

Blowing Kisses



Aunt Allie's Guide To Level Headed Hysteria Your guide to surviving the bumpy ride of writing

By Allie Pleiter

Scene 1: I was promoting my first non-fiction book and had just published my second novel. I had "made it." I had come off an airplane to see someone holding a sign with my name. Yessirree, I now rated a "driver." On the return trip, after a live national television interview seen by millions in which I neither spit, fell, nor stuck my foot in my mouth, I saw my novel in the airport bookstore. Of course, I took them to the counter, informed them I was the author, and asked to sign the copies. As I was signing, a young girl came up and asked if I would autograph her copy of *People* magazine. I informed her I was none of the people on the cover, but she wanted my signature anyway. I complied and walked on air the entire trip home. Heaven.

Scene 2: Having decided to make a leap forward in my career based on positive feedback for a book, I was delighted when my agent called. "Sit down," she said. Thinking I'm moments away from signing a movie deal, I sit. I learn the book is doing so hideously that there are serious consequences to my career path. The news was so devastating, unexpected, and inexplicable that for the first time in my life I couldn't get out of bed. I, who normally wear my heart on my sleeve, couldn't speak of it for several days. Definitely not heaven. The other place.

While I feel as though I've had more ups and downs than your garden variety author, I doubt that's the case. I admit I'm one of those people everyone loves to hate: I sold my first book in sin-

gle title to a major house. I launched my career quickly when many have pined long years to achieve publication. But I tell you one thing: I deeply admire those who've had a longer, straighter career path than this roller-coaster of mine. I've gone from 0 to 60mph in 7.2 seconds and back to 0 in what seems like nanoseconds—and I've got the whiplash to prove it. As I told someone recently, "The good is very, very good; but the bad is very, very bad."

Any roller coaster fan will tell you, though, there would be little thrill in a long steady climb; the ups and downs make the ride worth taking. Perhaps we ought to look at our writing careers in the same way. For better or worse, publishing is a career guaranteed to keep your head spinning. There is no job security, no set career path, no guarantee that good work will get you results.

It's just plain insane. Good thing most of us were lunatics long before we started.

What's a savvy writer to do? I'm going to offer you the literary equivalent of safety belts. I'll give you the lessons I've learned to handle the twists and turns of a writing career without letting it get to you—too much. How to weather the good and bad without taking yourself, your family, and your friends up and down with you. Call it "Aunt Allie's Guide to Level-Headed Hysteria."

(Continued on page 10)

About Windy City

2005 Officers

President	Melody Thomas 815-467-1714
Vice President	Dyanne Davis 630-972-0777
Secretary	Jean Newlin 630-369-9765
Treasurer	Rose Fisk 630-579-1790
Newsletter	Kelle Z. Riley 630-778-7655
Presentations	Linda Kampschroeder 708-485-2867
Membership	Chris Foutris 630-357-5361
Critiques	Deborah Pfeiffer 630-416-9194
Contests	Lauren Ford
Librarian	Cathie Linz

Meetings

Windy City meets for a general business meeting and program from 7-9:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month at the Naperville Municipal Center, 400 S. Eagle St. unless otherwise specified. Critique sessions are at 7 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Lisle Library, 777 Front St.

Visit our website at
www.WindyCityRWA.com

Blowing Kisses

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Articles may be reprinted by other RWA® chapters and should be attributed to the author and Windy City.

Submissions are welcome.

Copy should be in text format on PC disk or via e-mail. Please include a hard copy.

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Bartlett, IL 60103

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RWA: The Rewards of Networking

By Melody Thomas

As I sit down to write my final letter as president of this great chapter, I'm caught between feeling melancholy and a sense of excitement. Melancholy because I've served two great terms as president and will miss sitting on the board. Excitement because the chapter is heading in the right direction and the next president will get to climb a few more steps than I did. The board these past two years has been able to accomplish the things we have because of the exemplary work of the preceding boards and all of the committee chairmen who come together to make this chapter whole.

A lot has happened to our industry that is a reflection of our society and world events in the years since I first joined RWA in 1997. As writers, we've seen publishers merge or go under. We've watched lines close and new ones open. We've seen the heartbeat of time travels and westerns fade while watching the rise of romantic suspense, paranormal, and erotica. At the same time, we've seen members of RWA become increasingly well informed and knowledgeable about an industry that is ever-changing. Our chapter is at the forefront of those changes.

As Windy City Writers, we've learned that to succeed, we must first sit down to write, not a novel concept, but one that many people surprisingly do not comprehend. Dreaming of being published is not the same thing as working toward that goal.

President's Message



Windy City
Romance Writers of America

We've learned to utilize the tools at our disposal. Those tools come to us through our critique night, workshops, and conferences where we learn more about the craft, the importance of networking, and the value of positive attitude.



However, something else this chapter offers its members extends even beyond all the basic writing necessities. This chapter nurtures and supports its writers. We celebrate every accomplishment no matter how seemingly small. It is those small details that define who we are as a chapter.

On a personal note, I wish to thank all of you for your enduring support over all the years I have been a member of this chapter. I would not be published now without Windy City. You are friends near and dear to my heart. Finally, I'd like to thank, Dyanne Davis, Jean Newlin, Rose Fisk, Allie Pleiter & Wendy Byrne who served on the 2004 & 2005 boards. You all are the best!

Blowin' in the Wind

Susan Elizabeth Phillips reports: “*Match Me If You Can* (William Morrow, August 2005) debuted at #9 on the New York Times during a really, really tough month. The MATCH ME tour went well, and I managed a batch of television interviews without embarrassing myself too much.”

Cathie Linz received the Romantic Times Reviewers Choice award for best Silhouette Romance for *The Marine Meets His Match*. Her first single title romantic comedy, *Good Girls Do*, comes out in January from Berkley.

Kelle Z. Riley’s *Dangerous Affairs* for Echelon Press is due out next Spring. She has also signed with agent Laura Blake Peterson of Curtis Brown. And, Kelle’s seminar, “Creating Realistic Kick-Butt Characters,” was taped by Brava at RWA National.

Melody Thomas just signed another two book deal with Avon. Meanwhile, *In My Heart* and *Must Have Been the Moonlight* both finalled in the Bookseller’s Best Award and the Holt Medallion for long historical. *In My Heart* won the historical division in the Yellow Rose contest. *Must Have been the Moonlight* was RT nominated for Best Adventure Romance in 2004.

Denise Swanson’s *Murder of a Smart Cookie* was on the Barnes and Noble bestseller list for six weeks and on both the July and August IMBA Bestseller list.

Dyanne Davis just signed a three-book contract with Genesis Press. Her book, *The Wedding Dress* finalled in *Affaire de Coeur*.

Rosemary Kaenel received third place from the Catholic Press Association for her short story “Bertha Dear” in the *Liguorian*.

Teresa McCarthy (*The Convenient Bride*), Jesse Petersen (*Scandalous*), Ann Macela (*The Oldest Kind of Magic*), Nancy Parra (*The Bettin’ Kind*), and Anne Blaeske (*Texas Hearts*) have received good reviews for their books. See Bookshelf for the book covers and blurbs.



Golden Heart Nominee Kelle Riley and her husband Tom at the RWA National Gala Dinner.

Ann Macela will present a program, “The Publishing Game, or The Joy of Romance,” and sign her books at the holiday party of the Wheaton-Glen Ellyn American Association of University Women.

Theresa Stevens received three requests at National, two from editors and one from an agent.

Teresa McCarthy gave a short talk about publishing at Savannah’s Restaurant in Fox Valley Mall and signed her September release *The Convenient Bride*.

Deborah Pfeiffer will be on a panel entitled “The World of Freelancing” at the ASBPE Chicago Chapter’s Midwest Fall Half-Day Workshop in October.

We didn’t have Marie Donovan’s cover of *Her Body Of Work* (Blaze, September 2005) for the last issue. So here it is. She is busy working on revisions for her option book.



RWA National Overview

By Jean Newlin

How do I sum up a week of conference, especially for Windy City members who've never had the opportunity to attend, especially in light of the mass destruction of Hurricane Katrina, I wonder what to say? Do I focus on the inspiring luncheon speeches? The insights I got from attending the "how to sell to" workshops offered by the publishing houses? The free books autographed at the publishing house book signings? The joy of seeing Kelly Z. Riley dressed up in her Golden Heart finery with her husband and family in attendance? What about those down and out nitty gritty "anonymous" agent and editor critiques which left some authors in tears? Or the fact that conference is as much about standing in lines as it is about sitting in warm, sometimes overcrowded meeting rooms listening to volunteers—people who are the pinnacles in the industry—tell you their secrets—even when those secrets are that there ARE no secrets. Unfortunately, not every RWA chapter gets to have their very own private moments with Susan Elizabeth Phillips, who gave the keynote speech on Saturday as well as two other inspiring workshops. No other chapter gets to have the wisdom of the many Windy City members who presented workshops at Nationals. Not every chapter gets told over and over again by brilliant published writers that every writer has his/her own process and what works for you, might not work for another.

The past few days, I've tried to put the entire conference experience in proper context as I've watched New Orleans sink beneath overflowing waters, and Biloxi, Mississippi, flattened into non-existence. Here I sit in my dry, safe house with clean drinking water, food, electricity, gasoline in my vehicles and the medications I need to survive, feeling guilty for my good fortune. Even my conference attendance this year was due to good fortune—I had my conference fee paid by an anonymous donor (from a raffle held at the Booksellers and Librarian's Dinner this spring). I am a very lucky woman in many ways. Lucky and guilty.

How can I complain that I am one of only two people who have been members of the Windy City chapter since its inception—and actively writing—who still aren't published? As those years mount up, I admit I have trouble justifying to family and non-writing friends that I really "need" to be at Nationals. They all look at me as if to say: Why would ANYBODY with that kind of track record, still want to be a writer?

Why DO I still write? Because writing is my life. I cannot NOT write (poor grammar, but the truth all the same). I write in my head at stop lights, as I drift off to sleep at night, as I proofread text I've just transcribed for work, in the checkout line at the grocery store, as I fold clean laundry. Writing is as much a part of my being as is my beating heart.

I go to Nationals because I get to hear people like Jennifer Cruise inspire the PRO members at the PRO Retreat. I get to listen to the Debbie Macomber and Susan Elizabeth Phillips of the writing world inspire me to keep on writing, to follow my dreams. For the five days of each national conference I attend, I give myself permission to leave the daily routine of work, home, family, church and all the other myriad commitments in my life, and focus on writing. I get to attend workshops all day long taught by people who want to write. I get to sit in large meeting rooms with a hundred other people who don't think I am mentally ill just because I routinely have people talking to me in my head.

The most amazing thing about National Conference is that I come away with the same insights every year. It isn't the inspiring luncheon speeches—although they are always inspiring—it is the knowledge that I belong to an organization willing to share its secrets with me. There are no pyramid schemes, no huge amounts of money I have to fork over to get to the "next level," no secret handshake I need to learn, no decoder ring I have to purchase to get published. For the conference fee, I get motivational, instructional, inspiring speakers and

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RWA National Overview

(Continued from page 4)

workshop leaders. Every year I've attended National conference, I've felt a part of a greater community. I see the National Board laboring for the common good of all writers. RWA is actively working to see that we get fair contracts and are paid well deserved wages for our work, and the members of the National Board donate an enormous amount of time they could be spending writing themselves to work in our behalf. National Conference always leaves me in awe of the hundreds of people who donate their time so I can be renewed and feel inspired to go back to the keyboard when I get home.

From THIS National Conference, "Shining Bright in Reno," I was reminded:

You don't have to be published to call yourself a writer. You write, therefore you are a writer. Whether New York ever wakes up and purchases my manuscripts (and there are several!) or not, I am a writer.

I am not insane to want to do this. Thankfully, RWA is a haven. I belong to an organization of over nine thousand like-minded souls who want to tell stories so well written that they change people's lives for the better.

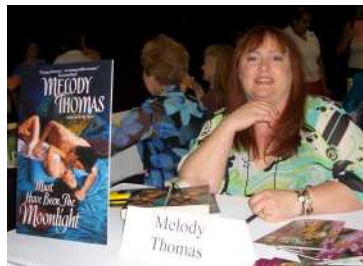
And, the most important of all, Windy City is a jewel to be cherished. Over the past decade, Windy City has turned into an organization of people dedicated to the craft of writing who nurture the writer in every person. Instead of sitting around arguing about policies and procedures, or running for chapter office to accomplish personal agendas, we have been blessed with a continuous group of elected volunteers and unelected Committee Chairs who have donated their time, talents and energies to making the "writing life" a good life for each individual writer in the group. We have been given time to "fill our creative wells." I think of Windy City as an oasis in the publishing world, and RWA National as our sophisticated, bigger sister. At National we get to hear diverse voices. It is inspiring to sit in an auditorium, or luncheon with over 2000

other writers who are there for the sheer joy of writing.

So, as I sit back and put conference in "context" of the current horrific events in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, I see needs that will still be there long after fresh water, housing and food are once again secured for the thousands now displaced and grieving. They will need happy endings, and who can give them better happy endings than nine thousand dedicated writers who want to make their world a better place, if even for the space of a few stolen hours?

Jean Newlin had her first work published at age 10. (I got a poem published in the Junior High Newspaper because my sister was editor—I'm claiming it ANYWAY!) She has been a member of RWA since 1989 and currently is writing her tenth book.

Booksigning for Literacy



Melody Thomas



Cathie Linz →



Jesse Petersen, et al



Nancy Parra →



One Writer's Trek Across Different Genres And The Reasons Why

By Dyanne Davis

As a beginning writer I've skipped about, writing cross genres despite advice against it. Many new writers cross genres before they have mastered one. My advice? Follow your muse, do what's right for you. I'm still in the learning process.

I have written in different genres for two main reasons: boredom, and stretching my creativity. In trying to get a handle on what to write, I found that the adage, "write what you know" didn't work for me. I couldn't find a way to make nursing appear sensual or attractive. "Write what you like" seemed better suited to me. But what I liked was vampires, and didn't know if I wanted to write that.

When I wrote my first interracial romance, I thought, "okay, I've told that story, there is nothing more to be said on the subject." But my publisher wanted me to write more of the same. Knowing the market is as important as knowing your audience.

I first heard the phrase "branding" in a Windy City program. I learned that it takes three books in the same genre to become a brand. The publishers are looking for authors they can brand, writers who can produce several similar stories. The readers are looking for the same thing. And here I thought, "tell it once and it's over."

Is there validity to the complaint that stories by certain authors are the same? Maybe.

But readers also enjoy reading stories similar to those they've already enjoyed.

I continue to get letters from readers who want a sequel to my first book, *The Color Of Trouble*. The danger is that readers have their own ideas about what should happen next and may not be pleased with my version. Right now my muse is not leading me in that direction.

Despite the importance of branding, I find I need to write in a different genre. It is necessary to my own creativity not to become bored with what I'm doing, and or to retell the same story with different characters. Luckily, I learned that lesson for myself. I saw the same names and some of the same scenes repeating on my paper, and stopped and reread it, knowing that I'd read it before. Sure enough I had—in the last book I'd written.

Because my publisher's mainstay is multicultural fiction, it's a given that I will be writing in that particular genre.

Then the question remains, why do I switch? I suppose I write in different genres for myself. It keeps me enjoying what I do. Switching genres for me is like cleaning your palate with sorbet at a restaurant before the main course is served. I switch to keep my work fresh. At the same time, knowing the importance of building an audience, I now write three stories in each genre before switching.

My inspirational fiction was filled with raw emotion, and contained more than a glimpse into my soul. It was much too personal to share. I then decided to try to write what I most enjoyed reading—paranormal stories. There my imagination can truly take flight. No one can tell me that my vampires cannot take communion, because I created them so that they could. I write paranormals purely for the fun of it.

In crossing genres, I believe I found the beginning of my voice. My editors say that I do emotion really well, and that my dialogue is natural. What I noticed is that my voice is faith based, annoying, and preachy. I've learned to edit most of it out. I think I was becoming aware of the tenets of my faith showing up in everything I write, but when my vampires begin to pray, it was one of those 'Aha' moments.

I'm not a typical plotter in my writing, which goes against my Virgo genes. I am a planner in real life who always needs a backup plan. Not so with my writing. I give my characters free rein.

I love writing. I love the undisciplined characters, and the sheer wonder of not knowing what's going to happen to them. I eagerly wait for their arrival, allowing them to lead me here and there, and being amazed when they show me why they behaved in a manner so foreign to me that I wanted to slap some sense into them. I've found myself going "WOW" many times at learning the why of the stories I write. Not because I'm such a great writer, but because I had no idea of the pain my characters had endured. Even Adam, my wonderfully dark vampire, makes me feel for him and the

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Writing Interrupted: Setting Realistic Goals While Your Career Is On Hiatus

by **Anita Baker**

A new baby in the family. Aging parents. Going back to college. Rejoining the workforce. Life constantly presents us with new challenges, some anticipated and welcome, some not. Sometimes these challenges demand all of our physical, mental, or emotional resources, leaving us too little time and energy to write on a regular basis.

My writing schedule of thirty hours a week was sharply curtailed three years ago when I had to go back to work full-time. I still rarely write. How do I keep hope alive and set realistic goals when I can't find time to write? Preparing this article has allowed me to reflect on my experience and offer a few tips:

Keep your priorities straight: Unless you're under contract, your writing is not as important as offering aid to your family or finding a means of contributing to your own financial support. Lower your expectations of how much you may be able to accomplish. Trying to be a super-hero will only lead to frustration and a sense of inadequacy, and it's useless to beat yourself up over a situation that is beyond your control.

Your Windy City friends may not understand at first how your life has changed. They may make comments that are meant to encourage, but in your fragile state may sound like criticism, leaving you feeling that you're not doing enough to achieve your writing goals. Be as patient with them as you should be with yourself. It's a hard adjustment for them, too. They may have to find another critique partner, or another roommate for the National conference. Let them know that their friendship continues to be important to you. Eventually, they too will come to accept that this other challenge is more important than your writing career at this stage of your life.

Recognize that all situations are temporary. This one is, too. Prepare for the day that you will be able to write again. Stay as active in your Windy City chapter as time allows. Sure, you may feel awkward that you're not actively writing. Attend the meetings anyway. You'll come away feeling inspired and reconnected. And you may learn something about changing market trends, new publishers, new agents. At home, you may not be able

to find an hour in your day to write, but you may find fifteen minutes to read your Windy City e-mail or a few pages of the RWR.

Two friends of mine who were once very active in Windy City have dropped their membership. When I asked why, they replied, "Because I'm not writing anymore." It's their choice, of course. But have they renounced writing? Do they plan to never write again? How can they be sure? In my view, being a writer is like being a Marine. There are no ex-Marines, and there are no ex-writers. Because I have written in the past, and because I still wish to write, I am still a writer and always will be.

So, for now, this writer will continue to stay connected with Windy City, in preparation for the day when she will be able to write again.

Anita Baker sold her first manuscript, *That Certain Sparkle*, to Kensington Precious Gems in 2000. A past treasurer, secretary, and vice president for Windy City, she has been an active member since 1996.

Writer's Trek

(Continued from page 6)

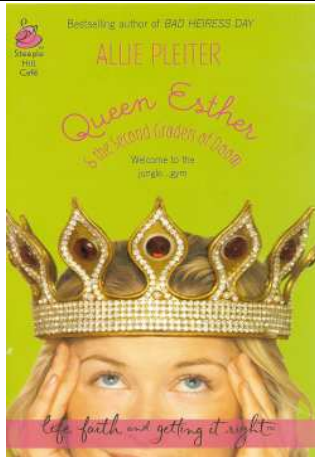
pain he's lived with for over a thousand years.

Through all of the years of writing and all of the manuscripts under my bed, I'm finally beginning to get a glimpse of what I'm doing. I now agree with my critique partners and my editors. My voice is partly getting the emotion out on paper, and using threads of my religious beliefs, by hiding some moral lesson in my stories without preaching.

In the end, I write cross genre because as much as I love writing, I love reading even more. So I follow my muse from genre to genre knowing that while the voice will be the same, the story will be different. And if I'm not bored, then hopefully my reader will not be bored either.

A Windy City member for nine years Dyanne has served as publicity liaison, contest coordinator, program chair, and vice president. When not writing you can find Dyanne reading, her greatest passion next to spending time with her husband Bill and son Bill Jr. You can reach Dyanne at her website www.dyannedavis.com or read and post to her blog at <http://dyannedavis.blogspot.com>

The Windy City Bookshelf



Queen Esther And The Second Graders Of Doom

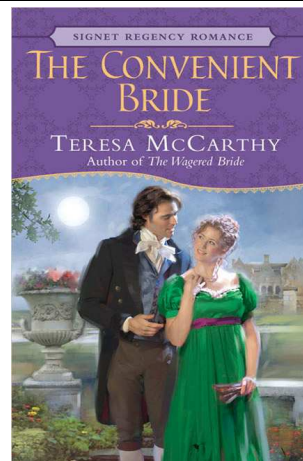
Allie Pleiter
Steeple Hill
ISBN 0-373-78556-9
February 2006

Teaching Sunday school at her brother's church in the Bay area was supposed to help former champion athlete Esther "Essie" Walker understand boys—the better to raise her newborn son as a stellar example of motherhood. Fat chance! Enter the eight year old-male psyche: awful jokes, disrespectful behavior, and general mayhem. Essie, the queen of control, finds herself in a world of chaos. The pressure builds on all fronts—Sunday school class, husband's job search, church dramatic pageant, aging parents, finances—until Queen Esther has one royal meltdown. God, it seems, has makeover plans for Essie's competitive nature. Her characteristic control is in very short supply as she gains a better understanding of the nature of imperfection, the value of motherhood, and the virtues of a messy but connected life.



Good Girls Do
Cathie Linz
Berkley
ISBN 0-425-20848-6
January 2006

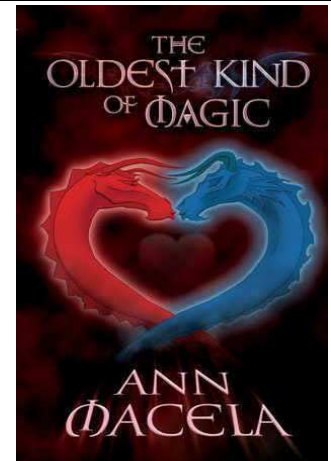
Julia Wright could not be more content with her job at the local library, nestled in placid, picturesque Serenity Falls. Until her wacky mother, petty-thief sister, and little niece decide to crash her quiet party of one. And her troubles really stack up when a new guy roars into town on his Harley, shaking up more than just the books on her shelves.



The Convenient Bride
Teresa McCarthy
Signet/NAL
ISBN 0-451-21637-7
September 2005

Facing financial ruin, Lord Clayton Clearbrook inherits his uncle's fortune with the stipulation that he must marry within three weeks—an opportunity he dare not refuse. Not many weddings in the *ton* are based on love, after all—and a bride of convenience would suit Clayton perfectly. Knowing time is of the essence, he sets his sights on Miss Briana Garland, who has adored him since childhood. But to Clayton's dismay, the lady shuns his advances.

Though Briana still has feelings for the handsome lord, she has vowed never to marry. Besides, she has other things on her mind, namely taking part in a secret mission to break up the assassination attempt of the Prince Regent! However, her rejection does not stop Lord Clayton. And as he intensifies his pursuit of her, the lady finds herself falling in love...and in more jeopardy than she ever bargained for...



The Oldest Kind of Magic
Ann Macela
Medallion Press
ISBN 1-932815-43-0
October 2005

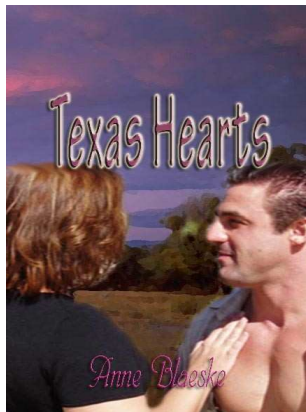
Daria Morgan is a magic practitioner who uses magic and spells to do her everyday job as a management consultant.

John "Bent" Benthausen is a CEO who, despite improvements in production, can't make a profit. He needs her help.

With her special gifts, Daria gets right to the heart of Bent's problem—crooked employees. Crooked, vicious, employees who are now out to get Daria. Those are just Problems One and Two.

Problem Three: An ancient force, an irresistible compulsion, called the soulmate imperative brings together magic-users and their mates in a lifelong bond. And it won't be happy until they surrender to the inevitable . . . the Oldest Kind of Magic . . .

The Windy City Bookshelf



Texas Hearts

Anne Blaeske
Triskelion Publishing
ISBN: 1-933471-08-5
June 2005

Texas Ranger Jesse Walker liked her life of undercover drug buys and taking down the bad guys, but when the streets get too hot for her, she is assigned to guard a senator from his stalker.

Senator Andrew Wallis is handsome, successful, and single. While a crazed fan plays a dangerous game of cat and mouse, Andrew and Jesse get caught up in a game as old as time. Can she guard her heart while keeping him safe from harm?



The Bettin' Kind

Nancy J. Parra
Avelon
ISBN 0-8034-9736-9
October 2005

Amelia Morgan dreams of a handsome prince with whom she would found a dynasty of magnificent horses and live happily ever after. What she never counted on was her brother losing her beloved stallion to a slick card shark. Desperate not to lose her dream, she gambles that the threat of marriage would cause the card shark to cut and run.

Alex Laird is no dummy. He calls Amelia's bluff, expecting her to jilt him at the altar. Then the horse would be indisputably his.

These two stubborn foes go through with a hasty marriage, neither willing to let go of their claim to the horse. Amelia believes the only way to see her dream come true is to make Alex fall in love with her. The struggles that ensue become more than a battle of wills. It becomes a battle of the heart where dreams are won and lost at the turn of a card.

In the Spotlight

Cindy Maday



Cindy Maday recently joined Romance Writers of America as an aspiring author. She has finished two novels. Cindy enjoys bringing her characters to life.

Writing is intriguing as you take an idea and start developing it into a book. Even as the author, she isn't sure where her thoughts or characters are going to take her. It's like watching a movie. She can't write fast enough and wonders how the story will continue to develop.

In June 2000, Cindy graduated in Accounting from DePaul University. She works full time as a staff accountant and writes in the evening and weekends. She has two grown children who graduated from college in 2004 and 2005. Last December she shared a special moment with her family as they were part of the commissioning ceremony when her daughter became an officer in the United States Navy. She enjoyed watching her son-in-law, a Navy enlisted man, give his wife her first salute. She was thrilled in May to watch her son receive his diploma from the University of Illinois, Chicago Campus.

On route to becoming an empty-nester, Cindy has been looking for ways to fill her time. She is active in her church and her hobbies include country line dancing, theater, and walking. She is often found at the summer fests with her friends enjoying the outdoors as well as the music.

Learning the craft of writing well is Cindy's current goal. She is thrilled to be a part of the Windy City Chapter and has been very impressed with the comradeship and support of the members. Listening to the members' adventures at the National Conference was a learning experience in itself. She also enjoyed the first critique class and was very impressed by the professionalism of the critique. Cindy hopes to learn a lot. It's one thing when mom and a friend read your work, it's quite another when a professional does. Her goal is to write a book that the reader can thoroughly enjoy.

Aunt Allie's Guide To Level Headed Hysteria

(Continued from page 1)

1. Decide how public you want to be.

Some of us tell everything to everyone. Others play it much closer to the vest. There are some helpful conscious decisions you can make ahead of time that will serve you well when news—good or bad—hits. Do you want to share good news, or its prospect, fast? Or do you need to wait until it's certain so you don't "jinx" it? Do you need to stew in your misery before you can talk about bad news, or does your kind of misery adore company?

When I was faced with the airing of an exceedingly uncomfortable media interview, a wise friend told me to "decide *before* it airs what you'll do if you hate it." Excellent advice: it's risky to rely on your knee-jerk reaction. I chose a few close friends to share the gory details with, and crafted a vague-yet-gracious public line to give anyone else.

Take some time to think through how you'll handle big news. Your plan will keep your emotions or your mouth from running away with you (oh, the lessons I have learned on this one . . .).

2. Diversify, diversify.

Publishing is a funny business; not everyone understands it. Not everyone understands that mean comments about your work are like telling a mother her children are ugly. Most people don't understand that an exceptional piece of writing can meet with rejection and failure for reasons we will never know. I have had people tell me my sales would be better if I write better books. Ugh. Don't they understand I'm writing the very best books I can? That sometimes below-par books meet with great success while wonderful books meet with gut-wrenching failure? No, they don't understand.

Non-writers look at you funny if you share the painful news that your eighth book is meeting an untimely death. That's eight more books than the rest of the world has, isn't it? They don't get that it would be like telling a mother not to mourn the death of her third child because she had such a nice run with the first two. Some news is better shared with other writers.

Then again, sometimes you need a whack on the head to remind you what a magical thing it is to pull people and stories out of thin air. It's good to have someone remind you to be grateful about those eight books, and to remember now and then what amazing odds you've beaten to even *finish* those books, much less publish them.

Non-writer friends will remind you of the magic. Writer friends will understand how it feels when the magic's not there. You need both.

3. Chose your ears wisely.

It's not just the idiosyncrasies of publishing that can drag you down—it's people in general. People come in optimist and pessimist varieties, worrier and warrior, fighters and flee-ers. We can let those differences cause friction, or we can harness them to our advantage.

I have friends who have the souls of poets, who enter into my sorrow or fear and are also great celebrators. I call them when I need to grieve bad news or celebrate good news. They are NOT, however, the first people I call in a crisis. Their dramatic, empathic nature won't pull me out of a pity party or a fear festival. For that I need someone who'll find solutions, create calm, and occasionally whack me on the side of the head. It's not that one friend is better than the other—each of them brings specific gifts. Think about your circle of friends. Who's the best to call when a crisis hits, who's best at celebrating, who's the problem solver, who's the cheerleader, etc.? Then you'll know the answer to the classic Ghostbusters query: "Who ya gonna call?"

4. Celebrate Every Little Thing.

No, really, I mean *every little thing*. Writing is often magic, but it is more often torture. Some days that cursor laughs at you, blinking at the top of an excruciatingly blank page. Critics can be unkind. Agents and editors say "no" far more often than they say "yes." We're all waging an uphill battle here. We're all nice, friendly people, but this is hardly a nice, friendly career choice. It's not even a nice, friendly hobby. Our best weapon against this ugly

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Aunt Allie's Guide To Level Headed Hysteria

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foe is celebration. Every reason to celebrate is valid because it fills our emotional well to cope with the “slings and arrows of our outrageous fortune.” I celebrate writing page 1 and page 100. I set small goals for each week and month, rewarding myself when I've reached them. I take my family to dinner when I sell a book, and I buy myself a present when I finish a book.

It's not just because I like presents (and I really do), but I believe in the power of memorializing things. Tangible reminders of events help me recall mountaintops when all I can see are valleys. I have a bead bracelet that gets a new bead for all kinds of positive events in my life. These things speak directly to our hearts, even when our brains get in the way. All too often we give the negatives in our lives more power than the positives. Celebrating helps us bolster the positives—and we stay in balance.

5. Don't forget to say Ouch! loud enough

No writer writes without passion. We care deeply about our work. So, rejection and criticism can hurt us deeply. We know we shouldn't take it personally, but we do. I take both the good and the bad of my writing very personally. Earlier this year I suffered a hefty career setback: someone made a business choice that did me harm. Now, I am the kind of person who makes friends with everyone, so I'm even more likely to make things personal. What I failed to realize, however, was just how personally I'd taken this particular setback. I ignored my irrational feelings of betrayal and rejection and tried to talk myself out of them instead of dealing with them. What happened? I let it fester until a very unprofessional blow-up occurred. In a public venue. Not a wise career move.

That incident taught me a lot about giving myself time and space to cry when I take a beating. You can't always yell “ouch” to the person who hurt you, but you need to yell to someone. My rule of thumb is that after any blow—rewrite letter, rejection letter, bad review, nasty contest judge, you name it—the first twenty-four hours *don't count*. Get mad. Throw things. Rant and rave in a safe place. Take the time to *be hurt*. Recognize that how you feel now is no indication of how you'll feel later, but how you feel now is

real. You'll never get past that initial rage, and on to something more useful, if you don't give it the space to blow itself out.

6. Put your desk where it belongs.

Stephen King offers a warning about the place our writing has in our lives. In *On Writing*, he talks about buying the biggest, most impressive desk and placing it in the center of his study. I know writers who've done the emotional equivalent. People who've defined themselves only in terms of their writing. People for whom a writing failure is a life failure, and the only way to succeed in life is to succeed in writing. Authors who have precious little life outside their laptops. You might say, “That will never be me,” but watch when a string of tight deadlines is breathing down your back. Even without publishing pressures, it's an easy thing to fall into because we care so much about our work.

King relates that he later moved the desk to a corner to make his study more about *living* than writing. I agree. It's all too easy to let my life be mostly about my books, but I always remember my books will not visit me in the nursing home. I had to work so hard at this that I crafted myself a tiny “board of directors;” six people whose job is to keep me stable, encourage me in other areas of my life like faith and home and marriage, and whack me upside the head when I get too full of myself (alarmingly easy). They are my best recipe for keeping perspective, and for not letting the roller-coaster life of publishing make me crazy. At the end of the day, I hope I have been more mother than author, more friend than writer, more wife than public speaker.

I don't know what my career holds for me. If the past is any indication, I'll be overwhelmed, disappointed, elated, pressured, thrilled, but not bored. Just remember to fasten your seatbelts, because we all know it's going to be a bumpy ride.

Allie Pleiter survived three publishers, three genres, two names, eight years of writing, sixteen years of marriage, thirteen years of parenting, and seven published books. A national speaker on parenting, faith, and women's issues, she can be found at www.alliepleiter.com and look for *Queen Esther and the Second Graders Of Doom* from Steeple Hill Café in February 2006.

In and Around Windy City

Chapter Activities

Oct. 12	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Oct. 26	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library
Nov. 9	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Dec. 9		Holiday Party
Dec. 14	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library
Jan. 11	7 p.m.	General Meeting
Jan. 25	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library
Feb. 8	7 p.m.	General Meeting
Feb. 22	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library

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