

*Feb / March 2022*

# *Heart 2 Heart*

*Romance Writers of New Zealand*

**TIPS ON :  
CO-WRITING**

**+**

**WRITING IN SERIES**

**+**

**RWNZ COMPETITIONS**

**+**

**RWNZ CONFERENCE 2022**

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## NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Mollie Smith**

Hi y'all!

As I sit here at my mother-in-law's house, trying to figure out what to write, I've also got a touch of the vertigo. I'm not sure why, but it's forcing me to take things a little slow, lest the room start spinning out of control again. Looking straight ahead helps, as does looking at things at a very short distance. Hopefully by the time this goes to print, I'll be back to my old self.

Taking things slow isn't in my nature; I like to take the bull by the horns and go, go, go. I've fallen victim to the modern need to be 100% productive 100% of the time. From the time I wake up in the morning to the time I go to sleep, I need to be doing 'something' active: work, housework, cooking, meetings...the list goes on.

At my mother-in-law's, there's none of that. It's visiting, talking, the occasional social media surfing hour, and reading (until I get called anti-social and asked to join the rest of the family at dinner). It's supposed to be calming, a much slower pace, and relaxing. However, a very large part of me is concerned that the dishes from Friday night haven't been done, that I need to fold the clothes, clean the bathrooms, vacuum, mop, dust, and change the sheets. After that, I need to go to the market, pick up the pets from the kennels, change the chickens' bedding.... See what I mean about wanting to be productive and doing things? Where's the calm and relaxing downtime? I'm not fully in-the-moment, and it detracts from the visit.

It's taking a while to learn to let go of the 100% productive mindset. We don't have to be (and shouldn't be) part of the toxic hustle culture. We need downtime. We need time to ourselves. We need to take the time and veg out, binge watch *Bridgerton* or *Reacher* or *Downton Abbey*, or eat our pets' collective weight in chocolate and read the latest offerings from our favourite authors.



Speaking of reading and writing: The **Chapter Short Story Contest** starts on **1 April and closes on 30 April**. This is a contest for a previously unpublished short romance story, which means you've got time left to get something written and sent in. Contests, as I've said before, are a wonderful way of showcasing your talent and getting feedback on your writing. It is hard letting your baby out into the big, wide world, and contests are also a good way of testing the waters for yourself. Many thanks to Shelagh Merlin, our contest coordinator, and to our contest managers for all their hard work in collecting, collating, and sending these off to the judges and readers. If you want to know more about the contests, head over to the RWNZ Contests page (<https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/contests/>) or email Shelagh at: [contests@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:contests@romancewriters.co.nz)

**Conference organisation** is coming along wonderfully. Melissa and her amazing conference committee are still busy putting together the schedule of events, the workshop speakers, the cocktail party, and the awards dinner. Y'all, I'm excited for what the conference committee have planned for us. So many awesome things are happening in this space. If you're keen to help at the conference, even in a small capacity, get in touch with Melissa ([melissa@foreverlovepublishing.com](mailto:melissa@foreverlovepublishing.com)).

If you have any questions or concerns at all about RWNZ, feel free to send the Exec an email at [info@romancewriters.co.nz](mailto:info@romancewriters.co.nz). This is *your* romance writing community. We're here to help!

*Nga mihi nui*

*Mollie Smith  
President*

## SMALL FISH IN A BIG POND



*Corina Douglas*

This last month has been fraught with delays as our family got ‘that thing’ only two days into March. It flew through all six of us like wildfire and took a solid two weeks of my time to nurse us through it and get back to school/work life. During this time, not only did my work become backlogged but I also let my author career take a nosedive (unintentionally, of course).

You see, while I was on ‘sick leave’, I didn’t do my daily check-ins with KDP, or my Amazon bestseller rankings, my AMS ads, my FB ads, or my Goodreads reviews. That was silly, because if I had checked in, I would have realised that my Amazon bestseller rankings had tanked, and, on looking further, I would have understood this was due to two reasons:

- One, my AMS ads had expired (because I’d forgotten to push the date out!); and
- Two, my FB ads had diverged because I’d saturated my audience.

But, even though this result was not ideal, the timing was opportune. I’d had the foresight(!) to sign up for a free five-day across seven-days FB ad challenge being run by The Writing

Wives in late February. (Don’t ask about the title of the challenge—it was very confusing and created a few laughs over how it was such an oxymoron.) And, lucky me, even though I missed the live challenge that was run in early March, the hosts decided to keep the videos up in perpetuity. So, as soon as everyone was back to school and a sense of normalcy had returned, I jumped onto their free seven-day challenge and watched all the videos.

I’m so glad I did this, because I learned so much about FB ads—more than I thought possible, even after using them for the last six months. Therefore, as this topic is ‘top-of-mind’, I’ve chosen to outline the key takeaways from this challenge in this editorial. I’m hoping there is something in here for everyone, whether you’ve already started FB ads or if you’re considering testing the water.

But first—about **The Writing Wives**. If you haven’t heard of them before, they are a duo made up of Mal and Jill Cooper. These two lovely ladies have published over a hundred books between them and made over 1.4 million dollars in the process. And in one year,



they published 40 books! I kid you not—do the math, it will astound you. As a result, they have a *wealth* of information on not only everything to do with book production, but also launching, marketing, and advertising.

All of their ‘first in the series’ and their standalones are advertised via FB ads. This also includes Instagram ads (via the FB platform). Of the two, Mal usually fronts the webinars/FB lives. She’s engaging and very entertaining. On meeting Mal, it becomes apparent straight away that she knows her stuff. It goes without saying their free FB ad challenge was fabulous. It was suitable for not only those who have already delved into FB ads but also those who are just beginning.

Mal started on day one by explaining the FB ad dashboard. Day two was all about creating your audience, day three about other parts of the platform, day four on how to construct your ad and publish one, and day five on how to analyse the data and tweak your ads. Each FB live webinar was between 12-45 minutes long, and there was always homework to do following. (Not much, but worthwhile. Think of it like a Bryan Cohen seven-day AMS challenge here.)

The following is a quick rundown of what I learned over the challenge.

### Key Learning 1: Refine your audience

This is one of the most important tasks of creating a FB ad. There is so much to discuss on the topic, but in the interest of keeping this short, I’ll list the relevant key points:

- Only target one country at a time,
- Only target one gender at a time, and
- Ensure you target the most lucrative age group for your genre.

The other important aspect to refining your audience is to only target specific categories one at a time. In other words, don’t spread your audience too thinly. By doing so, FB will take all your money even quicker. Spreading your audience too thin means you generate weak targeting efforts. Therefore, the more refined your audience, the greater the reach for your dollar. For example, in one ad, target a group of authors; in another, target relevant

genre-related TV shows, films, and movies; and in another, target relevant interests (e.g., if sci-fi, you could target Comic Con, Star Wars, Star Trek, etc.).

AND, no matter what audience you create, please, please, please ensure you always ‘narrow your audience further’ and hit targets such as ‘kindle ebooks’, ‘Amazon’, ‘Barnes and Noble’ etc. (depending on if you are wide or not). Why? Because this will ensure you are targeting people who not only have similar genre interests but who ALSO read books on your desired platform. Very important, don’t you think?

### Key Learning 2: Target the right images

Mal believes that sharing an image of your book cover may not be that engaging, particularly if the image comes off small (similar to those Bookbrush mockups we all use). She recommends you trawl through image sites (like [Depositphotos](#)) to find images that illustrate and convey the genre, tropes, and tone of your story. Thus, make sure you pick images that convey exactly what your book is about i.e., if it’s a billionaire romance, clearly, you would choose a mansion over a quaint villa, or a picture of a sexy guy driving a Lamborghini over a little hatchback.

Another important thing to consider is whether your chosen images/videos have sufficient contrast. Contrast is huge. Ensuring contrast means your pictures will be eye-catching and clearly defined in black and white. Typically, orange and blue are the best contrasting colours you could use.

If you aren’t that great at understanding contrast, find a colour wheel. Pick the primary colour in your image and find it on the colour wheel. Now, trace that image diagonally to the colour on the exact opposite side of the wheel—this is the most contrasting colour to your primary colour. This means that if you have an image with these two colours (i.e., blue and orange), then the image will catch peoples’ eyes while also looking good in black and white—which is very important for those people who change their background colour schemes to black instead of white on their computer/tablet/phone (I’m one of those!).



### **Key Learning 3: Use priming words in your various text**

After the images, the text is your next chance to draw in the reader. If you're familiar with the FB ad dashboard, you'll know there are three places to add text—the 'header', the 'primary text', and 'description'.

Mal recommends that you use all three options available and fill in one or two text scenarios in the header, the primary text section, and the description. Why? Because FB is very smart—the bots will pick and choose which text the FB user will prefer (based on data they've gathered from other ads) and deliver the ad that suits their needs best. For example, if we have a user that tends to click on one-liners over screeds of text, then FB will show your one-liner header to that user instead of a three-four sentence header, and vice versa for a person who prefers to read more text. Clever huh? Just be aware that the same also goes for images—the FB bots will ensure the type of image the user clicks on the most is the one being shown in your feed. So, make sure you offer a range of image options in the ad. Honestly, technology never ceases to amaze me!

### **A few other relevant points:**

#### ***Priming words***

Anyone that's done marketing will know you must always add priming words to your text to drive those endorphins and crush the tropes, the story, and the emotions you're selling. Mal was generous enough to post her 20booksto50k presentation to The Writing Wives website. If you are interested in learning how to drive sales and boost your marketing/advertising efforts, make sure you visit their webpage and watch her presentation on priming [here](#). In one word—invaluable.

#### ***FB will spend your money!***

Like anything we attempt, there is always risk. In this case, it's losing money and having no return on our ads. Therefore, please be aware that jumping into the world of FB ads comes with high costs—it's not like AMS where we throw money at the platform, and it refuses to spend our dollar. No, *FB will and does* spend your money. And that old adage 'you have to spend money to make money' really does have relevance here.

In my case, I went from spending NZ \$7.50 a day to NZ \$21.00 a day. The reason why is that Mal showed me how to use dynamic creative, and I have not just one FB ad running now but two under the same campaign. This requires a higher budget. And at the end of the month, this meant my FB ad spend grew to over NZ \$400 instead of the usual NZ \$60-\$70 I was spending beforehand. However, the sales data page has also shown a significant jump, and even though it currently tells me I'm about \$60 in debt last month, that's okay, because the first two weeks following my ad wasn't wasted but rather a learning curve, as I gathered a whole heap of data I didn't otherwise have.

### ***The magic of having real data***

What kind of data am I talking about? Well, after two weeks of running my FB ads (one directed at a US audience, the second at a UK audience), I now know that 90% and 75% of my readers in the UK and US (respectively) are women, and 10% and 25% of my readers in the UK and US (respectively) are men. I also found out to my surprise that, instead of the usual 65+ age group being my most prolific readers, it appears the 18–24-year-old group are the largest group on FB who are clicking on my ads. Following this crowd, the 40-65+ age group are my next largest group of readers (although there's not much in it), but that was to be expected given this age group has the most available time, the kids have grown up and potentially left the home, and/or they may be retired with plenty of time on their hands.

This data is invaluable because it can be used to refine my ads and garner greater results on spend. This means I can now target readers in future ads by refining the ad spend to only target specific genders and age groups in certain countries. I can also reassess and tweak the images and text that had the most hits. Again, in a word—invaluable. Especially because there are very few platforms that can give you such detailed data on who clicks your ads. And, hopefully, my future ads will ensure a positive return on spend.

**... I suppose you're wondering how my ads went following the challenge?**

Well, after only 12 hours of going live, I woke up to find that the first in my series had jumped from an Amazon BSR in the 400,000s to the 60,000s! Was I surprised? Hell yeah! Was I excited—oh yeah! And since then, my BSR has jumped around to as low as the 30,000s over most days. However, after the training, I'm more than aware that my BSR and my sales will take a dive again at some stage in the future, but I can always revisit the challenge videos to tweak my ads and make new ones. Therefore, in conclusion, I can honestly say that the results of this free challenge spoke for themselves, and what Mal and Jill had to share is really valuable. At the least, I had a confidence boost in using the FB ad platform.

### ***Caveat***

However, please note that even though I've finished my first introductory course on FB ads, I am by no means an expert—far from it! I feel like a small fish in a big pond. But the important thing is that I am inching along, learning as I go, and still pushing that needle forward.

If you would also like to delve into the world of FB ads and soak in some learning, I encourage you to join The Writing Wives on FB and look out for their next free FB ad challenge as they are intending on running more in future! You can join their group [here](#).

And, if FB ads aren't on the agenda right now, well then, lucky for you we have some other exciting things to delve into in this edition! The lovely Laura Wolf has submitted an article on the world of box sets and we also have the second part in a three-part series of articles on co-writing from the dazzling duo, Ashley Lindsay and Sarah Anderson. There's also a fabulous conference update, some news on RWNZ's writing competitions, member announcements to celebrate, and chapter meeting summaries to review. Phew! With all that in store, grab a cuppa and a snack and enjoy!

Until next edition,

*Corina x*



## THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF CO-WRITING



*Ashley Lindsay*



*Sarah Anderson*

Co-writing has been growing in popularity over the past decade. Renowned authors have found success writing this way, and with the rise of self-publishing, so are indie authors. Maybe you are thinking about trying to co-write a novel. Or, perhaps you already have a writing partner but don't know where to start. From finding the perfect person to write with, to figuring out what you're going to write about, there is a lot of new territory to navigate.

We've been co-writing together for a long time and have put together a few tips and tricks to help get you on your way to co-writing a great novel.

### **Choosing the Right Partner**

Finding the right person to work with is critical—you have to write thousands of words together. Not to mention, you're going to be critiquing each other's work. You will have disagreements. There will be tough patches and times when you need to make creative decisions as a team. **That's why it's important to find the right person from the start—your perfect match, so to speak.**

While there is no fail-proof way to find your Mr (or Mrs) Write, we can offer some advice. First, find someone who shares the same vision and goals as you. This is the most important aspect to consider. Do you both want to publish the work you end up creating? Are you both willing to put in the effort required? Where do you see yourselves as writers in the future? Have you discussed how the writing arrangement will work? Sharing the same aspirations and vision for your book will help your writing relationship flourish.

Second, while differing writing styles won't break-up a co-writing partnership, it's helpful for co-writers to share a similar writing style. Or, at least have complimentary skills—perhaps one of you is particularly skilled at writing description, while the other has a great grasp of pacing.

Thinking about these issues before jumping into co-writing a novel together can help prevent problems arising in the future, leaving you and your partner free to get down to the business of writing.



## The Methods of Co-writing

One of the questions we get asked all the time is: *How do you co-write a novel together? Do you write each chapter together or...?*

**There are two primary methods for co-writing a novel.**

**1. Alternating Chapters:** This is the method we use to co-write our novels. Authors take turns to write chapters. This method requires outlining and planning your book to avoid plot holes and keep the plot moving forward. It works particularly well with multi-perspective novels where each author can consistently write from the same character's point of view.

**2. Drafter/Editor:** This is another popular method where one author writes the first draft while the other author follows along behind doing the re-writing and editing. This type of relationship can work well for partnerships where one author loves to write the first draft but struggles with editing, and the other prefers the editing side to writing a novel. Usually, even with this type of relationship, both authors plan and outline the novel together. A shared vision,

remember.

Both these methods are popular, and there is no right or wrong way of creating a novel together. So, figure out which way plays to the strengths of you and your co-writer, and start planning your novel!

## Planning and Plotting a Novel Together

We know a lot of writers don't usually plan out their novels, and that isn't a problem if you're working on a solo project. **But when you are working collaboratively, the planning phase is crucial.** Both of you need to be on the same page with respect to the direction of your novel before you start writing.

It is important to establish this joint vision with your co-writer from the very beginning, and the first step to accomplishing this is melding your ideas together in the planning phases. There are many different strategies to planning out a novel, but we thought we'd share our process. It has worked well for us, and hopefully you can gain some useful insight from it.

**We use a two-phase approach to planning a novel. In the first step, we complete an**

**overall outline of the novel.**

This encompasses the general story progression with major plot points, along with character arcs for the protagonist(s). This first stage usually takes a few hours of brainstorming and discussion before we land on a story we are both happy with.

**In the second step, we create a detailed chapter-by-chapter plan.** This is where the story is fleshed out, and the resulting 'chapter plans' act as a guide for writing the novel. This enables us to avoid plot holes, inconsistencies, and can even allow you or your writing partner to write ahead in the story without causing too many issues.

**Writing a Novel Together – Navigating Doubt**

Now comes the fun part. With all the outlining and planning done, hopefully you and your writing partner have a clear image of what you want your novel to become. And . . . it's time to start writing!

Even though you might be excited to get words on the page, this time can be awkward. You are trying to find your writing groove while grappling with new characters, a new plot, and a new writing style while figuring out how to write with someone else.

There might be a lot of questions swirling around your mind. What if I'm not as good at writing as my partner? What if people can tell two people have written this book? What if our writing styles don't gel?

These doubts can make the early stages of writing the book together feel daunting and stressful—you might even be nervous sharing those first chapters with your partner. What if they hate the chapter you wrote? What if they regret deciding to write with you?

**We are here to tell you that all those worries are normal.** The same thoughts cross our minds at the start of a new writing project. Remember, it takes a few (or more!) chapters to find your voice. So, don't be too critical of those first chapters, you can always fix them in the edits later. Give yourselves time to get into the rhythm of writing together. Provide encouragement to one another. And most of all, have fun.

**Bio:**

*Ashley and Sarah grew up together in the small city of Tauranga, New Zealand, and in high-school they began co-authoring the first draft of the Black Skies series. Soon, their lives took some major plot twists—Sarah moved halfway across the world and is now an operating room nurse in Canada, and Ashley completed a PhD in Chemistry, applying her research to innovation and sustainability. But despite the distance, and after a hiatus of several years, they returned to the Black Skies series with fresh eyes and new determination. Their passion for writing and co-authoring has remained strong, and along with the Black Skies series, they have a number of other writing-related pursuits in progress.*

*One of their recent co-authored books can be found here:*

<http://www.lindersoncreations.com/books/>



## WRITING IN SERIES



*Laura Wolf*

Although I would consider myself far from a master of box sets, as a self-published author with nine currently published titles in one universe and more on the way, I have learned *a lot* about what to do (and what not to do) when writing in a series.

Please, for the love of all things romance, learn from my mistakes!

**First things first, if you know you are going to be writing a series, do your future-self a favour and keep a series bible.** This is basically a document where you keep ALL your important character information—physical descriptions and ages, family trees, business names, details about pets, houses, children, and whatever else you will need to remember. If you don't do this while you're working on your books, you're going to spend a lot of time in Book 3 re-reading Book 1 trying to figure out where it was that you mentioned what your character's brother's lawyer's name was or what kind of dog breed your love interest's mother bred for shows. *Trust me, that's a lot of time down the drain compared to if you spend a few minutes here and there copying information across to a reference document early on.*

Second, before you even start, have a think about your branding, your reader promise, and if people are going to continue reading through your series or if they're going to get confused at why the vibe and genre has changed. I made this mistake in my first series, and I've improved my branding a lot in my second. I'll show you what I mean:



What a mess, right?

While I love all these books, and I'm still really proud of them, I learned a few important things.

**Series Should be Kept Consistent with their Tropes** When I first started out, I thought

having them all as sweet billionaire romances would be fine, BUT I WAS WRONG. If I could go back in time, I'd be planning this entire series as YA/College and keeping them all in that life-stage for a little longer. I had originally planned this as a six-book series as well, but learning from my mistakes, I've cut it short, pivoted and might go back to pick those extra characters up at a later date to finish their stories. As it is, I've improved my original set as much as I could with some back editing to keep them more YA-ish. I've also made some cover/title changes, which has improved its performance, but that original mistake of branding and inconsistent tropes is something not so easily changed in retrospect.

Also, for my newsletter magnets/bonus books, I originally used stories of side characters/excluded scenes with short stories titled *An Artist for the Curator* and *A Fashionista for the Photographer*. Can you see the problem? *NEITHER OF THEM ARE ABOUT BILLIONAIRES!* I wish I could go back in time and slap myself with a fish. Seriously.

You can see how I've learned from this in my second box set here, which is 2.5/4 books through and shaping up substantially better. (Book 4 and the Bonus Book covers are just mock-ups for now by the way, so I'll be adjusting the awkward lighting by the time they're live later this year).



Immediately, you can see **there's consistent branding and themes throughout**. They're ALL single dads (because let's face it, people either hate kids in romance or love kids in romance, and readers will either throw the lot of them in the bin or gobble them all up without hesitation).

They're ALL second-chance, because second-

chance romances have those familiar themes that fit very well with single parent romances. They provide a consistent vibe to fulfill that promise I've made to my readers from the beginning of Book 1. Even the "RE" in the titles point to second-chance, while keeping the style consistent with font style and colours from my last series shows they're all on-brand from me as an author. This means the same vibe and heat level will be carried across the series within the wider universe.

And my bonus newsletter book is my 'gateway drug book' to the rest of my 'not exclusively single dad' series. **Rather than using up leftover side characters like artists and curators (who I still love, but they aren't really marketable), I've got a strong character with a gripping story planned out to treat my exclusive newsletter subscribers to something they REALLY want, using the same tropes that attracted them to me in the first place.**

You might also note the cowboy hat in book one and ask me "Laura, why do you have a cowboy billionaire in your billionaire series?" To which I would say, "Fantastic question, let me tell you *exactly* why I have a cowboy in my billionaire series, and my grand master plan to take over the sweet romance-world with my giant romance universe with this handy diagram."



If this horrifying monstrosity of a diagram doesn't show you the necessity of keeping a series bible, there's no helping you.

Some of these series are partially planned with characters names, basic plots, locations etc., and are waiting to be fleshed out in the next X years of my master plan, but basically, every person's brother, sister, cousin, intern etc., has been set up with the potential for their own series. When writing series and setting up characters I've kept this in mind. So, when my MC for *The Billionaire's Regret* returned home to his family ranch in Montana to get help from his mama to look after the toddler he just inherited from his best friend, and, he also resolved his second-chance romance with his childhood sweetheart cowgirl, YOU BETTER BELIEVE he has a very eligible brother who is going to inherit the ranch and kick off a Montana cowboy series for me.

And 100%, my cowgirl-turned-billionaire's-PA-turned-desert-island-survivalist, who ends up accidentally falling in love with her boss in *Stranded with Her Billionaire Boss* also comes from a town in Montana a couple of hours away. *Because why would I ever waste a cast of fully developed characters that can pop in for a cameo when they're doing rodeo rounds in the next series?*

I love finding 'easter eggs' when I'm reading, and I love planting them as I'm writing. **Building a series in one big universe gives you this wonderful opportunity to enrich your worlds, and for overarching themes to develop and be built up over time.** For 'sweet' and 'inspirational' romance, this is a fantastic opportunity because there's underlying themes of community that can ripen over time and give back again and again. For example, all my billionaires' and their friends and family move within the same social circles, and I've put in a lot of thought into how they've made their money and what their businesses do. (There's a huge difference if you're self-made versus if you have inherited your wealth and are trying to break out of your parent's shadow, for example.) They bump into each other at fundraiser events or social gatherings, and they occasionally call on each other when they need investment or services that the other billionaire's business specializes in.

When one of them needs a computer system upgrade, they'll call Parker Price from A

*Cinderella for the Undercover Billionaire 1* for his paperless VR system. When they need to stay at a resort, they'll be staying at one of Daschel Durincourt's top-of-the-line eco-tourism spots from *A Bridesmaid for the Troubled Billionaire*. And when they need prototyping for new technology done, they'll be heading over to Zenterprises and the developmental technologies labs run by my Crypto-Billionaire series brotherhood. There, they'll talk to whichever MC personality-wise would help them along with their plot—Yohan or Xavier for antagonizing and teasing; Zeke or Chase for grounding and being brought back to Earth.

I fully intend to keep writing in this series for the next 5+ years, establishing strong ground in the Billionaire/Cowboy/Celebrity tropes, so it's been worth putting the effort into world-building.

Hopefully the overarching thing you'll remember after looking at all this is that if you want to write series in box sets or as a larger expanding universe, **FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, KEEP A SERIES BIBLE FOR REFERENCE.**



## Bio:

Laura Wolf is a sweet romance author and purveyor of billionaire book boyfriends. You can find her at:

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<https://www.facebook.com/LauraWolfAuthor>

<https://www.instagram.com/laurawolfauthor/>

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### The 2022 RWNZ Conference is going to be a blast!

The conference committee is super excited about the upcoming conference. Thanks to some fantastic guest speakers, we are in for a treat of learning and growing in our writing journeys. If you're planning on coming to the conference, here are some of the things you can look forward to....

- Leeanna Morgan, USA Today best-selling author, will be sharing her personal writing story as well as how she plots out a book and then prepares it for market.
- Rachael Herron, international best-selling author and writing teacher, will be sharing her experiences as a hybrid author as well as teaching how to revise your manuscript to really make it shine.
- Kathryn Burnett, award-winning screenwriter and writing coach, is going to be inspiring us with how to set killer goals for making the most of our careers, as well as running a special workshop on how to adapt your book into a pitchable screenplay.

Along with these amazing keynote speakers, we have a stellar lineup of workshops coming your way, covering everything from craft to marketing. Look forward to empowering

yourself in the land of BookTok or learning how to deepen your writing by understanding the psychology of a character. There'll also be how-to workshops covering everything from long-term writing strategies, pitching to an agent, and author collaborations.\*

Registrations for the conference open up in May. The committee is working hard to bring you an enriching weekend that will leave you motivated and inspired.

If you'd like to book your hotel room now, there are special booking codes on the registration page:

<https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/event/2022-rwnz-conference-registration/>

Don't forget to **use the hashtag #rwnz22** when posting about the conference!

We can't wait to see you all there!

Ngā mihi,

Melissa Pearl Guyan

(Conference Convenor 2022)

**\*Disclaimer: The project is subject to change.**

## COMPETITION NEWS:

### Great Beginnings

Due to insufficient judges, the first round of judging was significantly delayed, but the top three entries have now been sent off to the final round judges. The finalists in alphabetical order by author are:

- Amy Blythe, *What's Welsh for Wild*
- Nancy M. Cunningham, *Girls of the USO*
- Melanie Harding-Shaw, *City of Souls*

### The Daphne Clair de Jong First Kiss

First round scores for entries in this contest were very close. The top five entries in alphabetical order by author are:

- Courtney Clark Michaels, *Protecting His Princess*
- Susan Frame, *It's Okay To Change Your Tune*
- Gabriella Margo, *All's Fair In Love And Tequila*
- Gabriella Margo, *Tulips From Mal*
- Colette Rivera, *One Wicked Night*

### Pacific Hearts

Entries in this contest closed on 28 February and were sent out for first round judging in mid March. Judging in that round should be complete by 30 April.

### Koru

The Koru Award for best published book of the year ran from 1-31 March and entries will be sent out to readers mid-April. Judging should be complete by the end of May but results will not be announced until the RWNZ conference in August.

### Chapter Short Story

This contest is open for entries until 30 April, so there's still time to write up a storm and send in something scintillating. At just 1800 words per manuscript, this contest suits itself to those of you who like to keep your stories concise. Check the website for details and get those keyboards clicking.

### Contest managers

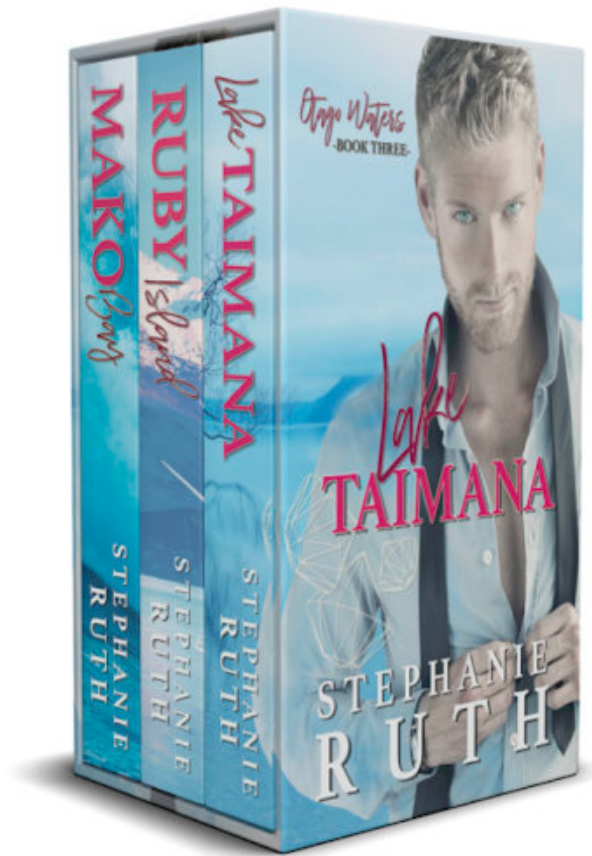
A huge thank you to this year's contest managers without whom we wouldn't be able to run our contests. **Megan Mayfair** managed Great Beginnings in 2020 and stepped up again to manage the 2021 contest. Thanks also to **Jill Batty** and **Anna Klein**, who are running our two largest and most prestigious contests this year. Jill managed Pacific Hearts last year and stayed on to run this year's contest, while Anna has stepped up again to manage the Koru after taking a break from this contest. Words cannot express how much I appreciate you three.

However, we still need two more contest managers, one to run First Kiss, which opens on 1 November, and one to run Chapter Short Story, which is currently running. I would really like to hand both these contests to somebody else so **please consider volunteering**. First Kiss and Chapter Short Story are easy contests to run and I am available to support whoever takes on either role. Running a contest is a great way to give back to our organisation, but it is also a good way of meeting other members, both entrants and judges, and making friends. All this is to say please, **please, please consider helping out and managing a contest**.

You can reach me on **contests@romancewriters.co.nz** if you have any questions or would like to volunteer.

Shelagh Merlin

RWNZ Contest Manager



## Stephanie Ruth

### OTAGO WATERS SERIES

Emerging author, Stephanie Ruth, now has three contemporary romances out in the award winning Otago Waters series. This includes *Mako Bay* (winner of First Kiss 2018), *Ruby Island* (Editor and Agent's Choice, Great Beginnings 2018, Pacific Hearts finalist 2020), and *Lake Taimana* (winner of First Kiss 2019, Agent's Choice, Great Beginnings 2019). Her New Zealand titles can be read in sequence or as standalones and are intended for readers who enjoy their feel-good HEAs on the steamy side.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09CTBPMJS>



## Caroline Corvin

### TANGLED THREADS

Carolyn Crow, writing as Caroline Corvin, recently released *Tangled Threads*, the first book in the Tangled In Time series.

*What if her future lies in a past she can't even remember?*

*A love story across time. Within time's tangled threads Kate finds the promise of two men, two loves, and two lives—but also the risk of losing them both forever.*

<https://amzn.to/3qXKVS9>





## Kristie Klewes

### **BODY! THEY BARKED**

Kris Pearson, writing as Kristie Klewes, has just released *Body! They Barked*, the fourth book in her Merry Summerfield cozy mystery series.

*Our heroine gets told about some Christian Louboutin shoes by the German Shepherds she's currently pet-sitting. Shoes on legs. Legs hanging out of wheelie bin. Ummm...*

<http://mybook.to/BodyTheyBarked>



## Rachel Armstrong

### **REUNITED WITH THE MILLIONAIRE**

Rachel Armstrong's debut, *Reunited with the Millionaire*, a Pacific Hearts Award finalist and Emerald Award winner, is available March 1st.

*Amidst pristine beaches, gorgeous hikes and breathtaking sunsets in the Whitsundays, can Mirabella convince the man she's always loved to open his heart to her and her child?*

<https://www.romance.com.au/9781867251224/reunited-with-the-millionaire/>

## REGIONAL ROUND-UP REPORTS

### Hawkes Bay

**Convenor: Bronwen Evans**

February/March meeting:

The Hawkes Bay group had a Feb/March combined Zoom meeting where we talked about a course from The Writing Wives that Bronwen Evans had taken. We discussed different launch strategies depending on how many books a year you publish. It was really fascinating and made a lot of sense. The crux was, the fewer books you release, the more advertising spend you needed. Next meeting is via Zoom on April 2, 1pm.

### Coast to Coast

**Convenor: Lyn Rasmussen + Lyndsay-Jean Campbell**

**February meeting:** No matter how few or how many words we write, research is always a part of our writing life. Deborah Challinor, bestselling historical fiction novelist, joined us virtually in February with some of her tips on research. Deb's novels are based on actual historical events so detailing those events and presenting them accurately are an important part of her work. One of Deb's key messages is, 'Don't write what you know, write what you LOVE.' Deb praised the internet but warned "No source is neutral, all sources embody an agenda of some sort – it's up to you to work out what that agenda is and avoid being influenced by it." Some of the tools Deb uses in her research are old maps, letters and diaries. She visits living museums e.g., places like

Howick's Historical Village and uses all her senses to get the most from these experiences. Questions and contributions from attendees made for robust and useful discussion, and we all benefited. Thanks to Deb for jumping in at short notice and for the time and effort you put into your presentation.

**March meeting:** In March, we had the pleasure of learning from another bestselling author, who not only presented but did the tech mahi to set up and host the Zoom session. Melissa's talk was around making your book appeal to the readers you want to target. She talked about researching your target market during the planning stages and how to make sure your content, cover, and book description is going to be a winner in whatever genre you are writing in. Melissa's pragmatic approach involves spending considerable time researching the genre she intends to write in before even starting. She wants to know what is trending and selling in the fickle world of ebook readers. While Amazon only offers authors two categories for their books, she advises us to email with a request to be allowed more, and this way it is possible to place books in up to ten categories. She advises us to read widely to keep up with what is being published in our genre. While the business-like way Melissa goes about tailoring her books to suit the market may seem to go against our sense of creativity and desire to write what we want, her comment that 'it's not that hard to tweak a bit so your book will fit what is in your heart', resonated with many of us. Thank you so much, Melissa, I'm sure we all resolved to give our next projects the benefit of some research at the beginning rather than at the end when we're often so tired of it we just want to 'get it out there'!



## Wellington / Kapiti Coast

**Convenor:** *Lisa Page*

**February meeting:** With a new committee starting out, Kerry Lambeth and Lisa Page stepped up to the challenge to run our meeting via Zoom as we thought it would be safer and more accessible to people. There were great discussions on what everyone is up to and even a goose (yes a goose) joined in too. It was a turn out of about twelve, and since some are going on an in person retreat in March, the offer of an online one has been made too. There was lots of writing and busyness going on with everyone from new jobs started, to lots of us working from home, so we are all making sure we get some writing in to keep accountable to our Christmas 2021 goal. Great to see new ones starting to put their mark in our branch.

**March meeting:** Another Zoom meeting for the Wellington/Kapiti branch with fifteen members on screen and Kerry keeping us online. Amazingly, we had Megan join from her car in Australia. Abbie was kept company by her tame goose in the garden who contributed the odd honk.

We're busy! New books out, new books nearly out, and many thousands of words written over the summer. Moira told us she'd achieved a nice swing up with sales by tweaking her Amazon 7 keywords, and encouraged us all to try it. We talked about unexpected things that had happened while we were writing, and in Jude's case, a hero died in the prologue and quickly had to be replaced! The next meeting will be Sat, 2nd of April, 1pm, on Zoom again.

## Nelson

**Convenor:** *Annika Ohlson-Smith*

**February meeting:** A select few members attended the February meeting of the Nelson Branch. Unfortunately, because of a combination of work and family commitments, two of our younger members have decided not to attend meetings this year. As they are both very able writers, we hope to see them again when circumstances change. We swapped progress reports, discussed ideas for meetings this year, and then shared extracts from our current works, these latter demonstrating the talent within the group. We concluded with some of Annika's superb Swedish Cinnamon Cake, washed down with tea and coffee.

## Otago / Southland

**Convenor:** *Laura Hewson*

**February Meeting:** Eight of us met this month to discuss our goals for the foreseeable future. For some it was finding joy again, for others it was upskilling in social media and marketing. For many of us it was just to blimmin write something. We also discussed how we can safely meet in future and decided to add a mid-month Zoom to let out-of-towners and health-conscious members catch up and share news. We will trial this in March.

**March Meeting:** We had a very cushy meeting this month. Thanks very much to Metalon for hosting us—we were definitely not short of chairs! The theme of our meeting was how a strong conflict feeds into an emotionally satisfying black/dark moment. We shared examples of where this was done well (or not so well) in some of our favourite books and movies, and a couple of members discussed examples from their own work. We also held our first mid-month online catch up. It was great to see some of the people we've missed at meetings, and we plan to continue these for the foreseeable future. Next month's meeting is on April 2, and the theme is short stories.



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Amy Hutton ~ Wellington  
Ashley Lindsay ~ Auckland  
Babette Furstner ~ Overseas  
Bonnie Mosen ~ Wellington  
Danielle Gilkison ~ Auckland  
Jacinta Peachey ~ Overseas  
Jayne Grace ~ Wellington  
Jeanette Churches ~ Northland  
Karen Heslop ~ Nelson

Katrina Cameron ~ Overseas  
Marian Rocco ~ Auckland  
Megan Short ~ Overseas  
Pragati Vasisht ~ Auckland  
Rachel Peacocke ~ Central North  
Samara Thorn ~ Overseas  
Sara Land ~ Overseas  
Wendy Goodwin ~ Christchurch

Great to have you all with us!

Don't forget to read the information for new members page on our website. 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.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RWNZMembersOnly/>

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