

Writing Consent in a #MeToo World

Mollie Smith



In 1972, Kathleen Woodiwiss published *The Flame and The Flower*, a novel which is arguably the Western world's most influential romance novel-cum-bodice-ripper. In it, protagonist Heather is raped by Captain Brandon Birmingham, who confuses her for a sex worker at first, then when he finds out she's not a sex worker and was a virgin to boot, offers to put her up as his mistress. When she refuses, he takes her hostage and attempts to rape her again before she says no. Thus started a trend in the romance world: no-means-yes, with violent, often rapey male leads, and sexually subjugated, but still feisty women who fall in love with them. It was a trend that persisted at least until the third wave of feminism in the 1990s, when women like Anita Hill, began accusing powerful men of sexual misconduct or rape.

In 2017, Alyssa Milano tweeted: "If all the women who have ever been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, then we give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem". That tweet, combined with a 2006 status on MySpace by Tarana Burke, launched the #MeToo movement, which aims to show vulnerable and young people that women (and men) have endured inappropriate behaviour from those in power for generations.

Whatever your personal thoughts are on #MeToo, it's hard to say that the world today hasn't changed because of it. What can romance writers do to ensure that what we're writing won't be criticised or called out for being creepy, rapey, or "just plain wrong"? In order to make writing consent sexy, we need to look at how we communicate, and define what consent is.

Human communication is extremely complex. To make any sense of it, you have to look at the whole (the attitude). Most scholars agree that body language is the most important aspect of communication (55%), followed by how we say it (38%), and then what is said (7%). We can find ourselves in situations where we misunderstand what's happening, take things out of context, or miss the message completely. Not recognising the attitude of communication can have serious consequences, especially when we talk about giving and receiving consent.

The dictionary definition of "consent" is "permission for something to happen or agreement to do something".

The dictionary definition of "consent" is "permission for something to happen or agreement to do something". But, it's not as simple as it looks. Consent is a two-way street; it's a give and receive process. What is consensual for one person may not be for another. To be clear, giving and receiving consent is not just about clarifying "yes" and "no", but also grey areas like, "yeah, sure" and "whatever you want", and "trust me" and "um, okay". The attitude is important; body language, tone, and message are all important. In writing, our characters need to be on the same page (no pun intended) when it comes to sex and romance. By all means, cause communication problems and breakdowns with your characters, but not during the sexy bits; readers want to read sensual and consensual sex, whatever form it takes.





There are a couple of different types of consent which we can use: no-means-no, and affirmative consent. In both types, consent can be withdrawn at any time for any reason by any partner, and both types have their place within our stories.

1. Affirmative consent is a knowing, voluntary, and mutual decision by all parties. Silence and lack of resistance does not imply consent; a person must be able to say “yes” and mean it. It sets hard limits and soft limits on acts, and what is acceptable once is not necessarily acceptable a second time.

2. No-means-no implies that everything is consented to until a “no” appears. More than likely, this is what we were taught as youngsters. The partner can initiate any kind of activity, but until someone says no, consent is implicitly given. It may discuss hard and soft limits on acts, but assumes silence and lack of resistance means you consent.

Of course, there are criticisms on each side. I suggest you do your own research here to see how these criticisms can affect you and your characters.

Art, in any form, has a tendency to emphasise, highlight, and mirror socio-political movements. During the HIV/AIDS crisis, there was a massive push for young people to use condoms and engage in safe sex. Romance writers at the time collectively wrote that safe sex is loving sex, and wanting the best for your partner was an act of true love. It’s hard to find a contemporary romance novel now that doesn’t have a condom in it somewhere.

In the #MeToo era, romance authors have a golden opportunity to change the narrative surrounding consent, regardless of what we write. We read romance to escape, to have a safe space to explore a fantasy (shifter, sci-fi, kidnapping, kink, sweet, historical, and everything in between). Why, then, are we reading and accepting the same creepy behaviour from romantic leads that we fight against in real life? Who doesn’t want to get swept up in a fantasy with a jaw-dropping partner who asks after our well-being? We can explore those fantasies without the creepy, rapey behaviour from romantic leads, unless your fantasy involves consensual non-consent-- and that’s a whole different ball game.

The default consent process in novels tends to be no-means-no. But, what if your character explicitly asked another character if they were enjoying X-act? What if a character asked for permission to do something? What kind of message would that send to Romancelandia, especially to readers who are struggling, or whose vulnerability and past traumas haunt them? How would it change them to see an active consent process, or to see characters find their voice and a partner who respects them?

So, how do you walk the fine line between actively asking for consent and skirting/jumping over it? Here are a few tips:

- Pick what type of consent you believe your characters need, and what they need to ask consent for. A twenty-year-old with past trauma in a contemporary setting may want to use an affirmative consent process. A twenty-year-

old in Regency England may want to use no-means-no.

- Characters don’t need consent for every thing that happens, because that would be overkill and would add thousands of words to your scenes. Two or three things: a kiss, an invitation to the bedroom, undressing, the use of a condom, a particular act, videoing, touching (especially when associated with trauma), etc.

- Use body language (lifts, moans, strains, etc) to show and highlight consent, in addition to dialogue. Tell and show a character how amazing/beautiful/handsome they are, and show how their partner respects them. Have them listen, ask questions, confirm. “Are you alright”, “I thought we might [do X]; what do you think”, and “Is this okay” are perfectly good questions. If you can make the questions sexier, do it!

- Diversify experiences within your novel. Have your character say no to something else, and have their partner respect that in some way (sure, maybe later, etc). This establishes trust between your characters.

- Don’t have one character say “trust me” when the other hesitates in the bedroom. Let your characters have the conversation around acceptance of an act. It doesn’t have to go for pages; a few sentences, an explanation, and a choice to trust is paramount.

Every author is different in how they write, so consent will look different for every author in every genre, from sweet teen to historical to erotic romance. I write kink and dark kink, so my consent process centres around negotiation and discussion, since consent and trust in a kink-based relationship are absolutely necessary.

Gone are the days where a warrior-type throws a vulnerable-type over a horse and rides off into the sunset; gone are helpless characters who want to please their partners and will do anything they want, even if they don’t want to do it; gone are the rapey lead men who “just have to have her”, with or without her consent; and gone are the pushy leads who don’t accept “no” and “leave me alone” for an answer. We’re living in a different world. Our readers want, and should expect, characters who are strong and have the wherewithal to show their strength in negotiating all aspects of those complex things called relationships to get to their happily ever after.



Mollie moved to Aotearoa ages ago from the US, fell in love with the country and her husband (not in that order), then bought a house with rural vistas which include cows, the occasional pukeko, a white-faced heron named Harry, and lots of hay fever.

When Mollie’s not dreaming up or writing about characters who (a) look suspiciously like her favourite actors, (b) she’d like to take down in a fight, or (c) she’d like to take down to the pub for a drink, she puts up with the shenanigans of a dog and a day-job, though her husband and her cats are indulged and spoiled rotten.

She’s currently at work on her first novel.

A Weekend Planning World Domination



Zoe Piper

You may or may not be aware that there are several members of RWNZ who write LGBTQI+ romance. We have an active Facebook group, New Zealand Rainbow Romance Writers, where we share our weekly goals, support and promote each other, and discuss issues that we face as predominantly independent self-publishers.

A while ago it was suggested we have a meetup and in the second to last weekend of February, six of us met in Wellington. We were hosted by Anne Barwell and it was wonderful to finally meet with people who we've only interacted with online.

We spent the weekend swapping experiences, knowledge, and planning world domination in the form of a shared universe. As several of us are attending GLO (Gay Lit Oz) in Sydney next year, we also discussed swag, and options for promo graphics using online resources such as Canva.

It wasn't all work and no play though. We took time out to stretch our legs along Petone beach, peruse the local second-hand book shop in Wainuiomata, and enjoyed an amazing dinner at Killim Turkish Restaurant. Some of us even managed to write a few words as well.

We're hoping this will be the first of many future meetups in various locations around New Zealand. Today, New Zealand, tomorrow the world (domination™).



WINNING LOVE'S LOTTERY

An average Kiwi guy, Jase MacKenzie wasn't born rich, and winning the lottery at eighteen didn't change the way he looked at the world. In fact, he never even told his family and friends he was a sudden millionaire.

When Kyle Foster moves to Auckland to head a new business venture for his father, he's wary of love. His past is full of heartache thanks to a gold-digging, cheating ex. All he wants to do is make his family proud and forget about love.

Only, working with Jase makes that impossible. Kyle is immediately drawn to Jase, but they need boundaries. Can Kyle learn to trust again and how will he react when he finds out Jase has secrets? About a million of them.

Buy *Winning Love's Lottery* [here](#)



Zoe Piper is English by birth and a Kiwi by choice, living in Auckland, New Zealand for over thirty years. By day she is an international arms dealer, (yes, really), mother to two horrible teenage boys and long-suffering partner of their father. She has been reading since she learned the alphabet as a small child and devours several books a week. She loves a good romance and a happy ever after.

Wellington/Kapiti Summer Retreat: A recipe for a writer's inspiration, productivity, and sanity...



Moira Kay

Take one beautiful, affordable location, large enough to hold a small tribe.

Set aside one weekend, and grease with escapism by removing extraneous life duties.

Fill said location with motivated writers.

Add a dash of gameplay, and a sumptuous smorgasbord.

Stir, to invigorate imagination.

Then sit buttocks in chair, and watch the words fly...

Due to a previous flirtation with this fail-safe recipe, the Wellington/Kapiti Chapter now uses the formula twice a year. The first for 2020, took place in late February, at the peaceful, homestead-like, yoga-retreat of Strathean, in Otaki.

Ten writers participated, making the trip from Wellington, Kapiti, and even the Wairarapa.

There was no pressure, and writers chose to stay overnight, or just visit for a day squeezed in between other responsibilities.

Most of us arrived Friday afternoon to settle in early and crank out a few words, or trade playlists before dinner when it was discovered that yogis prefer their wi-fi limited. Others arrived after a long work week, and bad traffic, but a hearty meal, light-hearted tribal banter, and a riotous game of Cards Against Humanity, followed by the private slumber granted by single bedrooms, assisted with recovery for the next day — when the work would truly begin.

If writing together was a sporting event, then our Saturday, is what it would look like...

The morning demonstrated some of the many ways in which a writing day might begin. There was a sighting of actual yoga being done by one dedicated member as others slept on, or guzzled caffeine in preparation for the work ahead.

Warming up is important.

Fingers were stretched, necks were rolled, equipment was assessed for its ability to last the distance, and positions were taken at the starting blocks of the kitchen table, assorted desks, the couch, armchairs with footstools dragged close, and there was always an electrical socket and some refreshments nearby.

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Goals were set, and while some writers set off at a sprint to achieve these, others paced themselves for the long haul. After all, writing is an endurance sport.

And a sedentary one.

Sometimes it was as if a spell had been cast upon us, pinning us in place to click-clack our keyboards toward some unknown end.

Every now and then, a glimpse could be caught of a writer on the move. There was more coffee to be made, and walks to be taken in the beautiful gardens, rain, or shine.

There were vicious murder plots discussed over sweet treats, and whole communities were brought to life and explored for their marketability. These are things writers know about; things we can share, and help each other with, free from the side glances and quirked eyebrows we might otherwise receive.

Worth a mention, is the progress made on the manuscripts being worked on. Huge wordcounts were churned out, WIPs completed, chapters, books, and whole series mapped for the future!

The work was fun, and the work was real.

But all work and no play makes for rather dull literature, so after the plotters, planners, pantsers, and dreamers wrapped up writing for another communal dinner, they proceeded to fill their minds with new and hilarious things with a challenging, four-rounded twist on the game of charades that will not soon be forgotten!

Sunday saw more magical writing time granted to those who can hardly find it when at home and was used to maximum potential before things came to a regretful end. Imminent thoughts of returning to life's realities began creeping in, and eventually, reluctantly, we said goodbye until next time.

As tribes go, we writers are a special breed.

Alone in our minds and captured by strange worlds much of the time as we attempt to concurrently navigate the real world, it's important to know that we have back up when any of those worlds get overwhelming and scary.

The Wellington/Kapiti Chapter has certainly found it rather beneficial to take some time to be alone together.

Already, our sage leader, Gudrun Frerichs, has made bookings for the next retreat in October. Slots are filling fast, because as helpful as we've found these things for our wordcounts, we also know just how good they can be for our author hearts.

Perhaps you and your Chapter will organize a getaway soon?



Moira Kay — aka Moisy — writes under a few names, in romantic sub-genres ranging from steamy contemporary, to dystopian and sci-fi. With a strong affection for underdogs, she loves to write hard-won happy ever afters, using both heart and humour to shine some light into dark places. She also enjoys dressing for comfort and unrestrained belly-laughs, but folding laundry, she hates with a passion.

Her current saucy series, written under the penname Ashley Logan, explores the gritty romances of a 'found family' troop of strippers dancing for therapy to overcome their psychological issues of past and present to find love and hope for the future.

You can find out more about her and her books at:

moirakay.com or ashleyloganromance.com

Understanding Point of View



Lola Goulton

Welcome to the next in my series of articles on the most common issues I see in manuscripts. So far, we've covered big-picture issues such as plot, structure, and characterisation. Last month, we looked at point of view. Today we're looking at a related issue, how we show what our characters are thinking.

Writers use three main ways to indicate when a character is thinking:

- Quotation marks
- Italics
- Interior monologue

QUOTATION MARKS

I was taught that double quotation marks indicated spoken dialogue, while single quotation marks indicated unspoken thought. However, it's now common to use single quotation marks to indicate spoken dialogue. It would seem odd to then use double quotation marks to indicate unspoken thought, and it would probably confuse readers. This is probably one reason quotation marks for thought have out of favour:

Never, ever use quotes with your interior monologue. It is not merely poor style; it is, by today's standards, ungrammatical. Thoughts are thought, not spoken.

(Renni Browne and Dave King, *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*)

As such, it's not considered correct to use quotation marks. So, what do we do instead?

ITALICS

One solution to this dilemma is to use italics to indicate direct thought. Italics do distinguish unspoken thought from spoken dialogue, but there are disadvantages:

- Long passages of italics are more difficult to read.
- Direct thought is always first person present tense, whereas most novels are written in third person and past tense. Switching from third to first person and past to





present tense can come across as a glitch.

- There are many other uses of italics, and overusing italics can confuse the reader.

There is another issue with both using quotation marks and italics to indicate thought: both presume that the characters think in words ... and that's not always the case. Apparently, only a quarter of the population think exclusively in words. The rest either use visual/spatial thinking (30%) or a combination of visual/spatial thinking and thinking in words.

Other recognised forms of non-verbal thought include, kinesthetic, musical, and mathematical thinking. If your character doesn't think in words, using italics for direct thought might feel wrong as it's emphasising the words over the impressions and feelings.

But how can we use acknowledge non-verbal thought in our writing? The best way is to use interior monologue.

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

Interior monologue is what your point of view character is thinking, expressed in their own voice. This is the preferred style for modern fiction, whether contemporary or historical. With interior monologue, the reader assumes the viewpoint character is narrating the story, so assumes everything is shown from that character's point of view.

This means getting inside your character's head and telling the story through that character's eyes and ears, and in their voice. Any time the narration steps outside the character's head, we have a point of view violation.

- Sometimes we hop into another character's head—that's called headhopping.
- Sometimes we hop into the author's head—that's called an author intrusion.

Here are some tips for writing solid and engaging interior monologue:

STAY IN THE POINT OF VIEW CHARACTER'S HEAD

Modern writing tends to stay in one character's head for an entire scene. If the point of view does change, this can be indicated by a scene break (e.g. ***), or by starting a new chapter. But don't be like the author I saw who added *** between each paragraph because they couldn't be bothered to rewrite the novel to eliminate the headhopping.

My personal preference is to only add a break if there is a new scene, which usually means a change in time, location, or point of view character. (And check out *Scene and Structure* by Jack Bickham for an in-depth analysis on how to write a scene.)

Staying in the character's head means the reader can only experience what the character experiences. We can only:

See what the character can see.

If the door opens behind the character, we can't know who comes through that door unless the character turns around, or there is some other cue (e.g. the person they're with says "Hi, John," or there is a convenient mirror).

Notice what the character would notice.

A botanist would probably call a flower by its Latin name. A keen gardener or a florist might know a flower by its

Latin name, but could use the common name. A child might refer to the flower as the pink one with the nice smell.

Hear what the character can hear.

If a character is mumbling under their breath, it's likely the point of view character won't hear all the words. Show that. If a character has a hearing impairment, that's going to show in the dialogue.

Say what the character would say.

An uneducated character will use different vocabulary than a more educated character, and their dialogue should reflect that. Equally, their interior monologue should reflect their unique character voice.

Know what the character would know.

If your character is a telepath, then they will know what another character is thinking. Non-telepaths can't know what other characters are thinking. They can only infer thoughts and feelings from spoken dialogue, body language, or other external cues (e.g. how the character is speaking).

CHANGE SCENES TO CHANGE HEADS

If you want to write the story from more than one point of view, you can. But introduce the new character at the beginning of a new scene by ensuring their name is the first name mentioned in the new scene. This tells the reader there is a new point of view character, and that the interior monologue is from the viewpoint of that new character.

AVOID ADDING NARRATIVE DISTANCE

When you show the reader what the character can see or hear or smell or touch or feel, show them directly. Don't add filter words—words that add a layer of distance between the character and the reader—because they are telling what you should be showing.

Words which indicate the author is adding narrative distance include:

- Feel (felt, feeling)
- See (saw, look, looked, glanced, noticed)
- Hear (heard, listened)
- Think (thought, wondered, pondered, realised, knew, remembered)

Readers don't need to be told the character can see or hear or feel. Nor do readers need to be told what the character is thinking—if you're writing interior monologue correctly, the reader knows all the narrative is the character's own thoughts. And the deeper you can go into that character's mind, the stronger and more engaging your novel will be.

Because that's what readers want: an engaging story.

If you're looking for some good books on point of view and interior monologue, check out my Amazon shop at www.amazon.com/shop/iolagoulton. And visit www.christianediting.co.nz to sign up for my free email course, *Learn to Revise Your Novel in Two Weeks*.



Lola Goulton is a New Zealand book reviewer, freelance editor, and writer. She holds a degree in marketing, has a background in human resource consulting, and works as a freelance editor specialising in Christian fiction. When she's not working, Lola is usually reading or writing her next book review.

From the Editor: A Marathon Not a Sprint



Gillian St. Kevern

So much for the next edition of Heart to Heart being out on time! I was so determined to get myself on a more regular schedule. Turns out life had other plans for me. The health issues I'd been circumnavigating for a while caught up with me in a really big way at the start of April. I've had to look closely at my life and make some tough choices in order to better manage my health.

One of those choices is standing down as editor of Heart to Heart. I've already said it on Facebook, but I'll say it again here—this was a super hard decision to make. This month marks my two-year anniversary as editor, and it has been an incredible two years. Editing Heart to Heart was such a rewarding experience, and I feel really lucky to have worked with Ruth and Emma to bring you these issues.

That said, while there is a lot that is not the greatest right now, I actually feel grateful for this experience. I now know a lot more about myself and have learned that I really do need to value my health as much as I value productivity or earning. Through this experience, I've learned a number of extremely obvious things that I'm going to share in the hope that there is someone out there who needs to hear them. These are things I'm doing to take control of and manage my mood and energy during this challenging time.

1. Reframing how you look at your downtime.

Taking time to rest, relax and otherwise care for yourself isn't wasted time. It's giving yourself future productive time. Pushing yourself too hard can actually lose you more time if you end up overdoing things and running out of energy or actually getting sick. Whether filling the well means immersing yourself in books in your chosen genre or blobbing out with your favourite series on Netflix, you should not feel bad for doing stuff that makes you feel good—especially now.

2. Endorphins are awesome.

It's just like Elle states in Legally Blonde: "Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy. Happy people just don't shoot their husbands." Exercise—done in accordance with lockdown proceedings, of course—is a really great way to give yourself a natural boost in both mood and energy. I've been going for a thirty minute walk each day, and leaving the house and getting outdoors have both added to my wellbeing, but there are other forms of exercise. I've seen other friends exploring Yoga or Tai-chi via online sessions, and with Les Mills teaming up with TVNZ, there's a ton of other options too.

3. Letting go of my to-do list.

I'm a list person. I love making lists, and I love the feeling of accomplishment of checking things off lists. But I have a tendency to add more to my to-do list than I am capable of doing in one day. This is especially true when I am sick and don't have the energy reserves available that I usually do...but still somehow expect myself to plow through a list of jobs that would be ambitious on a good day. Not checking off my list has a negative impact, making me feel unproductive. It's good to set goals and to be productive, but not at the cost of your wellbeing. I think we all need to figure out where to draw the line here. I'm still making ambitious lists, but I've learned to be more accepting of not making much progress on them. I'm managing this by...

4. Being grateful.

Whether I'm being grateful for what I have managed to accomplish or a phonecall or email from a friend, or a beautiful sunny day, pausing to acknowledge what is going well is a powerful tool for keeping overwhelm at bay. Our minds are predisposed to focus on what is not going well or what other people have that we don't. Simply taking a few moments to acknowledge and be glad for the things that are going well resets you mentally and realigns your mental gears. It's hard to feel fear and anger at the same time as gratitude.

5. Making my bed.

This is a really small thing that makes a big difference, especially as I'm spending so much more time in my room which doubles as my office. I'll be honest—I was spending almost as much time in here pre-lockdown, but the fact I could leave made my environment feel different. Now, it matters more that I like my space. Taking a few basic steps to keep it feeling nice and not cluttered, helps me stay focused longer.

6. Reading is meditation with words.

I've been doing a lot of meditation too, to be honest. Smiling Mind, which is a free app, has put out a programme on dealing with stress which is amazing, and also has two programmes designed to help you fall asleep, which I've been finding amazingly helpful. But reading is a really quick break for you and your brain. By transporting yourself to another place and immersing yourself in someone else's story, you get a breather from reality, which in turn gives you the resilience to better cope with today's challenges.





I'm struggling to engage with anything new—with so much uncertainty in my life right now, adding fictional uncertainty to the mix is more than I can accommodate. Instead I've been binge-reading old favourites, dusting off my Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Gladys Mitchell and Charlotte Brontë novels (am I the only person who comfort reads Villette?).

7. Limit news/social media.

It can feel irresponsible not to be tuned in to every new development or to put your phone out of reach, but social media—actually media in general—creates a false sense of urgency out of necessity. They need you to stay connected so they can feed you more content, so that you stay connected. Social media giants and their advertisers benefit. Your sanity? Not so much.

You need to be up to date on everything that is happening right now only if you are Jacinda Adern. As most of us are not, we can switch off without feeling guilty. I find it easier to digest news after the fact, when the initial emotional reactions have died down and you can get just the facts. I've also been limiting my Facebook time and making it a hard rule not to go on Facebook/news sites after 8:00 pm. Of all the things on this list, this one thing had the biggest and most immediate positive impact on my wellbeing.

8. Reach out to friends and family.

I'll admit that I haven't been as good at this one as I would like to be. As an introvert, scrounging up energy to be social when I don't have a lot of energy to spare is hard. Luckily I have extrovert friends and family who have been proactive having conversations with me—and every time we talk, I feel better.

9. Accepting there is no instant fix.

I was diagnosed with anxiety on a Monday. By Tuesday, I'd worked out a complex plan of how I was going to 'fix' myself. My therapist listened politely to my plan, but her expression was sceptical. "You do realise you're sick, right?" She reminded me. "The virus you were telling me about? All you should be doing right now is resting." I took her advice. Once I slowed down, my body just sort of revolted on me, and I conked out for three whole days—I didn't do anything remotely productive until Saturday and it was exactly what me—and my body—needed.

Next week, I sat down and created my wellness plan #2, learning exactly nothing from my experience the week before. Wednesday I was frustrated by the fact that I wasn't making more progress, Friday I was miserable. I had to get my head around the fact that there is no instant fix here, and that I have to be patient and in it for the long term. Once I did, I felt a lot better about things.

I'm not very good at patient, so there will likely be a lot of complaining from me as I learn how to take better care of myself and better manage my energy levels. As I do, I'd love to hear what you're doing to take care of yourselves during these unprecedented times! If you've got any tips, I'd love to hear them, either by email or on our RWNZ Facebook group.

News from the President



Susan Sims

I hope everyone has coped as well as possible under the lockdown levels to date. I've seen the whole gamut on my social feeds and emails, from people working from home in their day jobs; those unable to work; those not able to write at all; those who are editing instead; those who have decided not to get stressed about it; and those writing faster than ever before.

Personally, I'm working full-time from home in my day job, in a bubble of one and I know I'm lucky, and most days it's been manageable, but not always. It's been very hard to spend this much time alone and Zoom calls do not cover the need for contact. My writing is totally on hold as I'm one who hasn't been able to get it done. I'm trying not to let that get to me too much and hope the rumination will lead to better work when I can...

We all still need to follow the guidelines from the New Zealand Government (both for health-related and business support information) for Kiwis, or the Australian Government for our Australian members, it is really important. Fingers crossed for our double nation bubble to come to fruition so we can cross the ditch and see each other again!

It is normal to feel stressed or anxious in these situations. For Kiwis to get support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, call or text the free 'Need to talk?' service on 1737. This is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for you to talk things through with a trained counsellor.

As you will know from the newsletter and Facebook group the Executive along with Steff, Linda and their Dream Team have had to make the difficult decision that Conference 2020 needs to be postponed until next year. Keep August 6-8 2021 at Waipuna in your diaries! I'm really delighted that the conference Dream Team are going to stay on and complete their fabulous plan for our conference.

The exec are trying to figure out the best way to conduct the AGM under our rules, and we'll let everyone know as soon as we can.

Keep safe, keep well, and keep writing!

Love, *Susan*



Romance Writers of New Zealand 2020 Conference Postponed

The RWNZ Executive and Dream Team conference committee are announcing today that the 2020 Romance Writers of New Zealand conference, “Get out of my dreams, get into my book,” will be postponed until August 2021.

Given the current state of worldwide uncertainty over travel and large gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, and our Government and creative sector recommendations for events, we have made the decision that it’s in the best interests of our speakers and delegates to move the conference to the following year. We’ve weighed up a number of alternatives, and we believe this is the right course of action.

The 2020 Dream Team is excited to remain in place for another year to deliver a world-class conference. Many of our international speakers have already expressed interest in staying on in 2021 also we’re confident we’ll be able to deliver a wonderful event, and an extra year of planning means more value for you.

The Executive is working on alternatives to running our 2020 AGM and Awards and will reveal those details in due course.

We’d like to thank the members of RWNZ for your support and positive messages during this time. You are what make this organisation a wonderful and caring space for writers of all creeds, and we’re excited to do you proud with a new event in 2021.

We understand this may be disappointing. Conference is always the highlight of our writing year and we were looking forward to seeing you all and hearing from our amazing speakers. But hope is not lost! We are delighted to announce the dates of the 2021 “Get out of my dreams, get into my book” RWNZ conference.

Add 6-8 August 2021 into your calendar NOW!

We hope you’re all safe and healthy and enjoying time with loved ones. And maybe getting some words down!

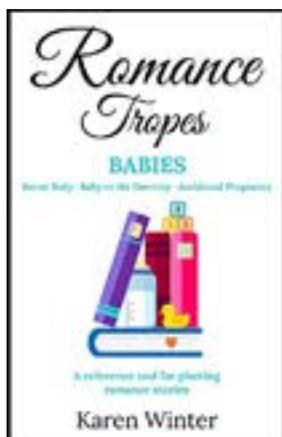
If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to reach out to your Executive through the President Susan Sims president@romancewriters.co.nz or Steff Green for the Dream Team steffgreen@gmail.com.

We’re happy to help if we can.

Thank you for your understanding,

Steff, Linda, Susan, and the RWNZ Executive.

Woos and Hoos



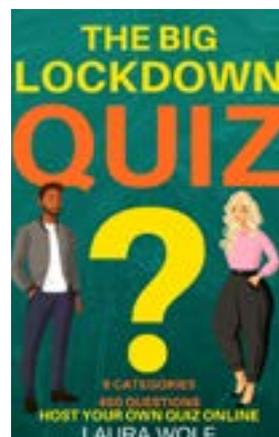
Karen Winter has published another book in her Romance Writers' Bookshelf series: Romance Tropes: Babies. It covers three tropes – Secret Baby, Baby on the Doorstep and Accidental Pregnancy. You'll find it to be a valuable resource, providing you with examples of stories written in these tropes.

Buy Romance Tropes [here](#)



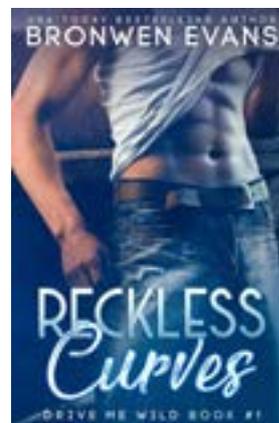
Huge congratulations to Jay Hogan whose mm romance book 'Digging Deep' was a finalist in the prestigious 2020 USA Lambda Literary Awards—gay romance category. Lambda is the biggest international LGBT literary award around. Finalists were announced in Oprah Magazine and the award ceremony is to be in New York in June.

Read the article [here!](#)



Laura Wolf has just released a quiz project designed to help bored people stuck at home and wanting to connect with family and friends. Packed with 450 questions spanning nine categories, her Big Lockdown Quiz has everything you need to host your own quiz from home.

Buy The Big Lockdown Quiz [here](#)



Bronwen Evans' new release RECKLESS CURVES: Bad Boy Autos, Drive Me Wild Book #1 released on March 30th, the first in a new contemporary romance series. A secret baby, best friend's little sister romance set in Bad Boy Autos. Think Fast and Furious but nothing illegal!

Buy Reckless Curves [here](#)

A reminder: you can submit WooHoos by emailing Gillian or via the form on the RWNZ website.

WooHoos should be 2-3 sentences in the third person, and, if featuring a book release, the accompanying image should be of the cover.

No other images will be accepted. This is to ensure that everyone's news gets equal prominence.

Thanks! ♥

Woos and Hoos



Juanita Kees has an upcoming release on June 02, with *Montana Son* (Book 3 of the Calhouns of Montana).

Mason Calhoun's penchant for fast cars and Harleys makes it difficult for the town to forget the accident that killed his youngest brother, Mitch. It's hard for him to forget when the girl responsible for him losing his head is back in town, hotter than ever, swinging spanners at his father's garage, Calhoun Customs.

Buy *Montana Son* [here](#)

Heart to Heart Needs You!

Are you an InDesign whiz? Ace at editing? Have always wanted to make your mark on RWNZ? If so, Heart to Heart wants you.

Our amazing formatter Emma and myself are stepping down with the June/July issue, and we're looking for volunteers to replace us from August. Whether you have your eye on a particular role or would like to form a team to share the job, it's up to you—as is the decision on whether to put out an issue every two months or return to the monthly format. There is a lot of flexibility in these roles and what you decide you want to do with them.

To find out more about what is involved, contact us at heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz

The Welcome Mat

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



Elaine Casey - Wellington
Leanne Shilton - Central North
Louise Graham - Auckland
Janie Smith - Auckland
Carol Roberts - Wellington



Great to have you all with us!

Don't forget to read the information for new members page on our website [here](#)

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

Susan Sims: president@romancewriters.co.nz
Mollie Smith: vicepresident@romancewriters.co.nz
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Deb Howell: secretary@romancewriters.co.nz
Josie Berliner: publicity@romancewriters.co.nz
Gillian St Kevern: membership@romancewriters.co.nz

The next issue of Heart to Heart will be the combined June/July issue, coming out mid-July. The deadline for this issue is June 20th. Please have all articles, news, reports, and advertising to Gillian at heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz on or before the deadline.

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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

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](#)

HAWKES BAY

Convenor: [Bronwen Evans](#)

WELLINGTON/KAPITI COAST

Convenor: [Gudrun Frerichs](#)

MARCH

Eight of us met at the Paraparaumu Library on Saturday 4 March, which made for a rather intimate meeting, and demonstrates just how busy life is for everyone just now.

We had a quick catch up, followed by another comedic round of Gudrun's story game. Concentrating on blurbs this month, we gained some intriguing insights into our processes, shared helpful tips and pertinent podcasts. We also made a group attempt at a snappy blurb for *Pride & Prejudice*, and in doing so, revealed that great copywriting is a tricky business for us all!

Our summer writing retreat recently took place, and many participants were in attendance. They shared productivity achievements and some highlights – including Tracey and Fred's hilarious twist on charades that will not soon be forgotten. Another retreat is already being planned for October!

Next meeting: Petone Library on 4 April at the adjusted time of 12:30-3:30.

COAST TO COAST

Convenor: [Bel Macfie](#)

MARCH

Writing consent in the #MeToo world

A smaller group of 11 met at Mollie's house to discuss the topic of consent. #MeToo was coined in 2006. It gained momentum on 15 October 2017 when actress Alyssa Milano asked women who had been in a non-consented sexual situation to add #MeToo to their tweets and posts. Facebook had 12 million posts with this hashtag in less than 24 hours. This movement aims to give people a voice and for women, especially, to feel empowered and not alone.

We had a spirited interactive discussion about consent in fiction including affirmative consent (knowing, voluntary and mutual), 'no means no' (everything is consented to until someone says no) and consent in the kink community (SSC safe sane consensual, RACK risk aware consensual kink, PRICK personal responsibility and informed consent kink)

We discussed 'no means no' where silence and lack of resistance may imply consent therefore communication between partners and being on the same page is imperative. We explored the topic of communication, which many times is not done well or explicitly, then we took these thoughts into our writing by practicing writing consent in a way that is not robotic but still shows consent is implied through words and body language.

The focus was on writing body language well since 55% of communication is through body language. As writers we need to tell the story of consent through our writing because romance authors have a unique platform to be able to change the narrative around consent. One example of this is that romance authors introduced safe sex and made it part of loving sex. Perhaps we need to be more intentional to make our writing platform influence positive social change.

APRIL

This month about 20 of us met virtually! Thanks to Julie O and Cat for organising, hosting and solving technical issues so we could virtually meet.

Cat outlined some of the key concepts in the book starting with genre. She found that in this book genre is broken down in a way that was more precise and complete by incorporating notions that usually sit on the periphery of 'genre'. There is a five leaf clover to cover all the concepts below (view on the website and check out <https://storygrid.com/downloadable-tools> for a number of useful tools. Also you can sign up for emails and listen to podcasts).

Gaylene and Wendy talked about some highlights from the retreat a few weeks ago. Wendy discussed Margie Lawsons course she was doing and the concept of backloading where you end a sentence with the power word, so you get the best psychological impact. Wendy says it has made her think more about the structure of sentences and paragraphs.

Regional Round-Up Reports

NELSON

Convenor: [LaVerne Clark](#)

CHRISTCHURCH

Convenor: [Emma Lowe](#)

MARCH

The Christchurch chapter's March meeting was cancelled due to the Christchurch libraries closing. Plans are underway to move online for our next meeting. Chapter members, keep an eye on your email.

APRIL

The Christchurch chapter's first virtual meeting was a success with thirteen members attending. After a short delay to get up to speed with technology we were away. Since it had been so long since we saw each other, the meeting took the format of a much needed catch up with members taking it in turns to update the rest of the chapter with where they were with their writing and the challenges they're facing with regards to writing during Lockdown. Many of our members are struggling to balance writing with home-schooling—a particular challenge for the teachers in our ranks!

OTAGO

Convenor: [Samantha Burton](#)

MARCH

The chapter met up on Saturday 7 March for a special get-together. After hearing about all our current and planned writing projects Emily Gee (w/a: Emily Larkin) gave a talk about her writing journey, and her shift from trad to self-published author. Emily had a lot of great advice, especially for those of us in the group who are about to publish our first novel and wondering about the next step to take. Thanks, Emily!

APRIL

The chapter met for our first ever online meeting via Zoom on Saturday 4 April. Eleven of us attended, which was one of our biggest meetings yet. Otago/Southland covers a huge geographical area so the 'virtual meeting' gave everyone a chance to attend. After an in-depth catch up, we then launched into a discussion about 'reader promises - what are they, and why do they matter? Our next meeting is scheduled for May 2 at 2pm - venue (online or at our usual haunt tbc).

BLenheim AREA

Contact: [Iona Jones](#)