

More Than Naked, Tattooed Men: A Conversation With Christie Craig

Catherine Robertson



Christie Craig, an Alabama native, is a NY Times bestselling author, multi-published writer, multi-published photo journalist, motivational speaker, and writing teacher. We're lucky enough to have her speaking to us at our Conference

in Rotorua in August. Catherine Robertson had a lovely chat to her for *Heart to Heart*.

How do you juggle your multiple writing personas and keep everything straight in your mind?

I keep the two writing personas in separate rooms and one doesn't even know the other exists. As for the second part of that question, who says I keep anything straight in my mind. LOL.

As for having two different writing personas. The hardest part of the juggling is feeding the two different dragons/genres. Making sure I put out books in a timely manner so the readers don't forget me. I try to do two books of each a year, but I don't always accomplish that.

A lot of people assume that I use two different voices. But I don't really feel that I do. Actually, when I was asked to write my Young Adult series, the editor made it clear that she didn't want me to change my voice. So as I started writing the *Shadow Falls* series, all I did was change the age of the characters and pull character traits from someone in my protagonist's stage of life. Because St. Martins also wanted it to be paranormal, I added magical elements. All of my books contain a blend of heart, humor, mystery/suspense and a sexy tone. Some books are stronger on heart than they are on humor, all of my books are sexy, but some are just more explicit than others. Some plots focus more on the suspense elements. Each book, depending on character and targ-

targeted audience, will be heavier on one element more than the other. I just sold an adult Romantic Suspense trilogy that will be more suspense than humor.

Do you write your different types of books in parallel or sequentially?

I'm definitely a one-book-at-a-time person. I may be working on one and have to do the copy edits on the other, but for the most part when I'm in a book, I don't jump to another. I know a lot of writers who can do this, but I'm not one of them.

Romance writing never used to be humorous because jokes were supposed to kill the mood. But we've lightened up now – how do you feel humour enhances the romance?

I totally disagree that humor kills the mood.

First, there have been studies to what women and men find most attractive about a mate. The majority said a sense of humor. Second, love is supposed to be fun. Have you ever really noticed someone who is just falling in love? They go around day and night wearing that stupid grin. Love makes us happy.

I believe it was Jennifer Crusie who said something like, you'd better write a character who you wouldn't mind being locked in closet with for four or five days, because that's what you are asking of your readers. To stop their lives for however long it takes them to read your book and spend time alone with your story people. Let me tell you, if I was locked in a closet with someone who was solemn, serious, and acted as if they had a stick up their rear, I'd go crazy. Give me someone who can laugh, joke, and is fun to be around.

As for how humour enhances romance. Laughter releas-

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

es feel good hormones in our mind. Falling in love releases even more hormones. By writing humor and love in our books, we offer readers a double dose of an irresistible cocktail of fun hormones.

We can still add naked, tattooed guys, right?

Oh, yeah, we can have all the naked tattooed guys, with tattoos where we didn't even know men got tattoos. You don't need to be writing a romantic comedy to use humor in your books. Humor should be part of real life just as it should be part of our fiction. Think of *Steel Magnolias* or *Fried Green Tomatoes*. I took the advice from my grandmother, "If you can laugh at it, you can live with it." I've given this advice to every character I've created.

What's been your proudest moment as an author?

Oh, that's a hard question. Part of me wants to say it's the feeling I get every time I finish a book, because there's nothing like that feeling. Another part of me hopes it's one that hasn't happened yet. Don't get me wrong, I've had some real proud moments: finishing and selling over 40 books, making the New York Times list, making RWA's Honor Roll and being a RITA finalist. That said, I'm a firm believer that if we ever stop trying to reach for our next big goal, if we stop learning or stop challenging ourselves, we shrivel up, get old, grumpy and sad.

You've co-written a humorous self-help relationship book – can reading romance genuinely help with relationships or does it give unrealistic expectations as critics claim?

It's been proven that married women who read romance have more sex than those who don't. It's said that reading romance can rekindle our belief in love. Romance novels show strong women standing up for what they want. They show heroines and heroes, most of whom have had bad relationships and who have overcome that pain, willing to give love another shot. I don't think I've read a romance in a long time that made it sound like all you needed was love. In these novels there's conflict, compromise, and a couple learning how to make each other happy. There's also great sex. Can anyone claim those are bad things for which to aspire?

As for your question about romance books being unrealistic. It's true. Romance novels are fiction. We don't hang around these fictional couples long enough to write about how the man starts leaving the toilet seat up, and how he's flexing his muscles while nude in front of a mirror and becomes more of an eye roller than a sight for sore eyes. Or about how we women may put on some pounds and get a few stretch marks.

My husband and I have been married thirty-three years. We've argued, disagreed, I've been known to nag some and he farts in bed. Most of the time, sex isn't mind blowing, but it's still good. Yet, we've stuck by each other, we respect each other, and we support each other. Now, if I had to write our story, I'd take out some of the nags,

farts, and add more mind-blowing sex—I'd probably leave the naked flexing in front of the mirror. Heck, I might even leave in the farting—but the most important part of our story would be the love and devotion. And that is not unrealistic.

You're from the heart of the American South, Alabama. How do you feel that's influenced your writing?

My fans tell me I have a southern voice. It makes sense. Southern is what I know. I have southern beliefs. I'm kind, and even when pissed, it takes a lot to make me say more than, "Bless her heart!" And as my grandmother said, "Every southern gal must know how to fry a mean bird." Most of my characters are southern. But I think the biggest way it has influenced my writing is that I'm a storyteller. When we went to see my grandfather, we would sit around on the floor and we'd listen to him tell stories. At the dinner table we told stories. And they'd better be interesting. It didn't matter if you had to fictionalize them some, the stories needed to be intriguing.

You seem to have a real passion for educating and motivating people. Where did that stem from, and what do you love about it?

I'm dyslexic and while storytelling might be a natural talent, writing wasn't. I had to learn to write. And it was no easy feat. It took me ten years to sell my first book. And thirteen more before I sold my second. I don't have the educational background of some writers. I'm self-educated, and I mainly taught myself to write by dissecting books. Although I do have to say, I learned a lot by attending meetings through RWA over the years. But being dyslexic, I learned to persevere. Writing is so important to me, that I want to share that passion. I think passion is the key element to teaching.

Apart from speaking to us, what else are you looking forward to at this year's #Love Romance Writers NZ Conference?

I love traveling. I've been to France, South America, China, England and Denmark. Now while I love seeing landmarks, history, and beautiful landscapes, what I love most is getting to know the people. My Denmark trip stands out because the librarians who brought me out, took me into their homes and I got to know them. I got to peek into the real lives of Danish people. I learned how they live, their passions, their way of life. I look forward to getting to know the people in New Zealand.

If you had to give budding romance writers one piece of advice, what would it be?

Three pieces of advice.

Never stop learning. I know writers who stop reading, stop studying how-to books, or stop attending conferences. We are in the entertainment business. It changes

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

so fast, that even if you just slow down on learning, you might get left behind.

Don't write in a vacuum. I've heard some people say, all you need to do is write, write, write. And that's good advice. But if you're the only one who reads your work before you send it out, you might not realize the mistakes you are making. Find people you trust to read your work and offer a critique. And don't give it to people who will love anything you write, you need honesty.

Never, ever give up. I have published 36 books and have sold four more and have a three-book Indie trilogy in the works. And I will tell you out front that I didn't accomplish what I have because I'm the best writer. I accomplished it because I never gave up, I kept writing, learning, and listened to people's honest evaluation of my work.

And five fun, quick, questions to end on...

If you could bring one fictional character to life, who would it be and why?

Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*. I would be scared shitless because I'm terrified of spiders. But that was the first chapter book I ever read. And there was something about her characterization that I fell in love with. I think all my characters have a little of Charlotte in them.

What is your favourite word (it can be a curse word)?

Okay, the southern gal in me is trying to get me to lie. But I will be honest. It's shit. It was my father's favorite word. And what can I say, I'm a daddy's girl.

What word would you like never to hear again?

Can't. I hate it when someone tells me or someone else they "can't" do something. It makes me want to prove them wrong.

What is your secret (or not so secret now) guilty pleasure?

Wine.

Sneakers, boots or high heels?

Sneakers.

Christie, thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

Thank you so much for interviewing me. And I look forward to seeing everyone.

Christie's romance fiction is widely acclaimed for combining witty humor and heart-felt emotions with a suspenseful, sexy tone. She currently hangs her hat in Texas and writes for Grand Central/Forever. Her backlist titles are available wherever e-books are sold. Check out her website at www.christie-craig.com and her blog at <http://christie-craig.com/blog/>.



Craig also writes the New York Times and USA Today best-selling young adult paranormal romance series, *Shadow Falls*, published by St. Martin's Press/Griffin under her pen name C.C. Hunter. You can learn more about C.C.'s books at her website, www.CCHunterBooks.com

In addition, Craig writes romance-flavored non-fiction with Faye Hughes, including *The Everything Guide To Writing A Romance Novel* and *Wild,*

Wicked and Wanton: 101 Ways to Love Like You Are in a Romance Novel, a humorous self-help relationship book. You can learn more about Christie's books with Faye at www.WritethUs.net

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Meet Your New H2H Editor: A Conversation With Megan Cameron

Gracie O'Neil



One of the things the Exec is trying to do is improve RWNZ's volunteer handover mechanisms. I'll be stepping down as Editor for *Heart to Heart* at the AGM so as to be more available to my mother and family. Megan Cameron will be stepping up.

However, it's never easy coming in cold to a new position, so for the next few months Megan and I are going to be working in tandem as she learns the ropes—and I learn to let go before she shoots me.

I know you're all going to get behind her and give her all the support and encouragement you can.

Now, as she's one of our new members, we're doing a quick "speed date" here so you can learn a bit about her.

So, Megan, let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

I was born three streets away from where I live now, actually. At Calvary Hospital, Christchurch.

Have you always lived in Christchurch?

For the most part. I did spend some years away but for now Christchurch is home.

Have the earthquakes been much of an issue?

Well, I don't think you can live here and not have some issues with earthquakes. In fact, I work with several displaced communities integrating and resettling them. As a part of that, I am currently overseeing some major rebuild projects in my day job, which is fantastic. Personally though, one of the reasons I am writing romance is that the quakes reminded me of the need to seize the day and live your dreams. And here we are.

If we were to have movie night at your place, what would be your first movie choice?

Amelie every time. It feels like a visual feast for me. Although if you dig a little deeper you'd find some speculative fiction and steampunk material lurking.

What about your book shelves?

You'd find a bit of spirituality, some art books. If you were after my favourite book though you couldn't go past *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee. I keep my romance close on my Kindle.

What's something interesting you do that fits into the "little odd" category?

Oh well, I have a little side gig as an actress.

Really? Who with?

That's the funny bit. I work with Addiction and Psychiatric services as an actress for their training program. Basically, I get to role play in assessments of medical practitioners in training. Aside from that, I guess some people would see my work as a Spiritual Director as odd.

What about the worst job you ever had?

Oh my that would hands-down be working in a fish and chip shop in Cathedral Square from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. The supervisor used to give you a ladle to attach to your apron so that if you were attacked you could splatter your attacker with hot oil. Before you ask ... never happened.

So what do you do in your spare time?

Well, you might have guessed I talk a lot! Also writing, reading, painting, teaching painting, hanging out with my honey, dreaming—oh, and contemplating chocolate.

What about romance? When did you read your first romance novel?

I was fourteen, we were on holiday, it was raining, I was ill, and in the bach where we were staying there were three books. The first was a Barbara Cartland novel where the heroine seemed positively tubercular with enormous eyes, translucent skin and; most mysteriously, a heart shaped face (I'm still trying to work that one out). The second was Vincent Bugliosi's exposition on the Manson family murders *Helter Skelter*. And the third was my mother's copy of Linda Goodman's *Love Signs*.

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

I was on imposed bed rest, and I was so bored I decided to open all three and see what happened when I moved between them, one paragraph at a time. It was—to say the least—disturbing, and I'm sure has deeply impacted my writing style to this day!

Yet there was something about each book that was intriguing. *Helter Skelter* revealed the horror of a humanity with no moral boundaries. The Barbara Cartland novel introduced me to the possibility of a happy ever after—and the knowledge that (with a heart shaped face) all things are possible. And in *Love Signs* I found my innate proclivity toward the dramatic was Mars's fault, not mine! In the end I fell in love with the romantic journey. It helped shape how I see the world.

How so?

In romance I found hope, and that hope helped me look at the slightly dusty everyday love that loiters within us and, I think, see it for what it really is ...epic!

This is where I get a little passionate. I mean, isn't it wonderful to be able to write about Hope Fulfilled and Hearts Meeting Hearts? There's a magazine title in that somewhere! To be able to speak into the thin places between heaven and earth where love breaks through, and one lost soul finds another, where people are broken and remade in a moment. That's great stuff.

So you became a member of RWNZ, and are about to become the editor of Heart to Heart. What do you need from our readers?

To keep contributing! Just keep sharing your passion, your knowledge, and your enthusiasm. And I guess to be gentle as I learn the ropes. Gracie has been fantastic, and I know will be a hard act to follow! Oh, and if you're so inclined, to put yourselves forward as article writers and interviewers. That way you never have to hear me interview myself again!

I look forward to getting to know you all, and—of course—meeting some of you at conference. Inspired to share? Feel free to contact me on MegHM@gmx.com

Until then, peace - Megan.

“Style means the right word. The rest matters little.”

— *Jules Renard*

“If a nation loses its storytellers, it loses its childhood.”

— *Peter Handke*

The Welcome Mat

We're rolling out the red carpet this month for another lovely group of new members. Welcome, ladies. It's great to have you as part of RWNZ!

Lori-Jay Ellis—Auckland

Catherine Hudson—Tauranga

Kelly Lyndon—Hibiscus Coast

Christopher Norman—Wellington

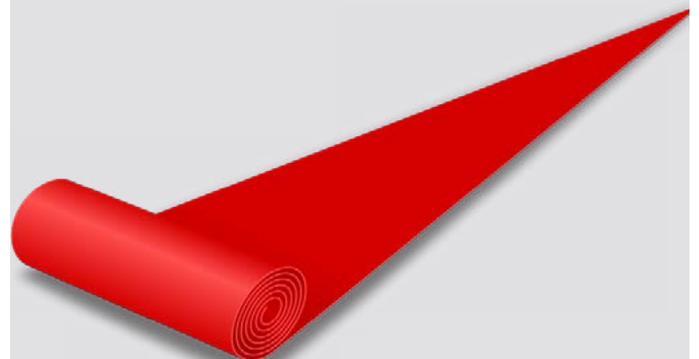
Jenni Sands—Auckland

It's lovely to have you with us, ladies.

You should already have your username and password for the RWNZ site. If not, give Gracie a shout at membership@romancewriters.co.nz and she'll sort you out.

Don't forget to read the INFORMATION FOR NEW MEMBERS page on our website: <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/membership/information-new-members/>

Of course, you'll need to login before you can access the members' area, but you'll find information there about how to join up with our Members Only Facebook page and the NZRomance Yahoo loop—along with a whole lot of other fun stuff.



Love For The Book Comes First: A Conversation With Elaine Spencer

Catherine Robertson



When you take on a new author, is how much you love their book the only criteria, or are you looking for other qualities?

Love for the book always comes first. We are living in an unpredictable market. These days, imprints and publishers can come and go as quickly as a trend.

I believe it is essential for a true love of the work (and the author!) to prevail to be able to champion the loudest for an author and to be able to overcome any other market noise or unforeseen circumstances that may happen along the way. While I don't want to sound a pessimist, I can assure you, at some point, there will be market noise and unplanned bumps in the road! For me as an agent, the projects I really love, I never stop thinking about them. Whenever I hear of a new opportunity my wheels start turning, I'm thinking "could I make X, Y, Z, fit there?". If an agent doesn't love the work, perhaps instead they simply love the income that a deal on the table brings along, or an author under contract, well, that perennial drive isn't going to shine through should the circumstances mandate it.

Now don't get me wrong—of course I look at other things that make up "the total package". Firstly, how well I communicate with an author, followed closely by, how well the author and my goals align? I also must ask the question "Can I sell this?", there may be a project that I really love but if I don't know how to place it, I should admit I also likely am not the best agent for the work. Likewise, I may love an author's voice but not totally believe in their concept. Or maybe a concept is well executed but it feels just a little too like something else dominating the market or my list. These are just a few of the things I take into consideration before adding a potential partner onto my list.

Do authors who are writing in the current 'hot' genre have an edge? Or is it all about the quality of the writing and storytelling?

I want to drop down and be a fairy godmother and say that quality of writing and storytelling trumps everything, but ... I would be lying if I said that genre doesn't matter. For the quality of writing and storytelling to win out, those factors must be out of this world exceptional. A one in a million project. Don't get me wrong, they exist, but for the mainstream author, good enough in a popular genre may

yield results faster than great in a tighter one. When you're writing in a down genre even with great writing you're going to have to work twice as hard to overcome critics and get buyers attention. You're going to have to convince people to take risks and find exactly the right champion to work with a project despite the odds.

There are Cinderella stories out there, but, this isn't the easy path, and it's definitely not a sure bet. I think sometimes those authors that are the loudest advocates for "writing what you love" can say it because they've got a contract and sales history backing them up. They fail to acknowledge that their story is the exception, not the norm. I think it's important for authors to remember this going in so that they have realistic expectations.

In this world of self-publishing successes, what's the advantage to an author of working with an agent? Would self-published authors also benefit?

Aye, this is an article and not a novel, right? So much to say. Obviously, as an agent I'm inclined to state my role as essential. But really, honestly, I think the best place to start with an answer is turning the question back around to the author and asking if an author wants to work with an agent in the first place? If not, there is little I can say to make my case, and we're lucky, in this market, I don't need to convince anyone. People can make the choice that is right for them. If you're asking though instead how to make that choice, I would suggest taking a hard look at your writing objectives and career goals. If you want a career that crosses into the traditional publishing space in any capacity its essential that you have a partner that has experience in that space.

Take a step back—when you're looking at selling a house do you work with an agent? Most people will say yes. Why? Agents know the ins and outs of the other buying agents. They know how to get the most traffic through the door. They manage all inquiring buying agents and streamline showings and organize open houses so that you can just sit back and keep living your life until a deal is closed. They know how to make a property seem more valuable. They know what clauses to look for in contracts and offers. They can leverage different buyers against each other. They may be able to drive the price up depending on the circumstances. They have no problem being the bad guy when inspections go wrong, or closings get delayed.

continued on page 7

continued from page 6

They help keep the emotion in check. They make it less personal. Now of course anyone can list a home “for sale by owner” but for the above-mentioned reasons, most people chose not to.

So, what about on the literary side? What do we do? It's quite similar in many capacities. There are the obvious business-driven responsibilities, a partner experienced in working with foreign publishers, audio publishers, well-versed in all contracts, experienced in auditing royalties and knowing when something looks amiss in statements. And then there are the more nuanced parts that come from years of experience inside the market—an insider track on new opportunities and emerging trends and networking and how to weather the long-haul. Additionally, unless an author is prepared to take on their writing career full-time (and then some), an agent helps in all the other areas of a career so that the author can focus on writing the best books possible. Any author that's self-publishing successfully will attest that it takes an army to pull it off.

There was a report recently that said author earnings were down—what's your view on that? Is it still possible to make a decent living from writing?

If you're writing simply to get rich you may want to look towards another career. It's a hard path. I don't know which report this is, there have been many. The thing is, it's all relative. Some people are making more. Some are making less. Some are making a little that wouldn't previously have made any. Some that used to make some are being cut out and making none. It's all dependent on the career. It is possible to make a decent living from writing, but just like every other career, it takes hard work and a good bit of luck. Ask any professional if they can make a decent living doing what they do? The answer is the same here – yes, but, it takes a lot of training, hours and skill.

What's been your proudest moment as an agent?

It's one I get to have over and over. I know it sounds cliché, and it's been said before – but the moment that an editor says, “I want to publish this book” – that One. Always. We're all book lovers. Knowing that I'm fundamentally responsible for putting an author and an editor together and badabingbadaboom having a book baby emerge. It's incredible. Holding a paper copy in hand and saying, “I helped make this happen” – its insanely rewarding. Walking into a bookstore and seeing other people looking at these books and seeking enjoyment. So incredible. Simple as that.

What are some of the most successful promotional tools for authors these days? Are blogs dead, for example?

The best promotional tools are whatever works for an author to drive readers towards their brand. That can still be blogging if the author has a viable way to create energy, excitement and a community within that blog.

Same things go with other social media – Facebook, Goodreads, Bookbub, Tumbler, Pinterest, Litsy, Instagram – any of these. It's not enough to just share content, you must get people to engage with that content. Whatever that mean is, that's the one that is the most successful. Promotional opportunities are also not a one-sized fits all space. What may work phenomenally well for one person will not automatically work for another unless the author has the capacity to drive the readers to it, and more essentially, to create an obligation in these readers to want to buy the book, to be a part of the total experience. Otherwise, if those followers aren't translating to sales, all that time wasted is for nothing.

Is it ever possible to predict “the next big thing”?

I don't think so. By the time people are predicting it's probably because a couple of smart buys have already been made and announced that are driving attention in that direction. Now, having said that, let's be smart and realize there are millions of readers and bloggers and industry insiders out there attempting to predict “the next best thing” – someone is going to get it right. Is it because they had a crystal ball or because they got lucky? I prefer not to answer that as it may make me look overly pessimistic .

Now that I've put that out there let me generate my own personal prediction. One thing that I think will be new is a boost in romantic suspense that is carrying over from the general market trend of the unreliable narrator. We haven't seen that done much yet, and I think it fits. We're also going to see a lot more light-hearted crossover books into the commercial space as publishers try to figure out how to pull their romance titles into the general market shelf real estate.

You started your career as an Economist! How has that background helped with your role as an agent?

Right brain, left brain. I think I'm unique in that while I love reading, I really love the business aspects. I love tracking sales. Researching editors. Evaluating and negotiating contracts. I also love teaching. I love getting up and explaining things.

Apart from speaking to us, what else are you looking forward to at this year's #Love Romance Writers NZ Conference?

Whenever we get the opportunity to travel to a new part of the globe its fascinating to get to learn about this whole other culture via their submissions. People write what they know. I'm looking forward to learning more about the NZ at large. I'm a sponge. I don't know what I should be looking forward to. I invite your attendees to tell me what I should be looking forward to. What are the things I must do and experience in my time with you?

If you had to give budding romance writers one piece of

continued on page 8

continued from page 7
advice, what would it be?

To be a writer you need to first be a reader. I think authors do themselves such a disservice by not having eyes wide open on the space they're writing in. If you're writing young adult. You better be able to tell me about that market and I don't just mean the series that have been sitting on the best seller lists for years and years. You need to tell me a half dozen books you've read in the last year that make me say "I'm going to go look that one up" because you've sold me on your passion for it. You need to know what is selling in your market. In romance when I ask for a comp title, even if there isn't one, I want to get a sense that you've been reading what IS out there and why that is NOT a comp for your book. I am stunned at how often authors sit down and pitch me projects that are overwhelmingly dated and don't acknowledge this. It's OK if you're writing in a smaller space but as a business professional I want to see an acknowledgement of this and why you think you can overcome it. Let me clarify, I'm not asking an author to do my job, but, I do need to get the sense that they're looking at their writing careers as professionals and have a sense of how they could fit into the market. So, this is the one thing – knowing how you could fit into the market if you achieved your writing goals.

And five fun, quick, questions to end on...

If you could bring one fictional character to life, who would it be and why?

Peppa the Pig so all of my daughter's dreams would come true and mommy might finally get a break from reading about those dang muddy puddles in her off hours.

What is your favourite word (it can be a curse word)?

Coffee.
Wine.
Chocolate.

What word would you like never to hear again?

I don't have one.

What is your secret (or not so secret now) guilty pleasure?

Coffee. Wine. Chocolate. Not necessarily in that order. Do you see a trend emerging?

Sneakers, boots or high heels?

Umm, how about Flats or Flip flops? I am an avid runner so to me sneakers signify working out and that's rarely fun (even if you enjoy it!). Boots signify winter or rain, and no one wants that. High Heels, well, I'm a heel wearer, but, only for special occasions or business as I believe heels convey confidence and that's always great,

right? But really, on the daily I'm a flats or flip flop kind of girl. Flip flops signal warm weather and comfort. And flats keep me from towering over my husband who is otherwise the same height as me.

A Guide To Tax Affairs

Do you consider your writing to be a hobby, something you do in your spare time for enjoyment, or are you in business, carrying on your writing activities in a business-like manner with the intention to make a profit? If it is the latter, then you need to get serious about your record keeping and get your tax affairs in order.

The tax year in New Zealand runs from 1 April to 31 March. If you have a tax agent, who is registered with Inland Revenue, preparing your income tax return they will have an extension of time in which to file. Otherwise your IR3 (assuming you are a sole trader) needs to be lodged with Inland Revenue by 7 July. The profit or loss from your writing business is calculated on an accrual basis, that is, making allowance for amounts owed to you but not yet received and amounts owed by you but not yet paid. The net profit is added to or net loss is deducted from your income from other sources and your tax obligation calculated.

If you are tax resident in New Zealand, then you are taxed on your worldwide income. So that foreign bank account, your royalties are being paid into, needs to be taken into account in determining your taxable income.

You should ensure you are maximising your claim for expenses and thereby minimising the amount of tax you have to pay. You will be allowed a 100% deduction for expenses directly related to your writing—for example: stationery, printing, website hosting fees, conference and proof reading fees; and a proportional deduction where the expenditure has both a business and private or capital element.

If you have a writing space at home, then you can claim the expenses that relate to the area used for business. Work out the percentage of the work area, compared to the total floor area of the house. Then apply this percentage to the total house expenses, such as the rates, insurance, power and mortgage interest, or rent if you are renting. You do not have to have an area specifically set aside for the business but if there isn't a separate area for the business the apportionment will need to take into account criteria such as the amount of time spent on income-earning activities and the area used at home.

However, if you prefer to sit in your favourite chair at the local café, tapping away on your I-pad, your coffees and muffins will not be tax deductible unless you are meeting up with your agent, publisher, mentor or critique partner. Then it can be considered entertainment and you will be

continued on page 9

continued from page 8
entitled to a 50% deduction.

If you use your motor vehicle for business, then you should keep a log book for three months to determine the percentage of actual motor vehicle running costs you are entitled to claim. If you do not keep a log book you are limited to a maximum claim of 25% of actual expenses. You must retain invoices to prove the amount of fuel, registration, RUC, tyres, insurance etc. The percentage is also applied to the claim for depreciation, that is the percentage of the cost price of the vehicle you are entitled to claim each year.

Where no proof of actual motor vehicles expenses is retained, you can keep a log book for the whole year and make a claim based on the mileage rate which for the 2017 income year is 73 cents per km for a petrol or diesel vehicle. The mileage rate can only be used for a maximum of 5,000 kilometres per annum.

The deduction for your home telephone is limited to a maximum 50% of the rental and any business tolls. An apportionment will also need to be made where your mobile phone and internet are used for both business and private purposes.

When it comes time for a new computer, if it costs more than \$500 then it will capitalised as an asset and you will only get a deduction for depreciation at the rate specified by Inland Revenue for the number of months you've owned the computer in the income year. The same applies if you are constructing a website to market yourself and your books. If the cost of building the website is more than \$500 then it will be capitalised and depreciated. Once built, the cost of updating and maintaining the website will be tax deductible.

If you are travelling to conference, then the travel costs are tax deductible but if you decide to stay on for a few days and have a look around then you will need to apportion the costs between business and private. It is best to keep a diary of where you went and what you did.

You may consider visiting a location or trying out some activity in the name of research to make your writing more authentic. Again, if that is your sole purpose, the costs will be tax deductible but if there is a private element then you will need to make an apportionment.

The records that you obtain to justify the deduction of any of the above expenses must be retained for seven years. It will be easier to keep track of everything if you have a separate business account into which all income is deposited and expenses paid from. Your record keeping doesn't have to be computerised but there are many online packages available to help you get your tax affairs sorted.

Tania Roberts is RWNZ's Treasurer and also an accountant. However, the above is intended as a general discussion only and you should seek advice from your tax adviser as to how the various rules, which are subject to change, apply to your specific circumstances.

Woos & Hoos



Kris Pearson has made her second set of Wellington novels available in a box set. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B072NHV13>

Kendra Delugar released her debut novel, *Under The Stars*, on 4th June. Congratulations Kendra! Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B071JL-7W9N>



Ada Maria Soto has released *His Quiet Agent*. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B072PWDT89>



J C Harroway's new release *Devoted*, from Escape Publishing goes on sale 4th July. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B071HL2BNQ>



Samantha Charlton (w/a Jayne Castel) has published *BLOOD FEUD*. The novel is Book #1 in her new Scottish Historical Romance series set in Dark Ages Isle of Skye. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0722N3VVD>



Louisa George's first indie published book in the *Something Borrowed* series has won the Mainstream/Single title category of the HOLT Medallion contest. Yay, Louisa!



And the second book in Louisa's *Something Borrowed* series, *Something About You* is now available on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0721BVXSF>

Rock Stars & Dive Bars: A Conversation With Kylie Scott

Toni Kenyon



RWNZ rockstar romance author, Toni Kenyon is having a 'fangirl' moment. She's talking to New York Times and USA Today bestselling author, Kylie Scott ahead of Kylie's visit to New Zealand to attend RWNZ's 2017 Conference, #Love.

[Toni taps microphone to make sure that the recording equipment is working. Sits on shaking hands and takes another look at the creased paper in her lap. Discovers that sweaty palms have made the ink from her lucky Artline 200 pen smear. Takes off glasses and tries to read her spider scrawl. Swallows hard and wonders if she should have let someone with more experience volunteer for this job. Decides it's too late for that, and dives into the interview.]

So, Kylie you've agreed to Hop-the-Ditch and come and share your knowledge with us in Rotorua. How about five fun questions to warm us up :-) and calm my trembling nerves? *If you could bring one fictional character to life, who would it be and why?*

Ooh, that's tough. I think I'd like to try matching wits with Mister Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*. Daresay I'd lose, but it would be fun to try.

What is your favourite word? (It can be a curse word.)

Brouhaha or fuck. It changes depending on the day.

What word would you like never to hear again?

I'm going to have to go with moist. Let's say no more.

What is your secret (or not so secret now) guilty pleasure?

Ben and Jerry's Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Ice-cream or Ciroc Vodka. They both make me happy.

Sneakers, boots or high heels?

Boots, though I don't get to wear them enough in South East Queensland.

Okay, now I think I can stop behaving like a groupie meeting their rockstar idol for the first time and think straight. You've written a spectacularly successful series about rockstars. If you're a rockstar romance lover, you'd have to be living under a rock (LOL) not to have heard of the Stage Dive series. What is it that you love about musicians?

Music is awesome. I grew up taping songs off the radio and watching Count Down and other music video shows. And I spent some time working in a guitar shop during high school and got to hang out with musicians. It was a lot of fun. My own guitar skills are pretty mediocre, but I still love going to concerts and finding new music to listen to while writing. When I needed a break from the *Flesh* series, it just seemed obvious to write about a rock band.

I have heard it mentioned that Queensland is the Vegas of Australia. Did you ever think about setting the series in Australia?

I needed a quickie wedding so Vegas won out.

Karina Bliss and I were chatting the other day about Mal (in Lick). How he explodes onto the page and likes to hog the limelight. It's a question that every author hates, but who is your favourite band member and why?

I enjoy writing Mal, but Jimmy is my favourite. He's such a big, difficult, loveable jerk. Lena always comes first for him. I find that swoon worthy.

Now you've moved on to the Dive Bar series. I have to admit that I didn't even know what a Dive Bar was until I looked it up on the internet. Can you explain the concept for our readers who may be as clueless as me?

I got taken to a Dive Bar in Portland and fell in love with the idea. They're basically your local bar, dark, relaxed, and great for hanging out with friends in.

I know your inspiration for the band was Kings of Leon. What has been your inspiration for the Dive Bar series?

I worked as a bartender for a while when I was traveling in Europe in my early 20's. It makes for a fascinating study in human nature, seeing people after a few drinks. Plus, I was ready to take a break from the millionaires for a little while.

continued on page 11

continued from page 10

It's great that your fans can see a glimpse of the Stage Dive characters in the Dive Bar series. What was your motivation for including them in the new series?

I was finished writing books about the band, but I still wanted to play with the characters and visit with them now and then. Since the Dive Bar is based in their home town, it seemed likely they'd all gone to school together and still had family in the area.

What are your writing plans for the future?

My first YA and Indie release is out 18th July, and I'm currently working on the third and final book in the Dive Bar series, *Chaser*. After that, I'm going to see what story idea is speaking to me the loudest.

Are you planning on visiting any other places while you're here in New Zealand?

We're taking the kids to Queenstown. They've never seen snow before!

Lastly, where's your favourite place to hang out on the internet?

I love internet shopping a little too much and social media is always a distraction. It's great how we can have friends around the world we've never even met. But everyone is brought together by the shared love of romance.

Thanks so much, Kylie for your time today and for dealing so graciously with a nervous interviewer. We're all looking forward to seeing you in RotoVegas! (haha! a little New Zealand in-joke) in August.

Thank you very much, Toni! Can't wait to see some of New Zealand and get to meet you all at conference.

You can find Kylie at <http://www.kyliescott.com/> and Toni at <http://www.tonikenyon.com/>

From The President

Winter is well and truly upon us. I like the cold weather as I can wrap up warm and write! Plus it means that the Rotorua conference is not far away. I'm really excited. I'll be catching up with writing friends, my editor Sue Grimshaw, and hopefully making new friends.

But I'm really, really looking forward to Kristen Lamb's workshop. I'll be the first to admit that when Gudrun (Wellington conference committee) first told me they had Kristen Lamb signed up for the Friday workshop my first response was 'who?' But I've read more about Kristen since then, and anyone who can help me build my author brand will find me willing to listen. Because to sell well, an author has to build readers. How can I build readers if I don't understand what it is I have to offer them? What is

my brand?

The romance market is crowded now, and new authors are finding it tough to break through. Price is no longer a differentiator. There are literally hundreds of free or cheap books, and Amazon's Kindle Unlimited is also pretty crowded. How do you get seen? (Read Elaine Spencer's article in this month's magazine for her view on author brands.)

How do you engage readers so that they buy any book you release? Nalini Singh is an author who has a huge fan base (and congratulations to Nalini on hitting NY Times for *Silver Silence*). She works hard at keeping her readers happy by writing amazing books. But what else does she do? When you see her at conference ask!

An author's brand is more than a logo. It's the story promise. It's what a reader knows they will get when they buy your book. It's how you interact with readers through social media. It's your use of pricing and it's your publishing schedule—meaning how often do you need to publish to keep you top of mind. Most of all it's about writing a bloody great story. Brand is key to who you are as an author.

What do you need for a successful brand? I'm hoping Kristen Lamb can help me with that question. Here's my take on branding ... and I'm eager to learn more from Kristen Lamb the expert.

1. **Audience Knowledge**—The best brands have a thorough understanding of the demographics of their target market, what their interests are, and how they communicate. I write Regency historical romance, I have to understand how my readers buy (test print and eBook), how they relate to me the author, and what they want from any relationship, if anything.
2. **Uniqueness**—Establishing a brand identity requires something distinctive. What story promise are you giving your readers? I'm from NZ and that gives me a point of difference. How can I use that?
3. **Passion**—You have to be passionate about every new book and show it. Be proud of each new release and try and generate buzz with covers, quotes, reviews etc.
4. **Consistency**—Every book has to be the best you can write. A no-brainer, especially if it's the start of a new series.
5. **Competitiveness**—What's your price point compared to other authors? What price point do your readers accept? How do your stories differ from other authors?
6. **Exposure**—How do you reach your audience? Free books? Promotions like Bookbub? I'm hoping Kristen can share her knowledge here. There are more tools than ever before offering any author a chance at establishing their brand—regardless of the fact we live in NZ.
7. **Leadership**—You have to have a strategic vision for your writing career. Make a plan and implement it. Obviously you can change it as you learn.

continued on page 12

continued from page 11

It means trying different ideas and refining. Think long term. This is a long term business.

If there is one thing you attend at this year's conference, I hope it's Kristen Lamb's workshop. Never has it been so important to understand author branding and how you can build yours.

See you there.

Brownen Evans



RWNZ President



“When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, ‘I am going to produce a work of art.’ I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.”

— George Orwell



We're so excited about this Conference—it's shaping up to be a cracker. Our speakers all say they're looking forward to meeting you all, and sharing their experience, knowledge and hot tips about all aspects of writing and publishing.

Latest things to note:

Raffles: Megan Herles-Mooar is our raffles queen. If you'd like to donate an item or a whole raffle, email her on: MegHM@gmx.com

Goody Bags: Everyone who's registered for Conference can put promotional items in our goody bags. All light items welcome, or one book, if that's what you'd like to include.

No later than August 9th SEND enough items to fit 120 bags (or however many you can) to:

Catherine Robertson, 35 Boardwalk Lane, Seatoun, Wellington 6022

Or DELIVER them to the Lakeside Novotel **by lunch-time on Thursday 17th August**—we'll be stuffing bags that afternoon.

Cocktail party: our theme is #LiveYourDreams. Come as the favourite character in your own books, a fantasy figure, your dream lover, king or queen of the book world—whatever you can dream up.

Awards dinner: our theme is Some Enchanted Evening. Interpret this in whatever enchanting way you like!

FAQs:

“Do I have to dress up for the Cocktail Party and Awards dinner?” Absolutely not. You can enjoy other people's costumes.

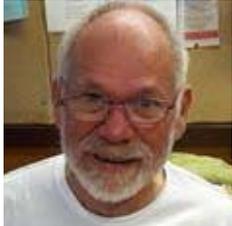
“Can I still register?” Of course—registrations don't close until August 10th.

continued on page 13

continued from page 12

"Is Conference perfume-free?" Yes, it is, and we ask all members to respect that. It can be absolute hell if you're perfume sensitive.

"I've never been to Conference before. What should I expect?" There's a section on our website just for first timers. Check it out here: www.romancewriters.co.nz/events/first-time-confererees



We're talking to a few people about their experiences at their first conference. Grant Bayley has this to say.

I'm a newbie writer. Was editor of a local group plant magazine (made up of "oldies"). Writing started with a play, now working on several books ... hmmm ... but nothing finished/published yet. I'm a graphic designer and my main push is to have an art exhibition of some 'music based art' later this year or early next. At present my writing is slow but moving forward.

What is it that made the trip to last year's conference worthwhile?

The value of attending the conference helped put my writing in perspective ... so reassurance and perspective. Discussion with "complete strangers" who became friends over the conference time. Everyone was so welcoming, or inclusive in their conversations. The speakers were fantastic / bloody excellent—Kathryn Burnett, Michael Hauge, and the list goes on. Brilliant.

What other specific benefits did you get out of attending?

The party time was good fun. There are people who I am able to contact. Networking, Facebook page etc. Connect with writers who write in your genre... wow. My writing is LGBTQ.

I think you said you were coming again this year. What are you looking forward to?

What I'm looking forward to is the 'workshops, the cold reads, new faces and familiar, and the atmosphere. Being in Rotorua will be excellent.

Do you attend other writing conferences? How does the RWNZ one compare?

I belong to the C2C group. This feels like a pretty amazing group with a wealth of knowledge and experience. At present to attend more than I do would be a huge stretch.

Thanks for talking to us, Grant! We're looking forward to seeing you at Rotorua.



Bob and Shelagh were Conference Newbies in 2016. Would you mind telling us a bit about yourselves, and your writing and life, work, etc.



Bob is medically retired after thirty-seven years working as an intensive care ambulance paramedic. The latter part of his career in ambulance management involved a lot of business writing, which he enjoyed.

I've done all sort of things over the years, and writing of one sort or another has been a feature of my working life. After uni, I was lucky enough to get a job at Channel Seven in Sydney, where I worked as the teletext editor. In essence, I was it as far as editorial and graphic content. It was a wonderful experience and one I still look back on fondly.

Between then and my retirement last year I've written training programs for sales and marketing staff, policies and procedures, lots of news articles, council reports, grant submissions and adult road safety education programs. I've always loved the research that goes with writing—finding out new things has been a passion for as long as I can remember.

Since retiring we've moved to a home we built in the middle of a chestnut orchard just south of Beechworth in north east Victoria. We have glorious views in all directions and a house which is comfortable and welcoming. We share our home with three dogs and twelve alpacas and count our blessings every day.

If you are writing, what are you working on, anything published yet?

When Bob retired he decided to try his hand at writing fiction, something he has found he enjoys. He's written several unpublished stories, which haven't proven to be a good learning tool and has recently created a fictional story world in which he is setting a number of stories, spanning around 1000 years in time. The location, in the fictitious town of Beechwood in Norfolk, will tie them all together. Bob has now completed the first draft of his first novelette for that story world and is now editing it and plans to self-publish.

I stopped working at the end of June 2016 as I have scoliosis and severe osteoarthritis. I read and review other people's stories for pleasure, and have beta read a couple of stories as well. I confess to being more of a reader than a writer, though I do love to write.

continued on page 14

continued from page 13

Thus far I've dabbled in an Australian rural historical, which I will probably finish one of these days. I've also written a couple of very short stories, one for the RWAus *Little Gems* competition and another for the RWNZ Chapter Story competition. Both were fun to write, and the feedback I've had so far has been invaluable. I've now moved on to deconstructing the first story and will rebuild it into a novella. My children's story is also coming along slowly in the background.

Do you and Bob come all the way from Aussie to the conference? What is it that made the trip worthwhile?

Yes, we sure do. We both love New Zealand—both its people and its glorious countryside. I went to high school in Auckland and have very happy memories of my time there, and we holidayed in Rotorua a year or so ago and loved that. Meeting new people and having the chance to try things we'd never tried before was particularly appealing.

We loved the participatory regency dance workshop and still perform the Comical Fellow fairly often, to the amusement of our dogs. Other memorable workshops included Deborah Challinor's presentation, the swords workshop with Matthew Mole and Lizzie Tremayne, and Keri Arthur's presentation.

I know you said it was a particular speaker that first attracted you. What other specific things did you get out of attending?

First and foremost, we came away with a wealth of knowledge as well as having made some new friends with shared interests. We were a little nervous as we walked into the Friday night cocktail party, not really knowing anybody by sight, but it wasn't long before we felt like we were part of the crowd. Everyone was inclusive and welcoming.

We hadn't booked into the Friday workshop last year because we were already booked into the same workshop at RWAus, but we enjoyed Michael Hague's presentations over the weekend and got so much out of them. Being able to chat with him one on one throughout the weekend was pretty special.

Finally, there was the gala dinner—a great opportunity to meet other authors, but the thing I remember most was when Barb de Leo did the E Tu (not sure of the spelling) at the end. As one person after another stood up, I swore to myself that I would be one of that number this year.

I think you said you were coming again this year—what are you looking forward to?

Bob says he's looking forward to seeing possums. I'll settle for possum socks. Seriously though, we're both thrilled that the conference is being held at Rotorua, having holidayed there previously. We're looking forward to catching up with friends from last year and people we've

got to know through the RWNZ Facebook group. Kristen Lamb's Friday workshop looks incredible and is a big drawcard for us, but there are also plenty of workshops over the weekend that look appealing.

Do you attend other writing conferences? How does the RWNZ one compare?

We attended RWAus last year and we're going again this year. It's obviously larger with between 300 and 400 delegates attending, so RWNZ is more intimate and personal, which we love. As far as content goes, we found plenty to appeal to us at both conferences last year and the same goes for this year. There is very little crossover with the workshops and for beginner writers all knowledge is good knowledge.

Thanks for talking about your conference experiences, Bob and Shelagh!

The Bookshelf



Leveraging Free

Kelly Caldwell

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B073C5C68N>

This book contains one marketing tool that independent authors simply cannot afford to ignore: the FREE and LOW-COST sales model.



Get Your Book Selling

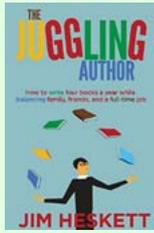
Monica Leonelle

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0723CX5MR>

Amazon Review: "I'm so glad to have this book in my hands! It's jam-packed with information on how to get your book selling, all of which is strategy-based rather than tactic-based so it won't go out of date. I know I'm going to have to read this a few more times to take it all in, but I've already picked up a bunch of useful tips."

continued on page 15

continued from page 14



The Juggling Author

Jim Heskett

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B071CX5WH1>

Amazon Review: “This book introduces techniques that will help you tear through the first rough draft, and finally start publishing more books. No matter who you are or what kind of crazy schedule you have, you CAN become a successful writer. Jim’s tips will help.” —Derek Murphy, bestselling fiction and non-fiction author and owner of creativindie.com



So You Want To Be A Paranormal Romance Writer

W. C. Green

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07374T2DP>

Fifteen successful paranormal romance authors- many of whom have been on the USA Today Best-Sellers and New York Times Best-Sellers lists— tackle forty questions authors face during their career. Their answers will help guide and influence your decisions regarding writing, editing, marketing, covers, and other areas pertaining to writing and running your own publishing **business!**

“When writing a novel a writer should create living people; people, not characters. A character is a caricature.”

— Ernest Hemingway

Love Unites Us All: A Conversation With Jessica Watterson

Wilma McKay



USA-based literary agent Jessica Watterson of the Sandra Dijkstra Agency tells Heart to Heart Love unites us all—a love of books that is! And Jessica says she can't wait for her first visit to New Zealand to speak at this year's Romance Writers of NZ

Conference.

To start with, would you mind providing us with some basic background about yourself, please?

I grew up in the high desert of California, and have been a lifelong booklover, starting with the first time my mom read me *Island of the Blue Dolphins* when I was in the first grade. I attended University of California of Irvine for college, and while in college I was an indie blogger, and I reviewed several authors on the cusp on NYT Bestseller Lists. I joined SDLA in 2013, and started the jump into true agenting in 2014 with my first two sales.

Why the Romance genre for you? What thrills you about your role? What keeps you interested?

I love romance because I'm an insanely practical person in real life, but definitely lean towards a dreamer in my imagination. I love the idea that there are happily ever afters, and it's always about the journey of a story for me, not necessarily the ending. Which I guess is really what excites me about my role in helping a book on its path to publication. I like the thrill of the sale also, so that never hurts!

What do you hope for when you open a submitted manuscript?

Stellar writing, a unique premise, and of course a story that makes me feel.

What do you read in your spare time?

Currently my TBR is filled to the brim with Young Adult. I actually have the new Sarah J. Maas waiting for me on my bedside table, and one of my lovely editor friends at TOR sent me some new contemporary YAs and an adult thriller to dig into when I find magic spare time.

continued on page 16

continued from page 15

If you had to give budding romance writers advice, what would it be?

Make sure the story you're writing is fulfilling you. It's very easy to churn out things in order to fill a deadline, but so many people lose their love of writing when that happens. BUT, at the same time you need to be realistic with that beautiful story and the changes you'll inevitably have to make to it. You need to find the balance of nurturing your passion while remaining realistic to the challenges of the industry.

In terms of writing style, describe your ideal romance writer.

So, if anyone has followed me on Twitter, you will herd me wax poetic of my love for Kristen Ashley. I found her books at a time when I was just burned-out of reading, and her voice just sucks me right in. She's very colloquial in some of her books, which doesn't work for everyone, but she has SO much heart behind those words, I immediately relate to her work.

As far as a working with a writer, someone who I love working with is willing to listen to feedback, but also tells me their hard lines of what they won't give up. There has to be give and take in an agent and author relationship, and contrary to popular belief, I am not a psychic, so I don't know what's going on in my author's brain while they're crafting a story, or while they are reading edit notes. So, not only does a writer have to be willing to edit their work, they have to be willing to communicate issues/things they love about that work.

So, relatable, willing to edit, and communicative. I'm not asking for too much, right? :)

Do you believe writing gatherings, like conferences, are beneficial to authors and others in the industry and why?

Yes, 100%. Panels can be greatly informative, especially for individuals new to the community. Meeting other writers and making connections is wonderful. Writing is SO solitary, and I've seen conference friendships that are many years old, where these authors read each other's work, they help one another, they form their own mini-community within a bigger community. And finally, it is a great place to make industry connections. Many people don't realize we're human, and even if you don't have something to pitch, we generally LOVE talking about books. J It's the common thread that unites us all.

Apart from your speaking engagement, is there anything you'll be hoping to achieve at this year's #Love Romance Writers NZ Conference?

I've never been to New Zealand, so I am just really looking forward to meeting writers I've never met before!

Now for some fun questions: If you could bring one fictional character to life, who would it be and why?

Oh man, Nancy Drew all the way. How fun would it be to go solve a mystery with her?

What is your favourite word (it can be a curse word)?

Fuck—many people can attest to this.

What word would you like never to hear again?

I don't know that I have one, I'm not super weird about words.

What is your secret (or not so secret now) guilty pleasure?

Oh judge me please, it's *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. (hangs head in shame).

Sneakers, boots or high heels?

Boots, for sure!

Thanks for chatting with us Jessica and we look forward to seeing you at Rotorua at #Love Romance.



Annika Ohlson-Smith (left), convenor of the Nelson Chapter of RWNZ, with paranormal romance author Nalini Singh at an event at the Elma Turner library in Nelson. For more details, see the Regional Round-Up reports in this edition.

“Every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works.”

— Virginia Woolf

Creating Kick-Butt Heroines: Part One

Brynn Kelly



When I look at my fictional childhood heroes, it's no wonder I ended up writing romantic suspense. Princess Leia, Wonder Woman, Nancy Drew, Matilda, even Anne Shirley... Reading and watching smart and tough women and girls wielding their particular brands of kickass

empowered me, which is saying something considering I was a shy freckled redhead with glasses.

The single best thing about writing romantic suspense is that now I get to write kickass heroines. And by kickass, I don't mean she must have a black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu (though that'd be cool). But this is a subgenre that invites you to push the boundaries in creating fascinating strong and flawed larger-than-life women.

Give her a unique superpower.

Gone are the days when romantic suspense was about helpless female victims being saved by alpha males. Readers in this genre love strong and clever women, so let your imagination run. Whether she's a boxer, an anthropologist, a soldier or a florist, whether she's a hero, an underdog, an average Jo or an antihero, give her one kickass set of skills that sets her apart. Maybe she's an expert in animal behaviour, a human lie detector, an explosives expert, or maybe she simply never gives up. Sure, she can also be the victim or intended victim of a crime but she needs a unique strength that will come in handy in the story. Just don't make her awesome at everything because that's dull and unbelievable.

Give her a big weakness.

Superpowers are boring unless they come with super flaws. For all her strength, she should have an equally powerful vulnerability or secret that threatens to screw up everything until she faces it and deals with it. Think about an emotional wound derived from a past trauma or mistake that in some way controls her—a hole in the soul that gives her a blind spot. It could be a mistaken belief about herself, an obsession that leaves her blinded, a deep fear, a selfishness... It could have physical and emotional properties.

Let's say she's claustrophobic and guilt ridden after being trapped in an overturned car as a teenage driver,

with her dead best friend next to her, and she's refused to seek help because she believes she deserves the pain. Maybe the villain is aware of this and preys on it, making him or her an emotional threat as well as a physical one. You can demonstrate this flaw by giving the heroine an early failure in the plot, then develop it into a time bomb, leading to a near-disaster in the climactic scene that drives her to her limits, physically, mentally and emotionally. Establish a breaking point and push her toward it. Until she overcomes this vulnerability, she can't overpower the villain or earn her HEA.

Give her a strong GMC.

Often in a romantic suspense, one of the two main characters owns the initial goal of the story. Perhaps the hero's son has been kidnapped, and the heroine is a detective investigating the case. Regardless of who kicks off the story, both main characters must have a strong GMC, and it must be personal, not just professional.

(That's Goal, Motivation, Conflict, in case you're not familiar. Goal: the character must desperately want something. Motivation: she needs a strong, primal reason to want it. Conflict: there must be powerful external and internal obstacles in the way.)

In our scenario above, the hero's goal and motivation is clear—he wants his son back. The heroine's goal is the same, but her motivation can't simply be "because it's her job". Maybe her job is at risk, or her little brother disappeared in a similar way when she was a child, or the kidnapped boy is her daughter's best friend.

In a romantic suspense, the key outer conflict is provided by a villain, but the inner conflict must be something that stems from the heroine and hero's flaws, as above. I also like to jot down a romance GMC for both hero and heroine. Maybe his romantic goal is to stay single because he doesn't want to risk his son's heart getting broken by another relationship disaster but he becomes attracted to the heroine, etc. So I usually end up with four GMCs, and every scene must complicate one (or preferably more) of these struggles.

Make her relatable.

Empathy is vital in any romance, but particularly in suspense because the characters and situations can be far removed from a reader's field of experience. Readers must bond with the heroine so they'll care so much about

continued on page 18

continued from page 17

about what happens to her that they won't want to put the book down. Giving her a meaty flaw and powerful motivations, as above, are a good start but there are other tricks that will bond the reader with your heroine.

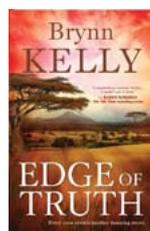
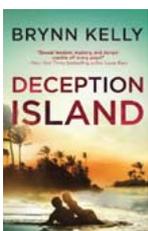
Your single best tool is deep POV, where you write as if you're occupying the POV character's body and mind and soul, experiencing everything from her perspective. Think sensory detail, and ditch the distant narrator. As well as a big overall vulnerability, give her little weaknesses and quirks that make her human. Give her a sense of humour—but be wary of making her snarky to the point of cruelty. Give her admirable, specific and solidly rooted values and virtues and a moral code—a line she will absolutely not cross in pursuit of her goal (and then force her to cross it). Make her passionate about something—classical music, protecting ancient manuscripts, helping struggling kids with maths. Make her clever and resourceful. Throw her into trouble, make her a deserving underdog, make her the victim of an injustice or misconception. Make her fail, again and again, in the pursuit of her goal.

Stakes and more stakes.

What does your heroine stand to gain and lose in this story? These are the stakes, and they must be powerful and personal, with disastrous consequences for failure. The story should begin with something huge at stake, and the stakes should get progressively bigger until they consume everything your heroine cares about. In romantic suspense the stakes are dramatic. They might start as the fear of losing a job or home or money and of being disappointed in love, and progress through the fear of seeing an injustice go unpunished, through to the fear of incarceration, of harm (to herself or a loved one), of poverty, of heartbreak (as she finds herself falling in love), of death, of world destruction. Back her into a corner, add a ticking clock, make it impossible for her to return to normal life unless she fixes this. Meanwhile, intensify her personal wound through added complications, fears and failures. The suspense and the romance should hurtle together toward disaster.

NEXT MONTH IN HEART TO HEART: complications, heroes, character transformation and common mistakes

Keen for more romantic suspense tips? Award-winning HQN author Brynn Kelly is presenting a workshop called Keeping Them in Suspense at the RWNZ conference in August, with her editor, Allison Carroll, and Rita-nominated suspense and historical writer Frances Housden.



Writing The Contemporary Romance Heroine

Kris Pearson



Above all, make her interesting and memorable. The romance world already has enough high-heeled secretaries pining for their bosses, and nurses gazing hopefully after doctors (and I'm sure you can supply lots of other predictable and

overdone examples.)

I like heroines who have a job that's somewhat out of the ordinary. My last one was an industrial designer—and although my current one is a lawyer, she'd far rather be running a café. She starts the book by making curry.

It's imperative she's someone you like. Someone who fascinates you. You're going to be spending months with her, after all. If she's not good company for you, why bother, because she won't be good company for anyone else either. She might be an alien princess or a lesbian astronomer or a governess for a grand eighteenth century family or the hottest rock chick who ever lived, but you need to enjoy being with her and bringing her story to your readers.

Give her a big secret, and the ticking time-bomb will really help perk the story up. By this, I mean give her a secret to hide from the hero. The sense of inevitable disclosure will carry your readers through until the awful event finally happens. Will he find out about the baby? Is it his? Why does she have all that money? Did she embezzle it?

OK, those are pretty obvious examples, but I'm sure you can invent some great ones. Make her angst-ridden about something a lot more important than having no date for Saturday's party. Goodness, I hate girls who worry endlessly about what to wear and how to do their hair and what their friends will think of them. It's the fastest route to deleting them from my Kindle.

Make her strong and capable, because who wants a wimp? But give her enough vulnerability that revealing her secret will blow her world apart. She can be tough and feisty if she's protecting someone else, but be careful not to go so far that she comes across as hard and heartless. Your heroine needs to have some inner softness for the hero to excavate his way towards.

continued on page 19

continued from page 18

Don't make her too perfect. A quirky hobby, an irregularity or eccentricity in her appearance, or a shattering life event she's lived through will all help to make her a more rounded human being and easier to relate to.

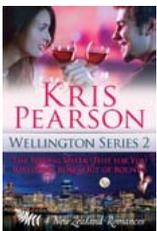
What in her past has shaped her into the woman she now is? This needn't be the big secret, but an only child who grew up with two quiet grandparents who are keen gardeners is going to be totally different from a girl with four brothers who dragged her off to all the local motor races and brought their nosy mates home for beer and pizza every Saturday.

Make her female. Show (in moderation) how the way she dresses reflects her personality. Does she wear pink lace under her plumber's overalls? Are her clothes always black? (Why? Does she feel it's slimming, or is she desperate for extra confidence from her 'power dressing' uniform?) Is she dropping brand-names left and right, or does she practically live in a favourite pair of cheap old jeans that used to be her dead sister's? Is she a girly girl or is she a tomboy? Does she even want a man?

Does she expect she has to be the driving force in the partnership because her mother was super-efficient and this influenced her to feel she should be every bit as capable? Or is she happy to fall in with the hero's plans (without, of course, being a doormat.) Does she want to be dominated in the bedroom or is she itching to spank him? If you ask her a few questions like this, you'll start getting a picture of a real person.

I was amazed to see the detail Shirley Jump put into creating her characters several conferences ago. She covered the whiteboard in all sorts of suggestions from the floor—even that her heroine grew bonsai trees. I seem to recall this interesting suggestion influenced the whole plot of the eventual possible book.

So there we go—make your heroines fascinating, and hope that reviews and word of mouth about this great person will sell your books for you.



Kris Pearson is Convener for the Wellington Chapter of RWNZ. She writes Contemporary Romance with a distinctly New Zealand flavour. Visit her at <http://www.krispearson.com>

"I do not over-intellectualise the production process. I try to keep it simple: Tell the damned story."

—Tom Clancy

Spinning the Regency Historical: A Conversation With Anne Gracie

Shelagh Merlin



I'm a relatively new convert to the wonderful Regency world created by the very talented Anne Gracie - my first Anne Gracie book was *The Summer Bride*, which I was lucky enough to win in a competition. I was only a few pages into that story when I

realised just how lucky I really was, and since then I've been very much a fan.

Anne is presenting two workshops at this year's RWNZ annual conference and I can't wait to take part. In the meantime, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to chat with her.

You've been an avid reader since childhood. What led you to finally start writing yourself, and why did you choose to write historical?

I was backpacking solo in countries where I didn't speak the language, and I found stories spinning in my brain, so rather than going out at night or staring blankly at foreign TV, I started writing in exercise books. I came home determined to become a published writer.

When you were starting out as a writer trying to get published, did you do it solo or did you have a mentor or a support network? What sort of help did they provide?

I didn't know any other fiction writers, I didn't know about RWA, and the internet barely existed (at least for me). I did a couple of short "writing romance" classes run by a non-published-writer - they were bad and quite misleading. So it was trial and error and a LOT of reading. By the time I'd had several "good rejections" and an invitation to submit a full manuscript, I'd found a 6 month novel writing course taught by a wonderful teacher. It focused on literary fiction, but that didn't matter. At the same time I met a couple of other aspiring authors and we started a crit group. The three of us more or less taught each other.

You're running a workshop on reader engagement, which I'm very much looking forward to. Did you hit any stumbling blocks in this area when you were starting out as a writer? How did you overcome these?

continued on page 20

continued from page 19

When I submitted my first historical (Gallant Waif) the editorial feedback was that they liked my writing and the story, but they didn't like the heroine. Turned out I hadn't shown the reader enough of what she was thinking and feeling, and they couldn't really connect with what was driving her. I worked on that, resubmitted, and not only did they buy the book, it was a RITA finalist and my heroine was listed on a "favorite heroine" list.

Have you had any funny experiences that you would like to share about your early days as an author? Did you do anything special to get yourself noticed either by publishers or the reading public?

The first time I met other romance authors, I don't know what I expected, but I think something like Barbara Cartland. Turned out that I was the only one who actually owned a pink feather boa! (I have since rectified that deficiency.) I never would have dreamed they'd become some of my closest friends.

As for getting myself noticed, I'd rather be anonymous. I'm not bad at doing promo these days—my American author friends have bullied me into learning—but I still find it hard.

Your latest novel, Marry In Haste, has a wonderful thread of social commentary interwoven with the main story. I found this particularly engaging and an enriching aspect of the story. Do you always try to balance the romantic aspects of your stories with information/education about the times in which they are set? How do you determine which social facts of the time period in which you are writing will be woven into your stories?

Thanks. I don't try to educate people in my novels, and I hope there's nothing in the book that doesn't enhance the story. But I've spent most of my life working for social justice—in teaching, volunteering and writing—so that awareness probably seeps into my books.

I love your characters in Marry in Haste. They are so well rounded that they virtually step off the page and tell the story themselves. How do you develop your characters?

Thank you. I think about characters a lot. At every stage in the book, I think about what's driving them, what are they worrying about, what forces in their past shaped them, what is making them stuck. I think about how they need to change to achieve their HEA, and what might force them to change. Characters only come to life for me on the page. I can plan a hero down to his toenails, but put him on a page and let him start talking and he's different. So I write, and try to follow, and to understand and show the person that's emerging.

You're passionate about adult literacy, and I love the look of the short stories you've co-authored to use as a teaching aid. Would you like to share any memorable experiences that led to those books being written?

I've always taught adults how to read. For many years it was in a voluntary capacity, and so because I had no resources, I used to get students to tell me their stories. I'd make them into a little book, and they'd use it to learn. Later, when I started teaching it professionally, I realized there were very few beginners books suitable for adults — a lot of teachers used to use children's books. I had night classes of big tough blokes, and it was insulting to give them baby books. So I made books to suit them. I made lots of duplicates and started a lending basket, and when my boss saw them, she said, "Why don't we make these to sell?" So we did, and now they're sold all over the world. <https://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au>

And now for some fun questions. If you could bring one fictional character to life, who would it be and why?

Terry Pratchett's The Luggage, because it would be hilarious. The Luggage is a trunk made of sapient pear-wood. It's unpredictable and aggressive, contains amazing things and has hundreds of little legs. It follows its owner around and causes havoc on the way.

What is your favourite word (it can be a curse word)?

Chocolate, because it rolls on the tongue (as opposed to rolling off it.)

What word would you like never to hear again?

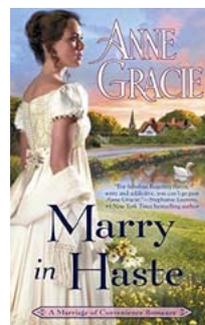
Tax-time — I don't mind paying tax — it's preparing the return I hate.

What is your secret (or not so secret now) guilty pleasure?

Reading when I should be writing or doing housework.

Sneakers, boots or high heels?

I wear runners most of the time, but I do love my silly red cowboy boots.



Anne Gracie writes fun, heartwarming regency-era romances for Berkley, USA. She's a national bestselling author in the USA, a five time RITA finalist and her books have won a number of awards, both in the USA and Australia. Her books have been translated into 17 languages. In 2015 and 2016 she was voted "Favorite Australian Romance Author".

A Holiday Romance

Nelson Romance Writers present: A Romance Short Story Competition 2017



Open to: Published, Self-published & Non-published writers plus Senior Students within New Zealand

Launch: Thursday 1 June 2017

Deadline: Friday 1 September 2017

The winner in each category will get a basket of romantic goodies.

The Supreme overall winner will get one year's membership of Romance Writers New Zealand (RWNZ) plus a certificate.

Judge: Angela Bissell - A NZ Romance Writer published by Harlequin Mills & Boon.

Posters and flyers printed by Copy Press, Nelson

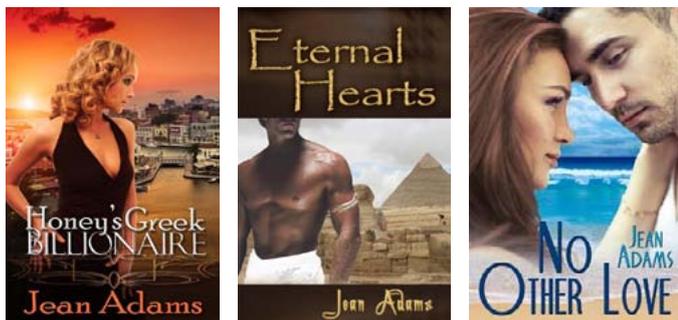


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For more information and entry form: Email: Annika Ohlson-Smith on nelsonromancewriters@xtra.co.nz or phone Annika on 03 548 5561

Get To Know Our Authors



Jean Adams

When Jean Adams (Drew) founded RWNZ more than 25 years ago, she had no idea it would grow to these proportions and last for so long. Gratifying to see New Zealand authors holding their own in the international marketplace. Learn more about Jean and her books at <http://www.jeandrew.co.nz>

Kerri Peach

Kerri Peach is the sweeter side of Wellington member Kris Pearson—her Wellington series re-edited for translating in China.

For those of you who might be considering the sweeter market and wonder if it's possible to edit and repurpose your current books—(plus it's interesting to see how people do different stuff)—here's a comparison of Kris's/Kerri's covers with the hot versions on top. Of course!



To be featured on this free page, please email **EITHER** one cover **OR** three, **PLUS** bio, **PLUS** buy links to: heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz by the 20th of the month deadline.

Regional Round-Up Reports

Auckland

Convenor: Pamela Gervai (pamelagervai.com)

Camilla Urdahl gave us a superb Power Point presentation on VILLAINS at the June meeting. Check out RWNZ Members Only Face Book site for photos. 'Villains' would make a great seminar for Conference. Being Queens Birthday Weekend, we had a smaller number of members at the meeting than usual. Eighteen of us attended.

We have the delightful Toni Kenyon as our speaker for our next meeting on 1st July. Her topic is Road to Release Day. As usual our meeting will be at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion from 12.30 until 3.00 p.m. Bring a plate to share, a gold coin donation, and change for the raffles.

Coast to Coast

Convenor: Vivienne Matthews
(vivienнематthewswriter@gmail.com)

Our June meeting was full of fun, laughter and fantastic food again. We also learnt a lot as our own Deborah Challinor gave us some tips, tricks and info she's garnered over her years of being a very successful published author. We talked about Outlining, Building Characters / Motivation, Point of View and Editing. Big thing to remember is it's the characters that sell the story – so we need to ensure both our 'good' and 'bad' characters have positive and negative personality traits. We did a fun activity around seeing how the same situation can be seen so differently by each of our characters and Deborah let us know about a great website on point of view - <http://janefriedman.com/point-of-view/>.

Next month we're meeting again in Waihi on 1st July and we'll be learning about Scrivener.

Hawkes Bay

Convenor: Kendra Delugar
(kendraonthemove@hotmail.com)

Our June meeting was a small group due to Queen's Birthday weekend and took place at Bron's. After our standard round-the-room catch-up, we had a more in-depth talk about strategies for getting the rights to your books back, and then we had a lesson in creating Facebook ads.

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 1pm, and new members are always welcome. The July 1st meeting will be held at Bron's again, where we will be talking about Character Development, as well as organizing what raffle basket items we're donating for conference. And in our August meeting (venue still to be announced) we'll be practicing our pitches.

Wellington/Kapiti Coast

Convenor: Kris Pearson (kris.p@paradise.net.nz)

Our lively June meeting was chaired by Jane, and took place at Emma's home at Island Bay. We welcomed new member Sandra, so that's three new attendees in two meetings. We're growing! A wish-list for future discussion topics was worked on, and it was decided that during the two meetings leading up to conference we could do some pitch practicing.

Local members were invited to join the Wellington/Kapiti Facebook group as a way to share news and keep in touch. Gudrun's book launch invitation is already there, and Tracey has offered to send out her instructions to get Amazon to add more categories to your book listings. Our next meeting (venue undecided) will take place at 1pm, Saturday July 1st.

Nelson

Convenor: Annika Ohlson-Smith
(nelsonromancewriters@xtra.co.nz)

The launch of 'A Holiday Romance' short story competition went well. Now we're waiting for submissions.

The June meeting was a real treat. We went to Elma Turner Library in Nelson to listen to Nalini Singh talking about her career. Having had Nalini give us a workshop some years ago, we were all keen to see her again. The venue was filled to the last seat and we counted to at least six males! Nalini asked us what we wanted to know, and the questions were many. One of our two local independent bookstores, Page & Blackmore's, was there with Nalini's books, so she was very occupied signing afterwards. A young male participant had a big poster of the event. He wanted Nalini to sign it with a gold marker pen. He claimed it was for his partner.

Annika was lucky enough to get a photo with Nalini - see page 16 for the photo.

Otago

Convenor: Samantha Charlton
(samanthacharlton@hotmail.com)

Our last meeting was a few months back (time has flown!) so we had plenty to chat about and catch-up on. A group of six of us met at Rhubarb cafe in Roslyn, Dunedin. We talked about our various writing projects and ideas, and discussed the theme: Writing for passion or writing what sells—is there a compromise? Lots of opinions and ideas flowed about this topic! Our next meeting will be taking place in July.