

LARA Confidential

The Newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors Chapter of RWA®

Promoting Excellence in Romantic Fiction through Education and Community

Apr 2012 Newsletter

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Join us on April 15th for our General Meeting at the Sportsman's Lodge in Studio City, CA (on the corner of Ventura & Coldwater Canyon)

LARA Presents

Your First Line, Paragraph, and Scene: Creating a Good First Impression with speaker Josie Brown

April 15th, 2012

Josie Brown is the author of five novels, including *The Secret Lives of Husbands and Wives* (Simon & Schuster), which has been optioned by Jerry Bruckheimer as a dramatic television series. Josie has also published three non-fiction books and her works as a journalist have been featured in the *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate International, *Redbook* and *Complete Woman* magazines, as well as AOL, Yahoo, Ask-Men.com, and more.

On April 15th, she will be speaking on "Your First Line, Paragraph, Scene: Creating a Good First Impression." In her presentation, Josie will go over positive examples from works submitted by LARA members.



**See Page 3 for a Q&A
with Josie!**

Join us on
April 15th, 2012
from 10AM to 12PM
Your First Line, Paragraph, Scene:
Creating a Good First Impression
Speaker: Josie Brown
Sportsman's Lodge in Studio City, CA

Visit Josie Brown online at
<http://www.josiebrown.com>

April 2012

Upcoming LARA Events

May 20 May General Meeting: HelenKay Dimon will talk about **Building Strong Characters**. HelenKay is a Harlequin Intrigue romance author (www.helenkaydimon.com)

May 27 Workshop: Learn **How to Sell Your Book Online** with Internet Marketer **Penny Sansevieri** and Blogger/Researcher **Erica Barton**. The half-day workshop will be held on May 27th from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Sportsman's Lodge in Studio City. Attendees will receive a PowerPoint presentation to use at home and a free Marketing WordPress Plug-In (valued at \$37). Penny Sansevieri will be teaching attendees some of her best techniques on author marketing on the internet, auto-marketing tips, and other "cutting edge" information. Erica Barton will walk authors step-by-step through setting up their blogs to become their auto-marketing machines, show authors how to grow their Social Media sites on auto-pilot, and focus on Social Media tips that will bring traffic from social media sites to your blog and onto your book sales pages the easy way. For more information and to register for this workshop, please visit: lararwa.com.

SPEW: Don't forget that SPEW (Stop Procrastinating Everybody Write) starts the Monday after our regular monthly meeting. To join the SPEW mailing list, please email saravance@gmail.com.

Author Critique Opportunity Drawing: For just one dollar, you can buy a chance to get your manuscript read by one of LARA's fabulous published authors! You can buy your raffle ticket (or many raffle tickets) at the beginning each General Meeting. The more tickets you buy, the greater your chances of winning, and the more you will help out our chapter.

Upcoming RWA Writing Contests

29th Annual Orange Rose: Deadline: Apr 14. RWA members, not contracted/published in book-length fiction in last 5 yrs. 50 pgs including synopsis. occrwa.org/contest.

21st Annual Duel on the Delta: Deadline: Apr 15. First 20 pgs. rivercityromancewriters.org.

7th Annual Passionate Plume Contest: Deadline: Apr 15. Electronic and print books with strong erotic elements, 2011 copyright. passionateink.org.

7th Annual Stroke of Midnight: Deadline: Apr 15. First 35 pages, first 20 pages for novellas. Entry must contain strong erotic elements. passionateink.org

Wishing You Holiday Love Short Story: Deadline: Apr 21. Unpublished and PRO authors who are not PAN eligible. Up to 10,000 words. solawriters.org/short-story-contest/.

2012 Published Maggie Award : Deadline: May 1. Novel-length romances with 2011 copyright. georgiaromancewriters.org/the-maggies/.

2012 Tara Contest: Deadline: May 1. Unpublished and published authors of novel-length fiction. The entry must be unpublished and uncontracted at the time of the contest deadline. The first chapter, 4,000 words max. tararwa.com

The 5th Annual Alaska Break-Up: Deadline: May 1. Unpublished manuscripts. Up to 10 pgs of your manuscript's most tense argument, breakup, or black moment. akrwa.org.

International Digital Awards (IDA): Deadline: May 1. Any ebook with a 2010 or 2011 copyright and is NOT available in print. IdaContest.Wordpress.com.

For more information and more contests, visit the RWA website.

Speaker Spotlight

Victoria Russell, LARA Programming Director, interviews May speaker, Josie Brown:

What do you wish someone had told you when you began your career?

Ah! great question! Well, for starters:

1. The best financial offer does not always ensure you'll also have the best editor. If more than one bids on your book, talk to each of them. Ask questions as to (a) what they love about your book; (b) their editing styles; and (c) what they can do to get you in-store co-op, so that your book will have a chance to find readers.
2. That, as much as you love your agent, you may not be with him/her forever. Besides any personal relationship you have with your agent, your primary relationship is built on the business of publishing. Their job is to sell your manuscripts to editors who will champion them onto bookshelves, and into the hands of readers. However, if for whatever reason, you feel your agent isn't loving your plots/characters/writing voice anymore, you need to move on. No harm, no foul, just business. Have an honest conversation about it. Both of you will appreciate it. In business and friendship, respect is key. You can't have that if one of you is frustrated with the other.

**“If you're in the game already, stay in it.
If you want your turn up to bat, stay in it.”**

What's your favorite romance novel and why?

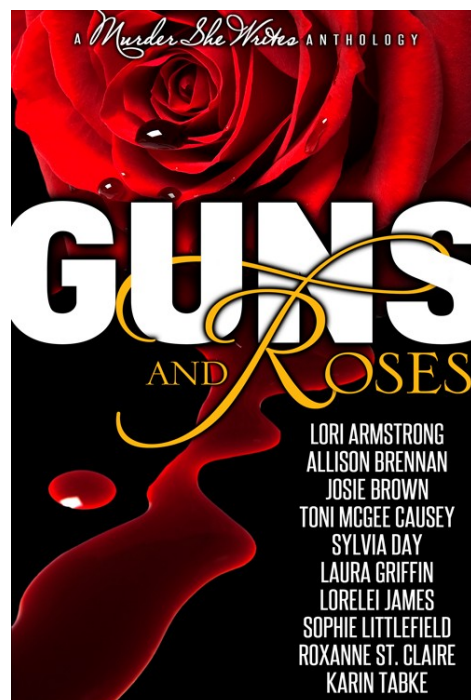
I am TOTALLY "old school" when it comes to romance novels. By that, I mean I love big sagas. To me, the biggest one of all is GONE

WITH THE WIND -- which is possibly why I read it thirteen times before I reached the age of sixteen, ha ha! To this day, I can open it to any page and the words are like old friends.

What's next for you? Book? Development deal or website? Book tour or speaking engagement?

Thanks for asking! This year is a VERY busy year for me:

1. Along with nine other mystery novelists, I've just released a 12,000-word story based on my character Donna Stone and her series. It's called "The Housewife Assassin's Bloody Valentine". You'll find it in GUNS AND ROSES: A MURDER SHE WRITES ANTHOLOGY", which also includes stories from authors Lori Armstrong, Allison Brennan, Sylvia Day, Laura Griffin, Toni McGee Causey, Karin Tabke, Roxanne St. Claire, Lorelei James, and Sophie Littlefield. We had a blast putting it together!
2. Besides the sale of SECRET LIVES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES to Jerry Bruckheimer, I have producers interested in a couple of my other books. Fingers crossed I'll have great news when I'm there to speak to LARA.



(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3) *Speaker Spotlight*

3. I'm completing the second book in my HOUSEWIFE ASSASSIN series, THE HOUSEWIFE ASSASSIN'S GUIDE TO GRACIOUS KILLING. I love my character, Donna Stone, and her balancing act of mama drama between her espionage assignments.

What's your favorite thing to do when you are not writing?

Walking! My husband and I live in a great walker's town: San Francisco. It's got great architectural eye candy, what with all the Victorian and Edwardian townhouses, the vistas from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Bay Bridge, and walking paths in Marin County, which has more national park land than any other county in the country. We walk about five miles a day, up to eleven on the weekends.

What is your favorite dessert? (Mine is red velvet cupcakes...the humor of the inter-viewer)

HAHA! I love those, too! Yep, and certainly a cake (okay, yes, and admittedly a pie person, too)...albeit my favorite cake of all time is chocolate with egg-white cocoanut frosting. For pies, it's one I bake every Thanksgiving: chocolate walnut.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

You'll hear me say it during the workshop, so get used to it: "last author standing."

If you're in the game already, stay in it.

If you want your turn up to bat, stay in it.

It's why we write....right?

Writing Research

Misconceptions about Mental Illness

By Beverly Diehl

We throw the word "crazy" around pretty lightly, but despite misconceptions about what mental illness is, the truth is there's a lot of crazy out there. Estimates are that one in five Americans experience some kind of diagnosable, treatable mental illness in the course of each year. (Not that anywhere near this number actually *gets* treated.)

Though research indicates that mental illness is generated by the physical and chemical make-up of the brain, and no more the sufferer's "fault" or choice than being nearsighted or having a gimpy knee, there's still a big stigma about acknowledging mental illness.

Then too, one of the symptoms of many mental illnesses is denial by the affected person. Not simply because of the stigma, but because

many with mental illness feel fine, great, they are *winners!*

Mental illness doesn't simply impact the person with the condition. It affects everyone around them: lovers, family, friends, neighbors, co-workers. If we are smart writers, it can also inform our writing.

Consider these scenarios:

Our hero's mother was alcoholic; he has many unpleasant childhood memories of drunken scenes and next day hangovers. If his love interest gets slightly tipsy at a social event, he may go ballistic, totally out of proportion to the "offense." Perhaps mom disappeared. Will she reappear, still alcoholic and expecting to be enabled? Dried out and wanting to repair the relationship? Or did she crawl into a hole and die somewhere? Our hero may be haunted by a sense of unfinished business and guilt that he didn't "save" her.

Heroine's father was OCPD (Obsessive-

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4) *Mental Illness*

Compulsive Personality Disorder). He constantly nitpicked at her, her siblings, and her co-dependent mother. Now she has a rock-bottom sense of self-esteem, a need to prove herself as perfect and to hide any flaws. Daddy Dearest presents a jovial, "good guy" appearance around outer-circle people, so her love interest doesn't understand why she avoids her family, and why even the slightest criticism sends her into an emotional tailspin.

Hero has an autistic brother, whom he both loves and resents because the family dynamic was all about caring for the special needs child, and the others were mostly left to fend for themselves.

Heroine's mother was hugely obese and a binge eater. Having seen the pain and ostracism her mother received, heroine vowed she'd be different. She's on the flip side of the eating disorder coin, with anorectic tendencies. She lets the number on the scale or the size on the clothing tag determine whether it will be a good day or a bad day.

Hero has been diagnosed in the past with clinical depression, and once attempted suicide as a teen. He's been stable for years, but is afraid to reveal his history to his new love.

Heroine fears she may be bi-polar. She experiences mood swings of feeling spiritually high, powerful, creative, and energetic, and does most her painting, networking, and partying during those times, but they alternate with days when she can barely crawl out of bed. If she seeks treatment, will medication rob her of the highs and creativity?

Giving some of our characters a mental illness

not only deepens them, but is guaranteed to add drama and conflict. (Always a good thing in story, if not in real life.) Every era, every culture has had mentally ill members, even if some have considered it demonic possession or heavenly visitation. It can be used in any work, from sci-fi to historical fiction.

One of the things I loved about Eve Berlin's *Pleasure's Edge* is that the heroine is deeply impacted by growing up with a bi-polar mother; so much so that Dylan can barely talk about it to her new love. Her hero, Alec, models himself after a father who was distant; could or would not engage in emotional connection with a love partner. Wally Lamb's Dolores Price of *She's Come Undone*, spends seven years in a mental institution - and is still someone we root for at the end.

I'm not suggesting that we cruise the headlines, pick a mental illness "flavor of the month," and crudely staple it into

our work. But why not take a look at our work and characters as they develop, and see if mental illness, diagnosed or undiagnosed, fits with their personal or family dynamics?

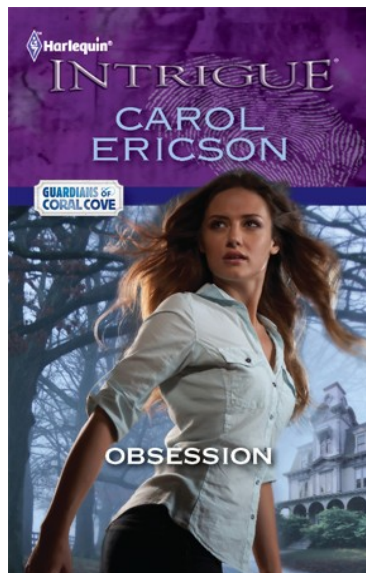
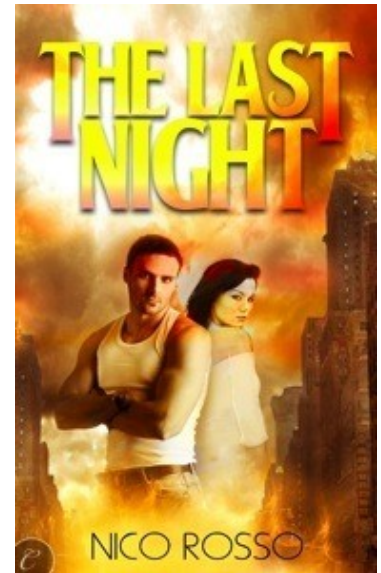
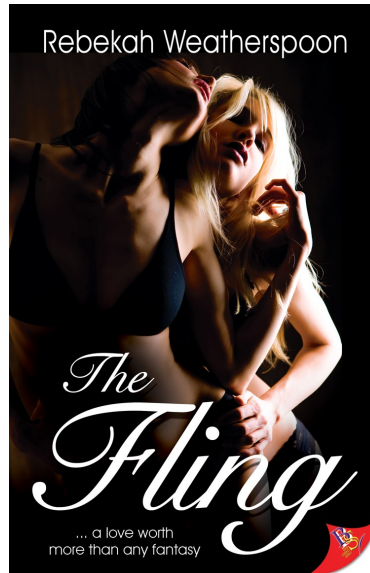
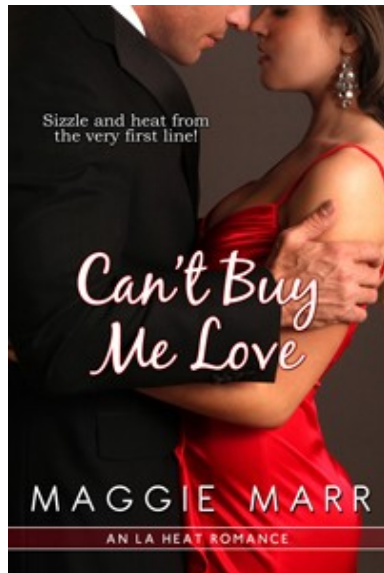
By highlighting mental illness as a source of conflict or pain, especially if we do our homework and present it in an accurate and respectful way, our work will become deeper and more real. We also perform the very valuable social purpose of bringing more awareness to mental health issues.

You can find Beverly Diehl online at:

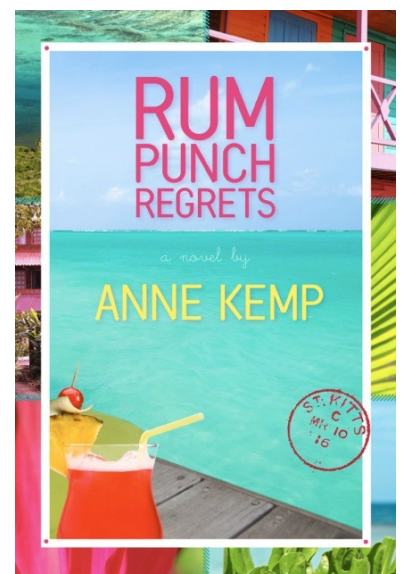
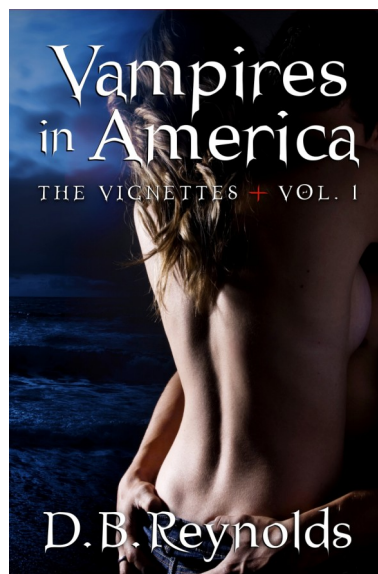
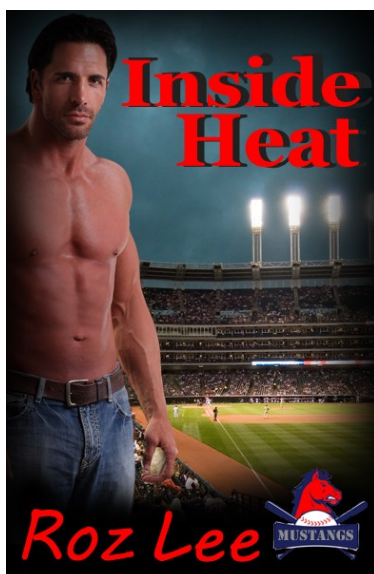
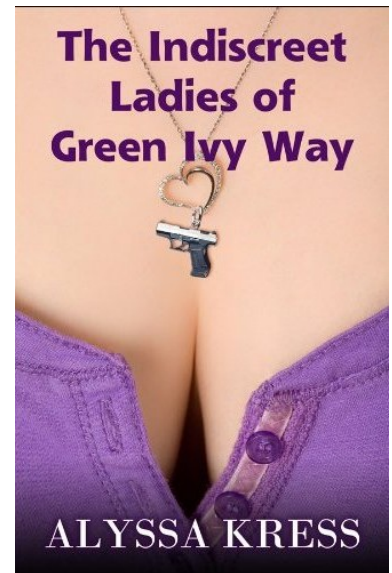
Website: www.beverlydiehl.com

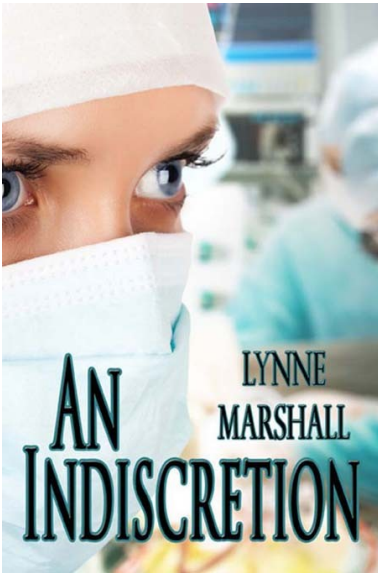
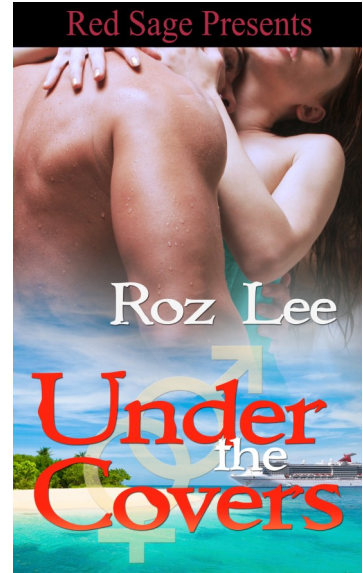
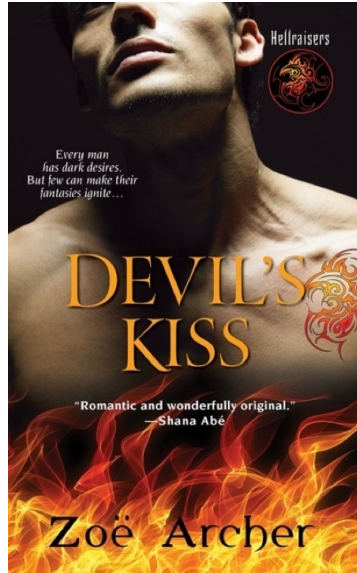
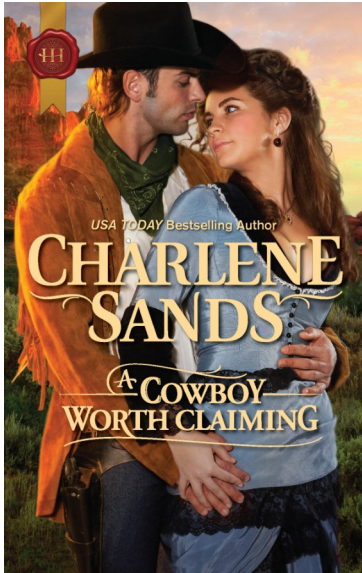
Blog: <http://writinginflow.blogspot.com>



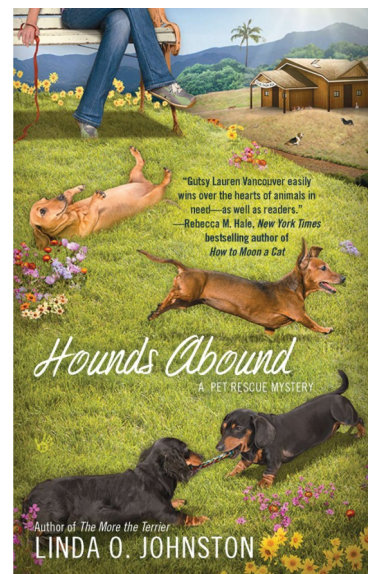
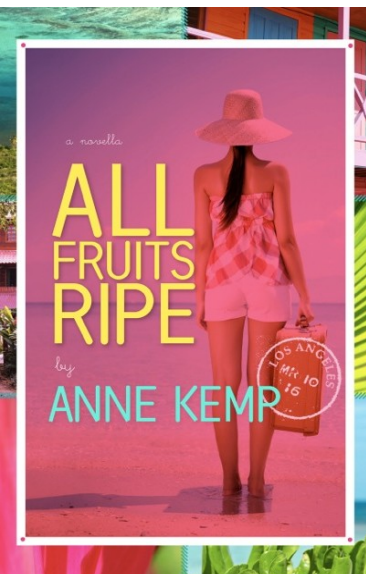


New Releases





by **LARA**
Members



Industry Insights

Don't Judge a Book by Its Color: The white default of the publishing industry

By Christine Leo / Christine Collier

We've all heard the popular saying, "Never assume. You'll just make an ass out of u and me." I, for one, am not afraid to admit that I can be an "ass" sometimes. The truth is we all make assumptions every day. Sometimes little, sometimes big, but almost always incorrect.

Just the other day I was speeding down the freeway when I heard the heavy rumble and pop-pop sound of a Harley Davidson coming up on the passenger side of my car. I was in such deep thought over this very article that I hadn't noticed I was veering slightly into his lane. Mr. Harley gave me a polite revving of the engine to wake me up and get me back on my side of the road before speeding past me. That's when I realized "Mr. Harley" was actually a "Ms. Harley" right down to the slender build and long blond locks flowing out from underneath her badass helmet.

My initial shock over this revelation spoke volumes regarding my own preconceived notions about motorcycle riders. I was guilty of the very offense I was going to be writing about... Arriving at a conclusion, based on a stereotype. It reminded me that not all "assumptions" are evil in their conception. Sometimes it's simply lazy thinking. It's like flopping back without looking onto an old chair after a long day on your feet. If you don't turn around, you might miss the seat by a couple of inches and hit the floor. The true offense is when you are aware of what you are doing and you continue to do it.

An Unsettling Discovery

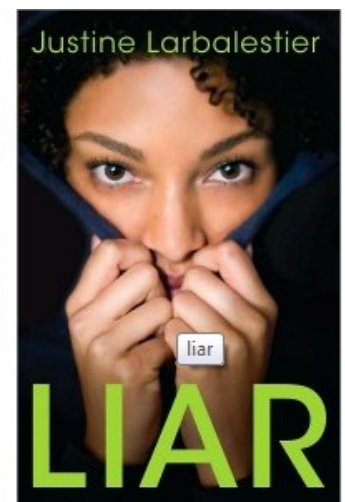
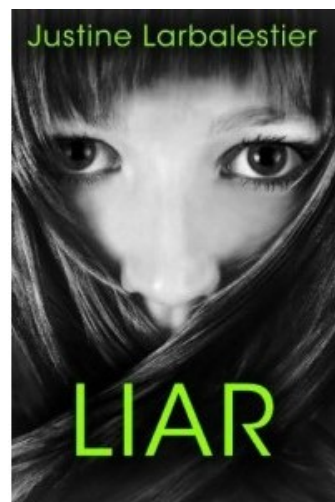
I rode into the bustling metropolis of romance fiction about four years ago on the *Twilight* bandwagon. Prior to that, reading had been a source of drudgery I only associated with

school. So when my new obsession grew into several teetering towers around my home, I thought it might be a good idea to expel some of that energy by actually writing romance.

Several months after joining RWA, I discovered the Golden Heart contest and the 2011 winner for the Paranormal Romance category, Trisza LeAnn Ray for *The Blood Sworn King*. I was hunting on the internet for an interview with Ms. Ray and came across Alicia McCalla's blog "Fantasy, Futuristic and Paranormal Stories in Color" (www.AliciaMcCalla.com).

Ms. McCalla started out her interview with Ms. Ray by saying, "Trisza, I was so excited to see an African-American win in the Paranormal Romance category. I cried along with you at Nationals."

I froze after reading that first sentence. I was dumbfounded. Not because I was so naïve as to think all racial barriers had already been broken, but because it suddenly occurred to me that in the 80 plus books I had devoured in the last two years, I couldn't think of any non-white characters. Well, maybe one or two, but they had been so minute, they were hard to recall. How could I not have noticed until now? And that's when a little voice of reason said, "Ah,



Revised and re-released cover of Justine Larbalestier's *LIAR*, whose protagonist is not Caucasian. From: thebooksmugglers.com.

(Continued from page 8) *Don't Judge a Book by Its Color*

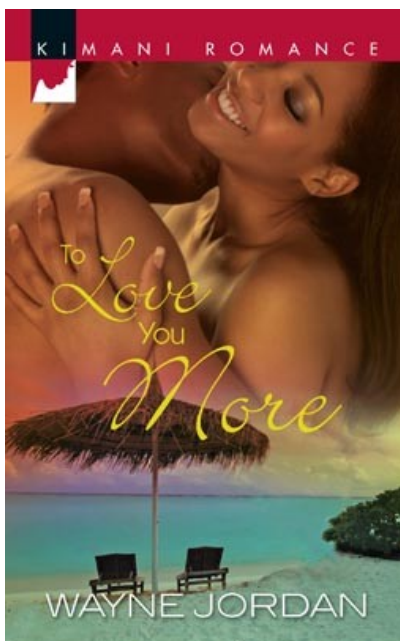
probably because you're white and you're represented in almost every book you pull off the shelf."

I realize this issue has probably been talked/blogged about for years, but it was news to my ears. Not because I was brought up in a bubble, but I hadn't been part of the literary world. I was born and raised in Southern California (the melting pot of melting pots) with T.V. shows, movies and music where **all races seemed present**. Seriously, the first *Star Trek*, with its multi-cultural cast, aired in 1966! Are we really still dealing with segments of the population being so under-represented to such a severe degree in any medium 46 years later?

Fact Finding Frustrations

I'd like to consider myself a master of Google searches. There've even been times my computer technician of a husband will have trouble getting the results he needs and I'll be like, "Have you tried blah, blah, blah?" And magically an article pops up he can use.

However, I've met my match when it comes to finding hard statistics on the percentage of books that are written, published and sold that contain minorities as their title characters. Likewise, I've had a difficult time finding demographics on romance readers, broken down by ethnicity. I even downloaded the full 32 page "RWA Romance Book Consumer Survey" and could not find anything on the race of their survey respondents. They broke them down by age, gender, employment status and income levels all in an attempt to show what a unique smattering of individuals their test group consists of, but nothing on their race.



TO LOVE YOU MORE by
Wayne Jordan, Kimani Press.

If it's important that we hear from every age, gender and income level, shouldn't we make sure we are hearing from every race as well?

Actions Speak Louder than Words

According to RWA's website, "Romance fiction generated \$1.358 billion in sales in 2010." (rwa.org). It repeatedly trumps all other categories of literature in mainstream publishing.

I'm no marketing professional, but if romance fiction is the biggest cow on the farm, wouldn't you want to milk that cow for all its worth? And wouldn't you do that by reaching out to **all** women?

Since statistics are scarce, I figured the best way to determine if publishers are indeed marketing to all segments of the female population is to go where the advertisements are placed. I decided to use the latest issue of RWA's Romance Writers Report (April 2012, Vol. 32, Num. 4) as a test subject. I counted 13 advertisements containing the images of approximately 45 book covers. Of those 45 covers, only two appeared to contain the image of a non-white character, while 10 of them were nondescript (either containing just the outline/shadow of a character or no person at all).

Since a publisher purchased most of these advertisements, it left me wondering if: 1. There were simply no books with minority title characters about to be released; 2. They are not willing to give a prime advertising spot to one of these titles; or 3. They felt as though RWR was not the right medium for them. No matter what the reason, the end result is still disheartening.

Next I decided to visit the online home of some popular publishers and book review websites to see if they would give a "prime spot" to a book

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9) *Don't Judge a Book by Its Color*

“We can connect with people that think like us — and perhaps more importantly — *don't think like us.*”

with minority title characters by featuring it on their home page. (Please note, these counts were taken on 3/31/2012 and they are solely based on my assessments, which are far from perfect). Here's what I found:

Avon Romance: avonromance.com/

- 25 Book Covers
- 21 covers featured Caucasian looking characters
- 4 covers were nondescript

Romantic Times Book Reviews: rtbookreviews.com (Count taken from their "Featured Top Picks" section)

- 23 Book Covers
- 16 featured Caucasian looking characters
- 6 were nondescript
- 1 featured a character that appeared to be of non-Caucasian descent

Harlequin: harlequin.com/

- 17 Book Covers
- 9 featured Caucasian looking characters
- 6 were nondescript
- 2 featured a character that appeared to be of non-Caucasian descent

Kensington: kensingtonbooks.com/ (Count taken from their "Featured Titles" and "Coming Next Month" section. All books included in this count are romance titles).

- 23 Book Covers
- 12 featured Caucasian looking characters
- 9 were nondescript
- 2 featured a character that appeared to be of non-Caucasian descent

Random House: romanceatrandom.com

- 21 Book Covers
- 19 featured Caucasian looking characters
- 2 were nondescript

In the end, Harlequin did the best by dedicating 11% of the spots designated on its homepage for book cover images to novels with minority title characters. Kensington came in second with 9%. It should be noted that each of these publishers have African American series imprints (Harlequin's Kimani Press and Kensington's Dafina).

Destructive assumptions that lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy

Most women love a good romance, no matter what race they are. It's been proven time and time again by blockbuster films and top-rated television shows that don't contain white lead characters. So why the lack of diversity in romance fiction?

The only answer I can come up with after hours upon hours of reading through countless articles, message boards, and blogs is... assumptions. Assumptions made by publishers that say, "white books sell more," which have led to the insidious practice of "whitewashing" book covers and the segregation of books into racially based categories rather than their appropriate genres. And to those that say, "readers vote with their dollars and white books sell"... That may be true, but when the industry is flooded with books that only have white faces on the cover, you're not exactly allowing read-

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10) *Don't Judge a Book by Its Color*

ers to fish from a multicultural pond, are you?

In a perfect world, *every woman would be able to browse the romance section of a bookstore and see covers that represent them, their friends, their co-workers and neighbors.*

The Final Frontier

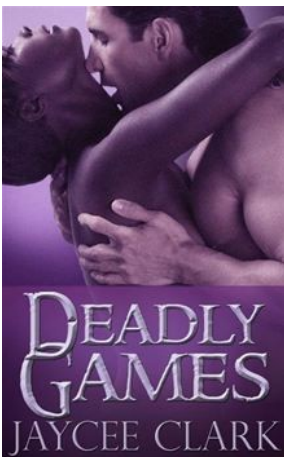
We live in exciting times! In a world where we don't have to take NO for an answer *anymore!* Things like self-publishing, blogging and social networking allow us to expand our horizons and access content previously kept from the mainstream at the click of a button. We can connect with people that think like us -and perhaps more importantly - *don't* think like us. It's not easy, but if you want to make a difference, awareness is key.

Readers - Support your favorite authors that create characters you identify with. It's wonderful that you have purchased their book and enjoyed it, but get online and see what the author is doing. Most authors have an online footprint and nothing is better than hearing from their readers. Tell them specifically what characters/plotlines spoke to you and why.

Bloggers - Write about issues that you genuinely support but that may not be in line with your usual content. Shake stuff up a bit. I've seen bloggers double their number of comments because one day they decided to write about something completely out of left field that they felt passionate about. Chances

are if it's bugging you, it's bugging someone else.

Writers - Pick and choose your battles with the gatekeepers, but stick to your guns on the things that



DEADLY GAMES by Jaycee Clark (Beyond the Page Publishing), whose heroine is multi-racial.

matter. If there is character you feel strongly about with an aspect of his or her background, personality, or culture that's crucial to the story, don't change it for *anyone*. I realize that's easier said than done, but if you are changing something so essential to a character or the story that it won't be the same without it, then maybe you're not working with the right people.

Book Reviewers - In one word, diversify. If every book you review has the same color of people on the front cover, then something is wrong. *Every* genre, I don't care what it is, has quality contributors from every culture and if you're not taking notice, you could be missing out.

Suggested Articles & Sites:

Alicia McCalla's Interview with 2011 Golden Heart winner, Trisza LeAnn Ray:

aliciamccalla.com

For more on whitewashing book covers and some startling examples:

thebooksmugglers.com

For campaigns and movements against whitewashing:

racebending.com

facebook.com/pages/Readers-Against-WhiteWashing

To get a feel for just how long this conversation has been going on, see this LA Times article from 1994:

articles.latimes.com

For some suggested reading:

squidoo.com/blackromancenovel

latinabookclub.com/

kayedacus.com/2008/05/07/asian-american-romances-by-camy-tang/

Christine Collier writes as Christine Leo
www.ChristineLeo.com

Chapter Business

Five Minute Love Stories... Written Lovingly by LARA

By Kathy Bennett, Ways and Means Director

Okay, LARA members! Here's an opportunity where you're being offered a chance to dip your toes into the swift tides of self-publishing. But don't worry, you won't be alone. Other LARA members will be there right beside you, knee-deep in the waters, submitting their best efforts as well.

The LARA chapter of RWA is going to self-publish a fund-raising anthology entitled *Five Minute Love Stories*. We're looking for LARA members to write those stories and submit them for the opportunity to be included the anthology.

Please note that not every story submitted to LARA will be selected to be placed in the anthology.

This is how it will work:

LARA members will write a short love story – up to 1500 words. While many writers might submit a story involving romantic love, there are other types of love stories that could be told as well. For example, a grandmother's love for a grandchild, or a person's act of love as they go out of their way to help a total stranger. All heat levels will be accepted. You can submit more than one story, but each will need it's own cover sheet and should be submitted separately.

The submission process will open May 1, 2012 and end at midnight May 31, 2012. Please e-mail your short story and cover sheet (which can be found on the LARA website in the Members section) to: ericka_scott@sbcglobal.net Instructions for the submissions will be a part of the cover sheet.

A story selection committee has been formed from LARA Board members. The submissions will be presented to the selection committee without any author-identifying information. Instead, the manuscripts will be marked with an identifying code number. In this way, it is assured that every LARA member has an equal opportunity to have their work selected for the anthology.

Important Notes:

The Five Minute Love Stories anthology is a great promotional tool for writers. It will offer previously unpublished authors the chance to get their work in front of readers. Published authors can benefit from exposure to readers who may not have seen their work before.

This anthology will serve as an on-going fundraiser for the LARA Chapter of RWA. With this thought in mind, authors will be *donating their stories* to LARA, with **all** proceeds going to LARA. However, authors will retain the rights to the characters and worlds. *Authors who have their story selected for the anthology* will be issued a contract for the use of their story.

So what are you waiting for?

Put on your water wings, take the plunge and get your feet wet in the ocean of self-publishing...the water is fine!



Photo by Charisma, freedigitalphotos.net

Writing Research

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Horses In Romance: Part I. The Historical Horse

By Liz Selvig

Whether it's Richard III shouting, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse," or Winston Churchill declaring, "There's nothing so good for the inside of a man as the outside of a horse," Equus Caballas has captured man- and womankind's imagination for thousands of years.

Throughout history, the horse has served as an equivalent to the plow, the semi-truck, the moving van, the SAR team, the mail service, the tank, the automobile and the PlayStation. The Marlboro man was never without his horse. The Old Spice guy brags about riding one. We know the names Trigger, Silver and Flicka even if we don't have the crazies for horses. And, be honest, what is still the most awesome present a child can request from Santa? A pony!

It's no wonder horses play such an important role in romance. Lovers riding into the sunset, a highlanders on his steed, knights jousting on their destriers, or a modern day cowboy with his beloved pony, all have places in the books on our keeper shelves. It doesn't take much, using little tidbits we see about horses all the time, to throw a romantic horseback ride into a story. However, to write a truly realistic horse character or scene, you need more than clichés and knowing that a horse whinnies and eats hay.

How to bug a horse person

Why should anyone care about getting horse facts right? Because it's so easy to get them wrong! Here are a few romantic-sounding but unrealistic horse scenarios I've run across over the years. These kinds of dreamy-sounding things will lose your credibility with (and bug the heck out of) a horse expert.

1) Rearing. Exciting and impressive, right? Wrong. When a horse rears, 99 percent of the time, it's very dangerous. Yes, the Lone Ranger did it. Yes, circus performers do it. Don't have your characters do it, at least not to show off. A rearing horse is usually frightened or hurt. Only an experienced rider knows how to stay on and stay safe, or make an emergency dismount if the horse flips over. The exception to

this is a war or battle horse if he was trained to rear in front of enemies and be intimidating.

2) Galloping the fields. Once again, forget every Western you've ever seen. Tearing across an open field just to have the wind blowing your hair, unless the field is one made for galloping horses or

is well-known private property, is something a good horseman would never do. One hole, one root, one grass tangle is all it would take to send a horse head over tail with a broken leg. On a trail, on a known path or along a beach, fine. But no races across the prairie unless you describe them as dangerous.

3) Taking a leisurely ride on your stallion. Stallions are sexy, it's true. And some stallions are mellow. But a stallion is a sexually intact male animal and, as such, is unpredictable and not always suitable in mixed company. Never put a child on one in your story, and make sure your rider is an expert if he or she is riding one.

(Continued on page 14)



(Continued from page 13) Horses in Romance

4) Sex on horseback. This romantic ideal is so pervasive, I'm going to address it in part two of this article. Stay tuned for this one!

Those are only a few examples of how easy it is to fall into cliché and ruin your horsey scenes. But, as with any subject, a little knowledge can help ensure you'll sound like an expert. Let's explore the history of horses and touch on a few facts that will make your historical romances ring true when it comes to your heroes' and heroines' trusty mounts.



The Basics - Choosing the right type

The first prehistoric horsey ancestor, Hyracotherium, aka Eohippus or "Dawn Horse" was about the size of a large fox. It hid in tall grasses, had four toes on its front legs and three on the back. (There are still vestiges of these toes in modern horses.) Those prehistoric animals have evolved into today's three distinct equine types: light breeds, warmbloods, and cold-bloods. The differences in these general types dictate how we use them in our novels.

Light breeds are those most familiar to the majority of us. These are Arabians, Thoroughbreds, Quarterhorses, Paints, Morgans etc. If you're writing a story about cowboys, horse showing, dude ranches, racing etc. you would choose from these breeds.

Cold blooded horses (so called because of the climates they were bred to work in and for their cool, calm temperaments) are the draft horses

we've come to love as gentle giants. The best known are, of course, the Budweiser Clydesdales. Other breeds are Belgians, Percherons, Shires, and American Creams. In a contemporary story, these horses would have small roles if your H/h were on, say, a hay ride or if you were writing an Amish story. In a historical, these would be farm horses. It's a misconception that medieval jousting horses and clan war horses were huge coldbloods. For those you want:

Warmblood horses. These are purposefully bred mixes of light pleasure-riding animals and large work horses. Names of these breeds are less familiar to non-horse people: Oldenburg, Trakehner, Holsteiner, Selle Francais, Friesian, Andalusian. They have compact, heavy bodies combined with flexibility and athleticism. In a contemporary story, these horses can be used for English style horse showing such as dressage and three-day eventing. In historicals, the ancestors of these horses are your shining stars!

There are also hot-blooded horses. Most experts consider there are only two true hot-bloods, the Arabian and the Thoroughbred (originally bred in hot, dry, desert climates). These two breeds have contributed bloodlines to almost every light breed of horse in the world today. And you might note that you wouldn't likely find hot bloods at a working or dude ranch, but you might at a riding stable or private farm or in Victorian or Regency England.

Destrier rides again

If you love historicals, you've read about the warriors' mighty destriers. But what were the horses used in historical times? The closest modern example of a top quality war horse might be a Friesian. These beautiful black horses are the size and weight of an ancient steed. They stand between 15-16 hands (a hand is four inches) at their withers (the bump at the base of a horse's neck) and are nimble and quick.

Horses used for warriors and royalty were generally referred to as Chargers. Since good things come in threes, it stands to reason there were three types of chargers. Keep in mind, these are not breeds, but types of horses.

Destriers were very expensive animals, usually stallions, used for battle and prized for tournaments. They were well-muscled, very strong and highly trained. A good destrier in medieval times sold for upwards of 12 solidi. To put that in some frame of reference, a sound mare might cost three solidi and a cow one.

Coursers were larger stronger, workhorses able to carry a knight with his heavy armor and men-at-arms with their weapons for long distances into battle.

Rounceys were all-purpose, more ordinary, horses closer to our light breeds of today. They were less bulky, swifter and able to travel farther. These were the horses of squires and poorer knights, and they were pack horses and those of retainers that had to cover a lot of ground.

Finally, there is the palfrey. Palfreys were much sought-after horses with an ambling gait, similar to today's Tennessee Walkers, American Saddlebreds and Paso Finos. They were used by nobles and by the very wealthy as saddle horses, and could cost as much as a knight's destrier.

Horses also show up, of course, in Victorians and Regencies as riding and carriage horses. By this time, light riding horses and trotting breeds as well as Thoroughbreds or "blood horses" had become very popular. Racing was widespread as a sport, and recreational riding was popular for both men and women. Most women rode "aside" (sidesaddle) while men rode "astride." Horse breeding was a sought-after skill, and businesses such as liveries and way stations where horses pulling long-distance coaches could be switched out were a

huge part of the economy. There was also much abuse of horses, especially working animals. Remember "Black Beauty"? Anna Sewell wrote that to highlight the plight of horses in 1877.

Horses were an integral part of society until the internal combustion engine came into widespread use in the early 19th Century, and through the end of WWI horses played a large part in the hauling and farming industries.

It's very easy to see how including a horse or several in our historical romance novels is almost impossible to avoid. And it's easy to understand why a little bit of accuracy in writing about horses goes a long way.

Next month I'll share some basics for writing believably about horses in both historical and contemporary settings. From piebalds and fetlocks to loping and spurs, whether you want to use horses as a major plot theme or simply window dressing, next month's tips will make the horses in your books come alive with the romance they evoke so naturally.

Plus, we'll answer the burning question: can you really have sex on a Palomino?

Here are a couple of fun links for more information:

fairytalefriesian.com/today.html

articlesnatch.com/Article/A-Taste-Of-The-Modern-Cowboy-s-Life/518151

regencyredingote.wordpress.com/2010/11/05/the-english-blood-horse/



Craft Corner

This article first appeared in the February 2011 issue of the Monterey Bay Chapter RWA Monarch e-News, Christie Maurer, Editor. Reprinted with permission.

Passive Voice (Craft Connoptions II)

By Lynna Banning

Oh, groan, I just finished judging five more contest entries, so today I'm going to address the difference between "passive voice" and "past tense."

At the heart of this confusion are the misconceptions that:

- (1) any sentence with the verb "was" in it is "passive"
- (2) passive is just the same as past tense.

Well, it ain't the same. Passive [correctly termed "passive voice"] is when the action is done to the subject of the sentence. Past tense is simply an action that occurs in the past. For example:

"Barbara smacked John in the knee." This is past tense.

"Barbara was smacking John in the knee." This is still past tense!

"John was smacked by Barbara." This is passive voice; the action is done to the subject of the sentence.

Note, dear reader, that the verb "was" is not what determines whether it's passive voice or past tense. What determines the passive voice is when the action is done to the subject.

"Tootsie was kissed by Ferdinand." Passive voice.

"Ferdinand was kissed by Tootsie." Passive voice.

"Tootsie kissed Ferdinand." Plain old past tense.

"Ferdinand kissed Tootsie." Plain old past tense.

And... "Ferdinand was kissing Tootsie" - that's still past tense, not passive voice. The subject is doing the action (past tense) as opposed to the action being done to the subject.

So ... "Ferdinand was kissed by Tootsie" is (you guessed it!) passive voice.

Ways to get yourself out of a "passive" blunder include:

(1) Turn the sentence around: "Tootsie kissed Ferdinand." Here the action is in simple past tense.

(2) To use "was" in order to indicate ongoing action in the past: "Tootsie was kissing Ferdinand."

(3) To simplify matters: try to avoid the verb "was" unless it does indicate ongoing action in the past (not passive) tense.



"Grammar harangues were driving you nuts." (Past tense)

"The reader is being driven nuts by grammar harangues.." (Passive voice)

I rest my case. (present tense).

The case is rested by me. (passive voice)

*Carolyn Woolston writes as Lynna Banning
www.lynnabanning.com. Her books
include Lady Lavender, Templar Knight, Forbidden
Bride, Crusader's Lady, and Loner's Lady.*

Laura's Letter

Misconceptions

By Laura Sheehan, Editor

As romance writers, we are all familiar with misconceptions. Misconceptions about the genre, the quality of what we write, the heat level, you name it. Even amongst romance readers and authors, there are plenty of misconceptions about many sub-genres of romance:

Same-sex romances are erotic romances. All Harlequin books are formulaic. Only people of color will read a romance with a non-Caucasian hero/heroine. Paranormal romances are always about vampires (or werewolves). Erotica novels don't have a plot.

Although I'm not about to own up to any of the aforementioned misconceptions, I won't deny that I've been guilty of unfairly stereotyping novels before I've read them, or of making assumptions about something without being familiar with it.

If you'd asked me 13 years ago what I thought of the movie *Rocky*, I would've told you that it was a cheesy sports movie starring Rambo, about a boxer who wins some big boxing match. In fact, I think I said as much to my now-husband when we met.

He looked at me very seriously and said, "That isn't what it's about at all. Have you even seen it?"

I had to admit that, no, I hadn't. I'd heard about it, seen clips of it, watched parodies of its more famous scenes, and therefore assumed that I knew enough to make a judgment about its worth.

And then I sat down to watch it.

Spoiler Alert for those who haven't seen it:

Did you know *Rocky* was a romance? Did you know that Rocky doesn't even win? Did you know it was nominated for ten Academy Awards and won three of them, including the Oscar for Best Picture? Did you know Sylvester Stallone wrote it himself?

OK, maybe some of you are not surprised. Maybe you were more well-versed in film than I was in my late teens and always recognized *Rocky* as the fine piece of cinema that it is.

And maybe none of you thought the *Harry Potter* craze was overblown hysteria about a children's book until you finally picked them up and then couldn't put them down until you'd finished all seven.

Maybe y'all didn't roll your eyes at *Twilight* before you gave it a try and discovered that it was actually a quite enjoyable YA paranormal romance.

Maybe.

But none of us are completely free of misconceptions. And we should own up to it, recognize that we're not all-knowing, that we sometimes jump to the wrong conclusion.

If we discover that our assumption was right after all: Good for us. We can proceed with confidence in our now-educated judgment instead of an unfounded assumption.

And if we discover we were wrong: Enjoy it! Life is all about discovering new things. Like romance novels, *Rocky*, and vinegar on our French Fries.

~ Laura

Laura's debut novel, DANCING WITH DANGER (Red Sage) will be on e-shelves on May 1st, 2012.

www.LauraSheehan.wordpress.com

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