Mills & Boon series, creating the right characters for your story, building a story world, conflict and pacing, plotting and submitting your work to publishers, plus your chance to ask questions of these two talented authors.

\$40 for RWNZ members, \$50 for non-members

Tea and coffee provided, BYO lunch

A more detailed schedule, plus registration and payment details, will be emailed to RWNZ members soon



The Kapiti/Wellington mini Conference

The Kapiti/Wellington region is organising a one-day workshop (8.45-3.30PM) on 17 April at Paraparaumu on the Kapiti Coast and we'd love you to join us.

Our keynote speakers, Desire author **Yvonne Lindsay** and new Superromance author **Zana Bell**, along with M&B Historical author **Victoria Aldridge** and e-published romance author **Ann Patrick**, will be offering a variety of workshops. All this for \$45 for RWNZ members and \$50 for others.

Morning tea is included. Please provide your own lunch.

If you're in the area on Friday, 16 April, drop into Whitcoulls, Paraparaumu, who are hosting a book signing for Yvonne and Zana around 11am.

If you'd like more information, please email Giovanna Lee on giovanna@xtra.co.nz. We would love to see you

Christchurch

Our mini-Conference Workshop will be held at the Cashmere Club on Sunday 30th May, 9.30am - 3.30pm. Cost \$50 for non-members and \$40 for members. Guest speakers and lunchtime chats with published romance authors. Names to be confirmed next month.

Please contact Sue Knight - sueknight@ihug.co.nz - for more information.

NEW MEMBERS

Carmem Aim, Iran
Ann Russell, Auckland
Jean Needham, Tauranga



Adrienne Smith, Waitakere
Bernice Greenham, Australia
Leah Clapton, Australia

THE THREE BEARS METHOD

by Zana Bell

My website, hosted by an American provider, had crashed. I hadn't set it up and had no idea whether I should apply CPR (and where indeed, does one start if so?) or to place a little cyber cross on its tomb. Given such dilemmas, I did what all good luddites do and simply gave up in despair.

It was with delight and disbelief therefore, that I saw Gracie advertise an online course in website building. Taking courage into both hands, I signed up and launched into the stormy seas of what I was sure would be incomprehensible cyberbabble, only to discover I had landed in a life-raft that not only provided compass, oars and charts but also the omnipotent voice of expertise when all these failed.

The Three Bears Method is an astoundingly clear, succinct and easy-to-follow course. I loved the chatty style it is written in and I loved even more the wonderful, one-on-one help that was available, seemingly around the clock. So, if you've played with the idea of setting up a website but, like me, suffer from a severe form of internetitis, then READ ON.

Gracie and Jem answer questions about their course and a few helpful Three Bears Method graduates then share their experiences.

THE COURSE:

What inspired you to think of setting up this course?

After Gracie had set up her own website, she had friends in RWNZ ask how she did it--and there is no short answer. Both being teachers by nature, we had been thinking about what courses we could offer using the internet anyway, and Wonderful Writers' Websites stepped forward and said, "Pick me."

Three Bears Method is an unusual name. Where did it come from?

We had been musing on Einstein's admonition to "Make things simple, but not simpler" from which we understood the need for any course neither to be too hard, nor too easy, but "just right". So, in a moment of insanity, we came up with the following:

The Three Bears Method is about making our student's websites "Just Right" in three ways:

- Setting the Table - Mastering Mechanics: how to use the tools you need to create and maintain your web pages
- Making the Porridge - Creating Content: how to maximize the impact on your site visitors so they come back for more
- Adding the Cream - Perfecting Presentation: how to add graphics and other goodies to make your site visually attractive

A quick Google search told us the name was not taken yet, and the Three Bears Method was born.

Can you tell us briefly how you went about setting up the course?

We brainstormed over what combination of writing and marketing and web design skills people need to create effective promotional websites. We realised that many professional writers only look on their computers as glorified typewriters, so this told us what computer literacy level to build from--it is not aimed at computer geeks. We planned the content into weekly lessons which would stretch everyone a little at a time until they had built their own web presence--which reflected them as a writer--eight weeks later.

The instructions are incredibly easy to follow and the whole style of presentation is chatty and non-threatening. Was this easy to achieve?

The art of teaching is to remember where one came from in one's own journey, and to be able to help others over the same obstacles. So we point to the hill on the horizon eight weeks away, then show and guide them how to get one step closer at a time until they arrive, and discover to their delight that they have a web presence. We picture having a personal conversation to guide each single student--which from their point of view, it is. We wanted the feel of having a chat over a *latté*--and drinking eight *lattés* turned out to be fun.

There are two of you running the course. How does that work?

We naturally gravitate to different aspects of the content which tends to complement rather than compete. We try to include each week something on content, marketing, and a practical how-to. Gracie deals with content and marketing. Jem deals with how to use the tools and with the behind-the-scenes administration of the ThreeBearsMethod site. Neither of us are graphics designers--we paint by numbers using the many "templates" available, customising the content as we go. So our students feel they can do this too, and it leaves room for those with artistic talents to go further.

A feature of the course is the forums in which the students ask questions. We both see different aspects to the questions, so we are able to give complementary answers, frequently both answering the same question from our different perspectives.

To date this course has been offered free to the RWNZ, which is very generous. Why did you do this?

Gracie has found RWNZ to be inspirational in her career development, and this is one way we could give something back--by inspiring others. We didn't feel right about charging anyone for the course until we had

it fully developed, tried, and proven. The next course (beginning APRIL 5th) is a subscribed course for which we are offering significant introductory discounts to Romance Writers groups. Readers of this article will receive a 20% discount when they enter the special offer code, A9627 for Aus and Z5713 for NZ.

You have run two courses. How do you feel they have gone?

In the first course we tried to minimise costs by using free webpage editing software. This was false economy as the software was extremely temperamental. In spite of this, our students did a fabulous job and should be proud of the results that they obtained. For the second course we bit the bullet and required the students to pay a small fee to purchase the popular Web Page Maker, which proved to be much easier to use, to teach, and to get good results. So, overall we are thrilled at what everyone has achieved.

The participants on this course are obviously on a learning curve and at the end of it they have a website. What have you got out of running this course?

For us, the key is seeing people's eyes light up (cybernetically speaking!) during the course as they realise they can actually do this. There is a tremendous satisfaction in seeing people come in terrified, discover it is fun instead, and go out empowered.

Where to from here?

We would like to develop several short courses--for writers and others--and make them available internationally. These will be based on our personal experience and areas of expertise. We're still discussing topics.

THE GRADUATES

The proof of the pudding (or porridge in this case ☺), so here are some Three Bear graduates talking about their experiences on the course: the advantages, challenges and outcomes.

Kris Pearson

I knew some of the people doing the course, and this made me determined not to be shown up too badly in front of friends! I also knew Gracie, had heard her speak at conference, and felt the course would be of good quality. I've never used a computer as anything but 'a typewriter' and really doubted that my skills would be adequate. I put some pretty hairy queries onto the forum and learned a lot.

The videos were like gold, but I would have liked more of the video info incorporated into the lesson notes. However, I watched them repeatedly, scribbled like crazy, and probably have most things covered.

How do I feel about my finished webpages? Thrilled. Impressed! Did I really manage that? What I wanted was something pretty basic; something I could refer editors to instead of using space in query letters to sell myself. Now they can see what I look like, find out that I've completed a number of books, have done OK in competitions, am the current membership secretary for RWNZ, on the conference committee for the last two years, and that I'm serious about my writing. No blog, no gimmicks. And now my letterhead paper and business cards echo the same look.

Karen Browning:

I got HUGE satisfaction out of creating my own website from scratch. I'm fairly competent on a computer, but had never done anything like this before so it was great to have someone holding my hand through the process. One of the best aspects of the course was that if I had a question, it was answered within the day

and sometimes within minutes. Jem and Gracie were there to help me sort it all out, 24/7, a bit like rust (ie I'm sure they never sleep).

Their lecture notes were incredibly user-friendly, with step-by-step instructions and even video tutorials to help. Jem and Gracie managed to reduce rocket science to kidstuff (not that my son is getting a look-in just yet, thanks!)

Getting my site to upload to the internet for the first time was difficult. In the end I got in touch with the webhosting provider (yes, thanks to ThreeBearsMethod I do have a vague idea what that means - but only vague!!) and it came down to something as simple as uppercase vs lowercase

letters! Other than that, my biggest challenge was STOPPING! It all got a bit addictive, and I wasted HUGE hours doing stuff I really didn't need to do.

Someone said to me a while ago that I should look at creating a website BEFORE I got "the call" because AFTER "the call" I wouldn't have time. Now that I've created my website I soooooo agree. It takes a long time to establish the right look, the right voice... the right everything, really. And the real bonus is that now, when I'm sending out my query letters, I can point agents/editors to my website and they'll get

a better feel for who I am and what I write. Yay!

Pamela Gervai:

Being a techophobe and a somewhat computer-speak illiterate I came to the Three Bears Course with trepidation. This was soon dispelled by Gracie and Jem's magic lessons. Not only did they make everything so word by word easy to follow but were right on hand for all of us on the course whenever we strayed off track or if our computers decided to do something else than what we'd thought we told them to. Although I'm a klutz on the computer and need



constant reminding to achieve anything, all was made possible by this amazing course. Now I actually have a workable website which I never would have thought possible when I started.

Comments? Are Gracie and Jem really angels? I suspect that they are.

Advice? Anyone dithering about taking this course out there, stop worrying and take it on. Jem and Gracie will make it all worth the effort – because the effort is all on their side. All you need to do is follow what they tell you to do.

Footnote: In the interests of balanced reporting, I did ask the students what problems and difficulties they encountered. There was not one complaint or doubt

about the course itself. Way to go, Gracie and Jem, and thanks for providing us with such invaluable skills!

To ensure a place on the April course, writers should pre-register their interest (free of charge) by emailing [Gracie](mailto:Gracie@ThreeBearsMethod.com) at courses@ThreeBearsMethod.com with details, or by visiting us at www.ThreeBearsMethod.com and pre-registering there.

To find out more about Zana and her books, or to check out her website - www.zanabell.com

RWNZ ON FACEBOOK

Thanks to the initiative of RWNZ publicity officer Sue Knight, RWNZ has a presence on Facebook. Now former H2H editor and professional PR person Kate Gordon has picked up the reins and aims to help our organisation build its presence on one of the world's biggest social networking websites. According to www.cyberjournalist.net, the fastest growing demographic on Facebook is still women over 55 – there are now nearly 1.5 million of them active on Facebook each month. More than 700,000 New Zealand women on Facebook, so even if we had 0.1% as fans of RWNZ, we're able to communicate with a sizeable number of people who like romance. Kate is trialling some very low cost promotions on Facebook to build our audience, initially targeting over 70,000 New Zealanders and Australians who like romance novels.

The aims are to:

1. Help build RWNZ's profile and therefore our membership numbers;
2. Help RWNZ members build their profile through Facebook and therefore create their own author brands, sell more books, etc.

What can you do?

- If you are on Facebook, please look for the Romance Writers of New Zealand page and become a fan.
- Issue an invitation to your Facebook friends who you know like romance to become fans of RWNZ.
- Post news on the RWNZ 'wall' – success in competitions, new book releases and book covers, links to your own blogs

Facebook isn't everyone's cup of tea, and that's fine.

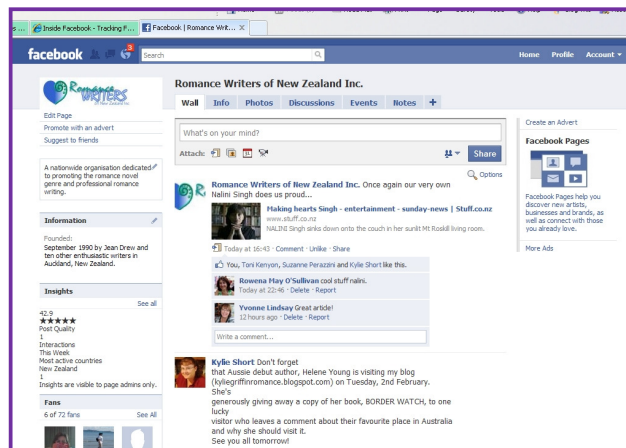
www.romancewriters.co.nz

But consider that Australian author Anna Campbell has 4,454 fans (or virtual friends) at last count, Mary Jo Putney has over 2,500 fans and Janet Evanovich has 42,000! Whatever the number of fans, Facebook offers another

opportunity to create an online presence and fan-base – if you want to use it as one of your marketing tools. It's free, it just takes a bit of time, so join us in the wonderful virtual world that is Facebook.com and let's grow RWNZ and our own presence in this social marketing phenomenon.

About Kate Gordon

Kate, aka Cate Harris if you get a friend request from her using her fiction writing pseudonym, has been using Facebook to successfully promote some of the businesses and events for which she provides contracted media relations services. Cate will endeavour to write an article about the role Facebook can play in your own author marketing plan for Heart to Heart... no promises about when as she's busy posting comments, photos and links to share news with a wide array of personal and professional colleagues on Facebook..!



MAKE THIS YOUR WRITING YEAR

Part One - Money

By Joanne Graves

From RWNZ fees to the conference, to the printing of the manuscript and the cost of postage, unpublished writers can spend a fortune on their writing careers - which can be quite a worry when you're wondering if you will ever see any kind of financial return. What should you spend your precious dollars on? Heart to Heart investigates

JOIN A GROUP

Step one, and you've all done that – yippee!! But should you join any other romance writers groups? Marlborough Sounds author, Sue McKay, (she's just sold to Mills and Boon Medical), belongs to RWNZ and RWAustralia and considers them a good investment. "They validated what I was working towards – becoming a published author. The support, the camaraderie, the knowledge and all the interesting newsletter articles are helpful. Just reading about other people's success stories is a boost and reiterates that getting that precious 'call' is possible."

Besides the practical benefits of belonging to a writers group, something that can't be underestimated is the lift that getting your newsletter in the mail provides. Fiona Brand recalls of her pre published days, "I always found it a real boost to get writer's mail, like industry magazines."

Besides RWNZ, what are your options? Joining RWAmerica (www.rwanational.org) will cost US\$140 per year plus a one off joining fee of \$25 – in Kiwi dollars all up around \$220, with \$190 each year depending on exchange rates. It's a lot - but the monthly magazine *Romance Writers Report* is a class publication - RWA is a professional organization with paid staff. Sue McKay belongs and agrees it is expensive. "But it gives you access to RWA contests and their chapter contests."

RWAustralia membership (www.romanceaustralia.com) will be \$105 Australian dollars (around \$130 NZ) but that includes a \$10 admin fee for new members. Like RWNZ, you get a monthly newsletter and access to some good contests with editor and agent judges. If you fancy a trip across the Tasman, the annual conference alternates between the Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne.

Novelists Association (www.rna-uk.org) would be your group. Katie Fforde is the current chair. But it is a very different beast from RWNZ. If you're not published, you join through the New Writers Scheme; only 250 new writers are accepted each year and it is full for 2010. The cost is a hundred pounds.

GET TO A CONFERENCE

The conference is the highlight of the year but it is a massive expense, especially when you add accommodation in to the mix. Is it really worth going? Sue McKay says that if she had to make a choice where to spend those dollars as an unpublished writer, she would definitely choose the conference over everything else. "It is the best way to really learn how the publishing world works. You also get to meet other people like yourself who happily spend hours stuck in front of a computer tapping away at their keyboards. You make lifelong friendships, and then there's all the knowledge to be gained from the speakers." And you can always cut costs by room sharing - and avoiding the book shop. 2009 Clendon winner, Kylie Griffin suggests that if money doesn't stretch to doing it every year then make it once every two or three years. "A two or three day conference full of workshops and guest speakers and networking is more valuable than most people realise. Personally, I believe you learn much more by being a participant or even an observer at these events than a passive reader. Conferences do motivate but the whole immersion value you get from attending isn't something to pass up lightly."

GET THE BEST BANG FOR YOUR CONTEST BUCK

Contests are a love/hate thing for many; finalling is the best feeling ever, but getting a bad score can send you into a raging depression for days. Red Sage Author and Clendon winner Maree Anderson estimates that since 2004 she has entered more than 20 different US-based contests and spent well over US\$600 in entry fees – not including the one time she entered the Golden Heart. She has also entered every one of her completed full manuscripts in the Clendon. "So entry fees over 9 manuscripts, say around another NZ\$400." She is selective about

which contest she enters. "I have high expectations for the way contests are run, the way the score sheets are designed, and the level of feedback I expect—I am paying to enter, after all! Ultimately it depends on what you wish to accomplish. If you're entering for feedback, then only you can decide how much that feedback—and remember, you might not get any!—is worth to you. US\$20? US\$25? US\$30? More? If you're trying to get your work in front of the specific agent or editor who is judging the final round, then in my opinion it's definitely worth the entry fee – if you final."

Kylie adds, "The wealth of learning that comes from the feedback makes them a hard tool to leave in the box. These days most of the feedback is extremely practical and very applicable to honing your writing craft."

While finalling is the best, never write yourself off if you don't final. Judging is terribly subjective. Take double Clendon finalist, Rowena May O'Sullivan who placed 2nd in the 2008 Clendon with her paranormal romance, *The Silver Rose* - it was judged by former Silhouette editor, Leslie Wainger. But when she entered *The Silver Rose* in the latest RWA Emerald, it didn't make it to the Top 15.

TIPS WHEN MONEY IS TIGHT:

Use the library. If you can't afford to purchase the latest How To Book everyone's raving about, suggest to your local library that they purchase it. Many libraries will have a Suggest Purchase form on line – they rely on you to help them decide what to add to the collection. For a small fee, you can request the book so that when it comes in, you get first dibs on the brand new copy. The only downside is that the process can take several months. Sue McKay used the library to have a look at a potential book before buying. "For me, a few well selected How-To books are a must. I borrowed them from my library first to check that they were what I wanted."

Re-think your gift list. If hubby asks what you want for your birthday – why not ask for cash to fund your books, contest fees, or to go towards a weekend Kara Course? Family might be happy to help, as well. Fiona Brand recalls her mother helping her out before she was published by buying her a computer, then later on a decent printer.

Don't feel guilty buying second hand. Books are, let's face it, a luxury item when you're broke. As Jenny Crusie said on a recent (Feb 2010) blog post: "Don't ever apologize for buying used books. I get a lot of new readers that way. It would be nice if booksellers would wait a month after the book is out to sell it used, but once that first month is up, it's every woman for herself."

Choose your contest carefully: Maree Anderson says that if your writing tends to polarise readers,

enter contests that use discrepancy judging. That is where the lowest score is dropped if there is too great a discrepancy between highest and lowest. "I've found with US contests that a couple will rave about my entry and one will reeeally hate it. And the one that hates it marks so low that despite two really high scores, I'm invariably knocked out of contention."

Look at spending as an investment in your career. Fiona Brand did this before she even had a career. "Usually, I would spend money on anything that I thought would help educate me in some way. My main spends were on Kara courses, joining romance writing organizations (RWNZ, RWAust, RWA, Australian Chapter of RWA), attending conferences and entering writing competitions." Kylie Griffin adds, "You do need to stick to the basics - writing, but if that's all you focus on how do you go about growing your skills when you have nothing to compare to or the tools to develop the standard and quality of what you're writing?"

Seek contests with electronic entry: Especially important with overseas contests. The majority of contests Maree enters are electronic, so no postage and printing fees apply, unlike the Golden Heart. "The one year I entered two manuscripts in the GH, it cost me just over NZ\$100 in postage on top of the actual USD\$50 apiece entry fees. Ouch!"

Don't forget your Heart to Heart. If you've been a member of RWNZ for a few years, you've got a wealth of material in your old issues of the newsletter – probably a whole How To Books worth from the articles. Our website (www.romancewriters.co.nz) also archives past issues, back to July 2007 in pdf. You can log in to the Members section using the following: *romance*, and then *rwnz345*.

And finally - Focus on the Writing Whether you write on an Alphasmart, by biro on refill, or via the computer at the library, focus on *doing the pages*. You won't get published if you're not disciplined enough to write. Ultimately, suggests Fiona Brand, it's about "education, information and creating opportunity through getting your work out there with competitions and submissions to publishers." She also adds the following advice: "In my opinion launching a web page before you have made a sale is counterproductive, especially if money is tight. I think it's far better for an unpublished writer to concentrate on learning the craft of writing and making that first sale."

With thanks to Maree Anderson, Fiona Brand, Kylie Griffin, Sue McKay and Rowena May O'Sullivan for their contributions to this article. You can read Jenny Crusie's blog is www.arghink.com

OFFICIAL RELEASES & MEMBER SUCCESSES

Official March Releases

Border Watch by **Hélène Young** (Hachette Australia)

French Kiss by **Cherie Le Clare** (Wild Rose Press)

Coming Home by **Vonnie Hughes** (Robert Hale Ltd)

Taken by the Pirate Tycoon by **Daphne Clair** (Harlequin)

Hot Boss, Boardroom Mistress by **Natalie Anderson** (Harlequin)

His Mistress for a Million by **Trish Morey** (Harlequin)



Member Successes - Competitions and Accolades

The Lists

Sandra Hyatt's second Desire book **THE MAGNATE'S PREGNANCY PROPOSAL** and **Rachel Bailey's** book **CLAIMING HIS BOUGHT BRIDE** made it to the **USA Today Bestseller** list. They both also made #2 on the **Waldenbooks** list.

Nalini Singh's **ARCHANGEL'S KISS** hit the **New York Times** and **USA Today Bestseller** lists.

The Call

Sue Mackay got 'THE CALL' from HM&B. They are buying her medical **THE DOCTORS DESTINY** and want another by July!

Agented

Frances Housden's pitch to Melissa Jeglinski was successful!

Competitions

Louise Groarke came fourth in the **Silicone Valley GOTCHA!** Contest - her submission is winging its way to Susan Litman at Silhouette.

Karen Browning won a mini critique from the **Chase the Dream** competition.

Kylie won a place in the finals for the **Chase the Dream** competition. Voting is from 3 March to 10 March 2010 – check out chasethedreamcontest.wordpress.com.

Michelle de Rooy is a finalist in the **Emerald** - Category section. – Good luck Michelle.

Maree Anderson's paranormal YA, **Freaks Of Greenfield High**, placed second equal in the **Oklahoma Romance Writers "Finally A Bride" contest**.

Kylie Griffin won the **West Houston Emily** contest in the Paranormal section.

Soraya Nicholas won **Donna Alward's Perfect Pitch contest**, and has Donna as her writing mentor for the coming year.

Suzanne Perazzini has been asked for a partial by Nephele Tempest from her online **I'm in the Mood for Love contest**.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEST NEWS

Compiled by Lisa Elkind-Gardiner

Writers of the Future

Enter: Short Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Dark Fantasy stories up to 17,000 words in length

Deadline: Postmark by midnight Mar 31st **Fee:** Free and writer retains all rights

Eligibility: Open to those who have not professionally published a novel or short novel, or more than one novelette, or more than 3 short stories in any medium.

Prizes: Cash prizes of \$500, \$750, \$1,000

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

Lo City Enterprises, Inc. Erotic Poetry Contest

Enter: erotic poetry (1,000 words max) in English Theme is Hot Summer Nights

Deadline: April 1st **Fee:** \$15 US **Eligibility:** Anyone over 18

http://www.eroticstoriescontests.com/erotic_poetry_contest

Heart and Scroll Romance Writers of America presents The Magic Moments Contest

Enter: the first ten (10) pages of your manuscript (either the first chapter or the prologue)

Deadline: May 1st **Fee:** \$30 US **Eligibility:** Unpublished in last 5 yrs

Prizes: The Magic Moments Contest specializes in detailed personal critiques. All contestants get three detailed critiques. First Place Winner will receive \$100 and a certificate; Second and Third Place winners will receive certificates.

http://www.heartandscroll.com/contest_MagicMoment_rules.htm

Georgia Romance Writers of America Maggie Contest for Published Authors

Enter: 3 copies of book as published by publisher (electronic and audio accepted in print-book format produced by publisher w/ copyright page)

Deadline: Received by May 1st. **Fee:** \$20 US

Eligibility: RWA authors who meet RITA guidelines for eligibility. Books must have 2009 copyright date.

<http://www.georgiaromancewriters.org/cart/published-fees/>

Ozarks Romance Authors Weta Nichols Writing Contest

Enter: Any genre...romance, sci-fi, mystery 1st 10 pages

Deadline: May 1st **Fee:** \$10 Email entry. PayPal preferred as payment

Eligibility: Pubbed or Unpubbed author. Manuscript must not be accepted for publication at time of entry.

http://www.ozarksromanceauthors.com/2010_contest.htm

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 editline@xtra.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.

RWENZ 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 – Annika Ohlson-Smith
email: allan-annika@xtra.co.nz

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



Auckland

2010 started with a bang for us, with over thirty members attending our first meeting where we discussed romantic sub-genres. In March our workshop will be run by Tessa Radley who will be speaking on dialogue. This will be very good as Tessa always runs excellent workshops. As usual our meeting will be held in the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion corner of Mt Albert and Mt Eden Roads at 12.30 p.m. Bring a small plate for a shared lunch.

Nelson

Our first meeting for 2010 eventuated on Valentine's Day (a Sunday), but we will continue to meet on the 2nd Saturday of the month. We kicked off the New Year with strawberry bubbles and heart shaped mini cakes & cookies. Not to mention the red chocolate roses that Cherie brought us all. We toasted recent successes. Cherie Skinner's first novel will be out in March, Sue Mackay has just landed a contract with Mills & Boons and Annika Ohlson-Smith has sold two short stories to a Swedish woman's weekly.

After that we had a good discussion about what we want to do on our meetings. We agreed that the criteria for being a member of the group you need to be (or become) a member of RWENZ and that Romance is the only genre we work with at our meetings. An agenda will be sent out a week before the meetings, so that we all are prepared to contribute to the meeting. We brain-stormed ideas and besides critiquing and helping each other when stuck, writing exercises and inviting speakers, we decided to use any of the 'Heart to Heart' articles as a frequent topic. Finally we read and enjoyed our Valentine 500 word stories.

Wellington

Champagne to celebrate Bron's two-book deal with Kensington – what a great way to start the year! More good news; Joan has now secured funding for her father's aviation story.

Rachel's mother and Cassandra's partner and Meryl's daughter gave the meeting a whole new atmosphere.

We discussed character development and plotting, and publishers who say they want to push the envelope. Unfortunately the pushing doesn't seem to bring the results we hope for, and the envelope remains firmly gummed shut. Ah well, back to the secret baby, the revenge plot, the marriage of convenience, etc...

Christchurch

Diary this date. Christchurch group are holding a mini-Conference Workshop on Sunday 30th May, 9.30am - 3.30pm at the Cashmere Club. Cost \$50 for non-members and \$40 for members. Guest speakers and lunchtime chats with published romance authors. Names to be confirmed next month.

WEB SURFING

Compiled by Nalini Singh

- Links that discuss the recent Amazon / Macmillan situation relating to the agency model of book pricing.
 - **Pub Rants:** <http://tinyurl.com/yb964wz>
 - **Booksquare:** <http://tinyurl.com/yh8v9sj>
 - **TeleRead:** <http://tinyurl.com/yzu8kue>
 - **Charles Stross:** <http://tinyurl.com/ye8errm>
 - **Publishers Weekly:** <http://tinyurl.com/yhxp3bw>
- Note that these are just the top 5 links that popped up when I did a search - there is a lot of material online discussing this from various angles, so type in a few key words and you'll be away.
- **Writer Beware's Victoria Strauss** summarizes the Department of Justice's new filing re their continuing concerns about the Google Book Settlement: <http://tinyurl.com/yj9x39g>
- **Galleycat** story on how writer David K. Randall found an agent for his non-fiction book: <http://tinyurl.com/yjvfucd>
- Post and discussion on agent **Nathan Bransford's** blog focusing on balancing "Publicity and Privacy in the Internet Era:" <http://tinyurl.com/yb2exq3>
- Also, did you know that this year marks the publication of the 30th book in **JD Robb's** (a.k.a. Nora Robert) "In Death" series? I personally am a huge fan of this series, so here's to 30 more books!

Nalini Singh, New York Times bestselling author and web junkie: www.nalinisingh.com

BITS AND PIECES

Compiled by Soraya Nicholas

News from **Harlequin Australia** . . . In March, Harlequin Australia will be making changes to the way the **Sweet**, **Superromance** and **Special Edition** releases are marketed in Australia and New Zealand.

"The **Special Edition** and **Superromance** lines will be merged into one Series, titled '**Special Moments**'. The tagline, or description, for this new series is "Moving, true-to-life romances" a description we believe encapsulates the experience of reading the titles in this new line. We will be publishing ten stories per month, offered as four duos and two singles. The product offering for **Sweet** has also changed, from six single stories to four single stories and one duo, and the Series name has changed slightly to 'Sweet Romance'. Please note that Australian and New Zealand authors will continue to be published in the single story format in these series.

The cover direction for **Superromance**, **Sweet** and **Historical** is also undergoing change, moving to a more single title feel with strong, emotive images. In addition to the change to the cover, our format and paper stock has changed – we are moving to a standard A-format or mass market paperback size and will be using a thicker, creamier paper stock. These changes will also add to the single title feel of the books and will present a value offering to our customers. Please see attached for some examples of our new cover look.

These changes are part of an on-going process to bring our Series product to its optimum performance and to increase our customer base for Mills & Boon. We are very excited about this new offering and hope that you will be too."

- Cristina Lee, Sales, Marketing and Publishing Director, Harlequin Enterprises (Australia)

• A debut author has just sold their novel for more than US\$500,000. The following was reported in Publisher's Weekly: UK - **Amor Towles's** debut **RULES OF CIVILITY**, set in New York in 1938 and telling the story of a young woman of extraordinary ability and ignominious beginnings who, armed with little more than formidable intellect, bracing wit, and uncommonly good legs, embarks on a journey through the upper echelons of a city on the brink of dramatic change in search of a future far brighter than she's been told she has the right to expect, to Jocasta Hamilton at Hodder Sceptre and to Neri Pozza, in a major deal, in a pre-empt, by Cathryn Summerhayes and Laura Bonner on behalf of Dorian Karchmar at William Morris Endeavor, who will be auctioning North American rights next week