

LARA CONFIDENTIAL

The Newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors Chapter of RWA

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"Promoting Excellence in Romantic Fiction Through Education and Community Service"

EDITOR'S TALK

For no other reason than that I thought you might find this interesting, I'm presenting my "Lessons Learned from the School of Hard Knocks." I've got these hanging over my computer cubicle in my bedroom (euphemistically known as my home office when no one is sleeping there). When I get to thinking something is going to be as easy as it looks, or things are going too smoothly, or that I am a goddess and others must worship me, I give a glance at these words and they bring me right back down to earth. I crafted this list when I hit the big Four-Oh and decided that living that long must mean I'd learned stuff I could pass down to my kids. In theory.

I mean, I know I've learned that one should never wear brown shoes with a black tuxedo, and horizontal stripes make a big person look bigger, and mayonnaise sandwiches just aren't as tasty as you might think. But what, I asked myself, are the really important rules to live by? Granted, this list reflects my particularly pragmatic approach to life, and it may not be the lessons you have learned, but to me, it resonates. And if you squint at it in just the right light, you'll see most of the things on the list have a lot to do with writing.

So here they are, my "Lessons Learned from the School of Hard Knocks," in no particular order. Let me know what you think.

- *Follow your dreams. Just don't give up your day job.*
- *If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.*
- *Things that look easy when other people do them invariably are not.*
- *You can only worry about so many things. Have the rest take a number and wait their turn.*
- *If you think things can't get any worse, wait.*
- *If you think things can't get any better, wait.*
- *If you think things will never be the same again, wait.*
- *You can do anything you have to do. Even if you think you can't. Especially when you have no choice.*

That's it. Don't spend it all in one place.

If you're a mom, I hope you had a great Mother's Day. If you're not a mom, I hope you were able to call yours to say hello. Take care, and Happy Reading!

*Thieme Jackson Bittick
Editor, LARA Confidential
Golden Heart Finalist 2005*

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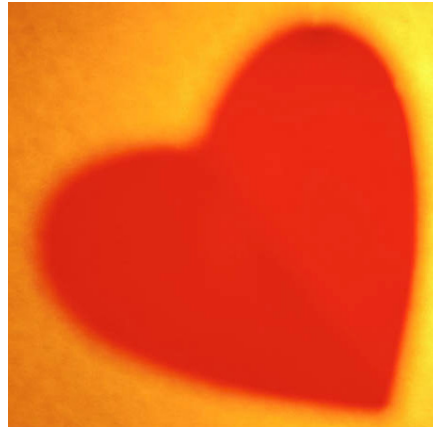
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Torrance, CA 90503

or by email:
bitti2@spamcop.net

Newsletters are published one week prior to each meeting, and the publication deadline is two weeks prior to each meeting, which is typically held the third Sunday of the month.

Next meeting:
Saturday, May 21st.

The "Plot Doctor", Carolyn Greene, presents her "Perscription For Plotting" full-day workshop at the Holiday Inn in Burbank.



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Los Angeles Romance Authors
c/o Thieme Jackson Bittick
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Newsletter Design: Tai Shan Jackson

Plot Your Novel

Sponsor: Los Angeles Romance Authors

Location: The Holiday Inn, Burbank, CA

Fee: \$45.00 members. \$50.00 non-LARA

Date: May 21, 2005. 9:00-4:00

Are inspiration and intuition letting you down? Carolyn Greene, the "Plot Doctor," will share tried-and-true plotting methods, including stages of character growth and the power of theme in this LARA sponsored workshop.

For more information: www.losangelesromanceauthors.com

Contact:

Janet Maarschalk, VP Programming, at JMarshock@aol.com

See back page for sign-up sheet.



Presidential Prattle: Eight Points a Quarter Equals One Page a Day

by Kim Winklhofer

I admit it. I caved. I was standing in line at the grocery store and made an impulse buy. You know those little books they have there? The collections of word searches, horoscopes, recipes? Usually I glance at those and pass, but this one was called “*Getting Results for Dummies.*” Because Susan Mallery had recently spoken to us about boosting writing productivity, I thought it would be interesting to see if this booklet had any other ideas on the topic. Surprisingly, although geared toward business and being productive in general, I found quite a bit that could be applied toward writing, and at only two bucks, it was a bargain.

This one strategy in particular caught my eye. The author, Mark H. McCormack, explained:

When Michael Jordan retired from the NBA in 1999, he did so with an astonishing average of 31.5 points per game—an NBA record. No matter who the opponent or what incarnation of the Chicago Bulls were on the floor, Jordan got his 32 points every night for 13 years. When he was asked how he could maintain such astonishing consis-

tency at such a high level for such an extended period of time, Jordan answered, “I simplified it a few years ago. Thirty-two points a game is just eight points a quarter. I figure I can get eight points a quarter in some kind of way during the course of a game.”

Susan Mallery’s strategy was geared toward writing more and more and *more*. I just wanted a way to write, period. This eight points a quarter idea sounded good to me. I thought, what I need to do is start with baby steps. When I set bigger writing goals in order to push myself, I end up getting stressed. Who needs unnecessary, self-inflicted stress?



Also, I have this little guilt problem. I think as modern women we have so much on our plates and if we don’t “do it all,” we feel bad. So, this small one page commitment could help alleviate that. Because, I don’t know about you, but when I don’t write, I feel something like self-betrayal...this niggling guilt that I haven’t moved forward toward my dream to be published. I feel dis-

appointed in myself. I need guilt about as much as I need stress. And then if I take a lot of time to write, I feel like I’ve neglected my house, my family, and all the other responsibilities I have.

So, I thought, what if I just set a small daily goal? One page a day. I decided I could write one page a day and not freak out from the pressure, and if I kept to that, I’d have 90,000 words at the end of a year. That’s a full category romance, folks! That’s 10,000 words short of a single-title. And if I write my page (or more), then when it comes time to make a dessert for the Teacher Appreciation Luncheon, I think to myself, “No problem! I already came through with my writing today.”

Having that small increment on my to-do list makes it easier to fit in my schedule, too. If I’m busy all day, then come evening, one page is still doable even if I’m tired. If I miss a day, then making up that one page from the day before isn’t a huge task.

Perhaps this idea could work for you. We could call it the Tortoise Approach. Slow and steady wins the race, after all, and the prize is a finished book with less stress and guilt.

Kim Winklhofer has no aspirations toward success in basketball, since she isn’t even five feet tall; however, despite being perhaps the slowest writer on the North American continent, she does believe that someday soon she will see a book of her own on the shelf at a bookstore. Preferably, a shelf she can reach.

Editor's Note: This column begins a series of articles regarding elected LARA board positions. Board members believe it is important that anyone considering running for the vacant positions in December 2005 should be informed about the duties and responsibilities involved from someone on the inside.

The LARA Board: Office of the President

"Hail to the Chief "

by Kim Winklhofer

According to our bylaws, Article V, Section 1, the president must be "a general member of LARA and RWA, shall serve as a spokesperson for LARA, (a) preside at meetings, (b) call for and preside at meetings of the Executive Board, (c) call for and preside at special meetings of membership deemed necessary at the direction of the Board, (d) appoint special committees, subject to the approval of a simple majority of the Board, and (e) be one of the two persons authorized to sign checks."

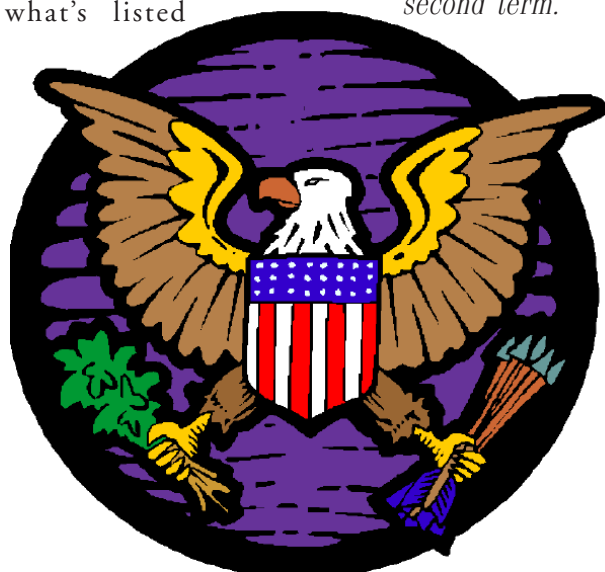
However, there is more to the job than what's listed

above, although that is plenty. The president also writes a monthly article for our newsletter, *The LARA Confidential*. She fields the occasional email from prospective members. She participates on ChapLink, a YahooGroup where other RWA chapter presidents and VPs discuss anything and everything presidential.

Are there perks? You bet. Of course, there's that satisfaction you get from a job well done, but beyond that, you get to wield your title. You can call attention to that fact on query and cover letters. During your term you may interact with Important People, either in the publishing business or not, and the fact that you're the president does carry with it some weight. Also, recently, the board voted that LARA should pay for the president's RWA National Conference fee and one hotel night, so that she can attend the President's Retreat, which always takes place one day before the conference officially begins. You'll have duties to perform at the conference, but will still have time to take full advantage of attendance.

So, please consider running for this office in December. Being president does require work, but it is a satisfying job and carries with it some rewards.

Kim Winklhofer is the current president of LARA, finishing out her second term.



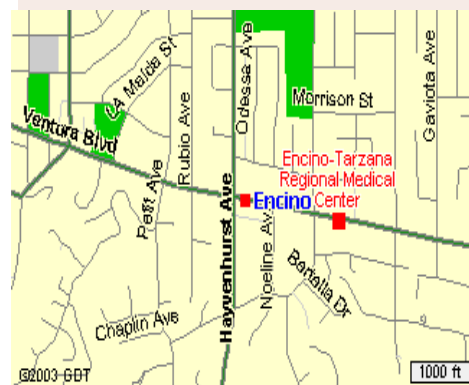
Monthly meetings:

Meetings of the Los Angeles Romance Authors are held at the Barnes and Noble in Encino, usually on the third Sunday of the month. Guests are welcome to attend one meeting for free. Coffee and chat starts at 10:00 AM.

General meeting starts at 10:30 AM.

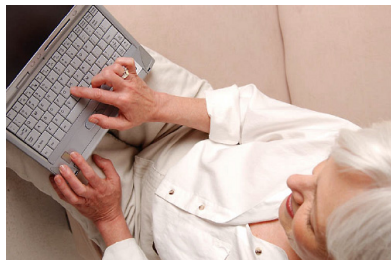
Address:

*Barnes & Noble Booksellers
16461 Ventura Blvd.,
Encino, CA 91436
(818) 380-1636
Cross-street: Hayvenhurst*



Hot Off the Keyboard

(Last minute news from the grapevine)



News of Note: During our April 17th meeting, the LARA board proposed three motions that the members passed unanimously. The first allows for the spending of two hundred dollars toward the Literacy Fund at the RWA national convention. Those books purchased will then be distributed to local libraries to help further the readership of the romance genre. The second states that the LARA president has her/his conference fee paid for, and the third motion gives a



LARA member Sandra Richards receives her Pro pin during the April 2005 meeting.

hundred dollars to author Jamie Denton in her fight against cancer.

In other news, President **Kim Winklhofer** had the honor of presenting **Sandra Kleinschmitt** (aka Richards) her PRO pin for PRO Recognition status.

Madaleine Laird has volunteered to take over as editor for the LARA Confidential after the departure of the current editor in June. **Anne Devore** has also volunteered to take **Jacqueline** (aka Jax) Crane's place as treasurer. Thank you ladies for stepping up to the plate.



LARA members Madaleine Laird and Kirsten Griffone display their winning hand-decorated mugs received by writers who met their "Book-in-a-Week" challenge.

Six writers, **Kim Winklhofer**, **Janet Maarschalk**, **Kirsten Griffone**, **Jacqueline Crane**, **Madaleine Laird**, and **Jennifer Laam** (formerly Salmi), met their goals in the "Book-In-A-Week" challenge. Participants logged in a whopping 174 new pages and 20 pages of revisions! Congrats, ladies!

- Submitted by D'Anne Avner -

PAN NEWS

PAN News: Mollie Molé reports the third book in her Sullivan's Rules trilogy, *A Convenient Engagement*, will be out on June 10, 2005. **Liz Maverick** has a Love Spell release, *Crimson City*, due out July 2005. **Linda O. Johnston** attended the LA Times Book Festival in April and signed copies of her books at the Sisters In Crime/Prime Crime Books booth. *Nothing To Fear But Ferrets* is scheduled for release August 2005, with *Murder, My Macaw* coming out in May 2006. Keep up with Linda at her website at <http://www.LindaOJohnston.com>.

YEAH, BUT DID I WIN? (Contest News)

Contest News: Lots has been happening on the contest front. **Christine Locksy** is a finalist in the Wisconsin Romance Writers' 2005 Write Touch Readers' Award Contest, and both she and **Shannon Donnelly** are finalists in the Regency category of the Desert Rose chapter 2005 Golden Quill contest. **Thieme Jackson Bittick** is a finalist in the Kiss of Death Suspense/Mystery chapter's Daphne du Maurier contest, and she also placed second in the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers' Laurie Contest. **Katie McGuinness** finaled



in the Washington Romance Writer's Marlene contest. **Janet Maarschalk** was pleasantly surprised when she received her Golden Heart scores and found that she had finaled in the top quarter-percent.

Whew! That's a lot of contests news, folks. LARA is on the move!

GOOD NEWS

Milestone recognition: **Thieme Jackson Bittick** received a request for a full from an agent she's been courting. **Jacqueline (Jax) Crane** was ecstatic when *Writer's Digest Magazine* gave her website Romance Divas (www.romancedivas.com) a great rating. Jax reports that the magazine featured her site in their article "101 Best/Most Useful Sites on the Web," listing it fourth under the Genre Category. Speaking of magazines, **Cara King** was quoted in the *Romantic Times* April 2005 issue in an article about keeping your day job.

Other News: On April 24, **Christine Ashworth** took part in the Huntington Gardens' Shakespeare Festival, playing Celia from *As You Like It* in one of many scenes performed by the group "Shakespeare at Play." From all reports, the festival was a smashing success, setting a new record at the Huntington for one-day attendance.

Christine Locksy was scheduled to speak at a community



LARA member Christine Ashworth (right), playing Celia from Shakespeare's As You Like It at the Huntington Gardens. Photo by Jon Mullich.

event to the El Camino High School in Woodland Hills, CA. The event was entitled "Melody of Words." We may get the opportunity to hear more about her participation in a later edition of the *LARA Confidential*.



LARA member Christine Locksey at the April 2005 meeting.

Got any news for "Hot Off the Keyboard"? Be sure to send it along to the editor before the next dead-

line on June 10, 2005.

If you wish to receive the *LARA Confidential* in hard copy in the future instead of accessing it on-line, please send your name and mailing address to the editor at bitti2@spamcop.net.



Meeting Notes: Thieme Jackson Bittick on "The Black Moment... and Beyond"

by D'Anne Avner

Thieme Jackson Bittick, LARA's 2005 Golden Heart Finalist, spoke on "the black moment." She says every book hinges on the black moment: that instant when the hero/heroine is convinced he or she has lost. Think, "What's the worst thing that can happen to my characters?" Then make it happen and deal with it.

Thieme stressed that you can't go back from the black moment, and the more powerful the moment, the more fulfilling the resolution.

Conflict is the first foundation of the black moment. The needs and fears of one character must conflict with the needs and fears of the other. Character flaws and relationship barriers are the second and third building blocks. Your characters must go through escalating steps to make the black moment as believable as possible.

Have your hero and heroine want to change to resolve the story. Love is a sacrifice; ask yourself *what must they give up to be with the other?* Then have them be prepared to give that up. When the black moment is resolved the story is pretty much over, so don't linger long after the black moment.

Thieme reminded us that the most important thing to remember is that "Love is not the goal. Love is the reward for *reaching* the goal." When the characters meet their goals, then love can be waiting for them at the end.



Golden Heart 2005 Finalist
Thieme Jackson Bittick spoke
on "The Black Moment."

She also states that writers have a black moment, too: they need to write the scenes they don't want to write, remembering that bad things happen to good people. Put to paper those heartfelt emotions that make up those tough scenes and you'll suck in your reader as well.

Thanks for the tips, Thieme, and good luck at Nationals. Now attack those black moments, people!

D'Anne Avner has been a LARA member for almost 5 years and serves as the PRO liaison. She has 5 completed manuscripts and isn't afraid to pitch them.



Audience members listened to Thieme's presentation on "The Black Moment" during the April 2005 meeting.

Reviewing Romance: An Insider's Perspective

by Madaleine J. Laird

I've always envied book reviewers. An endless supply of free reading material, getting paid to do something I love, seeing my name in print on a regular basis . . . it sounded like a great gig to me. Six months ago I started writing reviews for *Romantic Times BOOKclub*, and the job isn't *all* fun and freebies, but it *is* a great gig.

Breaking in at *RT* wasn't as difficult as I'd imagined. Their reviews are short and snappy, and so was my introductory email to the managing editor. My strategy must have worked, because she responded within an hour, asking me to send her some sample reviews. A few days later, I eagerly accepted her offer to review four Harlequin American Romance titles per month. Perhaps it was pure luck that there was an opening for a reviewer at the exact moment I decided to apply, but I

also believe that courage creates opportunity. I wasn't just *in* the right place at the right time; I *put* myself there.

Every month or so an assistant editor at Harlequin sends me a box of "reviewer's copies." Instead of mass-market paperbacks, I get a stack of single-spaced manuscripts printed on 8 ½ x 11 paper and secured by rubber bands. And though I do get paid for my services, I probably made more money from one night of babysitting during my teenage years. Opening each new issue of *RT* and turning to the page that contains my reviews still gives me a huge rush. I'm glad that feeling hasn't faded, and I hope it never does, because I think it's good practice for the future. As an aspiring romance author, I can imagine how thrilling it will be to see my name on the cover of a book!

When I'm wearing my reviewer's hat, I have to keep that aspiring romance author in check. I remind myself that my job is to tell the readers of *Romantic Times BOOKclub* why they should or should not read and/or purchase a particular book. If I express an opinion that's less than completely

honest, I'm not meeting my obligations as a reviewer. I'd love to make every book I review a Top Pick with a 4 ½ star Gold rating. Unfortunately, that's not the way things work. Excellence is, by definition, the exception rather than the rule, so I save the higher ratings for books that are truly deserving.

Don't get me wrong: I don't enjoy giving out low ratings, but I can't allow myself to be overly concerned about hurting the author's feelings. Honesty doesn't have to be brutal, though. A little tact goes a long way. I try to provide specific details about the book's strengths and weaknesses, and that's no easy feat when I only have 100 words to spend on each title.

In addition to writing book reviews, I'm also working on my first romance novel. It's a category, and it may just fit into the Harlequin American line I've become so familiar with. I'm able to read my work-in-progress more objectively now, and after describing and evaluating four books a month in 100 words or less, writing a synopsis should be a snap!



LARA member Madaleine Laird rekindled her love of romance novels during a graduate-level class that required her to present one oral book review per week. Recently accepted to the master's program in library and information science at UCLA, she plans to focus on reader's advisory and special collections. Her reviews for Romantic Times BOOKclub can be viewed online at RomanticTimes.com.

Writer's Block: Myth or Misery?

by Cara King

“Writer’s block is a myth. When I get writer’s block, I just sit myself down in my chair and make myself write. Anyone who doesn’t is just kidding herself.”

Have you heard that statement or others like it? I hear it all the time. I think it arises from the frustration that productive writers feel when they’re told, “You’re so lucky that writing is easy for you! I have writer’s block, which makes writing terribly hard!” The productive writers want to say, “It is hard for me, too, every day! Please give me credit for the agony I go through.”

So, what’s the problem? Simple. There *is* such a thing as writer’s block. True writer’s block is hell. And telling the writers who have it that they could overcome it with a little effort, a little discipline, is telling these people that they should feel guilty on top of miserable—that they’re pretending they have writer’s block because they’re too lazy to actually write.

The writer hating himself for being lazy does not cure true writer’s block. True writer’s block lasts for months, or years, or decades. The writer may produce nothing in that time, or may produce very slowly. The writer may be able to write one sort of thing but not another. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, hit writer’s block early. He found he could write literary criticism, but could never again tackle the grand poetry that made him famous in his twenties. When a friend urged him to pull himself together, Coleridge wrote him, “You bid me rouse myself. Go, bid a man paralytic in both arms rub them briskly together, and that will cure

him. Alas! (he would reply), that I cannot move my arms is my complaint.”

Coleridge described his years of writer’s block as “sorrow and shame,” during which the thought of tackling another poem filled him with “an indescribable terror.” F. Scott Fitzgerald experienced his block as “no choice, no road, no hope.” Many others suffered years of writer’s block, including Douglas Adams, Ralph Ellison, and Ernest Hemingway. And of course, there are the suicides: Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, John Kennedy O’Toole, Hunter S. Thompson, and many more.



Arnold Ludwig, a psychiatrist at the University of Kentucky Medical Center, made a study of eminent people of the 20th Century. Of these, he found that poets, writers, painters and composers had rates of serious depression double those of other eminent people. Writer’s block can be a symptom of depression, or of a variety of other conditions (such as an anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or a substance addiction.) Of course, writer’s block can also *lead* to depression or anxiety or substance abuse, so the whole thing can be a vicious cycle. So what’s the solution? I’m no genius, so all I have is a few observations to offer.

1) *Do you suffer from serious, long-term writer’s block?* Please do what you can to see a psychiatrist—you may suffer from depression or another treatable disease. If you couldn’t write due to carpal tunnel syndrome, you’d see a doctor, right? Mental illness is just as real as CTS, at least as common, and often as treatable.

2) *Do you have trouble writing, or experience a feeling of panic when you sit down at the keyboard, or feel frustrated by how slowly you produce?* However, are you not sure whether you suffer from writer’s block, or have merely hit a bad patch? Experiment. There are hundreds of websites that suggest ways to jump-start your writing, as well as books, essays, seminars—you name it. Daily journaling helps some people. Giving oneself permission to write dreck frees many from the internal critic. And there are as many other ideas out there as there are writers. If one thing doesn’t work for you, try another. And keep in mind that nasty little progression: perfectionism leads to procrastination, procrastination leads to panic. All three can contribute to writer’s block. So don’t let that nasty little progression get started. Always tell yourself: *It Doesn’t Need To Be Perfect!*

3) *Are you someone who prides yourself on your ability to make yourself write, no matter how difficult it becomes?* Good for you—I admire your hard work and determination. But please don’t conclude that writer’s block doesn’t exist. And please, please, *please* don’t tell your fellow writers that writer’s block is a myth. Your words may cause more harm than you know.

LARA member Cara King’s first novel, My Lady Gamester, will be a November 2005 release from Signet Regency. For years she wrote movie reviews (and was delighted to be paid for being opinionated), but now she’s focusing on fiction (and is delighted to be paid for living a fantasy life.)

Writing for Joy

by Jennifer Laam

First, a confession: I like to fly by the seat of my pants. To some extent I've seen the error of my ways. When faced with a revision of my western historical, I pledged not to battle through the ten years of improvisational hell that resulted in my first novel. So, I joined RWA and used every tool I found: outlines, character sketches, lists of scenes and sequels, conflicts, goals...all helpful, to be sure. Having duly charted the course, I planted myself in front of the computer.

Nothing. For the first time in my life, I dreaded writing.

Even with these new instruments at my disposal, I wasn't happy with the revisions. I panicked. In attempting to mend the errors of the past had I gone too far in the other direction and over-thought the story? Possibly. Still, the problem seemed to run deeper than that. Luckily, I found a popular scapegoat.

I just didn't have enough time for my writing.

I'm a fifth grade teacher. In other words, I've chosen a day job that requires a tremendous amount of energy and emotion. Some days are rewarding and others beyond depressing. Nevertheless, I'd always considered teaching something I did for now, rather than a final career path. Eventually, I'd become an author. Freed from the hassles of student conflicts and administration demands, the words would flow freely, right? Perhaps I was a little naive?

My attitude changed for good when I met the new teacher next door. She was excited, eager, and enthusiastic: three adjectives that describe every teacher when they start and no one by

the end of the year. I sensed a kindred spirit and we started talking. It turns out she's a multi-published author currently enrolled in an MFA program.

What was she doing in my day job?

No one should start writing for the money. My brain accepts this truth. But deep down, haven't you fantasized about what might happen once the rest of the world discovers your brilliance? Someday, everyone will recognize the massive appeal of your hero's quirks and even though it's not your end goal, a financial pay-off could result. Haven't you practiced your banter with Oprah? Window-shopped for that dream house with the view of the ocean? Personally, my Oscar® acceptance speech for adapted screenplay is ready, just in case, and my gown is stunning (take *that*, Catherine Zeta-Jones).

But when I met this new teacher, the truth hit me right in the gut. Even if I achieve that ultimate dream of publication, I'll still need a day job to make ends meet. So I better make sure I like my day job. And I better make *damn* sure I like to write. Somewhere among the lists of contest deadlines and hungry agents, I'd lost sight of the joy writing once brought me.

Around this same time, our administration decided everyone needed to emphasize writing more in our curriculum. So, I decided to try something new. Three times a week, for 15 minutes a day, my students just write. No questions, no talking, no throwing pencils. Just writing. I give them three possible topics and tell them to get started. No grades, no pressure. Afterwards, they can share their work if they wish or keep it to themselves.

During that time I also write, to model the correct behavior, and I follow the same rules. I don't worry about what contest judges might think or what rules I'm breaking or what sub-genre is selling where.



To my great shock, this worked. Suddenly, my students loved to write. They love the freedom those fifteen minutes provide, to express their

thoughts freely without fear of repercussions. Several of them are really good! And all of the students, no matter what their skill level, shine during these assignments.

I love this time as well. The blank page is no longer intimidating. I spend those fifteen minutes writing solely for pleasure in my own little journal. So I'm stuck in the middle of my work-in-progress? Relating the details of last night's dream about Jude Law (chaste, unfortunately) may not solve sticky plot problems, but it does renew faith in my ability to communicate. This is a feeling I take to my WIP. Now, I actually look forward to those precious free moments when I'm with my computer. That time is fun again.

So, I blew the dust off a former book idea of questionable marketability that I happen to love. My favorite part of writing is still discovering what happens next at the same time the characters do, but I've completed an outline and a few character sketches. More importantly, I have a whole new perspective on my day job. Teaching no longer sucks away my energy. It helps inspire me and keeps me writing.

LARA member Jennifer Laam, (formerly Salmi), teaches Language Arts for sixty-two fifth graders, all of whom maintain better writing discipline than she does. Still, someday the romantic, historical thriller with the Russian twist will sell and she'll buy that mansion by the ocean.

Letters from the Stacks: For Your Listening Pleasure by Kate Fink



Every month or so, one of our members asks me, “What’s HOT in the tape library?”

Clever comebacks aside, at right is the unofficial tally of what is heading out the double doors with the Listening LARAs.

*AND...*the most checked out workshop from the 2003 RWA National Convention is...[Drum R o l l] ... [b u i l d i n g suspense]...[Hang in there, the payoff’s really worth it!]...

Tape No. 107: Isn’t a Bride, Doesn’t Have a Baby, Doesn’t Want a Cowboy: New Heroines of Category Romance! [Woo-Hoo!]

These tapes (and 138 others) are available every month for check out. Just because they are popular, doesn’t mean they’re not accessible. They are here for you. You should take some home, get to know them.

These ten workshops tied for an Honorable Mention:

<u>Tape</u>	<u>Title</u>
7	The Nitty, Gritty, Down and Dirty Truth About Writing the Breakout/Blockbuster Novel
12	I Hate to Write A Synopsis!
14	Real Heroes and the Writers Who Keep Them That Way
28	Compelling Themes: Barrier and Ritual Death as Thematic Goldmines
91	Nonfiction on the Side: Fame, Fortune & Publicity
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(Conference tapes can be reserved by logging on to the Members Only Section of the LARA website. Click on “Conference Library” and follow the instructions on how to access the list of titles. Email Kate with your selections—up to five tapes—and she will bring them to the next chapter meeting.)

Kate Fink is the tape librarian for the Los Angeles Romance Authors and writes contemporary romance.



In this feature, a LARA member with PRO status reviews a published author's book from any subgenre of romance or on the writing craft.

PROS Review the PANS

by Janet Maarschalk

Publication: Joyce Lamb, Found Wanting



While reading *Found Wanting*, by Joyce Lamb (RITA Award finalist for her second novel, *Caught in the Act*), three words immediately came to mind: tension, conflict and emotion. The story starts with a dramatic prologue; a reunion scene involving the heroine and her mother. When the first words out of the heroine's mouth are, "How did you find me? Were you followed?" the stage is set for this powerful romantic suspense novel.

If the key to a memorable character is conflict, then the heroine Alaina Chancellor is unforgettable. In order to keep her son safe, she

must live on the lam. Never without an alternate set of identification for both herself and her son, she lives hand to mouth, afraid to make or keep friends. For fourteen years she lives a life on the edge, always looking over her shoulder for the one man she never wants to find her, her son's father. The heroine's personal stakes are continually being raised with set-ups, hit men and kidnappers, as the layers of the story unfold with the use of multiple flashbacks. Alaina regularly gets her butt kicked, but fueled with the heart of a warrior where her son's safety is concerned, she also kicks butt, sometimes even the hero's.

Trust, being her greatest challenge, takes on a key role when Alaina is faced with having to do just that with the hero, Mitch Kane, who is conflicted with *beaucoup* guilt for walking away from his own son when his marriage ended. Not only has Mitch tracked Alaina down, but he works for the very man she never wants to get found by: the man that is married to her sister; the man that betrayed her when she was 18; the man that now runs her father's multi-million dollar company, and is all powerful.

With Mitch's arrival, Alaina must face her worst fears of being caught. Mitch, an ex-FBI agent on a routine missing person locate-and-inform mission, realizes early on that there is more to the story than his "good guy civic leader" employer is revealing. Trained to think outside of the box, he takes note when his gut tells him that Alaina's bizarre behavior of a cor-

nered and desperate woman isn't unfounded. Starting out as enemies, and constantly interfering with each other's plans, the hero and heroine still recognize and appreciate the other's finer qualities: her bravery and his resourcefulness. And somehow Joyce Lamb manages, in a compressed timeline, to take the hero and heroine through all four of the expected stages of a valid relationship: conflict, respect, trust, and love.

The story accelerates at all the right moments and both the hero and heroine contribute to resolving the puzzle of the real goal of the villain—it's not what you think—and, more importantly, how to take him out. And the reader cheers for Alaina and Mitch as they finally quit working against each other, and team up to solve the deadly problem...while falling in love.

After attending Donald Maas' all day workshop in OC last fall, I came away with a million thoughts, but one stood foremost in my mind. He said, "No editor ever rejected a book because it had too much tension on the page."

If that's the main requirement for a page-turner, then Joyce Lamb nailed it.

Janet Maarschalk is a PRO member of RWA, VP of Programming for LARA, and the Treasurer for her online medical chapter, Heartbeat. She considers herself pre-published and continues her search for the one editor that will eventually help her drop the prefix.

Hello, here's my website....

by Jacqueline Crane

Everywhere you go you're bound to run into someone you know, haven't seen in a while, or just happened to meet and click with. Hopefully, it's an agent or editor, but what do you do? Ask them for their contact info, of course, so you can keep in touch. Okay, maybe you normally would scrawl their phone number hastily on a napkin or save it in your cell phone address book. These days, you'll discover that most everyone you meet will be quick to whip out their business card, while nonchalantly informing you they have a website. That's true, folks. Websites have become the résumé and calling cards of this century.

After I politely thank the person for their business card, the first thing I do when I get home is fire up my computer and type in the web address. Maybe I'm an oddball, but I tend to be curious about the site's design and content. Most importantly, I want to learn more about the person or their business. Okay, sometimes it's because I can't remember who they are, and I'm hoping the con-

"Websites have become the résumé and calling cards of this century."

tent on the site will jar my memory.

What I've discovered from the numerous sites I've visited is that a majority of them are self-created. As I click through the pages, I usually end up evaluating the site. I don't mean to be so critical about what I see, but I can't help noticing a dozen ways they could have tweaked their design or layout to improve the look, navigation, and feel of their site. I have a desire to call up the person and give them friendly tips on making their site shine. Well, as a graphic and web designer my thoughts and actions are purely habitual...promise! (So please forgive me, dear friends, possibly now foes, whom I have contacted and forced to listen to my long-winded explanations, ideas, and suggestions.)

With all the web surfing I've done, it's easy for me to remember common web "no-no's" that stick out in my mind. I'm no authority on websites, by any means, but during my stint as a Creative Director, I picked up a thing or two that may prove to be helpful. Here are a few "do's" and "don't" that can help you when you think about creating your professional or personal website.

GISS (Keep It Simple, Silly)

As an aspiring author, I must have seen every kind of author site imaginable. I've gone through the entire RWA author and member's list...as well as browsed through a gazillion links listed on other author sites. The one big problem I see on these sites is the incredible amounts of information authors provide. Time is limited and no one really has the time to read everything you've posted. These pages are so cluttered, you wouldn't know where to begin and where the site ends. Frankly, you don't need to include every book review,



award, writing sample, or bits and pieces of news about yourself or photos taken from the last thirty years, unless it's absolutely necessary. If your objective is to have a professional site, too much information dumping may not hold a person's attention for more than ten minutes.

Simplicity is key, folks.

Simple design will go a long way and you'll find it quite pleasing to the eye for anyone who is browsing your pages. Just because it's simple doesn't mean it will be unattractive, boring, or plain. Simplicity can show your elegance, professionalism, and uniqueness without being overstated.

Sure enough, fancy, flashy animation, floating objects, or complicated navigation may be entertaining—well, maybe for the first few minutes, but it easily becomes an annoyance and you can't wait to skip through the bells and whistles to get to the meat of the site.

You'll find simple sites are more appealing to the eye than sites that are burdened with the weight of heavy graphics that affect your page loads. The most important thing to remember: simple designs can be viewed successfully in almost any platform or web browser.

Simplicity can prove to be timeless.



CONSISTENCY (from page-to-page)

Years ago when I started web design, I slapped together my own personal website. Okay, I wanted to be innovative and thought I was ingenious. In truth, I let my imagination run amuck. I wanted to break all the rules of web design by creating masterpiece collages within my website. After months of design and implementation, I e-mailed every family member, relative, and friend I could think of. Then, I made the mistake of e-mailing my web link to my designer friends. Nothing beats hearing brutally honest opinions.

The main criticism was that every page looked different. After a few clicks they felt like they were lost in an entirely new site and had to click the back button to make sure it was still mine. They told me they loved my use of colors and design before they kindly deposited book after book into my arms that focused on the topic of web design.

I decided to take the hint and re-design my site in order to maintain a consistent look from page to page. In addition, I made certain I had a consistent navigation scheme to make it easier for people to get through the pages quickly and conveniently with-

out a need to search for the navigation.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Here are a few examples of things you should avoid on your website.

1. Losing focus – counters, weather and stock tickers, and flashing animated objects aren't necessary, and may make your site appear amateurish.

2. Filling your site with “coming soon” pages – never launch your site without finishing it. You wouldn't hand over an unfinished manuscript to an editor or agent, would you?

3. Using music on your website (unless you're in a band!) – the repetitious music would eventually drive those viewing your site away, especially without a “music off” button.

4. Using a hit counter – it's not necessary to keep track of how many people view your site each day. This isn't a popularity contest. Nowadays your hosting company tracks every hit, URL pointers, and supply statistics on countries where the clicks are coming from.

5. Hosting your site on a free, advertising-based service – it's okay to do a free site if you're showing your family, but if you want to be taken seriously as a writer or professional you don't want pop ups and banners with inappropriate ads to be visible. Your website reflects you as a professional and operates as your resume. You don't dress sloppy to a job interview, so you don't want your website to give off signals that you don't really care about your business or you're too cheap to get a professional site up. It's okay for you to start off with a free site if you can't afford a professional one yet, but keep in mind it's a good investment in the long run.

6. Hiring an amateur designer and expecting a professional website – research and look at portfolio samples of web and graphic designers before com-

mitting to a designer. Don't go with the first company you find. Check rates and get feedback from people who have used these designers. Chances are you know someone who could refer you to a good, inexpensive web designer. Find a person that is willing to work with you to produce the best site possible—and the end product is representative of who you are.

Lastly, if you have an active lifestyle it may be too difficult to continually maintain your site. Make sure your site stays current to keep people's interest. You may want to find a designer that will maintain your website for you if you can't do it yourself. Consistent updates will keep you fresh in the search engines for those who may query your name. Maybe add a blog (web log) or change out information on a weekly basis. This will keep your site fresh and others will be eager to return to it.

Whether you decide to design a website yourself or go with a professional to get the job done, you should try to avoid those common mistakes as outlined in this article, browse through other sites for examples, and weigh your options before you proceed in building your web site.

Jacqueline Crane, aka Jax, has worked as a staff writer for several local independent music and entertainment magazines in Orlando, Florida. She owns a graphic and web design business, Jaxadora Design, which specializes in author websites. Jax has written fourteen screenplays, a paranormal romance, and is currently working on a contemporary gothic romance. In 2004 she was elected Treasurer of the Los Angeles Romance Authors and is the co-founder and web designer of Romance Divas, an award winning online romance writer's resource and forum.

For more information, check out: www.romancedivas.com and www.jaxadora.com



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If It Doesn't Kill You...You Must Be A Writer

by Julie Elizabeth Leto©

The old expression goes, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." For any writer who has survived more than five minutes on the published side of the business, if you aren't dead yet, you're Hercules. I'm Hercules. Okay, most of the time I feel more like that comic book character—you know the one, the wimpy guy at the beach who keeps getting sand kicked in his face? I had one of those weeks recently. When I first sat down to write this article, I hadn't yet gotten to the point where I can say, "I survived." But I'd survived other crises, so chances were I'd make it through this one, too.



If I didn't quit first. My favorite question to bandy with my critique partner is, "why are we doing this again?" Sometimes, because "we love it" simply doesn't cut it.

I've heard a lot of writers say, "Oh, I couldn't quit. I'll keep writing anyway, if only for my own enjoyment." To me, that's a load of hooey. I'm a writer, but I'm also a businesswoman. Quitting the business side would likely mean the categorical end of the writer/artistic side of me...at least, as a writer who sits down for six hours every day to bleed on the page. If not for the paycheck, how can I justify ignoring the rest of my life? Yeah, I'd probably dally with stories in my head, but I'd probably find other venues for my creative juices. They wouldn't have to be about money, per se, but they would have to be about measurable success—which would probably mean money, now that I think about it. I know myself. I know how I was raised. Even though I spent nine years struggling toward publication and in that near decade, acting in every way, shape or form as an unpaid professional, I'm fairly certain I'm not willing to go back and do that all again.

Why am I telling you this? Because on nearly a daily basis, I communicate with wannabe writers who have unrealistic expectations of the business. I should note here that anyone who really knows me would call me an optimist. They would tell you I'm one of the most positive, enthusiastic people they've ever met, that I mentor a

"...writing isn't about a steady paycheck or healthcare benefits or glamorous book signings and parties."

good number of aspiring writers through my local writers group and that I'm a tireless advocate for the craft and business of writing. But I'm also someone who believes very firmly that you should know what you're getting yourself into before you give this profession a shot.

Writing is not about big advances and working in your pajamas. Okay, the working in your pajamas part is real—if you don't have children that have to be taken to school every morning who would be horrified if you stopped to chat with the teacher in your Winnie the Pooh nightshirt and fuzzy slippers. Big advances are also real—but not everyone gets them. In fact, very few writers do and in most cases, who gets the big bucks is a crapshoot. So writing isn't about a steady paycheck or healthcare benefits or glamorous book



"There are no rules in this business.

There is no right way.

There is simply a jungle of risk and uncertainty."

signings and parties. In fact, nearly every writer I know hates book signings because the author is generally more likely to be asked directions to the bookstore's bathroom than they are to sign a book for a real reader.

Writing is hard. Another myth that encourages wannabe writers to drop their day jobs to pursue this profession is that if you are inspired, the book writes itself. That's bull. Books don't write themselves. Maybe the first one will—mine didn't, but I'll give the benefit of the doubt here. It happens. But I'm betting that phenomena also explains why there are so many authors who have written and published one book in their career and then they disappear. Writing is hard. The more you write, the harder it gets.

Why? Lots of reasons. The more you write, the more you

learn about the process and the craft. The more you learn, the more you want to improve and therefore, the craft is harder. Okay, what if you don't want to improve? What if you think you're perfect the way you are? Well, that's nice, but someone somewhere, if you're writing for a legitimate publisher, is going to want you to push farther, deeper or expand your scope. At some point, the market will change and either you will fight to keep up or you get left in the dust.

Ah, the market. The ever-changing, ever-exasperating market. No one really knows what the book buying public wants. Sure, editors and publishers like to think they know—but they aren't always right, are they? Look at how many of them rejected J.K. Rowling when she was shopping Harry Potter. Even superstars like John Grisham and Stephen King racked up their fair share of rejections before they finally found the right publisher for their work. They didn't give up, thankfully. They didn't sell out—and by that, I mean they didn't find some small, quasi-respectable publisher to print ten copies of their books that they could hawk on the Internet. But then, what of that? We've all heard stories of self-published authors who have gone on to great success with a big publisher simply because of perseverance, good writing and word of mouth.

Which proves a point—maybe not my point, but a point. There are no rules in this business. There is no right way. There is simply a

jungle of risk and uncertainty. There are predators who want to suck the joy of writing right out of you, and the worst part is, those predators could end up being your ally and advocate five seconds later. There are pitfalls and sand traps and mountains of joy so tall and broad, you might never climb down from the summit once you've reached it. But you'll probably get pushed down at some point. Wow, does that sound right coming from an optimistic person? I guess I'm more of an optimistic realist. And the thing is, reality is a whole lot easier to deal with if you see it coming.

So before you decide whether or not you want to explore this wilderness, decide if you have the right stuff. Can't take rejection? Stay away. Can't live through criticism without rolling up in a ball and sucking your thumb until it bleeds? Do us all a favor and find another profession. Think you're the perfect artist who has penned the great American novel and clearly deserves endless kudos and admiration?

Get a life. Maybe you are the perfect artist. Maybe you have penned the great American novel. Maybe you will receive endless



cont. on
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kudos and admiration. But trust me, you'll have a lot more friends if you don't act as if you know all this ahead of time.

And let's talk about friends. The people in my life who helped me work out of my writing business-induced funk this week were a mixed bunch. They were readers, aspiring writers, published writers and various industry professionals. I pick and choose my friends very carefully—a lesson I learned in those nine long years before I published.



Are you the jealous type who is going to talk behind my back about how I have no reason to complain about my current crisis because I've had X, Y and Z happen for me? Well, you can take a flying leap. You'll experience your own crisis someday and when that dark day comes, I won't be there to help talk you down. Are you the Pollyanna, passive-aggressive type who thinks, "Geez, she must not be a very talented writer or this hor-

rible crisis wouldn't be happening to her." I've got a few four-letter words for you, too. Everyone, no matter how talented, goal-oriented and positive-minded, if they work toward a career in this business, will hit a roadblock. Grinning and bearing it might be fine for some people, but I'm not that type. I hate grinning and bearing. I'm a fighter. I'm not a diva (though some of my editors might argue that point) but I'm a professional who isn't afraid to speak up when I don't think the plan is going in the right direction. I'm not always listened to—and those are the times I need my friends. My real friends. The ones who have been through what I'm experiencing or the ones who acknowledge deep in their hearts that if they stay in this business long enough, they will go through something similarly frustrating. And when they do, I'll be there—that you can count on.

Then there are the readers. Ah, my readers. In 2001, shortly after the tragedy of 9/11, I learned the most valuable lesson a genre writer can learn. What we do counts. What we do brings joy and entertainment to people who sometimes desperately need an escape from their own lives, even if only for a few hours. My readers can coax me out of my anger and frustration more quickly than anyone else, even without knowing that's what they are doing. So as a side note, if you're a reader and you've been thinking about sending a note to a favorite author lately—do it. She or he might really need it right now. They might be having a seriously crappy week and might

"What we do brings joy and entertainment to people who sometimes desperately need an escape from their own lives, even if only for a few hours. "

even be contemplating, even in the most illusory sense, the idea of quitting. Your note might be the one that makes them change their mind.

The bottom line is that writing is a lonely, hard and frustrating profession. It can also be wonderful, fantastic and magical. But if you want to pursue this, be prepared for all of it. Only then might you truly succeed—or at least, you won't annoy the rest of us who are seriously trying to.

Julie Elizabeth Leto is the RITA-nominated, USA Today bestselling author of over twenty novels for Harlequin, NAL/Signet and Pocket's Down-town Press. Her summer releases include Dirty Little Secrets and Making Waves, both of which nearly killed her, since that's really what books do. Visit <http://www.julieleto.com> for excerpts and other down-and-dirty articles on writing.

Los Angeles Romance Authors Presents

Carolyn Greene “The Plot Doctor”

Got a great idea for a romance but don't know where to begin? Know your beginning and end but not much in between? Carolyn is just what the doctor ordered. Whether your book is in need of a quick fix or on serious life support, Greene's step-by step plotting methods can help you too! This interactive workshop is open to all levels of writers. Attendees will learn to:

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- Outline and structure your novel—great for writing a synopsis
- Create believable conflict
- Keep the reader hooked and the action going
- Break through writer's block
- Have a payoff ending to leave the reader satisfied

When and Where:

Saturday, May 21, 2005. 9:00 A.M. TO 4:00 P.M.

Holiday Inn: Burbank Media Center – (818) 841-4770
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Cost:

\$45.00 for LARA members, **\$50.00** all others

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Ms. Greene's workbook **Prescription for Plotting**, will be available for \$30.00.

Continental breakfast included. Special hotel room rate for attendees from out of the area: \$99.00

Space is limited, so please enroll early!

Carolyn Greene is a much-sought after speaker who has taught her “Plot Doctor” methods to writers all over the country. She is a bestselling author and has been a finalist for RWA's prestigious RITA award. Her next work on shelves will be **Birds of a Feather**, in September 2005, from Guidepost Books.

Register by April 1, 2005 and you'll be entered in a drawing to have your synopsis critiqued by Carolyn Greene.

For more information please go to www.losangelesromanceauthors.com

Mail registration form and check made out to LARA to: Janet Maarschalk
3088 Texas Avenue
Simi Valley, CA 93063

Registration form. Tear off and mail in with check to LARA.

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