



ROMANTICS

Special Edition

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The Good in Judging Others

By Carrie Lewis

I could lie and say I didn't see the call go out over my board's general loop, but the truth is I remember reading the request and deleting the email. My life is too busy. I have too much to do. It's summer time. And besides, I have never judged a contest before.

Delete. Just like that I forgot about it.

It's true that our board makes a lot of our money off our contest, money that goes towards bringing in guest speakers and providing workshops for the members. But I was too busy. Just like everyone else.

Then a second, more urgent email showed up in my inbox. They were short of judges and those that had already taken up the challenge of reading other people's chapters were working fiendishly trying to get through the stacks of submissions. So I gave in and agreed to do a batch.

One batch worked out to be six submissions and along with each chapter and synopsis came a detailed checklist of how to perform a thorough evaluation.

I was relieved, truth be told. I had never

judged anything before. I had only recently hooked up with a critique partner and even then I only felt at all useful because of some of the writing books I had read. This detailed judge's form broke down the components and trained me how to read *critically*.

I took my new role as judge seriously and tackled the first submission leisurely at my dining room table on a Sunday morning with a cup of coffee in one hand and my cat begging attention from my other. Sometimes the writing amazed me with the originality and strength of voice. Sometimes I smiled in remembrance of mistakes I used to make, or those with which I still struggle. As I read, I jotted observations in the margins.

The dreaded synopsis had its own section in our evaluation with questions like: *Do the hero and heroine change by the end of the manuscript?* It was amazing how many of the synopses didn't explicitly show that. It amazed me that my own didn't always show that.

By the fifth submission, I was by the pool (instead of in it) and feeling the pressure of the deadline. The sixth was done the night before the judging deadline while

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Opening Lines

"It's hard to meet nice guys when you sell sex toys for a living."

NICE GIRLS FINISH FIRST
by Alesia Holliday (Berkley Sensation, 2005)

Joining Toronto Romance Writers

If you would like to:

- Join our chapter
- Learn more about our chapter
- Find out more about attending a meeting
- Contact us for any reason

You can email us at torontoromancewriters@yahoo.com

Or visit our website at torontoromancewriters.com

What I've Learned Along the Way: Your goals are not my goals, because your needs are not mine

By Margaret Moore

While attending a conference or even your local RWA chapter meeting, it's easy to start believing that everybody else is doing better than you are. They're writing ten books (or partials) a year, they're winning contests, they're getting multi-book deals from more than one publisher, making lists and "breaking out" in a big way.

That's all very wonderful and exciting, but here's what I've learned in my fifteen years as a published writer: they are writing so prolifically, entering those contests and working as they do because it fulfills their goals, and their goals may not be the same as mine. Their needs, as a writer or an individual, are, in fact, probably not the same. We all have vastly different reasons for what we do, bred in the bone and the product of years. Yet it's unfortunately easy to forget our own goals—the reasons we started writing in the first place—and get caught up in somebody else's definition of success.

For some, success means making the New York Times bestseller list. For others, it's winning awards or getting multi-book deals or writing ten books a year. Writers with this sort of "obvious" success as their primary goal may take a more calculated look at what's selling and what's not, and then write books designed to have broadest popular appeal. They'll spend money on PR and publicists. They are commer-

cial" writers, and they are proud of the rewards earned by their hard work and focus.

On the other end of the scale are what I'd call the "artistic purists." They would never, ever consider writing anything other than "a work of the heart." If their work sells, obviously it is to a very perceptive and intelligent editor. If it sells only 2,000 copies? That's okay, too, because those are Very Discerning, Intelligent Readers. Such writers absolutely resist any commercial consideration when it comes to their work. They are artists, and proud of it.

The "artistic purists" condemn commercial writers as money-grubbing hacks; to the purists, they are failures. The commercial writers think the artists are excusing their failure to make it big.

I think both types of writers have ample justification for their pride and neither are failures. The failure lies in the yardstick, because there is not, nor should there be, only one measure of success. Yet many people believe there is, and it just happens to coincide with their own particular yardstick.

But we who struggle to create individual, unique characters should be the first to realize this simply isn't so. We don't know what drives the individual writer, what their "backstory" is, so why should we presume to cast judgement on his or her motives, or their goals, or how they measure success? Maybe the writer who craves making the NY-Times list was belittled and teased during her school days. Maybe she never felt quite good enough. Making that list will be one sure-fire way to prove that she is, to everybody. Or maybe another author grew up poor and won't feel secure without a large bank account.

Maybe the artistic writer saw a friend or relative stuck in a dead-end job where they had monetary success, but was creatively stifled and bitter. Or did somebody impress upon her that what is popular cannot also be well written, good or valid?

I think most writers fall somewhere in between these two extremes, and for reasons as varied as the writers themselves. When I began writing, my goals were to (a) tell a good story that would entertain people, (b) tell it well enough to sell it and (b) make some extra money. After I sold, my goals shifted slightly, to (a) tell even better stories so (b) I could keep selling and (c) make more money so we could be debt-free and send the kids to university. I knew that as a category writer, I'd never make the New York Times list, and that was okay, because I also knew that as a category writer, I could have more than one book out per year, and the sales were relatively stable, too.

Then I began to see people who'd sold after me "breaking out" and making lists. And frankly, it bothered me. I started to chafe at being a category writer, even though I'd been very happy writing what I wanted to write the way I wanted to write it, and making good money, too. Nevertheless, I decided *Something Must Be Done*, and I did it. Some things were good, some...not so much. In fact, trying to write what I thought would be more popular proved to be a disaster for me. Yes, I was making more money writing for two houses, but personally? I was miserable, stressed out and getting ever closer to burn out. I had adopted goals that were not my own, and the joy of creativity—one of the reasons I'd started writing in the first place—deserted me.

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Chatting With...

Kate Bridges

By Maureen
McGowan



This month I'm chatting with Harlequin Historicals author Kate Bridges whose latest book, *The Commander*, will hit the shelves on July 1, 2006.

Maureen McGowan: Kate, thanks for agreeing to chat with our fellow TRW members. Did you always want to be a writer?

Kate Bridges: It's my pleasure to be here. I've wanted to be a writer ever since I was a teenager. I loved all kinds of fiction and felt in my heart I would one day write a novel, but always thought it would be during retirement. In my youth, I thought only old people wrote books. When my daughter was born, I took time off work and decided that maybe I could write a few stories before I turned 65. And 65 doesn't seem so old anymore.

MM: I'm glad you got to it young! What did you do before finding your calling as a writer?

KB: I was a pediatric intensive care nurse for ten years. Then I studied architecture and interior design and worked in television production as a researcher and writer for a design show. It's all great background material for a writer. A lot of my historicals have medical characters.

MM: Wow. What a diverse and interesting background. Tell us about your first sale. How many manuscripts had you written? Did you have an agent?

KB: I'd written three partials, but the first full manuscript I wrote was the historical that sold—*The Doctor's Homecoming*. I did have an agent and he called one Valentine's Day to tell me he had a Valentine's present for me—that Harlequin Historicals had

just called with a contract offer.

MM: Now that's what I'd call a perfect Valentine's present! What did you do to celebrate?

KB: At the time, I had quit my day job to write full time, so money was tight. The day I got the call I went to the gas station and said something I hadn't said in a long time, "Fill it up." And then to the grocery store and told my family, "You can put anything you want in the cart today." That evening, my husband took me to my favorite restaurant. Never mind all those groceries!

MM: I'm always amazed by the "wild" things our members have done to celebrate ☺. Didn't Kelley Armstrong say she bought a laser printer? You girls are wild! So, how have you celebrated later milestones?

KB: I went to New York for the award ceremonies when I was nominated for my first award—and completely shocked—Romantic Times' Best Western of the Year for my first Mountie novel, *The Surgeon*. To mark the occasion, I went shopping at Macy's for a pearl brooch. It's very pretty, inexpensive, and means a lot to me. Also, whenever I get a new contract for a new novel, I donate part of the proceeds to global UNICEF to help children in other parts of the world. I guess it's the pediatric nurse in me, and one small way I can help.

MM: That's lovely. Now I feel badly about joking, earlier. How did your life change when you became a published author?

KB: Your comments are making me smile, so please don't stop! Since publication, nothing has changed on the outside. But a lot of great feelings on the inside.

MM: I'll bet! Where do you get your inspiration? Characters first? Plot? Dreams? Divine intervention?

KB: Usually characters first but sometimes plot. Quite often, photographs inspire me. I was in the airport four

years ago when I spotted a postcard of a group of Mounties in the late 1800s standing knee-high in snow beside a dogsled team. A chill went through me and I knew instantly that I would write about them. I bought the postcard, am looking at it right now pinned to my bulletin board, and here I am three years later with 5 Mountie novels and 3 novellas. The same thing happened in IKEA two years ago. I spotted a gorgeous photograph of colorful raw spices—and suddenly the heroine in my Christmas novella was the owner of that spice shop in 1887, *A Season of the Heart*.

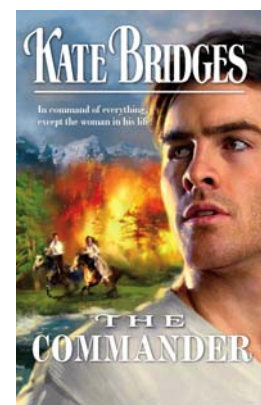
MM: Are you a plotter or a seat-of-your-pantser?

KB: A combination. Because I now sell on synopses and partials, it was in my best interest to learn how to plot ahead of time. Although I usually know where I'm going in a scene, I have no idea how to get there. Often times the characters surprise me by doing something completely different than I expected. I let them.

MM: Coke or Pepsi?

KB: Pepsi all the way!

MM: Tell us a little about *The Commander*.



KB: *The Commander* is a Mountie novel set in Calgary. This one is about Ryan Reid, a man who left town ten years earlier accused of murder. He's

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Judging Others Cont'd

waiting for my toenails to dry.

With a click of a button, I sent my electronic judging forms off and returned to my current WIP to prepare it for my next critique meeting. Except something changed when I read through my chapter. I had increased awareness of the individual components that make up a scene and I could better evaluate them on an individual basis.

When I commented on this to friends who had also judged this year, they all agreed that judging helped them with their editing and writing. After all, it is significantly

easier to see flaws in other people's work. That is why we have critique partners or groups. In our head, we see what we *mean* to say, not necessarily how it actually *is* on the page.

As a judge, I learned how to read more like an editor, how to isolate components and pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. Fixing them is something altogether different, but you can't fix something if you don't yet see the problem.

As I finished this article, an RWA email appeared in my inbox calling for judges for the 2007 Golden Heart and/or RITA contest. It's a great opportunity especially if you have never judged before.

For all the details, go to www.rwanatinal.org and click on "My Contest" on the left-hand side of the home page. You will be able to choose between the Golden Heart and RITA, and even pick your category preferences. Beyond helping out RWA and giving valuable feedback to hopeful writers, it is a great opportunity to shift your perspective and strengthen your editing and writing skills.

Carrie Lewis is the PRO Liaison for Toronto Romance Writers.

Hey Jude

THIS MONTH'S GRAMMAR 101 - You only have baited breath if you've been eating worms.

Yes, language lovers, we're going to talk about the Horrible Homonyms. Words that sound identical, but have different meanings (also called homophones).

For example, the correct expression is 'bated breath.' The derivation is *abated* – in other words, you're holding your breath waiting for something to happen.

Misuse of homonyms is becoming rampant in romance novels, so it's important you educate yourself; you can't depend on anyone else who reads your manuscript to be better informed. Here are some homonyms I've seen incorrectly used all too often.

Peak means crest or summit; **peek** means a furtive look. If your heroine peaks under the covers it doesn't mean she looks, it means she

reaches, um, fulfillment. Please make sure that's really what you mean. To **complement** means to balance or complete (her fabulous shoes complemented her outfit); to **compliment** means to admire or praise (he complimented her on her fabulous shoes).

And the most Horrible Homonym of them all – **its** and **it's**. My advice? Don't try to memorize any complicated rules about apostrophes. Instead, simply remember that **it's is always a contraction** (usually of 'it is' or 'it has') and use that as a check. If you write 'her fabulous shoe lost it's heel' are you saying that 'her shoe lost it is heel'? No. So you lose the apostrophe, and her shoe loses *its* heel.

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION

Hey Jude—If I don't know I've made a mistake, how do I know how to correct it? - Baffled in Buffalo

Dear Baffled: I'm so glad you asked, because, while it's difficult to know what you don't know, there are some tools you can use to help yourself.

When it comes to homonyms, for

instance, the spellchecker on your word processor is not your friend—but the thesaurus is, because it gives you synonyms, thereby telling you what the word *means*. Pay attention to the squeaky little voice in the back of your head that tries to get your attention when you're not absolutely sure about a word (yes, you know the voice I'm talking about). Then, right then and there, do a quick check using either the thesaurus on your computer or the one on your desk.

If you don't have a thesaurus on your desk, Jude begs you to purchase one immediately. Not one of those pathetic alphabetical things, either – those are for writing essays, not creative fiction. You want an abundance of word choices full of subtlety and nuance, and for that you need a thesaurus organized by subject.

Any time there is even the teeniest, tiniest, most minute iota of doubt in your mind about any word, take a second to **look it up**. You—and your readers—will be happy you did. Have a grammar question? Send it to heyjude-@sympatico.ca.

The Un-rejected Synopsis

By Joan Frantschuk

A synopsis states in chronological sequence the significant external events of the plot and the internal evolution of the characters through those events.

A good synopsis is one that an editor can't reject because all the elements are there: a compelling and complete story that fits the requirements of the target line.

Each year, I judge a number of contest entries for my two RWA affiliates, the Toronto Romance Writers and the online group From the Heart Romance Writers. Each of these entries comes with a synopsis which is judged.

After completing the judging for this year, I went through all my comments to the authors. Here is what I believe constitutes a synopsis that will grab an editor's attention and lead to acceptance.

Use Your Space Wisely

Many synopses spent a great deal of time re-stating the entry. This forced the rest of the story into too small a space to do it justice.

For example, your entry is 50 pages and your target line is a maximum of 250 pages. Re-stating the entry should occupy approximately 1/5 of the entire synopsis. In a three-page synopsis, that will be 3/5, or just over half, of a single page. In a six-page synopsis, you'll have 6/5, or just over one full page.

The same test can be applied to the midpoint at half way through, and the black moment, usually occurring around the 2/3 to 3/4 mark.

If math makes your head hurt, just remember to keep the space allotted to the entry in proportion to length of the total synopsis. If you've taken four of six pages to re-tell your entry,

you need to do some serious chopping.

One style of synopsis includes an introductory section with a story hook and character sketches for the hero and heroine. If you're using this style, consider how long this section is relative to the total synopsis, and make sure you've still covered the main points of your story.

Research your Target Line

The hero's family has called in the heroine for up-to-the-minute techniques on how to get the farm ready for a quick sale before financial ruin hits. The hero doesn't want the farm sold and believes he can save it using the tried and true methods. He could also save the farm by marrying another woman. But, there's this attraction between the hero and heroine. She is engaged to the man her father cares for like a son. So far, so good; you can see lots of opportunity for conflict. Then more conflict was added in the criminal activities of the other woman's father who's creating the financial ruin. The heroine is kidnapped by the other woman's father in order to blackmail the hero into marrying his daughter.

When I researched the target line on eharlequin.com, the requirements were an emotional character-driven plot focused on the hero and heroine. To keep the focus firmly on the couple in a short (50k to 55k words) contemporary, I suggested that the other woman's father and his nefarious deeds be eliminated from the plot. I felt, the streamlined story was better suited to the line.

The most effective way to get a feel for a target line is to buy a subscription (if available) and read the books. A careful analysis of the characters and circumstances favored by the editors and readers will get that synopsis accepted.

Another targeted line clearly stated 60k to 65k was required. The entry stated the length to be almost 80k.

That information alone would get the editor to reject a submission as 'doesn't meet requirements'.

If your target line demands a subplot, it had better be there, fully stated with goals and motivations, conflicts and resolutions, just like the main plot. If it's missing, that's another easy rejection.

The Devil's in the Details

Unless the color of the heroine's eyes, or the hero's automotive preferences, are pivotal plot details, they don't belong in a synopsis. Neither do the names of minor characters like the housemaid or secretary unless they impact the plot. Dialogue is forbidden, as are rhetorical questions.

Avoid scene by scene re-enactments. Stick to the big story. Several scenes can frequently be connected with an inclusive statement like 'Danni and Carter share a special weekend at the cottage where they make love for the first time.'

Setting details that are key to the story do belong; sketch them quickly and show their impact. Describe relationships with secondary characters concisely and avoid irrelevant details. Once you name a character and state the relationship, use that name or relationship every time the character hits the page. He's and she's can be confusing.

Reveal Your Goal, Motivation and Conflict

In the chapter portion of the entry, it's perfectly acceptable, even *de rigueur*, to reveal the goal, motivation and conflict gradually. In a synopsis, state it baldly: 'Ethan has abandonment issues stemming from his mother's death when he was seven, so his adult relationships are possessive and jealous'. There's no need to chew up whole paragraphs to explain it. Judges, editors, and agents can figure out the emotional trauma and subsequent behaviors.

State the hero's and heroine's goals
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Chatting With... Cont'd

back to face his family and the woman he left behind, Julia O'Shea. Even though he's moved from the bottom of society, as a drifter and fighter, to the top as a battlefield surgeon and Mountie officer, no one will forgive him for what he did in the past. Least of all, Julia. She owns one of the town's newspapers, though, and has to interview 'the black sheep' of the Reid family upon his return, so the book opens with a lot of heated conflict. It was fun to write the arguments!

MM: Fun to read them too, I'll bet! So, other than the chills upon seeing the postcard, what drew you to Mounties as heroes?

KB: My first two novels were set in the American West. The more research I did for those, the more intrigued I was how Canada's West was settled. Basically, America had sheriffs and deputies, while Canada had Mounties. I uncovered a true-life story about a Mountie troop playing a prank on their commander by ordering him a mail-order bride as a joke, and that story became the basis of my first Mountie novel, *The Surgeon*. The men all have nicknames and special skills and share a camaraderie that appeals to me.

MM: Do you write full time? What's a normal writing day like?

KB: I do write full time. I work best in the early morning so often start at 6:00. I try to end the day around 3:00 when school gets out. After that I will usually catch up on email and business details that don't require a lot of concentration if kids are around.

MM: Wish I could get up at 6:00 am. Dogs or cats?

KB: Both! We had a Jack Russell terrier for a number of years (can anyone spell hyper?) and we currently have a quiet gray cat, Daisy, we adopted

from the pound. Actually, hamsters are my favorite pet, but ours is now spinning her little wheel in heaven.

MM: Hey, hamster is a perfectly valid answer to my dog or cat question ☺. Sorry to hear yours passed on. ☹ While we're on the serious stuff, what are your favorite books, movies, TV shows?

KB: My favorite books are biographies. I love to read about people accomplished in their fields, and American politics. Growing up I loved the classics, particularly Thomas Hardy. I enjoy reading Jennifer Crusie, Sophie Kinsella, John Grisham, and a million others. I usually have one fiction and one non-fiction book going at all times. Currently it's *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weisberger and two of Pierre Berton's. I like action movies, and character movies like *Shirley Valentine* and *Something's Gotta Give*. My favorite TV shows are *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, *American Idol* and *CNN*—the reality shows!

MM: What are you working on now?

KB: I just accepted a 3-book contract from Harlequin Historicals, so I'll be writing more Mountie novels. I'm taking them to the Klondike Gold Rush! Or maybe they're taking me. I'm very excited about the time period and have been researching it for months. I'm also hoping to write more American-set historicals in the future. To break up the long stretches of writing, I'm writing some magazine articles, too.

MM: Congrats on the new contract. What's your favorite thing about being an author? Your least favorite?

KB: Thank you for the congrats. My favorite thing – I love when I connect to the characters on the page and get lost in the scene. It's a thrill like no other. My least favorite is the loneliness that accompanies writing.

MM: What do you know now that you wish you'd known before your

first sale?

KB: This may sound weird, but nothing really. I was pretty much aware of what to look for in terms of contracts and agent-hunting. I'm not the type of person who has regrets, so rarely go back and say, "I wish I would have..." Things have a way of working out. I do my best to prepare and then cross my fingers.

MM: What a great attitude! What's your #1 piece of advice for aspiring pre-pub's?

KB: Finish your manuscript from beginning to end and polish it completely before submitting any part of it to anyone. I never did this with my early work, and when my partials were rejected by editors, I never had the stamina to finish them and submit elsewhere. Sometimes this situation can't be avoided, or an opportunity to pitch shouldn't be missed, but there's a learning curve involved in completing a novel. And how are editors going to buy your product unless you have a product to buy?

MM: And finally, the most important question.... What's your favorite drink?

KB: Red wine. I love ice wine, too, but it costs more than champagne!

MM: I'll buy you a glass next time I see you! Thanks so much for chatting with me. Our members love to get to know our published authors a little bit better.

KB: Thanks for the invitation. Your questions were great!

The Commander hits the shelves on July 1, 2006. Check out Kate's website at www.katebridges.com

Maureen McGowan writes women's fiction in Toronto, Canada. Visit: www.maureenmcgowan.blogspot.com and www.drunkwritertalk.blogspot.com

Un-rejected Synopsis Cont'd

at the opening of the book. Then show how those goals are altered by the events of the plot. Describe how the motivations of the characters come into conflict with these new goals.

Show your Character's Growth

An interesting story has external and internal conflicts that are shown to be resolved in a satisfying manner.

Many times the character growth arc is missing. How did those external events create internal tensions that were eventually resolved? One external plot was almost perfect. But, it ended with 'he came to realize love conquered all and asked her to marry him'. My initial response was a puzzled Huh? I read the synopsis three times before I detected the characters' growth between the lines. Expose your characters, show

their growth, help me to sympathize with them and celebrate their well-deserved happily-ever-after.

Resolve All of Your Conflicts

The heroine's brother-in-law has disappeared. The heroine's sister was arrested for suspicion of murder by the policeman hero. The heroine is torn between believing her sister or the hero.

Excellent. You can see the external events that led to the internal conflict. What was the big problem? The synopsis never stated what happened to the brother-in-law, or if the sister was convicted or released.

Romance Above All

Your story is a romance. Show the progression of the romantic relationship from first meeting, first kiss, first love-making (if included), the black moment, and the final resolution. Link the progression to the significant events in the story.

Get Critiqued

If you're uncertain, find a critique

group or loop that will help you identify problems and suggest solutions. Authors, myself included, are frequently too close, too invested, in their work to see the flaws that result in rejection.

Consider all suggestions carefully. Remember, your critiquers have your best interests at heart. Don't waste your energy arguing and explaining. If you don't understand a comment, ask for further explanation. If you still don't agree, that's fine. But if you hear the same comment several times, it's wise to give the feedback some careful thought.

I would like to thank Kate Freiman, Helen Taylor, and Mona Risk for their valuable input to this article.

Joan Frantschuk is a Member Liaison for the Toronto Romance Writers and is now working on the first book in her contemporary romantic trilogy, THE PAINTED LADIES.

What I've Learned Along the Way Cont'd

After much thought and soul-searching and consultation with my family because our income would be affected, I made a course correction. I went back to writing for one house. I also returned to the story setting I most enjoy, less popular though it may be. And then, when I'd stopped making it a major goal, I made the USA Today bestseller list.

So when I apply my own criteria for success as a writer, I've done even better than I'd hoped. Does this mean I get to sit on my laurels and write any ol' thing now? Oh, heck no. My goals now are to (a)

tell stories that are even better than they've been before so (b) I attract new readers so (c) we can travel and be comfortable when my husband retires. And okay, I would love to make the New York Times list. But that's not the be-all and end-all. I won't feel like a failure if I don't.

There's only one goal I think writers who seriously attempt to get their work published truly share, and that is the desire to be read. Otherwise, every author's motives and goals are different, depending on their history. For that reason, every author, and every author alone, should decide what his or her definition of success as a writer is—whether it's making a list, making lots of money, writing only "books

of the heart" or something in between. And we should all bear in mind that another writer's goals fulfill her needs, not ours. To do otherwise can be stressful and ultimately, self-defeating. Haven't we got enough to contend with in this business without that?

Margaret Moore has been published since 1992 and is the author of 40 historical romance novels and novellas for Harlequin, Avon Books and HarperCollins Childrens Books. Her most recent release is HERS TO DESIRE (Aug. '06) from HQN. Find out more about Margaret, her books and her blog at www.margaretmoore.com.

Desperately Seeking Sanity: Inspiration for a Writing Mum

By Tanya Freedman

When my one-year-old honey-bunch looks deeply and soulfully into my bleary eyes I swear there's a conspiracy between her and the writing gods never to let me write another word. At least not until she's safely at pre-school, by which time I suspect my brain may be permanently scrambled in ga-ga-goo-goo land.

I'm not searching for mere fame, I'm compelled to write to stay sane. But excuses are my best friends. When it comes to writing that blockbuster I confess to suffering from a chronic Scarlet O'Hara condition. Well, tomorrow *is* another day.

My creative brain has given birth to beautiful nuggets of prose, regrettably fated to wither and die within the confines of my brain before I could capture them on paper. The passion I've nurtured in my romantic dreams starts to wane when it comes to putting bum on seat and actually writing. It's much easier and more chic to talk—to anyone who'll listen—about my endeavors in the craft.

One of my adolescent excuses was, "My English Lit teacher told me to go out and experience life." It gave me nearly a decade of freedom, without writing a word.

Then the writing itch grabbed me by the inspirations reawakening that burning desire to write. My unwritten blockbuster beckoned. At least I was ahead of my contemporaries; I knew romantic fiction was my genre.

Mills and Boon books were my teenage companions feeding my dreams of creating drop-dead gorgeous hunks and wouldn't-you-just-love-to-throttle sweet, virginal heroines. Later I was inspired by the

sassy, modern, gutsy protagonists readers adore. I could imagine receiving the coveted RITA award when I'd become a celebrated author.

But life got in the way. Yes, marriage qualified me to talk and write about love, but the only certificate I deserved was for consistent creative procrastination. I was too busy working—nay slaving—years in the heart of the West End of London to write even a word. A catatonic moment the crowded train was my only opportunity to enter into my own little world.

Then the writing bug would sink its greedy teeth into me at the most unlikely moments. Numbed at having to type reams of a pedant's engineering garbology in my job, I'd be overtaken with an unquenchable yearning to throw the computer out of the window and lunge for my secret cerise notebook in my desk drawer. You know the drawer, filled with the obligatory chocolate fix and newspaper clippings of writers drinking from the cup of enigmatic wisdom and fortune to success. My heart galloping, I'd put down gems of ideas and overflowing witty dialogue immediately. Temporarily sated, I'd return calmly to the dull work of reality.

But! Nothing prepared me for the most frustrating mind numbing and yet exhilarating task of writing when pregnant.

Food or writing were *not* on the agenda in those first few months. Who put the word "morning" in "morning sickness"? A man? "Eternal with no forewarning sickness" is more apt.

To add insult to injury, my bulk left me feeling like a beluga whale in my suddenly tiny desk chair, concentrating on the keyboard feeling as elegant as a dancing hippopotamus in a tutu. I lost many a great story idea while being distracted by my need to empty my overtaxed bladder. Definitely not in the mood to get to my

little note book, all I cared about was my potty emergency.

I threw in the towel when my bottom set off the printer while I leaned in the opposite direction in my writing space. I know it's all good story material in hind-sight, but I knew an escapist reader would much rather be swooning and panting with ecstasy, longing for heroes that shame Johnny Depp or Brad Pitt, instead of thinking of Braxton Hicks contractions.

Forever a romantic I was certain I *would* live to write again. Maybe snatch a few peaceful hours while baby slept the day away, like other new-borns did.

But, no, not a bit of it.

Now a year on, I've found my niche of relative sanity and I do get to write. A bit. Sometimes.

When?

Here's my secret. I tire baby out by day; stimulate her inquisitive (sometimes devious) little mind and keep her wriggling body well occupied in bouncers, swings, cots, buggies and any contraption that will get her exhausted.

By seven-thirty it feels more like midnight. Even if every cell of my body is stiff from being her personal walker, chauffeur, piggyback rider, chef, clown, I focus on the keyboard. But don't worry, unlike cursing the entire male population in the labor room, these days only the postman gets sworn at, through a closed door, when he dares to drop that rejection slip through my letterbox.

At first I resented my husband's ability to return to work to rest (only kidding, darling) because I was going round the bend praying for my muse to awaken. But we kept missing each other in different time zones, or maybe it was geographically challenged. And just when I become convinced my vivid imagination has defected to the south of France or Hawaii—something magnificent

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Desperately Seeking Cont'd

happens. Inspiration strikes.

The haze lifts, I hear voices, (I'll try and outrun the nice man holding out the jacket with the extra long arms), I open my notebook and within a short time I'm engrossed in my writing. I give it my all, feeling rejuvenated at being a creative channel in the world of the sane once more.

After some nights writing deep into the night, exhaustion catches up with me, but I feel accomplished. So what if I walk into walls, doors, and my husband!

Can you see me with my night pen scratching away in the dark, trying to contain my crazy giggles at my out-pourings, while my husband sleeps the night away?

Even if wakened in the wee hours by my tiny gorgeousness, I'm giddy with excitement at having captured the muse! And as I'm trying to keep up with baby's mischief, her crawling from zero to sixty squeals in five seconds, a heroine jumps into my mind, some funny droll one-liners dictate themselves as if I'm watching a polished movie scene unravel, and I have to catch the butterfly in my net of words on paper.

I dump baby in her play-pen-cum-

travel cot—see how far you travel in that, you little rascal of an angel—grab my notebook and my idea is forever encapsulated.

I breathe a sigh of relief, thanking all the gods and stars for my biggest miracle smiling at me from the cot, and realize the gray matter in my brain isn't completely defunct. Just slightly shell-shocked.

Tanya Freedman spreads her love of writing, art and her family as fairly as she can. She's busy writing her non-fiction book for the "Start and Run" series, to be published in Spring 2007 by Self Counsel Press. Web site: www.tanyafreedman.com.

Deconstructing Emotion

By Joan Frantschuk

Suzanne McMinn presented her workshop to the Toronto Romance Writers on July 8, 2006. The following article is a compilation of my notes taken during the class and excerpts from Suzanne's handout.

From characterization and setting to conflict and pacing, it's all about emotion. Take your story from a flat road going nowhere to a roller-coaster ride of tension and passion with these concrete strategies for exploring and layering realistic emotion onto every page.

What is Emotion?

Emotion means movement. We are motivated to take action in some way that will aid our survival. Emotions blossom, change, or diminish. The stimulus to act may be external (an approaching dog) or internal (the memory of being attacked by a dog).

Emotion is the key to romance, more important than plot.

Sympathetic Emotions

Sympathetic emotions are an involuntary physiological response to real or emotional danger. The patterns are familiar to all human beings when the body initiates changes to guarantee survival in an emergency. Sugar is released for a quick burst of energy, the heart rate accelerates to pump blood to the muscles, digestion slows, blood is directed away from the skin to reduce bleeding.

Parasympathetic Emotions

These generally reverse the influence of sympathetic emotions. They calm us and restore the body's balance. The heart rate slows, pupils return to normal size, and the blood pressure drops to a normal range.

Use this common biology to ground emotions in a scene, to connect the reader to something they may not have experienced. Many readers have been frightened by a dog though very few have witnessed a murder. The familiar response grounds the unfamiliar experience by using the common physiological responses.

Primary and Secondary Emotions

The primary emotions like fear, anger, and joy frequently combine to create secondary, or mixed, emotions. Awe combines fear and surprise, love combines joy and acceptance. The most common experiences are a mix of contradictory primary emotions. A person may be disappointed she didn't get the hoped-for job but also relieved as the job didn't really suit her.

Show the combination of the more realistic mixed emotions in the facial gestures, body language and dialogue.

Sometimes we want to feel a specific emotion but can't conjure it. At other times, we long to deny an emotion we already feel.

Elements of Emotion

There are many elements to the same emotion that you can pick and choose from to put in your characters.

Adaptive elements are coping strategies learned through life experiences that help us deal with changing environments and stress.

Physiological changes are the sympathetic or involuntary reactions caused by emotions.

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Emotion Cont'd

Feelings are a person's private experience that determines her response to a situation. It is revealed in internal dialogue.

Expressions communicate to others what a person is feeling. Trembling hands, facial contortions, marked shifts in vocal inflections are all indicators that reveal a character's emotions. These responses can sometimes be controlled.

Finding your Character's Emotions

If you're having difficulty pinpointing your character's feelings in a scene, step away from the computer, close your eyes, and run the scene like a movie in your head. Visualize the action from all angles and points-of-view, maximize or minimize the emotions to get the greatest impact out of the scene. Analyze what parts of the body reflect the emotions you visualize in your head. Open your eyes, make lots of notes, and then return to your computer and pour that emotion onto the page.

Showing your Character's Emotions

If you describe an emotional response, you don't necessarily have to tell the reader what emotion is being felt by your character. Behavior reveals emotion. Tune into the physical responses of your characters to identify how they're feeling on a deeper level. For example: anger shows in tense neck and shoulders, throbbing temples and clenched fists; joy shows in a wide smile and sparkling eyes.

Defense Mechanisms

All people develop coping strategies throughout their lives to avoid, deny, or distort sources of threat or anxiety. These unconscious defense mechanisms also maintain an idealized self-image so that we can live comfortably with ourselves.

These behaviors appear to be inconsistent with the external situation and action. But there is an underlying internal stimulus, a deepest fear, that connects them all.

Figure out the coping strategies that your character needs and be consistent in

their usage. The coping strategies diminish as the character grows and heals.

Black humor and sarcasm minimize and set aside emotional response.

Denial is refusing to perceive, accept, or believe a reality. When writing a denial, make it believable and important.

Depression is giving up completely, surrendering to feelings powerlessness and hopelessness.

Fantasy fulfills unmet desire through the imagination. Fantasy is frequently followed by denial to prevent acting upon it. For example, a secretary daydreams of running over the boss, but shakes her head in denial when she realizes what she's doing.

Hope is the antidote to depression. It offers a glimpse of a better future.

Rationalization uses reasonable, but false, justifications for behavior. A character will say "It's for her own good that I hurt her."

Repression prevents dangerous or painful thoughts from entering the consciousness. A person will regress into less demanding habits and situations to make the repression easier.

Sublimation is a way to work off frustrated unacceptable desires in acceptable activities. Cold showers are a common antidote to seduction.

Ten Minute Character Emotion Test

Take ten minutes to explore a character's most painful internal conflict at the beginning of the book and formulate a question to probe it. What is the worst thing that could happen to you? What makes you feel bad? What do you fear the most?

Answer the question for your character using whatever words pop into your mind. Use 'juice' words that express emotion rather than a detached description. Instead of "The finances are in terrible shape and Junior is staying out too late", express it as "I feel very worried about the finances. In fact, I am feeling overwhelmed and scared. I am also feeling a little anxious about Junior staying out too late."

When you've finished with the emotional state of your character at the open-

ing, ask the same question over again for the subsequent chapters. Go deeper into the emotions, questioning whatever comes up.

Keep asking the one question for ten minutes, peeling off the layers of your character's emotions.

Exploring Character Memory

Now take these revealed emotions back to their origins. What happened in the past that results in these current emotions?

Assign a number from one (wonderful) to ten (horrible) that quantifies the current level of pain that your character is feeling.

List the negative emotions revealed in the Ten Minute Test. List corresponding negative beliefs that are connected to these feelings. A typical belief associated with an old trauma is "People I trust/love hurt me when I need them the most. Life isn't safe."

Ask your character "When have you felt like this before?" Take your character back to the earliest experience that created the trauma. Ask your character how they would feel if they could magically heal all the feelings connected to each memory. The memory that gets the most emphatic sense of relief is the memory to focus on.

Once a specific memory is selected, write down a detached emotionless picture of that memory as if you had a photograph of the event. This is the 'still photo'.

Now write down your character's memory a second time, from the beginning, using 'juice' words.

The still photo and its accompanying feelings are the heart of the emotional internal conflict your character must resolve by the end of the book. In your resolution, replace the trauma image with a healing image filled with positive, hopeful emotions.

Joan Franstchuk is a Member Liaison for the Toronto Romance Writers and is now working on the first book in her contemporary romantic trilogy, THE PAINTED LADIES.

Writing Romance Through Heart Break

By Carrie Lewis

We have all been there, or at least know someone who has. It's that horrific and emotionally volatile period when a relationship ends either because you realized it wasn't working or because your partner did. Whether you saw it coming or were blindsided, the emotional schizophrenia afterwards makes most things difficult, especially focus and creativity.

Now if you're a horror writer and the ending of the relationship was bitter or accompanied by either betrayal or cruelty you can use that fire of anger in your belly to *really* envision the blood, guts and gore of the murder. If you're a graphic paranormal writer with a dark edge, you can let your imagination run rampant and creatively obliterate *him*, or even all mankind, until the pain and rage pass.

The question remains: what happens to your creative outlet, to your escape into writing when your current WIP is a love story and you're just not feeling the love?

Suzanne McMinn just spoke to us at our TRW meeting about *The Art of Pouring Feelings onto the Page*. Exactly one week before this great lecture, I broke up with my boyfriend of almost a year. We had talked marriage and kids, all that future stuff that great love stories often include. I came to the lecture knowing the reasons for ending the relationship were sound, but I carried the heartbreak and disappointment just the same.

As an unpublished writer, I still occasionally struggle with my true voice and my place in the writing world. Emotions and character de-

velopment are a challenge as I struggle to come into awareness of not only the hero and heroine, but also of myself as a writer.

When Suzanne talked about finding the hero and heroine's truest and deepest fear, I sat up. Emotions are tricky because we all dupe ourselves and play games even in our own heads. But like Suzanne said, if you know that person's deepest fear, all other responses and actions from that person are often suddenly consistent even when they appear chaotic.

So I figured, what better time to write the chaos of emotion, the authentic heartbreak and disappointment, fears and tears than when I'm in the midst of them? What better place from which to seek to understand a deepest fear than when I am confronted with one? Except, again, I am just not feeling the love. When my heroine looks at the hero, I don't feel the barely repressed desire for him or the blooming love. I hear my own voice screaming at her: "Run, before it's too late!"

I could neither smother my own feelings of frustration, hurt, and anger, nor could I set aside writing for the moment. My personal therapy for anything life has ever thrown at me has to be to escape into my writing, to pour out the excess emotions and create something, even if it's crap. Cheaper than a therapist.

So when enough of the emotion had passed that I could focus, I sat at my computer prepared to get to work, to *write through the moment*. But as my fingers hovered over the keyboard and my mind tried to force an image of the scene, something became very apparent: I cannot write love when I am in heartbreak mode. Just as I find it hard to write heartbreak or anguish when in the throes of new love. After a couple of days, I gave up and just let my fingers trans-

fer the raw emotion onto my screen.

What came out surprised me: a caustic female who is harsh, humorous and determined to *show the world* (read: show *him*) just how incredible, how successful, and—why not?—how creatively vengeful she could be.

I had never considered writing Chick Lit before, but the emotions within me didn't lend itself well to my present Paranormal Love Story. Though Suzanne McMinn suggests analyzing friends and family for their emotions and behavioral responses, I decided to use this moment in my life to analyze myself (I'm a child of therapists and can't really help it!) In this journey I have thus far discovered the deepest layer of my own Nutterbutter secret (this is one of Suzanne's theories), and a Chick Lit storyline of a woman journeying from a black moment to a brilliant future.

I suspect that when I come out the other side of the Break-up Blues, I will go back, reread these chapters and absolutely cringe. The evidence will thus be hidden beneath my bed for my cat to chew on while I sleep.

One thing remains though: this has been an incredible opportunity to push my limits as a writer, to experiment with my voice and really *pour my feelings onto the page*.

Someday, this WIP will be a raw record of my fears and tears, and a tribute to my dedication as a woman determined to love and write.

Besides, if this doesn't thoroughly purge the emotions, I am not above trying a graphic murder mystery...

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