

# Heart to Heart

ROMANCE WRITERS  
OF NEW ZEALAND

ISSN: 1178-3948

December 2018

## Research, Foiled Again

Sera Trevor



**Is research important? I hope you rolled your eyes at that question. Of course research is important. I've read books containing action heroes who brush off catastrophic injuries, eighteenth-century aristocrats who work nine-to-five jobs, and people who go casino-**

**hopping in Los Angeles. Nothing sucks a reader out of a story faster than glaring inaccuracies.**

But what about non-glaring inaccuracies? Is it okay to fudge a little? I accidentally tested this idea with my book *Curses, Foiled Again*. In it, the famous Hollywood cemetery Forest Lawn plays a small but important role. I thought I'd done a pretty good job with my research. I read up on the history, studied pictures, and looked it up on Google Maps. I did everything short of actually visiting the place. This was pretty silly of me, because I live in the suburbs of Los Angeles. But since it would involve braving LA traffic, I took the lazy way out. I'd done a good enough job, surely. I turned the manuscript into my publisher feeling pretty pleased with myself.

But in between turning it in and the actual publication, I decided getting some pictures for my blog would be a good idea, especially since my mother agreed to take the kids for a day in honor of my wedding anniversary. After convincing my husband that a visit to a cemetery would be very romantic, we were off.

All went well for a while. My research had paid off, although I encountered a lot of small details that I'd missed that might have made good additions to my story. For example, along the curbsides throughout the cemetery, words of serenity were stenciled in, like "hope" and "comfort." How lovely is that? But for the most part, I got it right.

In my novel, the main character sits by a replica of the famous Danish statue of the Little Mermaid. Forest Lawn can be a bit difficult to navigate because it is enormous, and also because the staff is forbidden from telling you where specific graves are so that the celebrity gravesites won't be vandalized. I also felt really tacky taking pictures in a cemetery, so I was trying to keep a low profile. But even with as big as the place was and with no direction, I figured finding the statue couldn't be too hard.

How wrong I was. We spent two and a half hours hunting for it. When the sun began to set, I finally gave up. We got in the car and prepared to leave. And that's when I saw it. The statue was not in the cemetery, amongst the graves. It was right at the entrance!

This was a pretty big problem, because my character lies beside the statue, contemplating his mortality in a poignant, melancholy scene. It would still be technically possible for him to do so, but it's not quite as poignantly melancholic if he's in full view of all the cars driving by! What was I to do? By this point, the book had already been proofed. Should I alert my publisher to stop the presses so I could rework the scene? But that would push the publication date back, and probably annoy my publisher.

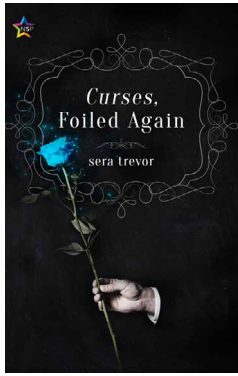


*The Little Mermaid Statue*

In the end, I decided that I would let the book stand as-is. Was it possible that someone who was a big fan of Hollywood cemeteries would become outraged by the misplacement of the statue? I guess so. But was it a detail that would completely ruin the reading experience for the vast majority of readers? Probably not.

Don't get me wrong—I'm not recommending that anyone brush off research. By all means, do your due diligence! I've certainly learned my lesson and plan to visit the places I write about if possible, or at the very least interview someone who has been there. However, no matter how much research we as authors do, we are bound to make mistakes. Only authors who write solely from personal experience have the chance to get every detail exactly right—and maybe not even then, with human memory being as unreliable as it is. Most readers will forgive us for taking a little artistic license.





### CURSES FOILED AGAIN

*Felix is a vampire – a fierce creature of the night who strikes terror into the hearts of everyone unlucky enough to become his prey. Or at least, that's what he thought was true, until he met John. John is completely unimpressed with Felix, much to his dismay. Felix becomes fixated on proving his ferocity to John – and when that doesn't work, he strives to make any impression on him at all.*

*John is a witch, and as all witches know, vampires are notoriously stupid creatures*

*who only have the power to hurt those who fear them. Besides, he's under a curse much more frightening than any vampire. Felix's desperate attempts to impress him annoy John at first, but gradually, they become sort of endearing. Because of his curse, John has pushed everyone in his life away. But Felix can't be hurt, so there's no harm in letting him hang around.*

*Felix is technically dead. John has nothing left to live for. But together, they might be able to form something close to a life.*

Buy *Curses Foiled Again* [here](#).



Sera Trevor is terminally curious and views the 35 book limit at her local library as a dare. She's a little bit interested in just about everything, which is probably why she can't pin herself to one subgenre. Her books are populated with dragons, vampire movie stars, shadow people, and internet trolls. (Not in the same book, obviously, although that would be interesting!) Her works have been nominated for several Goodreads M/M Romance Reader's Choice Awards, including Best Contemporary, Best Fantasy, and Best Debut, for which she won third prize in 2015.

She lives in California with her husband, two kids, and a cat the size of three cats.

## RWNZ Writing Competitions: To Enter or not to Enter?

Stephanie Ruth



**The answer, if you ask me, is 'Enter. Enter. Enter.'**

**I know I'm not the only one who feels honoured to belong to their RWNZ chapter. In fact, on speaking to a few newbies at the 2018 Auckland conference, I'd say in Aotearoa a large majority of us are feeling particularly blessed. You're**

**stuck too? The three Es are all there at your next RWNZ meeting: enthusiasm, experience, and encouragement. (We have a fourth E: Em... but Christchurch is just lucky that way).**

New to the group in 2017, I had questions aplenty. The most oppressive were: "Am I any good? How do I hone my craft? How do I know what I'm doing right?" More to the point... how do I know what I'm doing wrong, and how do I improve?

"Competitions," they said. "Enter them, judge them, just be an all round part of it."

It sounded like a jump-in-the-deep-end way to start my journey—and trust me, that first one felt like blind faith.

"Just so you know, I'm planning on winning this one," I told my husband (not very convincingly) as I entered my first ever writing competition with a full manuscript into Pacific Hearts.

"Confidence is good," he assured me, just as warily.

The manuscript didn't place, and I was so incredibly disappointed at first. Not getting anywhere was the only thing I could focus on. I'd done poorly, and it was all I had to show for a year of writing. It took me a few days to get over my glum self, then I finally went back and read over the judges comments.

Oh my giddy Aunt (as my mother would say). How had I missed the judges comments the first time through? Well... I was new to this, remember, and more familiar with sporting activities, where the aim of the game is to 'win.' It stands to reason if you don't win, you lose, right?

Wrong.

A veritable treasure trove of information awaited. An incredible wealth of knowledge, experience, and downright love of the genre. I learned more about my own writing in the thirty minutes it took me to pour over those comments than I had in the twelve months it took me to write the whole manuscript. No joke.

All the questions I had from earlier were addressed, and then some. The judges wrote candidly about what they thought was good, and how they thought I could hone my craft when it wasn't so great. They told me what resonated with them, what irritated them, and their personal opinions on how to dry out what was slushy.

It was exactly what I needed—the good, the bad, and the downright ugly—because it gave me some serious meat to chew on. If I've learned one thing, it's that sometimes you're so surrounded by the beef, you can't see the individual bullocks in the paddock.

There were a lot of bullocks in my paddock.

I entered another competition, Great Beginnings. Then the Daphne Claire de Jong First Kiss. What the hell, I put in two entries. I was hungry for the feedback. Are these protagonists believable? Interesting? Warm and connected? Does the potential for love between my main characters leap off the page and grab you, like it does me?

Ultimately: Is. It. Any. Good?

Other pre-published members from our chapter who were also thinking of entering RWNZ competitions got together and swapped entries. We began to give our honest opinions, share advice, and support each other.



◀◀  
We also began to realize we could learn almost as much critiquing each other's work as we could by loosening up on our own writing; accepting constructive feedback.

When I was contacted by the organiser of the First Kiss competition and told both my entries had made the final five, I squealed and ran around the house like a chicken on speed.

*'I'm a competition junkie now.  
I don't mind admitting it, and  
I'm not beyond trying to convert  
you all. Enter. Everyone who  
has ever wondered:  
"Is my writing any good?"'*

Then the Imposter Syndrome kicked in, and I realised they may well have made a mistake.

"Are you sure?" I emailed back.

"Very sure," she assured me.

The neighbors are aware I'm a bit nuts on any given morning, but they must have thought I was a whole new breed of crazy that day.

I'm a competition junkie now. I don't mind admitting it, and I'm not beyond trying to convert you all. Enter. Everyone who has ever wondered: 'Is my writing any good?'

You have nothing to lose, and seriously, everything to gain.

I may not be a great writer yet, but due to hard slog, determination, and invaluable input from others, I am an improving one... learning to embrace the label 'pre-published.'

To all of you; the readers, editors, agents, pre-published and published authors, who step up and give your time freely as RWNZ judges. I don't know who you all are, and that's part of the beauty of this game we're playing, but I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for placing wings on my running shoes. Without you on my team, it would have been a lonely playing field indeed. Whereas with this line-up? I'm thinking maybe World Series... Tri-Nations at the very least.



*Stephanie was half-way through her teens by the time she stumbled across her mother's collection of Lucy Walker's. She's been known to read almost anything she can get her hands on, but from the day she picked up 'A Man Called Masters,' she's been unabashedly seeking out the HEA. When her third (and final) child entered school three years ago, she had precious time to read more than magazine articles again, and headed straight back to the romance genre. It sure had changed... but then, so had she. So much so that she was no longer content to be sinking into other people's beautifully told stories... she wanted to be creating them.*

*Two years and two RWNZ conferences later, Stephanie's still writing, still enthused, and still totally addicted (she's also still 'pre-published,' but as she reassures her resigned husband: 'It just takes time...')*

# Writing Humorous Dialogue

Janet Elizabeth Henderson



**You might not want to write a full-blown rom-com, but you may be interested in injecting some humor into the novel you're working on at the moment. There are several reasons for putting humor in your books—it gives the reader some relief from tension, it encourages reader empathy for your**

**characters, it lightens a dark plot, it makes your characters more relatable (especially if they can laugh at themselves) and it delights the reader.**

But how do you inject humor into your novel? And how do you do it if writing humorously doesn't come naturally to you? One of the simplest places to thread humor throughout your book is in the dialogue. And I'm going to give you some practical tips for doing just that.

First up, some general points to remember:

- Don't make any one character sarcastic/witty all of the time. It's more annoying than funny.
- Keep bouts of banter short and snappy. If it goes on for pages, it loses its edge.
- Mispronunciation, wrong words, words used incorrectly, etc. can be effective but use them sparingly.
- Keep the dialogue in character—if it isn't something they would naturally say, don't have them say it in an attempt to be funny.
- Remember that humorous dialogue undercuts tension and emotional depth—use it sparingly and in the right place.

With that said, there are three easy ways to get humor into dialogue. The first is banter.

## BANTER

*"The playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks."*

When to use banter:

- Between the hero and heroine. It will help them work out their relationship tension without being completely at odds with one another and sabotaging their growing relationship.
- Within homosocial groups. Use with groups of friends who are jockeying for position within their social hierarchy but don't want to threaten their friendships. *Example:* A series set around a group of alpha-male characters, or books set around sisters.







- Between the protagonist and antagonist. This technique is used to good effect in comic books or action movies, where the adversaries throw humorous barbs at each other while fighting.

*Exercise:*

- Choose one element for characters to argue over throughout the book, e.g., who's the strongest, who's the smartest, who's the most accident prone, who's the cutest, who's the funniest, etc. (Works well with homosocial groups.)

OR

- Choose one remembered incident to bring up repeatedly—the time someone was rejected, the time someone fell in a pond, or the time someone was late and missed an important meeting. (Works well with family members.)

Once you have a group of characters (or just two) around which to build your banter, and you've decided which type you want to focus on (see above), then spend time thinking of ten pithy, witty, snappy things you could say about the topics you've chosen. This kind of brainstorming is great if you aren't one of those people who can think of a witty retort on the spot—either for yourself or your characters! Use these remarks throughout the book. Make sure the *right* character says them at the *right* time.

*Examples:* “You couldn't make a hyena laugh.” “You're so weak, tissue paper weeps for you.” “You're so ugly, Katy Perry would wear you.”

*Resource:* Writers who write great homosocial banter are: Gena Showalter, JR Ward, and Kresley Cole. Study up on what they've done and steal their techniques!

## SUBTEXT

*“An underlying and often distinct theme in a piece of writing or conversation.”*

### Using subtext one on one.

Subtext is a valuable writing tool that's not only used for humor, but it can be extremely effective in lightening the tone of your book and making your reader laugh. To use subtext for humor between a couple, make the couple's conversation at odds with what's physically happening in the scene. For example, although the romantic/sexual tension is building, the couple voice their denial of the attraction. This works well with a dismissive or self-deprecating tone.

*Example:* “Don't read anything into this,” he said as he pressed her palm against the front of his jeans, “I've been known to get hard watching Monday night football.”

“Good to know we're both turned on by men in tight shorts.”

*Exercise:* Take a short scene that you've already written, one that focuses on the interaction and growing attraction between the hero and heroine, and rewrite the dialogue to work as a counterpoint to the physical action.

*Resource:* Susan Elizabeth Phillips uses this type of subtext brilliantly in *Dream a Little Dream*.

### Using subtext in a setting or scene.

Make the character at odds with the circumstances of the scene—fish out of water—or make them oblivious to

what's really happening in the scene.

*Example:* “So you're here for the...dancing position?” Larry sat back in his chair, cocked an eyebrow at his partner. “Do you have any um, experience...dancing?”

“Yes, ten years classical ballet.” Clara sat straighter in her seat.

A hotel room was a strange place for an interview, but Larry and his partner seemed nice. Although, Larry's beige suit looked like it come straight out of the seventies and Dale was wearing too many rings on his right hand. Rings that needed cleaning, two of them looked rusty.

“You don't look like the kind of broad...I mean woman, who, er, dances for money.”

(They're setting up an escort agency. Clara got two ads confused.)

*Exercise:* Write a scene where your character completely misunderstands something or walks into a situation they don't read properly, and they stay ignorant to the reality of the situation throughout the scene.

*Resource:* Susan Elizabeth Phillips does this brilliantly in *Nobody's Baby But Mine*. Pay careful attention to the scene where the heroine pretends to be a hooker and the hero sees right through it.

### Using subtext when everyone but your character is in on the joke.

This is when one of your characters knows something the other doesn't. Just make sure that the reader is in on the joke and be careful it doesn't turn mean. Remember, we want our readers to empathize with our characters, and no one wants to identify with a mean character.

*Example:* “I'm fed up dealing with this Max guy,” Jack said. “He's yanking my chain from a distance. I'm going over to his fight club and I'm gonna put him on his ass.”

“Fight club? Max? You've never been to this bar, have you?”

“No.” He cast him a glance. “Why? Have you?”

“Oh yeah, it's brutal.” Sam smothered a smile.

“Good. Then he won't mind me putting him on his ass in front of his clientele. I told him enough is enough. Tonight, we fight it out. Like men.”

(Max is Maxine, and she runs a topless bar that has nightly jello fights. Something the reader knows but Jack doesn't.)

*Exercise:* Look at a scene you've written where the hero/heroine is walking into a situation. Can you rewrite it so that they don't know something about it but everyone around them, including the reader, does?

## ONE-LINERS

*“A short joke or witty remark.”*

When you're using one-liners in your story, it's good to keep these points in mind:

- Sprinkle them *sparingly* through the book.
- They can be used as a punch line to a scene/conversation. The scene or conversation builds





up to the delivery of this one, beautifully funny line.

- They can be used as a “left-field” observation that interrupts the flow of the dialogue. This technique can defuse any tension you’ve built within the scene so be careful when using it—unless, of course, you *want* to defuse the tension.
- You can steal them. If you can’t think of your own, have a character who randomly quotes famous one-liners. This works best when the one-liners are easily recognizable, and part of the joke is that the person is quoting someone else.
- Be careful of the rhythm of the one-liner, or it can sound like it has the ba-dum-tss drum effect at the end of it. If you don’t know what I mean, watch any late-night US talk show.
- A fun way to use one-liners is to have someone who doesn’t get the joke and takes it literally. Think Drax the Destroyer from Marvel’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* movies: “Nothing goes over my head. My reflexes are fast, and I would grab it.”

Now that we’ve covered the basics for using one-liners, you might be wondering exactly how you go about writing one. Well, here are a few suggestions:

#### **Utilize exaggeration and understatement.**

Exaggeration works best when a thought or comment is taken beyond its natural conclusion. Exaggeration works well across cultures and is a great way to get comedy into your novel when you have an international audience.

*Example:* Carole glared at her sister. “You can’t cancel a date because you have a pimple.”

Joyce pointed at her chin. “This isn’t a pimple. This is Mount Vesuvius and it’s ready to blow.”

Understatement is used more often in British humor than American, so bear this in mind when writing your novel. Understatement is playing something down for laughs.

*Example:* “How was the date?” Carol said.

“My pimple blew. The food sucked. And he left wearing my wine.”

“So...no need to plan a wedding, then?”

*Exercise:* Go through the dialogue in something you’ve already written and search for opportunities to use exaggeration or understatement to inject some humor into the scene.

*Exercise 2:* Keep a notebook of metaphors that would be useful in writing lines that include exaggeration or understatement.

#### **Make someone say something that’s out of left field.**

Make a character say something that has nothing to do with the situation/scene. Or is an astute observation on the subtext of that same scene.

*Example:* “Tricky, isn’t it, if you’re both a moth and a sea captain in charge of a ship but up ahead, you see a lighthouse.” *Milton Jones, comic.*

*Exercise:* Choose a scene you’ve written that has several characters interacting and play around with having each character say something out of left field. Which one works and why?

#### **USE THE RULE OF THREES.**

This utilizes the rhythm and expectation of listing things in threes. The key to making the list funny is to ensure the final, third, item is unexpected.

*Example:* “This heartbreak is too much,” she wailed. “I need chocolate. I need ice-cream. I need a hitman.”

*Exercise:* If you know the central theme of your novel, try writing a series of “gags” based on that theme, using the rule of threes. You can then seed these through your story, at appropriate times.

#### **SHATTER EXPECTATIONS—DO THE TWIST.**

Lead your reader somewhere, but in the end, take them somewhere else.

*Example:* “The hardest part about my grandmother’s death was making it seem like an accident.”

*Exercise:* Look for places in your scenes where someone makes a statement. Could you rewrite it to take the reader to an unexpected place and inject some humor into your writing? Remember to keep it character and situation appropriate.

#### **If in doubt, use a pun!**

These can work well in two ways—either as a tongue-in-cheek scenario where the characters realize the joke is cheesy but use it anyway or in a situation where the character is oblivious to the pun.

*Example of tongue in cheek:*

“Having sex in an elevator is wrong.”

“On so many levels...”

*Example of being unaware of the pun:*

“Wherever I go, I’m greeted with so much warmth,” said the new town fire chief.

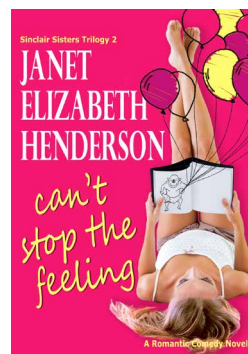
*Exercise:* You’re a writer—collect puns and use them!

There are many more ways you can inject humor into your dialogue. These are just a few techniques. If you’d like to read more on the topic, try *Writing the Romantic Comedy* by Billy Mernit, *Comedy Writing Secrets* by Mark Shatz and *The Hidden Tools of Comedy* by Steve Kaplan.

Now, go make yourself—and your reader—laugh!



*Janet is a Scot who moved to New Zealand fifteen years ago. Amongst other things, she’s been an artist, a teacher, a security guard at a castle, a magazine editor, and a cleaner in a drop in center for drug addicts (NOT the best job!). She now writes full-time and is working on her 18th book. When she isn’t living in her head, she raises two kids, one husband and several random animals. She survives on chocolate and caffeine.*



*A retelling of Beauty and the Beast—with a twist.*

# Getting Ready to Launch

Samantha Burton



**My book launch process is constantly a constantly evolving one!**

**With each launch I refine it ... and bizarrely, I seem to be simplifying what I do (which is great, more time for writing). I used to throw everything I had at each book launch and end-up completely**

**drained on launch day ... only to feel deflated if my new book didn't set the world alight as I'd hoped! Since then I've learned that the launch day itself isn't so important, it's the foundations you lay weeks and months beforehand that matters.**

So here's what's working for me at present:

- 1. The most important thing for me is a connection with my audience**, as the best launch in the world will fizzle if no one knows who I am! As such, I make sure I keep in touch with my mailing list at least once a month and really engage with them. I've just read Newsletter Ninja which has given me lots of amazing ideas on how to develop this reader relationship.
- 2. Build an ARC team.** I have around 20 in mine at present. It used to be bigger but I trimmed it down. I don't think it has to be big, just engaged. I periodically ask my mailing list if anyone is keen to join ... usually during the lead-up to a new book.
- 3. Keep audience engaged during the manuscript writing process.** This is key. Involve them in the process. Ask them questions. Share writing dilemmas. Do a cover reveal. Keep posting juicy snippets (tension filled exchanges between the H and H are what I'm talking about – just a few lines) on social media, newsletter and your blog so that by the time you launch the book they're wringing their hands with excitement! The author Maria Luis does this really well on her Facebook (FB) page. Stalk (er ... follow) her and learn!
- 4. Put the book on pre-order 1-2 months max before publication.** Any longer than this and you risk losing impetus.
- 5. Amp up these snippets, promo graphics, banners** during the last month before release (1-2 a week). Make some pretty banners for your website and FB page. Make sure they're consistent to your brand. Don't make them salesy, but beautiful. Canva is great for this. Make quote

graphics too. Do some snippets (always with an image as people seem to engage better with these) for FB posts and boost them occasionally during preorder period.

- 6. Create a Coming Soon banner** a couple of weeks before launch at put it up on the FB page with a link to the preorder page, or your website (if you're not doing preorder).
- 7. 10 days before release:** send out ARC copies to my team.
- 8.** In the lead up to the release I might do a couple of 'Just one week' or 'just two days' posts with exciting image and juicy snippet on FB. I don't overdo it though ... as I use my social media platforms to engage rather than sell.
- 9. Release day:**
  - Do a \*\*\*new release alert\*\*\* email, blog post, and social media blast. Just once and no more.
  - Make sure my book is enrolled in KDP Select. My subgenre does quite well here ... so I tend to put most of my novels in.
  - Email ARC team with live links to let them know it's ready for their review
  - Change banner on FB to 'available now!'
  - Do a FB ad and/or a couple of boosted posts
  - Run an AMS ad (\$3 per day) for 1 week initially and see how it goes
  - If you can find a blog in your genre to guest post on to coincide with your release that's great ... Occasionally I do this
  - Run competitions on my newsletter/FB page for an ebook or paperback giveaway to coincide with launch. Helps build buzz. I keep some contests for those in my closed FB group, as these are my committed fans and it's good to give them something special once in a while
  - Big glass of wine in the evening of release day ... I've earned it!
- 10. In the days following the release:**
  - Share social proof on social media (We just hit number 3 in the Hot New Releases list!).
  - Thank everyone on social media for their support.
  - Get cracking on my next book!

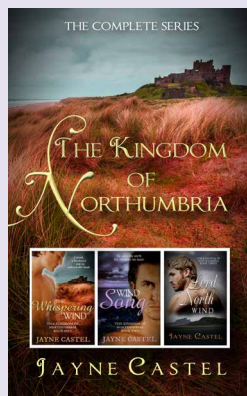
So there you have it: my book launch process. Many of the above will be standard practice for most authors. However, hopefully there are one or two items you can incorporate into your process.

Best of luck with your next launch!



[Samantha Burton](#) writes *Historical Romance set in Dark Ages Britain and Scotland and Epic Fantasy Romance under the pen-name, Jayne Castel*. She lives in Dunedin with her husband (and editor!) Tim, and her hairy dog, Juno.

Buy *The Kingdom of Northumbria* [here](#)





# Why I Love my Dragon

Bronwen Evans



**I have very bad neck and shoulder issues (from years of playing rep netball) and I found sitting at a desk killed my neck and shoulders to the point I got migraines and was so sick I could not write. I also know many authors have wrist issues from typing.**

I tried the early versions of Dragon Naturally Speaking and they would not work with my strong kiwi accent (really only USA/UK to start). What came out was a jumbled mess. So, I got around my issue by speaking into a Dictaphone and sending the files to a lady to type up for me, but that got a bit expensive. It did alert me to the fact that talking produced words faster than my typing. I'm not really a touch typist.

That was my light bulb moment, and a few years later I was speaking to fellow member Karen Browning, who told me the kiwi version of Dragon was awesome.

Dragon Naturally Speaking is touted as the world's fastest and most accurate speech recognition software, used by millions of people. Winner of more than 200 awards, Dragon lets you dictate three times faster than typing – with up to 99.9% accuracy.

I rang Nuance in Auckland (seller of Dragon, they have a NZ based office) and asked if I paid for the software, but found it didn't work, could I get a refund? They said absolutely. I bought Dragon for Mac V5 (Karen was using the PC version and thought it good too but I've heard Mac is really good) and I never looked back.

I did buy a set of Logitech noise canceling head phones for about \$80, and this helped with the accuracy. I can walk and talk as it's transmitted via bluetooth to the laptop. I can also talk straight into my Mac as well. I am actually writing this using Dragon, talking into my Mac microphone.

I then had to work out how to optimize Dragon and my writing process. It's not easy to get your brain into story talking mode. It took me a while, but now I have a really good process.

I start each bit of dictation on a new blank word document. I have it set up to automatically save every minute as sometimes Dragon decides to quit or I use a command that causes an issue. Just regularly save the dictation. And I simply title the document my Dragon file.

I decide on the scene that I want to write. I bullet point the scene, and I organize my thoughts using the bullet points until I know how scene intimately and how it should flow. Literally it's like playing a movie in my head. Then I simply start speaking my story.

I don't worry about grammar. I don't worry about putting in speech quotes or line breaks. I don't worry if the words are not filled with emotion, or description is blah or there is too much telling. I can layer that in and edit that afterwards. I simply get the words on a blank page. As I think Nora Roberts once said, you can't edit a blank page.

I talk until I have completed a rough first draft of the scene, usually anywhere between 1500 and 5000 words.

I then close Dragon down, and edit that scene putting in the grammar, spelling mistakes, line breaks, maybe fleshing out the emotion which is often difficult to speak, and finally when I'm happy with it, I copy it into the full draft manuscript file, formatted to double spaced etc..

I have written 25,000 words in three days using this method. Obviously you've got to know the scene well; otherwise the words tend not to flow. And that is why I first like to take a few minutes to plan out the scene and I use the movie analogy. If I can see it playing in my head, the words flow well as I talk the scene.

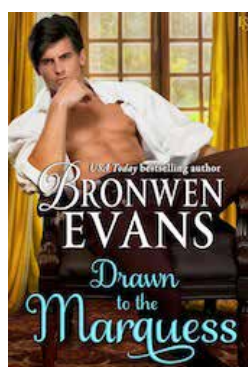
Then I repeat the process for the next scene. It's fast! I don't use it all the time as sometimes I'm struggling with a scene, but for the scenes you know well it's fabulous.

It does increase my output and save my neck and shoulders and wrists. However, I find I have to write my love/sex scenes as I hate talking them and funnily enough if someone else is in the house, even if I know they can't really hear me, I hate talking my story. BUT it is nice to know I can talk a scene that is sitting in my head. It also means I don't have to write my book in chronological order as I speak the scene playing in my head which could be the black moment or the epilogue etc.

I hope this helps you tame your dragon and speed up your writing output, which we all need in this fast paced market.

[Here is the link](#) to Nuance's website. It will take you to the NZ store. Pricing ranges from \$140NZ to \$530NZ for the Mac version but it's worth it.

## DRAWN TO THE MARQUESS



*Destined to go blind, a rake sets his sights on the toast of society, lighting a fire of passion that scorches the night, in this captivating novel from USA Today bestselling author Bronwen Evans.*

*Stephen Hornsby, the Marquess of Clevedon, has one goal: to see every exquisite thing he can before he goes blind. His greatest joy, watching a woman shuddering in the throes of passion, will be gone. But before the darkness descends, he is determined to seduce a magnificent widow, Lady*

*Penelope Fisherton. Unfortunately, his rakish reputation has preceded him; Lady Penelope spurns his advances. Being a man who relishes a challenge, however, her reluctance adds only luster to his desire for the last beautiful sight he'll ever see.*

*Considered the belle of London society, Lady Penelope was married to a scoundrel who cared for no one but himself. Now that she's free, she wants nothing to do with love, passion, or desire—emotions that abandoned her with a cruel husband. So why does her body react when Stephen smiles? As much as*



◀◀  
she'd like to avoid the rogue, her brother-in-law wants her fortune, and he'll kill to get it. Stephen is willing to help, but he'll take only one thing in return: Her. In his bed.

"Beautifully done! Drawn to the Marquess is a moving, touching romance of two people who prove to be exactly what each other needs at exactly the right time. I fell in love with Penelope and Stephen!"—New York Times bestselling author Jennifer Ashley

Buy Drawn to the Marquess [here](#)



USA Today bestselling author, [Bronwen Evans](#) grew up loving books. She writes both historical and contemporary sexy romances for the modern woman who likes intelligent, spirited heroines, and compassionate alpha heroes. Evans is a three-time winner of the RomCon Readers' Crown and has been nominated for an RT Reviewers' Choice Award. She lives in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand with her dogs Brandy and Duke.

You can keep up with Bronwen's news by visiting her website and get a FREE novella A SCOT FOR CHRISTMAS by [signing up to her newsletter](#)

## Get Your Manuscript Summer Submission Ready

Emma Bryson



Spring has well and truly sprung, and – in between hailstorms – the great weather gods have graced us with the first glimpses of summer. Nanoers are frantically nanoing (or celebrating well-deserved wins), first kisses have been submitted, and those of us with a drawerful of drafts may well be contemplating what gold is hiding between those dusty pages. It's the perfect time of year to set your sights on submission – starting with a spot of structural editing.

To help, I traversed through a couple-dozen manuscript assessment reports, first pass letters, the depths of my brain, and editing seminar notes to unearth a few of the most common reasons for either manuscript rejection, or significant pull-your-hair-out structural edits. Read on; hopefully these pointers will save you some heartache (or at least a little time!).

### CRAFT A KNOCKOUT OPENING SCENE

To capture the attention of an editor, agent, or reader, your opening scene needs to be a knockout. First scenes are often your first chance to woo: if your desired bookish person falls in love with your first scene, it often won't

matter so much what sins are committed in the coming chapters – errors become forgivable. Likewise, if a first scene doesn't quite sit right, that scene may well prejudice a bookish person against the rest of the manuscript.

The old opening scene clichés are important to avoid. Try not to include your protagonist considering their outward appearance – especially if they're doing so in a mirror or other reflective surface. Don't start with your protagonist's banal morning routine, *a la* 90s romcom. It's also important not to introduce too many characters at the same time (be very careful with opening scenes in bars or clubs, or a protagonist talking with a group of friends – err towards avoiding these situations in the first pages, if possible). In most circumstances, it's on trend to start as close as humanly possible to the meet cute. Buck this trend at your own peril! (I can't tell you how heartbreaking it is to tell a veteran author that they need to lose the first 50-100 pages of their manuscript because the inciting incident starts late, and yet it still happens...)

Beware the woeful heroine! Especially in contemporary romance. It's extremely difficult for readers to build empathy with a character who is having the worst-day-hashtag-ever. Partly because worst days are relative and therefore can come across to readers as trivial; but in the case of a truly terrible event, because our 'human suffering protection mechanisms' will engage before we've had a chance to connect to the character. Our instinct is to avoid experiencing pain – so a gradual build of empathy before a character experiences extreme hardship will be more powerful than plunging us right into the depths of a character's despair.

Something I've also seen coming up more commonly lately is protagonists who in the first scenes are defined *against* something. 'Defined-against' characters are intrinsically negative – whether that be experienced as 'I'm not *that* kind of girl (insert finger pointing to 'bimbo' here)' or 'thank goodness I'm not like my mother/sister/friend/secondary character who is painfully annoying/horrible'. While these kinds of definitions can be helpful in a writer's mind to form a layered character, these defined-against situations create negative associations for readers. The primary thing that draws us to people is joy. We all like witnessing others' joy, so get your character excited about something they like. After all, truly memorable characters are loved for who they are, not who they are not.

### BALANCE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONFLICT

Often in my manuscript assessment notes, I've written something along the lines of 'feels episodic'. Episodicness – or a reliance on external over internal conflict – is increasingly important to avoid in an editorial world that's becoming obsessed with the character-driven plot. ('Episodic' came up in over two-thirds of the manuscript rejection reports I reviewed in preparation for writing this article.)

Here's a clue that your manuscript might be starting to get episodic: sit down with a friend and describe your manuscript to them – record yourself doing this, so you can go back and review it later. If you use the words 'and then \_\_\_ happens' repeatedly, then chances are your plot is reliant on external conflict.





◀◀  
'And then this happens' plots are perfect for your favorite street-based TV show, but not for novels where we want big, flowing character development arcs. What you do want to hear is *feeling* words when describing your plot: 'and then she feels \_\_\_\_, and he feels \_\_\_\_, so when \_\_\_\_ happens...' This shows internally-focused conflict – your character is going on an emotional journey – their feelings and resulting actions are causing the plot progression, not external events forcing them to react. Emotions are big, messy and complicated, so if you find yourself saying 'bleh, I can't describe my plot, it's too complicated!' your may well be on the right track (either that, or your secondary plots are getting out of hand – a topic for another time!).

#### ELIMINATE CHARACTERIZATION INCONSISTENCY

For me, there's nothing more frustrating than a paragraph with an essential subtext like this: 'By the way, the reason she's upset is because she had a baby that she was forced to put up for adoption. I didn't mention that earlier? Oh well – surprise!'

Massive, life-altering events that inform a character's backstory need to be present on the page through the medium of that character's actions. This doesn't mean that you need to explicitly tell every detail of backstory on page one – that would definitely be inadvisable – but it does mean that you need to give enough detail to inform your readers spidey senses that something deeper is going on.

Take the above example of a heroine who has given a secret baby up for adoption. Perhaps initially we want to give the impression that she is perfectly fine – this is a normal, everyday woman going about her normal, everyday life. We still want something – preferably from the very first scene – that tips us off that appearances aren't what they seem. Perhaps a workmate brings their own baby into work and she refuses to hold him. Or perhaps something subtler: the heroine winces at a crying baby in a café or on a plane, or she's caught zoning out by a friend just as a person with a pram walks past the window, or someone at the work Christmas party wants to show off pictures of their kids and she makes a hasty escape. Small details make a huge difference, and consistent, tight characterization centred around a character's flaws is crucially important – readers don't want to be blindsighted by a character detail that will essentially make us have to go back and reform the entire character in our head (unless we're reading *Life of Pi*.)

Above all, remember: editors, agents and readers are primarily looking for good storytellers – not technical perfection. And everyone has a good storyteller in them – how else would you enthrall a friend with office gossip, or capture the attention of a tired spouse to tell them about your day?



*Emma Bryson is a freelance editor, creative, and writer based in Auckland. She spent five years working with Entangled Publishing, holds a Diploma in Publishing from Whitireia New Zealand, and has worked on books for Penguin Random House NZ, Steele Roberts Publishers, Makaro Press, Victoria University Press, and Te Papa Press. Her first novella Take Me Private was published this year by Carina. Come and say hi on Facebook, or [email her](#) for info on her summery editing specials!*

## News from the President Vivienne Matthews



**And another year slowly draws to a close... or if your end of year is anything like mine it's rushing headlong widely spinning almost out of control to a fast and well looked forward to end!**

Either way, 2018 is nearly over. It's been a full on year within RWNZ with webinars, an amazing conference, writing contests to enter and judge, a massive amount of books being published by our members - many of them first books - and of course, our regional workshops and events. Congrats and well done to all who have accomplished their goals. You did good. To those who worked hard but didn't quite get their goals over the line – good on ya! You've done well to progress things as far as you did. To those who's goals have sat there poking them occasionally to remind you they're there....meh, maybe next year... ;o)

2019 is shaping up to be another full on and awesome year. Conference is looking freakin amaaaazing! Our first one in the South Island and the plans the girls have for you – man it's gonna go off! I for one am really looking forward to it. As always, we have brilliant opportunities in the way of contests – both to enter and to judge. And we're looking at what we can bring to you in the form of webinars.

The New Year is always a good chance to have a look at your goals and aspirations, so this year why not take a good look at the contests and work out early which ones you could enter and start planning for those. Also think about how you can give back to the writing community, maybe offer to take a workshop at your regional meeting, offer to put together a webinar, maybe even go a little crazy and check out the different roles on the Executive and work out which one you could take on (these roles don't come up till August at Conference, but that gives you plenty of time to figure out what they involve, talk to those doing the role now and give it some thought).

Whatever you plan for 2019, remember to include some down time for yourself. Curled up with your favourite books, enjoying the outdoors, some time with your significant other – or finding your significant other! Whatever you need to do to ensure your own health and well-being through the year, as well as having a blast and achieving what you want to achieve.

Have a fabulous summer one and all. Take care on the roads and our beaches. Remember to slip, slop, slap – the sunscreen and hats not the family when they annoy you – and laugh. See you in the New Year.

Cheers,

*Vivienne Matthews*

# From the Editor:

Gillian St. Kevern



**2018 did not go as planned—and I had a plan. I was so organised. So, so organised. I had a production schedule, a marketing campaign, was enrolled in advertising courses... I even had a daily schedule. I knew exactly what I was doing. And instead of spending today finishing up the tenth manuscript I was going to write this year, I am in an Air BNB in Fairlie, the spectacular mountain view completely hidden by cloud and drizzle. I have a cup of tea next to me and a custard slice as big as my fist waiting for me. In terms of places to spend a cold, grey day, our BNB with its lovely log fire is pretty high on the list. But of all the places I thought I'd be ending my November, Fairlie was not it.**

What happened to my plans? Well, the vintage mystery series I was going to launch this year turns out to need a lot more work and research. Work that I'm not going to be able to do any time soon. With two completed drafts and half of a third done, I shelved the project to come back to when I have levelled up my writing skills. I turned my attention to the next project, a YA novel that has traditional publishing potential. I gave myself a month to write it, not realising the writing for a younger audience is more challenging to me. Pushing back my deadline again and again had a demoralising effect, and eventually I set it aside altogether to work on a different project. Tor Publishing had opened novella submissions and I had been sitting on the perfect story since my University days. It turns out that writing High Fantasy is as challenging to me as working on my YA project. It took twice as long to complete the project as anticipated—at which point I had to switch gears and finish my YA novel.

At the end of all this, I felt completely unmotivated. Writing had become hard work, and I felt like I'd lost my ability to write. For all my hard work, I wasn't going to be able to publish any of these stories for a really long time. Worse, I wasn't sure who I was as an author any more. Was I a mystery writer, a romance writer...? After some soul searching and comfort reading, I decided that I am an urban fantasy author... Which means that I've got to start the process of learning my genre all over again.

I'm a security minded person. I like knowing I have a place to sleep lined up, that I can pay my bills, even what I'm going to be doing every day for the next week. I like routine. I am the world's most boring person. I make plans for fun. I live for schedules and lists. Sometimes I make lists of everything I need to make a list about. It's ridiculous, but that is the sort of person I am.

Writing means that I have to live with a lot of uncertainty. I don't know if the story I'm working on now is any good, or where I'm going to be come February. But the freedom from a nine to five job, has unexpected benefits. My family had two major events this year, the birth of my nephew and the death of my grandmother. Being able to drop everything and be there for my family in both cases meant a lot. I've also had other opportunities, such as the one that has brought me to Fairlie—travelling with friends.

The friend in question I met in Japan. We were both teaching English, along with a third friend who we visited in Invercargill. As we sat around, comparing our trajectories since Japan, I confessed that I wondered if I was doing the right thing. I was the person everyone thought was going to be in Japan for life. I'd been totally happy with my routine. But while the writing life has come with an increase in uncertainty, the satisfaction of making my living through writing more than makes up for it.

Turns out, while neither of my friends are writers, both of them have wound up pursuing careers they never would have expected either, and we've all questioned whether or not we were making the right choices. I've come to realise that plans are meant to be changed, adapted or even abandoned. No matter what path you take, you'll never be able to avoid uncertainty. But at least with writing, I have the certainty of doing something I know brings me joy.

A huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to H2H this year! I really appreciate it. Enjoy your summer, and I'll see you again in February with the first Heart to Heart of 2019!

*Robin: "You can't get away from Batman that easy!"*

*Batman: "Easily."*

*Robin: "Easily."*

*Batman: "Good grammar is essential, Robin."*

*— Adam West & Burt Ward.*

# Post Conference Survey Results

## Mel Climo – 2019 RWNZ Conference Convener

**Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on the 2018 survey, all 85 of you! This was a very good response given there were about 150 at conference, and a bunch of them were international guests.**

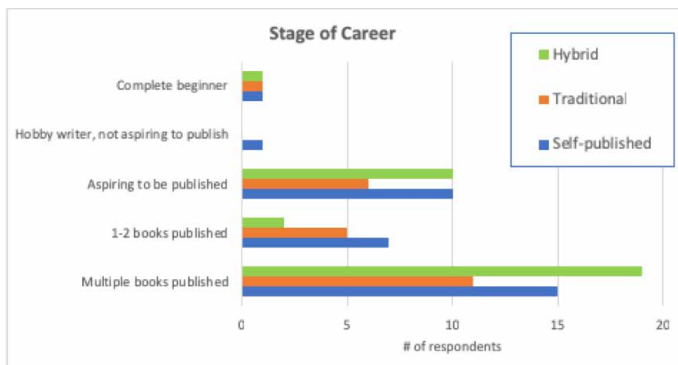
We wanted to summarise the information and share it with you. There were no major surprises; feedback was consistent with previous years. We especially appreciate the open comments questions where we are finding treasure - excellent suggestions for making conferences even better.

But first some interesting stats:

- 2018 conference was the first conference for 22 of the 85; a warm welcome to you all!
- 94% said they were extremely likely, or very likely to attend again
- 81% said the conference exceeded their expectations
- 90% said is important to have editors and agents at conference
- 86% liked the international panel
- 81% said cold reads were useful

*What stage of writing career are the conference attendees?*

I found this data really insightful – as we are a mixture stage and style. This was also reflected clearly in the comments: more for newbies and more for advanced authors, more for traditional and more for self-published, more for this sub-genre and that sub-genre....



The published author round table raised some great suggestions – the first of which was to explain what it is to those not in the know. Those who attended are keen to see this workshop provide more value to attendees, including having more time, a pre-set theme or set of discussion points and an active moderator.

Some of the other feedback included:

- The food. Good food. Better food. Yes, thank you, this message came through loudly and repeatedly
- Make the registration process much clearer so what is and isn't included is blindingly obvious
- Improve value for money – on the conference dinner particularly
- For newbies - more preconference information, more support
- Opportunities to promote networking e.g. better use of events, more spaces, targeted activities
- Handouts were appreciated, book shops and signings were suggested
- Kudos to Kendra for excellent 2018 speakers and workshops, and a smoothly run conference
- And of course there was a plethora of suggestions for potential workshops, enough for a decade or so...

Thanks again for your participation in this survey. Every year the importance of choosing the “right” speakers, the “best” workshops, is highlighted. With small numbers but such diversity, the RWNZ conference can't be everything to everyone, every year. But over the years, the aim is to make sure there will be value for everyone who attends.

See you in Christchurch in 2019!

*If you have any young friends who aspire to become writers, the second greatest favor you can do them is to present them with copies of The Elements of Style. The first greatest, of course, is to shoot them now, while they're happy.*

*– Dorothy Parker*



# Ask the Members

**This month's question: How do you stay focused on writing even during challenging circumstances?**

## Responses:

I work best when isolated from others. That can be in a coffee shop, surrounded by complete strangers, or at home with the doors shut. When at the coffee shop, if the background music is too much for my brain to cope with, I'll put on music on my phone and the earbuds in the ears; however, I will only play instrumental music while writing. I actually start focusing on words in the songs, instead of the words on the page.

I also set myself time goals. I've given up on the word count goals long ago, because I know that when I'm in the zone, I can write like a bat out of hell. But staying on task for a period of time... that's the challenge for this flighty personality.

**Judy L Mohr**



First, be kind to yourself—circumstances may mean there are time when you simply cannot write so accept it and roll with it. Writing time will return. Second, know exactly how many words you ideally need to write each day to reach your goal—I say ideally because we all know when things start going wrong, they can go majorly wrong or right without warning. Flexibility is really important. Third, write in timed increments—even in ten or fifteen minutes you can take a big bite out of your daily word count goal. Fourth, reward yourself, which basically is being kind.

**Yvonne Lindsay**



*The Art of Procrastination* has some very helpful tips for people (like me!) who struggle with staying focused. One tip I've employed in my day-to-day life is adding 'do nots' into my morning to do lists. These do nots are there to circumvent distractions that may otherwise prove irresistible. They can be anything that commonly causes derailments—from 'do not hit the snooze button', through to 'do not check email/Facebook until 11am,' or 'do not eat doughnuts for breakfast'. It's worked fairly well for me—especially when I limit myself to focusing on breaking one or two derailment habits at a time.

**Emma Bryson**

*"If the words don't flow,  
don't beat yourself up.  
They'll come back."*

Staying focussed in adverse circumstances is sometimes quite out of our control. Three years ago my over-90 parents-in-law both became ill and we had to find them alternative accommodation in a hurry and clean out and sell their house for them. They'd been there 60 years. It was a mission. Then he died. Within weeks, their youngest son's marriage split up in spectacular style. Another house to help clean out and sell. (I got a novella out of that eventually.) Then my oldest nephew suicided in front of a train on Christmas Eve, so my sister needed to move house – away from the railway line. You think I felt like writing much after that little lot? Two deaths, three houses sold, heaps of angst. All of this happened pretty soon after one of my husband's knee replacements came unglued and then got infected, so he'd ended up in hospital with a dangerous bone infection. All up, six months of hell.

All you can do in circumstances like this is keep putting one foot in front of the other and being a little kind to yourself. If the words don't flow, don't beat yourself up. They'll come back.

But what about when you 'just can't write'? If it gets to a critical point, I've known both counselling and medication to help people.

The best thing I've found for me is a good dose of panic. Indie-publishing as I do, there are really no deadlines. Around November last year I started my third Scarlet Bay novel. And oops, over Christmas I somehow started two cozy mysteries and finished half of each. Back to Scarlet Bay eventually, and then an invitation to join a team of ten putting out a Christmas themed box-set of novellas got me all distracted. The story I started for that wasn't enthusing me. Time was running short. Somehow in the final 21 days I managed 25,000 good finished words for the box-set. It seems I need deadlines. Maybe setting yourself a really firm deadline, gritting your teeth, and just going for it might help you if you're having problems?

**Kris Pearson**



**Have a question you'd like the collective wisdom of the RWNZ members on? E-mail it to [heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz)**

# Author Spotlight

## Cherie Mitchell



**Editors note: In the H2H Survey, many members commented that they wanted to know more about the careers of our successful author members and someone suggested an author spotlight where we go in depth with one author every month. I loved this idea, and knew exactly who I wanted to approach for our first spotlight. Cherie is a fairly recent addition to the RWNZ, but the Christchurch chapter have already benefited from her experience and advice. Thank you, Cherie, for being our guinea pig!**

### CAREER OVERVIEW

I have always loved to write and my earliest memory of 'writing stories' was at age four. During the years when my children were young, I dabbled in writing and made a small income on the side via magazine articles and stories that I wrote for publications such as Woman's Weekly and New Idea. I wrote my first book (all 25,000 words) four years ago, a short romance novel subsequently published by a boutique New York publishing house. This contract led to exciting writer firsts including working with the in-house editor, nervously completing an American TV interview via Skype, the unrivalled thrill of a cardboard box of my paperbacks arriving by courier at the front door, and my own little book enjoying a brief but proud moment on the bookshelves of Walmart.

I returned to New Zealand in 2015 after living in Australia and China, determined that my stressful and unsatisfying corporate life was over. I established a freelance writing business and soon landed a lucrative two-year, six-figure business writing contract with a US executive placement company. Separate to this, a niche US publisher approached me seeking a permanent writer for Mail Order Bride Christian Wild West Romances (wut?). So began my career as a ghost-writer and I watched with interest as my books (published under a pseudonym and with no link to my name) quickly attracted an appreciative audience. After two years and 150 books and novellas for which I received no author credit, I finally decided it was time to write under my own name.

### A TYPICAL DAY IN YOUR LIFE

Every story throws a shadow. That phrase was the result of a misread on my part (the sentence I myopically misread was about selecting river stones for building a bridge) but I have since adapted it, used it in my latest book Lucy's War, and adopted it as my personal mantra.

I'm a morning writer – 7am to 10am is my sweet spot – and words generally flow easily for me at this time of the day. Taking my mantra to heart, I have recently begun to dedicate a couple of mornings a week to penning short stories. The internet has endless opportunities for the short story writer (try the Published to Death Blog for a start). You never know just whose desk your flash fiction or short story may land upon and where it may lead. I read of someone who won her first book-publishing contract due to one of her short stories attracting the right attention, despite the story not winning a prize in the competition itself.

For the remainder of the day I work on my current WIP, fiddle around with marketing activities (all of them trial and error), conduct research, go back to my WIP, follow sometimes pointless links on the internet, stare out the window, go back to my current WIP... typical writer stuff! I write a LOT of words – a crazy amount – but writing is my job and that is how I treat it.

### YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE AND HOW YOU OVERCAME IT

I think any writer who says they never suffer from moments of self-doubt isn't being entirely truthful. After all, you are putting your heart on the page and expecting other people to understand what you are trying to say. I'm a fast and prolific writer and although my career is moving relatively quickly in the direction I want it to go, sometimes I have to stop and remind myself of just what I've achieved and how far I've come. I've also formed the occasional habit of throwing out a request to the ether for a 'sign', and I make sure I take notice of the requested sign when it arrives (generally at some stage within the next 24 hours). I guess you could list this one under the category of The Power of Positive Thinking.

My asked-for signs have been many and varied. I've had a sparrow fly into my office to land beside my desk before leaving again, and an unsolicited email from a UK reader gushing over how much she loves my books. On other occasions, I've had a message from a man in South Korea telling me he is in love with my main character; a writing competition win; a flurry of signups for my newsletter; or an unexpectedly great review for one of my books. My biggest four-by-two-to-the-forehead moment was when I found a contest listing a laptop as the prize. I threw out a "If I'm supposed to be a writer I'll win that laptop!" Yes, I won the laptop.



## THE BEST ADVICE YOU EVER GOT

I've been given some great advice, most of it relating to tenacity and persistence. However, I think the most useful and long-lasting advice I ever listened to was Never Say No.

I learned that important life lesson at age six whilst on holiday in the Bay of Islands. Childishly cross for some long forgotten reason, I said no to an invitation to walk to the next bay with Nan. My siblings had a fabulous day: swimming, exploring rock pools, making sandcastles, eating ice-cream, and spending time with our lovely Nan. I stared glumly out the window for six long hours and wished I'd said yes.

By applying this philosophy to my life and my writing, I never say no when opportunity comes knocking. I have written guest blogs, articles, created stories in genres outside my usual comfort zone, promoted other people's books in return for promoting mine, and jumped in feet first to something new whilst others have dithered and held back, and some of these yes's have led to wonderful advancements or career leg-ups.

Remember that lucrative six-figure writing contract I wrote about a few paragraphs back? That contract was the direct result of reading and replying to an email that looked like spam and deciding to give it a go anyway. My New York publishing contract was the result of taking the time to follow up on a general call for submissions through a writing blog. The ghost-writing job gave me confidence that there is a willing audience for my style of writing. Never Say No.

## ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE

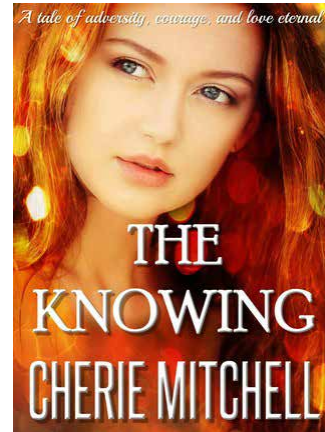
Be seen. Put your writing name on everything, whether you use a pen name or whether you're out there loud and proud with your own name. Carve your name on Google with a view to permanence. All the articles, opinion pieces, notes, stories, etc that I have written carry my name. I even publish to Quora using my own name. My lack of aversion to publicity means that a Google search of my name now pulls up several interesting links (all part of my evil plan, heh heh heh).

Learn stuff. Teach yourself or do a course on the important outer bits such as editing, formatting, or cover creation. Learning to DIY will save you both time and money and there is the added satisfaction of knowing you did it on your own.

Writing your book is only a very small part of making a name as a writer, as annoying as that might be. Choose your objective, create your plan, think global, and make your mark!



[Cherie Mitchell](#) is a hybrid (traditional and indie) writer based in Christchurch. Since November 2017 she has published approximately 18 books in her name, won or placed in several international writing competitions, signed with High Spot Literary Agency, built a subscriber list of nearly 5000, and dedicated her time to writing romance and women's fiction novels. She is currently working on Book 3, *Lucy's War*, in *The Knowing* series.



## THE KNOWING

*Several generations of women with an extraordinary gift. A tumultuous period in America's history that honored the brave and the foolhardy. And an intricate tale of everlasting love that spans the fragile bridge between life and death.*

*Independence, Missouri, 1853: Mary and Norton Beecroft share a love like no other. They have endured their share of heartache and tragedy but a new life now awaits them in the promised land of California. Along with their young daughter Lucy and their twin sons, Mary and Norton plan to leave Independence, Missouri with a wagon train bound for a state so wondrous it has been referred to as the golden future of the rapidly growing country of America.*

*However, the Beecroft family are different from most. With a history on his wife's side stretching back many generations to the gypsies of Europe and an undoubted (but little understood) gift shared by the women in the family since time immemorial, Norton has his work cut out trying to understand his womenfolk.*

*The Knowing is the first full-size novel in the series and preceded by Mary Ellen (a novelette). Book 2, Cutter's Mill is now available and Book 3, Lucy's War is due for release in early December 2018.*

*A series to captivate you, engage you, and have you questioning all that you thought you knew.*

Buy *The Knowing* [here](#)

*"Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don't know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings."*

*—Anaïs Nin*



# Maleny Writing Retreat



**Join 1 Bestselling Author Sarah Williams in Maleny, Sunshine Coast, Queensland. 31st May – 3rd June 2019**

Take time out of your regular routine this autumn and join me on a boutique writing retreat you won't forget in Maleny, on Queensland's beautiful Sunshine Coast Hinterland. You'll spend 3 nights at a stunning country house located just 1.5 hours from Brisbane, alongside me and a small group of like-minded writers. Spaces for this retreat are strictly limited to only 6 people!

Born in New Zealand, Sarah Williams knew she wanted to be an author ever since picking up her first romance novel at fourteen years old. After starting up her own boutique small press, Serenade Publishing, Sarah has gone on to publish a novel every six months, including her bestselling series "Brigadier Station". In 2017 Sarah was nominated for Best Debut Author by the ARRA (Australian Romance Readers Association) and AusRom Today.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS RETREAT:**

You can expect to create in a beautiful environment, alongside an intimate group of like-minded writers in an atmosphere that allows for socialisation as well as connection. I believe that a retreat should allow for rest, relaxation, and fun, as well as support that extends far beyond the retreat stay once friendships are made.

During our time together, we'll be creating the space to brainstorm new ideas, participate in discussion, give and receive feedback (if you choose to) and most importantly, write. This is a time for you to detach from the pressures and distractions of everyday life, so you can become comfortable with your voice and with your craft.

It doesn't matter if you aren't calling yourself a writer (yet!) or if all you have right now is an idea. This retreat is open to all kinds of writers, no matter where you're at on your writing journey. I'll be there to support and coach you. We'll regroup each evening for dinner. I'll champion you and your work. We'll have fun. And hopefully, by the time you go home you'll have made some lifelong friends too.

## **WRITING SUPPORT**

It's all about you! The aim of this retreat is to provide you with a highly individualised experience, tailored to your specific needs as a writer. Workshops and activities are completely optional. You may participate in as much or as little of the program as you like. You can also expect informal discussions around aspects of writing craft, and these topics will be determined once I have an idea of what members of the group need.

## **PERSONALISED FEEDBACK ON YOUR WORK**

Each retreat attendee will have the chance to submit up to 20 manuscript pages for written and oral feedback. Your pages will be critiqued by me before the beginning of the retreat. I will then set aside some time during our time away where I will be available for one:ones to discuss your work in a personalised feedback session.

## **SUCCESSFUL SELF-PUBLISHING WORKSHOP**

This in-depth workshop will teach you how to take your precious manuscript from polished to published!

## **WHAT'S INCLUDED:**

- 3 nights accommodation in a private room
- All meals except dinner out on Saturday night
- Feedback on your writing and one on one time with Sarah
- Much more!!

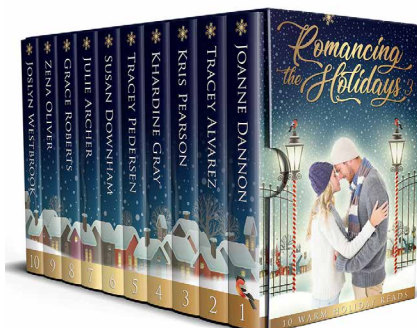
**Cost per person: \$969**

**Payment plans are available. Retreat prices are in Australian dollars.**

**For more information and to reserve your spot, go to: <https://www.sarahwilliamsauthor.com/maleny-writers-retreat/>**

*Be yourself; everyone else is  
already taken.  
– Oscar Wilde.*

# Woos and Hoos



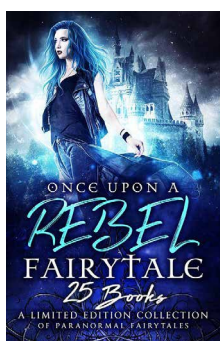
Three RWNZ members are represented in *Romancing the Holidays 3*, featuring ten Christmas-themed novellas. Congratulations to Kris Pearson, Joanne Dannon and Tracey Alvarez on their seasonal release!

Buy *Romancing the Holidays* [here](#)

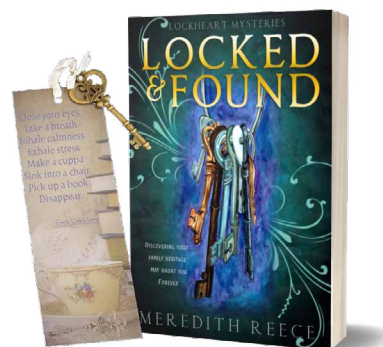


Jean Drew writing as Jean Adams has two novellas out this month from Highland Press: *Soul Mates*, a reunion story, and *A Touch of Magic*, also part of the Christmas Tidings anthology.

Buy *A Touch of Magic* [here](#)



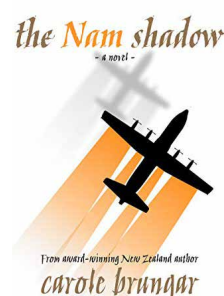
Lisa Matthews writing as Sadie Carter hit the USA Today Bestsellers List as part of the *Once Upon a Rebel Fairytale* collection.



A locked box. A Dead Child. Who holds the key to unlocking it all?

Meredith Reece's debut novel is a Young adult, time slip, family history mystery - with a pinch of Paranormal, and a dash of romance. It is the first in the Lockheart Mysteries series. Set in Scotland - Cousins, Jess and Ella, must use every key they have to unlock their family's secrets.

Buy *Locked & Found* [here](#)



Carole Brungar has a new release. *The Nam Shadow* is the second novel in a series based on Kiwi soldiers and their experiences before, during and after the Vietnam War. In this story, 19 year-old Terry meets combat photographer Frankie Proctor. He has no idea just how much impact their relationship, or Vietnam, will have on him during his lifetime.

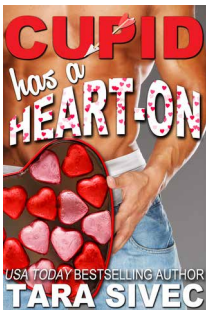
Buy *The Nam Shadow* [here](#)



# The Bookshelf

## Book Review: Cupid has a Heart-On by Tara Sivec

Reviewed by Paula Phillips



*The Holiday family is back, crazier than ever in this special, Valentine's Day story!*

*Cupid hits a few roadblocks on the way to Sam and Noel's hearts after their whirlwind Christmas romance. Nipplegate 2016, a stray stripper and a regrettable mix-up with narcotics are just the tips of the arrow when it comes to shooting these two with happily ever after. Nothing seeing a grown man wearing an adult diaper and wings can't fix...hopefully.*

Buy *Cupid has a Heart-On* [here](#)

### REVIEW

First off, if you need to have a good laugh and want a whack-a-doodle of a book, then I highly recommend that you read *Cupid has a Heart-On* by Tara Sivec. To be honest, I have always found Meghan Quinn's books hilarious but OMFG - this was like a whole new level. I was laughing so hard from page 1. This

book was pure and utter craziness, and you just can't help laughing at the antics of all these characters. I have to say Grandma Mazur and Stephanie Plum's family have nothing on *The Holidays*. If it wasn't one thing, then it was another, and there is no pausing in the laughter either as every page has you in stitches. In Book 2 Noel and Sam are moving from fake engagement to a real relationship, but with this family sex and crazy is part of their everyday vocabulary. From Aunt Bobbie who is a woman now to the Sex Parties to Noel's crazy sex-fuelled parents and then, of course, I went Awh when Sam's secret was discovered haha. If you are single this Valentine's Day and needing something like a crazy book to cheer you up and make you feel less lonely, then check out *Cupid has a Heart-On* and trust me, readers after reading this book if you thought your family put the fun in dysfunctional - think again.



*Librarian by Day, Book Reviewer by night - Paula Phillips is The Phantom Paragrapher Blogger. She lives in Tauranga and in her spare time has had four short stories published and more upcoming in 2019/2020.*

Website: <http://thephantomparagrapher.blogspot.com/>

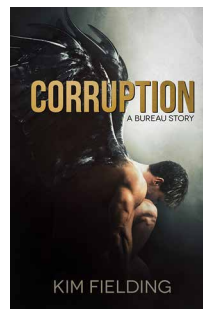
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pparagrapher7/>

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/beau\\_angelnz](https://twitter.com/beau_angelnz)

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/nzgeekchic](https://www.instagram.com/nzgeekchic)

## Book Review: Corruption by Kim Fielding

Reviewed by Anne Barwell



*Once a proud demon of the night sky who carried nightmares to humans, Tenrael has spent decades in captivity as the star attraction of a traveling carnival. He exists in miserable servitude to men who plunk down ten dollars to fulfill their dark desires.*

*Charles Grimes is half human, half... something else. For fifteen years he's worked for the Bureau of Trans-Species Affairs, ridding the country of dangerous*

*monsters. When his boss sends him to Kansas to chase a rumor about a captive demon, Charles figures it's just another assignment. Until he meets Tenrael.*

Buy *Corruption* [here](#)

### REVIEW

This packs a lot of story into not many pages. The world building is interesting, detailed, and a mix of paranormal and historical. I'm very happy this is the first of a series about the Bureau, an organization that investigates the paranormal. This story has a noir feel, with its atmosphere and setting, which

hooked me in right from the beginning. The descriptions are very visual, and I had a clear picture in my head of what I was reading. The time period isn't stated but it felt very 1920s/30s.

I loved the characters, and the contrast between them. Tenrael's resignation to his position came across very clearly, and I felt sorry for him. Sometimes the monsters are the humans. I also loved the connection between Tenrael and Charles and how they complemented each other.

The set up for the story is fabulous, and the world building and characters left me wanting more.

I'd recommend *Corruption* to readers who enjoy short stories with detailed world building, deep characterization, and a story that sucks you in from the first page. 5 out of 5 stars.

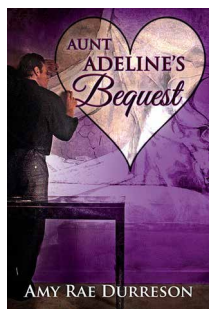


Reviewer bio over page





# Book Review: Aunt Adeline's Bequest by Amy Rae Durreson Reviewed by Anne Barwell



One snowy evening, wounded WWI veteran Jasper Pritchard arrives at Valentine Nugent's sweet shop with an unusual request. Jasper's deceased great-aunt has left him a fortune, along with a box of indiscreet letters she wants returned to the writer, and the only clue is a tin sold in Valentine's shop over twenty years ago. As they search the shop's records and uncover a love story from long ago, they find far more than the answer to the mystery.

A part of the "A Valentine Rainbow" set of 14 holiday stories.

Buy Aunt Adeline's Bequest [here](#)



## REVIEW

I love historical stories set post WWI, and this didn't disappoint. Although it's a sweet romance, the consequences of the war aren't glossed over, and I really felt for Jasper and how he was afraid to let Valentine see how damaged he is. I liked how Valentine saw past Jasper's scars to the man. Both men's emotions are well written, and realistic.

Their intimacy is beautifully written, and a perfect reflection of their setting.

Being gay in this time period isn't easy, and I loved how Adeline's bequest isn't all it appears to be. I enjoy stories which have a sense of past and present about them with the past having consequences for the future, often in a good way.

Although this is a short story, it has a lot of depth in storytelling and characterization. This isn't the first story I've read by this author, and I have yet to find one I didn't enjoy.

I'd recommend Aunt Adeline's Bequest to readers who enjoy satisfying historical short stories which are a mix of sweet but also reflect the time period in which they're set, and how a war affects those who survive it. 5 out of 5 stars.



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.

Website: <http://annebarwell.wordpress.com/>

## Write With Love Sarah Williams



G'day, I'm Sarah Williams Romance Author and host of Write with Love, a weekly podcast for writers and readers of love stories. Haven't heard of it? Well then here are four good reasons to tune in!

Pamela Freeman, who writes as Pamela Hart, talked about her job with the Australian Writers Centre (AWC) and we got an inside into her writing process for The Desert Nurse on Episode 44.

TM Clark appeared on Episode 45 and discussed her career writing for children and organising the CYA Conference - Children's and Young Adult Writers and Illustrators. Tina's latest adult novel Nature of the Lion is out now.

It was a privilege to spend time with Anna Campbell at her home on the Sunshine Coast for episode 46. Anna's publishing career started with a record-breaking rights auction and many books later, Anna has turned Indie and couldn't

be happier. She has a new regency novella out just in time for Christmas - The Laird's Christmas Kiss.

Brynn Kelly was the first New Zealand author to win a Rita at this year's Romance Writers of America Conference.

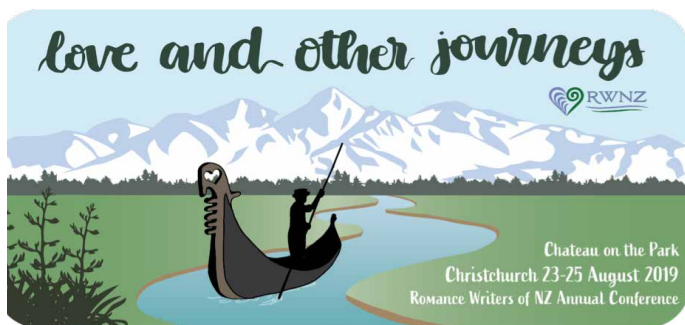
On Episode 47 Brynn tells us about her career and those hot covers!

The big names keep coming in December including fabulous Women's Fiction author, Monica McInerney.

Check out all the episodes [here](#). Join in on the fun, including regular competitions at [www.facebook.com/WritewithLovePodcast/](http://www.facebook.com/WritewithLovePodcast/) If you are an author who would like a shout out for only \$25, email me [sarah@serenadepublishing.com](mailto:sarah@serenadepublishing.com) or become a sponsor on Patreon!

*Sarah Williams*





## 2019 Conference Update

Well there is plenty of exciting news to share this month.

### Firstly, in Editors & Agents...

Nalini Akolekar will be joining us from Spencer Hill as our agent. Nalini represents several bestselling authors, and has placed books with a wide range of publishers, from the Big Five to Amazon, Harlequin, indies and E-first. Nalini specializes in romance and women's fiction in the adult market, but she also loves thrillers.

Monique Patterson is the Editorial Director and Executive Editor at St. Martin's Press, and she is coming to Christchurch next year too! This is an awesome opportunity to pitch your work directly to an editor from this big publishing house.

We also have another editor lined up to join us – and will announce her details as soon as we get the signed contract sorted out.

### 2019 Workshops

We received a fantastic selection of proposals for 2019 workshops from our members. Thank you to all those who put forward your ideas and are willing to share your expertise and enthusiasm. We are currently working through a selection process, balancing topics and content across both our international guests and local presenter. Yes, this is one of the most fun parts of organising conference.

### Programme and Registration

There won't be a Heart to Heart in January, but by the February issue, I hope to be able to update you with more on our conference programme, and a date for when we plan to open registration.

Happy holidays to all!

*Mel Climo*  
2019 Conference Convener  
On behalf of the fabulous committee



## Great Beginnings Finalists 2018

LaVerne Clark

**It is my pleasure and privilege to announce the finalists in the Great Beginnings Contest 2018.**

In no particular order, they are:

Caenys Kerr

Amy Talbot

Wendy and Leonie Wethey w/a Sonya Leowen

Stephanie Ruth x2

Huge congratulations to our finalists, and to everyone who entered. The most common thing I've heard from our judges this year is just how high the quality of the writing was from every entry, and how much they enjoyed the reads.

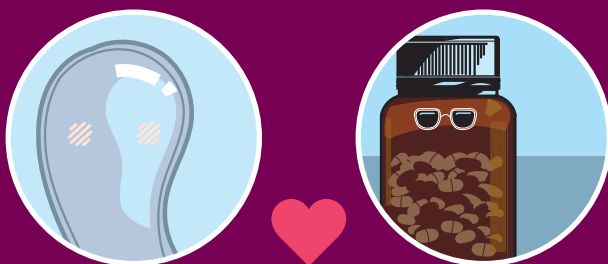
A massive THANK YOU goes to our army of judges. You people rock and are heroines and heroes for answering the many calls for help with your time and expertise.

Good luck with the final judges, Finalists!



# It's a Match!

Mitochondria and MitoQ have liked each other.



MitoQ is a scientific breakthrough. It's the first supplement capable of entering your mitochondria and supporting their health in a meaningful way.

When your mitochondria are healthier they produce more energy, meaning you can be at your best for longer.

Order online at [www.mitoq.com](http://www.mitoq.com)

MitoQ

## The Welcome Mat

Another red carpet roll-out this month for new members:



Jessica Ferri

Jenny Jeffries

Fiona Lothian-McPherson



Great to have you all with us.

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](#).

## Contacts

**Vivienne Matthews:** [president@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:president@romancewriters.co.nz)

**Zoe Sojourner:** [vicepresident@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:vicepresident@romancewriters.co.nz)

**Tania Roberts:** [treasurer@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:treasurer@romancewriters.co.nz)

**Kate O'Keeffe:** [secretary@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:secretary@romancewriters.co.nz)

**???:** [publicity@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:publicity@romancewriters.co.nz)

**Kendra Delugar:** [membership@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:membership@romancewriters.co.nz)

Heart to Heart will be published in the first week of each month except January. The deadline for every issue is the 20th of the month prior (e.g. 20th October for November issue). Please have all articles, news, reports, and advertising to Gillian at [heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz) on or before the deadline.

Heart To Heart (H2H) is the official publication of Romance Writers of New Zealand (RWNZ) and is published eleven times a year. No part may be reproduced or used for profit by RWNZ or others without prior written permission from the editor.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of RWNZ, its executive, or its editors. While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, no responsibility will be taken by RWNZ or the editors for inaccurate information.

Heart to Heart Contact: Gillian St. Kevern (Editor) [heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz)

To submit a woo hoo, e-mail Gillian or use [this form](#) on the website



To join the RWNZ Members-Only Facebook page, click [here](#).



# Regional Round-Up Reports

## AUCKLAND

Convenor: [Ruth Clough](#)

This month's meeting took place on Saturday 3 November at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion. Seventeen members attended the meeting this month - it was lovely to see all of you.

We didn't have a speaker for this month - instead we had an open forum discussion and all the members who attended had a chance to talk about what they've been up to and what they hope to achieve in the coming year. Lots of advice was shared around the room and several members shared lots of good news about their writing life and careers. A special thank you to Simon, who is such an enthusiastic speaker and always willing to share his insights with the wider group.

Our Christmas Party will be held on Saturday 1 December from 12:30 to 3:00 p.m. at Julie McKechnie's house. Please bring a lunch platter to share and something to drink as well as a wrapped mystery gift (max value \$15). Look forward to seeing you there!

## HAWKES BAY

Convenor: [Kendra Delugar](#)

Our November meeting was held at Kates's, where we caught up on what we'd been up to. And then we talked about secondary characters, how we use them, how we could utilise them more and how to get them into your book early on to build a series.

Our Christmas meeting will be held at the Boardwalk Restaurant on the first Saturday of the month at 12pm. Please come with a list of your goals for 2019!

## WELLINGTON/KAPITI COAST

Convenor: [Jane Ashurst](#)

We met in Jeanette's house in Levin, but had a good sized group, despite the distance from Wellington. Thank you to Jeanette for letting us take over your house for the afternoon.

With Jeanette were Jane, Ellie, Diana, Anne Kemp, Helen, Moira, Sara, Janet Henderson, Leanne, Liz, Sandra, and Kris. Also welcome back to Valda whom we haven't seen for ages :)

Janet presented an exclusive presentation on writing romantic comedy, and she kept us in stitches. Thank you to Janet!

We also did a round-table to catch up on everyone's news, and talked about plans for next year, and for the Christmas meeting. We've agreed to use the meeting room at Paraparaumu Library as the venue, and this has been confirmed for Saturday 1 December.

## NELSON

Convenor: [LaVerne Clark](#)

November's meeting was a small but lively one where we ironed out some of the kinks in our processes, talked craft in what makes a good story, and discussed transport

options for next years conference. We're all very excited it is coming to the South Island! Once again, we were all spoiled by Annika who'd baked us some lovely muffins while we pinned down a date and venue for our end-of-year Christmas lunch celebration, and final meeting for the year. Styx café on Sunday 9th December at noon it is.

The Nelson group hope you all enjoy the festive season with your loved ones and may the words flow!

## CHRISTCHURCH

Convenor: [Lyssa Randolph](#)

In November, the Christchurch Chapter group met at South Library in the Sydenham Room. We had a very informative and instructive presentation from science and suspense writer, Judy L. Mohr who talked us through the pitfalls of social media for writers and how to protect your identity online.

We have formed a 'circulating' library of romance novels through the kind donation of books from a member's friend, to whom Chapter members may make a contribution and enjoy borrowing and sharing lots of titles.

We are looking forward to our last meeting of the year which will be a social one of dinner at Madam Kwong's restaurant on 5 December.

## OTAGO

Convenor: [Samantha Burton](#)

The Otago/Southland chapter had a fun meeting at Dunedin's Rhubarb Cafe on Saturday 3 November. Six of us chatted over coffee and cake. We discussed our current projects and then talked about 'Creating chemistry between the hero and heroine'. After that, Sam gave an overview on how she launches a book (a constantly evolving process!). The chapter's next meeting is scheduled for Saturday 8 December.

## COAST TO COAST

Convenor: [Vivienne Matthews](#)

Our last formal workshop was a blast. I totally plagiarised Keri Arthur's conference workshop 'Getting the Beginning Right' - though I found my own photos for the team - and led a discussion about the important parts of the beginning of a piece. With those in mind, we chose a picture from the pile provided and went off and wrote the beginning of something new. Sharing the pieces turned out to be a hilarious time as we discovered how morbid our supposedly romantic group is - at least half of our beginnings involved dead bodies in some form or other and I don't think one involved romance!! One of our guys summed it up quite nicely in the observation of 'If we can't romance it, we kill it!' Made for a rather laughter-filled meeting.

Over December and January the C2C group meet in Tirau for a casual lunch and catch up with no formal workshops again till February.

## BLenheim AREA

Contact: [Iona Jones](#)