

Heart to Heart

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ROMANCE WRITERS
OF NEW ZEALAND

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Seventy-Seven And A Half Of Us

Ada Maria Soto



Roughly one in four New Zealanders have, are currently, or at some point will experience mental health problems in their life. There are approximately 310 members of the RWNZ at present which means

statistically speaking seventy-seven (and a half) of us are lined up to experience a mental illness at some point. I'm one of them.

I have rapid cycling, mixed state, bipolar disorder and have for my entire life. It's something I blog about on occasion but don't exactly put on a t-shirt. Going off my mother's reports and some early memories I was showing signs of mental health problems as young as four, however at the time there was no concept that a four-year-old could be depressed. As I got older my problems were dismissed as shyness, teen angst, and 'artistic temperament'. By the time it was obvious to everyone, including myself, that there was something wrong on a neurochemical level I was hesitant to seek help. Why? Because I was a Writer and didn't want anything *messing with my brain*. As a writer my brain is what I've got going for me.

I, like most of us, had grown up on the romanticized idea of the tragic depressed writer, holed up somewhere, churning out genius works before some beautiful, young, tragic death. Even after standing in my kitchen crying for an hour because I dropped an egg I was scared to get help because what if what made me feel better took away my ability to put words on a page. It didn't help that I had been in high school for that stint when doctors (in California) were handing out, now black labelled anti-depressants like candy to misdiagnosed teenagers and seen the damage it had done to still developing brains. What if I became an apathetic, uncreative mess?

Here's the thing, (and this is of course personal opinion

with the benefit of hindsight) those fears were bullshit.

First, those tragic genius writers, **died**, and there was nothing beautiful or romantic about it. Wikipedia has a list of Writers Who Committed Suicide that has over 300 people on it. Imagine how much grander our libraries would be if each had managed just a few more years. And that list isn't counting all the ones who fell into cycles of self-abuse before their words even got out into the world. I hadn't been published yet when I had my Big Crack and decided I needed help. If I hadn't gotten that help I seriously doubt I would have ever become focused enough to finish a work or confident enough to publish.

Second, there are a lot of authors out there dealing with mental illness and I'm willing to bet you'll find very few who will tell you they wrote better before getting help. John Green (*The Fault in our Stars*, *Paper Towns*) stated "I have written my best work not when flirting with the brink, but when treating my chronic health problem with consistency and care". Stephen King was prolific in the 80's but he was also about five minutes away from overdosing on cocaine and cough syrup before his family staged an intervention. Our beloved bipolar Princess General Carrie Fisher had to go to some lengths to find stability but once she did she became one of the most in demand script doctors in Hollywood, on top of writing her own books. And these are just my personal top three. *Messing with their brains* in no way diminished them.

In Western Society and, I'm sorry to say, particularly in New Zealand there is a stigma to mental illness, in part because we can't see it. I am lucky in so far as I was part of a research project that allowed me to watch fMRI images of my brain malfunctioning. When I take a pill in the morning I know exactly which bit of grey matter is getting propped up. None of us would think twice about seeing a professional rugby player going on the field covered in strapping tape. It lets them play at their peak for as long as they're able. Seeking and maintaining appropriate mental care, be it short term or life long, will allow us to write with as much focus and confidence as any author can muster. There is no difference between the visible and invisible here.

So, a little completely unsolicited advice to the other seventy-six and a half members of RWNZ who might be having problems, or will find themselves having problems in the future, and haven't dealt with them yet.

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

If you think you might have a problem talk to someone. Even if it's just your GP at the local clinic it can get the ball rolling. Most of us are women, a lot of us are moms, and all of us are writers. We fear being dismissed and we are *really* good at prioritizing things over what we should or need to do for ourselves. Stop. Go talk to someone. If you don't feel you are being heard talk to someone else.

Get a correct diagnosis. You can have more than one thing going on, and symptoms from one thing can mask or mimic symptoms of another. You're a writer which means you should be able to research the heck out of this. You know you better than anyone else.

Know your treatment options. We are long past the days of valium and never-ending talk therapy. There is EMDR for trauma, anticonvulsants used as mood stabilizers, and the whole field for treating depression is blowing wide open right now. If you feel guilty using research time on learning this tell yourself it'll all go into a book one day.

Talk to your family, especially your children if you have them. Even my four-year-old, who is a raging ball of pure id, understands that there are days when she *really* needs to not be pushing mommy's buttons.

Keep writing. That can be the hardest when our brains are acting as our own worst enemies but we are writers, it is what we do, it is who we are. When we stop writing the evil little brain weasels win. It doesn't have to be publishable or even good. It can be freeform strings of obscenities, or the sequel to that X-Files fanfic you wrote when you were twelve. Scream words into a cheap speech to text program if your fingers try to join the general strike. It can all be exhausting, frustrating, and even terrifying but we're writers, what's more we are romance writers. We are the masters of overcoming all odds for a happy ever after. If we can do it for our characters we can do it for ourselves.

Ada Maria Soto is a born and raised Californian, Mexican-American/WASP, currently living as an expat in the South Pacific. Writing is her day job for the two days a week her child is in preschool. The other five days a week her child is her day job. A psychologist once told her she has a fantasy prone personality, but since she's a writer that's not a bad thing. She has dysgraphia and phonological dyslexia but doesn't let exciting spelling slow her down. She is a sports fan dedicated to the Oakland A's, San Jose Sharks, Auckland Blues, USA Eagles, New Zealand All Blacks, and New Zealand Black Caps. Visit Ada on her blog: <http://blog.adamariasoto.com>

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"In general...there's no point in writing hopeless novels. We all know we're going to die; what's important is the kind of men and women we are in the face of this."

- Anne Lamott

Writing Good Sex

J C Harroway

Prompted by a discussion at our latest chapter meeting (okay, I might have started said discussion...) and in keeping with my new year release *A Week To Be Wild*, which is one of four launch titles for Harlequin Mills and Boon's new Sexier than ever line, DARE, I thought I would offer my take on this often blush inducing, sometimes polarizing topic.

DARE, Sexy, Passionate, Bold, promises explicit and graphic heat levels and high levels of sexual tension. So what are some key elements to writing this level of heat?

1. Keep it real. Avoid corny euphemisms but don't get too anatomical either. The P and V words are definitely out (nothing sexy about medical terminology). So what to use as a replacement? My advice, especially for a line like DARE, is to go all out, embrace the graphic, call a spade a spade and a nipple a nipple. If you need to, have a glass of wine first, and write the scene as if no one else will EVER read it....

2. Remember the emotion. So as our happy fictional couples are steaming up the pages with all this awesome sex, the sexual tension plummets, because they've already done the dance with no pants. So what now...? Crank up the tension throughout the sex scene by using the character's thoughts and feelings. All those reasons they can't possibly be together/are not right for each other are still running through their head, even as they succumb to the overwhelming physical desires to get down and dirty.

3. Sprinkle in a dash of humour or a reality check moment. So the sweat is evaporating, the high dissipating... Now is a perfect time to throw in a funny or open a fresh can of worms. In romance, the biggest conflict IS the relationship, so use that. Weave it through the sex scene so the reader can't skip the naughty bits (although surely no one ever does that, right? I mean, they're the best bits.)

4. Don't forget the foreplay. Just like the real act, the lead up to the sex scene is just as important, if not more so. Build all that delicious tension by using the characters' five senses during the flirtatious banter, the lingering looks, the whisper of touch. Then have them notice the little things. So the hero has strong, muscular forearms, but does the heroine find the golden smattering of arm hair sexy? Yes he has a six-pack, but are her eyes drawn to that delicious 'V' of muscle disappearing into the waistband of his jeans? Yes his scruff feels amazing when they kiss, but does she marvel how soft the skin of his neck is beyond the demarcation of his facial hair?

5. Use the characters vulnerability. Physical intimacy exposes us emotionally. Use the characters lust for each other to show those deep set vulnerabilities which rise to the surface. After all, this man/woman, unlike any other, has awoken something in our protagonist. They've poked and prodded at those vulnerabilities, so use the sex scenes to show this tension at play.

6. Show them falling. Unless you are writing erotica, the main goal behind the hero and heroine's journey of sexploration is that they fall in love. Show this in the evolution of their intimate encounters. Yes the first time they bang might be up against a wall in a dark corner of a nightclub, but as the story progresses, the intimate moments they share provide endless opportunities for them to get to know each other in non-physical ways. Of course, they'll be doing this outside of the bedroom, too, but make sure the sex between them evolves during the course of their journey towards their HEA.

7. Safety first—always! This last tip is a personal bugbear of mine. Nothing draws me out of a sex scene faster than unsafe sexual practices. I can't help it—I'm the mother of teenagers and I have a medical background. And I believe that as romance writers, we too have a responsibility to promote safe sex as the norm. Nothing is more romantic/heroic than a responsible man looking out for the heroine, in my opinion, so my heroes are ALWAYS prepared. No glove, no love.

Writing sex scenes isn't for everyone, and that's okay, too. Fortunately, the romance genre caters to all tastes and heat levels. But if you want to write sexy, just hang your inhibitions next to your internal critic and go for it, no holes barred. (Sorry, couldn't resist that last one!)

‘Remember: Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations.’

—Ray Bradbury



How To Beat Blank Page Syndrome

Brynn Kelly



Recently an award-winning author friend of mine admitted she was struggling. She'd simplified her life so she could write more—even changed jobs and moved towns. But she was still finding herself staring at a blank screen, and getting ever more frustrated and glum about her lack of progress.

"I've grown depressed and defeated but I'm determined to change my mindset," she said. "Whatever it takes."

But she just couldn't figure out how.

I'm sure all writers hit these phases. I know I do. From my vast experience of staring at blank pages (plus tips I've heard elsewhere), I compiled a list of possible fixes for my friend. Not every fix will work for every writer, but I'm sharing it here in case you are also battling the dreaded blank page.

- Are there writing-related reasons for your writer's block? Is it a lack of confidence? Lack of a burning idea? The weight of expectation? If you can figure out what's triggering it, you might be able to reason your way out of it. Defining a problem is halfway to solving it.

- Is something distracting you, such as the internet? (Projecting my own shortcomings on to you, here!) Can you find a way to eliminate the distraction? I sometimes turn my internet off at the modem, which requires going to the laundry at the other end of the house, hauling a chair over from the dining room and climbing up on it to press the off switch. The prospect of having to do all that again to turn it back on kills the urge to "quickly" check Facebook.

- Try a change of scenery. Get out of your usual work space and seek out nature and/or people. A beach, a cafe, a shopping mall... There's a neuroscience theory that if you want to solve a logical, mathematical problem you should shut yourself away in a small low-ceilinged room, and if you want to think creatively you should find a large space with a soaring ceiling, and/or find a spot where you can stare at the horizon.

- If you don't have a regular workspace, create one. Last winter when my study somehow morphed into the laundry room and household storage receptacle, I dragged

an outdoor chair and side table to a corner of the lounge and wrote there while the kids were at school. It was such a relief to not have to stare at my householding failures, while still having a dedicated place to work that helped switch my brain into work mode.

- Try scribbling in a notebook or dictating to your phone notes app rather than typing on a computer.

- Shower Thinking is a real thing. All my best ideas come in the shower. Neuroscientists think this may be because a pleasurable activity boosts dopamine, and promotes a relaxed state of mind. You might get the same boost from exercise or nature or driving or cooking or...other stuff.

- Rather than order yourself to sit down and write an opening scene to a novel or plot an entire book, which can be daunting, set yourself a tiny goal. Grab a leaf and describe it in detail. Pick someone in a cafe or shopping mall and write a description of him or her. Find a list of writing prompts on the internet and see if there's something that interests you. You might find these exercises will make their way into a story, but even if they don't, practice is never wasted.

- Related to the above, if the thought of writing an entire book is intimidating you into inaction, stop thinking of it as, "I'm writing a book." Instead, tell yourself, "I'm telling a story." Yes, the idea of writing an entire novel can be daunting, but telling stories is what we do as humans, every day. If you're getting stuck, maybe you don't yet have a story to tell, so that's something you could work on.

- Let go of the desire for perfection. Give yourself permission to write a messy, dirty draft. Just get that story down, any way you can. Anything can be fixed—except, as they say, a blank page. I love writing dialogue so I'll usually start a new story by writing it like a screenplay—just dialogue and basic stage directions. I'll layer in the rest later. One of the advantages to this method is that it doesn't hurt so much if you decide to cut a scene from that first rough draft. It's a lot less painful to kill darlings before they properly form.

- Set modest goals and reward yourself for achieving them. Many writers have success with setting word count goals. I don't find this works for me, so I use time goals instead. Whichever method you choose, keep the goals reachable. If I'm having trouble settling into a task, I will set a timer for 20 minutes and get stuck in to something, anything. Once I'm started, the motivation usually hits and I'm away.

- Related to the above, give yourself permission to free-write anything. Set a timer for something super modest—maybe five minutes. Give yourself permission to write whatever crap comes to mind. If you get stuck halfway through a sentence, abandon that sentence and begin a new one. Just keep on going.

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

- Got a favourite TV show? Brainstorm a storyline for it, borrowing the readymade characters and settings. Write it down as a basic bullet pointed outline, or as a script. Pause a scene and write a setting description from it. Study the way the actors look and move, and write descriptions based on those. You might find you can adapt your storyline for a novel. Once you've changed the names and setting and made it your own, no one need know where you started.
- Do you have a passion project? Something you're not sure will fly commercially, or you're not sure you can pull off, but gives you that pull in the heart? Play around with that, with no expectation that anyone will ever see it.
- Write something in a totally different genre. I'm currently between deadlines and weighing up ideas for my next romance project, so I'm giving myself permission to go off the plantation for a few weeks, and am furiously writing a middle-grade novel for my kids. Who knows if it'll come to anything but I'm loving it, and my word count is booming.
- Don't be hard on yourself. We genre writers, especially, get into a mindset that we must always be sitting in front of a computer, furiously typing. And if we're not doing that, we're not being productive. But thinking time is important, too. I find this is where the notes app on my phone comes in handy. I'll open my mind up to ideas while I'm out and about, and then the next time I'm back at the computer, I already have a starting point.
- I'm a hybrid plotter and pantsier, but a dedicated plotter friend of mine is currently addressing her Blank Page Syndrome by first spending some time building the framework and pacing of a book. Then she'll plot the twists and turns for each major scene. Then she'll do the same for the minor scenes. Once she has the foundations built, she plans to write a little each day, choosing whatever she feels inspired to write in that moment. "Hopefully doing it intentionally means I'll be able to increase my word count goal as I get in shape."
- Most of these tips are about getting started, but here's a quick one that also works for me if I get bogged down halfway through a story: Try asking some "what-if" questions. I'll open a blank document and just start writing "What if?" sentences, thinking about plot complications and solutions. "What if my hero busts his ankle?" "What if my heroine leaves her mobile phone in the villain's lair?" "What if they capture a goon and interrogate her?" The more the better. Maybe the first one you think of will be the breakthrough, or maybe the 27th. But one of them may become a lightbulb moment. (This can be a good way of creating unexpected twists.)
- And my favourite piece of advice? Keep in mind that motivation comes AFTER you start something, not before. Too often we think we have to wait for inspiration to hit before we can start creating. But our brains work the other way around. Once we launch into a task, that's

when the ideas start to flow, and that's when the motivation hits. Not before. That's when we start waking at 3am and furiously scribbling notes. So just start! The starting point doesn't have to be an opening chapter. It can be tiny—that leaf, or that character description in the cafe, or that TV show.

Got any other tips? What works to bust through your Blank Page Syndrome? Email Megan Cameron on Heart2Hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz, and maybe she can add them to a future H2H.



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From The Editor



RWNZ is a wonderful mix of professionals, enthusiasts, hobby writers, published writers, amateurs, motivated beginners and hard-core long-timers. As we will read in our News from the President, professional writers who have quit the day job

have a set of skills and requirements in addition to their passion for the craft.

I, and many others among us, am a different kind of writer. Currently (and with a hope that it will one day change) I am not published in the romance genre. I write for the sheer enjoyment of it, as well as secretly hoping that what I write will one day be a romance best seller. Sometimes I glance ahead to the published world as inspiration and a just to day-dream, but mainly it is head down, tale up, words on the page.

Of course, this only happens when the day job is done. When the dinner is cooked and cat is feed, when others in the house have gone to bed. Or it is done early in the morning in a few hours snuck just for myself. Tuesday is my glorious and precious writing day. My day off from the normal work and a chance to knuckle down with the others at my writing group.

Being a writer with a full time job is a difficult balancing

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

act. Many of us will have set writing resolutions for the new year, and many of us will have let them go again as the wave of back to school, back to work, family dramas and other assorted life moments hit us. Some days, being a writer with a day job means just keeping your head above water and hitting that minimum word count. Other times, it is about letting the tide take you and letting yourself feel defeated because of it. Occasionally it's about taking the two week holiday and dedicating it to writing and enjoying the chance to just embrace it wholly. My advice to you this year is to not let the distractions and hiccups get you down; letting go of resolutions can have a funny way of bringing in fresh inspiration. Persistence, resilience and determination are the qualities we love in our heroines. This year I challenge you all, whether published or unpublished, professional or day job, to embody the same qualities.

This year H2H has new challenges to offer and inspire you with, such as themed editions. Next month, we are looking for submissions on the topic 'Love over Forty; writing romance for older women.' April is 'Diversity in Love' and May is going to be 'Out of this World; the Romance/Sci-fi drama.' If you feel inspired to write on any of these areas, please do so and send us what you come up with.

Happy New Year and Happy Writing,

Megan

The Lure And Love Of Words

Janis Susan



According to some, that which separates man from animal is language... and they may be right. Without language - without words - we would be reduced to communicating with only grunts, gestures and pictures. Language is what allows us to know the thoughts and ideas

of those who lived centuries before us, and what allows us to pass down our knowledge to future generations.

All of which sounds very high-toned and pedagogic, doesn't it? It's very true, but also very stuffy. What is not said is that language, i.e. words, is a very flexible, nuanced tool. Neither is it universally recognized that words

are great fun.

I was fortunate enough to have been raised in a family that prized words. We used them like toys when I was a child. One of my earliest memories is sitting at the dinner table with my parents playing word games as we ate. Of course, what they were really doing was teaching me the Greek and Latin root words that influence so much of our language today.

For example, *polis* - Greek for city - shows up in police, metropolitan, politics and many more. Likewise, *haemo* - Greek for blood - means the word has something to do with blood, like hemostat, hemoglobin, hematology, etc. *Grat* - Latin for pleasing - is obvious in gratuity, gratitude, gratify, great and more. Learning root words is a marvelous way to expand your vocabulary.

So why should we be concerned with expanding our vocabulary? As a young man of my acquaintance asked after chiding me for using a variety of words during our conversation, "Why do we need so many words for the same thing? Isn't it simpler just to have one word?"

Don't worry - I let him live, but only after asking him if he liked hamburgers. He replied, "Of course." I then asked him if he would like to eat hamburgers every meal. Every single meal, every single day. As we were at a dinner party being given by a renowned gourmet cook and he had obviously been enjoying the fare, he suddenly turned very wise and didn't say a word.

So let's get to the words themselves. Words have texture and a form of mental tactility, which may or may not have anything to do with their actual meaning. Think of the word '*avoirdufois*' - now there is a wonderful word. Smooth as silk, it fills the mouth with lovely, slippery syllables that feel almost like a wonderful buttercream frosting.

By contrast, think of the word '*autoschediasms*.' While I'm sure that it can be a very useful word in certain circumstances, it is a very uncomfortable word, all angles and sharp points.

Yes, I am a collector of odd words. Remember in the olden pre-internet days when we had to either use the dictionary (and most homes had only one if any) or go to the library to look up a spectacular word? And where did you find these polysyllabic gems? If you were a serious wordsmith, that meant collecting dictionaries. Lots of them. I've thinned mine out, but I still have twenty or so, not counting the foreign language ones. One of the most wonderful gifts my husband has ever given me is a copy of the Oxford English Dictionary, the two volume edition. And a super-sharp magnifying glass with which to read it! In my heart of hearts I sort of long for the full 11 volume set, but we neither have the money to buy it or any space to put it! (Did I mention that we live in a house with three libraries, and are contemplating making a fourth?)

continued on page 7

continued from page 6

Nowadays wordsmiths have an almost magical resource in the internet, with a plethora of online dictionaries and thesauri and even full sites dedicated to unusual words. It's an embarrassment of riches that far too few people seem to take advantage of. Two of my main treasures are dictionary.com and wordsmith.com. Sign up with them - for free - and every day each site will send you a new word. Sometimes it is a common word that you would think everyone knows, but often it is a multi-syllable jawbreaker of a word with an obscure meaning. It's like getting two gifts every day.

Whether they're commonplace or exotic, though, one of the most wonderful things about words to a writer is the control of nuance they give. Depending on how they are used, words can give a myriad of meanings. For example - "She went to the store." Plain, informative and unutterably pedestrian. Contrast with - "She mounted an expedition to the store." Both with a single subject and a single verb, both simple informative statements, but doesn't the second tweak our curiosity more? What made it an expedition instead of a simple trip?

Another example - 'naked' and 'nude.' Both mean unclothed, unadorned, without covering, but the nuance is poles apart. Naked to me is a rough word, a blatant statement devoid of any finesse or delicacy. "The naked truth." "The corpse, battered and naked...." Contrast that with nude, a word that is as smooth as satin and has much more pleasant connotations. "The robe slipped off, exposing her nude body." "Completely nude, she walked slowly across the room." The examples could go on and on.

One of the most telling usage of individual words is in dialogue; it's a masterly way of describing your character without being tied to plain exposition. What is the mental impression of a character who says, "I don't give a rat's ass..." as opposed to one who says, "I could not care less..." Of course, any character can talk in any way, but only if you have an unassailable reason for it. A semi-literate hard-rock miner will use different word choices than a university professor of romantic poetry, both of whom will speak differently than a semi-literate hard rock miner who through unimaginable work has become a university professor of romantic poetry. Using the exact right choice and combination of words in their speech patterns can define character and status more than any amount of description.

Every craftsman has to be familiar with his tools before he can use them to create something new. Writers are no different, because words are our tools. With them we can create the driest collection of facts or a magical world of colour, texture and emotion. Words deserve our respect and should be treated as the incredible building blocks they are... and that includes using the right word! One of my personal *bête noirs* is a writer who commits the unforgivable sin of homophonic mayhem. To read that one brooches a cask, or a character wears a broach, will stop me dead - and depending on how egregious the misuses

are, make me never buy that author again. (Brooch = a decorative pin, broach = to open, as a cask or bottle) Not only does such misuse make staying in the story difficult, it shows that the writer does not have enough respect for the tools of her trade to use them properly. I have been known to become profane when discovering the misuse of such basics as 'to' 'too' and 'two.'

I know that language should be a living thing, but that implies it gets better. Unfortunately, it seems that in this modern world we are losing much of the magic of words as the language devolves into hybrid words, revisions (making nouns into verbs or vice-versa), techno-speak and a celebration of unimaginative simplicity. Or simpletonism, as some of us regard it. If this sad trend continues, it is not too *outré* to fear that someday we will be reduced to the communication skills of not-too-bright toddlers, i.e., "Cold." "Want eat." "Need go." And if that happens, we as writers, as word-based dream-spinners, will be out of business.

As writers, though, no matter how dedicated we are to all kinds of words, we must avoid the pitfalls endemic to fanatics and remember that not everyone thinks as we do. Some people just plain don't like to read - a state of mind I simply do not understand - and some don't like to be challenged. I read once where the average reading level of popular novels was 7th grade in the US - sorry, I couldn't find the statistics for New Zealand, but I hope they are better than the US! Assuming the statistics are roughly equivalent, there is not an abundance of interesting and challenging words at the 7th grade level. For my part, that's much too close to the 'hamburgers every meal' model.

So what are we as writers to do? Leave things alone and play along with the 7th grade level, often at the expense of the integrity of our work? Or write with words we love, and risk alienating the majority of readers? It's a fine-line balancing act. My solution is to cheat. Write clear and simple prose accessible to the majority of readers, but...! Slip in a few goodies, but make sure that they are made clear in the text, i.e., "It was an egregious thing to do, but not as bad as it could have been." Sort of like slipping nutritious squash into muffins.

Writing has always been more than a job - for most of us it is a calling, something that we must do, whether or not we try to sell. It fulfills a need deep within us, and if we respect ourselves, and our passion, and our readers, we must respect as well as enjoy the language.

As a parting gift to say thank you for letting me come, I will share with you my father's party piece, with which he could stop a cocktail party dead. (I am almost embarrassed to admit that I was a grown woman before I knew this was not a regulation nursery rhyme...)

"When you oraculate or pontificate, consistently utilize pedantic, polysyllabic persiflage. If such a pedagogic

continued on page 8

continued from page 7

course proves egregiously inefficacious, obfuscate.”
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Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a 7th-generation Texan and a 3rd-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Once an actress and a singer Janis has also been editor-in-chief of two multi-magazine publishing groups as well as many other things, including an enthusiastic amateur Egyptologist. Janis' husband even proposed in a moonlit garden near the Pyramids of Giza. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

The Bookshelf



How To Write Pulp Fiction James Scott Bell

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0771SP274/>

Type Hard. Type Fast. Make Dough. That was the formula of old-school pulp fiction—plot-driven, popular and gobbled up by a reading public hungry for more. And it produced many writers who hammered out a living selling “cash-and-carry” stories and novels. Some of these writers were among the best America has ever produced. Writers like Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and John D. MacDonald. Learn the secrets of these successful pulp writers and how any writer, of any genre, can use them to produce fiction that sells.



Align Your Writing Habits To Success Jennifer Blanchard

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01F1I6XLK/>

This short multimedia, interactive eBook will take you from “procrastinating writer” (or wherever you are now) to “inspired, productive writer.” In only 30 days, you will completely overhaul your writing habits and your mindset, so you can step up to be and act like the writer and author you dream of being. When you align your writing habits to success you will be unstoppable in your writing career.



Twitter For Authors

Jesper Schmidt

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B075C71XFT/>

Do you feel as if you're wasting your time on Twitter? Not a single book sold, despite all your efforts? Then Twitter for Authors is precisely what you need. The techniques taught in Twitter for Authors can all be executed in under 30 minutes a day, and will drive massive amounts of traffic to your books, blog and everywhere else where you have an online presence. Throughout the chapters you will find free tutorial videos that show you exactly, with easy, step-by-step guides, how to put a system in place that will deliver upon all the promises made.



Grit For Writers

Tamar Sloan

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B078N23ZM1/>

Grit is the ability to stick with things that are important to you, through thick and thin, through the thousands of words and hundreds of pages. The good news is this very key to your success can be cultivated and grown. With Grit for Writers you'll learn how to recalibrate your mindset and how to motivate your actions with proven psychological strategies. Before you realise it, you'll be the writer you're proud of, the one others look up to, the one that lives their passion.



The Complete Guide To Facebook Advertising

Brian Meert

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07641GJ3Z/>

In this book, author Brian Meert teaches you how to successfully advertise on Facebook. Filled with step-by-step guides, easy to understand explanations and lots of helpful illustrations. The book also has free resources and tips for creating the perfect Facebook ad.

The Jayne Ann Krentz Webinar

Cheryl Phipps



The author of a string of New York Times bestsellers, JAYNE ANN KRENTZ uses three different pen names for each of her three “worlds”. As JAYNE ANN KRENTZ (her married name) she writes contemporary romantic-suspense. She uses AMANDA

QUICK for her novels of historical romantic-suspense. JAYNE CASTLE (her birth name) is reserved these days for her stories of futuristic/paranormal romantic-suspense.

“I am often asked why I use a variety of pen names,” she says. “The answer is that this way readers always know which of my three worlds they will be entering when they pick up one of my books.”

In addition to her fiction writing, she is the editor of, and a contributor to, a non-fiction essay collection, DANGEROUS MEN AND ADVENTUROUS WOMEN: ROMANCE WRITERS ON THE APPEAL OF THE ROMANCE published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Her commitment to her chosen genre has been strong from the very beginning of her career. Each year at the annual convention of the Romance Writers of America she participates in a special day-long workshop for librarians and speaks on the importance of the romance genre.

“The romance genre is the only genre where readers are guaranteed novels that place the heroine at the heart of the story,” Jayne says. “These are books that celebrate women’s heroic virtues and values: courage, honor, determination and a belief in the healing power of love.” She earned a B.A. in History from the University of California at Santa Cruz and went on to obtain a Masters degree in Library Science from San Jose State University in California. Before she began writing full time she worked as a librarian in both academic and corporate libraries. She is married and lives with her husband, Frank, in Seattle, Washington.

Cheryl’s Webinar Report

I was delighted to meet up with Jayne Ann Krentz in December, along with several other members of RWNZ and this is a short rundown on our conversation through the webinar and our informal chat prior. A lovely open lady, her words struck a chord with us, and she is truly an inspiration.

An American author of romance novels, she has a string of New York Times Bestsellers under seven different

pseudonyms which I personally found very intriguing. I will add that she uses only three now, Amanda Quick, Jayne Castle and Jayne Ann Krentz, which seems more doable! In the process she admitted to having killed a couple of careers along the way to re-invent her name. It hadn’t been part of her plan to have more names, but the plus side is writing in different sub-genres keeps her fresh as she rotates through them. The downside is that you have to build three different careers.

A self-confessed morning person, she is a very disciplined with her process and doesn’t get excited about the book until she starts the actual writing. Each book will take her about four months. She has two modes to her process, Outlining and Writing. When outlining she uses the first three chapters for the setup. When writing she writes from scene to scene.

Jayne’s Tips:

- Don’t give up.
- Understand your core story
- Readers want a particular landscape, so follow the tropes for your genre. Don’t change, but reinvent them in a new story, new characters and new problems.
- Writers block is boredom block, therefore you should start the scene over again or interview your character (talk about their problems)
- Take time to interact and give back to other authors and readers.
- Research movies/books for language as you go. Don’t overwhelm yourself ahead of time.
- Know your market and what it realistically entails. (Your Mailing list is the most important platform and then Facebook)
- Treat this like an entrepreneurial business.

Many thanks to Jayne for taking time from her cruise’s short stop in Auckland.



Cheryl Phipps is a USA Today Best seller author of contemporary romance and women’s fiction who loves weaving sensual stories that celebrate love, family and resilience, as well as delivering a heart-racing, happy ending, with a sprinkle of humour. You’ll find her Billionaire Knights, Family Ties, Prossers Bay and Sycamore Springs series as well as Laguna Beach Novellas, at www.cherylhipps.com

“The first sentence can’t be written until the final sentence is written.”

—Joyce Carol Oates

From The President

It's the start of a new writing year and I always take the time to build a yearly publishing plan or at least define my writing goals for the year. That's because writing is my career. If you write as a hobby then you are in a different game to me, but writing to make money is a job! Being a job doesn't mean it's not a passion, it just means we are lucky enough to try and make a living from something we love!

As in any career, it helps to have a plan. If you don't set yourself realistic goals, and I stress realistic (some of us have other jobs, families, health, etc. to take into account), then:

1. Motivation may suffer as we have no goals to achieve – no one is pushing us but ourselves
2. We could get stressed and depressed at lack of progress because we didn't set a realistic target or we have no idea what our target is
3. We can think it's all too hard and give up

Every year each writer goes off on a different journey with a variety of destinations. At the beginning of the year I like to define what my destination is, and what I hope to see when I get there. I ask myself 'what do I want to achieve'. If I want to publish a Christmas story I better get it written by at least October for instance.

We call our goals many different things: hitting lists, achieving financial independence, earning enough to become a full-time author. The description is long and looks different to everyone. Forget the journey for a moment, let's focus on arriving at our desired destination.

How do you get to your destination if you don't have a map?

My maps are things like:

- A word count worksheet
- A book publishing schedule
- A marketing plan
- A new release plan
- A publishing plan
- A way to track what we need to track in order to see we're well on our way to where we want to go

Maybe you're not a planner. Maybe in the past you've always been able to fly by the seat of your pants and do just fine. Maybe now you're determined to be more than fine and you aspire to awesome.

The market is really crowded out there and taking a realistic organized professional approach to your writing year can only help.

You should know when you're going to be releasing books. You have to know what amount of money you need to have set aside, how you're going to manage

each release, and what strategy you're going to use. The easiest way to do that is to know when you're going to have books ready. And how do you know when you're going to have books ready?

To me this should be top of your writing plan for the year. How many books, and what length books, will I be able to produce this year. Well, my suggestion is have a word count goal. If you set a reasonable daily word count goal for yourself, and you adhere to it, then you can plan your publishing schedule. For example, if you know you're going to be able to write 2000 words a day and you think that you can potentially accomplish this 3 days a week, then that means you'll write roughly 6000 words each week, which means approximately 24,000 words per month. With me so far?

Now if you know you're going to be writing 24,000 words a month and you know that your books are anywhere from 50-60,000, then you can assume you'll be able to write a novel in 3 months, especially if you add in a little time for your editor, who you'll be able to schedule in advance because you know when you're going to complete a first draft. Factor in the time it will take your editor to get it back to you, and your rewrites and edits. Don't forget to consider the formatting time. Once you calculate all this, you know how long it takes you to release a book. This means every four to six months, you could be publishing a book. Are you excited yet?

When working out your weekly word count – don't forget to allow for the time you spend on marketing, social media, holidays, family commitments, other work commitments etc. The last thing you want to do is set unrealistic goals or your plan falls over and if you've booked in editors it mucks up their schedule to.

Ultimately, the goal here is to be able to turn a hobby into a career. We all want to earn enough money to pay our bills doing something we love. We want to be able to quit our day jobs. This is why daily word goals and a publishing schedule really matter.

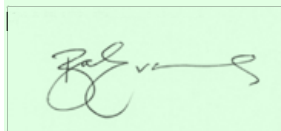
Best wishes on your writing journey this year, and whatever destination you select, I hope it's rewarding when you get there!

As always

Happy writing

Bron

Bronwen Evans



Nelson Romance Writers' Short Story Competition

Winning Stories

We hope you enjoy the Nelson Romance Writers' Short Story Competition Winning Entry in the Senior Students (Under 18) category - 'An Unsuspecting Love' by Summer Vartan. Final judge Angela Bissell's comment: *"It's great to see diversity in romantic fiction and this story delivers with a lovely surprise ending."*

An Unsuspecting Love Summer Vartan



Dedicated to: Alexis who unsuspectingly helped me with the title.

Her long white skirt fluttered across the ground. The short front showed off her long, pale legs that looked as smooth as a pearl. Her bare toes painted a shimmering silver. Little bells jingled against her ankles. Her hips swayed to the beat. A belly button piercing glinted in the flickering light. Silver bangles jangled on her wrists. White ribbons danced, coming alive in her hands. A silver arm band shone, like it was a part of her. Around her neck a silver choker gleamed. Her smiling lips were a natural pink, her nose a perfect button. Her cheeks flushed and rosy from the fire. Her eyes, so magnificent, were a sparkling warm brown. Her long, shining hair, a lovely chestnut. Strands of silver plaited in. She danced. The music a part of her, a part of her very being and soul. She danced in and out of the flickering shadows. A ghost, then a beautiful free bird. She laughed, a glorious sound. In the moment I saw her, I knew I was caught.

6 Years Later

"Jay? Are you ok?"

I snapped out of my memory of the first time we met and looked at her. Her voice was as magnificent as it had ever been, maybe more so. Today was our five year dating anniversary and I was going to propose. She giggled at my startled face. Uhhh, I loved her laugh so much, it was just so... I can't even describe it.

"I'm fine, just remembering something."

"Oh?"

"When I first ever laid my eyes on your beautiful self at the festival during the holidays. You were so amazing, you still are."

"But I was nervous when you approached me."

"Not as much as I was! I had had a couple drinks by then."

She chuckles, "Only a couple? You were so drunk by then that you messed your English up. You said my Jay is name."

I blush, "You're the one who accepted a drunken idiots number."

"It was the best decision I ever made." She kisses me on the tip of my nose with a smile.

We lay wrapped in each other's arms on a picnic blanket in the midst of what remains of our lunch. I feel the smooth wood of the ring box in my pocket. It holds a beautiful ring that I spent a month searching for. The perfect ring for her. A silver ring that depicted two wings reaching around to hold a small diamond that sparkled in the light.

Was now the time to ask? What do I say? All the words that I had thought of weren't in my head anymore. My palms started to get sweaty. I swallowed hard and took a silent deep breath so as not to alarm Willow. Ah, what a lovely name. I untangled myself from her and sat up. She sat up too.

"Jay?" She asked in that sweet voice of hers.

I took another steadying breath. "Willow, ever since I first saw you, I knew you were the one. I just knew. And... um, I um... well..." I breath again. I pull out the box and open it. "Will you marry me?!" I shove it a bit forcefully towards her.

Well, crap. That didn't go quite right.

Her beautiful face was one of surprise. Her lips slightly parted. Her beautiful eyes wide. My heart pounded. It raged in my ears. My blood rushed around. It felt like hours but was probably only seconds.

Then she smiled and shouted "Yes!" As she jumped into my arms. And then we were laughing and kissing and cuddling.

After we had calmed down we sat back up.

"Where's the ring?" I say looking around slightly panicked when I realised I dropped it.

She giggled and held up the box, "What would you do without me?"

continued on page 12

continued from page 11

I laugh, relieved that I hadn't just lost it, "I honestly haven't got a clue."

I take the box back and open it again. I carefully take out the ring and hold her small delicate hand. I gently rub my thumb in circles on her hand as I slid the ring on her finger. She looked up at me in excitement. Her cheeks were flushed pink and she had never looked more beautiful.

6 Months Later

I lied. She's never looked more beautiful than in this moment.

She walks down the aisle in a magnificent white dress. The skirt drifts across the ground behind her. In her delicate hands she holds white roses, freshly picked. A veil glittered in silver covers her smiling face.

I take a deep breath trying to calm my nerves. I tug at my clothes. I look like dirt compared to her. She stands in front of me and holds my hand. I stare into her warm brown eyes, through the sparkling curtain. The ceremony seems to stretch out as the priest goes on and on and on. I can't seem to concentrate on what he is saying till we exchange our vows. I rush through mine. It's really short anyway. Her words capture my heart, setting it at ease. I love her voice so much. The priest's next words cause it to speed up again.

"Do you, Jay, take Willow to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do."

"And do you, Willow, take Jay to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

The space between breaths seem to take forever.

"I do" She says.

"You may now kiss the bride."

I smile as I lift her veil off her lovely face. I pull her into my arms and kiss her, long and hard. We pull away breathing a bit more deeply.

"I have never loved anyone as much as I love you"
I say. "Me too. I love you."

We walk, hand in hand, back down the aisle, our skirts trailing behind us.

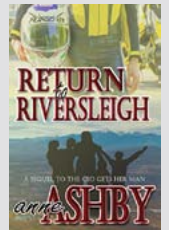
Woos & Hoos



Deryn Pittar is celebrating the release of her dragon novel **Lutapolii - White Dragon of the South**, a dragon-filled love story published by Junction Publishing. <http://geni.us/vA2Bz>

Huge congratulations to Wendy Cooper for receiving a contract with Junction Publishing. We look forward to celebrating her novel in print!

Anne Ashby has released the sequel to **The CEO Gets Her Man** in January. **Return to Riversleigh** is a clean (16+) contemporary set in rural Southland. <http://amzn.to/2DkKisI>



Catherine Robertson's fifth novel, **Gabriel's Bay** (Black Swan) came out on January 2nd, and has already spent two weeks at #1 on the NZ bestseller list. <http://amzn.to/2nkuezr>

Samantha Burton (w/a Jayne Castel) has released **Barbarian Slave** - Book 2 in her Warrior Brothers of Skye series set in Dark Ages Scotland. <http://amzn.to/2DGn0wA>



Jen Yates has just published for pre-order **Her Dark Lord**, the fourth and final book in the **Lords of the Matrix Club** series. The series is a sexy with spice romance set in Regency era. Release date 28 March. <http://amzn.to/2njusqH>

Faye w/a Serenity Woods has a special Valentines Day release with her **Bay of Islands Brides** series. <http://amzn.to/2DUNZb3>



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Congratulations to Bronwen Evans who has just released books 3 and 4 in her contemporary **Coopers Creek** series.

<http://amzn.to/2EmJvaW>
<http://amzn.to/2DLHOqX>

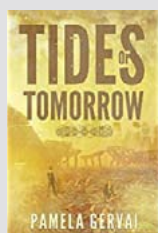


Soraya M. Lane's novel **Wives of War** was listed at #34 on the Bestselling Kindle books of 2017 list! <http://amzn.to/2En8WJN>



Lucy Parker is thrilled that her book **Pretty Face** was included in NPR's (the National Public Radio organisation in the US) Best Books of 2017 list: <https://apps.npr.org/best-books-2017/>
<http://amzn.to/2DIVEGk>

Pamela Gervai just published on Amazon a YA Dystopian romance **Tides of Tomorrow** available in print and e-book. <http://amzn.to/2Gvr6cl>



Holly James has just released her second book entitled **Worth The Risk** on Amazon KDP. The book is number two in **The English Rose** series and is a follow-up to her debut novel released earlier last year. <http://amzn.to/2BCnGS3>

JC Harroway is celebrating as her debut novel for Mills and Boon's new line DARE, **A Week To Be Wild**, is out. <http://amzn.to/2DWrhzn>



Jacquie Lambert (w/a Jay Hogan) has released her first book - a M/M Romance called **First Impressions**. <http://amzn.to/2GvwufZ>

Kellie Watkinson (w/a Kellie Hailes) has just signed a contract for her fourth book with HQ Digital. It's currently untitled, but it's due out sometime in June this year.



Shirley Wine's new book from Escape Publishing **Lies That Bind** is available for pre-order. <http://amzn.to/2Ejq2bd>

Joanne Dannon has received some well deserved recognition for her writing recently, winning the "Author of the Year" category, in the AusRom Today Reader Choice awards.



Joanne says "I was beside myself with excitement to appear on Denis Walter's afternoon program on 3AW. 3AW is Melbourne's top rating radio, and to appear on Denis's show (with his tens of thousands of listeners) was an incredible experience. I have to confess I was shaking before I went on but he's such a professional and made me feel very welcome."



Congratulations Joanne! For more information about Joanne's books, visit her website: www.joannedannon.com

"A book is simply the container of an idea—like a bottle; what is inside the book is what matters."

—Angela Carter

Is It Worth Trying BookBub?

Kris Pearson



If you're indie-published like me, it's a heck of a way to have a thrilling day. One proviso though – you need to have several other books available for people to buy or you'll waste your money. If you're trad-published, just smile nicely and let them do it for you!

Bookbub has cornered the market as the most effective promotor of books. They grew themselves big enough by offering a variety of newsletters which send you deals on one to four books each day. If you want romance, that's all you get. If you want cookery, that's all you get. No wasted time trawling through motivational books, sweet romance if you prefer sexy, thrillers if they aren't your bag, travel tales if you want to stay home and write. One to four books, aimed directly at you, and at great prices. There are a lot of other promo sites around, but this one works best.

It also costs the most.

A one-day spot for a free contemporary romance sent to customers who shop in the US, the UK, Australasia and India costs \$403 US dollars. (Other genres, other prices – have a look.) My \$403 US grew to \$574.73 New Zealand dollars. Ouch. And if you want to set a price for your book, it costs a heap more.



Cowboy Wants Her Heart

By Kris Pearson

Texas cowboy Rory is ready to wed heiress Alfrieda. The problem? Alfie's unaware of the arranged marriage and its conditions: She must go through with it or lose her inheritance. Will she and Rory find happily ever after despite their rocky start?

Free! \$4.10

Amazon

Apple iBooks

It's not as simple as just booking a spot when it suits you. They mightn't want you at all. They publicly acknowledge they turn down four-fifths of the deals that are submitted to them. There's only one way to get around this, and that's to submit, and submit, and submit. Eventually, if they like your blurb, your cover, your reviews, and possibly the colour of your underwear, they'll tell you the day they're willing to accept you and send you an invoice. No pay, no day.

I said on the members-only Facebook page that I'd be willing to share numbers, so here we go: these are Amazon figures only because it just turns into a lot more work for me otherwise. The first time I had a Bookbub was October 2012. I gave away 113,148 books, and sold 2481. So that would have brought me in around \$5000,

and gave me a nice profit on whatever Bookbub cost back then. The effect lingered. The next month I sold 4312 books.

Good things don't last forever though. A year later in September 2013, 48,646 went free and only 1035 sold. In February 2016 58,080 went free and 2983 sold. Nicer month! Then I had a real drought. My writing dwindled to just about nothing because of assorted family traumas. I did very little promotion. My sales fell away enormously. Of course during this time a few million more ebooks appeared, some of the authors and publishers were willing to spend and promote at an alarming rate, and everything became more difficult for those of us further down the heap.

I'm writing this on January 12th. Yesterday I had another Bookbub promo. I'd already made COWBOY WANTS HER HEART free for a Freebooksy place on Christmas Day. This worked well – 10,419 given away and a nice lift in sales over the next several days. Thinking I now had nothing to lose I applied for a Bookbub and kept it free 'just in case'. I was really surprised to be accepted.

By 9am yesterday I'd given away 18,272 copies and sold 164 as a result of the Bookbub ad and a newsletter I sent to my 2300 people. I had a lovely time watching those figures grow to 38,975 free and 296 sold. No doubt those are sad figures for some of you big-hitters, but I was plenty happy. I'd more than covered my cost and made some profit in one day, and that was a lot more people who now knew about me and my books.

Of course I wasted some pleasant time tracking the book around the stores. Here's what happened on Amazon by late last night:

Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #3 Free in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Free in Kindle Store)

#1 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Romance > Contemporary

#1 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult

#1 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Romance > Romantic Comedy

It actually increased from No 3 in the whole store to No 2 late in the day. No idea why – the books generally drift down instead. By this morning it was number 9 free in the whole Kindle store and 3 in those other three categories. I'm still wondering why Amazon thought 'teen and young adult' was a suitable place to include it, though.

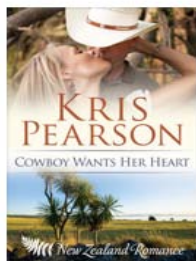
On the whole US iBook store it hit No 1 free book. In Canada, No 2. By late in the day those two had swapped places. (Michael Wolff's controversial book on Trump was the top paid book in EVERY store I checked. He made more than me yesterday!)

I said at the beginning you needed to have several books out so readers could buy them after they'd grabbed their free one. Almost without exception, the other books in

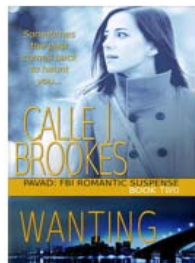
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the Heartlands series were what sold yesterday and this morning. There were the usual others, but Heartlands won hands down.

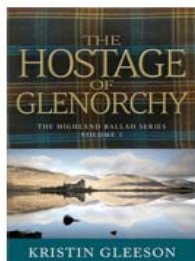
Top Free Books



1. Cowboy Wants Her Heart
Kris Pearson



2. Wanting
Calle J. Brookes



3. The Hostage of Glenorchy
Kristin Gleeson

PS - Jan 14th. I now have some figures in from iBooks and Nook and Kobo because I load through Smashwords and their reports happen a day or two later. All-up in three days I've given away 43,693 copies of Cowboy and sold 406 of my others. Bookbub cost four times as much as Freebooksy, and brought approximately four times as many free downloads – but sales were substantially better.

Meet The Authors

Gillian St Kevern

<https://www.gillianstkevern.com>



Gillian St. Kevern reports that on February 26th, the fourth book in her paranormal series Thorns and Fangs will be released by NineStar Press, wrapping up Nate and Ben's storyline (for now). Gillian says "Thorns and Fangs is the first story of mine to be accepted by a publisher, and this feels like I've come full circle in more ways than one. Thorns and Fangs is a gay paranormal romance, following reluctant vampire Ben and not as human as he thinks he is Nate, as they face the challenges thrown at them by necromancers, demons, werewolves and their own identities." <http://amzn.to/2Gu9s9x>

Kathy Servian

<https://kaservian.com/>



After a twenty-year career in the fashion and applied arts industries, Kathy squeezes full-time study for an Advanced Diploma in Applied Writing around working on a historical fiction series. Her third novel and the first in the series, The Moral Compass, is imminent. Kathy made the costume for the cover and shot the image on Long Bay Beach.

Shirley Wine

www.shirleywine.com



Shirley Wine is from a family where oral storytelling was encouraged. Born into a farming family, she worked on the land alongside her husband for many years and a love of the land runs as deep as the blood in her veins. So writing rural romance was a natural progression. A long-time member of RWNZ, Shirley lives with her husband in a rural Waikato town. <http://amzn.to/2GQ1Q15>

Janet Elizabeth Henderson

<http://www.janetelizabethhenderson.com>



Janet Elizabeth Henderson writes contemporary romance and romantic suspense, with a humorous bent. She was born in Scotland, but now lives in New Zealand with about four million pets, two feral children and a husband who's obsessed with DIY (obsessed NOT skilled). Her thirteenth book, Rage, released at the end of September. <http://amzn.to/2BaKjQN>

Regional Round-Up Reports

Wellington/Kapiti Coast

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

Wow – what a great Christmas lunch! Eighteen of us gathered in Giovanna's lovely sitting room opposite the sea at Paraparaumu Beach on December 10. Peter talked about the progress of his LITKIWIS marketing app and we were able to have a look at the process on Giovanna's big screen. Our round-in-a-circle catch-up had to be briefer than usual because there were so many of us, but there was plenty to talk about. Photos were taken for the Facebook page.



Anne has volunteered to take over sending out the monthly notices from now on, so watch your inboxes. There's a lot of new writing planned for the holiday break, so by our February meeting there should be a heap of progress to report. This will be held at 1pm on Saturday February 3rd. An email will be sent regarding venue and everything else.

Otago

Convenor: Maria King (franciscowie@gmail.com)

A big thank you to Samantha Charlton who has been the convenor of the Otago/Southland Chapter. Samantha is stepping down from the role as she heads off for some overseas travel. May you find some great inspiration! As Samantha says "I've really enjoyed my time in this role, and will miss the catch ups with the members in my area. Fortunately, the lovely Maria King (who is based in Wanaka), has agreed to take over!" Thanks Maria!

Auckland Convenor: Pamela Gervai (December 2017) and Ruth Bell (2018 onwards) (ruth.s.clough@gmail.com)

Coast to Coast Convenor: Vivienne Matthews (vivienmatthewswriter@gmail.com)

Hawkes Bay Convenor: Kendra Delugar ([kend-raonthemove@hotmail.com](mailto:kendraonthemove@hotmail.com))

Nelson

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

Saturday 9/12 was our last meeting for the year. It was also Annika's last meeting as convenor. Next year the convenorship will be in a delegated spirit. The meeting was a Xmas lunch at the lovely rural Grape Escape Café. All the girls were beautifully dressed. LaVerne Clark walked up the garden path, as if it was the Red Carpet. Her purple creation would've got 10/10 in the Women's Weekly.

We started with a glass of bubbly, before a scrumptious meal. Great news about Paper Plus selling Heather Holmes' book 'What's In A Name'; still \$20 per book will go to the Cancer Society! Sally Astridge and Swedish writer Arne Norlin will launch the NZ version of 'Time Twins' on Tuesday 19/12 at 6pm at our new independent bookshop 'Volume'.



Annika got a fantastic gift basket, as a thank you for being convenor for many years. Then Annika went to the 'Ladies' and coming back, she was told she'd missed the Secret Santa – an Agent from the SSSDC (Secret Santa Service Department of CIA). Before good-bye hugs and kisses, a much needed new group photo shot.



Blenheim Convenor: Iona Jones (ionajones@xtra.co.nz)

Christchurch Convenor: Jane Madison-Jones (maddiejane@xtra.co.nz)