A Newbie’s Adventures at the Annual RWA Conference

by Janet Periat

Recently a top editor at Kensington told me my latest romantic suspense wasn’t “romantic enough or suspenseful enough.” So what was it? I thought. It was nothing. A year of work, hours and hours and hours of writing, rewriting, editing all for… nothing. Soon after receiving the letter, I was on the bed in my office in tears, writing my “Reasons To Live” list.

Thankfully, I still had enough wherewithal to email our chapter. I asked them for one good reason to go to the Romance Writers of America Conference. I was supposed to be on a plane in two days, I couldn’t figure out why the hell I’d want to fly halfway across the country to be surrounded by successful authors. I could be just as depressed at home and save the money. A flood of letters answered me.

One previously unpublished fellow chapter member had just got a two-book deal the week before from the same editor at Kensington. While anything she said should have been suspect and immediately disregarded, she cheered me up the most.

She told me to get my butt on the plane, that I needed the conference more than ever. She told me that a personal letter from an editor was a huge step forward. That I was closer than ever to getting published. More letters followed in the same vein.

My fellow writers all understood. They told me I wasn’t crazy. They all had empty boxes of Kleenex everywhere. They all understood why after 17 years and 17 rejected manuscripts, I continued to move forward with my career.

They made me feel like I wasn’t a loser, that I was just in the process of achieving my goals. I packed and got my butt on that plane and I am so glad I did. The following is a day-by-day accounting of my adventures at the Romance Writers of America Conference held in Atlanta.

DAY ONE: On the plane: I headed off to my first RWA conference totally blind. I was so busy getting work prepared for agents and editors I met at our Prepare To Pitch conference in May, I missed my opportunity to get an appointment for an agent or an editor at the national conference. I also missed any and all information on the conference, period. I was nervous.
Atlanta: I missed registration by five minutes, which meant I had no idea what was going on or what workshops were being held, when the luncheons were, nothing. I was completely in the dark. I also found out the importance of the PRO membership level of RWA. All I knew was that if you had written a full manuscript, had submitted it and had it rejected, you were eligible for PRO and you got this little pin. I could not figure out why I would want a pin that proclaimed I’d been rejected.

Well, I found out why. Because at the conferences, you get an appointment with an agent and an editor and can go to special workshops. I also didn’t realize that there were many members of the RWA that hadn’t completed a manuscript.

I had no idea that writing a manuscript was such an accomplishment. So there I was in Atlanta sans PRO status. I tried not to kick myself. I also didn’t know anyone at the conference.

While several members of our chapter were supposed to be there, I had no idea where they were. Feeling stupid about the PRO thing, lonely and completely out of the loop, I did what all great writers do when faced with such problems — I headed to the bar where I met a group of writers from Texas.

Even though I was miles away from home, once I was around other writers, I immediately felt at home.

After chatting at the bar, I took a swim at the pool where I met other writers. Lo and behold, they had registered. They invited me to their room where I finally got some info on the conference. I sat and laughed with them for a good hour before turning in. I felt much better.

DAY TWO: I finally registered and got an agent appointment — I was thrilled! Plus I got my goody bag — extra thrilled! I read through the materials and got my game plan together. I tried not to let the PRO thing bug me. I have to admit, it was intimidating to walk around and see fellow attendees bling-bling. PRO pins galore. Awards, published people everywhere.

I still hadn’t connected with any people I knew. I felt kind of alone, but everyone was so nice. I looked forward to the Book Faire where 450 authors would be signing and selling their books for charity.

Since I had the rest of the afternoon to myself, I decided to check out the Atlanta Underground, an underground novelty shopping area where they were hosting the African-American Heritage Festival.

At the Underground, many artists were displaying and selling their work. I was immediately drawn to a woman’s work: vibrant, fascinating, painted paper on canvas collages.

I struck up a conversation with the artist and she told me her story. Her husband had lost his job and they were on the verge of losing their home so she was forced to find work.

She found housecleaning work for a white family in an upscale neighborhood, which made her feel bad about herself, but all she could think about was keeping her house. Her employers were nice, but she had to ride a bus for an hour each way to get to their home.

Everyday on the bus, she passed an art supply store. Every time she passed it, she thought, “Hey, I could be an artist. I’ve never done it before, but why not? Why not me?”

After six months, she finally got off the bus and used the last bit of money she had — six bucks — to buy two tubes of paint and a canvas. She started painting and never looked back.

She has sold to Bill Cosby, Gladys Knight and Oprah Winfrey’s father. She saved her house and has made enough money to support herself and her children after the death of her husband. With no training, only a steadfast belief in herself, she succeeded. She was an amazing, courageous woman.
Her story reminded me of my own, sans the success part. I told her how I was cleaning houses, putting myself through college in the late eighties, majoring in drama — not writing.

One of my clients was a writer. We talked a lot and he kept encouraging me to write my stories down.

One day, while I was cleaning his kitchen, he came in, slammed a notebook down on the counter and a pack of pens and said, “You know what that’s for.” Then he turned around and walked out. That was seventeen years ago. I filled that notebook and never stopped.

Both the artist and I talked about divine intervention, that we believed that the Universe/God had guided us to our futures. I left the Underground, feeling blessed I had run into that woman. She reminded me why I was there in Atlanta, to pursue my dream, to follow my path. She made me feel like I was going to make it. That if I just kept moving forward along my path, I would reach my goals.

As I walked back to my hotel, I started thinking about all the wonderful writers who had come to Atlanta to pursue their dreams. I realized that even though a lot of us hadn’t been published yet, that we were still lucky. Because for every woman who was there, following their dreams, there was a woman somewhere, too afraid to do the same. Women who only dreamed about writing, but couldn’t summon the courage to begin.

I realized that all the women at the conference were warriors. Each and every one of us braves that horrible pain of rejection every day, we face our fears and meet our challenges head on. I was so proud of all of us. I was so glad I was there.

DAY THREE: Went to some workshops, got some invaluable information, very pleased with the caliber of presenters. Found the Goody Room. YES! The luncheon was super fun, met a new friend (Yay, I’m not alone!).

I absolutely loved Meg Cabot’s keynote speech! After all the workshops, went for a swim with my new friend, then off to a welcome reception where I finally hooked up with my chapter buddies. Got some great info on online critique opportunities. My new friend and I went off for drinks afterwards, then we retired early. Once I was tucked neatly into bed, I realized that I was completely unprepared for my agent appointment. I didn’t have my laptop, no synopsis, nothing. So I ended up staying up until midnight writing pitches furiously. Hoped all to hell that they didn’t suck.

DAY FOUR: Woke up early, couldn’t get out of bed. Finally made it to a couple of awesome workshops. Learned why my romantic suspense wasn’t romantic enough nor suspenseful enough.

Then, I attended a publishers panel about their new erotica lines, the editor who had just rejected me happened to be there. Went up to her afterwards, (she remembered me!) and thanked her for her rejection letter because she’d also put some positives in it. She had said she liked my dialogue and that she’d like to see my future work. She was embarrassed at first, then pleased. I pitched another work, she gave me her card, I felt so much better.

Left there and found out about the publisher sponsored book signings. I thought you had to buy the books, then I found out they were giving out FREE BOOKS. You got in line, had your favorite author sign her latest book and then you just walked away with it. WOW! I was all over that one! Went to my new friend’s book signing (that was cool) then hit up another publisher’s book signing, Free books — yee-hah!

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He came in, slammed a notebook down on the counter and a pack of pens and said, “You know what that’s for.” Then he turned around and walked out.
After loading up on books, I attended the spotlight on the publisher Dorchester, where editors talk about their latest releases and talk about what they are looking for. After listening to them talk about their lines and how they liked interesting and funny book titles, I realized a book I wrote might be a good fit with their house. After their presentation, I approached an editor and pitched my futuristic romance, Tastes Just Like Chicken to him; he laughed and wanted to see a partial. Yay! Happy Janet!

After a few more workshops, realized that I was BURNT OUT. Worked out, bought a six dollar beer (gotta love hotels) and retreated to my room. Never made it out again. I was on information overload and homesick. Ran into women in the elevator on the way to my room who felt exactly like I did. Intense conference!

DAY FIVE: The Final Day. Awoke early, could not get out of bed, yet again. “You are missing the spotlight on MIRA books,” my brain nagged. “Shut up,” I replied. “What about that great seminar on solving the perfect murder?” “How about pretending to be the dead body?” I answered.

Finally got out of bed at nine with just enough time to get to my agent appointment. Had a group appointment, it went well. Really liked the agent. Went to a couple workshops, got some more free books and sat in on a few spotlights on publishers.

Luncheon was fantastic; keynote speaker Christina Dodd was very inspiring. She likened submitting manuscripts to pulling your pants down in front of a crowd of two thousand and asking, “What do you think?” Too true!

After lunch, got some more free books, then my friend and I went to dinner with a cultural anthropologist from Beloit University who was attending the conference so she could study the world of romance writers, readers, agents and editors. Great gal, we had a great time and decided to go the RITA awards ceremony together. What a wonderful evening. Rae Monet, a Black Diamond RWA member who attended our Prepare To Pitch conference, won a Golden Heart! Great awards show followed by a chocolate buffet. I love romance writers! Finally died at around midnight, went to my room and collapsed into bed.

On the plane back home, I sat across from a RWA San Francisco chapter member, great gal, great writing conversation. I was home by one that next afternoon, so happy to see my husband and so happy I went to Atlanta. What a great conference! Even though I was so tired after taking a bath, I clipped my toenails and accidentally took off the tip of my small toe — ouch!

I had been worried about attending the conference, not only because I’d just suffered that rejection letter but because I am weird. I have pink hair and prefer animal print, clothes with skulls on them and bracelets with studs. This is who I am, no matter how hard I’ve tried to fit in stylistically with the rest of society, I just don’t. In recent years, I’ve stopped trying to fit in and just concentrated on being who I am. Many people react strongly to me. They try to figure me out, try to determine what would cause someone to choose my style. While rarely outwardly hostile, people do make lots of comments.

We began talking and she asked me many questions. She was nice, but very curious. I felt like a bug being studied by an entomologist. When the speaker said some things that resonated with me, I said so, my neighbor agreed.

At one point, she said, “Just think, all the ladies in this room are full of stories.” In that moment, she and I realized the same thing. While we couldn’t look any more different on the outside, inside we were the same. We had the same hopes and dreams, we lived very
similar lives, we were more alike than not. It was a profound moment for the both of us.

I’ve never felt better about my craft, my path or myself.

Whenever I get one of those rejection letters, I will think about all those writers at the conference and in my chapter and thank them for being part of my team. I’ll think of that wonderful African-American artist and her trials and her accomplishments. I’ll think of the keynote speakers, their tales of years of rejections before their first sale.

And even though I’m locked away in my office from the rest of humanity most of the time, I now know this: I am not alone and I’m a not a loser. I’m just following my path.

Janet Periat was born and raised in the Bay Area and graduated from UC Santa Cruz with a degree in acting. She writes a humor column for Coast Views magazine, an advice column called “What Would Janet Do?” for the same publication and sells reprints of her humor column to The Funny Times. Along with writing romance novels, she writes short sexy fiction for a commercial website. She lives in San Mateo with her husband of nineteen years and her cat. In her spare time she gardens and rides her various two-wheeled contraptions. You can email her at janetperiat@yahoo.com

President's Corner
Writing Through Change
by Barbara Plum

Fall brings changes in most of our lives. Outside activities increase. Work deadlines loom larger. Plans for holidays begin. Our chapter is looking toward some changes as well.

In October, we'll present a slate of officers for election in December. Thanks to Ann Smitherman, Sonya Dow, and Rita St. Claire for serving on the Elections Committee. We'll be electing a new President, VP of Facilities, Programming VP. Thanks to Ann Smitherman and Rachel Taylor for returning as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. Thanks, also to our Webmisress, Ann Mallory and Membership Chair, Linda Hill. As a result of the elections, we're sure to have some changes in the chapter that will keep us strong and growing.

The meeting on September 30th is going to be an all day workshop by Cherry Adair (www.cherryadair.com) on dialogue and is promises to be a great one! If you have a financial need, contact me for scholarship information.

Mark your calendars now for December 9 (Saturday) from 10-2 for our second Holiday Party. More details will follow later, but we'll have elections and a fun business meeting as well as great food.

In the midst of change, some things remain the same. Our GOTCHA contest is drawing near. We have a new chair this year: Conference Czarina Norah Connors. I hope you'll think about volunteering to help judge or help with other tasks Norah identifies. I also challenge all of us to enter – maybe in a different category than in past years. Hey! This column is about change.

Our January 28th meeting with Margie Lawson promises to be excellent. Reserve the date on your calendar for this all-day event. Read more about the program on the Website (www.svrwa.com) and drop a few hints to your favorite elf that you’d love to attend.

Change is inevitable. Generally, I think of change as good. It forces me to get out of my rut, to think about things a little differently, to figure out new strategies.
Too often, I find little changes to my writing routine offer a perfect excuse not to write. I hope you won't fall in this same trap over the next few months.

What does not change for our chapter: we are writers. We write. Through good times and bad; through the mundane and the sublime.

We don't have to write for hours every day, but I think we have to make time – if we are writers rather than wannabes – to practice and hone our craft.

If you're stuck and need ideas, encouragement, or feedback, use the Chapter Loop (sv-RWA@yahoogroups.com), the brainstorming session after our meetings, or the networking time before and after meetings.

If you still need additional input, write to members privately. What does not change about us is that we all want each other to succeed, to get THE CALL, to see our book(s) in print, to soar.

Kicking off this season of change, I'm not closing with a quote, but with a request that more of you write an article for our newsletter in the coming months. Write about what excites you or provokes you or drives you. Go for it!

I didn’t yelp, or scream, but I could feel my stomach flip when she said, “I have your manuscript here and this is wonderful. I can’t believe you haven’t published . . .”

I gulped.

In December, Barbara will complete her second year as President of Silicon Valley RWA. Author of two contemporary novels, Prince of Frogs and Queen of the Universe, she writes about smart, modern women juggling careers, love, family and personal dreams. You can reach her at www.barbaraplum.com

Getting the Call
by Sherril Green
(aka Kathrynn Dennis)

On Monday, June 12 at 3:07 PM, I was staring at my computer screen and completely engrossed in chapter eight on my latest work in progress, when my phone rang.

“Hello,” I said, bracing the phone between my shoulder and ear while I typed.

“Sherril?”

“Yes?”

“This is Hilary.”

At that point, my heartbeat went into triple drive. My hands got sweaty. Utter astonishment and extreme anxiety stole most of my coherent thoughts.

I’d mailed my manuscript to Hilary Sares, editor at Kensington, barely a week ago. I’d been totally prepared to wait months, expecting to get a nice rejection. After all, she’d asked me for the full on Touch of the Spur, the manuscript she’d judged as first place in the SVRWA Gotcha contest. I’d sent her Horsewitch instead, begging off for time for another round of polishing “Spur.”

I heard her say, “I’d like to buy this one, and the other one, too . . .”

I have your manuscript here and this is wonderful. I can’t believe you haven’t published.
I leaned back in the chair and took a deep breath. She wanted both of them?

I managed to gush, “Thank you. Wonderful!” and mumble a few sentences about having to contact the agents on my short-list, agents I’d just met at the SVRWA Prepare to Pitch Conference.

Forty-eight hours later had a two book contract with Kensington Books.

It happened that fast.

That afternoon I called my husband. We went out for a four course meal and champagne.

I called my mom. I called my critique partners for an emergency session Skype session at 9:30 pm on a weekday night.

I talked to, or emailed SVRWA published authors who reassured me and offered good advice.

My first book’s shelf-date is planned for Aug/Sep, 2007. I’ll write under the pen name Kathrynn Dennis.

I don’t even know if Horsewitch will be the title, and I still find it hard to believe I’m off to the races.

I can’t begin to express my sincere thanks to the SVRWA chapter members who have helped me, but I’ll try: I thank you. It’s a privilege and a pleasure to be part of this group.

Sherril Green has been writing seriously for three years. Her manuscript, winner of the 2005 Golden Pen (contest under the title Horsewitch) has been retitled as Dark Rider and will be released by Kensington in August 2007. Sherril writes under the pen name Kathrynn Dennis (www.kdennis.com).

Wake Up and Write The Pages
by Susan Mitchell

I am not a morning person. My tendency is to while away the night and sleep through the various buzzer, radio, and watch alarms I have set in an often futile attempt to prod myself out of bed the next day.

One thing that invariably gets me going, however, is a phone call. Like the instant-on technology of newfangled printers that wake up ready to churn out documents with no warm-up delay, I evolve from an oblivious snorer to a cheerful conversationalist before the phone can ring a second time.

I’ve often wished for a programmable wakeup service that would call me when it was time to get up, especially after I’ve missed an early appointment or awakened to the knock of the airport limo service ready to pick up my slumbering family for a trip across the country.

When it comes to writing, discipline is all-important, that discipline of writing at least something every weekday.

Several months ago, however, I lost my momentum and found myself stuck, paralyzed by questions about my story and concerns about my abilities. I would have thoughts constantly swirling around my head about possible plot points and character issues, but I had no inclination to make the space and time to transfer any of it to a document.

The “Prepare to Pitch” conference held May 2006 by the Silicon Valley RWA chapter inspired Kayvan Sylvan to promote a brilliant solution, ready made for me. He offered to organize an early morning wake-up call, and I leaped at the chance to carve out such a previously inaccessible chunk of time from my schedule.

Others were interested in the concept, but, unlike me, were actually capable of rousing themselves early in the morning. Together, we formed the BICHOK club of folks dedicated to writing at least once a day, with our “Butt In Chair Hands On Keyboard.” We emailed each other news of our successes and difficulties, and we encouraged each other to keep it up or do better.

In the four months we’ve been in operation, Kayvan has been relentless in calling me daily at 5:00 AM, except for weekends and holidays, conceding to the later hour of 6:00 AM during the summer. I have derived a number of benefits from this approach, the primary one, of course, being that the words and pages add up quickly when a writer actually plunks herself down on a regular basis and doesn’t get up until something has been produced.

To ensure that the writing actually happens, the wake up call carries with it a double layer of encouragement and accountability. Kayvan knows if he’s awakened me because we have a brief conversation every morning. And my husband has his own ways of knowing what’s going on.

Keith Mitchell, while supportive, does not exactly thrill to the phone’s aural assault. Each morning, he faces his own Hercules at the crossroads: “Should I pull her back into my arms, or kick her out if she decides to stay in bed?”

If I dive back under the warm covers too often, he’s been known to speak up about his irritation: “If I have to put up
with the blasted ringing, you actually have to get up and get going!” It’s a lot to ask a husband to endure, but that’s what book dedications and acknowledgment pages are all about, eh?

Unexpectedly, discipline in one area often spills over into more rigor in other areas. Once I’ve spilled my quota of words on the page, I find myself making a nicer-than-usual breakfast, straightening the house before my two youngsters can mess it up again, throwing in a load of laundry. This makes hubby happy, too.

I confess that I don’t always use the time to write about my creative WIP. I also use the time to write articles like this one, a spiritual blog, technical writing feature stories, and reports on things going on in my life. The most important thing to me, though, is that this golden hour is devoted to producing words in sufficient quantity that my works are being published through various venues as a result.

Thanks, Kayvan!

Editor's Note: You can join BICHOK by visiting
http://tinyurl.com/kbefb

Meeting Recap (6/2006)
Wolves and Ravens
by Rita St. Claire

This is a recap of Eva Gordon's June 2006 presentation.
A biologist by background, Eva has used her continuing interest in this scientific discipline to enrich her writing and the writing of others. Eva gave us an informative, interesting, and inspiring presentation about wolves and ravens as archetypes in fantasy writing.

Since the handouts of her presentation and bibliography are so packed with information, in this article I will simply add random items from the notes I took at the meeting to supplement the handouts, and recap the questions we asked Eva.

She has graciously granted permission for me to photocopy her handouts for those of you who would like a copy.

If you want, please contact me at mail@ritastclaire.com and I will bring a copy for you to the next meeting, or I can mail you a copy if need be.

Notes From Slide Presentation

Wolf Facts

Wolves have a variety of eye colors: dark eyes, yellow eyes, green eyes.

Forms of Wolf Behavior

Howling/Vocal Communication
- Eva played wonderful CD’s with examples of different vocalizations, such as howling, growling, etc.

Social order - wolves mate for life.

It seems to have been common in wild areas long ago, for example, in India and Italy, for a wolf to foster human children (see Romulus and Remus).

Communication of emotions
Displayed by tail positions.

Tail straight up - intimidation

Tail straight out (parallel to ground) attack/arousal position

Susan Mitchell writes contemporary women's fiction, Java technology related features, success stories, and case studies (www.jcp.org), and maintains a weekly spiritual blog (www.phoshozoe.org). You can reach her at susan@mitchlink.com
Reintroduction of the Wolf

After 70 years of absence wolves are being reintroduced in Arizona. This is causing some problems between Arizona ranchers and the Apache tribes – the Apaches want brother wolf back, and some ranchers don’t, worrying about their livestock.

Wolves are also being reintroduced in Minnesota.

Wolves have also been reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park because the aspen were disappearing. Now the aspen are starting to come back. Wolves are key predators of the elk who forage the aspen, and their reappearance has reduced the elk’s over-foraging of the trees.

Ravens

The corvid bird family also includes blue jays.

Ravens are larger than crows. Most of the birds in the South Bay are crows; we see more ravens on the Peninsula.

Facts about Ravens

They can imitate human speech, and the sounds of other species.

Eva told the story of a man in Alaska who had a dog. Every time the dog barked, the man threw a piece of steak outside for the dog. One day the man was inside with his dog and heard the sound of his dog barking outside. When he went outside he found the barking came from a raven!

Ravens are omnivorous scavengers but are fond of eating flesh. They eat already dead animals; they don’t attack and kill. When they eat, they start with the eye balls. Ugh!

Raven Behavior

They hide their food, for example, under twigs.

They like to play with wolf cubs.

The Raven in New World Myths

Some tribes also believe the raven brought fire to man.

From Sacred Spirit Guide to Servants of the Devil:

In the Bible, Noah sent out the raven, and he didn’t come back, but the dove did. (Eva thinks perhaps the raven didn’t come back because there would have been many dead bodies of animals floating on the water as food for the raven, so he didn’t have to come back.)

In ancient France, a bad priest was often represented as a raven, and a bad nun as a magpie.

More Wolf Facts

Wolves on occasion killed livestock and when infected with rabies became mad and killed anyone in sight. The wolf had to be hunted and exterminated.

Commenting on this, Eva asked us to imagine how we would feel if we lived in a small village and a pack of twelve wolves with rabies was running around the village. When you put yourself in the villagers’ position, you can begin to understand how fear of the wolf came about.

Wolf Bane and Other Ways One Can Become a Werewolf

In certain parts of Italy long ago, the superstition was that if you were a male born on Christmas day, you’d become a werewolf, if you were a female born on Christmas day, you’d become a witch.

Questions and Answers

How many packs in a typical litter?

Wolf litters are similar to those of dogs – there could be four to six pups, even as many as nine.
At what point do pups move out of the litter?

They don’t move out, they stay with the pack. There are few lone wolves, because it is very hard to join a pack.

Then why would you ever have a lone wolf?

Disease can wipe out a pack, except for a few, and sometimes even only one is left. Sometimes two wolves will roam in a pair, and then one dies. Sometimes a wolf gets rejected from a pack.

Wherever there are wolves, are there usually ravens?

Yes, and in Europe the raven is associated with the wolf. There are many stories of wolves and ravens there, for example, wolves and ravens ate the soldiers’ dead bodies that were strewn around the forests in World War I.

What’s the difference between a wolf and a dog?

Although genetically they aren’t very different and have much in common, wolves and dogs are separate species. “Wolves always look like wolves,” Eva says, whereas dogs have changed in appearance over time. Dogs have been domesticated for thousands of years, and their behavior reflects this. For example, most of the time, a dog will try to act like an alpha, even to a Rottweiler!

Here’s an interesting factoid Eva shared with us: If you point somewhere, a dog will look in that direction (a wolf will not). Dogs are the only animal species that will do this.

What about wolves and coyotes?

When you remove wolves, the coyotes take over. Coyotes kill for fun, wolves kill only to eat. (But coyotes are afraid of people, so if you encounter one, just make yourself look big and they’ll go away.)

Writing Exercise

After her inspiring presentation, Eva gave us a writing exercise. First she had us close our eyes, while she sprayed the scent of sage around our tables, to get rid of negative energy and open up our creativity.

While we kept our eyes closed, she played soft music and drummed for us softly. After a few minutes, she had us open our eyes and write, asking us to write a fable about a wolf or a raven, or an animal of our choosing. I for one, felt inspired, and my writing seemed to flow after this preparation. I enjoyed writing a couple of paragraphs to start my very own wolf/raven/Native American fable. Thank you, Eva!

Rita St. Claire has been a member of SVRWA since January 2005, and has been writing for two years. A finalist in several contests, her main interest is women’s fiction, and she is currently pursuing publication of her first novel, Lost Mountain, awaiting feedback from several agents and editors to whom she has submitted partials. For more about Rita, see www.ritastclaire.com.

Editor's Corner
by Laura and Kayvan Sylvan

(The following is taken from various sources on the Internet.)

This is so funny that it will boggle your mind. And you will keep trying at least 50 more times to see if you can outsmart your foot, but you can't.

1. While sitting at your desk, lift your right foot off the floor and make clockwise circles.

2. Now, while doing this, draw the number “6” in the air with your right hand.

Your foot will change direction. Try it right now!

This has been the Editor's Corner, where we strive to creatively waste at least a minute of your time!
Reflections of a Two-Timer
by Christine Grissom

This is my very first attempt at writing an article (I’ve never written so much as a classified ad), so be kind. If you can’t be kind – be discreet. My fledgling author feelings may not be able to withstand criticism.

Yeah, right! With that attitude I should seriously consider keeping my day job and simply step away from the keyboard.

Okay, so I pulled you in with a hook. I’m shameless – I readily admit – and no, I do not need to be fitted for a scarlet emblem on my chest. Fortune has smiled on me, making the 2006 RWA-Atlanta conference my second pilgrimage to romance writer’s Nirvana.

I’ll try to provide the Cliff Notes version instead of the War & Peace version of my impressions the second time around. If I were only given one word to describe the conference, I would have to use “fabulous.”

The food was good considering the number of people to feed. The conference hotel accommodating – anytime we needed something the staff was quick to provide it. Regrettfully, I was stuck in overflow at the Hilton and it was less than desirable. There were plenty of great workshops, NY Times best-selling authors to listen and learn from, publisher’s spotlights, etc.

A personal favorite was an off-site event at the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum. Meg Cabot, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Julia Quinn and Stephanie Laurens all presented their unique views on writing at this special event. Attendees enjoyed a private tour of Margaret’s former apartment. (Knowing she had written Gone With The Wind in that very place was awe inspiring to me.) Listening to those talented authors was a kick in the pants. They all have a great sense of humor and hysterical comedic pacing.

I will tell you all about one workshop I attended, which pulled me in with the subject hook, much as I may have done with you all.

I thought it was going to be a workshop on how different methods employed to kill -- affected the body post-mortem, but in reality was a workshop on what actually happens to the body once it’s released from the hospital, sent to the morgue and eventually to the funeral home. Interesting stuff and on a positive note, I finally made my decision regarding cremation versus burial.

I have decided on burial. This is wholly based on the Q&A period after the workshop. A brave soul in the back asked, “Is it true that breast implants must be popped prior to cremation?”

That question was answered in the affirmative. Yikes! Personally I only have what Nature intended flopping around on my front side – lacking, sure, but we can’t all be built like Dolly Parton. Yet, it makes me slightly squamish at the thought of those women having to face death and cremation knowing their after-market boobs require deflation or they could pop in the middle of the burning process to spew, sizzle and otherwise wreak havoc on the staid process. Not I. The other major check box in the “pro” column was that once embalmed and interred within your eternal resting chamber (or coffin for all you Buffy types) your body would not decompose.

This bit of trivia brought about a spirited debate about the merits of burial, especially if you’ve had work done to your chest area. I’m sorry to report the conversation digressed from there – as you can well imagine.

One writer opined, “Post-Mortem Perky” and how that might make a great paranormal...
novel premise and book title. Another confirmed the excellence of this idea by adding to the overall book title cleverness, “Post Mortem Perky – A Tale of Two Titties.”

Convention – where else can you find like-minded women and men who speak of the voices in their heads with perfect seriousness without fear of incarceration in the local funny farm? Where else can you have a conversation where a writer admits to learning martial arts, weaponry and the like to bring realism to her tale (personally I hope she doesn’t murder someone in some heinous way just to see how the villain might feel once the feat was accomplished).

Attending a convention can inspire, broaden your network, help you hone your craft, and allow you to meet some of the most generous people in this industry. They share their time and talent and love of the business with you. What could be better than that?

The answer to that is a book deal – but while you’re waiting for that wonderful day to arrive; time spent at a convention can help you find your path. You can laugh, you can meet new people, you can leave with the inspiration needed to get your butt glued to that chair and write your own story.

GOTCHA! 2006 Contest
Catch that Editor's Attention with the GOTCHA!

RWA Silicon Valley chapter revs up for its 9th annual GOTCHA! contest!

Fee
$25 ($22 for Members of Silicon Valley, SFA, Monterey and Black Diamond Chapters)

Deadline
Received by November 8, 2006

Eligibility
Not published in category entered. For Gotcha! Contest eligibility, “published in a category” means any form of publication of a fictional work in that category of more than novella length (more than 20,000 words), including self-publication in print or on a writer's own website not restricted by a password.

Enter
First 15 pages of manuscript. Top 3 winners in each category are sent to an editor. Winners have 2 weeks to revise the 15-page entry prior to editorial review.

First round judges
One published author and three experienced writers. Lowest score is dropped and three highest determine final score. All score sheets will be returned. Top three winners in each category will be sent to an Editor. The winners will have two weeks to revise their 15 page entry prior to Editorial review.

2006 participating editors
Series contemporary/traditional:
Susan Litman, Silhouette

Single title contemporary:
Kerry Donovan, NAL

Series mystery/romantic suspense:
Jessica Alvarez, Silhouette

Single title mystery/romantic suspense:
Christopher Keeslar, Dorchester

Historical (before 1920):
Hilary Sares, Kensington

Paranormal/time travel/specialty:
Jessica Wade, Berkley/Jove

For more details see
www.svrwa.com

Christine Grissom is an unpublished author of women's fiction. She joined RWA in May of 2004 and SVRWA in May of 2006. When not writing, she can be found slaving away at her day job managing projects for a well-known computer maker. She lives with her husband and two boys, loves to read, prefers caramel to chocolate and is addicted to Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey ice cream. You can contact her at grissom1994@sbcglobal.net.
Writing Craft Corner
The Premise
by Katie Lovette

The following article appeared in the April 2006 issue of Smoke Signals, newsletter of the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers.

What is a story's Premise? The Premise is the issue that is being illustrated, the core belief that provokes the characters into action. What is an issue? It is the basic driving force of human nature: love, hate, greed, jealousy, etc., and is the heart of the story.

Each character in the story faces the Premise and either succeeds or fails. The bad guys are killed or jailed because they cannot refrain from committing the crime and the hero gets the girl because he brings to an end the evil or wrong doing. The bad guy fails and the good guy succeeds.

Two good examples are “The Transporter” movies. In each, greed is the Premise. In the first movie the transporter, who follows the rules and is not greedy, halts those who are smuggling illegal aliens into the country for huge profits. He prevents evil from happening, prevailing over the bad guys. In the second, a child is kidnapped and infected with a virus. The child is used as a tool to murder the father, who is preventing the kidnappers from making large amounts of money.

Do not confuse Premise with the Concept or the Message. A Premise allows for several avenues to discuss and answer the issue. The Concept is how the Premise is presented, how the story tells it. The Message is presented and has only one outcome or one correct answer.

A good example of a Message versus Premise can be found in the movie “A Knight's Tale.” The Premise is pretending. The Message is why do we pretend to be something we are not? The Concept is a servant pretends to be a knight in hopes of changing his station in life.

Today's popular fiction has either a Premise or a Message. Award-winning books or movies always have a strong Premise. For example, the Premise of this year's Academy Awards Best Picture Crash was racism. The Message presented is that each of us is a racist to some degree. Although this is still a controversial subject, this script enticed plenty of Hollywood talent to take a role.

In the Romance genre, the hero and heroine are representatives of the Premise and this dictates the way they act and react to the issue and conflict. To add to the conflict, the hero and heroine have opposing ideas and reactions to the Premise. To illustrate this, make jealousy the Premise.

Have your hero be extremely jealous of any man who is near the heroine. Have the heroine not experience jealousy because she trusts the hero to be faithful to her. Thus, the hero believes that the heroine does not love him and the heroine is afraid to talk to anyone.

Showing how each main character handles the plot points, the meeting, the first kiss, the love scene, the dark moment, the resolution, as well as the external and internal conflicts adds to characterization.

Katie Lovette is the author of Loving Care for Alzheimer's Patients and is a charter member of SMRW.

A Writing Exercise
by Kayvan Sylvan

Since our chapter president is fond of saying that it's not important what you write, it is important that you write, here is a writing prompt for you to use for some fun writing.

Expand on the following premise: A man bumps into his ex-girlfriend while shopping for a wedding ring for his fiancée. He once told her that “I'm not the marrying type.” Use the words conquest, rat, and swiss cheese in your dialogue. Have fun!

Kayvan Sylvan is a writer, hypnotherapist, software consultant and a lot of other things. He had the honor of being one of three guys at the Prepare To Pitch conference.
A Little Night Music
(a typical critique group e-mail exchange)
by Sonja Getty and Sally Jane Driscoll

Sonja Getty wrote:
“I don’t have much of a problem with dialogue anywhere else except a love scene. I know I need to add dialogue, but that is so hard for me to write.”

Sally Jane Driscoll wrote:
“Hmmm...”
“Hmmm!”
“Mmm-mmm.”
“Mmm-hmm.”
“Ahhh.”
“Ahhhh!”
“OOH!”
“Oo-HOO!”
“EEK!”
“YIKES!”
“Mmmmm...”
“Mmmmm...”
“Phew.”
“Phew.”
“Zzz.”
“Zzzzzzz....”

Sonja Getty wrote:
“ROFL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Chocolate News

Paula McElwee is featured as an “author in waiting” on www.tamidee.com – including excerpts of the manuscripts she is submitting.

Mardi Ballou and Cricket Starr/Janet Miller’s seminar on short erotic fiction “Hot, Short and To The Point,” given at the Prepare To Pitch conference has been selected for the program at the 2007 Romantic Times Convention in Houston.

Rita St. Claire made it to the second round of the Molly and got great feedback from an agent judge. She also finaled in the Golden Synopsis contest.

Norah Connors finaled in the 2006 Sheila with her manuscript Toys in Babeland.

Alice Gaines who was a conference attendee at the Prepare To Pitch conference, sold the book she pitched to Raelene Gorlinsky at the conference of Cerridwen. Her working title is The Golden One.

Rachel Taylor is expecting a baby girl in January. Barring unexpected circumstances (like she isn't a girl after all), her name will be Brooke.

Linda Hill had requests from Mary Sue Seymour, one of the agents at the Prepare To Pitch conference, for all her completed manuscripts. Last month she expressed interest in book #2, A Cry in the Night. She made some suggestions on how to strengthen the heroine which Linda is in the process of implementing.

Claudia Levin has completed a little more than 200 pages of a first draft WIP romantic suspense entitled Finding Grace. She has been getting up early in the morning and writing for about 2 hours nearly every day.

Anne Lum's Harlequin Writing Round Robin win from last year got e-published this month as part of a special Mini Round Robin eBook! Check it out at http://tinyurl.com/jop5u!

“I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” — Albert Einstein
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Meeting Information

Crowne Plaza San Jose  
777 Bellew Drive  
Milpitas, CA 95035

Phone: 408-321-9500

Registration begins at 8:30am.  
From 9:00 AM to noon enjoy  
the camaraderie of fellow  
authors as well as a breakfast  
buffet.

We will have the usual  
activities: book raffle, sharing  
news, chocolate, etc.

Price is $18 for members, $21  
for guests.

In the event of a longer  
workshop, or full day event,  
prices may be higher.

Reservations requested.  
Please contact: Janet Miller  
at janet@miramontes.com

Future Meetings

2006

• September 30 -  
Cherry Adair  
- All day workshop!  
How to make dialogue shine  
on the page.

• October 28 -  
Phyllis Humphrey  
- “Word” Person  
or “Story” Person: Which  
are You?

• November 18 -  
Rachelle Chase  
- How to get  
published by accident

• December 9, 10am-2pm -  
SVRWA holiday party at the  
Crowne Plaza - free for  
members, 18 and over only

2007

• January 27 -  
Margie Lawson  
- Empowering Characters'  
Emotions workshop

• February 24 -  
Mary Mackey  
- topic TBA

• March 24 -  
Lynna Banning  
(aka Carolyln Woolston)  
- Bring first page for critique!

• April 28 -  
Alice LaPlante  
Workshop: Show not tell.

Submission Deadlines

Submit articles and chocolate  
news by the 5th of each month.

Email articles in Word format to  
svrwa-editor@sylvan.com and  
include short bio and attach  
your picture (face shot).

Send chocolate news to  
chocolate-news@sylvan.com

Planned publication date is the  
15th of each month.