

# HEART TO HEART



## AMANDA ASHBY & SARA HANTZ

*Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas*



Anyone who attended Amanda & Sara's workshop at last year's conference will be thrilled to know that they'll be teaming up again in August! As a prelude to the big event, our two favourite YA authors have stopped by to say hello . . .



**For those who don't know you, let's start by finding out a little about you both . . . how long have you been writing and when did you sell your first YA novels? And don't forget the details of those call stories!**

Amanda: I was probably writing seriously for about six years before I sold my first book. It was actually submitted as a young adult book but my publisher wanted me to rewrite it as women's fiction (which as it turns out sounded a lot easier than it really was!!!). That was in 2005 and then in 2007 I sold *Zombie Queen* of Newbury High (which, happily was submitted and bought as a young adult. Phew!)

As for the call story. Well, I was living in the UK at the time and my agent was in New York and she had emailed on the Friday to say that an editor at NAL had passed my book onto her Publisher to read on the weekend. To be honest I didn't really think much of it because while the Publisher is the head of the imprint, I'd heard so many nightmare stories of acquisition meetings and books being turned down by sales and marketing I thought that, even if the Publisher liked it, there would still be a long way to go. However on the Monday night my agent emailed to say NAL had offered and did we want to take it. Er, that would be a yes!!!!

Sara: I started writing in 2002. First I tried category, but quickly realised I'm hopeless at all the deep emotional stuff. Then, thanks to meeting up with Kate Buchanan (who's now a very close friend), I thought about writing chick lit, as it fit my voice so much better. It was a real light-bulb moment. It had always been my preferred reading material anyway, so it was just a case of writing what I like to read myself.

I didn't start writing YA until the end of 2005. I wrote the first three chapters and did what you're told not to and queried agents. I wanted to see if the idea was saleable. Anyway, I got an amazing response from a large number of agents asking for either the partial or full manuscript. I then worked really hard and had the manuscript ready within a couple of months (not something I'd recommend, and neither would my family, or crit partners). I was offered representation almost immediately and it sold to Flux within a couple of months. The title was changed to *The Second Virginity* of Suzy Green. **Contd page 4**

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

## EDITORS' DESK

Well, it's already April and that means lots of you have probably sent off your entries to the Great Beginnings Contest. Good luck to everyone who has! What about the rest of you? Have you managed to stick to those New Year's resolutions . . . they sound so easy in January but we all know how hard it is to fit in writing time.

This month in H2H, we are excited to have Young Adult authors Amanda Ashby and Sara Hantz stop by to talk with us. If you're thinking about attending the conference this year, Amanda and Sara presented a great workshop last year and are back again for 2009 to entertain and teach us all. Tessa Radley has also stopped by for an interview, as has Yvonne Lindsay, new author Maree Anderson and Harlequin Romance author Michelle Douglas.

In the months leading up to the August Conference, we will be profiling and introducing lots of wonderful authors and speakers . . . we hope you won't be able to resist joining us in Auckland for A Romantic Retreat!

Soraya & Suzanne

### The Brand New RWA/RWNZ Critique Partner Register

We're very excited to announce that the brand new **RWA/RWNZ Critique Partner Register** is now live!

Whether you're a beginning writer or someone who is published, if you're looking for feedback on your work, then ours is the place to visit.

The register is an anonymous database of romance writers across Australia and New Zealand who are in the market for a Critique Partner. All the information you need to join is on on the RWNZ website: [www.romancewriters.co.nz/members/cpreregister](http://www.romancewriters.co.nz/members/cpreregister)

After downloading the application form, filling it out and returning to [applycritpartners@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:applycritpartners@romanceaustralia.com), we will direct you to the database. After viewing our members' individual profiles and writing samples, **you choose** who you'd like a trial match with.

It's that easy! So what are you waiting for?

# PRESIDENT PAT



Welcome from the Hamilton Street Race. Taking timeout from a busy weekend to drop you a line.

Of necessity this column will be short this month, mainly due to the above situation but also because this H2H is chock full of information and space was at a premium.

Autumn is now upon us and with it has come wonderful sunny days and cooler nights and mornings. Just the time to spend time writing.

This issue of H2H is packed with interesting reading as well as inserts. Amongst these are:

## **Recruitment Poster**

You will find posters advertising RWNZ and what we can offer members. Please take them to your library, information centre, or wherever you think people might see them. Any extras can be obtained from Sue Knight or if you are able you could copy them yourselves.

## **AGM Notice/Nomination Form/Executive Job Descriptions**

Please refer to the notice below and the inserts with this newsletter.

## **Conference Registration Form**

Enclosed is the conference registration form and a schedule of the programme of speakers and what we have lined up for you at this year's conference.

Get your form in early so that you are guaranteed a place in your selected workshops. Don't forget that this year that we are not using online registration forms. Instructions for submission and payment details are on the form.

## **H2H Email Mail out**

Are you interested in getting your H2H by email. If so please contact Kamy Chetty at [kamychetty@yahoo.com](mailto:kamychetty@yahoo.com).

Don't forget get those registrations in for A Romantic Retreat. Your committee have put together a great line-up of speakers. This is the chance to meet new people, to learn more about writing and to have a great time with people who understand our obsession with writing and the written word.

Till next month

Pat Snellgrove

President, RWNZ

## **Romance Writers of New Zealand Inc**

### *Notice of Meeting*

It is hereby given that the sixth Annual General Meeting of the Romance Writers of New Zealand Inc (RWNZ) will be held on Saturday 22nd August 2009, at the Waipuna Hotel, Auckland.

Members wishing to propose remits to be considered at this meeting must send them to the Secretary at: AGM Remits, RWNZ, PO Box 102 64, Dominion Road, Auckland

**by 5pm Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2009**

Please note that to be accepted remits:

- May only be proposed by a current member.
- Need to be seconded by a current member.
- Must be dated
- Must be accompanied by arguments for the remit.

Pat Snellgrove  
President

### **Do you have agents? If so, is that recommended for this genre?**

Amanda: My agent is Jenny Bent who has just left Trident Media and set up her own agency ([www.thebentagency.com](http://www.thebentagency.com) for anyone who wants to find out more about her!) and yes, I would definitely recommend an agent for so many reasons. Not only can a good agent get your manuscript on an editor's desk and read a lot quicker. But they can help with revisions, brainstorming ideas, career planning, and most importantly they can make sure you get the best advance and contract terms possible.

Sara: Ditto everything Amanda said. A good agent is worth their weight in gold, emphasis on the word 'good' because having a bad agent (and this has happened to me) can set your career back big time. I love my current agent, Elizabeth Jote, and as we write she's getting my career back on track.

### **Have you always written YA? What made you want to write YA?**

Amanda: I started trying to write category romance but at the same time tried doing a young adult mystery involving blue penguins and a dodgy movie producer. After that I turned my hand to chick lit/single title books and that's when I really started to find my voice. Then when my father died I got an idea for a dead girl who was kicked out of heaven and I started to write the book based on a 30 year old woman. But honestly if you could've heard how Holly Evans my heroine sounded in my head, it was plainly obvious that she was nowhere near 30. Anyway, since Sara had been suggesting for ages that I try YA properly, I made my heroine 16 and never looked back!

Sara: Oops, I think I've answered part of this in the first question. To add, the only reason I wrote a young adult novel is because I was fed up of my crit partners ignoring my request that they should write one. So, in the end, I thought I'd write one myself. And it was the best thing I ever did. My voice seems to fit naturally into this genre. I can remember clearly what being a teen is like (even though it's a few years ago ☺). And I love reading YA books.

### **Do you read one another's work?**

Amanda: Yes. We have two other critique partners and I would be lost without them.

Sara: Yes. Over and over and over and over..... because one of us (mentioning no names but she's not a million miles away) has made rewriting an art form!!

### **What are the challenges of writing for a young market? Is it hard to stay in tune with teenagers and what they want to read?**

Amanda: Not really. I read a lot of the books and watch a lot of the TV and movies anyway, so it's not something I find hard (in fact it always gives me the giggles that the things I love to do are suddenly a tax deduction. Cool!!!!). As for what they want to read to be honest I tend to write the sort of books that I would want to read and then just cross my fingers that other people like them. Sometimes I think if you chase the market too much your writing can become dry and forced.

Sara: I agree. TV and movies are a great source of inspiration. As are my two children and their friends (especially my son whose exploits usually find their way into my books).

### **What are you working on at the moment? Any forthcoming releases or deadlines?**

Amanda: My next young adult book with Puffin is about a teenage girl who suddenly starts to see invisible fairies that no one has ever heard of before. Killer invisible fairies...

Sara: My agent is currently submitting a young adult proposal about two warring teens, and I'm working on a mid-grade novel about a girl who decides to change her image.

### **What authors do you like to read?**

Amanda: I read a mix of midgrade, YA and adult fiction and some of my favourite authors include: Janet Evanovich, Michelle Rowen, Megan Crane, Nalini Singh, PC Cast and Kristin Cast, Jonathan Stroud, Raymond E Feist, Eion Colfer, Jane Austen, Georgette Heyer, Jill Mansell.

Sara: Like Amanda I read a mix of authors. Mr favourite young adult authors are: Meg Cabot, PC & Kristin Cast, Alyson Noel, Carolyn Mackler. My favourite adult authors are: Sophie Kinsella, Louise Bagshawe, Marian Keyes, Penny Vincenzi, Allison Brennan.

### **If I'm not writing I'm . . .**

Amanda: Reading books, spending too much time on [pinkisthenewblog.com](http://pinkisthenewblog.com) or watching television (or all of them together because that's the way I roll).

Sara: On the phone to Amanda, on msn, reading, watching lots of TV (especially Idol), exercise class, doing jigsaws, walking on the beach, at the movies.

### Pansters or plotters? How would you describe your writing processes?

Amanda: I'm a panster squared and my writing process is pretty shambolic. I get an idea and then play with it for awhile before I start writing. Then once I start I change my mind like a million times and I end up with about 15 different versions before I hit chapter five. And from there it only gets worse.

Sara: Definitely a plotter. I use a variation on the snowflake method. I start small and build an idea up. I won't start writing until I have a full outline and a scene spreadsheet taking me every step of the

way. I am flexible though. If my story takes a different direction, I will alter my spreadsheet!

### Writing for a younger audience must mean staying up to date with technology. Do you feel the need to have a stronger web/blog/bebo presence to be accessible to your readers?

Amanda: To be honest I think most authors regardless of what genre they're writing in, need to stay up to date with this sort of technology, especially when you're living in NZ/Australia and are being published in an overseas market like the US because it means that the Internet is really your only way of connecting with readers.

Though saying all of that, I've had a very different experience marketing my YA book compared to when my women's fiction book came out. There is a huge network of YA reviewers on the net (most of them are still school students though there are also a lot of school teachers and librarians who do reviews). Anyway, it's amazing how quickly word can get out about your book. I had one reviewer mention my book several months ago on a segment called Waiting on Wednesday which is when they say what books they're looking forward to reading. Well, within weeks my book had been mentioned on at least ten other blogs so that by the time I did my own blog party to celebrate the release I had a horde of people who I'd never met or even heard of, all totally hyped up and excited about my book. Gotta love it!!!

Sara: I agree with everything Amanda said (her answer was so long there was nothing left for me to say ☺). Seriously though, I'd just like to add that we're both part of Teen Fiction Café and as the saying goes *the whole is more than the sum of the parts* and that's exactly how being a member of that group is. We've found so many more readers than we would have done working independently.

### Advice for unpublished authors wanting to write YA?

Amanda: If you want to write YA because it seems to be hot right now, that's probably not a great reason but if it's a genre that you love then dive in. YA fiction is really diverse and practically anything (excepting erotica) goes.

Sara: I'd say 'go for it' with the proviso if you don't understand teens, and can't relate to them, their music and their lives then you might find it hard.

You can visit Sara & Amanda on-line at [www.sarahantz.com](http://www.sarahantz.com) or [www.amandaashby.com](http://www.amandaashby.com). To meet them in person book for the conference now!

## YVONNE LINDSAY

*Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas*

### Yvonne, tell us about your latest 3-book mini-series. I heard a rumour that one of the books in your series hit the Waldenbooks/Borders best seller list at #2!

Yes, I was so excited to see SECRET BABY, PUBLIC AFFAIR sit at #2 for two weeks before dropping to #5. Each of the books in the Rogue Diamonds Mini-Series has hit the lists so I'm very happy with their success to date.

The Rogue Diamonds are a group of three guys--Brent Colby (the scholarship student,) Draco Sandrelli (the wealthy overseas student) and Adam Palmer (only son of the billionaire Palmer family,

and Brent's cousin)--who attended private school together, but had a bit of the devil in them too. They're risk takers, men who like to push boundaries, and men who have not yet found the right woman for them. As editorial have put it on the back cover of the books, "*Can love tame these unyielding billionaires?*" Cue my heroines--Amira Forsythe, Blair Carson and Lainey Delacorte.

### When did you first think about writing a mini-series? Was it an idea from your editor or something you wanted to do?

My first three books released in 2006 and 2007 (New Zealand Knights) was my first mini-series and I've always loved the idea of writing, and reading linked books. Essentially each of the stories can stand alone so it's not vital to read them in order as it is, say, in a continuity where a storyline is unravelled over six (or more) books. I like that--the whole getting to know the heroes, waiting for their story to come along. Wondering just who the heroine will be and how she'll be the right fit for him. This particular mini-series, my second, was originally suggested to me by my previous editor in conjunction with the 60<sup>th</sup> (Diamond) Anniversary of Harlequin in the USA. She thought it might be a good idea to keep diamonds in mind when developing my next story ideas, so far be it from me to ignore that kind of advice. When she left Silhouette (to prepare for the little boy she and her husband have since adopted) and I was introduced to my new editor, I pitched a series of ideas for this trilogy to her. She was keen on three of them so I developed those further and we went to contract (always a fun time.)

#### **What is the common thread that links all three books, and did you find it hard to write a linked series?**

The common thread that links the three books is that they guys are known as the Rogue Diamonds. How did they earn that moniker? Well, one of their worse escapades during their time at boarding school was demon riding (high speed motorbike runs with no headlights on) on a back road at the time they were supposed to be at their school honours ceremony. They were found by their favourite teacher, who made them feel terrible about their behaviour. After laying out their punishment he said to them, *"All of the students in your year are diamonds...some polished, some still a little rough. All, except you three. You, sirs, are rogues!"*

I like writing linked books. I keep a folder with each synopsis and pictures of the characters under separate dividers as I work on each story so I can flick back and check details on previous books if I need to. I also print off a calendar and rule it up so that if the stories run concurrently (as the first two in the Rogue Diamonds mini-series do) or overlap then I keep happenings and events in the correct chronological spaces. That's really important, especially when you have the characters overlap in each other's stories over drinks or a game of poker, for example.

#### **How different was it writing a mini-series you had created, rather than an editor-led continuity, such as the Diamonds Down Under series, which involved other writers?**

Actually, the Diamonds Down Under continuity was author led, which means that the six authors involved brainstormed ideas all together to create "The Bible," which is the total reference guide for the continuity, i.e. back story, characters, family trees, synopsis of each book, etc. In an editor-led continuity the editorial team put the Bible together and allocate a story to each author chosen to participate. I haven't worked on an editor-led continuity yet but I understand it can be quite different. In Diamonds Down Under we all felt so invested in the whole story outline because we'd had so much input into creating our world and our characters. It was both challenging and rewarding and the continuity is doing its big OE at the moment and is appearing in countries all over the world.

I look forward to the day I do get to work on an editor-led continuity though, I think there's a whole different kind of challenge in adapting your story writing style to someone else's outline for the characters than there is in working on your own.

Writing a mini-series that I've created is a whole lot less pressure, I think, in comparison to working on a continuity, because you're pretty much working to your own deadlines and the information you need for your book is all at your fingertips. You aren't reliant on other authors for information, nor do you need to furnish them with information either, and if you decide to change anything in the storyline or character profile it isn't going to have an ongoing ripple effect for your fellow authors because you're it! ☺

#### **And finally, what are you busy working on now? Any more mini-series in the near future?**

I've recently completed another book, which is scheduled for December this year, and which is loosely linked to the last in the Rogue Diamonds mini-series. I just couldn't let them go completely but I also wanted to work on a standalone title rather than tie up into another trilogy straight after my Rogues. Since I sent that away to my editor I've been developing a new trilogy for next year and I'm currently awaiting my editor's feedback on the proposals I've sent through. Waiting is always a difficult time for me. I'm seriously into instant gratification and like to know where I'm going next and know it right now! So, to keep myself occupied, I have started to dabble in something different, for me at least, and I'm developing a single title idea that's been humming away in the back of my mind for years. Think Barbara Erskine meets Linda Howard (at least that's what I'm telling myself.) I've never had a better time to work on it so I'm making the most of it! ☺

**You can find Yvonne Lindsay on-line . . . [www.yvonnelindsay.com](http://www.yvonnelindsay.com)**

# BEYOND TWILIGHT

## *What's Hot in YA*

*by Amanda Ashby*

For the last few years the young adult market has been growing and now thanks to the phenomenal success of Stephenie Meyers' Twilight books it's become even more popular than ever. So is this good news for writers who are trying to break into this market? Well, the answer is yes, no and maybe!!!

Because of the recent growth, there is already a large number of established YA authors, which combined with the recession and reduced publisher buying, means there are less slots and more people competing for them. Ouch. However, saying that, despite the recession, publishers still need to publish books so if you've got a young adult book that you've been working on, it's not all doom and gloom.

Some areas that are doing particularly well are paranormals and urban fantasy books, with the likes of PC Cast and Kristen Cast's House of Night books and Alyson Noel's Evermore (The Immortal Series) both New York Times Bestsellers.

Obviously vampires are still popular, with Berkley Jam even re-releasing some of their earlier vampire young adult books such as Mari Mancusi's The Blood Coven series and Julie Kenner's The Good Ghouls' Guide to Getting Even, however as a new author trying to break in, just remember that most editors have seen just about every sort of vampire book imaginable (twice) and so it would have to be something pretty special to catch their eye.

My advice would be to try and think outside the box and see what you can come up with. This is exactly what I did when I wrote ZOMBIE QUEEN OF NEWBURY HIGH. Of course back when I sold it in 2007 I'd never even heard of zombie books, but these days the shelves are full of them and Romantic Times magazine even did an article about why they are growing in popularity (May 2009). When I recently spoke to agent Alyssa Eisner Henkin from Trident Media, I asked her what YA editors are looking for right now and she said quite a few have mentioned 'clean teen' lit such as Ally Carter's 'I'd Tell You I Love You But Then I'd Have To Kill You' and Meg Cabot's new tween 'Allie Finke' series as opposed to heavier/more angsty books.

Alyssa also said that misery-lit books in the vein of Lurlene McDaniels are sought after, where the kids die romantic deaths but are not necessarily reincarnated.

Inspirational books seem to be in demand and Hachette have launched a new Inspirational line called FaithWords, leading with Shelley Adina's six book series starting with 'It's All About Us'.

Some hard sell genres right now are Hollywood insider/Celebrity/Gossip Girl style books. There has been a slew of them out in the last couple of years so you would really need a strong and original hook to stand out.

Teen Lit is starting to become more difficult to sell. This refers to a light-hearted 'chick lit' style voice, normally in first person. In this case, voice and character are not normally enough and you need to make sure you have a very strong plot to really make the book fresh and original.

So if you're now convinced that YA fiction is for you, here are a few tips to bear in mind when you're writing.

### **Pacing**

As most of you probably know, the modern reader doesn't want a lot of slow narration and back-story, they want dialogue and fast moving scenes and this applies to young adult fiction as well. Not just because a lot of the books are shorter (though they are and are often between 45-60k) but because teen readers are ruthless and if they get bored with your book, not only will they stop reading it, they'll probably go and tell all their friends not to bother as well (Oh, how I wish I was joking!).

### **Characterization.**

It's not enough to take your regular heroine and make her sixteen instead of twenty five, you need to make sure that they are emotionally true to their age. In other words make sure they behave like a teenager not an adult. Remember they are filled to the brim with hormones not to mention the fact that they don't have the same life experiences to fall back on so their coping skills are a LOT different from an adult character's. Which is why what seems like a small thing to us might be a big deal to them.

### Dialogue/Narration

To make it realistic you have to use teenspeak, but not in a way that's so way out that it dates quickly or it's grating. It's like in our adult writing when we're told not to use too many colloquialisms or regional accents because it can alienate people. The same is true of teenspeak.

### Issues

When you are dealing with issues you need to make sure it's from the character's point of view and not let your authorial opinion come through. Definitely make sure you don't moralize or punish your characters for making a bad decision (ie don't run over the sluts or put halos on the virgins!) because teen readers will see straight through it.

### Setting

There are some constraints with writing about teenage characters. For a start they have to go to school, they can't come and go from the house as they please and half the time they can't even drive. They also don't always have much money. And, if you are using a school setting, remember that inside the classroom has changed and they are more likely to have white boards, power point presentations and computers rather than blackboards and globes of the world.

And one final word of advice, make sure you have fun with it!

## Harlequin's new YA line is open for business by Abby Gaines

With the Harlequin Teen line due to launch later this year, it's worth checking out what senior editor Natashya Wilson and Associate Editor Keyren Gerlach have been reported saying recently about what they're looking for.

"Extraordinary characters, extraordinary stories," Keyren told me via email a few months back. "The target audience is 12- to 18-year-olds, and there is no word count limit at this time." (Note: guidelines on the Harlequin website specify 50,000–100,000 words, so that's probably a good place to start).

"We're looking for unique, memorable books that capture the teen experience and will speak to young adults with authenticity and power," Keyren continued. "Contemporary, paranormal, fantasy, historical, futuristic...anything goes, so long as the book delivers a reading experience that will resonate with the reader and be remembered long after the covers are closed. We expect that many of our projects will include a memorable romantic element, although that isn't necessarily a requirement."

Natashya Wilson is actively looking for novels but says that at the same time she is snowed under by submissions. She says that the most frequent reason for turning down books is lack of an authentic teen voice. She would love to see a good YA mystery (thriller, espionage, forensic, the possibilities are pretty open), or a great YA historical. She's also interested in paranormal (which are easier for her to do because they're selling so well), fantasy, and contemporary-although the contemporaries need to really have something to say, something for the reader to take away. The books are marketed as single titles, not as a Harlequin series.

One of the most publicized sales to the new line to date has been Gena Showalter's Intertwined series, with an astronomical figure for a multi-book series hinted at on Publisher's Marketplace. To get some more idea about what editors are looking for, here's some recommending reading included in the Harlequin Teen guidelines from the Harlequin website.

"Stories with the unforgettable romance, characters and atmosphere of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, the witty humor of Meg Cabot's *Princess Diaries* novels, the edgy emotion of Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the thrilling danger of Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games*, the futuristic world-building of Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, and the power of Marcus Zusak's *The Book Thief* are examples of the range and depth of projects that we're seeking."

### And the submission guidelines:

"Unagented authors, please mail a query letter and full synopsis to the street address below. Agents, please submit a partial or complete manuscript with full synopsis, either as a hard copy or as an e-mail attachment."

You go, girls!

# TEEN FICTION CAFE

*By Sara Hantz*

When Wendy Toliver and I set up the blog Teen Fiction Café, we had no idea it would turn out to be such a success. It all happened just over two years ago when we were talking on msn (Wendy is in the USA and I am in New Zealand) and realized that our debut books were coming out around the same time. We thought it would be fun to set up a group blog of young adult and mid-grade authors catering for readers and not just other authors. Every author we asked to join said yes, and most remain in the group today.

We didn't want to overload everyone, so we asked people to post once a month, on a predetermined topic, as per the schedule we drew up (okay, I admit it, I drew up the schedule... I'm such an anal person.... and Wendy generously went along with it). These posts go up over a three week period, and the fourth week of every month is devoted to promotion, including: book launches, contests, events and sales.

Over the past two years we've become good friends and are very supportive of each other, especially our successes. We were all so excited when, just recently, Alyson Noel hit the number one slot on the New York Times list with her latest book *Evermore*, the first in her *Immortals* series. Last year Kelly Parra was a double Rita finalist with her book *Graffiti Girl* and many of us were in San Fran to cheer her on. Also, one of the many awards Melissa Walker achieved for her *Violet* series was being on the 2008 New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age list. And let's not forget Sara Zarr, whose first book *Story of a Girl* was a USA National Book Award finalist... WOW!

I asked my fellow TFC authors what they felt were the benefits of being part of the blog and they were unanimous in their view that it not only helped them reach more readers, but it provided a sense of camaraderie in what can be a very lonely occupation. Here's what some of them said:

"I joined TFC because Sara Hantz asked me to. :) Also because while a single blogger can make a difference in the blogosphere, there's a real sense of sisterhood at TFC that I don't find anywhere else. It's like every week is one big party!" ~ **Lauren Baratz-Logsted**

"I was so excited to join TFC because it felt as if I'd been invited into the cool group with the popular girls. I love that we're able to interact with our readers and I

also enjoy the exchanges between the TFC authors. We all bring different perspectives to the blog and that keeps things interesting." ~ **Jessica Burkhart**

"I joined TFC because it feels like an office water-cooler space where I can hang out with other YA authors and talk about books! It's a community of smart, funny, thoughtful writers who are a great support system. And it's also fun to have a place to hang out with teen readers and let them into our lives a little. I definitely get an audience that clicks through to my own blog from TFC, and that adds to the readers, which is great!" ~ **Melissa Walker**

"I was over the moon when I was invited to join Teen Fiction Cafe. I feel like the more ways I have to reach out to the YA audience, the better. I like that we do short posts on fun topics which is different than my own blog. I've also learned a ton from my TFC sisters. Writing isn't a solo activity, you need the advice of other writers who understand you and people who are writing in your genre definitely are the best!" ~ **Stephanie Kuehnert**

"Joining up with TFC has been a fantastic experience. I love being part of a great group of talented writers and friends to share the triumphs and hardships of our careers and can always rely on a helping hand when it is needed." ~ **Kelly Parra**

"I was thrilled when I was approached to be a member of TFC! Writing is such a solitary endeavor, especially for someone like me who doesn't even use a critique group, and joining ranks with such a warm, friendly, enthusiastic community of writers makes me feel like I'm part of something!" ~ **Alyson Noel**

"I love this group of authors because we can ask each other for advice and share ideas. We're not only a group of YA authors, we're friends." ~ **Wendy Toliver**

Teen Fiction Café has definitely established itself as a popular blog. We not only have thousands of hits every month, many other website and blogs catering for young adult and mid-grade readers link to us. Check us out at [www.teenfictioncafe.blogspot.com](http://www.teenfictioncafe.blogspot.com)

Sara Hantz is author of *The Second Virginity* of Suzy Green, published by Flux. It was a New York Public Library pick for their 2008 Books for the Teen Age list.

# TESSA RADLEY

*Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas*



**Tessa, it only takes a glance through your backlist and recent releases to see you have been a very busy gal! How many books have you sold to Desire?**

Right now, I'm busy writing book twelve which still doesn't have a title. I'm in that twilight panic zone where I keep thinking, "How long is it going to take—and how much re-writing—until it starts to feel like a 'real' story?"

**Take us back in time to "the call". How did it happen and how long had you been dreaming of hearing those magical "we want to buy your book" words?**

My "call" came via an email from my agent. The subject line was something like "So what about an offer?" I screamed! And then went into a numb, surreal state that lasted all day—I was in total denial. I couldn't believe it had finally happened. My first sale came from an online pitch to the then senior editor at Desire at eHarlequin. I can't say it often enough, if you get the chance to pitch a book, grab it!

I'd heard about submissions to publishing houses sitting for months in a slushpile and writers never hearing back, and those gave me nightmares. As I couldn't write a good synopsis, I decided to enter contests where a synopsis wasn't required and hope like blazes that I would final and get my work in front of an editor. After a while I found I was spending a lot of time (not to say money!!!) on contests—all that formatting and fiddling with the first chapter endlessly—so I decided to go to conferences where editors were taking pitches. Not cheap either...

So the eHarlequin online pitch was a godsend. And I'm not alone in finding success through online pitches. Fellow Desire authors, Jan Colley, Jennifer Lewis and Maxine Sullivan all sold off online pitches. Soraya, I know you've recently gotten a request for a full from an online pitch—and our wonderful naked writer too. My fingers—and toes—are crossed for you both. I wish you lots of luck.

**What is your writing routine? Do you write full time and do you set regular goals?**

I used to do a lot of goal setting a couple of years ago, but I found it was giving me tunnel-vision. I had a couple of crises and goal-setting added to the stress, so lately I've been trying a more flexible approach.

Because I'm a very sl-o-ow thinker (lots of mulling) and an even slower writer (I don't have a big output), I have to write often. Like five days a week. But some days that just doesn't happen. My major roadblock to productivity is procrastination—looking for a pen or a notebook that I MUST have, long calls to Telstra about my MIA broadband, see how much charge is left on my mobile, making a sixth cup of tea, etc etc can waste far too much time if I let it.

I use an alphasmart, a \$5 wall planner and a timer that I bought from Dick Smith to try and manage my procrastination habit. The alphasmart is great because the only thing I can do while using it is get words out of my head onto a screen. There's not enough bells and whistles to procrastinate. The wall planner is right beside my computer, and I block out kids holidays in black, days away in purple, deadlines in red, days that are first draft days in blue, days that are final edit days, in blue. (Yes, setting it up was another procrastination, but I told myself it was essential.) Seeing the actual time I have available to write stops all ridiculously optimistic (aka delusional) thoughts like "I really think I can write a book by Easter." I note the number of pages I write every day on the wall planner in green vivid. Trust me, the lack of green numbers in a square can be very accusing! I set the timer for 30 minute spurts and try to write for that time without any procrastinating—that tip came from a Stephanie Bond workshop at a RWAus conference—Stephanie is a fabulously practical teacher. I do find that my process changes with every book, so it's not set in stone.

**Are you a pantser or a plotter?**

A bit of both. But I'm very big on story structure—and need to have as much of the story skeleton as possible worked out before I start writing. The

words are the flesh and clothing <g>. A prettier metaphor is thinking of story as a journey. And, yes, I need to have a map before I start, but that's not to say that I might not take a detour on the way. But having decided the point of departure and the destination, the direction of the journey is set. And I do need to know a bit about what happens along the way...what's the terrain like, the weather, does the car breakdown, do we give a hitchhiker a ride, etc. I had one book where my original synopsis had a strong emotional plot, so I knew how my characters felt and where we were going, but I wasn't sure of what happened along the way to escalate the emotional plot. I really struggled to write that book—even though I knew the characters, their backstory, their motivations inside out.

**Your latest book, *The Untamed Sheik*, has a very strong, sexy cover with a definite alpha male. Is the alpha hero mandatory in a Desire story? And do you find that type of character difficult to write?**

I love reading alpha males—they always translate into chemistry on page. So that makes them easier for me to write. While the Desire alpha male is softening a little—he is still the undoubted leader of the pack. Desire heroes are billionaires, sheiks, successful businessmen, outback heroes and wealthy cowboys. These are the men who play into our most secret fantasies—they're a world away from the nice, easy-going family guy next door.

**Do you have a favourite book you've written? Or is that like asking you to pick a favourite child . . .**

My favourite book is always the one I'm going to write next! The one singing that seductive siren-song, "Come to me...abandon that story, I'm so much more interesting." My least favourite is easy...it's the one I'm writing now.

**What advice do you have for unpublished writers?**

The only way you're going to sell is by submitting. Don't do what I did, I spent waaay too much time on contests. They're great for feedback when you're starting out, but even contests can become part of procrastinating. At some stage you need to start being selective. Pick contests judged by editors you want to get your work in front of; ask for copies of the score sheets before you enter so that you can make sure that your entry meets the criteria; be aware that some contests lead to sales more frequently than others. But don't make

contests your only strategy—and never ever use them as an alternative to submitting to an editor.

**Tell us what to expect from you in 2009 – what are you working on and what do you have coming out this year?**

In August *The Billion-Dollar Baby Bargain* comes out. It's part of the *Desire's Billionaires and Babies* series. While the books don't have connected characters or story lines, they're connected by theme. I've really enjoyed other titles I've read in this series, *Baby Bonanza*, *Baby Benefits*—and I've got *Baby Bequest* on my bedside table to read next. When I first sold to *Desire*, babies were not popular in the line. In fact, one of the reasons I thought my pitch would not be successful was because it was a secret baby story, so *Billionaires and Babies* simply shows how lines can evolve and change in a short time.

**And finally, tell us the back cover blurb for your current release!**

It was very cool to be asked to write *The Untamed Sheik* which is part of *Desire's Man of The Month* promotion—especially as I still have some of the original *Desire Man of the Month* books on my keeper shelves.

**Mr April: Prince Shafir Al Dhahar, desert sheik.**

**His creed: Family first, last...always**

**His challenge: One obstinate foreign beauty.**

**The wedding would go on. Prince Shafir would not let Megan Saxon steal away his cousin's groom-to-be. Stopping her by seduction seemed the easiest plan. He'd simply make Megan fall in love with another man – him.**

**But what would happen if the seducer found himself falling for a woman he couldn't—by royal rights—truly keep?**

**Man of the Month: A royal sheik with an iron clad destiny...until love changed the rules.**

**Tessa thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us! Visit Tessa on-line at [www.tessaradley.com](http://www.tessaradley.com).**

Tessa: Thank you :-)

#### **NEW MEMBERS**

Angela Townsend, Victoria, Australia

Amanda van Vliet, Rakaia

**WELCOME**

# CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRES

## *Useful Tool or Total Timewaster?*

*By Michelle Douglas*



I remember the very first time I discovered character questionnaires. Actually I was given one by a writer's group I once belonged to. Yes! I was so excited. This was the tool that would finally turn me into a real writer. I clutched it in my hot

little hand and raced home. I grabbed pen and paper, started to answer the questions... and promptly fell asleep.

Oh Good Lord! Who cares what colour eyes, hair and skin my heroine has? Weight? What do you mean, weight? I'm not going to divulge my heroine's exact dimensions. I mean... how unromantic. On and on it went – height, distinguishing facial features, birthmarks and scars, characteristic gestures and mannerisms, way of walking...

I dropped my head to my hands convinced I was wasting my time? Did it really matter who my heroine's best friend in fourth grade was? Or how many pets my hero had between the ages of 4 and 16? So what if my heroine prefers strappy heels to gym shoes? Does any of this really matter?

At first my answer to that was a resounding, *No*.

But then my mind started ticking over. What if the heroine's best friend since fourth grade has gone missing and that's the reason the heroine ends up in the hero's tiny town in the Outback? What if the hero is a vet and between the ages of 4 and 16 the only pet he had was a dog...and what if that dog died and he couldn't save it and from that moment on he was determined to become a vet, even though it meant defying his father? What if, in the opening scene, it's raining, the heroine's car is bogged, and she doesn't own a pair of gym shoes let alone Wellington boots?

Hmm... okay then, some questions do matter, but how was I going to decide which ones to ask? It took me a long time to work it out, but I discovered the answer depended entirely on the context in which I approached the questions.

Let's tackle questions about physical description first. Other than the fact that we don't want our

heroine's eye colour changing from blue to brown halfway through the story, who cares what colour her eyes, hair, and skin are? There's one person who cares and he cares a whole lot – the hero. He's fascinated by the colour of her eyes, mesmerised by the way her hair shines in the sun... and he can't get the exact shade of her skin out of his mind – is it the colour of peaches and cream, or more English rose? If she'd stop ranting at him and moved into the light a little more then perhaps he could work it out. Only if she moves into the light that glossy hair of hers is going to distract him all over again.

See what I've done? I've asked the hero to describe the heroine for me. I like to ask him to:

- describe the heroine the very first moment he sees her
- describe her looking her worst,
- describe her looking her best.

Then I get the heroine to answer the same questions for the hero. What's more, I get her to tell me how she thinks the hero sees her at each of those moments above.

These descriptions now contain a power my boring checklist lacked. They work because they not only tell me something about the heroine, they tell me something about the hero too. I'm not only discovering what my heroine looks like, but my hero's physical and/or emotional responses to her too. The descriptions now start to sizzle with emotional punch. And if I want to look at this in a purely practical light, these descriptions add to my word count – I can use them in my books.

How else can character questionnaires be useful? Sometimes I just like to play with them. They can, on occasion, help me generate plot ideas – as in the instance above with the heroine stuck in the outback looking for her best friend since fourth grade, getting soaked in the pouring rain in her high heels. For some reason I'm finding this an intriguing opening, but at the moment that's all it is – an opening. I need to flesh it out. So I start asking questions. And do I have favourite questions I like to ask my characters? You bet – these ones especially:

- What do you want?
- Why do you want it?

- What's stopping you from getting it?

What my characters want throughout the course of the story can change so these are questions I ask my characters at the beginning of chapter one, end of chapter three, and usually again at the end of chapter seven (for some reason these are the points in the story where I need to double check that I'm on the same page as my characters). My characters usually want more than one thing too – so I list them all. My heroine wants to find her missing best friend, but she also wants to become managing director for her software firm in Sydney. She's not going to find that an easy goal to accomplish while she's stuck in the outback. Hence, Plan A is to find her best friend and hightail it back to the city as soon as she can.

I also like to ask my characters:

- What do you want relationship-wise?
- Why do you want that?
- What prevents you from achieving this?

If my heroine is hell bent on never getting married, then I want to know why. I'm writing a romance so she's going to have to overcome her reservations about marriage at some stage. Which leads to a very important question:

- What will you learn, how will you change?

Sometimes I don't discover the answer to this question until after I've finished the book. Sometimes it's not having the answers that matter, just knowing the right questions to ask that keep me writing.

Some time ago, I stumbled upon a set of questions in a book called *Building Better Plots* by Robert Kern (Writers Digest Books, 1999). I love these questions – and I hate them – because I find them **SO** hard to answer. But I find, once I've answered them to my satisfaction, everything falls into place.

Placing the Obstacle, from *Building Better Plots* by Robert Kern (pg 30)

1. "What would make the attainment of my character's goal the most difficult?" Once this has been identified, the central obstacle in the story will become much clearer.

In *Casablanca* seeing Ilsa safe means that Rick must let her go.

2. "What is my character's greatest weakness?" Exploiting this vulnerability will provide a rich source of drama. Hamlet's course of action is clear – expose his uncle. His weakness is his indecisiveness.

3. "What is my character's greatest fear?" To draw the most depth from your protagonists, they must face their greatest fears.

In *Vertigo*, Scottie's greatest fear is high places, yet he must go into the bell tower to expose the murderer.

4. "What is my character's greatest strength?" This will give you a clue as to how your protagonist will eventually overcome the obstacle.

In *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roarke is able to succeed only through the tremendous force and conviction of his principles.

Kern claims that, *Answering these four questions should point you at the right obstacle that will give your story the greatest drama and create the utmost tension.*

And that's what we're in the business of – giving our readers a darn good story. Drama and tension are vital in a darn good story.

I've listed the ways character questionnaires (or simply asking my characters questions) have helped me with characterisation, plotting and building drama and tension in my stories. If I searched there would probably be other benefits I could add to the list. I'm of the opinion that anything that helps me to write is a damn fine thing – whether that's filling out character questionnaires, creating a collage, or making a soundtrack for my novel... whatever. My challenge to you is if at first a seemingly useful tool doesn't work... can you think up a new approach that brings it to life and makes it relevant for the way you work? If and when you do, don't forget to share it with the rest of us!

**Michelle's third romance, *The Aristocrat And The Single Mum*, is an April release and has received 41/2 stars from Romantic Times. For more info on Michelle and her books please visit her website at [www.michelle-douglas.com](http://www.michelle-douglas.com)**



# MAREE ANDERSON

## Interviewed by Soraya Nicholas



**First of all, we are so excited to announce that your debut book, *Even Demons Get the Blues*, is about to be released! How does it feel to be a “published” author?**

It's an amazing feeling. I was interviewed by a local newspaper reporter recently and I couldn't think of the right word when she asked me that same question—as is typical when you're put on the spot. But for me, the “right” word is: *justification*. As in, knowing editors love something you've written enough to want to publish it, is justification for all the hard slog, rejections, less-than-positive contest judges' comments and other not-so-fun stuff every aspiring author has to deal with.

**How long have you been writing for, and has the road to publication been a long one for you?**

I started writing in 2003. I figured I had one shot to see if I had it in me to write a book before my youngest went to school and I had to get a “real” job—you know, one that actually pays money. I took ¾ of that first effort (to adhere to the Clendon Award word count!) and called it Book 1, then mashed together the last ¼ of it plus a partially written sequel and called it Book 2, and entered them both in the 2004 Clendon. To my surprise, Book 1 finalled and Book 2 was highly commended...and I was hooked big-time. Since then, I've just kept writing and querying and learning my craft, and periodically wanting to scream in frustration. Or give up. Or both! But with 9 completed manuscripts, 8 of which have finalled in one competition or another, I figured I was good enough to be published, I just needed a break. And finally, I got there!

**In 2006 you won the Clendon Award. Is your upcoming release the manuscript from that competition?**

Nope. That manuscript has just undergone a major rewrite (courtesy of Lesley Marshall's excellent critiquing service, *Editline*) and now I've ironed out some of its core problems, it's currently “doing the rounds” again. My upcoming release is an erotic novella I entered in the Red Sage Alpha Male novella contest last year. It finalled and the editors liked it so much they emailed me to say they'd love to publish it and to ask if I was interested. Of course I said, “Yes, please!”

**What are you working on at the moment, what else can we expect to see of yours in the coming year?**

I've just completed another novella featuring a Felinoid Demon heroine (a secondary character from *Even Demons Get The Blues*), and a Leonine Lycan hero. So it's kitty vs lion with some truly heinous hyenas thrown in—here's hoping my Red Sage editor will like that one, too! Currently, I'm working on another single title paranormal, featuring immortal Spartan warriors and the dryad who stole their humanity. And of course there are queries, queries, and more queries. And just to break the monotony, maybe a couple of contest entries...if I'm feeling particularly brave and my “thick skin” is at its optimum thickness. Yes, I'm afraid to say even once you're published, those doubts about your ability to tell a good story don't magically vanish—sorry, guys!

**And finally, what we've all been waiting for . . . give us the back cover blurb!**

*Even Demons Get The Blues*  
By Maree Anderson  
[www.mareeanderson.com](http://www.mareeanderson.com)

Rezon was the Demon King's lieutenant for four thousand years. But even the most badass Demon in Hell gets jaded, so he took up beguiling humans. Except now *he's* beguiled—by Leisa, flawed human female.

Leisa might look like an angel but she sure doesn't act like one. Under the influence of a Destroyer Demon, she killed her sister's husband, and even though he badly needed killing, Leisa's guilt is eating her alive. Alcohol and sex are her chosen methods of self-destruction, and she's embracing both with a vengeance.

When Leisa picks up one loser too many, Rez is provoked into showing her what a real man—make that Demon!—can do. But their sexy encounter turns out to be potentially lethal for them both, when Leisa accidentally shatters Rez's defences and bonds with him.

The sole surviving Drakon Demon bonded to a *human* female?

There's gonna be Hell to pay!

*Even Demons Get the Blues*  
by Maree Anderson

Available: June 1<sup>st</sup>

From: Red Sage Publishing,  
[www.eRedSage.com](http://www.eRedSage.com)

*Red Sage – Read Dangerously*



# MEMBER SUCCESSES

*Compiled by Tyree Bidgood*

## *Official Releases*

Secret Baby, Public Affair by **Yvonne Lindsay**  
Friday Night Mistress by **Jan Colley**  
The Untamed Sheik by **Tessa Radley**  
The Aristocrat & the Single Mum by **Michelle Douglas**  
The Rebel King by **Melissa James**  
The Rich Man's Blackmailed Mistress by **Robyn Donald**  
Forced Wife, Royal Love Child by **Trish Morey**  
The Timber Baron's Virgin Bride by **Daphne Clair**  
Even Demons Get the Blues by Maree Anderson (Red Sage Publishing, 1 June)



## *Sold*

Sandra Hyatt has sold her second manuscript, tentatively titled The Billionaire's Baby Bargain, to HM&B Desire

Annie West sold her 10th title to Harlequin Mills and Boon Presents.

## *Official Release*

Yvonne Lindsay's Mini Series Rogue Diamonds has its Third book released - Pretend Mistress, Bona-Fide Boss May 2009. Yvonne's Secret Baby, Public Affair (April) spent 3 weeks on the Waldenbooks/Borders Best Seller List, and 2 weeks on the #2 spot!

Yvonne W. (writing as Eve Summers) Safe Sex Incorporated will be released by Red Rose Publishing ([www.redrosepublishing.com](http://www.redrosepublishing.com)) on 23 April 2009.

## *Competitions*

### **The Colorado Romance Writers' Award of Excellence:**

Annie West's book The Billionaire's Bought Mistress has been short listed in the finals.

### **Aussie Little Gems Short Story Contest:**

Kendra (writing as Katie Calloway) has placed second

### **2008 PEARL Awards:**

Finalist x 2 - Nalini Singh for The Magical Christmas Cat in the Paranormal category; and Hostage To Pleasure and Mine To Possess in the Shapeshifter category.

### **RITA Finalists:**

Nalini Singh – Mine to Possess

### **The Sir Julius Vogel Awards:**

Caressed By Ice and Visions of Heat Best Novel – Adult Category– by Nalini Singh

Beat of Temptation Best Novella/Novelette - By Nalini Singh

Sex, Lies and Here be Dragons Best Anthology - by Yvonne Eve Walus

Please email submissions to this page to, Tyree at [rocker.t@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rocker.t@xtra.co.nz). by 13<sup>th</sup> of each month.

# NEW AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Christina Phillips

Interviewed by Kylie Short

**Boldly Going ...  
where we all want to go!**

**Have you ever had a conversation with friends about what it would be like once you receive THE CALL? Have you wondered what happens next? What lies beyond that magical moment?**

**I thought it was time to ask some of our newly published about their experiences and see if they can shed some light on what to expect and how they've begun to build their careers now that they're published.**

**A little bit about myself...**

I'm Christina Phillips from Mandurah, WA and I moved here with my husband and three adorable children ten years ago from the UK. I currently write erotic romance with paranormal elements for the Scarlet Line of The Wild Rose Press.

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

At the beginning of 2008, after nine years of rejections, revisions and "almost-but-not-quite-what-we're-looking-for" responses, I was seriously fed up with the whole writing business. I didn't know whether to go back to my beloved category romances, or pursue my paranormals. A lot of the time I just procrastinated around the web and if it hadn't been for my fantastic crit partners who encouraged me to try something new – erotic romance – I'm honestly not sure I'd ever have got my act together again.

Then, in May 2008, the Romance Writers of Australia held their inaugural Romance Roadshow in Perth.

The Roadshow was an amazing experience. I met so many local writers I'd only known online before and the overall buzz

and atmosphere was so friendly and encouraging it completely revitalised me. I was so inspired, I queried The Wild Rose Press the following Wednesday with my first erotic romance, *Foretaste of Forever*. On Saturday, the editor emailed and said my synopsis intrigued her and could I send her the full.

I sent her the full. A week later I received an email offering me a contract. I was so excited! After calling my husband I jumped on MSN where I spent several hours squee-ing with my CPs!!

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

My latest release is *Touch of the Demon*, described by my publisher as futuristic/fantasy although I call it erotic romance with paranormal elements! Here's the blurb:

*Dark angel Rafe travels back in time to destroy the woman who is fated to bring untold chaos to the cosmos. Instead, he finds Celeste, a child of the Earth Goddess, who is sworn to protect the one Rafe seeks. He mistakes her for his quarry but an irresistible attraction prevents him from taking her soul. And although Celeste holds the one weapon capable of banishing Rafe from Earth forever, she's unable to deny the overwhelming desire to possess this creature from hell. They come together in a frenzy of passion, each believing they are changing destiny by their actions. But when the Earth Goddess appears they discover her plans are more far reaching than either had imagined.*

My debut release was *Foretaste of Forever*, a Scarlet Rosette about a strong heroine who is prepared to do anything to be with the man she loves, and an alpha hero who is so blinded by his sense of honour that he can't see his destiny when she is standing right in front of him.

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

The most exciting part about writing for me is being able to dive into this world I've created, and see how my characters react to all the lovely rocks I throw their way. I used to be a plotter, right down to the last detail, but now I tend to fly into the mist and see where my hero and heroine take me. It's not always where I anticipate, but I love the challenges that turns up!

Boring parts of writing? I don't find any of the process boring. I even love tackling revisions. Although I haven't yet managed to read the story again once it's published. By the time I've returned the galleys I'm so sick of it the thought of reading it again makes my eyes ache. Plus, I just know I'd find something to edit and that would bug me no end!!

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

The one thing I've really noticed is how time vanishes. Before I sold, I'd always be on MSN chatting with my CPs. It was just a part of my writing day and something I could never contemplate being without.

That changed after The Call (or The Email, lol!) I had revisions for my editor, getting the hang of TWRP loops and business side of things, and a mild panic attack that I'd never be able to write another sellable thing again EVER.

Another aspect that eats up time is promo, but being with a small e-publisher I always knew that was going to be an essential part of things.

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

I have a couple of mantras - the first is a quote from Galaxy Quest: "Never give up! Never surrender!" It took me more than nine years before I sold, and I was close to chucking it in on several occasions. Only the fact I become bad tempered and totally witchy to live with when I don't write kept me going back to the keyboard. Well, and the fact my wonderful CPs would never allow me to throw in the towel!

The second thing I'd like to share is this - Never say never! A couple of years ago it hadn't even occurred to me that I could write erotic romance, never mind sell in that genre. But when I sat down with the specific intention of writing erotic romance, something just clicked and I discovered I absolutely adored it. The weird thing is, up until I wrote *Foretaste of Forever*, my writing leaned towards romantic comedy.

Sometimes it really can pay to try something completely different, even something you've always maintained you'd never want or be able to tackle, just to see if you can do it!

Christina's website - <http://www.christinaphillips.com>  
Christina's blog - <http://christinaphillips.blogspot.com>

Thanks for your time, Christina!

## Setting the Conference in Concrete

Kris Pearson

Things are going well! Not only do we have our American guests (author Mary Jo Putney and agent Melissa Jeglinski) sounding very keen to meet us all, but Melissa has volunteered to 'be' a raffle prize, too. Buy your raffle tickets on Saturday and if you're the winner, Melissa will shout you breakfast on Sunday and discuss your current project. This is an amazing pitch opportunity - with time to really get serious about your work.

Having said that, if you don't 'win' her, and you've a book to sell, you'll want to meet her anyway, so book your pitch slot. She's an acquiring agent with The Knight Agency - with an impressive past as a romance editor.

We can now confirm there'll be a choice of three breakout workshops on Saturday morning, three more on Saturday afternoon, and yet another three on Sunday. All of these will be fronted by published authors. By conference time you'll have had bios of each author in Heart to Heart, and all the details will soon be on the loop and at [romancewriters.co.nz](http://romancewriters.co.nz). As well, there'll be 'whole-conference' sessions from Mary Jo, Melissa, Fiona Brand, Nalini Singh, Susan Napier, Gracie Stanners, Robyn Donald, and Daphne Clair.

Book your travel now while cheap airfares are available. And book Waipuna, too. RWNZ1805 is the code to ensure you get the specially negotiated conference room-rate of \$157.50 per night for a room with two queen-size beds. Consider inviting a friend. New members are valuable - and they'll be forever in your debt if you introduce them to a wonderful experience like our "Romantic Retreat".

# *INTERNATIONAL NEWS*

*Compiled by PDR Lindsay-Salmon, aka Patricia Salmon*

## **Short Romance Stories Wanted**

Read-a-Romance.com is a brand new site geared toward attracting romance readers. The goal? To be a place where romance writers can showcase their work and attract readership.

Submission details can be found at [read-a-romance.com/contribute](http://read-a-romance.com/contribute)

## **East of the Web**

East of the Web is keen to provide exposure for writers by offering them a place where their work will be seen and read in a high quality, respected setting.

Accepted authors receive a page on the site where readers can access all the author's stories as well as biographical or event information.

Website: <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/Publishing.html>

## **Shades of Romance Magazine**

Shades of Romance Magazine pays US\$10 - \$25 for short stories and articles.

Bi-monthly the magazine caters to the readers and writers of multi-cultural literature.

<http://www.sormag.com/guide.html>

## **'Catastrophie'**

'Catastrophie' is an anthology to be published by PS Publishing. Editor, Allen Ashley, is looking for well written stories, science fiction, fantasy, horror or crime - romance subplots welcomed - with the theme of 'catastrophes and disasters'. Short stories, 2,000 to 6,000 words in length.

<http://news.pspublishing.co.uk/?s=Catastrophie>;

Guidelines found at: <http://news.pspublishing.co.uk/2008/09/09/catastrophie-anthology-call-for-submissions/>

## **A Cup of Comfort Anthologies**

PAY: \$100

A Cup of Comfort for Couples: Stories that celebrate what it means to be in love - Submission Deadline: October 1, 2009

A Cup of Comfort for Golfers: Stories that celebrate the follies, the triumphs, and the joy of the game - Submission Deadline: December 15, 2009

Please see the Call for Submissions for more information on our submission

requirements for these two new books as well as for the other three books

currently in development (A Cup of Comfort for Fathers / A Cup of Comfort

for Mothers / A Cup of Comfort for a Better World). We look forward to reading your stories!

<http://www.cupofcomfort.com/WritersGuidelines/>

# *INTERNATIONAL CONTEST NEWS*

*Submitted by Lisa Elkind-Gardiner, aka Lisa Whitefern*

## **Land of Enchantment New Mexico chapter of RWA - "Rebecca" 2009 contest**

**Eligibility:** The contest is open to both published and unpublished authors!

**Deadline:** May 30th 2009 Entries will be 5,000 words or less in specific romance categories. Be quick only 30 entries accepted in each category. **Fee** \$20 US through Paypal- all electronic entry. <http://www.leranm.com/contest.html>

## **Northeast Ohio Romance Writers Cleveland Rocks Romance Contest**

**Eligibility:** Unpublished or not published in last 5 yrs. **Deadline:** June 1, 2009

**Enter:** First 6,000-7,000 words, optional, unjudged synopsis (750 wds max). Also has a "First Declaration of Love" category (500 wds max). **Fee:** \$25 US. All entrants receive comments- finalists receive critique.

<http://www.neorwa.com/index.php/Contest/Contest>

## **TORONTO RWA 21st Annual Original Golden Opportunity Contest 2009**

**Eligibility:** Open to all unpublished writers **Deadline:** June 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 **Enter:** synopsis, prologue/ first chapter, 30 pgs max. **Fee** \$30 US. <http://www.torontoromancewriters.com/contest.html>

## **Chick Lit Writers of the World - Get Your Stiletto in the Door Contest!**

**Eligibility:** Unpublished or not contracted / published in last 5 yrs. (Some published may enter see website.)

**Deadline:** June 15th 2009 **Enter:** first 35 pgs, synopsis (5 pgs max) of your fun, sassy, contemporary novel **Fee:** \$20 for RWA members \$30 for non RWA. <http://www.chicklitwriters.com/contest.htm>

## **Colorado RWA- Heart of the Rockies**

**Eligibility:** Unpublished/uncontracted as of deadline **Deadline:** June 15th 2009 **Enter:** 1st two chapters plus 1-5 pgs synopsis (35 pgs max) **Fee:** \$25 for RWA members \$30 for non RWA. <http://www.coloradoromancewriters.org/hor.html>

# RWNZ NEWS AROUND THE REGIONS

## Regional convenor contacts

AUCKLAND – Frances Housden  
email: [fhousden@xtra.co.nz](mailto:fhousden@xtra.co.nz)

CHRISTCHURCH – Sue Knight  
email: [sueknight@ihug.co.nz](mailto:sueknight@ihug.co.nz)

HAWKE'S BAY – Ginny Suckling  
email: [ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz)

NELSON – Cherie Skinner & Sally Astridge  
email: [bruceastridge@aol.com](mailto:bruceastridge@aol.com) or  
[cheriesk@hotmail.com](mailto:cheriesk@hotmail.com)

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

WELLINGTON – Ellie Huse  
email: [elliehuse@yahoo.com](mailto: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](mailto:rwnzpresident@xtra.co.nz) or our membership secretary Rachel Collins on [rachel\\_collins@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rachel_collins@xtra.co.nz)

## AUCKLAND

Our April meeting had very good attendance and Sandra Hyde's interactive workshop went down a treat. I know a few members in the group I was working with had lightbulb moments. For our May meeting, Norah Hansen Hill will be running a workshop on the MANY FACES OF SUSPENSE. Norah is multi published, with her books ranging from romance to horror.

The meeting will take place at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion, corner of Mt Eden and Mt Albert Roads on May 2nd at 12.30 p.m. Please bring a small plate for lunch and expect to buy raffle tickets, we always have good prizes.

## WAIKATO/BAY OF PLENTY/KING COUNTRY

Seven of us met at Lyn Rasmussen's on April 18 in Rotorua and had another fantastic meeting. We shared writing commitments and added to these so that we are each progressively working towards completion of an MS. We also talked about strategies to help us achieve this target.

Helen MacFarlane, who has a long background in fashion design and tutoring, talked about fashion through the ages and how important it is to make sure details are accurate. Not so tricky when writing about contemporary times perhaps, but what might a peasant, servant, or noblewoman have worn hundreds of years ago on the Continent, in the UK, or in Egypt? What fabrics were available and who could wear them? What about underwear? Accessories? Names of garments?

As usual, there were lots of laughs and a delicious lunch – really valuable time spent with other writers.

Our next meeting is May 23rd 12 noon at Tyree Bidgood's in Morrinsville.

Find this chapter on line at: <http://achapterofromance.blogspot.com/>

## WELLINGTON

Our April meeting drew a select crowd of eight – including Chicki who we haven't seen for a while, and new member Meryl.

Rachel had offered to hold a dialogue workshop, so we all brought a page or so of our writing which was dialogue-heavy, and these were read aloud and discussed. Then it was on to the workshop proper – and very good it was, too. Those of you who know Membership Secretary Rachel will know that she's a chatterbox – as are the characters in her writing! She was the ideal dialogue instructor, and we all appreciated the work she'd put in to her informative workshop.

Next time we're to bring a few paragraphs that describe one of our main characters; not the 'dark hair, green eyes, bulging abs' kind of description, but something that lets us know their personality.

The meeting will be at 1 pm, Saturday May 2nd at Ellie's, 135 Milne Drive, Paraparaumu. All welcome.

## NELSON

Our April meeting was rescheduled to the 3rd Saturday because of Easter.

We had a great meeting, covering a number of topics. We welcomed Dorothy to the group and read our 100 word romances. (Sadly, the dog ate Anna's, and not even a purgative did the trick.) I suggest that you try this exercise in our own group - it certainly concentrates the mind, and might well become the blurb for the back of your novel.

Anna led us in an exercise involving plot-lines, and for the May meeting we shall be analysing our own reading/viewing with these guidelines in mind. The May meeting will be held after the H2H deadline, on the 3rd Saturday, but anyone interested in joining our group can contact either Sally on (03) 545 2244 or Cherie on (03) 548 6070

## CHRISTCHURCH

We have continued with our Critique meetings and members have entered the Valerie Parv Award and Great Beginnings Contest.

Reminder of our **Full Day Workshop**

**Date:** Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May

**Time:** 9.15am – 4pm

**Cost:** \$10 - includes lunch

All welcome. To RSVP please contact Sue by 1<sup>st</sup> May - [sueknight@ihug.co.nz](mailto:sueknight@ihug.co.nz)

# THE NAKED WRITER

*Baring all in the world of romance and writing*

My teenage daughter recently bought a DIY wardrobe organiser. It was just some shelves to put in the wardrobe so it gave her made more space to hang clothes and store stuff. I informed her from the outset that I was not having a bar of DIY, everything always went wrong for me, it was never as easy as it looked, and that something that would take the average DIY person twenty minutes, took me a curse-ridden day. I'd had a gutsful of DIY, I told her, over and over and over again. In other words, she was on her own with this one. So we trotted down to the hardware chain, and she found the organizer she wanted. We examined it thoroughly in the shop, and we concluded it couldn't be difficult to install. We had a drill at home, we had nails, a hammer, it came with screws - what more could we need? We had measured the wardrobe and it was within the parameters. Easy peasy.

I should add I did not actually for even a flipping *second* think it was going to be easy peasy at all. In fact, my experience, as I repeated over and over and over again some more, just so she got the message, is that nothing like this ever is. Oh, it looks easy, and you rack your brain to think of any problems to pre-empt, but it all seems okay and you figure an idiot could put this up. Except for that nagging voice that tells you, Something isn't going to go right, here. You just don't know what the blazes it is.

We got home, and daughter is there in her room with the drill - measuring, drilling holes, when suddenly, it all comes to a halt. She needs to shorten the shelves. She gets out our "will cut anything" knife which after a few seconds, is a lost cause. Clearly, we need a real saw. I had a hacksaw once, so we go to the garage but can't find it. I don't believe I'd seen it since last century, anyhow. It's probably rusted away under the dandelions we're cultivating for our pet bunny. So there's only one thing to do.

We go next door to our neighbour who lends us his saw. I'm a bit nervous, I can tell you. The saw still has a cover on it. We stick the appropriate bits of the rack in the vice, and began to saw. But his saw's not having a bar of it. It was made for cutting wood, not metal. Much blaspheming spewed forth but it did us no good. We were well and truly stuck. We needed the professionals. I said to her, We've to go back to that bloody shop and see if they'll cut it for us.

I was pretty uptight, I can tell you. Because nowhere on the instructions had it indicated you might need to hack at this bloody thing to get it to size.

At the shop, I was led down to the timber yard. Two very nice gentlemen took the offending piece of shelving, - actually four pieces - and did the deed for us. I should add - - I kid you not - it took them twenty minutes, a bolt cutter, and a hack saw to get rid of the extraneous bits. And they expect the average person to be able to do that? I fumed all the way home again.

Later that night, the daughter installed her wardrobe organizer without any help from anyone. That girl's a tough 'un. She once erected a gazebo, the tent ones with the green roof, all on her own. In the end, the good news was the organiser looked good. All her clothes are hung nicely, the carebears are arranged. I begrudgingly confess that in the end, it was probably, I think, maybe worth the drama. Perhaps.

## **RWNZ NEEDS YOU!!!!**

If you have a few hours each month, and want to volunteer to help your organisation, we have a vacancy. We need someone to take over the *Heart to Heart* mail out job, starting for the next ie June, newsletter.

Requirements: You need Excel to print out the address labels, and several hours to do the mail-out ie stamp RWNZ's return address on the envelope, stuff the envelopes, stick on the label, and mail at a post box.

Could be good fun to get together with your writer friends for an afternoon. Newsletters are couriered to your door by around the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, and should be posted before the end of that month.

If interested, please contact ASAP, Pat Snellgrove, RWNZ President, [rwnzpresident@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rwnzpresident@xtra.co.nz)