

Romantic Spirit

Official Newsletter of the GRRRWA

Getting Serious About Writing... Hear Us Roar!

October 2005

Romantic Spirit... Why this title? "Romantic" is obvious for a Romance Writer's group, but "Spirit"? Is this a special interest group for ghost writers? No.

While developing this newsletter, we examined many titles and all ideas seemed to revolve around a certain word. Spirit.

Spirit – noun. An animation; a life principle; the soul; a supernatural essence; a individual; a disposition; courage; enthusiastic loyalty; the real meaning.

All of those words define us as a group, as writers. We have Romantic *Spirit*.

Meeting Information

Our meetings are held 11:30 AM, on the 2nd Saturday of the month (excluding December). Meetings are held at the Rio Grande Restaurant on Northland Drive.

Directions:

From the East – Take 96 to Northland Drive. Travel north for about five miles. Plainfield will dead end into Northland Drive. Turn left. Rio Grand is approximately ¼ mile down the road on the left hand side of the road.

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President's Message

Michele Hickerty

Fall has arrived. Autumn. The trees are full of color and we're all thinking of the last of our warm weather followed by the holiday season. I know getting outside with my notebook in hand is high on my list.

Did you know that one of the best things a writer can do is to keep a journal? Experts advise that you should record your writing-related thoughts everyday. I find this particularly helpful if I'm struggling with writer's block or a tough plot/character problem. I grouse it out in my journal and eventually, what I need to do becomes clear. Try it out! Let me know how it works for you.

Wow! It's hard to believe our chapter is unofficially one year old this month. I'm still very excited about all the plans we have. Conference, contests, mentoring, to name a few. Nothing will hold us back.

Michele

If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.

-- Toni Morrison

Vice President's Message

Christine Allen-Riley

We've all heard the adage, 'Have an attitude of gratitude.' Often, this is a difficult outlook to keep in mind. The daily necessities of life can be overwhelming – paying the bills, cleaning, cooking, getting the car serviced, holiday shopping, caring for children or parents, etc. Finding time and energy for our creative outlets often seems impossible. We may feel frustrated and angry that our desires take a backseat to the mundane details of existence. Now, you might be wondering why you should feel grateful for all of these obligations. The answer is so simple and yet more complicated than I could ever explain. Are you ready for it? Here it is. You're alive.

Before you roll your eyes and move on to the next article, let me elaborate. Yes, we have to do all of the things mentioned above and so many more in order to keep our lives running smoothly, but we have a multitude of gifts that far surpass these duties. Some of the gifts are obvious. We have families and friends who love us. They may not always understand us, but they love us and support us. We have shelter, a means of supporting ourselves and relative security. These are plenty of reasons to be thankful, but as writers we have so many more.

Dreams are whispers from the soul. As writers, we have the ability to hear them and give them life on paper. We have courage to forsake our inhibitions and follow these dreams wherever they lead us. We have dedication and perseverance to stay on track even when it's difficult. When we fall, we, often with the help of our friends and family, pick ourselves up and forge onward.

Our imagination is constantly in motion. We see possibility and inspiration everywhere we look. As romance writers, we find the ability to rise above the tragic and create hope and happiness. This is gift we not only give ourselves, but anyone we share our dreams with. Hope, happiness and love can be in short supply in today's world. By making our dreams reality, we can do our part to make the world a better place.

Yes, we'll have to work hard to juggle our obligations in order to make time to accomplish our goals. Do whatever you need to do to make your dreams come true. But in the midst of juggling, remember to find time to revel in your blessings and gifts.

Chris

Treasurer's Message

Cheryl Steimel

Send money. Really. I want to spend it. On you. Dues, contributions and contest funds should be spent for the benefit of you and other members of GRRRWA.

Think of all the things we could do with the collective cash. Pay for awesome speakers. Sponsor relevant workshops. Maybe give away a contest entry fee once in awhile? The possibilities abound at making you – us – better writers.

Let's keep enough in our account for necessities and spend the rest. On you. Send money now so we can get started on this great adventure.

If you have any great money-making ideas, be sure to let us know!

Cheryl

Our Contest Information

We will have two small contests: The Best Bite (Vampire) Contest and The Enter Laughing Contest. Details are available on our website and in the files section of the loop.

October, November and December Birthdays

12/03 – Marti Ocilka

Building Blocks

Tools and Advice for Beginners

“And then I jabbed a steak knife through it!” or, “Building your Hall of Shame.”

By: Jennifer Armintrout

Imagine, if you will, an English manor house on a winding country lane, far from modern conveniences. Night has fallen on the windswept moor. A group of people assembled there for insert-plausible-weird-British-type-get-together-here, now prepares for their elegant dinner. A scream shatters the night! A meek maid faints in her starched uniform and sensible shoes. The Lord of the Manor is face down on his dressing table, the quivering handle of a carving knife jutting from the back of his velvet dressing gown.

Okay, now imagine that instead of a country estate with the fox hunting and the posh manners, it's a cluttered, two-bedroom apartment in Kentwood, and instead of the Lord of the manor with the carving knife sticking in him, it's a five-inch, serrated steak knife and a copy of the latest vampire novel from a well-known and respected member of the RWA.

No, the butler didn't do it. I did it. The book was horrible and it got what was coming to it. My only regret is that I can't do it to every copy in existence.

No, this isn't just a mean-spirited ramble against bad books. I actually learned something from that first kill. I will never, ever write a book as bad as the one I stabbed. I wouldn't want to waste anyone's time that way. And since that first Freddy Krueger moment, my bookshelf has become a veritable slaughter house. There are now five victims on my "Don't" shelf, a locale I commonly refer to as my Hall of Shame.

Now, I will pass the secrets of this dark art to you. Don't worry if you can't think of any material you'd like to include in your Hall of Shame. Every author has, at one time or another, thrown a book aside in disgust. Nothing hurts worse than having your manuscript rejected, only to read published fiction with an incoherent plot, lamentable grammar, and a heroine you'd rather lock in a Porta-Potty than spend the rest of the book with. If this hasn't happened to you, it will.

When it does, take the book- stab wound optional- and analyze its flaws. Feel free to do so gleefully, though some discretion is required. Outside of my critique group- who I trust will

take the secret identity of my victims to the grave- only two people know the titles of the books that went under the knife. The last thing you want when you're accepting your RITA is to know that the person handing you the award heard every bad thing you've said about her novel.

I find it's best to use a five point criteria when deciding if a book belongs in my Hall of Shame. If the novel features a heroine and hero I can't stand, a hastily wrapped up or stretched out plot, one or more continuity errors, a supporting cast of pointless or stock characters, and a pervasive sense that the editor stamped it "APPROVED" without reading it first, it goes on the "Don't" shelf. Feel free to add or subtract from this list as necessary to fit your personal needs.

I cannot stress how important it is that the book meet all of your requirements. If I saved every book that just annoyed me, I'd soon be found dead beneath a landslide of punctured paperbacks. Only the truly bad belong on my shelf. They're there as a sort of reverse inspiration to me at times when I'd like to just type "And then they all exploded THE END" and throw out my manuscript. At other times, they force me to get off my butt and write, because each book signifies readers potentially lost to our genre. It's my job to get my fantastic stuff published and win them back.

No matter what they signify for you, your Hall of Shame will serve forever as a hard learned lesson. What you hated in someone else's book, you'll never put in yours.

The Publishing Process

What Happens After "The Call"

By: Cheryl Steimel (a.k.a. Cheryl Sterling)

Publicity and Promotion

Or, as I like to call it, Look at Me!

Almost every writer I know has the same dream – a quiet place to work, a reliable computer, internet access and unlimited time. No interruptions by children, husbands or the occasional animal unless (we've all said it) there's an open artery involved. The pool boy, on the other hand – oops, that's another dream.

Writing is a solitary business. It makes us solitary people. So, when it comes to publicity, we'd rather volunteer for endless toilet scrubbing than put ourselves in the public eye. Self-doubt strolls in and takes up residence. Your editor was on drugs when he/she bought the book. The cover stinks. No one will read it and, if they do, it will be passed around as an example of how not to write a book.

We've all had these thoughts. When it comes to putting not only your "baby" in the public eye, but yourself, nerves start to jangle. Yes, you'd prefer to sit at your desk, working on the next great masterpiece, but this one needs your attention.

Cheer up! Some of it can be anonymous. Press releases, sending out covers and bookmarks, ramping up your website – these can be done in your jammies. Talking face-to-face with someone about your book cannot.

Let's not even start with book signings, but go back a little further to setting one up. You're going to have to haul your neurotic butt to the local bookstore and persuade a complete

stranger that yes, your book is worth the commitment they'll have to make.

Easier said than done? Yes, if you take the right approach. Here are some guidelines to change the "Please don't look at me" attitude to "Yes, by gum, I did write a book and you'll enjoy reading it."

First, pick the brains of those more experienced. Contact your PAN liaison or members. Get names and feedback about different bookstore managers. Find out what worked and what didn't. Did they have stock? Are they romance friendly?

Next, scout the store. Oh, you've probably been there a million times before, but go with a fresh eye. See it from the bookseller's (your) point of view. Better yet, go when another author is having a reading or signing.

After that, call the manager. Don't apologize for your work (we tend toward self-deprecation.) Instead, put on a different persona. Maybe you'll be PTA Mom, stating your case to not have the music program cut. Maybe you'll be one of your kick-ass characters. Or maybe you'll pretend to be your critique partner or best friend who believes in you more than you do. Find a level of confidence and dig in your heels.

Arrange a satisfactory time to meet with them. Then MEET with them. They aren't any different than anyone else. Learn. They've been through this multiple times. Take a list. Make a list.

Next, don't take anything for granted. You've heard the stories from fellow authors who have shown up for book signings to not find any books. Double check that the stock is there, even if you physically need to see it.

Finally, relax. It will never be as terrible as you imagine. After all, everyone that comes in the door and walks by your table, whether they buy or not, is a book lover. What can be wrong with that?

Polishing Your Skills

Whether Newbie or Expert, we must all polish our skills to stay in the game.

I'll Take Modifiers for One Thousand, Alex

By: Marti Ocilka

Adjectives and adverbs can make your writing sparkle, but they can also be one of the main reasons a manuscript is rejected.

According to literary agent Noah Lukeman, editors receive hundreds of manuscripts each week and can quickly spot flaws in writing. You need to grab attention in the first five pages of your work, or it will probably be set aside without being read. The quickest way to earn a rejection is to misuse or overuse modifiers.

New writers try to bring nouns to life by embellishing them with garlands of adjectives and adverbs. For example, to paint a more vivid description, they call a day "cold, wet, gray, and gloomy." Unfortunately, cumbersome lists of modifiers drag down the story's pace and slow your reader. Editors and agents look for such overuse within the first few pages of a story as an excuse to reject the work.

So how do you breathe life into descriptions without lists of modifiers? Here's a few suggestions.

Go through your manuscript with an eye to weeding out adjectives and adverbs. Remember with modifiers, a little goes a long way. Pretend someone is giving you \$5 for every one you cut. Start with ones you've repeated. How many times do we need to read about the color of her eyes or his hair?

Wherever you've used multiple modifiers, remove all but one. Leave the one that is strongest or most unusual.

Get rid of commonplace or cliché modifiers, a hot day, for example. Replace these with stronger words.

Remove modifiers anywhere you've used an unusual noun or verb. The uniqueness eliminates the need to further modify them.

Once you've gotten rid of weak or unnecessary modifiers, look for places where you can strengthen the noun or verb to further eliminate modifiers. Instead of saying "she was a harsh and brutal boss," you can say "she was a tyrant."

Lastly, you can substitute a comparison, simile, or metaphor. You don't want to do this all the time, but an occasional use of a comparison can paint clearer visuals.

Book Review

Write and Sell Your First Novel

by Oscar Collier and Frances Spatz Leighton

Reviewed by Marti Ocilka

Like most of us, I've read more than a few good books on writing. In fact my library of books, both good and bad, on the craft could put many small book shops to shame. Therefore, when I came across Collins and Leighton's *Write and Sell Your First Novel*, I was skeptical of the reviewers who called it "The One Book You Should Own if You Are a Writer." (By the way, the caps are theirs not mine.)

However, in browsing the book, I found there are over a hundred down-to-earth and practical tips that will guide you from choosing the kind of book you want to write all the way through publicity and self-promotion once it is published. Collier and Leighton know the business. Leighton is a writer with more than thirty books to her credit, and Collier is a senior editor at Prentice-Hall who also spent 25 years as a literary agent.

In addition to tactical advice, the book also gives insights into the working methods and publishing strategies of several superstar novelist and some inspiring conversations with five recently published authors.

This book probably isn't the best basic instructional for a person who's never put pen to paper (or fingers to the keyboard). The authors assume their readers have at least a modest familiarity with the craft as well as a desire to write. But those of us who have stopped talking about writing and are actively doing it, this might be a good book to put on Santa's list.

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