

# Hearts Talk

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## Thirty's a Charm

Melbourne's **Joan Kilby** has celebrated two milestones this year—publishing her 30th book and winning her first Ruby award with RWA. Her book, *The Montana Son*, took out this year's 'short sweet' category. We spoke to her.

**Hi, Joan. Have you ever won an RWA award before? And how many years have you been writing and how many manuscripts have you 'notched up'?**

I've been nominated for a Ruby once before but this is my first win. It's very exciting! I've been writing for 27 years and published for 20. I wrote six complete manuscripts before I got 'the call', and since then I've published 30 novels.

**Where did the inspiration for *The Montana Son* (Tule Publishing) come from? And what do you think gave it the winning edge?**

*The Montana Son* is part of a multi-author series about cousins. The inspiration for my book came from the TV show, *Brothers & Sisters*, and the storyline about the deceased patriarch's mistress and secret daughter.

My hero was the 'secret' son of a woman his father had long ago loved and left behind. He comes to Montana to confront his estranged father over past wrongs but instead finds the family he's always longed for. And, of course, true love!

As to what gave it the winning edge, it's always a bit of a mystery why a particular book resonates with readers.

In this case, it was possibly the deep emotional content of the hero's

story balanced by the fun chemistry of his relationship with the heroine, I'm guessing! I wish I knew for certain :)

**How sweet are your romances, and why do you prefer to write this style of romance?**

*The Montana Son*, like all my books, leaves the door open on the bedroom but the sex scenes aren't prolonged or graphic.

I wrote a couple of sexier stories for *Entangled Brazen* but found that line wasn't the best fit for me. I prefer to concentrate on the emotional stories of the characters rather than explicit content.

Not saying that sexy stories aren't emotional, too, but it's a matter of focus.

**You were born in Canada's Vancouver, now live in Melbourne, and write about Montana in the US. Whew! Have you ever been to Montana, and what's your secret for writing about a place that's not your hometown?**

The town of Cherry Lake is fictional but it's based on settlements along Flathead Lake, Montana. I've travelled extensively in the United States, including Montana, and although I haven't spent a lot of time in that state, I've seen first-hand the geography and towns in the area.



I grew up in a small town in a rural community and I figure there are a lot of similarities no matter where in the world they're located. Aside from that, I do a lot of research specific to the area. Google Maps is a boon for writers. Using it, I was able to zoom in on photos of actual houses, streets, the lake and the surrounding vegetation.

I also surf the 'net looking at real estate for sale and business websites. Local government websites have a ton of information, ranging from climate to parks to local festivals etc. Then there's Wikipedia for demographics, employment, institutions, you

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Deadline for *Hearts Talk* submissions is the 8th of the month before publication.

# From Your Editors

Happy New Year, romance fans!

If you're sitting on a sun-lounger while reading this, with a mojito in your other hand, half your luck. Writers deserve time away from their keyboards and space to replenish the creative well.

If you're at your usual digs, don't despair; this issue will whisk you away anyway. Vanessa Carnevale's article will make you want to dust off your DVD of *Under the Tuscan Sun* while Robin Thomas's piece on a writers' group abroad will transport you to a remote part of Canada.

Here's what else is on our minds this month:

## Carla Caruso

For Christmas, a writer friend gifted me Shannah Kennedy's book, *The Life Plan: Simple Strategies for a Meaningful Life*. Maybe I've been looking a bit frazzled lately, ha! While I used to be quite good at goal-setting, since I've had kids, that's kind of gone out the window. Hopefully this book will get me back on the right track ;)

2016 was full of challenges for many people. But there seems to be a more positive feeling in the air for 2017. Perhaps the stars have aligned or the numerology digits have added up correctly, but the future is looking bright.



## Daniel de Lorne

Kicking off an exciting year of travel for me. Visiting family in the UK this month after having a taste of a cold Christmas. And then, going into February, trying something different with a trip with my husband and mother-in-law to India. Looking forward to the 'exotic' location, hopefully without any bad bugs.

Meanwhile, getting my teeth stuck into a couple of writing projects, one with an external deadline, one with my own. I'm going to be writing a lot more in 2017...at least that's the plan.



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## Committee Profile: Victoria Purman

I've been an RWA member since 2012 when the amazing Trish Morey told me at a workshop that if I wanted to write romance, there was no better organisation to be a part of.

She was right! Once I joined, I wrote my first book in six months, pitched it at the Gold Coast conference and won a three-book contract from Harlequin for what turned into my *Boys of Summer* series. The book that won me the contract—*Nobody But Him*—was nominated for a Ruby the next year, so believe me when I say I have much to thank RWA for.

That's why I put my hand up to become Sponsorship Coordinator

and then as Vice-President (along with the amazing Lana Pecherczyk). I'm now head-down, tail-up in organising sponsorships for Brisbane in 2017 and even further ahead to Sydney 2018.

I write for Harlequin MIRA and for Tule Publishing, teach the occasional workshop, interview authors at Adelaide Writers' Week, and my tenth book came out in November, *The Three Miss Allens*.

In my 'other life', I started out as a journalist, but I've done about a million jobs that involve having fun with words. Now, I work part-time in communications. I'm on the board of

the SA Writers Centre and a longtime member of South Australia's youth arts funding body, Carclew.



# Thirty's the Charm

Continued from page 1...

name it. For anything I can't find information on, my writer's imagination gets free rein.

**You started out writing Harlequin SuperRomances and have since branched out into ebooks as well, from Tule to Entangled, as well as indie publishing. What made you diversify?**

I loved writing for SuperRomance but after 24 books I was ready to try my hand at different types of stories. This coincided with a general decline in print sales and the rise of digital.

It made sense to me to explore new options. In today's market it's wise to have more than one string to your bow.

**How is the next 12 months looking for you writing-wise?**

The big news is that *The Secret Son* (aka *The Montana Son*) will become the first book in my individual

author series that I'm spinning off the original multi-author series.

The second book, Will's story, will be a Christmas 2017 Tule release. A confirmed bachelor, a desperate single mum and a baby born on Christmas Day. I can't wait to write that one!

That will be followed by two more books in the series, hopefully out in 2018. First though, I'm writing another [Harlequin] Superromance, release date to be advised.

And I've regained the rights to seven of my Superromances, including my first book, a Rita finalist. I'll be repackaging those and releasing them in 2017.

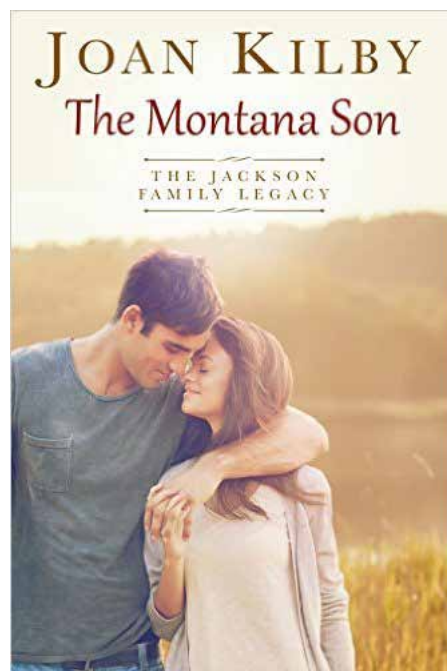
Finally, I have an idea for a self-pub series that keeps getting put on the backburner. It's one of those books of the heart so I hope that I can carve out time for it. So many books to write, so little time!

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**"So many books to write, so little time!"**

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# Pitching Success at Conference

by **Anthea Hodgson**

SCENE: Melbourne RWA conference 2015  
(Sweat. Lots of sweat. Heartbeats.)

Hi! (HANDSHAKE)

My name is Anthea Hodgson, and I've written a rural romance about death.

*Ali Watts, Penguin Legend*: That sounds interesting. Tell me more...

(ENCOURAGING SMILE)

Cate Christie is a drifter, moving restlessly through her life until tragedy strikes and she causes the death of her best friend, Brigit. When she leaves the city to do penance on her great-aunt's farm, she finds her new life has more to teach her than baking and shearing—she has a lot to learn from the women who run rural communities, and from the mysterious Henry, who has wandered onto the property to escape his own past.

Together they have to face the harsh realities of death and find out the hard way that you don't ever really have to say goodbye. *The Drifter* is an optimistic and moving rural romance about what makes a good death, and more importantly, what makes a good life.

END SCENE

This was my pitch at the RWA conference a year ago, and I have no idea if it's any good, I just know it worked! This year I had the absolute privilege of going to the conference in Adelaide to meet my novel, *The Drifter*, made whole, after almost a year of guidance, expertise and attention to detail from the amazing team at Penguin Random House.

The pitch sessions organised by the RWA are amazing, and I hope that RWA writers with polished manuscripts will be brave and pitch next year. It is certainly confronting, but valuable in more ways than just the incredible opportunity on

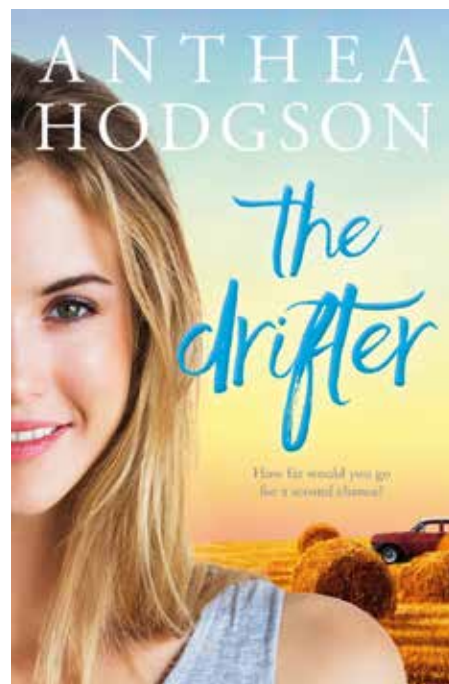
offer. If you are considering how you will pitch and what you will say, you are also forced to think about what your novel is *really* about, its themes, its subplots, its voice. Devising a short pitch is a great exercise for working out how you can have that conversation with people about your novel, be they friends, other writers or any kind of industry professional. Now when people ask me at the schoolgate what *The Drifter* is about I try not to bore them. "It's a rural romance about death," I say, "but funny."

And that wasn't what it was going to be. It was going to be a rural romance about a drifter. Classic. But my father had died recently, and he crept in between the pages, and I found I wanted to talk about death, that I wanted to say that not all death is tragic, that I wanted to celebrate the quiet lives of the country women who had helped raise me. To say that lives of love and dedication matter, that loyalty and history are truly valuable. And so I wrote *The Drifter* in five short weeks as a love letter to the bush and to my dad. And so, it's a rural romance about death, but funny.

And I really wasn't brave enough to pitch. For many years I was too scared to even write. Even though I had a journal for a couple of years, I never studied creative writing at uni, joined a writing group or had a mentor to read my work, because I was too scared. But it remained the only thing I wanted to do except that I was too embarrassed to even try. Until one day I sat down and gave it a go, and after I found *The Drifter*, I spent two years trying to get someone to read it, and failed. I sent *The Drifter* to competitions where it only had to be in the top half of entries to earn the right to send the whole MS. It wasn't. Twice. And it was ignored by agents and publishers alike.

And so, completely daunted, yet unwilling to give up on *The Drifter*, I went to the Melbourne RWA conference last year for the opportunity to pitch. I just did what I could handle. I booked the conference knowing that those five minutes were the only reason I was going. I pitched, had a couple of stiff, and flew home hours later.

That pitch changed my life, and I can't thank the RWA and its brilliant conference enough!



# Finding Your Voice

by Amanda Ashby

As we study the art of storytelling, we often get immersed in a lot of advice. Don't use adverbs, do use active sentences, show-don't-tell, don't head-hop, never dangle your participles. And while these are all useful things to know, what can happen is that, as our skills improve, we end up editing out the one thing that made our work stand out in the first place. Our unique voice.

Voice is one of those strange things that can't be taught. It's a combination of your worldview and life experiences, and it tends to sparkle in a way that perfect grammar just can't emulate. Voice is the filter through which we see the world.

For example, if I asked what your favourite tree memory is, you might think about a happy summer, reading under a weeping willow as dappled sunlight filtered through. It might bring up traumatic memories of a house fire that started when a gum tree was struck by lightning. It might be where your first love carved your initials into the trunk of an oak.

And that's just trees.

Whether we know it or not, we have an individual viewpoint on just about everything and this article is going to look at why voice matters, how to find it and what to do with it.

## So, what's the big deal?

In America, according to the *Bowker Report* (7 September 2016), there were more than 700,000 self-published books in 2015, and in 2013, there were 300,000 traditionally published books. That's a lot of books.

How can we make our own stories stand out in such a noisy

marketplace? Voice. Having a strong, distinct voice is a great way to differentiate ourselves. It's also why people will auto-buy the latest Nora Roberts or Lee Child, because they have a unique way of telling a story that the reader can relate to.

Another reason it's so important to write with our own authentic voice is because it's so much easier! Have you ever tried speaking with an accent or whispering instead of speaking at your normal level? Yes, it's possible, but it's hard work.

## If that's true, then how come writers can write in different genres and for different lines?

It's easy to confuse voice with style. Yes, we can move across genres and lines, and while the style and tone might change, it doesn't mean the authentic underlying voice is different. I write romance, young adult and middle-grade books, and while they are all for very different audiences with different genre expectations, my point of view is still the same.

## So, what does voice look like?

It looks real! It's a decision made. Voice jumps out from the page. Voice reads like it was written by a person not a computer and there are many things that can make it stand out. It might be word choice, the sentiment it's portraying, the world building, the characterisation. My favourite example of this is from the first chapter from Sara Hantz's *In the Blood*.

*Pedophile: Noun.*

*An adult who is sexually attracted to children.*

*Scum.*



*Sleazeball.*

*Creep.*

*Lowlife.*

*Asswipe.*

*Dad.*

Think of how many other ways she might have written this scene to get the information across. How many pages she might have used. Instead, she tells the entire setup of the story in 16 powerful, compelling words. A unique voice.

## Okay, I'm sold. So how do I get one?

The good news is that we all have a distinctive voice, even if we've buried it through over-polishing or emulating styles that we think the market wants, or what our well-meaning English teachers told us to do. Here are just a few tricks to help lure it out.

1. Make a list of your top 10 favourite books (okay, 20, because choosing is hard). Do the same with your favourite movies and see what they all have in common. Are there themes and tones that carry through?

2. What are the issues that are close to your heart? Are you passionate about gender equality? Saving the dust mites? (They have rights, too.) Follow your interests to get an idea of what matters to you.
3. How do you speak when you're talking to your friends? Are you vivacious, shy, considered? Even better, ask a friend what they think is distinct about you.
4. Have a write-off with a group of likeminded souls. Pick the same topic and then write freestyle for 15 minutes before comparing what you've done.
5. Write as if no one's looking. Not your mother/editor/agent/critique group/contest judge/inner critic. What would you say if you weren't scared of getting it wrong?
6. My absolute favourite trick is to write an alternative commentary on anything. A movie, a rugby match, the news. Make it serious, silly, in Klingon. Whatever you want and then see what comes out. The results might surprise you!

This list could go on, but hopefully you can see where it is leading. Deep down, there is a real you that has a point of view, shaped and moulded by your experiences and it's our job to let that point of view out.

### Okay, so what now?

Now it's time to experiment. And I don't mean you need to suddenly take out your entire third chapter action scene and replace it with a haiku, though Sara's shown it can definitely work. Instead consider ways to infuse your real truth into your words. Have you been using clichés instead of digging deeper into what you really want to say? Are your characters speaking from a place of emotional truth?

Are you writing plots that don't really resonate with your beliefs? This isn't about reinventing the wheel (which again sounds like hard work and who has time now that

we have Netflix?). This is about allowing yourself to be connected with the story instead of seeing it as something separate from yourself.

### Cool! I've done it. Does that mean people will love me now?

I wish I could say yes, but we all know that writing is subjective so even when you find your voice, it doesn't mean everyone will love it. An example of this is from my debut novel that came out almost 10 years ago. *You Had Me at Halo* is about a dead girl who gets kicked out of heaven and sent back to Earth to sort out her issues, and this is the opening paragraph:

*"Unbelievable." Holly Evans shook her head as she peered down through the glass window to the scene below. That was the problem with an open casket. It meant everyone's last memories of her would be with a white puffy face, the wrong colour lipstick and an ugly polyester dress. They always said the camera added five pounds, but no one ever talked about how fattening embalming fluid was.*

Now, the reason I'm including this is because it relates to my all-time favourite rejection, when an agent said: "I'm sorry but Holly doesn't seem to be taking her death seriously enough."

And, no, I didn't rage or get upset at the comment because she was absolutely right. There was nothing about that book that was serious. That's not my voice. In fact, my voice is the kind of voice that finds comments like that agent's hilarious! Thankfully, while it wasn't right for one agent, it was right for another, and for the publisher who went on to buy it.

### Some final thoughts

Using our voice isn't an excuse to write a bad story. Our goal should always be to use all the tools we have to tell the most compelling story we can. Think of voice as another part of your writing arsenal that helps your stories shine brighter.

## Resources

Some of my favourite craft books that touch on voice are:

- ♥ *Steal Like An Artist* by Austin Kleon—I love this book entirely. It is a fresh, fun way to tap into your creativity, which will help shake out your voice.
- ♥ *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield—another great book on unlocking your creativity and in the process expressing yourself.
- ♥ *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott—essential reading for all humans!
- ♥ *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron—a series of creative activities to help bring out your inner artist.

**Amanda Ashby was born in Australia but now lives in New Zealand where she writes romance, young adult and middle-grade books. She also works in a library, owns far too many vintage tablecloths, and likes to delight her family by constantly rearranging the furniture. Her latest release is *Falling for the Best Man* and you can find out more at [www.amandaashby.com](http://www.amandaashby.com).**



# Work in Progress

by **Stefanie London**

There's nothing like a new year to make you feel revived and ready to tackle your goals.

If one of yours happens to be finding yourself an agent, then this column has got you covered.

I sat down with my agent, the wonderful and oh-so savvy **Jill Marsal** (pictured bottom right) of Marsal Lyon Literary Agency, to ask her a few questions about querying.

For those uninitiated, a query is the act of approaching an agent to request representation of your book. Like submitting your book to an editor, this process can be a little daunting. So what elements of the query are most important?

"The book description is key for the agent to know what the project is about and if it might be a fit for their list," Jill says.

"I also like when one of the early sentences of the query tells me what genre the project is so that I can have that clear in my mind as I read the description and don't have to be distracted trying to figure that out."

Along with the book description it's a great idea to include a short

bio (one paragraph is fine). Jill adds: "Ideally, they would make sure that the genre matches what the agent is looking for."

**Tip: Not all agents represent all genres, but that information should be on the agency's website.**

To give your submission the strongest chance of success, ensure that you pay attention to the details.

Follow the agency's submission guidelines and check everything over before you hit 'send'. Ever wondered what an agent's pet peeves are?

"I don't like when someone sends me a query addressed to another agent's name—that is a little sloppy," Jill says. "And no fonts smaller than 12. I read so much a day, it makes it hard when someone sends a query in 8 font to 'fit in extra words'."

But what about the manuscript itself? I asked Jill what she looks for when signing a new author.

"Strong writing, a great voice, interesting characters, good story or 'hook', and intriguing plot," she says.

"When I am reading a manuscript, I want to be caught up in the pages. This means there should be an interesting character or compelling storyline or great voice (and hopefully all of the above)."

What happens when a submission doesn't have those elements?

"If I've read a number of pages and feel that none of those elements are coming across as strongly as I would like, that is typically when I will stop reading. I also want to feel like there is something in those opening pages that 'hooks' me to keep reading.

"Again, it can be based on questions raised in the plot, something to do

with the intriguing character or the high quality of the writing."

Having said that, many agents also look beyond that first book to an author's career potential.

"When I sign a client, I prefer to sign for the long-term. I like to help grow an author and build her/his brand, and I am looking at this from a long-term perspective rather than a one-off.

"I think an agent can help with different things at different stages of an author's career so it is important to be focused on the bigger picture and not just a quick sale, in my view."

Here are the top things I recommend you do when getting ready to query your manuscript:

1. Research the agencies you're interested in—make sure they represent your genre and note their submission requirements.
2. Have a kick-butt book description which clearly showcases the hook of your story. In some cases, the agency may not even want to see pages from your manuscript at this





point so your book description needs to do the heavy lifting.

3. Include important information about your book such as the genre, word count and if it's complete. (If you're a first-time author, generally agencies will want the book to be complete unless you get a request via a pitching competition or event, such as a conference.)
4. Have a bio that's concise and includes only the best bits, such as award wins or finals, professional memberships and other career highlights. If you have skills or experience relevant to the book you're querying (e.g. you're a doctor and you're

querying a medical romance), be sure to include that.

5. Cross your t's and dot your i's before you hit 'send'. Make sure you get the agent's name right.

In next month's column Jill and I chat about the author/agent relationship in more detail. If you are querying this year, I wish you the best of luck!

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**“Make sure that the genre matches what the agent is looking for.”**

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**Stefanie London is a *USA Today* bestselling author, a 2016 Ruby finalist and a self-confessed caffeine addict. She's currently based in Toronto but still calls Australia home. (You're welcome for the earworm.) You can find out more about her sexy contemporary romances by checking out [www.stefanie-london.com](http://www.stefanie-london.com).**

**The Marsal Lyon Literary Agency's mission is to help writers achieve their publishing dreams. The agency wants to work with authors not just for a book but for a career—it's dedicated to building long-term relationships with its authors and publishing partners.**

## Inaugural Melbourne Romance Catch-up

Melbourne RWA writers marched off their Facebook pages for some real-time face-time at the inaugural RWA Melbourne Writers Catch-up.

It was a unique networking experience, particularly trying to remember names, because we were also getting to meet the 'real' writer behind their nom de plume. At times, it was quite an art matching their name to their FB public face.

The dinner and drinks event was initiated by new member, Ursula Kolecki, after a dynamic thread on the RWA FB page by writers around Australia, and a baker's dozen from Melbourne enthusing about an opportunity to meet and greet. The FB event came alive with the critical support of well-known RWA identities Joanne Dannon and Rachael Howlett, whose RWA FB friends network enabled the invitations to be fired over the bow of writers across Melbourne and into regional corners.

Early feedback from the SurveyMonkey questions has



endorsed the RWA Melbourne Writers Catch-up as a quarterly/seasonal, - dinner and drinks event to be staged at the central Richmond venue. There was some interest in also hearing RWA news, welcoming new members and unpublished authors, and learning about what each writer was up to while building their writing profile. Respondents also supported participating in an

occasional mid-week movie night for a popular, new release romantic film to be held at Kino (Collins St), Camberwell Rivoli, or Como (South Yarra).

Add this date into your calendar: the next RWA Melbourne Writers Catch-up will be held the day after St Valentine's Day, Wednesday, 15 February 2017.



## How **Life in Italy** Inspired *The Florentine Bridge*

by **Vanessa Carnevale**

Before I landed on Chianti's doorstep back in the summer of 1999, I didn't yet know what it was like to live slowly and beautifully. I was unfamiliar with the kind of awe that strikes you the first time you look up at a 13th century cathedral in Florence, or how the world suddenly expands when you cast your eye over Brunelleschi's dome, as you wonder how it might have been possible to create such things.

The way your heart opens a little wider the first time you marvel at a Renaissance painting, while you try to decipher what secrets might be hidden in it, knowing it was painted at a time when apprentice artists toiled in workshops for years before they were allowed to attempt these masterpieces. No matter how many stories I'd been told, no matter how real Italy felt to me, I knew by the time I finished high school that I wanted to experience it for myself.

I'd met the man, who five years later would become my husband, on my first trip to Italy. There I was, fresh out of high school, not quite sure what path to take in life. I'd struggled with what university

degree to follow, and somehow ended up in a lecture room filled with budding economists. Needless to say, a business degree wasn't for me. The answer to my restlessness seemed to lie in seeking adventure in a place some 16,000 km from home.

So I wrote myself another permission slip to travel, lined up a job, travelled down that fork in the road—the one that opens up the world, then opens it up some more, and makes your heart nod with a resounding "Yes! Thank goodness I listened!"

My husband met me at the airport in Rome. We took the long way to Florence, via the ancient Roman road Via Cassia. It was on that trip that my heart wrapped itself around the scenic landscape of soft undulating hills and long stretches of fields awash with thousands of golden sunflowers pointing their faces towards the sun.

That three-hour drive was filled with a mashup of emotions: excitement about the possibilities ahead, and apprehension about all that I'd left behind—all the 'shoulds' and the 'sure things' exchanged for the

'maybes' and 'what ifs'. I was young enough to get away with making some mistakes yet old enough to feel the sting of them if things went wrong. Whichever way things might have gone, I couldn't have known at that point that my life was about to change forever. That my second trip to Florence would change the entire course of my life and bind me to Italy for the long-term.

Faced with so much history and culture, my life became filled with the excitement of learning new things, a thrill within itself. There was so much to become accustomed to, from the cadence of new dialects and accents—the way the Florentines don't pronounce a 'c' but replace it with the sound of an 'h', or the way their typical bread doesn't include salt. New recipes and traditional dishes, the stories behind the workshops tucked along the narrow cobblestone streets. The lack of Sunday trading, the abundance of trattorias and bars. The perfectly acceptable daytime nap.

During spare stretches of time in the middle of the day, where life in Italy came to a grinding halt



as people retreated indoors and shopkeepers closed their shutters, I spent time journaling, observing life and recording anecdotes about Italy. Life had captured my attention in a way it never had before and I wanted to satiate my curiosity for it all—the grape harvests, the centuries-old frescoes, what it *really* meant to live the slow life and whether it really would be possible to live the *dolce vita*.

The stirring of a lifelong dream began as my pencil scratched across the pages. Observations, feelings, memories. “One day,” I said to myself. “One day, they’ll come in handy.” Sitting with my legs outstretched on a patch of grass surrounded by olive trees, looking out towards the city, I couldn’t yet know that those notes would one day, many years later, form the research for a novel. A book that would become my debut novel, *The Florentine Bridge* (Harlequin MIRA).

All I knew back then was that Italy would take me where she needed to take me. I learnt how to ride a scooter. I learnt how to cook pasta *al dente*. I started dreaming in Italian. And somewhere in the middle, I fell in love, first with a country, then with my husband. Or maybe it was the other way around.

Years later, I finally sat down to write *The Florentine Bridge*, a love story about the *dolce vita* in Tuscany. I began poring over the notes I’d kept over the years, reviving memories of life in Italy. Some of these notes formed the basis of some of the fictional scenes

in the book. For example, the scene in which Beppe puts a clove of garlic in Zia Flora’s ear is loosely based on a recollection I had of my husband’s aunt who was over for lunch one day. She complained of a toothache, and sure enough, my father-in-law sought to resolve it with a garlic clove. And, yes, she did declare the pain had subsided minutes after he’d wedged it in there.

Within six weeks, I had a completed first draft. It was one of those magical experiences most writers probably wish for—it felt as if the story had been patiently waiting for the right time for me to write it. Many of the places featured in *The Florentine Bridge* are real. Others are relatively unknown, like La Fattoria di Maiano, which is the agricultural estate where I lived and worked for some time. The secret lake Mia and Luca visit is based on a small lake hidden away on the grounds of the property. It was this spot that inspired me to use a little creative licence and feature it in the book as a pretty and romantic backdrop.

Not long after I initially arrived in Florence, I was introduced to an elderly Florentine artist, Signor Consani, who sadly is no longer with us. Each day he’d visit the restaurant where my husband worked. I’d often sit with him to keep him company. We’d exchange stories about our contrasting lives and he’d entertain me with stories of the history of Florence and his work as a painter.

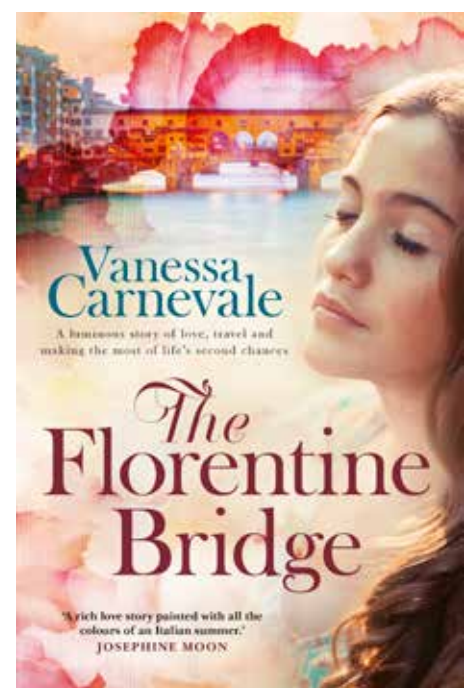
I’d only known him for a couple of weeks when he presented me with a framed oil painting he’d painted especially for me. With it, he included a poem he’d written about me. It was a gift that meant a lot, one that I still treasure today. It was Signor Consani who inspired me to create the fictional character, Giovanni Fiorelli. In turn, that informed my decision to make my main protagonist, Mia, an artist, too. Writing Italy through the eyes of an artist allowed me to reconnect to the setting, and bring it to life, as Mia takes note of her surroundings

in a way that’s different to those around her, due to her artistic nature and eye for beauty.

In writing *The Florentine Bridge*, I revived those delicious feelings of living a life that hums along at a dreamy pace, begging to be savoured, whether by pausing in the late afternoon for a glass of chianti, or standing on an ancient bridge while the sky blushes at sunset.

I can’t pinpoint exactly what it is that draws me back to Italy each time—maybe it’s that slow pull towards a country steeped in rich history, art, an appreciation for the table, and an even more immense one for family and friends. Or maybe it’s simply because of the reminder Italy taps me on the shoulder with each time I grace her presence—to celebrate life, the slow life, a beautiful life, while taking life as it comes.

**Vanessa Carnevale is an author and freelance writer, based in Melbourne, where she lives with her husband and two children. In her early twenties, Vanessa spent several years living in Florence, Italy, where she met her husband and discovered a love of travel and *la dolce vita*. She now considers Italy her second home. *The Florentine Bridge* is her first novel. You can connect with Vanessa at [www.vanessacarnevale.com](http://www.vanessacarnevale.com).**



# Author Brand: Talking With Nikki Logan

by **Sara Hood**

I know I bang on each month about Facebook and email lists and newsletters and websites, but of course, underpinning it all is something totally critical and fundamental. Your author brand. As that's the subject of this month's OWL it seemed completely appropriate to have a chat with the presenter, Nikki Logan.

Nikki is well-known to many as a past president of RWA and a longstanding office-bearer and volunteer, as well as multi-published author with Harlequin and Entangled, writing romance stories set in rich, natural settings.

We chatted over Skype, and as so many of the questions I'm asked are about getting started, that's where we began.

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## Why start to build an author platform when you're not yet published?

Nikki laughed and, with the experience of her many books behind, her said "because you won't have time afterwards". She went on to explain that many aspiring writers are so focused on getting the call or, if they're indie, getting the book onto Kindle that it's a shock to discover that's not the end, but more like the start.

"There's no busier time in an author's life than once they've just been signed," she explained. "To build a strong author brand, you need to soak for a while in the concepts and the whole idea of branding, look at what others are doing and not be rushed into it. There's not much time to do that if you wait until you're signed."

It's also not only about selling more once you have a book. "Agents and editors don't just assess your submission, they also assess the ability of that person to be able to take work off that editor's plate, and marketing underpinned by branding is one of those things. For example, consistent branding across all media is a signal that you know what you're doing and will take on your own marketing," she said.

So, on the other side of the coin, what happens if you don't bother with marketing?

"Nothing bad will happen," Nikki said. "But nothing good will either. Setting up a blog or a website is work, so opting out of it, you will have to accept that it's limiting your discoverability, and memorability will be impaired."

For a writer to be successful in the 21st century, Nikki is adamant they need to embrace an acceptance of needing to do their own marketing, but that this doesn't have to be time-consuming. "Do less, better" is her mantra. I have to say I agree. *Less is more* is a cliché for a reason.

## What's the one thing you frequently see authors getting wrong?

Don't create a brand because you think it will be popular or cool is Nikki's advice. "Instead create a brand that you can deliver on tomorrow. Be authentic. It doesn't have to be the real you, but it must be an aspect of the real you." Then "honour the promise". This is where young players can get caught out. A brand, as Nikki explains in the OWL, is more than skin-deep. It informs everything you do as that writer. Or it should.

"Focus your effort. We often over-imagine how much time our readers will have to focus on you, so you have to connect the dots for them. Subtlety is totally over-rated."

The next step, of course, is how do you create that memorable and

authentic brand? That's where the OWL comes in.

Nikki steps you through what a brand is and isn't and how to develop your brand, either to create it or to give it more power. I attended this OWL last year and the one thing that really had resonance for me was Nikki's riff about not being too subtle. I'd rewrite that as "go big or go home" in terms of creating a brand that is big on authenticity, big on visual vibe and big on emotion, and then delivered with bells on.

Branding is about creating a set of impressions in your reader's mind. But to get some space in their heads, you have to make an impression to start with.

Thanks to Nikki Logan for sharing her time to talk about author brands, and if you are thinking about how to start or wondering if you've got all the bases covered, then I'd recommend this OWL: [romanceaustralia.com/owl-author-branding-why-you-need-it-before-you-sell](http://romanceaustralia.com/owl-author-branding-why-you-need-it-before-you-sell).

Next month, we return to answering reader questions. So please feel free to send me yours at [sara@marketing4writers.net](mailto:sara@marketing4writers.net).

**Sara Hood has more than 30 years' experience in marketing and marketing communications. She can be found at [www.marketing4writers.net](http://www.marketing4writers.net).**

# Books 'n' Bloggers

by **Renee Conoulty**

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It's New Year's Day and we're all thinking about our goals and resolutions for 2017. How often have you made vague New Year's resolutions only to have them to fall by the wayside? *Write more. Sell more. I'll never drink again.* Sound familiar? Broad goals might be easy to make but they are hard to keep. This year, make your writing goals smart ones.

**S – Specific:** No more 'write more' resolutions this year. Be specific. Break your goal into steps or narrow it down. 'Write more' may become 'finish the first draft'. 'Better myself' may become 'read more books'.

**M – Measurable:** How do you know

when you've achieved your goal? Choose a benchmark you need to reach to know you have succeeded. You may choose to measure your writing by time spent or word count. *Read more books?* Work out how many books you usually read, then choose a number to aim for.

**A – Achievable:** If you only have half-an-hour a day to write, then writing 3,000 words a day might be unachievable. Writing 300 words might be a goal you could reach, or increasing your writing time to 40 minutes a day. If you haven't read a book since high school, then my goal from last year of reading 200 books in 12 months might be beyond you, but reading 12 books

may be a more achievable goal. Choose a resolution that you have a chance at succeeding with.

**R – Relevant:** Choose a resolution that is relevant to your life and you are more likely to stick with it. Work towards something you care about.

**T – Time bound:** Set a time limit for your resolution. When do you want to achieve your goal by? The end of the year? Within six months? Choose a time and set yourself a reminder to check if you have succeeded. If not, don't give up, just set a new goal and keep at it.

My goal for 2017 is to complete the first draft of my second novel by the end of June. What's yours?

## Book Spotlight

My top 10 Aussie reads from 2016—in no particular order.

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I gave these books five stars because they delivered what they promised, kept me turning pages, emotionally engaged me and stayed with me after I finished the last page.

*A Kiss from Mr Fitzgerald* by Natasha Lester

*Truly Madly Guilty* by Liane Moriarty

*The Art of Keeping Secrets* by Rachael Johns

*The War Bride* by Pamela Hart

*Under The Spanish Stars* by Alli Sinclair

*The Peppercorn Project* by Nicki Edwards

*Kakadu Sunset* by Annie Seaton

*Home to Bindarra Creek* by Juanita Kees

*The Goodbye Ride* by Lily Malone

*The Doctor Calling* by Meredith Appleyard

## Blogger in Focus

**J'aimee Brooker** of AusRom Today, [www.ausromtoday.com](http://www.ausromtoday.com)

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### What genre do you review?

Australian romance, including strictly romance and women's fiction with romantic elements.

### Do you accept review requests?

AusRom Today does accept review requests at various times throughout the year. You can apply here: [ausromtoday.com/about-ausrom-today/ausrom-today-review-policy](http://ausromtoday.com/about-ausrom-today/ausrom-today-review-policy).

### When did you start blogging?

I started blogging about five years ago on a blog called *Creative Conversations*, which focused on talking to people of all creative backgrounds—artists, poets, authors etc.

I streamlined this to interviewing only authors in mid-2013, and by June 2014, after chatting with many Australian authors, decided

to change tack completely and rebrand to AusRom Today.

Initially what led me to blogging was the desire to talk to other creatives and bring to the fore their inspiration and dedication to their craft. When the AusRom Today rebrand took place, it was done purely because I wanted to highlight the talent of the Australian romance literature industry.

# Indie World: Author Signings

by **K E Osborn**

So, you're attending your first author signing! How exciting and amazing is that? Also, nervewracking and scary. The thought of sitting in a room alongside some of Australia's, or even the world's, best authors can either electrify or terrify you. Add in the pandemonium of the fangirls and hot models roaming about, and you're in for a great day! But all of this can be slightly daunting the first time around.

What do I take? How do I prepare? How do I stop looking at the gorgeous male models and concentrate on the readers in front of me?

It can be overwhelming but if you go in prepared, and instead of stressing about how everything will go and just enjoy the day, you will have a hell of a lot of fun!

Signings are one of my favourite events of the year. I've been to five now in Australia, with another five planned for next year alone, including two in America. As you can see, I've caught the signing bug—they're like Pringles. *Once you pop, you can't stop!*

So what do you need to do before the signing itself? Prepare!

Make sure you have everything you need before the day. Have enough paperbacks, for not only the actual day/s but also to fill your pre-orders. (Pre-orders are made using Google Forms and are placed on the signing event's Facebook page prior to the event taking place. They allow the readers to order your book/s. They purchase their chosen book/s and you send out a PayPal invoice prior to the signing. Then they pick up their order from you on the day. Simple.)

Make sure you have plenty of swag, but in saying this don't have so much swag that it fills your table!



Remember you need enough room to actually sign your books. This is important. If you have no room to sign, then what are the readers there for?

Also on the subject of swag, unless you've spent a ton of money on it, don't make people pay for it—swag should be a gift for the reader. The readers who buy your book should get something a little extra special, give them the 'extra-mile swag'.

Think about the space you have in the room before you go the event. The organisers should give you details of the size of your table allocation. Keep this in mind when you're taking banners and displays. Some signings have ample space for massive banners but some are sardine cans. Be mindful and have respect for the other authors around you. If your banner is massive and the room is small, don't put it up. But if there's room, have at it. Show yourself to the world!

Above all, be respectful of those

around you and respectful of your readers. By the end of the day, your back is sore, your hand is cramping, and you're tired, but you have to remember that the readers are there for you. So get up and have a photo taken with your fans. Smile, be friendly and remember they're there for you. Have fun, enjoy it!

Signings are for you to network, to meet your fellow authors, to engage with your readers and to embrace this community. Because this reading community is one hell of a fun place to be in, and signings are one of the best ways to meet everyone and will honestly be one of the most rewarding and best experiences of your author career. Grab that bull by the horns and ride it. You'll have the time of your life!

In next month's column, I will discuss marketing. I look forward to bringing you some more helpful advice.

Much love, K E Osborn

[www.keosbornauthor.com](http://www.keosbornauthor.com)

# Romancing the Rock

Canada-born, Queensland-based author **Robin Thomas** recently visited family in Newfoundland, Canada. While there, she also attended an expo of the recently-formed romance society, *Romancing the Rock*. Here, she shares her experiences.

The challenge of geographical distance and remote locations are issues that both Australian and Canadian writers can relate to. And when you are a romance writer living in Canada's most eastern province, which is also an island, it can be a real problem.

And so, *Romancing the Rock* was started in early 2016 to help writers living in Newfoundland and Labrador connect with each other.

Being a native 'Newfie' myself, I was interested in exploring what the romance writing scene was like when I visited Canada recently. I was lucky enough to attend *Romancing the Rock's* inaugural expo, held in the atmospheric Magnum and Steins building in downtown St John's.

This was an opportunity to showcase local authors with workshops, readings and a book sale. I found a diverse and talented group of writers, whose enthusiasm for connecting with and supporting other romance writers was the new society's driving force. Founding member and historical romance author Kate Robbins and erotic romance writer Katherine King spoke about how the group was formed.

Kate Robbins, author of the bestselling *Highland Chief* series, set in Scotland, started *Romancing the Rock* along with Victoria Barbour, another popular Newfoundland author. Robbins said that, although she was a member of the Atlantic chapter of the Romance Writers of America, their meetings were held on the mainland. "Location," she said, "was problematic."

So she and Barbour decided to start their own local group for romance writers who lived in Newfoundland, which they named *Romancing the*



*Rock*, referencing both the movie and also a familiar nickname for the windswept province—the 'Rock'.

Robbins said: "By fluke we were able to get a CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] feature piece on the television show, *Here and Now*. After that it exploded." With numbers growing, especially after their recent expo, Robbins said the support that writers in the romance community have given each other has been "absolutely incredible". Networking and "paying it forward" are concepts which Australian writers in RWA would certainly understand and share.

Another member of the group, Katherine King, whose debut series, *Captivated*, has hit record sales on Amazon and iTunes, also spoke about the idea of writers helping each other. Having only taken up writing a couple of years ago, she was reluctant to tell people she had even written a book. Katherine said: "There's lots of support for authors writing about Newfoundland, but not for other authors, particularly those who write romance."

After she joined *Romancing the Rock*, she gained confidence and encouragement from other romance writers in the group. She's recently been contracted by the publisher of iTunes in Australia for

her *Captivated* series.

If *Romancing the Rock's* first expo is any indication, there's a lot of talent and support in the romance community there. The group has recently published *Tricks & Treats: A Romance Anthology*, available on Amazon, and *Holiday Hearts: A Christmas Romance Anthology*. If you'd like to find out more about some of these Canadian writers, you can check them out on *Romancing the Rock's* Facebook page.

**Robin Thomas is an author and teacher who writes both adult and young adult romance. Her published works include *Bonjour Cherie* and *High Stakes* (Escape Publishing). Her newest release is *My Alien*, a young adult romance published under the name, Robin Martin. Visit [www.robinmartinthomas.com](http://www.robinmartinthomas.com).**



# Legal Beagle

by Penelope Janu

Agreements have to comply with the law in order to be binding and enforceable—we saw this in relation to surrogacy arrangements in last month's column (thanks for your questions and comments!). This column will look at some everyday contractual scenarios that you may come across in your writing.

1. Simon threatens Susie (or someone close to her) with physical or economic harm if she refuses to sell her farm. Any agreement (even if Simon paid a fair price and Susie signed documentation) would be invalid for duress. Consent is an essential ingredient in every contract and Susie did not freely consent to the contract.

2. Edward promises that if his daughter, Emily, does well at school, he'll buy her a car. Emily gets straight As but Edward refuses to buy the car. There would be no contract because every contract needs an intention to be 'legally bound'. The law presumes that when close family members, or people in a close social setting, enter into an agreement, they don't intend to contract (the opposite presumption applies in a commercial context).

3. Jenny and Jay are workmates. Jenny is moving overseas and promises to give Jay her old car. Then she changes her mind. There is no contract because every contract needs 'consideration' or some form of payment, and both parties have to provide it. Without payment, there is simply a gift (so there's a chance it will have to be returned if there's a change of mind). Jay could have given Jenny a dollar when she made her promise—then she would have been bound.

4. Marjorie, a cat lover, consumes a bottle of wine. Soon afterwards, she enters into a contract to buy a \$2000 beagle. Marjorie would be



bound by the contract whether she wants the dog or not—provided the dog seller didn't know she was so affected by alcohol she didn't know what she was doing.

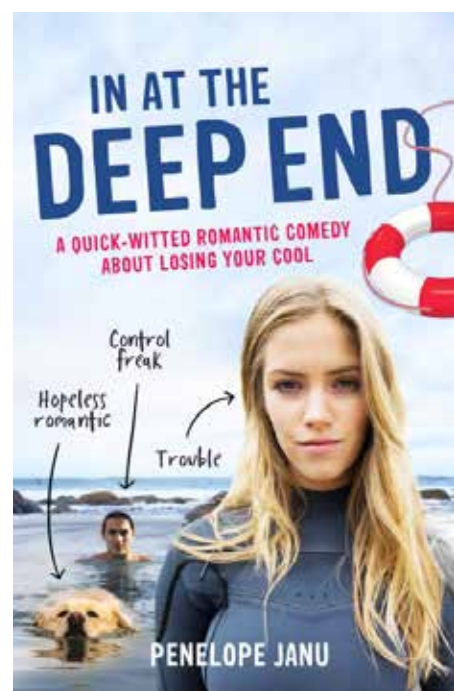
5. James enters into an agreement with Mary, an elderly and unwell neighbour, to buy her land. If James has taken advantage of Mary in some way (for example, he failed to explain the agreement and didn't encourage her to get independent advice), the agreement would fail because of inequality in bargaining power—James's behaviour was unconscionable or unfair. Undue influence could also apply.

6. Lane offers to pay Adam to teach her about sex. This situation came up in Avril Tremayne's *The Contract*. (I love this book!). Avril made it plain that Lane and Adam knew their agreement wasn't binding (even though it was in writing and signed) but merely a series of guidelines. Why couldn't there be a legally enforceable contract? There would be problems with uncertainty, subject matter, and a lack of intention to be legally bound. And assessment of damages might be tricky, too. How do you quantify mediocre sex—not that this was a problem with Lane and Adam ...

Statute law applies to many contractual issues, particularly consumer law. Have a look at

the NSW Fair Trading site, [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au) (each State and Territory has something similar). For information on consumer contracts go to the *contracts* tab (via the *consumers* tab). Hopefully all your Christmas gifts matched their description, were fit for purpose, and of merchantable quality. If not, consumer law will help!

**Penelope Janu is a lawyer. Her book, the romantic comedy *In at the Deep End*, will be published by Harlequin Mira in February. Please send questions for *Legal Beagle* consideration to [penelopejanu@penelopejanu.com](mailto:penelopejanu@penelopejanu.com).**





# Member News

Do you have some good news? Send it to [hteditor@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:hteditor@romanceaustralia.com).

**Sandi Wallace** was excited to win the 2016 Scarlet Stiletto Awards Romantic Suspense Prize for her short crime story, *Busted*, in November.

Sandi's debut rural crime novel, starring Georgie Harvey and John Franklin, *Tell Me Why*, won the 2015 Davitt Award Readers' Choice and

was also shortlisted for the 2015 Davitt Award Best Debut. She is thrilled that the sequel, *Dead Again*, will be out in April 2017.

In October, **CJ Archer** hit the *USA Today* bestseller list for the first time with her new indie-published release, *The Mapmakers' Apprentice*.

## Industry News

WA publisher **Serenity Press** is now calling for submissions for its 2018 romance anthology, *Destination Romance*.

More details at [www.serenitypress.org/a-bouquet-of-love](http://www.serenitypress.org/a-bouquet-of-love).

# Hoot, Hoot! Two February OWLs

**Course Dates:** 30/01/2017–26/02/2017

**Cost:** RWA member—\$30. Non-RWA member—\$80.

Register at [www.romanceaustralia.com/owl](http://www.romanceaustralia.com/owl)

## A Sparkling Guide to Gripping Goals, Motivation & Conflict! with C.T. Green

**Make it sparkle! Don't know what that is? Do this workshop! (Because everyone needs a little excitement!)**

Do you ever wonder why Cruella de Vil wanted all those Dalmatians? Because, Dalmatians! Much cute, many cuddles! Yes, yes, we know it was for a fur coat. But why? What drove her to her obsessive compulsiveness, eh? She didn't just wake up one day and decide she wanted lots of different furs (or maybe she did; some people roll that way). The point is, while we know her goal—Dalmatian coat—what was her motivation? How was the conflict resolved? How would it have been resolved if you'd been telling the story? Goal, Motivation,

Conflict (GMC), you know that's where I was going, and if you didn't, you also need to do this workshop!

New writers, understand what the heck Goal, Motivation and Conflict is. Seasoned writers (mmm, tasty!), we'll look at how you can use GMC just about anywhere to enhance those epic skills you've worked hard to acquire. There will be Dalmatian puppies and er, cookies...anyone bake? ;)

### About the Presenter:

Multi-award winning, New York-published author C.T. Green worked

in advertising for 10 years before she became a writer. She has a Bachelor of Arts with majors in communication and literature. C.T. Green now lives in regional Australia with her husband, children and extensive collection of animals, including the world's bossiest goldfish. In between writing, she reads, gardens, drinks Russian Caravan tea, kid-wrangles, plays Skyrim, and avoids the goldfish. She is a 2014 ARRA finalist for Favourite Paranormal Romance. You will find her at [www.ctgreen-author.com](http://www.ctgreen-author.com) and at [chevallum.wordpress.com](http://chevallum.wordpress.com).

## Quickly Learn Aeon Timeline for Fiction Writers & Authors with Kylie Ross

**This is an online course that is logically laid out and covers all the features within Aeon Timeline 2.**

Created for all types of writers, fiction and non-fiction, this course takes you through the basics of Aeon Timeline and then gives you ninja skills with practical real-world examples and bonus templates you can make your own.

If you don't already, you'll come to love brainstorming and plotting your timelines and then sync to Scrivener and begin writing faster!

### About the Presenter:

"I'm Kylie and these days I enjoy writing romantic fiction and I'm currently writing a paranormal romance series. I'm a retired accountant and spent many years travelling as a financial software implementation consultant, living a fun life working hard in the corporate world. I was born in Australia and I've also lived in New

Zealand, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. These days, I'm settled back into Brissy life and attempting a stay-at-home mum lifestyle as I settle my young son into the beginnings of school life. I split my time between running a kids' craft activity website and writing as much as this allows, with a view to getting published next year—fingers crossed!"

# It's Ruby Time!

January is entry time for the Romantic Book of the Year contest for published novels and novellas. Entries are already open and close on 16 January—if you are entering print copies, your books must be postmarked by **16 January**.

As outlined in last month's *HT*, features for this year are:

## New sections

The 2017 sections will be: Long Romance, Short Romance, Romance Novella and Romantic Elements.

## Enter online

Go to the RWA website and submit your entry form and payment.

## Two rounds of judging

For the first time, we're introducing a final round of judging and an overall Romantic Book of the Year Award. We're also introducing writer judges, in addition to our readers—if you enter, you are expected to judge.

## Digital entries

If your book has a DRM-free ebook edition, you'll be entering that. Print entries will be accepted only from those authors who don't have access to a usable digital edition of the final published book. If your ebook edition has DRM—and hence can't be emailed—you'll need to enter print.

Make sure your digital files are readable! If your file has watermarks, on some devices the text can be obscured, which means the judges can't read it! Please check your files on as many devices as you have handy—and always submit all the file formats that you have available. We can accept .pdf, .epub and .mobi (Kindle) files.

## Entry limits

The contest will be capped at 300 entries, so there's a limit of three entries per person (that's per human being, not per pseudonym).

The cap is larger than our entry total for last year, so there'll be plenty of room for everyone.

## Publishers can no longer enter for you

We're accepting entries only from authors. Some of you are used to your publishers entering for you but that no longer happens. Some publishers will supply the books if asked but it's up to you to enter and pay. So don't forget!

In the **contest guidelines** you'll find information on how to enter, contest categories and more. Download the guidelines from the RWA website:

[romanceaustralia.com/contests/emerging-contests/the-ruby](http://romanceaustralia.com/contests/emerging-contests/the-ruby)

As always, please contact the contest managers if you have any questions or special difficulties.

**Entries will close on 16 January.**

## Little Gems and Spicy Bites Short Story Contests

Our short story contests will open from **9 to 27 January**.

For *Little Gems*, enter your 3000-word romantic short story (on the 'sweet' side—no higher rating than 'M', please). The theme gem for this year is **onyx**.

New for this year is *Spicy Bites* for erotic romance short stories. The theme for this year is **tattoos**. Remember: you can earn extra marks for building the theme into your story in an original and interesting way.

Erotic romance only, please—that means your story focuses on the development of a romantic relationship between the protagonists, and has a happy-ever-after or happy-for-now ending. Erotica without a romance is not eligible. The word count is a little longer, to accommodate the explicit content—up to 5000 words.

Note: the scoresheets for all contests are available on the website—check them out to see what the judges will be looking for!

You might be able to modify your story to suit the contest better.

There's prize money for the top three placegetters in each contest. And the top 12 to 14 stories in each will have the opportunity to be published in our annual anthologies, *Little Gems* and *Spicy Bites*. So get your stories ready!

[romanceaustralia.com/contests/aspiring-contests/little-gems](http://romanceaustralia.com/contests/aspiring-contests/little-gems)

[romanceaustralia.com/contests/aspiring-contests/spicy-bite](http://romanceaustralia.com/contests/aspiring-contests/spicy-bite)

## 2017 Contest Season

**Ruby:** Closes 16 January 2017

**Little Gems & Spicy Bites:** 9–17 January 2017

**First Kiss:** 6–27 February 2017

**Valerie Parv Award:** April 2017

# Two Friday Workshops On Offer



RWA's 26th annual conference, *Love Gone Wild*, will be held in Brisbane from 11 to 13 August 2017, and we are excited to run, not one, but TWO workshops on the Friday.

The first is our *Bootcamp*, held by Anne Gracie. This all-day workshop is aimed at aspiring and emerging authors. Our second workshop is a masterclass. *Enchanting the Reader* is being run by Kate Forsyth and targeted toward emerging and established authors. Registrations for conference will open in mid-February, so make sure you get in quick to secure your spot.

## Workshop 1—Bootcamp

**Presenter:** Anne Gracie

**For:** Aspiring and Emerging Authors

### Friday Bootcamp at the conference? What's that about?

Traditionally the Friday workshop before the conference has been an intensive craft-of-writing program. As RWA has grown, we've been trying to cater to a wider variety of members at very different stages of their career, and we've passed the one-size-fits-all stage.

At the same time, very few of us have studied writing formally—we more or less fell into it, learning by doing and from studying the books we loved, and maybe doing an online course here and there along the way. Even so, most courses in Australia focus on literary fiction, and ignore or are unaware of some of the most important aspects of writing popular fiction.

So the *Bootcamp* Friday workshop is an intensive craft-of-writing program with a clear focus on writing romance—though the elements covered will be useful for all kinds of popular fiction.

### Who is the *Bootcamp* for?

Whether you're just starting out or have published a number of books there will be writing exercises and tips and tricks for all levels of experience.

It will be a day of intensive writing



and rewriting, working in groups. The focus is to try out a range of techniques and approaches, to play with your writing and see what might suit you and what doesn't. The last part of the day will concentrate on dealing with questions raised by the group.

It will also be a day of connecting with like-minded people—through working in groups and discussing some of the issues raised, you might arrive knowing nobody, but you will leave having made friends.

### Topics covered

- 1) Starting a novel
  - ♥ How to engage readers from the start and keep them reading.
  - ♥ Getting into characters' heads, point of view, backstory, motivation, info-dumps, character arcs.
  - ♥ Dialogue—tips and tricks to make your dialogue sparkle.
- 2) Structuring a novel
  - ♥ Plotting and structure, building scenes.

♥ Conflict—internal and external, levels of conflict, building tension, the black moment and the climax.

♥ Techniques—foreshadowing, pacing, avoiding the sagging middle.

### 3) Editing and rewriting

♥ Techniques to sharpen your writing.

### 4) Your unique writer's voice

♥ Developing your ideas—avoiding clichés and the 'same old, same old'.

♥ Your voice, your world, your themes.

♥ The long haul.

### 5) Questions from the floor

## Workshop 2: Masterclass— Enchanting the Reader

**Presenter:** Kate Forsyth

**For:** Emerging and Established Authors

For emerging and established authors, this Masterclass workshop is designed to help you keep the spark alive and writing stories that your readers will adore. This is an advanced workshop that will focus on deeper knowledge of the craft and helping you acquire new skills.

Vladimir Nabokov said great writers are storytellers, teachers and enchanters, with the final quality being the most important of all.

When we tell a story, we are casting a spell on our audience. The real world fades away and the reader is totally drawn into the fictional world of the story. Their own imaginations transform the words on the page into a fully immersive sensory experience. This is often called narrative transportation, and it is utterly addictive. Lose yourself in a book just once and you will want to do so again and again.

We all know what it feels like to be so enthralled by a story.

In this workshop learn how to:

♥ cast a spell upon our readers

♥ bewitch them so they cannot bear to put our book down

♥ write a novel that stays with the reader long after the last page has been turned.

This Masterclass will cover:

♥ creating characters that leap off the page

♥ building characters that seem alive to the reader

♥ understanding of story structure—beginnings and endings, rising and falling action, key turning points, crisis and resolution, denouement, the monomyth and so much more

♥ world-building—creating a deeply immersive reading experience for your reader by creating a world that feels real

♥ writing exercises to get the creative juices flowing

♥ suspense & surprise—the two secret ingredients that create a compelling narrative; understand the difference between them and how to use them to keep your readers turning the pages

♥ crowding & leaping—managing time in your novels.

Kate says: "I've been making up stories as long as I've been able to hold a pencil. I wrote my first novel when I was seven (it was only 29 pages long, but still!) By the time I left school, I had finished half-a-dozen more.

I spent my twenties scribbling poems and stories and articles, and reading every craft manual I could get my hands on. I undertook a MA in Creative Writing to follow on from my BA in Literature.

I went to every workshop and publishing seminar I could afford, sat in the front row, noted down each word that was said. I had my first novel published when I was 30 and have made my living from my writing ever since (and, yes, since you ask, I've made a very nice living indeed.)

But even though I've now had almost 40 novels published in 18 different



languages, won a number of awards including the American Library Association award for Best Historical Fiction, finished a Doctorate of Creative Arts, and sold quite a few books, this is still the question that I think about the most...

### How do we enchant the reader?

I want to bewitch them. I want to keep them utterly enthralled. I want my readers to love my books with all their hearts.

And many of them do (they write and tell me so). Of course, I know that there are many who will never much like what I do, no matter how hard I try. That's all right. I'm not writing for them. I'm writing for my kindred spirits, the bookworms who devour stories of romance and history and magic and mystery, set long, long ago or far, far away. Stories that celebrate the redemptive power of love.

### So how do I cast that spell of enchantment upon my readers?

Is it done in the dark of the moon, in the mirk and midnight hour, with eyes of newts and toes of frogs, wool of bats and tongues of dogs?

To find out, you will need to join me in this Friday Workshop at *Love Gone Wild*, the 26th annual Romance Writers of Australia conference Brisbane next August.

Root of hemlock optional."

# Holidays and the Writer

by Anne Gracie

Happy New Year to you all! Here's hoping 2017 is good to you.

I'll be continuing this column in 2017 with more guest writers sharing their experiences, their wisdom and how they approach their writing life. And, in the meantime, I'm going to talk about getting through the holidays as a writer.

Holidays can be a tricky time for a writer. Some of us want to work on the story idea burning inside our brain, but there are family members and visitors and fun to be had, and meals to be made and dishes to be done, and there's just no time or headspace for writing.

Others are reluctantly pounding their way toward a post-holiday deadline, wishing they were anywhere else but at the computer, thinking wistfully about the beach and picnics or just hanging out with a cool drink and a good book and no particular plan at all.

That's me at the moment. I have a looming deadline and need to be in a cave, writing. My trouble is I'm madly distractible, and if everyone else is on holidays, I want to be, too, having that thing called fun.

Others are feeling a bit exhausted and disheartened and just want to escape from the pressure of writing and publishing. That's me, too. Publishing used to be this clear pathway with a couple of roads to choose. Now it's a maze of choices.

Holidays are when your routines go to pieces—all your routines, not just your writing ones. That's good. We all need a break from routine, a chance to freshen up our lives by doing different things, an opportunity for the muse to rest, relax and play.

If you're in the group that wants to escape from writing, then have

your break, forget about writing and throw yourself wholeheartedly into enjoying your holiday. It will do you the world of good. *Life should not revolve around writing and publishing.*

My trouble is—and I think others have experienced this, too—the longer you take a break from writing, the harder it is to get back into it. After a long break from writing, I generally write a fair bit of rubbish before my writing starts to flow again as it did before the break. Writing is like a muscle; the less you use it, the stiffer and weaker it gets.

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## We all need a **break from routine**, a chance to **freshen up our lives**

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So for those like me, torn between writing commitments and holidays, here's my suggestion for giving yourself the break you need AND keeping your writing muscle—and your muse—in good shape. I learned this technique from Dorothea Brande, who was a writer and writing teacher in New York in the 1930s. She wrote a book called *Becoming a Writer* and it's still in print today.

My approach is this: write for 15 minutes first thing in the morning, before you get involved in any normal daytime activities. Have a pee, make a cuppa and sit down to write for 15 minutes. Write about anything; write down your dreams, try to describe the scene outside, set down your thoughts, do some creative writing-type exercises.

When you've done your 15 minutes, consider your plans for the rest of the day and try to find a spot where you can do another 15 minutes of

writing—after dinner, before lunch, while the kids are playing backyard cricket, before you go to bed, whenever. It's only 15 minutes, so it needn't mess up your day at all. But you need to commit to it.

In that 15 minutes, work on something—your current WIP (work in progress), a scene, a new story idea; or if you're not working on anything in particular, try another creative writing exercise. Of course you can write more if you like (or you have to), but if you can't or you don't want to, these two 15-minute sessions a day are all you need to keep your writing muscle in shape.

If you can't think of creative writing exercises, there are some here: [thewritepractice.com/creative-writing-prompts](http://thewritepractice.com/creative-writing-prompts) and links to more if you scroll down.

Not only will the regular daily practice keep your writing muscle limber, the exercises themselves will feed into your fiction. And it's only for two 15-minute periods a day.

So happy writing, happy holidays, and all the very best for 2017.

Anne Gracie



# NEW RELEASES JANUARY 2017

All covers are hyperlinked.

**E** Title available as ebook.

**P** Title available as print book (and often ebook too).



*And Then Mine Enemy*  
**Alison Stuart**  
Oporet Publishing



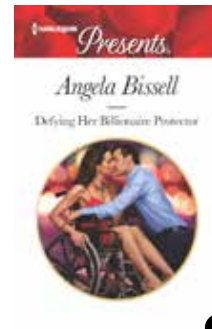
*Anything But Love*  
**Jacqueline Hayley**  
Indie Published



*Bitten*  
**Amanda Pillar**  
Indie Published



*Breaking the Playboy's Rules*  
**Emily Forbes**  
Mills & Boon



*Defying Her Billionaire Protector*  
**Angela Bissell**  
Harlequin Presents



*Gifts For Our Time*  
**Anna Jacobs**  
Hodder & Stoughton UK



*Her Savage Scot*  
**Christina Phillips**  
Indie Published



*Her Valentine Romance*  
**Margaret Sutherland**  
The Wild Rose Press



*Her Vengeful Scot*  
**Christina Phillips**  
Indie Published



*Lady Honor's Debt*  
**Maggi Andersen**  
Indie Published



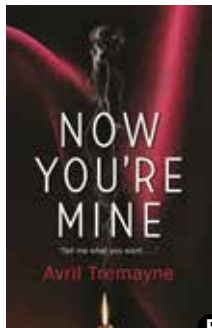
*Love After Waterloo*  
**Suzi Love**  
Indie Published



*Love in the Boondocks*  
**Adam Mann**  
Butterfly Books



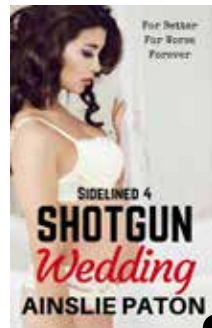
*Loving Nick...Again*  
**Joanie MacNeil**  
Books We Love Ltd



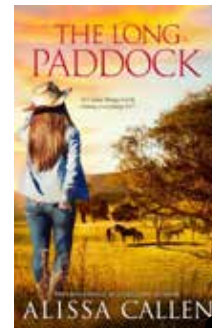
*Now You're Mine*  
**Avril Tremayne**  
Penguin Random House



*Place to Belong*  
**Claire Boston**  
Bantilly Publishing



*Shotgun Wedding*  
**Ainslie Paton**  
Indie Published



*The Long Paddock*  
**Alissa Callen**  
Harlequin MIRA



*The Scandalous Lady Mercy*  
**Maggi Andersen**  
Indie Published



*Twined*  
**Maggi Andersen**  
Indie Published



*Unexpected Obsession*  
**Barbara Strickland**  
Indie Published

Please visit [www.romanceaustralia.com](http://www.romanceaustralia.com) to upload your new release cover for a future edition of *Hearts Talk*. You will need to login to the website first. You can also include a URL to link to a book page or author website. Covers and information must be received by the 8th of the month prior to publication.