



The Write Touch

RWA Chapter 13
Volume 101, No. 3
July 2008

Love is the Cards II a great success!

Donna Kowalczyk

Wow, what a conference! We kicked it off Friday with Meet the Authors, where attendees threw all sorts of questions at our wonderful authors. Headliners Lori Foster, Susan Kearney, and Janice Maynard were all fun, funny, and a real pleasure to chat with. The literacy signing was a success (I came home with lots of great new books to read!). Saturday we had a full day of amazing workshops, nonstop agent/editor appointments, and lots of networking and socializing. The food was delicious, and between the Silent Auction and Basket Raffle we again raised over \$3,000 for the Brown Country Literacy Council. Thanks to all of you, we had more baskets and goodies to raffle away than we had room for. I think we must have broken a record! Thanks to everyone who attended, and here's hoping next year—our 25th anniversary—is an even greater success! 🍷



Headliner Lori Foster at the book signing



Kate Bowman presents Donna Kowalczyk with the 2008 Chapter Service Award



Laurel Bradley, Liz Kreger and Jo Schmidt enjoy the book signing



Helen Brenna, 2008 Rita Finalist

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The Board of Directors meets twice a year, in spring and fall.

*Area Contacts are the liaisons between the general membership and the executive board.

The *Write Touch* Newsletter is published quarterly. For more information, or for reprints, contact Rachel Berens-VanHeest, Newsletter Editor at reberens@charter.net.

The chapter's Web site, www.wisrwa.org, is updated monthly. Submit changes and new information to the Web site coordinator, Meagan Hatfield, at meaganhatfield@charter.net

President's Report

by Mary Jo Scheibl

Where does the time go? It's near the end of June, and we've endured record rains and flooding. Surely as writers, we can find some interesting plot twists in the weather we've had in 2008. Like maybe the mysterious demise of weather-forecasters?

You approved the WisRWA Revised Bylaws, which are now in place. You can find them in the files section of the AlertWisRWA loop. We will also be posting treasurer's financial reports and board meeting minutes and reports in that same area.

Currently our board members are busy updating and revising the WisRWA Policy and Procedures Manual. Once that has been finished, we will also post that in the files section.

We are coming up to elections of WisRWA Board officers and Area Contacts. Nominees have been announced and the election will take place between July 25 and July 31. We will be using electronic voting this year with a ballot set up on the AlertWisRWA loop. If you wish to snail mail a ballot, you can copy it and mail it to our election chair: **Kathryn Albright**. Directions will be posted.

WisRWA's spring conference was once again a resounding success. The speakers and guest editors and agents presented useful information and attendees garnered several requests. The Chapter Service Award was presented to **Donna Kowalczyk** for all she's done for her area, Green Bay, and for our state, by chairing two successful conferences and planning for next year.

Our two contests, The Write Touch Readers Award and FAB 5, were also successful. Several of the finalists were at the conference to receive their awards, which makes all the work much more fun. Thank you to all of you who have helped make these contests successful either through entering, judging, or coordinating.

The WisRWA Board decided at

its May meeting to donate three \$50 Barnes and Noble Gift certificates as part of the RWA National's Literacy Raffle. **Bobbi Dumas** put together a nifty PR flyer to go with each certificate. The flyer promotes WisRWA and what we've collected and donated to literacy efforts here in Wisconsin since 2004. That total is a bit more than \$11,000. Hoorah for all of you for your support of literacy!

Rachel Berens-VanHeest has developed a logo to commemorate our 25th anniversary year. We used this first on the PR brochure, and you all will be seeing a lot of it in the coming year.

Speaking of the anniversary year, if you have memories of the early years and/or photos you are willing to share, please contact me at mjscheibl@wi.rr.com. We're trying to put together some kind of retrospective to celebrate this major event.

We will be "kicking off" this anniversary year with a fall workshop. Margie Lawson will be the speaker/facilitator and the date is November 1, 2008. The workshop will be held in Milwaukee at the downtown Ramada Inn. You will be able to start registering for it mid-July. Her workshops fill up fast, so be watching for this.

WisRWA continues to grow. We now have 164 members, up from 133 members last year.

Our treasurer reports the following: Our current balance is \$14,501.27. Fab Five: \$3234.35 Income/\$503.18 expenses = \$2,731.17 profit. This is thanks to doing so much electronically. Reader's Award: \$2950.00 Income/\$1042.89 expense = \$1,907.11 profit. Conference: \$13,161.00 Income/\$14411.58 expenses = Loss \$1,250.58.

Now for the best part of this report: highlighting a WisRWA member who consistently volunteers at the area level. Someone most of us may not know but all of us should. This month I've chosen the Milwaukee area and **Jody Allen** as our quiet but

President's Report (continued)

efficient volunteer.

Jody has served as Milwaukee's Area Contact and Area Co-Contact in the past. She's been a FAB 5 judge and a category coordinator. She's helped with putting together literacy baskets and given meeting programs in her areas of expertise. She's started and maintains a blog on all things Scottish, which is helpful to many who are

writing about that interesting land and people. If you need another hand at conference, she volunteers with a smile and despite some health issues that can be challenging.

She volunteers because she believes the "group is only as strong as its individual members so one is supposed to help out for the good of the whole." The friendships she

gets as a result and the sense of accomplishment fuel her enthusiasm for volunteering. She's been a reader of romance for 40+ years and believes we should all promote the mission of RWA and WisRWA to the best of our abilities.

She's quite a Scottish lady with a generous heart. Thank you, Jody, for all you do. 

2008 Fab 5 Winners

The FAB 5 winners and final placements were announced at our fabulous conference over the weekend of May 16-18, 2008. WisRWA and the FAB 5 coordinators applaud the accomplishments of the 2008 finalists.

**denotes WisRWA member
++ denotes request for full
+ denotes request for partial

Erotic Romance

Final Judge: Diane Carlile,
Senior Editor, The Wild Rose Press

Category Coordinator:
DeAnne Wildes-Mickelson
Winner: Laura Logan:
Purrrfect Passion ++
2nd Place: Lori Philbin:
Bluebeard's Hunger ++
3rd Place: Barbara
Zukowski: *Love Rocks* +
4th Place: Cynthia
Arends: *Wings Of Desire* +
Honorable Mention:
**Jamie Kersten: *Work It
Out* +

Paranormal

Final Judge: Nephelē
Tempest, agent, The Knight
Agency
Category Coordinator:
Jamie Kersten
Winner: Cathy Leming:

Angels At Almack's
2nd Place: Michalea
Moore: *Lord Of Abydos*
3rd Place: Ann
Hinnenkamp: *Dyad Quest*
4th Place: Moira Rogers:
Big Easy
Honorable Mention:
Michelle Lauren-
Heartbreaker

Romantic Suspense

Final Judge: Kim Whalen,
agent, Trident Media Group
Category Coordinator:
Jamie Kersten
Winner: Pamela Kopfler:
Queen's Justice ++
2nd Place: Sharon Wray:
Guardian's Promise ++
3rd Place: **Sandra
DeTaranto: *Vegas, Baby* +
4th Place: Diane M.
Garner: *Redemption*
Honorable Mention: Billie
Jean Te: *It's Only Music*

Series Contemporary Long/Short

Final Judge: Wanda
Ottewell, Senior Editor,
Harlequin SuperRomance
Category Coordinator:
Helen Johannes

Winner: Jennifer Wilson:
Claire's Wish
2nd Place: Anna Sugden:
Bad Boy, Good Man
3rd Place: Jan Hoffman:
Coming Home
4th Place: **Kate
Bowman: *Lani Meets Her
Match*
Honorable Mention:
Theresa Ragan: *Better Late
Than Never*

Single Title

Final Judge: Deb
Werksman, Senior Editor,
Sourcebooks Publishing
Category Coordinator:
Karen Miller
Winner: Kim Duffy:
Saving Stoney Brook ++
2nd Place: Joanna
Westreich: *Risking It All*
++
3rd Place: **Jamie
Kersten: *Family Recipe* ++
4th Place: Marie Robison:
A Cottage By The Lake
Honorable Mention:
**Anne Stratton: *The Last
Codex*

Women's Fiction with Romantic Elements

Final Judge: Hilary Teeman,

editor, St. Martin's Press
Category Coordinator: Jody
Allen
Winner: **Virginia
McCullough: *Keeping
Secrets* +
2nd Place: **Virginia
McCullough: *Island
Healing*
3rd Place: Rachel
Goldsworthy: *Pasteur's
Angel*
4th Place: **Lorrie Kruse:
A Life Worth Living
Honorable Mention:
Ann Grace Crowder :
Becoming Kay Callahan

Historical

Final Judge: Shauna
Summers, Senior Editor,
Bantam Dell Publishing
Category Coordinator:
Marilyn Auer
Winner: Robin Le Fevers:
Nightshade ++
2nd Place: Deb Yates:
Heaven Sent
3rd Place: Pamela Bolton-
Holifield: *Lost In Love*
4th Place: Beverley
Kendall: *The Gauntlet*
Honorable Mention:
Donna Rosenbloom:
Entrapping The Earl

Why I Believe in Artist Dates

By Virginia McCullough

I have a collection of postcards and photographs tacked on a board next to my office door. One postcard shows a painting of a boathouse on Rock Island, a state park in Door County here in Wisconsin. Another is a photograph I took of an historic church and garden in St. Simons Island, Georgia. A third, added recently, features the famous grillwork at the entrance of Carson Pirie Scott & Co., on the corner of State Street and Madison Avenue in Chicago. The picture includes old-fashioned streetcars and women with big hats, no doubt everyday sights on June 26, 1915, the date on this card.

Viewed through someone else's eyes, my collection would likely look like a hodgepodge of things without any particular value, but to me my array of cards and photos have one thing in common. All are connected to what artist and teacher, Julia Cameron, calls the "artist date," an essential piece of her creativity program presented in *The Artist's Way*. In it, she says we need to "fill the well," to replenish our creative energy. That's where the artist date comes in.

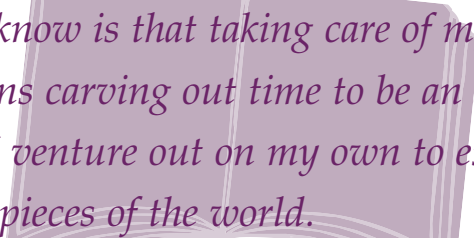
Cameron refers to our inner artist as a child who wants attention, and in order to nurture the child we need to spend solitary time with her. This led Cameron to recommend a once-a-week outing of at least two hours. An artist date could be anything from a long walk in a new neighborhood to a trip to a museum or browsing a specialty shop. For me, where I go is less important than the conscious effort it takes to schedule these timeouts. It's amazing how difficult it can be to manage even a quick trip to the nearby botanical gardens or a visit to a gourmet food shop across town. The trick is not getting too hung up on what constitutes filling the well or how often I get away.

As Cameron points out, most of us hear a voice that balks at the idea of taking this time for ourselves. It's easy to get bogged down in everyday work and long to-do lists. I've had to struggle with the notion that every minute not

consumed with projects that support me should be devoted to my novel-in-progress. I've often acted as if I'm a machine (or should be) with an ON and OFF switch that should respond instantly to my will. My artist dates are an antidote to that nose-to-the-grindstone attitude, which isn't good for me anyway.

So what constitutes an artist date? Well, shopping at my regular supermarket doesn't qualify, but trips to Farmers Market can—if I slow down and pay

that a two-week retreat in St. Simon's Island, on the Georgia coast, would help me begin a nonfiction book with a very tight deadline. The island is well known as the home of the late Eugenia Price, and she's buried in the cemetery linked to the historic Christ Church. After a week of writing, I needed a break, so I drove out to the church, which is a bit off the beaten path. I spent an hour or so taking pictures, reading headstones, and imagining island life in colonial and



What I do know is that taking care of myself as a writer means carving out time to be an absorbent sponge as I venture out on my own to explore and observe little pieces of the world.

attention to the colors and shapes and scents of the fruits and vegetables and fresh flowers on display and listen to the sounds of the music and conversation around me.


My 1915 postcard is the result of a late-afternoon artist date to an antique mall in downtown Green Bay. I've never been particularly interested in antiques, but I wandered through this mall one afternoon and have been drawn back several times. Although it's filled with all kinds of interesting "stuff," including china and vintage jewelry and linens, I always head to the bins of old postcards that provide endless "mini-stories."

I picked up the card showing the boathouse on a daytrip to Door County that included two ferry rides to get to Rock Island. Trips to Door County are my favorite day-long artist dates. This is true whether I walk on the trails and the beach in a state park or poke around in one of the small towns.

Some artist dates become particularly memorable. When I lived in Asheville, North Carolina in the 1990s, I decided

nineteenth century Georgia. When I left, I felt renewed, ready to focus on my new project again.

In "ordinary world" terms, it looks as if I simply took an afternoon off to visit a tourist attraction. But we all know how easy it is to sabotage ourselves and skip grabbing a day—or a couple of hours—to spend time alone, often without any defined reason or goal. The genius of Cameron's term, artist date, is the reminder that it's an essential and nurturing element of this wonderful, confusing, and often frustrating thing we call the "writer's life."

It doesn't matter what draws the water from our well and leaves us dry. It could be the everyday demands of family or outside jobs or volunteer work. What I do know is that taking care of myself as a writer means carving out time to be an absorbent sponge as I venture out on my own to explore and observe little pieces of the world. I always come back from one of these jaunts feeling fuller and ready to pour energy into my work. That's why I continue to believe in the wisdom of the artist date. 

The Tiny Art of Elevator Pitches

By Carrie Lofty, www.carrielofty.com

“Robin Hood’s estranged nephew rescues an alchemist who can clear him of murder, but she’s blind, obsessed with fire, and sister to the woman he helped kidnap.”

This elevator pitch for *What a Scoundrel Wants* (Zebra Debut, 12/08) took two tedious, mind-numbing days to complete, but it wound up catching my editor’s attention at Nationals. 2008 Nationals are coming. So how can you prep an elevator pitch that will open doors for your manuscript?

Most of us want to pitch romances, which are defined by four distinct plot arcs: heroine, hero, romantic, and external. Think about your protagonists’ basic characteristics, but only those details that are unique or applicable to their development. For the romance, find the heart of what keeps them apart. The external plot is any circumstance that throws the would-be lovers together.

Thus the first task is to identify your story’s arcs. The best pitches hint at all four. Next, combine these plot threads into a single paragraph—but don’t go for brevity just yet. I wrote this for *Scoundrel’s Kiss*, the sequel:

“In medieval Spain, a slave raised

to kill a king takes shelter among holy men. Gavriel must perform one last act of penance before being accepted to the brotherhood: He is to cure Ada, an English translator tortured by her past and consumed by an addiction to opium. But Ada will not be a captive again, not even for her own good. Her rebellion tests his three fragile vows—obedience, nonviolence, and chastity—as they uncover a plot by Gavriel’s exiled father to overthrow the King of Castile.”

But that’s 88 words, and it takes 32 seconds to read aloud. (Eyes start glazing over after about 10 seconds.) So use the following tips to trim it:

1. Eliminate given names, and feature only your male and female protagonists. Using clear pronouns will help listener comprehension. (I included Will Scarlet’s name in my pitch because he’s a legendary character, setting the story within the world of Robin Hood—the hook.)
2. Eliminate clichés and soft phrases. Keep only unique details.
3. Re-arrange phrases. “An addiction to opium” could become “an opium addiction,” saving one word. Little changes add up.

4. Cut anything that doesn’t enhance the most important conflict (whatever is keeping the hero and heroine apart). While I like the phrase “a slave raised to kill the King,” it’s too long. Cut! The central conflict is that he wants to cure her, and she’s willing to play dirty to see him fail. Everything else is padding.

Remember that the elevator pitch is meant to open doors, to grab and shake. You only want to intrigue the listener and get her to ask questions. It doesn’t have to be 100% accurate or explanatory.

Here’s what I came up with (at last) for *Scoundrel’s Kiss*: “In medieval Spain, a hunted warrior monk must cure an English translator of her opium addiction, but she plans to seduce her way to freedom, jeopardizing his vows of obedience, nonviolence, and chastity.”

I’ve kept key words to highlight its unique aspects, and “seduce her way to freedom” just sounds sexy. I’ve also created built-in questions. Why is he being hunted? By whom? Why must he cure this woman? How she came to become an opium addict?

The door is open. Good luck! 

New Releases

June

Jeannine VanEperen
You Can Bank on It
Wings ePress

July

Anna Schmidt
Seaside Cinderella
Love Inspired Historical,
Steeple Hill

Roxi Romano
The Sex Slave
Red Sage Publishing

Jeannine VanEperen
Wydecombe Manor
Whiskey Creek Press

Jannifer Hoffman
Ceremony of Deception
Trebleheartbooks.com

Jane Toombs
Traitor’s Kiss
Amber Quill Press

Laurel Bradley
Crème Brulee Upset
The Wild Rose Press

Jane Toombs
The Dark Lighthouse
Champagne Books

Isabel Sharpe
As Good As It Got
Avon/HarperCollins

Deb Barkelaar
“Leader of the Pack” in
Love on a Harley
Highland Press

August

Shari Anton

Magic in His Kiss
Grand Central
Publishing

Laura Iding
The Surgeon’s Secret
Baby Wish
Harlequin Medical
Romance

Donna Marie Rogers
Golden Opportunity
(novella)
The Wild Rose Press

Eden Rivers
Broken Pentacle
Loose Id

September

Kathryn Albright
The Rebel and the Lady
Harlequin Historicals

Jannifer Hoffman
Secret Sacrifices
Resplendence
Publishing

Lynnette Baughman
Love with a Welcome
Stranger
The Wild Rose Press
(ebook)

October

Donna Marie Rogers
There’s Only Been You
The Wild Rose Press
(ebook)

November

Jeannine VanEperen
Rose of the Rio Grande
Wings ePress

December

Carrie Lofty
What a Scoundrel Wants
Zebra Debut

Anna Schmidt
Mistletoe Reunion
Love Inspired
Steeple Hill

Jannifer Hoffman
Rough Edges
Resplendence
Publishing

March 2009

Emergency: Single
Dad, Mother Needed
Laura Iding
Harlequin Medical
Romance

Author News

Mary Biebel finaled in the Laurie contest.

Rowena Cherry's *Insufficient Mating Material* won the 2008 FANTASM Award for Best Futuristic of 2007 and also won the CAPA Award for Best Fantasy of 2007.

Lori Devoti has contracted for three more books in her *Unbound* series with Silhouette Nocturne and an urban fantasy set in Madison, titled *Amazon Ink*, to Juno Books. *Amazon Ink* is scheduled for a March 2009 release. Lori has also agreed to write a short story for inclusion in the Mammoth Book of Paranormal Romance to be published in 2009.

Jane Toombs signed a contract with DiskUs Publishing for three more (rights-back) Quick Picks: *Monte Carlo Masquerade*, *Heart Of Silver*, and *Return to Deville's Crossing*

Lyn Cote is doing a workshop at National this year: "Navigating the Ever-Changing, Ever-Expanding Christian Inspirational Market," scheduled for Friday, August 1 at 8:30 a.m. She will talk about the changes in this exploding market and how to judge whether this market would be a good "fit" for an author.

Isabel Sharpe's July release, *As Good As It Got*, was singled out in *Quick & Simple Magazine's* June

24th issue on their "Entertainment: Our picks of the week" page under the heading "Great Read."

Barbara Raffin has sold *The Mating Game* to Five Star via Techno Books as a result of our May WisRWA conference.

Lyn Cote's Love Inspired Suspense *Dangerous Secrets* won RT's Best Love Inspired Suspense for 2007 and finaled in Colorado RW's Award of Excellence in the inspirational category.

Laura Iding's August release will be available in the bookstores and through Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.com as a special promotion. 📖

2008 Write Touch Winners

Congratulations to all these wonderful writers!

**denotes WisRWA member

Short/Long

Contemporary

Winner: Linda Conrad, *Shadow Whispers*
2nd Place: Holly Jacobs, *The House on Briar Hill Road*
2nd Place: Linda Warren, *Once a Cowboy*
3rd Place: Geri Krotow, *A Rendezvous to Remember*

Erotica/Romantica

Winner: Lacey Alexander, *Voyeur*
2nd Place: Karen Kelley, *Double Dating With the Dead*
2nd Place: Sharon Page,

Blood Red

3rd Place: Elizabeth Amber, *Nicholas, The Lords of Satyr*

Romantic Suspense

Winner: Brenda Novak, *Dead Giveaway*
2nd Place: Brenda Novak, *Dead Right*
3rd Place: Valerie Hansen, *Shadow of Turning*

Contemporary Single Title

Winner: Lori Wilde, *There Goes the Bride*
2nd Place: Susan Mallery, *Tempting*
3rd Place: **Anna Jeffery, *Sweet Return*

Mainstream with Romantic Elements

Winner: Marlo Schalesky, *Veil of Fire*
2nd Place: **Kathy Steffen, *First, There is a River*
2nd Place: Karen White, *Learning to Breathe*
3rd Place: Claire Cross, *All or Nothing*

Historical

Winner: Candice Hern, *Lady be Bad*
2nd Place: Victoria Alexander, *What a Lady Wants*
2nd Place: Victoria Alexander, *A Little Bit Wicked*
3rd Place: **Kathryn Albright, *The Angel and the Outlaw*

Inspirational

Winner: Nikki Arana, *As I Have Loved You*
2nd Place: Valerie Hansen, *A Treasure of the Heart*
3rd Place: **Lynn Cote, *Dangerous Secrets*
3rd Place: Shirley Jump, *Back to Mr. & Mrs.*
3rd Place: Mae Nunn, *Mom in the Middle*

Paranormal

Winner: C.L. Wilson, *Lord of the Fading Land*
2nd Place: **Lori Devoti, *Unbound*
3rd Place: Patti O'Shea, *In the Midnight Hour*

The Pleasures of Life

By Kathryn Albright

In this fast paced world, it is easy to get side-tracked not only with the pressures of life, but with the pleasures.

I write historical romance and have a passion for history. Movies (especially historical ones), dinner out, and traveling are probably the worst offenders that pull me away from my writing.

A good friend of mine (and writer) finds that same passion in gardening. Every year Cheryl has a vegetable garden large enough to feed her family and close friends for the next year and a flower garden beyond belief. Her gazebo overlooks a babbling brook that flows from one pond into another filled with floating lily pads and Japanese Koi. To one side is a comfortable fire pit surrounded with chairs for bonfires in the fall. To top it off, her husband enjoys trains and has built a garden railroad running through tunnels and over bridges throughout the garden. It is a wonderland!

But she is having difficulty finishing her book.

By now almost everyone has heard the phrase: Put your butt in the chair and write the @#%\$# book! At one time, I think it was attributed to Nora Roberts, but don't quote me on that. I've heard it off and on over the years and it makes sense.

Finishing a book takes discipline, persistence, and a heck of a lot of delayed gratification. It takes making choices that are not always fun—ie: Do I spend the day _____ (insert shopping, beach, spa, with friends, etc) or do I write?

It comes down to choices--to priorities and figuring out what we want from life and then deciding if we will pay the price for it in terms of time, effort and sacrifice. As Tolkien said in his epic *The Lord of the Rings*, "Use well the days."

I do believe Cheryl will fin-

ish her story. She has determination and persistence on her side (plus a great story to tell). But her passion belongs to gardening.

With spring arriving, she has some great suggestions for turning my boring backyard into a paradise. Although I'd love to try them, I know I won't because then I'd never finish my next book...

Here are a few tips that have helped me finish books that I hope will help you too:

1. Place inspirational quotes on the wall behind your computer. For my book, *The Angel and the Outlaw*, I had the Nike quote Just Do It! over my computer along with a few others.
2. Create mini-deadlines. I'm a compulsive list maker and goal setter. I start with a big goal--for example a finished manuscript, and then break it down into smaller segments, creating mini-goals (and "soft" deadlines) along the way.

For example:

- By Sunday I will complete the rough outline with major turning points.
 - By next Sunday I will have the character charts done and scenes filled in.
 - By week three I will have the rough synopsis written.
 - By week four I will have the first two scenes written.
 - And so on...
3. Write the rough draft straight through.

This had to be learned the hard way. I am great at polishing those first three chapters until they shine, so it takes me forever to get past them and move on to the middle of the book, let alone the ending. Yet by the time I reach the end of my draft, I am better acquainted with my characters and always realize those first three chapters

have to be rewritten yet again. Believe me, it is difficult to change something that has been worked on so hard—like trying to re-stir concrete just before it sets. So now I push through to the end of the rough draft before going back NO MATTER WHAT.

Remember, the pleasures of life are there to be enjoyed and to inspire, but don't let them come between you and your real pleasure: writing your book. Happy Writing! 📖

Send in your News!

Do you have something to include in the newsletter? You don't have to wait for the Alert e-mail. Just e-mail Rachel Berens-VanHeest at reberens@charter.net whenever you have news to share!

Edgerton Book Fair

On October 4, WisRWA will participate in the Edgerton Book Fair, as part of the Edgerton Book and Film Festival. For more information about the festival, and how to participate as an author, visit www.edgertonbookfestival.com. The organizers of the Festival contacted us to participate in hopes to establish some ties with area writers' groups, and the Board decided this was a great opportunity to get the word out that WisRWA is a phenomenal resource for writers. You'll be hearing more about this event in the next few weeks, via the loop, or contact Bobbi Dumas, the Madison Area Coordinator (bobbidumas@charter.net).

Instinct or Fear?

By Isabel Sharpe

This is not going to be an article with a satisfying ending. Because, really, I don't know the answer. But it's something interesting that most if not all authors bump into at one time or another in their writing lives, and I think it's worth being aware of.

You've probably all heard writers whining that the books they just finished were career-ending disasters. Maybe you've felt this yourself. I have a friend who turns in "the worst thing she's ever written" every single time. She's genuinely disheartened, embarrassed, sure this is the end. Then her editor loves it, and it sells terrifically well. Does she ever learn? Nope.

For a long time I couldn't understand this phenomenon, and assumed she and people like her were just whining for attention, putting their expectations low to avoid rejection. I always liked my books. Often I loved them. I never turned in anything I


wasn't proud of. What was their problem?

Then (scary music) it happened to me. On my second women's fiction book for Avon/HarperCollins, my twentieth book. I'd lost it. No spark, no interest. I couldn't write. And yet every time I reread a chapter, I'd think hmmm, this isn't so bad. But I couldn't shake the feeling that I was penning the most dismally dull tale ever written. I turned the book in and waited an agonizing month to hear what I was sure I'd hear—that the entire thing needed to be rewritten, or worse, thanks and don't let the door hit me on the way out. You can probably guess what happened. A few tweaks, but my editor said it was publishable as it was, that she hadn't been able to put it down.

So how do you know when you're feeling a true instinct—something is really wrong with this book—and when you're just neurotic (ahem). How do you know when to listen to what your

inside voice is telling you—the book needs changing, something isn't working—or when you're just lacking in confidence?

I have no idea! Isn't that helpful? Maybe I got a clue when I reread the chapters expecting them to be as plodding and dull as I felt, and couldn't find anything to fix. I probably should have asked a trusted friend to read the book for a more objective opinion. I probably should have sat down and made a list of all the very real reasons why writing this book, above all others I'd written, was terrifying, and therefore why I was more likely to be afraid.

But no, I just suffered (good choice, Isabel). So I have no really good solution, but I do have advice: Be aware. Don't panic. Try to get to the core of your feelings and weed out the fear from the instinct. Just be aware that they can be very tricky little devils to sort out. 

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