

Heart to Heart

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ROMANCE WRITERS
OF NEW ZEALAND

July 2018

Interview With Editor Jo Mackay

Gillian St Kevern



We're fortunate to have Jo Mackay attending our conference for the second time. Jo began her career as a journalist, trained as a book editor, and has worked for several publishing houses in the UK and Australia. She's currently heading the Mira and HQ lines at Harlequin Australia, and is also on the look out for new additions to the Escape publishing line up.

Jo agreed to an interview to help those of us planning to pitch at conference learn a bit more about what she's looking for, and also give those unable to attend some insights into current publishing trends. Thank you, Jo!

1. You've been in publishing for over twenty years, during which time you'll have seen a lot of changes and overcome a lot of challenges. Change is often stressful. What advice can you offer authors about surviving and thriving in a climate of uncertainty?

Ignore uncertainty and stress where you can and write the stories you are interested in. People will always want to read great stories, well told; stories that have the kind of psychological insight that only books can bring. I would advise against trying to write a particular kind of story because its 'on trend'. It's good to be aware of market trends so you can highlight any of those elements that exist in your book when pitching but 'write what you love to read' is still the best advice I can offer.

2. What direction do you see romance, specifically the Mira and HQ lines, heading in?

HQ focuses on general trade fiction, so perhaps not so relevant here? In Mira, we have seen a lot of historical romance, primarily 19th Century and early 20th Century, coming through with strong, independent heroines and more beta than alpha male characters. The same

is true of our contemporary fiction. Both historicals and contemporaries tend to be set locally with recognisable characters and events and focus on how a sense of place and/or identity may be found through the power of a community or a retelling of history from a specifically female point of view. This preoccupation with telling our own stories, rather than US or UK stories, does not show any signs of disappearing.

Romance is now competing with Netflix and Stan and the joy of streaming. When we used to curl up on a sofa with a good book and a glass of wine, now we are binge-watching television series. I predict that books that are either very similar to this in terms of reader experience, or very different, will fare the best.

So for similar books, fast-moving plots, high concept ideas, brilliant deft characterisation and an ability to create a very visual sense of time and place with a few pen strokes will work.

For books that celebrate their difference to this, a detailed sense of world building that defeats even the best production designer and — for me the most enjoyable reader experience — depth of psychological insight into someone's world where we slowly understand what they are thinking and feeling and will always win over even the best TV. Of course, that other elusive narrative element, strong voice, will also work.

3. What has remained constant in romance while you've been involved in the industry? What don't you foresee changing?

Romance is a celebration of life and relationships and we will always, I hope, want to do that. I also think that we will always want to mend in our stories those things that don't always work out in real life. Romance is both an antidote to, and a celebration of, real life. Those things won't change.

In terms of romance novels, it seems to me that books are a highly successful form of technology. They've survived since the fifteenth century; they'll make it through the next swathe of change.

4. The Guardian declared 2018 the year of diversity in publishing. In your experience, has 2018 lived up to this promise? What can writers improve on? What would you like to see more of?

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The short answer is, no, not really. I think it's one thing to declare a year of diversity, and another to make it so. But there has been this year some very lively debate, which is hopefully where change begins. We all need to check our privilege, and we all need to work to keep the debate constructive so that it has real effect. I think the conference this year will contribute to that.

We welcome submissions from the whole community and perhaps this is something we need to start stating more boldly. At present there is no doubt that the vast majority of our submissions come from white women.

5. In your submission wish list, you've mentioned both romantic suspense and domestic noir. What is the difference between these genres, and what most excites you about them?

I'm not sure there is a great deal of difference but perhaps, if pushed, I would say that domestic noir plays with unreliable narrators and depth of point of view more than romantic suspense. (But I'm pretty sure that there are many examples where this is not the case!)

I like psychological depth, I love unreliable narrators and complex plotting, I like a good hooky narrative, but I think it's the exploration of identity in these books...how even when we think we know someone really well we might not know them at all — that individuals are basically unknowable — that makes them so interesting. And of course, that if your character is naïve about this, they may end up dead. High stakes stuff!

6. You've also stated you're looking for Australian and New Zealand historicals. Is the audience for these historicals domestic or International?

Depends. If you have overseas elements in them, such as a UK or US strand, you are more likely to sell them there, but then Germany, for example, seem to love Australian historical stories. We take a long-term view of this and build authors in the local market first; if they don't work overseas immediately, it's not really a problem. We'll get there.

The main thing that sells anywhere in the world is great writing. I think there is something about writing (or rewriting) your own history that allows authors to go deep and broad and engage with ideas of place and identity, so that can be a plus in every sense.

7. One of the hardest parts about writing historicals is keeping the momentum while working in language and dialogue that has a tendency to be slow and meandering. Do you have any authors you can recommend as getting that balance between pace and period language?

The struggles my authors have with historicals seem to be mainly to do with which events and facts can be sacrificed to storyline and which not, whether research

is blending with narrative or coming across as an information dump, and making sure that the things they have their characters doing were actually possible in the time and space they have them doing them.

I think overtly period language is best avoided, to be honest, as it tends to sound self-conscious (although I acknowledge that it has its place, for example, in Regency category writing). An occasional word here or there used consistently throughout for a particular character is probably enough to give readers a flavour of the language of the time. We have some lovely historical writers on our list such as Tea Cooper, Mary-Anne O'Connor, Tricia Stringer and Darry Fraser who do this really well.

8. I also noticed that you are looking for women's life lit! This sounds intriguing. What sort of stories does this cover?

I think life lit is primarily a marketing term, but it is quite a handy one because it describes books such as Rachael Johns' *The Greatest Gift*, Monica McInerney's *The Trip of a Lifetime* or internationally, books such as Joanna Trollope's *City of Friends* or Nora Roberts' 'Inn Boonsboro' books. Big layered stories concerned with relationships, that are often multi-generational, interested in both everyday life and the big events that shape our lives, and focused on the ideas and issues that affect women in particular.

9. Has a book ever changed your life? If so, what was the book?

Every book I read changes my life, to be honest. They give me another individual's vision of the world, and that alters mine.

But there are three in particular that I remember reading and thinking I would never be the same again: *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller. I think when I read them — my childhood and adolescence — was probably really important too.

10. Rotorua last year was your first RWNZ conference. What was your highlight and/or what are you looking forward to this year?

Meeting all our NZ authors for the first time was wonderful: a talented, charming and generous bunch of people. Christie Craig's presentation on craft was both brilliant and hilarious. She gave me some great insights into how to explain things to authors when something isn't working. I learnt a lot.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone again and I think the line-up is fabulous this year, so I can't possibly pick one element. It's going to be spectacular.

Jo heads the local lists for Mira and HQ at Harlequin Australia,

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commissioning fiction and nonfiction. A passionate advocate for her authors, Jo firmly believes good writing can change lives. She loves true stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, historical novels, suspense, psychological thrillers, romance set in close-knit communities and stories she can't put down after the first page. Jo has worked in publishing for more than 20 years. Originally from the UK, she began her career as a journalist in London before training as a book editor. Since then she has worked in Australia for several trade publishing houses in senior editorial roles, including six years as a Commissioning Editor at ABC Books and three years as an Associate Publisher at HarperCollins Publisher.

Jo is on the lookout for rural (or small community) romance, layered and compelling women's 'life lit', family sagas, Australian or NZ historical (especially 19th and early 20th Century), domestic noir, and romantic suspense for the Mira and HQ imprints. Upwards of 90k words preferred. And contemporary romances (billionaires, single dads, royals, clean and wholesome), LGBTQI, Interracial and diverse characters, historical, paranormal, suspense and rural for Escape Publishing. Escape is currently not looking for submissions of less than 45000 words.

When Not To Take Advice

Dan Holloway



There are few places as supportive as the writing community (yes, I know we have our moments, never more so than recently, but it's still true). And nowhere does that support manifest itself more than in writers' willingness to share advice, to work collectively to find, and

perfect the recipe for, our secret sauce.

But there can be moments when what most experience as a community of support can incredibly alienating to some. Nowhere have I experienced this more than when it comes to "advice". Ironically, as an indie writer, there are lots of spaces in which I come across advice that has almost become dogma, ways to do things that have become "the only way". And this is even more so in the world of romance writing, when the top selling writers in the field pack out conference halls and hand down the secrets of their success.

For most people these sessions, and the advice they contain, can be career-changing, and even life-changing. But having spent years trying to cook from these recipes, and years more going back to the recipe books to see if I'd read them wrong, I was left concluding that I simply wasn't meant to be a writer. Because no matter how I tried, I just couldn't follow the advice.

And the more I read, and the more I raised this question – why can't I seem to do what I am being told I need to do? – the more the answer seemed to come back – I

must simply be not trying hard enough. I'm making excuses. I'm lazy. The problem was I was working so hard I was making myself exhausted and ill and it still wasn't happening, but still I came up against a relentless wall of "then try harder."

The problem was one that you find in every sphere of life. People have a very hard time distinguishing between "I can't" and "I won't." Even the language is used imprecisely (not a particularly good thing for writers!). I see people all the time saying "I can't..." and the answer, from advisers, is to offer ways in which they "can" and, lo and behold, they "do." So what most people mean by "I can't" is "I can't right now, but if you teach me I'll be able to." And for those people all the traditional advice out there is exactly what they need to be scouring and trying. The thing is that for me "I can't" meant "I can't."

And there was a reason for that. I have bipolar disorder. I'm also neurodivergent and just starting the process of seeking a particular diagnosis. My brain simply doesn't respond the way other people's brains do. I struggle with routine and often find it impossible to sequence tasks in ways that seem second nature to most people. My mood is episodically very low, when it is impossible for me to begin to contemplate anything other than the battle to stay alive; and high, when I have vast amounts of energy, can write not just for hours but days without stopping – except that what I write is often utter garbage. And much of the time I am overwhelmed with anxiety.

Realising that my mental health was at the heart of my struggle to benefit from the advice I was receiving came as a great relief. I knew I wasn't just being obstinate or lazy. There were also negatives – other people still weren't so sure. That's what I mean by people not knowing the difference between can't and won't. Because many who have never experienced mental ill health mean "I can't right now, teach me" when those of us who simply "can't" don't seek out advice we know will be useless, they will quickly label us lazy or wilful. That is very hard to live with and I am not sure I have an answer other than to keep trying to explain, and at least knowing that the problem is with them not me. And that takes away a lot of the guilt that had spent so long eating me away.

The really good news, of course, is that knowing I was wired differently meant I could start thinking about what might work. I've been able, for example, to create a flexibility that means when I am able to write I can put other things aside and just go with it while at the same time knowing that might be the only session I have for a week – and being OK with that. It really is fine not to have a routine. It's fine not to have a regular time to write or a regular word count.

And that's something that runs contrary to everything you will read. But if you are anxious or depressed, sitting in front of a blank page will not be converted to any form of written text by any clever exercise other than rest and self-care.

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The secret is to stop being process-driven. Stop thinking you can't be a writer just because you can't do the things that other people do to produce words. What matters is the words. Only the words. Stop judging yourself against other people's processes, even if they are the most respected guru on the planet. Look only at the words you actually write, and work with your mind, with your neurology, to figure out how it is able to produce them.

Dan Holloway is the News Editor for the Alliance of Independent Authors and a long-time campaigner on mental health. He delivered the Oxford University Disability Lecture in 2017. He has been Creative Thinking World Champion for the past two years and runs the creative thinking consultancy Rogue Interrobang (<https://rogueinterrobang.com/>).

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When Footpaths Attack...

Renee Dahlia

"Hurry up, we are going to be late," Kid2 yelled at me as we crossed the road. We were walking to the train station on our way to a friend's birthday party. I started jogging, and as I took the last stride off the road, my left foot landed awkwardly on a rough piece of road. My ankle rolled and I felt the wrench in the ligaments even before I hit the pavement. The roads in inner west Sydney are made of large concrete slabs, and over the past hundred years, they've shifted leaving ridges between them. My foot landed along one of these ridges, rolling from the higher slab to the lower one. Thankfully years of horse riding has taught me to fall, and I instinctively rolled shoulder first, preventing any other injuries. Tears of agony poured down my cheeks as I dragged myself up to stand on the side of the road. My ankle immediately swelled up.

"I don't think we'll be going to O*'s party. I'm sorry." I hobbled up the street to the taxi rank and sent Kid2 into the local chip shop to grab some ice. We took the taxi home – paying the cab driver to drive us one kilometre down the road. By now, the pain had ratcheted upwards and my breath was coming short and sharp. Granted, the pain was less than when my appendix burst, or the four times I've been through child-birth, but it was still bad enough that I thought I might vomit.

We piled the whole family into the car, interrupting their happy Saturday afternoon plans, and drove to the local ER. After much fluffing around, my ankle was x-rayed, proclaimed to be not-broken, and I was sent home on crutches to rest. For a week, I couldn't weight-bear on it, and awkwardly the timing lined up with the last week at one of my day jobs*. If you ever want to feel like a freeloading slacker, I recommend getting an injury during your final week in a job and putting in the forms for sick leave rather than attending work. To counter this, I did go into their office three weeks later, on crutches, and hand in some final paperwork (which could have been done via email) just to ease my own guilt. *I work as a freelance data analyst and writer in the horse racing industry.

Back to the injury, two weeks after the accident, the swelling had reduced enough for an ultra-sound. The radiologist confirmed I'd partially torn two ligaments – one either side of the ankle – but not enough to require surgery. I started a program of rehabilitation with a physio (who, btw, is totally romance cover worthy, so it's no hardship to visit him), and had to alter my exercise program.

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Prior to this injury, my exercise program consisted of walking the kids to school each day (1.2km each way, twice a day). The physio recommended doing gentle exercises in the pool to strengthen up the muscles around the ligaments as they healed, as well as stretches, and I've used this time to slowly add in some lengths. It's now ten weeks since I injured myself, and I can swim 800m without stopping (a massive improvement in heart and lung fitness for me), and have almost all the flexibility back in my ankle.

The biggest challenge now is to increase the distance I can walk, and to improve my balance on that side. The ligaments around the ankle joint are used for balance, and with the tears, they couldn't do the micro-movements necessary to stand on one leg.

I discovered #romancefit on Twitter, which is a good way to get motivated to move during the day. In terms of writing, the injury didn't impact much on writing, although in the first few weeks, I did more reading than writing, as the ankle started to throb if I didn't keep it elevated. I'm lucky enough to work from home full time, so the impact on my life, and our family, hasn't been too great (apart from the first couple of weeks when I couldn't walk or drive). And yes, Kid2 is still mad at me for "being clumsy and ruining his fun forever." Twelve-year-olds can be so dramatic!

Overall, the injury has made me more aware of how my body is aging, being a tick over forty really slows down the rate of healing. It's also made me grateful for Australia's Medicare (public health) system, and the flexibility I have as a full-time writer.

Renée Dahlia is an unabashed romance reader who loves feisty women and strong, clever men. Her books reflect this, with a side-note of dark humour. Renée has a science degree in physics. When not distracted by the characters fighting for attention in her brain, she works in the horse racing industry doing data analysis. She writes for two racing publications, churning out feature articles, interviews and advertorials. When she isn't reading or writing, Renée wrangles a husband, four children, and volunteers on the local cricket club committee. Find her on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/reneedahliawriter/>, Twitter: <https://twitter.com/dekabat> and her website: www.reneedahlia.com.



Bluestocking Series: Victorian-era historical romances. Each book in this series works as a stand-alone book. Three remarkable young women, Josephine, Marie and Claire,

graduate from Amsterdam University's Medical program in 1887.

To Charm a Bluestocking (<https://books2read.com/u/3yZGRe>)

In Pursuit of a Bluestocking (<https://books2read.com/u/49PBky>)

The Heart of a Bluestocking (COMING: September 2018)

Writing With Chronic Illness

Jo Jakeman



I'm an open person - ask me a question and I will give you an honest answer. But there are some things that I don't bring up, like my health.

At a Derby Book Festival event recently, I mentioned that I gave up my job because of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and this gave me more time to write. Someone asked, 'How do you manage to write with a chronic illness?' I said something bland like, 'Self-care... naps... eating well...' Two people thanked me for being candid about my illnesses and to tell me their own struggles with their health.

But I wasn't as honest as I could have been. I didn't talk about how I get into cycles where I feel so ill I don't look after myself, which leads to me feeling worse and so begins the deep, dark, spiral of illness and depression. I didn't mention my crushing anxiety which has me not wanting to leave the house for days or how I get ratty with those around me, and how I become overwhelmed at the thought of doing simple tasks that others take for granted.

It got me thinking about why I don't talk about my health. Is it because I don't want to appear weak or be pitied? And the answer is - I'm embarrassed. I'm even embarrassed that I'm embarrassed. I feel like I'm to blame; that I'm always apologising for letting someone down; for cancelling at the last minute, for not being able to take the kids out on a bike ride.

Having a chronic illness can be lonely. My husband often takes the kids out without me because I'm either too ill or I need to rest. This week, I refused to miss out. We've been out every day as the summer holidays come to an end. My eldest (by four minutes) asked why I have 'bruises' around my eyes. I look terrible and feel even worse. Desperate fatigue means I find it difficult to lift my arms to wash my hair. It hurts to stand for as long as it takes the kettle to boil. But we made some memories this week so I think it's a price worth paying.

Catch me on a good day, and I'll tell you that chronic illness can be a gift. (And I don't mean one of those unwelcome gifts from your Gran which is going straight to the charity shop on Monday.) If I hadn't been signed off sick I wouldn't have read as much as I did, wouldn't have fallen in love with books all over again, and I wouldn't have considered writing a novel.

When I was signed off work there weren't many things I could do that wouldn't make me ill. Writing was my way of exploring the world without stepping foot outside my door.

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Adventures were only hampered by my imagination, not my body. I could use my brain when other muscles let me down. Even on days when I had serious brain fog, writing was a release - if nothing else, I was queen of synonyms because I could never remember the word I wanted.

I don't know how many writers are affected by chronic illnesses. I can name a couple of highly successful authors off the top of my head who have been open about their struggles with health. There's Sarah Perry, author of the award-winning *Essex Serpent* who has Graves' disease and Angela Clarke, author of three books in the Social Media Murder series who has a degenerative tissue disorder called Ehlers Danlos.

I have heard both women speak at events and you would never know that anything was other than rosy in their lives but they struggle just like the rest of us - and they're not embarrassed to own it. I wonder if writing is something that many of us would have relegated to 'hobby' status if it wasn't for the need to have something tangible to show, something we could be proud of when going 'out to work' was no longer an option.

I am doing what I love BECAUSE of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome not IN SPITE of it. We hear stories all the time about the medal-winning runner with asthma, the one-armed drummer, and though these stories are meant to inspire us, they can sometimes make us feel inadequate.

Take a look at the two photos in this article. The one at the top is an 'official' author photo. Look at her - she's a tough cookie. This is the person that the publicity department would have you believe wrote *Sticks and Stones*. Read a Psychological Thriller by her and you know you're in safe hands.

The one below... well, that's the story of my life. This is me in my comfy clothes about to embark on another round of editing without having a clue where to start. Many people portray a wildly different public persona to how they truly are. Whereas Clark Kent rips open his shirt to expose the famous symbol for Superman, my superhero outfit is a little snugglier and involves fluffy socks.



So, to everyone out there achieving 'greatness' through illness - whether that be starting a new business, writing

a novel, or binge-watching Netflix - fist bumps all round. You're not alone. We got this!

*Jo Jakeman was the winner of the Friday Night Live 2016 competition at the York Festival of Writing. Born in Cyprus, she worked for many years in the City of London before moving to Derbyshire with her husband and twin boys. *Sticks and Stones* is her debut thriller. Find out more at www.jojakeman.com.*



Sticks and Stones: How far would you go for revenge on your ex?

Imogen's husband is a bad man. His ex-wife and his new mistress might have different perspectives but Imogen thinks she knows the truth. And now he's given her an ultimatum: get out of the family home in the next fortnight or I'll fight you for custody of our son.

In a moment of madness, Imogen does something unthinkable. Something that puts her in control. But how far will she go to protect her son and punish her husband? And what will happen when his ex and his girlfriend get tangled up in her plans?

2018 Chapter Short Story Contest Report

Kendra Delugar

We had some truly outstanding entries this year and the marks reflected that. With 22 stories in total, we had a slight increase in numbers from last year.

The Chapter Short Story Contest is for contemporary romances, but the rules state that entries may include a wide variety of themes, such as mystery, humour, relationships and family issues – so there is room to stretch the boundaries if you want. And this year we had entrants who did. Amongst the standard contemporary romances, we had 1 contemporary with historical elements, 1 with paranormal elements, 1 noir americana and 1 young adult. Only 3 of the entrants classified their stories as steamy or sensual – the other 19 stories (that's over 85%) were either shy or sweet, so there is room to be a bit more adventurous there too if you're so inclined.

I would like to thank our contestants for entering – without you there would be no contest. And, of course, our amazing first-round judges who stepped forward and gave up their time to make it all possible. Thank you also to our final judge, Gaynor Davies from English Women's Weekly. And last but not least, we cannot, CANNOT forget to thank Frances Loo of Chapter Book and Tea Shop who sponsors this contest every year.



From The Editor



This time last year, I fell victim to a bug so virulent, so insidious, so obnoxious, that at one point, I was being tested for TB and told to avoid small children and elderly. I missed two big family events and the Christchurch RWNZ chapters dessert evening.

And, obviously, it knocked my writing schedule back by months. This bug first made itself felt in June and was still lingering at the conference in August. But was the bug itself so bad—or had the demands of a fulltime writing and freelancing career turned a mild-mannered cold into SuperBug?

Naturally, as the weather takes a turn for cold and depressing, my thoughts have been coming back to my old nemesis, illness, with increasing regularity. I'd also volunteered to lead a discussion for the Christchurch Chapter on Self-Care for Writers this month, and the two things together suggested the theme for this issue. With a wide range of writers speaking about different aspects of health and well-being, I hope there's something here that will be useful for all readers. I'd really like to thank all the contributors on this subject. Health struggles can be very personal, and I really appreciate your willingness to share what you've learned with us.

My Self-Care for Writers discussion surprised me too! For example, 100% of the members who took my pre-meeting survey reported struggling with Imposter Syndrome. That was reflected in the quick survey we took at the start of the discussion. We could easily have spent the hour just on this and the related self-doubt and anxiety, but we had to touch on other subjects.

Two important things came out of our discussion. The first one was the difference that being able to lean on fellow writers makes. While family members and non-writing friends might sympathise, it takes a writer to really get it. Sometimes, knowing you're not alone in your struggles is half the battle!

The other was the reminder that what works for one person may not work for you. A big part of your writing journey is working out what kind of writer you are, whether you write in a linear order, you can't write a word until your plot is entirely ironed out, or you disdain outlines altogether. Why would your writing health be any different?

To a lot of people this is just one more thing to worry about. Me? I kind of love it. I have a minor chronic illness that, before I was diagnosed, dominated my life. Knowing my options and being empowered to take charge of my health literally changed my life. I hope that this issue of Heart to Heart resonates with you and gives you new

tools or a different take for balancing your health and your writing.

Heart to Heart is welcoming submissions for the following upcoming Issues (articles do not necessarily have to match that issue's theme):

August: Travel

September: Tools for Writers

October: Research

Any questions let me know!

Our fantastic formatter, Ruth, is standing down after the August issue. If you'd like to see Heart to Heart continue, please consider taking on this crucial role!



It's your last chance to get on board – Conference Registration closes on the 31st of July!

In one month's time (or close enough) we'll be celebrating our "When Love Comes to Town" 25th Anniversary Conference – and it's a not to be missed event. It will be an incredible few days. We have amazing international writers, Bella Andre, Damon Suede, Grace Burrowes, as well as our own best-seller, Nalini Singh. There will be workshops, events, and international agents and editors looking for their newest talented client! So sign up and we'll see you there for a weekend of fun and learning.

Register here: <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/event/rwnz-2018-conference/>

Health, Health, Health, Darling...

Bronwen Evans



As Edwina from Ab Fab would say. Come on. Admit it. As writers we sit a lot—or do we?

Every job on this planet has stressful days or weeks or months... All of us, regardless of whether we write full time or not, should be conscious of our health and looking after ourselves so we can be there for others too. It's all about balance, darling.... I'm pretty sure Edwina's idea of a healthy balance and mine are quite far apart...

Our lives are busy and when it comes to health sometimes we let ourselves slip—especially when deadlines come around! I also work for the Association of General Surgeons NZ and even the surgeons forget to check their health and they have very stressful jobs. Right now they are consciously looking at a wellness programme for all surgeons' physical and mental health. Perhaps we should have an annual reminder for our health too?

Most of this is stuff we all know, but it's good to have a reminder every now and then. Here are my tips (and I still battle to follow them) on maximizing my writing life while keeping healthy.

1. Know yourself and what you are capable of. Don't put yourself under undue stress.

Sounds simple but we Kiwi's like to think we are tough and 'she'll be right'. Well sometimes it's not.

As I write this, two days ago my cousin David's wife, Megan died in a car accident. They live not far from me. She leaves behind a devoted husband of 10 years and two wee boys under 10. To say I'm devastated and in shock is an understatement. I'm also on book deadline for 1 August, and edits for my soon to be released book are due to arrive three days hence. I knew immediately that something would have to give. Both David's mother and Megan's mother are dead and David needs family to step in and help. While trying to grieve I have been cooking and cleaning and organizing for the last few days. I also have family from around the world descending on my home for a week. Can I write—no—and I ACCEPT that. I have already alerted my editor and agent and told them dates will have to move!!! It's okay to admit you can't manage. Don't try to be a hero or heroine!

To help my hectic work and writing life, I create a Weekly Planner (or daily planner if needed and it's not just connected to my writing yearly plan)—the weekly planner is for my total life. By all means put your writing hours into it

too. If you write down your tasks, you will:

- a) be able to see if that list is at all realistic - there is no point stressing about a list you can see is unachievable
- b) be able to prioritise the important tasks
- c) be able to decide what to cancel or how to move delivery dates
- d) be able to make time for yourself by planning a walk into your routine etc.
- e) It ensures you don't leave everything to the last minute

It might seem anal, but it helps manage your life and therefore hopefully your stress levels. I guess I'm saying—get organized.

Push back if you have to. Don't get so run down you can't be there for anyone, let alone yourself.

2. Don't forget to exercise!

Exercise doesn't have to take hours or cost money, it can be as simple as going for a short 20 minute walk a day. It's been proven that simple walking is good for our fitness but also helps us mentally. It's a prescription for depression—go for a walk. I have two small dogs (because I work from home) and I walk them every day. It makes me take an hour off and walk.

Don't sit for long periods of time. I have a standing desk and I alternate every hour between sitting and standing (I have one at work too). If you can't afford to buy a standing desk (it can fit on top of a normal desk see www.varidesk.com) then get up and move around every 40-45 minutes—take a 20-minute break and stretch, especially our arms, neck and shoulders.

A few yoga poses are especially good for strengthening our neck, shoulders and back, and for stretching. I've just started yoga again at my local town hall. I go once a week and do some poses at home during the week. It's amazing how that little bit helps.

If, like me, you suffer from a bad neck, back, wrists, or hands...etc. look for tools that can help. Have you trained your dragon lately? There is dragon naturally speaking software and other dictation software around that lets you talk your book. I use it. I know Nalini Singh does too because of neck and shoulder issues. It does take a bit of getting use to, and I'll write a piece for the October issue on taming your dragon and how to get the most out of dictation.

3. Eat well.

That's a loaded statement and one I have trouble following. I love my cakes and biscuits (as long as they are gluten free now). But we really need to ensure we eat not only the right amount of food for our bodies, but also focus on the type of food we eat.

continued on page 9

continued from page 8

I try not to 'pick' during the day as I'm writing. Hard when you work from home and the stocked kitchen is always there. One trick I use is not to have anything too naughty in my cupboards so I'm not tempted. I set proper meal breaks and stick to them.

I also check my portion sizes. Just cutting down on the amount I eat in one sitting has made a big difference. To get an idea of portion size – they say the amount of meat you should eat per dinner serve is less than the size of your palm or less than 100gm, and you should fill your plate with more vegetables than carbs. Sounds easy but we all know it's not.

Remember it's about balance. So, treat yourself now and then.

4. Sleep well

I find lack of sleep is one of the main reasons my productivity falls and feeling sorry for myself kicks in. Women of a certain older age do suffer from sleepless nights, as do those with young children. If you need a nap in the afternoon take one.

But my biggest tip here is to work out what hours you are most productive in. I write better in the morning even if I have not slept well. If I wait until the afternoon I'm too tired! But others I know are night owls and like to write late into the night. For some of us the night hours are the only time we have to write! BUT remember, if you are working late nights and have early mornings, you will need to recharge at least one day of the week!

If your mind is so active at night that you can't turn it off in order to sleep, have a nice bath and a hot cocoa. Also keep a pad and pen by your bed and empty your thoughts on it before trying to go to sleep. I always find watching a comedy on TV allows my mind to wind down. So I watch an episode of Big Bang Theory and then turn the lights off.

Every now and then I have succumbed to prescription sleeping pills if I can no longer cope, usually around deadline days when I know I need sleep. Again, you know best what you may need.

5. Health checks

This one is so important but one that we often forget. Get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked each year. Be proactive in managing your health.

Depending on your age, don't forget you mammograms, prostrate and/or colonoscopy exams, all of these can save lives and are often forgotten. The surgeons I work with all say to have a colonoscopy as soon as you hit 50. They tried to tell me it was an excellent 50th birthday present!

Flu injections! For me they are a must. I have low im

munity because of endometriosis and I catch everything going around. I definitely don't want the flu when on deadline.

If you look after yourself first, you are more likely to be able to look after others and manage the different tasks we juggle in our busy lives.

I hope this has just given us all a reminder to be kind to ourselves. Stress is a killer and keeping our stress levels low helps all aspects of our health including mental health.

Below I've listed some of the fun things I like to do when feeling like everything is getting on top of me.

1. Phone a friend or family member for a nice long chat
2. Get a nice massage
3. Organise a movie night with friends
4. Get out of the house and arrange to have a lunch with a friend/s
5. Set up a Skype or Facetime chat with my writing partners and just chat about books and life
6. Go for a walk, run, or bike ride along a beach or in the country
7. Take a day off and do nothing but read or watch old movies
8. Put some music on and sing and dance along while you cook something yummy
9. Plan a weekend away or a trip you might like to take in the next six months
10. Take a nap—you probably deserve it!

Most of all, remember to be kind to yourself! Then you will be in the best shape for others too.

USA Today Bestselling author, Bronwen Evans (Bron), loves story-telling – gobbling up movies, reading books and attending the theater. Her head is always filled with characters and stories, particularly lovers in angst. Is it any wonder she's a proud romance writer.

Bronwen's first manuscript, INVITATION TO RUIN, was completed late 2009, and was sold to Kensington Publishing early 2010, in a two book deal. Her debut novel, INVITATION TO RUIN, received a 4.5 star rating from RT Book Reviews and was nominated in the RT Reviewer's Choice Awards – Best First Historical. Invitation to Ruin was also won the RomCon Readers Crown Best Historical 2012.

Bron's since gone on to win the RomCon Readers Crown three times. Her first book in her Disgraced Lords series hit the USA Today bestsellers list and she has hit it several times since.

She lives in New Zealand in sunny Hawkes Bay with her two Cavoodles named Brandy and Duke.

Can't See The Forest For The Trees

Susan Pace/Allison Lane

When I checked our local falcons' web cam this morning, I did a double take. Since I knew from loop messages that the chicks had just eaten breakfast, I expected to see a white, fluffy huddle with a beak or two sticking out. But all the camera showed was a whirlwind of black feathers. Usually feathers plucked from meals dissipate quickly as breezes sweep across the 18th-floor ledge where they live, but today a trick of the breeze kept the feathers in the nestbox, swirling around the chicks and effectively burying them. Which reminds me of a book in my warning collection – bet you saw that one coming.

This author writes delightful stories. She is a witty, charming conversationalist with whom I've shared several meals over the years. But we all make mistakes once in a while, and this book was one of hers. The basic plot was solid, with good conflict and interesting characters. The theme of the book was honor, which works well in historicals. So what went wrong?

In contemplating her theme, the author apparently jotted down a 30,000-word treatise exploring various facets of honor. Then she sprinkled the treatise in its entirety into the book. Now this was a 70,000-word novel. Devoting nearly half of it to a treatise on honor didn't leave much space for the actual story, so too much of the action took place off screen. A confrontation between the heroine and the villain, which should have been a major scene in the story (since it was the catalyst for the hero to resurrect his dormant sense of honor) was merely alluded to in a brief verbal exchange between the heroine and a friend. Not even between her and the hero. Total loss of impact. And that's not all. Instead of showing us the plot action, the characters were too busy contemplating the nature of honor to actually do anything, so they resorted to telling their friends about major plot points instead of showing them to the readers. Thus, like the falcon chicks this morning, outsiders couldn't see the story because there were too many flying feathers in the way.

So I keep this book in my warning collection. I must never forget that the purpose of a novel is STORY. Without a story, we don't have a book. And that story must be shown. Even major elements of the story lose impact if merely told by one character to another. Yes, we also need thoughts as characters try to resolve problems. But as authors, we must maintain the right balance between thought and deed. Endless cogitations put fiction readers to sleep, no matter how interesting those thoughts might be in a different context.

I fell into this trap myself in my second book in print. My hero had to choose between pursuing one potential bride for her massive dowry or pursuing another for love. He

desperately needed the money, but chose love. An easy choice at the time because he had no idea where dowry girl was hiding, and his true love was right in front of him. But he spent an entire scene debating the consequences before he made that choice. Nothing wrong with that, of course, as he addressed his biggest internal conflict in that scene. But later in the book, after dowry girl showed up and his true love turned him down and fled, he faced the same choice again. He ultimately made the harder choice of pursuing his true love, but his second debate was far too similar to the first one. Not only were the arguments/consequences mostly the same, but the debate filled a lengthy scene that most readers found repetitive and that made him look wishy-washy. He should have stuck to his guns, ignored dowry girl, and immediately taken off in pursuit of his true love. Oh well... The book was my worst seller (not helped by a really bad cover...) I learned a lot from the experience, then ran across the book that now resides in my warning collection a couple of years later, which taught me even more.

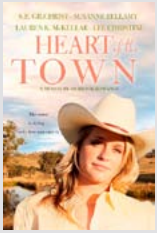
So I now focus on the story and keep a firm rein on characters when they need to contemplate their personal conflicts. If those cogitations get too long or too repetitive or occur too often, they obscure the story the readers want to experience. At which point I axe them and start over.

Award-winning author Allison Lane has enjoyed a lifelong affair with books. Born in Minnesota, she earned degrees in mathematics and computer science from the University of Illinois, then embarked on careers designing computer software and teaching classical piano, before settling on writing novels. Among her many awards is the Romantic Times Career Achievement Award and being named a finalist for RWA's RITA award. Allison and her husband currently reside in California. Visit her website at <http://www.eclectics.com/allisonlane/>

"The only thing I was fit for was to be a writer, and this notion rested solely on my suspicion that I would never be fit for real work, and that writing didn't require any."

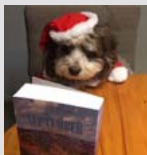
— Russell Baker

Woos & Hoos



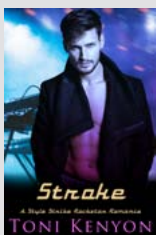
New member S. E. Gilchrist has two July releases. *Cotton Field Dreams* released on 2nd July by Escape Publishing in ebook format. It's the first book of a group writing venture she organised called Mindalby Outback Romance. It is also part of a paperback bind-up of the first four books in the series. The print book will be published by Harlequin on 23rd July and is called *Heart of the Town*.

Congratulations Bronwen Evans! Her novella A SCOT FOR CHRISTMAS (which is in the Christmas in Kilts: Highland Holiday Boxed Set) has finaled in the novella section of the Holt Medallion Virginia Romance Chapter Contest. AND - she has just signed another contract with her editor, Sue Grimshaw at Random House Loveswept for two new books in the Lady Bachelorette Series - The Seduction of Lord Sin and The Lady's Devil coming 2019. <https://www.bronwenevans.com/christmas-in-kilts-holiday-box-set-release-contest/>



Denise shares what might be the most unique woohoo I've encountered yet:

In late December I received a call from Colin, my Dunedin brother in law. He advised that the Editor of the 'Otago Daily Times' was on the lookout for pictures of dogs doing interesting things...with a Christmas flavor. Colin had seen my quirky advert for 'September Promise' on social media, and felt this picture was a winner!! Never one to look an opportunity in the face I made contact...despite being very doubtful (as a North Islander) that my pic would be published in a South Island newspaper!! To my surprise and delight, Chico and my novel 'September Promise' gained notoriety on page 2 of the 'Otago Daily Times'.



Toni Kenyon has released *Stroke*, the third book in her STYLE STRIKE ROCK-STAR ROMANCE series.

Editor Tips/Writing Tips: Quick Tips To Help Your Writing Be Amazing!

Raevyn McCann



Didn't you just say that?

Ask your friends what words or phrases you tend to overuse when speaking. Those could bleed over into your writing.

Transitional Help

Check your scene breaks. Do you overuse the same transitional phrase?

The reader knows time has passed, so just start with what the character is doing. You don't need to let the reader know that they are waking up or that a few hours have passed.

Filter out the filter words

Check your document for words that filter the action, such as feel/felt/feeling, think/thought/thinking, see/saw/seeing.

When you filter the action, the reader doesn't become a part of it because they are being told what is happening by your character rather than the narrative.

This article explains it well and gives practical examples: <https://annerallen.com/2017/06/filter-words-and-phrases-to-avoid-in-writing/>

Raevyn is a lover of books...just about any type. She is also Hispanic, panromantic, asexual, and genderqueer, which gives her a different view of the world around her. Her life-long goals have been to make a modest living doing something with books, visit Machu Picchu, and most importantly, build social consciousness in herself and others. After a career as an editor, Raevyn is now the managing director of NineStar Press. Find her online at: <https://www.facebook.com/raevyn.mccann>

"Words are a lens to focus one's mind."

— Ayn Rand

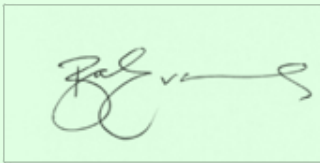
From The President

This month my report will be short and sweet. I'm currently dealing with an unexpected death in the family.

I wanted to remind everyone that conference is next month and I, for one, am looking forward to it. I can't wait to hear from our wonderful speakers, but more importantly I'm looking forward to catching up with writing friends and of course making new writing friends. We have quite a few Australian members joining us this year and it will be fun to meet them, and of course also see familiar faces.

I'm not sure when this month's H2H will be delivered, but I hope some of you have sent in nomination forms for the Executive Committee positions. If not, it's never too late to contact me and let me know you're interested. We need members to step up and take on these roles. It's fun!

Happy Writing



Bronwen Evans



Book Review: White Roses In Winter - Barbara Meyers

Gaylene M. Atkins



THE BOOK: Roses In Winter

The princess. The pauper. And a shotgun...

The only thing Jason is focused on is getting through his last year of college. But the instant attraction between him

and Kerrie leads to one unforgettable night together.

When Kerrie's wealthy, overly-protective father learns she is pregnant, he arranges a temporary marriage to teach her a lesson about choices and consequences. Jason reluctantly agrees to keep his participation in the plan a secret, because it's the only way he can safeguard his future and his family.

Kerrie is blinded by her romantic fantasy and doesn't suspect she's been set up. Meanwhile, Jason guards his heart and vows that when Kerrie leaves with their baby,

he won't beg her to stay.

Just when it seems a future together is possible, lies, betrayal and deceit threaten to separate Kerrie and Jason forever. Faced with losing each other and their baby, will their fragile bond be strong enough?

THE REVIEW: Gaylene M. Atkins



* * * * *

Five Star Review from me.

White Roses in Winter is definitely a romance in my view; but it comes with much more grit and reality than your average romance genre read. There is suspense. There is action.

There are real character flaws and traits that any reader will relate to or maybe even have had experience with? You will feel empathy for the all the characters and understand why they act as they do. I really enjoyed how the author 'showed' the behaviour of the three lead characters in this story; not just giving you the inside track on the two main characters, Jason Pendell and Kerrie Huddleston's thoughts, but also the ultimate arch rival's too.

Tiffany Preston wants Jason to focus his attention and affections on her. And what she wants she gets. Jason knows precisely what sort of person she is; and she's someone he doesn't wish to be around. Jason's a young guy who is good looking, knows what he wants in life and he's working hard to achieve that; he lives in a low rent district making just enough money to cover his study and rent and not much else. And he has walled himself off to emotional entanglements.

When he first sees Kerrie Huddleston he's drawn to her innate goodness; but her natural beauty and innocence shines as a reinforcing warning to him. She isn't for the likes of him. He isn't good enough for her. He wants to be but knows that it's unlikely to happen. But he wants her all the same. For Kerrie, she instinctively knows that Jason is someone she could love for her entire life; finding out she is pregnant, after protection fails, becomes a defining moment in her life.

And the manipulative actions of her parents has her standing up to take on the responsibility. Much to her parents horror. The backstory of Kerrie's overly protective and controlling parents, particularly her father, is quite believable. You will have empathy for her mother and her father, too, by the end of the story.

This is also a story about how jealousy and anger can turn into psychotic behaviour over a period of time; Tiffany has been Kerrie's BFF since they were little girls.

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Both living and growing up in close proximity to each other and within family groups of affluence and prestige. This is also a story about a girl who has been neglected by her rich parents and given everything money can buy, including her way to escape the lack of love and real unity that her family doesn't provide; she sees Kerrie as perfect, with perfect parents who dote on her and love her. And this continues to build into what, in the end, becomes the catalyst for the final heart-pounding scenes of the story.

An excellent read in my view.

THE AUTHOR: Barbara Meyers



Barista by day, romance novelist by night: When not writing fiction, Dr. Seuss-like poetry (for adults) or song lyrics, Barbara Meyers disguises herself behind a green apron and works part-time for a world-wide coffee company. Her novels are a mix of comedy, suspense and spice and often feature a

displaced child.

Barbara is still married to her first husband and has two fantastic children. Originally from Southwest Missouri, (she blames her roots in the Show Me state for her somewhat skeptical nature) she currently resides in Central Florida.

Find her online: <http://www.barbarameyers.com> and <https://twitter.com/barbmeyers>

Writing And Chronic Illness

Betsy Greenaker



This past week I've been dealing with a Lupus flare that has really affected my right hand and have been unable to type, write by hand or otherwise function as I would like. But, last week and from how

I'm still feeling, this week, is teaching me some powerful lessons when it comes to writing.

I have been able to read the books, articles that I've been saving for a rainy day, like all of the Medium articles I have archived, there are quite a few. Instead of being holed up in my office during all my free (ha) time, I've been able to observe the world around me and dictate notes via my keyboard with voice command. All of this has helped me past the pain and frustration of Lupus.

This experience has also brought the question of what I would do if I could never write again in the way I'm used to, typing on a keyboard. The answer for me has been adaptability. The voice to type command has been a lifesaver, I've been able to utilize this function quite well,

much to my delight. I've used this in the past for short text messages, but never anything long. It's been a bit of a learning curve, having to say the punctuation and other prompts, but gratifying that it works well enough so I don't feel like I'm taking a forced vacation from writing. An illness can enable one to focus on the important aspects of your craft rather than the typical time wasters that can plague us all.

I've also learned that no matter how I'm feeling, there is always something to write about. Probably more so when I'm feeling awful, I don't subscribe to the writer's block theory, in my opinion, that's a cop out. When you're dealing with a chronic illness you don't always have the luxury of "Well, I have nothing today, maybe tomorrow." Tomorrow may be worse, get something out today! You never know, what you write today, even if you feel it's crap, could be a diamond in the rough tomorrow, upon further review.

I doubt I will ever be a high production content writer, but that's ok. For one thing, I really don't need the hassle or stress of that kind of job, secondly, my illness forces me, from time to time, to slow down, take a look at the world through a different lens and write about subjects that I might otherwise miss. I have to look at the positive in life, not the negative, that's what keeps me going in my writing and in everything else.

Betsy Greenaker is a writer/poet/artist living in western NY State. She writes articles for various online platforms including Medium. She also contributes to the websites Greenaker Nation - greenakernation.com and using the pen name Penny Ann Leonard, she writes for The Four Season Pen - thefourseasonpen.wordpress.com

After a brief respite while recovering from recent Thyroid surgery, Betsy has resumed a full writing schedule. She is a freelancer for various blogs and is currently working on a memoir and her first novel.

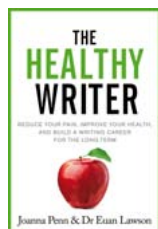
Contact Betsy at bgreenaker12@gmail.com or at greenakernation@gmail.com

"Begin with an individual, and before you know it you have created a type; begin with a type, and you find you have created – nothing."

– F. Scott Fitzgerald

Book Review: The Healthy Writer - Joanna Penn & Dr Euan Lawson

Melissa Climo



THE BOOK: The Healthy Writer

Do you suffer from physical pain relating to your writing life?

Are you struggling with back pain, weight gain related to sedentary working, anxiety, depression, sleep problems, neck pain, eye strain, stress, loneliness, digestive issues, or Repetitive Strain Injury?

These are the most common issues reported by writers and if you struggle with any of them, you are not alone. Writing is not a physically healthy job, but if you want a long-term writing career, then you need to look after your body.

I've been through my own pain journey over the last six years. I used to get crippling migraines that sent me to a dark room, and back pain so bad that I couldn't sleep, as well as stress levels so high that I wasn't able to breathe normally.

Now, my back pain, migraines and RSI have almost gone completely, and I manage my writing life in a far healthier way than ever before. I share my personal journey and insights with you in this book.

My co-author is Dr Euan Lawson, who shares his insights into how we can reduce pain, improve health and build a writing career for the long term.

THE REVIEW: Melissa Climo



...“hunching over for hours every day, eyes fixed on screen, hands bashing away at a keyboard or scribbling on a page can result in conditions that hinder a full life.”

Sound familiar?

The authors set a high reader expectation before I even opened this book. The full title is actually: *The Healthy Writer: reduce pain, improve your health and build a writing career for the long-term*. I leapt eagerly into all parts of this promise. While I am still apprentice-level on the writing career journey, I have already mastered spending too many hours sedentary at a desk. My day job has nearly always been deskbound, tied to a computer, reading, reviewing, processing words. And I have the aches and pains to show for it. On diving into fiction writing, I

would like to unlearn my less-than-healthy habits.

The Healthy Writer covered all the things I can relate to, plus other health issues for writers I had not yet encountered...but I can be proactive about now. This book touches on a range of physical, emotional and mental health issues, exploring back pain, eye strain, anxiety, burnout, weight gain, moods, sleep, and much more. The diligent, active reader can choose to consider the questions at the end of each chapter, and learn more using the resources provided. Or if you are like me, it is short enough to fly through the book in one go, and well-structured enough to allow a revisit to relevant sections.

Joanna and Euan are a complementary writing team. He brings the medial experience, she the writing. Both share their personal story and journey towards improved health, plus in developing the book they surveyed over 1100 writers, many of whom are quoted. Together they have uncovered the most common health impacts experienced by writers, and explored the latest medical evidence for countering each issue. Their approach, and non-technical language, makes the book highly applicable for their audience. Us. Writers. Individuals with different histories, habits, patterns of behaviour and circumstances.

This book is a great resource for all writers, where ever they are on their own journey. Just as the publishing industry is in a time of change, so is our wider culture increasingly focussed on the importance of good health. Jump into this book to help build resilience into your life and actively move towards being a healthier writer.

Mel is an emerging writer, still a self-confessed newbie to the fiction writing playground. She is parallelising her apprenticeship in story structure and characterisation with a RWNZ side hustle that uses her organisation skills. Mel is the convener of the 2019 RWNZ conference in Christchurch, and she looks forward to welcoming you to the South Island!

“If you write one story, it may be bad; if you write a hundred, you have the odds in your favor.”

— Edgar Rice Burroughs

The Welcome Mat

We're rolling out the red carpet this month for another lovely group of new and returning members. Welcome, everyone! It's great to have you with us.

Darry Fraser - Australia

Deborah Hart - Central North

Lucille Henry - Auckland

Jackie Hunter-Letham - Christchurch

Angelique Jurd - Auckland

Helen McNeil - Auckland

Charmaine Ross - Australia

Merren Tait - Central North

Jen Trewin - Auckland

Olivia Ventura - Australia

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 the RWNZ Members-Only Facebook page, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RWNZMembersOnly/>.

Book Review: The River City Chronicles

Anne Barwell



The BOOK: The River City Chronicles

A group of strangers meets at Ragazzi, an Italian restaurant, for a cooking lesson that will change them all. They quickly become intertwined in each other's lives, and a bit of magic touches each of them.

Meet Dave, the consultant who lost his partner; Matteo and Diego, the couple who run the restaurant; recently-widowed Carmelina; Marcos, a web designer getting too old for hook-ups; Ben, a trans author writing the Great American Novel; teenager Marissa, kicked out for being bi; and Sam and Brad, a May-September couple who would never have gotten together without a little magic of their own.

Everyone in the River City has a secret, and sooner or later secrets always come out.



The REVIEW: Anne Barwell

I have yet to read a J. Scott Coatsworth story I didn't enjoy, and this is no exception. *The River City Chronicles* was originally written as a serial story on the author's blog, but this is my first time reading it, and I think it works wonderfully well in this format

too.

The story starts with introductory chapters from each main character's perspective, which gives a taste of each of their 'set ups.' Then, as the story gets going, all of their stories interconnect and mesh as they meet, and become friends, and in some cases, more. I like the way characters are introduced as they meet with others I'd already 'met.' Although this story does have some romance in it, I thought it was more of a story about friendship, family, and the latter being those we choose and make ourselves. The characters feel very real.

I loved the sprinkle of magic realism in the story. It added a little extra special feeling to the story, but wasn't over-used, and made me smile. The settings are very easy to visualize, and I particularly loved the description of the restaurant from Carmelina's POV during the first cooking lesson. It feels warm and cozy, and very welcoming, and the line that stood out for me to the point I took note of it

continued on page 16

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for this review summed up the scene nicely—"the kitchen brings the memory of the heart."

I was drawn into the story immediately, and wanted to know more about the overarching story, the characters, and how they would interact. The chapters are a great size, perfect for diving in and out of the story although, as I approached the latter part of the book, I didn't want to put it down as I wanted to know how everyone's stories would end. The story is a lovely, easy, feel-good read with plenty of 'heart,' and I very much enjoyed it. Although I could guess how some characters were connected to others, and how their stories might unfold in places, it added to my reading enjoyment, rather than detracted from it.

I'd recommend *The River City Chronicles* to readers who enjoy a feel good story with real characters with a focus on the important of friends and family, both the ones we are born into, and those we choose.

Anne Barwell lives in Wellington, New Zealand. She shares her home with two cats who are convinced that the house is run to suit them; this is an ongoing "discussion," and to date it appears as though the cats may be winning. She works in a library, is an avid reader and watcher of a wide range of genres, and is constantly on the look out for more hours in her day. Anne likes to write in series and even so called one shots seem to breed more plot bunnies. Her writing is like her reading - across a range of genres, although her favourites are fantasy, SF, and historical. Anne also plays piano and violin, so often music plays a part in her stories and/or her characters are musicians.

Heart To Heart Format & Layout Designer Wanted

We have an exciting opportunity to join the H2H team. Our current format & layout designer is stepping down and we're on the lookout for someone to take the reins and, together with Gillian, continue to make the H2H the great magazine it is.

As format & layout designer your job will be take all the content gathered for the issue and put it all together into the finished product - ready for sending out to all our members. No specific experience is required and style guides and sample layouts will be available for you. This is an opportunity to leave your own mark on the H2H as there is some leeway to design the pages and collate the content so it makes the best use of the space available.

You can use any software programme you feel comfortable using.

If you have any questions or you would like to volunteer, please contact: heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz

Regional Round-Up Reports

Auckland
Convenor: Ruth Bell
(ruth.s.clough@gmail.com)

This month's meeting took place on Saturday 2 June at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion. Eighteen members braved the less than awesome Queen's Birthday week-end weather to attend the meeting. Our speaker this month was Ada Maria Soto who very kindly (and bravely) stepped in at the last minute when our scheduled speaker was unable to attend. Thanks so much Ada for agreeing to present your topic a month earlier!

Ada's topic was Fanfiction Is Good For You. During her presentation, Ada gave us the low down on all types of fanfiction and how it can be used to better your writing. It's a great way to learn various writing skills such as dialogue, word building, characterisation etc without having to start from scratch. Fanfiction allows you to play in someone else's sandbox and learn and hone your writing skills in an established universe. It's like having training wheels or as Ada put it - a safety wire as you walk across a tightrope at circus camp. It's also great for trying your hand at new genres, getting feedback and learning ac

countability and disciplining yourself to write regularly.

We also learned that there is a fanfiction community and/or fandom for absolutely everything - and they are just a google search away!

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

During June the C2C group had a couple of celebrations with one of our members, Jeanne, having a rather significant birthday and Deborah Challinor being honoured in the Queen's Birthday Honour List with an MNZM for her services to literature and historical research. After flowers, cake and congratulations we then proceeded to learn about Dialogue from our own Mollie. Dialogue is hugely important in your writing, done well it can help give the reader a sense of your characters, your world and really drive the story. Mollie gave some great examples of ways to use dialogue to help drive the story along with some things to avoid. She also explained the 'Reverse Onion

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Method' where you write the dialogue first then slowly build the story around it. It was a great new technique that looks like some fun to try as well. Another fun, informative day in the C2C Region.

Hawkes Bay

Convener: Kendra Delugar
(kendraonthemove@hotmail.com)

Our June meeting was held at Bron's, where we decided on the contents of our conference raffle basket (always fun!) Then we celebrated Jackie coming 1st equal in the Toronto Chapter's Catherine Contest and Bronwen finaling in the Holt Medallion novella section. (It's been quite a run for us here in Hawkes Bay contest wise.) Then our exercise this month was backstory and how to get it in there without the dreaded info-dump, or as bad, be so scared of using it that the reader is confused as to what's going on. I think it's a topic we could have used more time on, so we're looking forward to the Backstory Workshop at conference!

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 1pm, and new members are always welcome. Our next meeting will be held on the 7th of July at Ginny's and we'll be working on pitches for our conference goers (both New Zealand and those getting a head start and travelling in July to RWA Nationals in Denver).

Wellington/Kapiti Coast

Convener: Jane Ashurst
(11131.nz.move@googlemail.com)

A chilly Saturday 9 June in Wellington.

Jane, Kris, Susan Holt, Jeanette, Helen, Angelique, Bonnie, Helen McNaught, and Moira all met at Sandra's lovely house in Karori, despite her suffering from bronchitis!

After a quick update from everyone, we did another 10-minute round-robin creative exercise, and then talked about our experiences of using Instagram. We read out blurbs that we'd brought, and then had a discussion about different types of back matter in ebooks, and how important it is.

Next month we are going to review each others back matter pages, and practice cold reads in readiness for those going to conference. Date & location to be confirmed for the next meeting.

Nelson

Convener: LaVerne Clark
(nelsonromancewriters@xtra.co.nz)

This month, we were extremely fortunate to have Holly from The CopyPress come and present a talk about self-publishing. The CopyPress are a local high-quality book publisher, specializing in helping authors publish their

books in both digital and print format. Holly brought a few books with her that had been recently printed, and we were all very impressed at the quality and care with which they were produced. It was also very interesting to hear the ins and outs of the process that our own anthology 'Ripples' had gone through (shameless plug!) before being delivered to us in all its glory. We would highly recommend talking to them if you're interested in self-publishing but need that little bit of extra help all in one place. (www.copypress.co.nz)

Once again, we were treated to some beautiful home baking by the lovely Annika, which was more than appreciated on a cool winter's afternoon. Baking and books – what a combination!

Next meeting will be Saturday 14 July at 2pm. Venue: Nick Smith's meeting rooms on Quarantine Road. All welcome!

Christchurch

Convener: Lyssa Randolph
(lyssarandolph@hotmail.com)

June's meeting was held in South Library. A thoughtful and helpful session lead by Gillian St Kevern, explored 'Selfcare for Writers'. Of members of our group surveyed a majority had responded to Gillian's enquiry about our self-care as writers, that they experienced 'imposter syndrome', and that they wished to improve focus. During the afternoon, between us we came up with some of our own solutions to these issues, and Gillian shared a wealth of resources on a range of related topics from relaxation and mindfulness, to goal setting, and the processes of journaling.

Our July meeting will be held 8th July at Upper Riccarton Library.

Otago

Convener: Maria King
(franciscowie@gmail.com)

The Otago/Southland chapter had another informative meeting at Rhubarb in Dunedin in June. As there was only five of us, the meeting mainly comprised of a general catch up with each member asking the others questions. We covered the different types of editing, including the need for a developmental editor, as well as how to spot when an editor changes your voice. There was a general discussion on how we research our stories, the Critique Partner service through RWNZ, and a brief rundown on the changes at Amazon regarding book stuffing.

We plan to meet again in July with a cold reads session.

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