

# Blowing Kisses



## Why Me?

By Kelle Z. Riley

### Why me?

Writers love this question. In the beginning, we ask: why did my manuscript get rejected? I followed all the rules. I worked hard on it. Why me?

Later it becomes: what was special enough about my work to get a request for a full? An offer of representation? A publishing contract? Others are more talented. Why me?

When we're asked to do something for our chapter, we wonder why. Submit a newsletter article? Judge a contest? Be a committee chairperson? Run for office? Me? I'm too new to be of any help. I've got a lot on my plate. I don't know anyone well enough to take charge. Why me?

### Why not you?

I polled Windy City members to discover why—and how—they answered the call to volunteer. Responses poured in from everyone: established career authors; rising new stars; young authors still building their fan base; experienced writers “on the brink” of that first sale; and members still building their skills.

The responses were amazingly consistent.

### Why volunteer?

A common theme reverberating through the answers was that volunteers learn from their experience and gain valuable skills. Former Windy City president and RWA PRO member Barb Deane says the learning curve is greatly accelerated when you volunteer. Others echo her sentiments. Sherry Weddle volunteers as a reviewer and a contest judge. These positions helped her “learn more about the structure

of a book. . . pacing . . . what makes a good opening—and what can distract the reader or not engage her.” All lessons that helped her in her own writing.

Harlequin/Silhouette author and 2006 Reviewer's Choice Award Nominee Myrna Mackenzie doesn't believe in volunteering to “give back” to the community. Rather, she believes writers are driven to volunteer for internal reasons. Recalling her early days as a new writer, she says, “I probably got more from my volunteering efforts than anyone else did.”

Others had the same experience. New author Barbara Harrison admits to being shy, but nevertheless took on an important chapter leadership role—critique chairperson. Once she became an active volunteer she says, “The advantages of being in a group of other writers were tripled. I was exposed to far more opportunities. Volunteering gave me confidence. Working with other writers, even in a volunteer capacity made me feel like a writer.”

Adrienne Giordano-Maynard, Windy City treasurer and Four Seasons category coordinator, agrees. “Volunteering was a way to give something back because (being a fairly new writer) I wasn't sure how much I could contribute as far as experience. It's a great way to get involved, make friends, and bounce ideas or questions off of others.”

Writing is a solitary life, often riddled with rejection and self-doubt. Volunteering can be a way to combat both the loneliness and the doubt. Four-time RITA finalist and 1994 RITA winner Lindsay Longford calls it a *dirty little secret*. “Volunteering feels good. For writers, published or [not], volunteering is a way of connecting with others, of being validated.” Validation, it turns out, is important for writers of all

(Continued on page 11)

## About Windy City

### 2005 Officers

President	Dyanne Davis 630-972-0777
Vice President	Jackie Wallis
Secretary	Theresa Stevens
Treasurer	Adrienne Maynard
Newsletter	Kelle Z. Riley
Presentations	Luisa Buehler
Membership	Chris Foutris
Critiques	Barb Harrison
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](http://www.WindyCityRWA.com)

#### Blowing Kisses

Blowing Kisses is published semiannually and is the official publication of Windy City Romance Writers, Chapter 104.

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.

Send to Fredericka Meiners  
610 Golfers Lane  
Bartlett, IL 60103  
E-mail to [fameiners@msn.com](mailto:fameiners@msn.com)

## RWA: The Rewards of Networking

Dear Windy City Sisters,

My letter to you is intended as a reminder and a thank-you. First I want to remind each of you of the importance of refilling your creative well. It's really easy to lose focus and become disillusioned with everything that's thrown at us, if we don't take time to step back and reassess why we chose this writing path. Or, as a friend recently reminded me, why this writing life chose us.

We get rejections at every stage of our careers. That's the life. But the one thing that can make us have the courage to continue in spite of the arrows and the pain, is coming together with like-minded individuals and sharing. Sometimes just sitting there and allowing osmosis to work will refill you.

You have no idea how many times I've wanted to quit before being published. And after. A few weeks ago, I was contemplating quitting. Writing wasn't any fun because I was not taking the time to refill my creative well.

Going to the RWA National Conference and attending workshops helped partially, but this is where my thank-you comes in. You, Windy City, have kept me going. There are so many fresh voices filled with enthusiasm and you're bringing energy to the group. I love being in the room with all of you. Reading

## President's Message



**Windy City**  
Romance Writers of America

your work during critique makes me proud to be a writer. I'm amazed at the roads a writer's mind travels, and I leave each critique session refilled. There is so much talent at Windy City that it amazes me.



I've been a member of Windy City now for almost ten years and know that sometimes it seems like little things can burn you out. I'm suggesting when you feel burned out and ready to give up, whether you are a new member or long-time one, come to a meeting, renew acquaintances, and feel the enthusiasm that's always there.

Refill your well.

Dyanne

## Blowin' in the Wind

Susan Elizabeth Phillips received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the RWA National Conference.

Allie Pleiter's *Getting To Yes* went live on the charlequin.com website. It's the prequel to *My So-Called Love Life* which is the August release from Love Inspired Cafe.



*Kelle Riley, Sharon Nelson, and Susan Gibberman relax during the RWA National conference*

Debbie Pfeiffer's "Road Back Home" won first place in Women's Fiction in the Tampa Area Romance Authors (TARA) 2006 First Impressions Contest. Not only that, but Finalist Judge Kerry Donovan of NAL requested a partial!

Cathie Linz's novella, "Brides Gone Wild," in *Catch Of The Day* received a rave review in the Chicago Tribune's book section.

Lauren Ford's Long Contemporary, "Be Mine, Valentine," was awarded First Place in the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers Laurie Contest!

Pat Casiello and Kathie Clare, w/a K. M. Daughters, are finalists with "Reunion For The First Time" in the Series Contemporary Category in the PASIC Book Of Your Heart Contest.

Melody Thomas won first place in Historicals in the 2006 WISRWA Write Touch Readers Award for *A Match Made In Scandal*.

Teresa McCarthy and Susan Elizabeth Phillips had their books featured in *Naperville Glancer* magazine: Teresa's *Regency*, *The Convenient Bride*, and Susan's paperback of *Match Me*.

Denise Swanson's latest, *Murder of a Real Bad Boy*, placed on the Best-seller list on the Poison Pen mystery listings in August and was printed in Entertainment Weekly under best selling paperbacks.

Allie Pleiter had two "Live Audiobook Knit-Ins" celebrating her knitting heroine in *My So-Called Love Life*. The events were co-hosted by The Book Store and String Theory Yarn in Glen Ellyn and by Anderson's Bookshop and Knitche Yarn Store in Downers Grove.

The farewell issue of *Rendezvous Reviews* from Love Designers awarded its very last Rosebud award to Cathie Linz's *Bad Girls Don't*.

The 2006 *Affaire de Coeur* Reader-Writer's Poll (readers select their favorites from 2005 novels) awarded Best Overall Historical to Susan Carroll's *The Dark Queen* and among the top ten authors of the year was Susan Elizabeth Phillips.

Dyanne Davis has two "shorts" published on Amazon.com.



*Fredericka Meiners and Diane Whitton-Brown at the shooting range on the Kiss Of Death Tour*

## Blowin' in the Wind

Wendy Byrne's "Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This" finaled in the Molly in the Romantic Elements category from the Heart of Denver Romance Writers. It also finaled in the Unsinkable Heroine Category.

Ann Macela is pleased to announce that Medallion Press will be publishing *Do You Believe in Magic?*, the sequel to *The Oldest Kind Of Magic*, in October 2007, and *Windswept* early in 2008. The Press has also indicated that they will be contracting for the third in the series, *Your Magic Or Mine?* in the near future. *The Oldest Kind Of Magic* has placed in five contests this year.

Kelle Z. Riley received a very nice write-up in the Newark, Ohio, *Advocate*.

Elysa Hendricks' "The Human Breed" came in First in the Alternative category in the Reveal Your Inner Vixen Contest of Maryland Romance Writers. In addition, Final Judge Chris Keesler of Dorchester requested a full manuscript!

The Naperville Nichols Library and the Naper Blvd. Library featured Windy City Writers in a great display of our work. Betty Wampach also took our Windy City Sells booklet and duplicated it as a take-home booklet for interested people. What great publicity. Thanks to Naperville Libraries and Betty.



*Sharon Nelson and Dyanne Davis wait for the Gala to begin*



*Readers are where you find them. These wonderful people were thrilled to meet real authors in the bar at the RWA National Conference.*



*Sherry Weddle and Laura Renken at the party after the Gala.*



*Tom Riley shows his support for his wife Kelle by attending the Gala with her.*

## A Hot Time in “Hot-lanta”

By Chris Foutris

For those of you who have never been to Atlanta in July, there are two things that describe the weather. Hot and Hotter. Of course, we were indoors mostly... but at the Marriott, with all of that glass, well, suffice it to say that the A/C worked best in our rooms and in the conference rooms. Everyone agreed that the hotel did its best to make all 2,000+ of us very welcome, very comfortable and very well fed.

Where do I start? First of all, a heartfelt thank you to the anonymous donor who makes one of us Windy City-zens feel very grateful every year to have been gifted the cost of the conference. Of course, in return, an article like this one is expected for the newsletter.

This was my fifth conference and I've realized that there are certain differences and similarities in each conference. The most important thing is that each one is so invigorating. You are surrounded by writers and writing for four solid days. You don't have to explain your love of writing, or romance or feel anything but comfortable, because everyone else is experiencing the very same thing! Everything is geared for your craft, whether you've been writing for 20 years or 20 weeks, whether you're published, or, my new, personal favorite, AYU (as yet unpublished). Ideas, tricks of the trade and encouragement abound.

My most memorable moments included the following workshops:

- Persistence—Do You Have What It Takes To Thrive And Survive? Greene and Kaufman;
- The Bait, the Hook, the Catch: It's All About Chapter I – Ridgway;

- Theme – Taking An Old Fashioned Concept... etc. Greene and Keiler;
- From Identity to Essence: Love Stories and Transformation –Hauge.

Do yourself a favor and borrow the conference CD from the Windy City Library and listen to these unique presentations. The fun ones, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Nora Roberts, and anything with Jennie Cruisic, will entertain and inform.

We all had a great time at lunch. Between the aforementioned foods, new friends made, old acquaintances renewed, the keynote speakers revitalized and inspired us.

As to our members, the annual Windy City dinner at the City Grill kept up our anticipated tradition. As always, it was great fun connecting with my two roomies, Susan and Kelle. I saw Jimmie M. and “RITA Finalist” Margaret W. right away on Wednesday. I had lunch with Sherry “strangers are friends that I haven't met yet” Weddle and Blythe “queen of the six degrees of RWA separation (she knows everybody!)” Gifford. Sherry insisted that sole diner Helene from Connecticut shouldn't eat alone, so at our invitation she joined our group, and told us that our friendliness reminded her about how much she'd missed coming to conferences.

It was a great time, in a great city with great people, ideas and inspirations. Don't miss out next year...see y'all in Dallas!

Chris Foutris writes as Sophie Foster and is “AYU”—as yet unpublished. Her day job ends this June because SHE'S RETIRING after 34 years of teaching. Chris, who lives in Lisle, helps Windy City by providing a resident's library card for our critique meetings. She's been a member of Windy City for 10 years and has loved every minute of it.



*To the left, Chris Foutris and Valerie Francis.*

*To the right, Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Susan Elizabeth Phillips and Laura Renken (Melody Thomas).*



## Windy City's Craft Day

By Maryfrances Madonia

The Windy City RWA craft day held at the Bolingbrook Fountaindale Public Library on September 9<sup>th</sup> proved to be an enlightening and enjoyable experience for everyone.

Allie Pleiter started the day off with an inspirational talk challenging us to think about who we are both as a person and an author. First and foremost, we are writers. During the day she said, we would be learning new things, but it was important to focus on the one or two “next steps” we should take. She provided us with a list where we could jot down notes and then prioritize the tasks so that we would “*Do The Next Write Thing!*”

It was a day to share ideas and learn new ways to improve the craft of writing. Topics of the day included “showing, not telling,” characterization, plotting, point of view, marketing oneself, and energy healing for writers.



Presenter Maryfrances Madonia discussed ways to make revisions by using a few strategies that may help writers better “show” their work. To draw the reader into the story, Maryfrances suggested the following: avoiding adverbs, appealing to the five senses, choosing active over passive verbs and using figurative language. Everyone had the chance to try out some of those strategies and compare the results.



For those who needed more help with plot, guest speaker Lisa Riley provided some guidelines on how to plot a story. In her handout, Lisa covered the four elements of plot. For starters, the main characters should have a goal and conflict. In an effort to reach their goal, the story should move forward in time toward a logical conclusion. Cau-

sality and connectedness are important as well. “For every action, there’s a reaction and it should, in some way, help to move the story along.” And of course, in the end there should be a satisfying solution to the problem or answer to the question presented at the start of the story.

Denise Swanson presented an entertaining workshop on creating fictional characters through the use of the clinical interview. Participants joined together to fill out the profile sheet—with hilarious results. Then Denise took the divergent threads supplied by her boisterous group and turned them into a compelling detective hero. I can’t wait to see what our beautiful, black philanthropist with the purple hair and tattoos does when he goes undercover to investigate a murder at the homeless shelter he supports!



Todd Stone presented an overview from his newest Writer's Digest published book, *Novelist's Boot Camp*. We learned to plot a strategy to finish our manuscripts. Thankfully, Commander Stone didn't make us do the exercises (were those push ups or revisions?) but he does deserve a hearty salute for inspiring the troops.

For many writers, deciding whose point of view to use can be difficult. To tackle this challenge, Jade Lee offered a few pointers. According to Jade, point of view offers the reader an emotional connection with the character. In her writing, Jade often associates her



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## Windy City's Craft Day

(Continued from page 6)



heroine and hero with an imagery set; she may tie a character to certain colors or to elements like fire and water. Maintaining point of view during dialogue can also be a challenge. One can use several tricks, such as having the main character make a judgment on what the other character is thinking. Or, description of

the hero's reaction to the heroine can help connect readers to both characters without changing point of view.

Jade offered another fascinating workshop as well. In her workshop entitled "Energy Healing for Writers," she offered tips on how to stay in the present and clear your thoughts by engaging in a relaxing activity. Jade suggested repeating phrases over and over to

help in clearing clutter from the mind, or visualizing a cleansing image, such as a bright light shining through the fog. She demonstrated how to clear oneself and to help clear others of all negative thoughts crowding the mind. This can be a valuable tool for writers who have trouble letting go of their ongoing mental to-do list.

Everyone knows that without marketing, even the most stunning work of literature will have a difficult time taking off. Kelle Z. Riley shared her marketing strategies with the group. She outlined the most important aspects of marketing yourself. Kelle stressed that the first step is believing in yourself and having the courage to move your dreams forward. She suggests setting goals that you can control and being



persistent, yet patient while trying to accomplish these goals. Maintaining a professional image and exuding confidence makes you attractive to potential associates as well. Lastly, networking and joining a professional organization helps get your name out there. Kelle suggests that if you put in effort, opportunities will present themselves.

These workshops proved helpful and fun for all writers in every stage of the process. Novices appreciated the advice and input from the more experienced writers, while those who have been published may have learned new ways to approach the

many issues that come up in writing.

If you were unable to attend the craft day and would like to learn more about the topics covered in the workshops, see Dyanne Davis for copies of materials provided by pre-senters.



Note: Information on the workshops the author was not able to attend were added by the editors.

Maryfrances Madonia is a certified English Teacher currently employed as an Instructional Supervisor at a local High School. She is currently writing her first serious manuscript. Maryfrances graduated from Northern Illinois University with a degree in Communications. She completed her Master of Arts in Teaching at National-Louis University. She has also worked as an event videographer and video editor for seven years.

## Spotlight



### Vercyna Givens-Smith

I have been a member of the Crest Hill Writers Group for the past five years. During that time my poetry has been published in their yearly anthology. I began writing poetry and early childhood picture books in the late 90's. For the next few years writing for children was my main focus. Then my writing passion turned to writing erotica for couples.

In the years to follow, I've interviewed many wives who have issues concerning intimacy. Most of the women were looking for advice and/or ways to spice up their marriage. I came to realize that finding time and energy for sex was a major concern for some women. I wanted to research why this was true. In my research I came across many erotica and self-help books, but only a few talked about realistic issues that could help married couples. So, I decided to write short stories that most couples can relate to, which, combined with erotic poetry, could help bring back romantic thoughts.

In my dialogue, I also give a little advice here and there. I know we all have busy lives and growing families, but true life-long romantic relationships must take a break from everyday stress to reconnect. I like to send my husband suggestive e-mails during the day. I noticed on *Desperate Housewives* last week they had a scene where one of the girls sent her husband a spicy e-mail. I think sending an erotic poem could be great foreplay.

I have been married to my super hero, Mr. Incredible (aka) Mitchell Smith for sixteen years. Eleven years ago, God blessed us with a daughter. We call her Shana. Who knows what this spirited, honest, amazing, nature loving, far-from-average child, will achieve in the future.

I write as VicKay Smith. I am glad to be a part of Windy City and grateful for the positive feedback. I feel this is where I need to be in order to move forward in my career.

## Midwest Literary Festival: Hurrah For Two Of Our Own

By Terri Stone

On September 16-17, 2006, the 4th Annual Midwest Literary Festival welcomed many talented authors including our very own Luisa Buehler and Kelle Z. Riley. Todd and I sat in on The Joy of Romance workshop where Kelle participated on a panel with former RWA National President Tara Taylor Quinn and Echelon Publisher Karen Syed—also Kelle's and Luisa's publisher.

There were lots of questions from the audience and Kelle answered hers with knowledge and poise. She also found opportunities to plug the Windy City Chapter. One of the things that impressed me most was how well-prepared she was for the unexpected. At one point, the issue of how many romances are published each year became a hot topic and while the other two panelists had great answers, Kelle had the actual statistics.

But it didn't stop there. Spending time with both Luisa and Kelle at their publisher's tent, it's clear that these are two professional women who know how to promote their published works by promoting themselves.

For more information about this event go to [www.midwestliteraryfestival.com](http://www.midwestliteraryfestival.com)

Teresa (Terri) V. M. Stone is a frequent presenter at writers' conferences and author of the several articles on research techniques and the business of writing. Terri's knowledge about taxes and writers helped her shepherd a writer and writing business through the dreaded IRS audit process with positive results.



### Update:

Deb Larson finally received her cover for the book that appeared in last issue's Bookshelf.

Here it is!

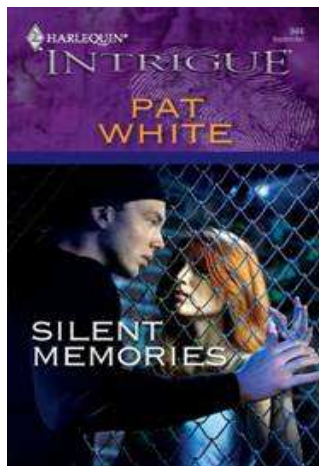
## The Windy City Bookshelf

### *Her Book of Pleasure* By *Marie Donovan*

**Her Book of Pleasure**  
Marie Donovan  
Harlequin Blaze  
January 2007  
ISBN 978-0-373-79306-8

Caught between her traditional Japanese childhood and modern American schooling, Asian art historian Megan Michiko O'Malley doesn't quite know where she belongs. While handsome Rick Sokol knows that Meg belongs in his arms, his conflicted feelings towards happily-ever-after are colored by his own past.

Though not one to dwell in the past, like any good historian, Meg must look to it for some unexpected lessons. And the antique book of erotic Japanese paintings that's inspiring their passionate affair can either bring them together or pull them apart.



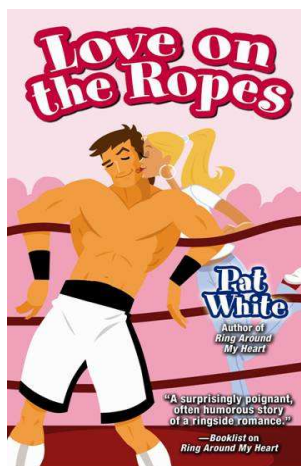
**Silent Memories**  
Pat White  
Harlequin Intrigue  
September 2006  
ISBN 0373229445

*She couldn't remember.*

FBI Agent Sean MacNeil's assignment: Protect brilliant scientist Annie Price at all costs. And though the seasoned vet was prepared for every possible attack, he could never have predicted the near-fatal car crash that stole Annie's memories—and the formula for an amazing scientific breakthrough.

*He couldn't forget.*

And now, the only way to keep Annie safe from the men who were after her—and recover the formula—was to face his greatest fear: Help her regain her memory, including their stormy past. Because one thing would never change... Sean MacNeil would stop at nothing to safeguard the woman he loved.



**Love On The Ropes**  
Pat White  
Dorchester  
October 2006  
ISBN 0505526663

Where do you put your service revolver when all you're wearing are spandex briefs? Just one of the challenges facing DEA agent Jason McBain when he's undercover as pro wrestler Jack the Stripper to find out who's distributing steroids, but he never thought his first suspect would be the beautiful medical assistant who fires his blood to the boiling point. The minute he feels Sandy's soft hands on his body, all thoughts of the mission leave his mind. He might not know much about wrestling, but he's pretty sure he wants to body-slam the petite blond into his bed.

Sandy Ryan knows the dangers of mixing work and romance—she's been burned before. So what if she wants to jump in the ring and help Jason tear his clothes off? It would be easier if there weren't something strangely vulnerable in the wrestler's mesmerizing blue-green eyes; that tugs at her heartstrings; that tells her to take a chance on...  
Love on the Ropes



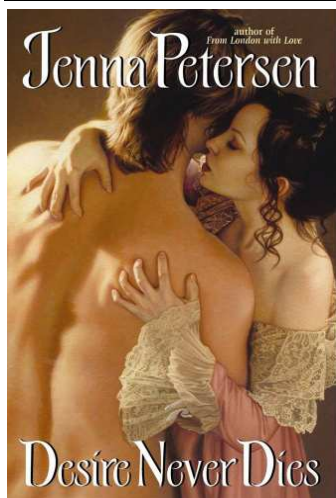
**How to Ruin a Summer Vacation**  
Simone Elkeles  
Flux  
October 2006  
ISBN: 0-7387-0961-1

Going to Israel with her estranged Israeli father is the last thing Amy wants to do this summer. She's got a serious grudge against her dad for showing up so rarely in her life.

Now he's dragging her to a war zone to meet a family she's never known, where she'll probably be drafted into the army.

At the very least, she'll be stuck in a house with no AC and only one bathroom for seven people all summer—no best friend, no boyfriend, no shopping, no cell phone... Goodbye pride—hello Israel.

## The Windy City Bookshelf

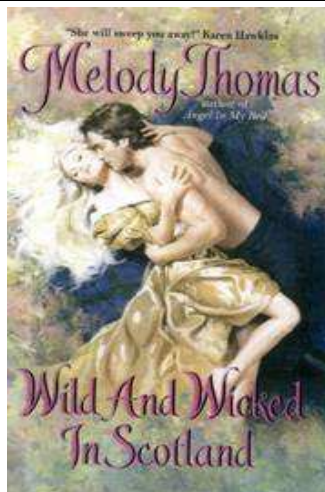


### Desire Never Dies

Jenna Petersen  
Avon Romance  
ISBN: 0061138088  
December 2006

Shy, intelligent widow Anastasia Whittig is really a Lady Spy in name only. Though she invents important items and decodes evidence, she's hardly ventured into the field and keeps herself wrapped in a shroud of mourning for her late husband. She's perfectly content to continue her sheltered life, but when one of her best friends is shot, she's forced into service at the side of Lucas Tyler.

Lucas is a daring, talented spy, driven to solve the case of attacks on his fellow agents. He doesn't want any help, and certainly not from Ana. But as the two edge ever closer to the disturbing truth, they cannot keep from developing a grudging respect for each other. And they cannot ignore the undeniable desire that threatens to change both their worlds.



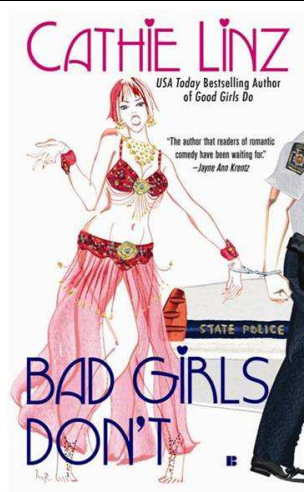
### Wild And Wicked In Scotland

Melody Thomas  
Avon Romance  
ISBN 0061129593  
January 2007

When Cassandra Sheridan agreed to an arranged marriage to the Earl of Hampstead, she never dreamed the cad wouldn't bother to appear for their betrothal ball. It seems her intended cares more for gallivanting than meeting his bride to be! Cassie decides to enjoy an adventure of her own, sets off across Scotland and meets a dashing stranger for whom dueling and deception is an art form.

A dedicated spy on a mission, Devlyn St. Clair has more on his mind than a silly party. Now fate has thrown him together with a lady whom he must protect from harm, and whose sensuous beauty is proving most distracting. Worse still, Devlyn is horrified to discover she's the woman he's engaged to marry!

With their lives and reputations in equal peril, do they dare surrender to their irresistible desires?

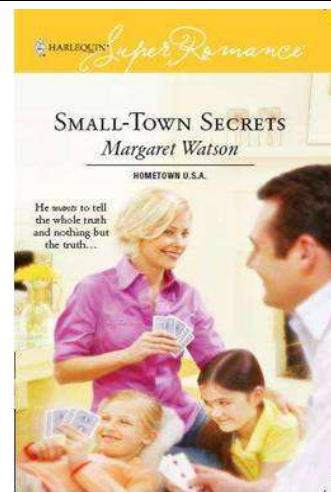


### Bad Girls Don't

Cathie Linz  
Berkley  
ISBN 0-425-21284-X

When Skye Wright saw flashing lights in her rearview mirror, she figured she'd just charm her way out of yet another speeding ticket. How could she have known that the handsome cop who stepped out of the police cruiser was a Studly Do-Right capable of taming the wild child right out of her?

It took less than two seconds for Sheriff Nathan Thornton to peg Skye as trouble. Maybe it was the way she shimmied her hips in that *I Dream of Jeannie* outfit. Or the huge stack of speeding tickets in her bag. Whatever it was, the woman was belly dancing her way into his thoughts. Now if only she'd belly dance into his bedroom.



### Small-Town Secrets

Margaret Watson  
Harlequin  
SuperRomance  
September, 2006  
ISBN 0-373-71371-1

Kendall's in for a shock. Two, actually.

Gabe Townsend has a lot of nerve to show up after seven years and book into her B&B. It hadn't been easy for Kendall to move on after her husband was killed. But she picked up the pieces, running a successful business and raising two girls on her own. She's put aside the guilt over her part in Carter's death. But she'll never forgive herself—or Gabe.

And Gabe hasn't even told her the whole truth. But the more he's around Kendall and the children, the more he grows to love them. Can he really tell them the truth?

## Why Me?

(Continued from page 1)

levels. Validation combats self-doubt, Longford stresses. Being validated is also about being part of a community. Multiple Golden Heart Finalist Pat White, whose publishing dream came true in 2003, says she can't imagine not volunteering.

Author-turned-publisher Teresa Basile puts it another way. "Donating your time away from the computer is a great way to get out and socialize, meet other writers, learn new things. It helps get your name out there. The networking is invaluable."

Networking was mentioned frequently as one of the benefits of volunteer work. As writers progress in their careers, networking becomes increasingly important. Award-winning historical author Teresa McCarthy said, "Volunteering at any level helps you interact with people and understand the industry." Former Golden Heart Finalist and Harlequin Historical author Blythe Gifford agrees, noting that published authors often volunteer more on a national level and less on a chapter level. Volunteering for RWA National "expands your name recognition and networking opportunities, as well as broadening your knowledge and perspective."

These sentiments are echoed throughout the ranks of volunteers. Debbie Pfeiffer, a 2004 Golden Heart Finalist, puts it this way. "Each level gains you experience and insight. It's about networking and developing relationships. Who says the person who's going to help you most is right in your backyard? Someone in Florida or DC or San Diego may have critical insight." Debbie, who has served the Windy City chapter as assistant newsletter editor, chapter retreat coordinator, critique program chair, and Four Seasons judge, to name a few, admits that the relationships can happen without volunteering, but believes volunteer work accelerates the process. She also stresses that the opportunities to be of service change as you grow in your career.

But for all the benefits of volunteering, it has a dark side. Every experienced chapter member and

published author alluded to it: burn-out. In an organization run by volunteers, those who are willing to give of their time are approached again and again. Most rise to the call for all of the reasons we've discussed. But experienced members with a long list of volunteer activities to their credit caution against giving too much. For the published author, especially, the work must always come first. According to 2006 RITA Nominee, Margaret Watson, "Volunteering is great, but not if it's an excuse for not writing. My priorities are family, work, friends, then volunteer work." Susan Carroll, also a 2006 RITA Nominee, offers a warning from her own experience. By "volunteering too much the quality of your own work suffers and you start missing deadlines."

The advice is as true for unpublished writers as it is for contracted authors. Gifford puts it succinctly. Writers should be "BIC-HOK! (Butt in Chair- Hands on Keyboard.)" Good advice for anyone. Giordano-Maynard followed Gifford's advice and is nearly finished with her second manuscript. She searched for times "where I can fit the writing in and schedule it as an appointment. Sometimes it's only an hour or thirty minutes, but I try hard to not 'cancel' the appointment."

Denise Swanson, author of the Best-Selling Scumble River mystery series, says she's always guarded her work, but, now that her writing success allowed her to quit her day job, she feels more able to volunteer.

Swanson is in a minority. Most writers, at all career stages, find that writing is a struggle. Not in terms of putting the words on paper—although we've all felt that from time to time—but in terms of juggling multiple responsibilities: full time jobs, motherhood, deadlines from one or more publishers, volunteer activities, friends, family, and self. Watson also notes that "the business part of a writing career demands more time as you advance."

While not a single person expressed regret at

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***"I take on jobs I know I'll get something out of or will really enjoy or that will use a skill I want to develop or maintain."***  
***Debbie Pfeiffer***

## Why Me?

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the time they spent volunteering, several commented on the impact volunteering had on their writing productivity. Former President Barb Deane referred to holding office as “both a privilege and a chore,” noting that it took significant time and focus away from actual writing. Further, she sees a trend in which almost all former presidents “disappear” for a while after serving a two-year term. She suspects that for others, as for herself, burn-out is a major contributor. Still, she stresses that her time as Windy City president benefited her writing career in many ways, despite the temporary slow down in productivity during her tenure.

Words like *burn-out* and *overwhelmed* came up frequently in the discussions. Luisa Buehler, Windy City program chair for 2006 and creator of the Grace Marsden mystery series, likens writing and promoting her work to a “gerbil on a wheel pattern.”

Extreme burn-out from this highly competitive career could lead to more dire consequences. In speaking of life changes that can accompany one’s career, Gifford observes “the first sale is [often] accompanied by other life changes . . . people get divorced, move across the country, have husbands lose their jobs, and have health problems. All these non-writing demands have to be dealt with first.”

So, how does one avoid burn-out and negatively affecting one’s career while writing and serving as a volunteer? The advice was loud and clear on that topic. Limit the number of volunteer activities. Choose carefully among the options. Learn to say “No.” Take time to renew your spirit and creativity—fill the well. And always put the writing first on your to-do list. Treat it like a “real” career if you want it to become one for you.

Allie Pleiter, who currently writes for the Steeple Hill Inspirational line, loves volunteering, including speaking to groups of all sizes. What challenges her is “banging it out alone at the keyboard.” But, she points out, an author can’t spend all of her time on volunteering, networking, and PR, or she won’t finish the manuscript. So how does she put the work first when everything else seems like more fun?

“I make a list of everything I’d like to do and pick a FEW,” says Pleiter, who also volunteers for her church and her children’s school. She tends to

pick a single volunteer activity to fill for each group. She says of her writing, “I am very deliberate in my mentoring because I think it’s professionally and spiritually vital.” Even so, she agrees with Mackenzie on a basic point. Volunteering is useful, but not crucial. If you can’t meet your deadlines, then you’re doing too much.

Pfeiffer has similar strategies for determining how and when she volunteers and is careful to avoid burn-out since it dims the experience for her. First, she chooses her jobs carefully. “I take on jobs I know I’ll get something out of or will really enjoy or that will use a skill I want to develop or maintain.” And she’s learning to say “no” to jobs that don’t fit her criteria.

She also suggests taking on only short term roles or determining in advance how long she’ll spend in the position. How does she stick to her predetermined limit? “I try to identify my next replacement and get them on board,” she says. That time of training/transition gives the new volunteer confidence and gives Pfeiffer an exit plan.

In summary, volunteering confers rich benefits on a writer of any level. It is a great way to establish crucial working relationships while learning new skills. It also builds your name recognition and career. But it must be approached with a sense of balance. Don’t over do it. Choose activities that benefit you as well as your chapter. Set limits on the time you’ll spend and stick to them. Above all, know that your chapter and the national RWA are volunteer organizations that exist, in part, to serve you as you progress through your writing career. Take advantage of all the opportunities they offer. Some of those are opportunities to learn by serving. Chances are, you’ll want to participate.

After all, remember Lindsay Longford’s *dirty little secret*. Volunteering validates the writer. It fights doubt. And it just feels good.

Kelle Z. Riley currently serves as Newsletter Co-editor for Windy City. Her previous volunteer activities have included Contest Category Coordinator and various short-term assignments. Her debut release, *Dangerous Affairs*, is currently available from Echelon Press. Kelle is a former Golden Heart Finalist who has also been featured as a speaker at the RWA National Conference and at various regional conferences.

## What Else Is Out There?

### By Fredericka Meiners

RWA is much more than its individual chapters and offers a wealth of information to members.

RWA National offers a number of “listservs,” Yahoo Groups, also called “loops,” to which members can belong. These are FREE. They are quite informative about everything from the writing craft to research to the industry and the organization.

These are interactive loops. A question may be posed or a situation described or a statement made and members are free to comment as they see fit. Pubbed and unpubbed members are on all the general loops. You do not have to participate in an active way unless you want to. Feel free to simply read the discussions as you will.

Belonging to the loops is also a good way to meet RWA members from all over the world.

This article contains a partial list of loops. Others will be featured in the next issue.

All you have to do is subscribe to them by sending a blank e-mail to the addresses below with each specific loop.

### The way they work:

A Yahoo Group is set up on Yahoo. As a member of a group, you have several ways to access them. You can go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/> and access your group directly, read all of the messages and answer any of them or post a new one. Or you can receive e-mails, either as individual messages (a real e-mail clogging method) or by digest (once or so a day, you receive an e-mail with up to 25 messages).

You’re already on a loop or loops: Our Windy City groups are set up on Yahoo.

### Official RWA Listservs

#### RWAalert

To subscribe to any of the other loops, you MUST belong to this one. Once you are approved to this list, you can subscribe to the others.  
rwaalert-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

#### RWAeNotes

A twice-monthly newsletter of news and links about RWA and the publishing industry. There is a

Research column and other craft info also.

[RWAenotes-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:RWAenotes-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

Note: There is a hyphen between the name of the loop and the word subscribe in all of them.

Listservs fall under one of three categories. Loops for all RWA members, one for RWA-PRO members, and one for RWA-PAN members. The lists named RWA are open to all RWA members.

### General Loops:

#### RWAwriterslife

Discusses all aspects of a writer's life, from the ridiculous to the sublime.

[rwawriterslife-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwawriterslife-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### RWAcraft

Discusses the craft of writing, such as technique, plotting, character, dialogue, grammar, punctuation, point of view, among them.

[rwaecraft-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwaecraft-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### RWAindustry

Discusses news within the romance publishing industry, such as editors, agents, publishing houses, etc. If you have a question about a particular publisher, editor or agent, this is the place.

[rwaindustry-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwaindustry-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### RWAesp

Concentrates on the non-traditional publishing industry, with electronic, new, or small publishers.

[rwaesp-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwaesp-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### RWAorg

Discusses RWA news and activities.

[rwaorg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwaorg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### RWAresearch

Covers all kinds of research, from contemporary to historical, USA or elsewhere, how things work, and more. [rwaresearch-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwaresearch-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### RWAtechnology

Discusses technology as it applies to writing, reading, publishing, and bookselling.

[rwaetchnology-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rwaetchnology-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

## In and Around Windy City

### Chapter Activities

Oct 25	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library
Nov. 8	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Nov. 22	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library
Dec. 13	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Jan. 10	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Feb. 14	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Feb. 28	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library
Mar. 14	7 p.m.	General Meeting, Naperville City Center
Mar. 28	7 p.m.	Critique Meeting, Lisle Library

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