

RWR

ROMANCE WRITERS REPORT

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Five Things Authors Get Wrong About Horses, and How You Can Get Them Right

Thinking Outside the Bookstore

Research as the Backbone of Fiction

**How to Speak so Strangers Will Buy:
Hand-Selling Your Book at Live Events**

An Indie Author's Guide for Getting More Book Events: Creative Book Events for Authors!

Your Book Signing Checklist

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Contributors

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Lizzie Jenks writes gritty historical romances set in early America. Under her legal name, she is also a history professor whose research focuses on horses in the western world and is a lifelong horsewoman. Find Lizzie at LizzieJenks.com.

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Mindy Hardwick writes small town sweet contemporary romance. Her Cranberry Bay series was inspired by small towns on the North Oregon Coast. She is a member of RWA and serves on the board of the Rose City Romance Writers as VP of Communications. Mindy is a frequent workshop presenter. When she is not writing, she works as an online high school teacher in the Portland Metro area and enjoys spending time on the Oregon Coast walking the beaches and thinking of new story ideas.

Belle Calhoun

A New York Times Best Selling Author, Belle Calhoun grew up in a small town in Massachusetts as one of five children. She began to gravitate toward romance books in her tween years. Growing up across the street from a public library was a huge influence on her life. Writing for a living is a dream come true. She is the author of approximately 55 novels. A Francophile, Belle has traveled extensively throughout France. Belle has been the recipient of the Maggie Award in 2023 and a finalist in the Holt Award in 2021. In 2019 her book, *An Alaskan Christmas*, was made into a television movie called *Love, Alaska* by Brain Power Studio. She is a Publisher's Weekly Best Seller. Belle currently writes for Hachette's Forever Line and Harlequin Love Inspired. She also indie publishes.

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Adrienne deWolfe is a #1 bestselling Romance author and fiction coach. Publishers send their up-and-coming authors to her for story help. As a result, several of Adrienne's writing students have become national bestsellers, and many are consistently earning 4+ star reviews. Adrienne is best known for action-packed storylines, where feisty Heroines buck the conventions and true Heroes must be wickedly funny. She has earned 48 awards for writing excellence, including the Best Historical Romance of the Year. Passionate about empowering women, Adrienne manages a Women in Leadership Program for a top-ranking university. Visit her at <https://WriteRomanceNovels.com>

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Message from the President

BY JACKI RENÉE



When I opened my annual email from RWA, I was struck by a deeply personal milestone: this month marks my tenth year as a member of Romance Writers of America. In January 2015, I took my first step into this community, not knowing just how significant it would be in my journey as a romance writer. Back then, I had just completed a 200,000-word romantic suspense manuscript and found myself searching the internet for guidance on what to do next. That search led me to the 2015 California Dreamin' conference, hosted by the Southern California chapters. To receive a registration discount, I joined RWA. At the time, I saw joining the national organization as a practical decision. Little did I know it would open doors to a world of opportunity, connection, and growth.

Looking back on my journey with RWA from then to now, I realize how profoundly this organization has shaped my life and career. It's not just the workshops, networking events, and resources that have guided my path. It's the people—fellow romance writers, mentors, and industry professionals—who have made the difference. The friendships I've made here and the sense of belonging I've found within this community are irreplaceable. Being surrounded by others who

understand the struggles of writing and are ready to lend their support has been a source of strength in times when I doubted myself or my work.

Each member's experience with RWA is unique, but one thing I've learned is this: what you get out of your membership is directly tied to what you're willing to invest in it. When I first joined, I was a passive member, hesitant to step out of my comfort zone. Over time, I realized the power of showing up. By volunteering, tapping into member benefits, and engaging with other members, I unlocked opportunities I never imagined. This mindset also taught me that growth—both personal and professional—requires adapting and embracing new things.

As I celebrate this milestone, I feel blessed.

Thank you, RWA, for the opportunities that launched my career, for the confidence I've gained in my voice as a writer and a leader, for the support of this community, and for the friendships that will last a lifetime.

When you receive that annual email from RWA, I encourage each of you to reflect on the possibilities this organization offers. Be active, be open to change, and, most importantly, believe in the power of what this organization was founded for. I, for one, am looking forward to another year of growth, connection, and celebrating the stories of romance, hope, and love that bring us together.

Jacki Renée
2024/2025 RWA President

News & Updates

BITE-SIZED INFO ON THE INDUSTRY

PUBLISHING

Internet Archive Copyright Case Ends Without Supreme Court Review

Publishers Weekly

After more than four years of litigation, a closely watched copyright case over the Internet Archive's scanning and lending of library books is finally over after Internet Archive officials decided against exercising their last option, an appeal to the Supreme Court. The deadline to file an appeal was December 3.

With a consent judgment already entered to settle claims in the case, the official end of the litigation now triggers an undisclosed monetary payment to the plaintiff publishers, which, according to the Association of American Publishers, will "substantially" cover the publishers' attorney fees and costs in the litigation.

"While we are deeply disappointed with the Second Circuit's opinion in Hachette v. Internet Archive, the Internet Archive has decided not to pursue Supreme Court review," reads a December 4 statement posted on the Internet Archive's blog.

[Read More.](#)

HarperCollins CEO Brian Murray Talks Hot Print Book Sales and AI

Publishers Weekly

The ongoing strength of print books and the possible uses of AI were among the topics discussed by HarperCollins CEO Brian Murray on December 10 at the UBS Global Media and Communications Conference. While sales of digital formats have grown, "the strength of print books has been surprising," Murray said.

The most recent example of the format's resiliency is from this holiday season, Murray said, pointing to the willingness of readers to buy deluxe editions of mostly backlist titles. Deluxe editions of such HC titles as *Wicked* and books in the *Bridgerton* series "are selling like crazy," Murray said, and helping to drive the overall market.

[Read More.](#)

Sourcebooks Launches In-House Audio Program

Publishers Weekly

Sourcebooks has partnered with Penguin Random House Audio to launch an audio program, Sourcebooks Audio, through which the publisher will produce audio content in-house via "editorially independent imprints" within PRH Audio, per a release. The company plans to release more than 40 titles in total next year, and roughly 250 titles through 2026. PRH is the majority owner of Sourcebooks.

[Read More.](#)

The Bookseller redesigns weekly magazine to bring authors and books to the front

The Bookseller

The Bookseller has redesigned its printed magazine bringing books and authors to the front of the weekly edition for the first time. The issue opens with an interview with Natasha Brown, author of the bestselling *Assembly*, talking about her forthcoming new book *Universality*, before its regular Paperback, and Children's Previews. The relaunch issue also includes for the first time a ranking of editors, based on the sales success of their books, as well as prize wins.

[Read more.](#)



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Member Benefit

Publisher Alley is a web-based sales reporting tool that includes all of the sales and inventory data from Baker & Taylor. Baker & Taylor is the world's largest book distributor! We work with publishers to provide their book products to all markets. Publisher Alley allows authors to see what titles libraries are buying on a daily basis. Publisher Alley is the BEST tool available for analyzing sales on your titles and competitive titles by subject area, sales level, publication date, price point, reviews, author affiliations, interdisciplinary identifiers and sales channel. Full bibliographic data, including cover images and table of contents is available for all titles.

Book sales data serves several needs:

- Easily produce market research for book proposals, based on sales of comparable titles. Approach the right publishers for each project.
- Evaluate the potential of projects for self-publication: learn what sells in which markets, and at what price points.
- Locate expert authors as sources for newspaper or magazine stories, or identify trends related to world events.

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RWA 2025 Conference



Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada July 16-19, 2025

Mark your calendars for July 16–19, 2025, and join us at the stunning Niagara Falls for an unforgettable experience! Whether you're new to romance writing, an established author, or anywhere in between, there's something for everyone—dynamic workshops, exciting community activities, and much more to elevate your career and connect with fellow writers.

Don't wait—early bird pricing is available until February 14th!

Register now and join us for an unforgettable experience! [Click here to learn more and register today.](#)

Call For Workshop Proposals!

We're already looking ahead to the RWA2025 Conference, and we want YOU to be a part of it! This is your chance to share your expertise, inspire fellow authors, and help shape an unforgettable event that will empower writers at every stage of their journey.

Submit your workshop proposal today!

If you've got a topic you're passionate about—whether it's about writing, publishing, marketing, or anything else that helps authors succeed—we want to hear from you. Here's your chance to lead a session and connect with the vibrant romance writing community. [Click here to submit your proposal.](#)



Indie Author WEEKEND Romance Writers of America®

You can't miss Indie Author Weekend—a two-day virtual self-publishing conference on January 25–26, 2025 designed to ignite your indie author potential! Whether you're starting your journey to self-publish a romance novel or a seasoned author looking to level up, this event connects you with key industry experts who'll provide straight answers to propel your career forward.

Your golden ticket to self-publishing success awaits.

Bonus: Registrants get lifetime access to all recorded sessions.

[REGISTER TODAY!](#)

2024 Golden Heart Award Winners

THE GOLDEN HEART®

The Golden Heart Award for Excellence in Pre-published Romance Writing

Contemporary Romance -

The Plus One Pact by Suzy Langevin

Suzy Langevin loves love, even though she forgot how to say it in Latin when she was a contestant on Jeopardy! In March 2024, she was selected for the KissPitch Mentorship program for romance writers. Her career as a clinical social worker, along with her own experience living with autoimmune disease and ADHD, allow her characters to embrace the tough stuff without it becoming a cliché. An experienced trainer and consultant, Suzy has been a featured presenter at regional and national conferences on a variety of topics related to mental health, substance use, trauma and recovery.



Historical Romance -

A Fearless Will by Lea Hollis

Lea Hollis's abiding love for historical romance began in adolescence when her grandmother introduced her to Georgette Heyer, Mary Balogh, and others. (Battered Signet Regencies remain a prized find at book sales.) Lea has worn many professional hats to date, including secondary school science teacher, professional pastry cook, and field biologist searching for undescribed South American reptile species. She lives in the Upper Midwest, United States, with her husband, son, and two dogs. When not spending time with family or writing, she can be found hiking, knitting, baking sweet treats, and working towards her black belt in taekwondo.



Love Across Genres -

Death in Miniature by Pamela Ruth Meyer

Pamela Ruth Meyer writes historical mysteries interwoven with love stories. As a high-school forensic science teacher, she discovered inventive ways to solve crimes, inspiring her to write adventurous tales about a crime-fighting duo like no other. Pamela is a member of Romance Writers of America, Mystery Writers of America (MWA), and Sisters in Crime. In 2024, her manuscript, DEATH IN MINIATURE, won the Daphne du Maurier Unpublished Romantic Suspense Award, the Rudy Award for unpublished romantic suspense, the MWA-NY Leon Burstein Award, and was Runner-Up for Book Pipeline's Unpublished Award (mystery/thriller). Pamela is represented by AKA Literary Management's Terrie Wolf.



2024 Diamond Heart Award Winners

THE DIAMOND HEART®

The Diamond Heart Award for Excellence in Published Romance Writing

Contemporary Romance -

Coming Home to Magnolia Bay by Babette de Jongh

Babette de Jongh is a romance author, telepathic animal communicator, and author of *Hear Them Speak*, a Twelve-Week Course in Telepathic Animal Communication. Her romance novels have won many awards, including the Aspen Gold Readers' Choice Award, the New England Readers' Choice Award, and the Book Buyers Best Award. In her series *Welcome to Magnolia Bay*, an animal communicator from a small helps matchmaking animals bring their human soulmates together. Learn more at www.BabettedeJongh.com.



Historical Romance -

Painting the Duke by Georgina North

Georgina lives in Southern California with her husband and their two cats. When she's not curled up with her laptop and a cup of coffee, you can find her daydreaming in her favorite chair, eating In-n-Out, or adding more books to her TBR pile.



Romantic Suspense -

Not My Shadow by Elaine Levine

Elaine Levine is an agoraphobe who lives in her son's basement and runs doggie daycare for his pack of hounds. Her mind, however, is irrepressible, and she fills the endless moments of endless days crafting romance fiction from dystopian headlines she reads online. Be warned—her stories are addictive and dangerously appealing to those with similarly twisted minds and hopeful hearts.



Speculative -

The Viking Who Fell Through Time by Maureen Castell

Best First Book -

The Viking Who Fell Through Time by Maureen Castell

I live in Manitoba, Canada and write under the pen name Maureen Castell (maureencastell.com). I came to Canada from England as a child, married, had a family, and am now retired from a satisfying career as a technical writer. I am a voracious reader, mainly of romance with a fantasy or science fiction twist, so it was only natural that I gravitated to that genre when I began writing fiction. I must have a happy ending, and a little bit of *different*. My writing journey began in high school and has been a constant friend ever since.



Five Things Authors Get Wrong About Horses, and How You Can Get Them Right

BY LIZZIE JENKS

London, 1817. The full moon still shone bright over the city as he entered the stable. The stable lads were all asleep, so he pulled his stallion out of its stall, buckled on its harness, and then he hitched up the coach and set out into the darkness.

Wait. What?

This would never have happened, and most of your readers know it. They might not know why, but they feel it in their bones, and that yanks them out of the story with a painful thunk.

Knowledge of horses in England and the US is not as ubiquitous as it used to be (though it was never as ubiquitous as most moderns think), and it is easy to go wrong, even if you are familiar with modern horses.

Here are five things authors get wrong, and how *you* can get them right.

1) Who had horses - what goes wrong:

Authors tend to assume that roughly anyone who would have a car in modern America would have had a horse. Not so. Horses have always been a more expensive proposition than a car because of their upkeep.

They need more space than a car, require massive

amounts of fuel even when sitting idle, and they produce a prodigious amount of...exhaust that requires equally prodigious physical labor daily to remove.

Who had horses - how to get it right:

If your historical characters would, if modern, drive an inexpensive car, even if new and tricked out, they would probably not have been able to afford the upkeep on a horse. They would more likely have used public transportation in the form of a hackney cab, horse-drawn streetcar, or stagecoach, or if they were traveling beyond the regular routes, they might have rented a livery horse.

Tenant farmers were more likely to have a yoke of oxen or a mule than a horse. Oxen and mules are easier and cheaper to keep and less prone to injury and illness. Only fairly well-to-do yeoman farmers would have had horses.

2) Knowledge of horses - what goes wrong:

Assuming historical characters know everything or nothing about horses. Do you change the oil in your car? Does your neighbor? How about rotating your own tires? Can you drive it with reasonable competence? Knowledge of horses ran along a spectrum then just as knowledge of cars runs along a spectrum today.

Knowledge of horses - how to get it right:

Your character is likely to know how much and what to feed their horse, how to saddle it, and how to ride it. Driving is a little trickier. Folks who are driving more than one horse were likely to have paid help that took care of the horse, so the owner might not know as much.

Your character would not likely know how to shoe their own horse, so if the horse were to throw a shoe far from a smithy, they would be in a pickle. If you need your character to have these skills despite being a gentleman, other characters should find that not only unusual, but scandalous.



3) Breeds - what goes wrong:

Authors use breed terms for horses in historical settings like we do today. Before 1900, most horses would be referred to by their use. A carriage horse, a saddle horse, a plow horse, and so on.

The selective breeding that created breeds as we think of them today was only in its infancy during the 1800s, and registries with restricted gene pools are really a thing of the 1900s except in a few cases.

Breeds - how to get it right:

If you are writing a story set in the 1800s or earlier, refer to horses by their use, or, if your character is a true aficionado with vast amounts of money and skill, they might have a Spanish horse or a Barbary horse, but that will take a lot of research on your part.

The elite horse of the 1800s would have been the racehorse, which was only beginning to be called a thoroughbred in the mid-1800s. Important note: the idea that thoroughbred racehorses are “thorough-bred Arabian” was a fiction popularized in the Victorian era. They are not purebred Arabian.

4) How to travel by horse - what goes wrong:

Horses are not cars. That sounds obvious, but it has subtle implications. A public stage coach would have regular stage stops (usually at taverns) where they changed teams of horses, but you would have had to be super-wealthy to be staging your own privately owned teams around the countryside.

Horses can only travel so far before they have to not just eat and drink, but rest. And this applies to both riding horses and driving horses. Your characters will not travel 100 miles in twenty four hours, unless on a main stage line with good roads and weather, with multiple changes of horses and drivers, and even that would be grueling for the passengers.

And your character cannot simply call for the carriage to be brought up and have it arrive in a couple of minutes. It takes time and multiple people to groom and harness a team of four and get them hitched.

How to travel by horse - how to get it right:

Your character is not likely to travel over 40 miles in a day without changing horses, and even that would take decent roads and a fast, fit horse or team that took regular breaks to rest, graze, and drink, and they will not do it for multiple days in a row.

And if your character is driving, they will not be going alone. Any fancy driving horses, and even most working horses, would have at least one groom on board the vehicle to help in case of trouble. Horses are prey animals, not hunters. That means they evolved to panic fairly easily and for panic to spread like lighting among them. At approximately 1000 pounds each, that can cause a lot of trouble fast.

If your character is going to be driving horses, especially if they are driving a four-in-hand, be sure to watch lots of YouTube videos of things going wrong when driving a four-in-hand before you write.

5) Stallions - what goes wrong:

Pretty much everything. Authors often portray stallions as man-eating monsters, which they rarely are. But they are disruptive. Not only can they be hard to handle around other horses, but other horses can be harder to handle around them.

So in a densely populated urban area that relied on horses for transportation, stallions were a significant problem. Remember, not everyone was an expert horseman then any more than everyone is a car expert today. Then imagine if your station wagon started acting up any time a minivan went by? And what if your station wagon was in heat?

We romance writers are especially prone to having our dashing hero ride a stallion to show how virile and expert he is. In reality, it makes him more the equivalent of a guy who hangs truck balls off the hitch of jacked up monster truck and expects other drivers to just get out of his way.

If that is what your hero would drive were he modern, then go for it. But riding or driving a stallion in a horse-dense environment where everyone else has only average horsemanship abilities makes him inconsiderate, not virile. Yes, modern people can and do drive and ride stallions and can have a delightful time doing it. But they do it in less horse-dense settings, and in environments where everyone has a significantly higher level horsemanship skills than the average person of any era.

Stallions - how to get it right:

Put your hero on a big, fancy gelding. Geldings tend to be bigger than stallions or mares, in part



because they don't get the hormonal signal to stop growing in the same way a horse with all its sex organs intact does. So geldings can be quite physically impressive.

And they are a lot less inconvenient for your hero to deal with on a daily basis, especially if you don't want your hero to consider his stable lads expendable when they get hurt. Modern readers would find him much less admirable if he treated his lads like that.

Mares were generally seen as ladies' mounts, especially in the 1800s, which is ironic, because a mare in heat can be quite a handful. And wealthy ladies who drove would most likely have driven ponies, and only for recreation, not for practical transportation.

Mares and ponies for ladies were less threatening to gentlemen's egos, if not to the ladies' safety.

A brief article can obviously only skim the surface of getting horses right.

Have more specific horse-related research questions? Feel free to contact Lizzie at Lizzie@lizziejenks.com for ideas about where to look.



RWA Writer Service List

It no longer matters if an author works with a publisher or not, they still have to have their book edited, promoted on social media, advertised, and so much more. Since every writer wants help, RWA's Writer Services List offers members a single location to find the support team they need for a great book with a long shelf life.

RWA's website annually garners more than 350,000 sessions and nearly one million page views, of which 79 percent are new users. As an established trade association with a growing membership, RWA's Writer Services List is the perfect place for focused advertising to those who need your services the most: authors.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

Thinking Outside the Bookstore

BY MINDY HARDWICK

What is your definition of writing success? When I first began writing, I attended a conference workshop on defining success. In my mind, I saw myself at a large bookstore, the seats packed as I read from my latest book. Afterward, there would be a line of people waiting for my signature. I'd worked in bookstores throughout college and into my early twenties and this was what a successful author looked like to me.

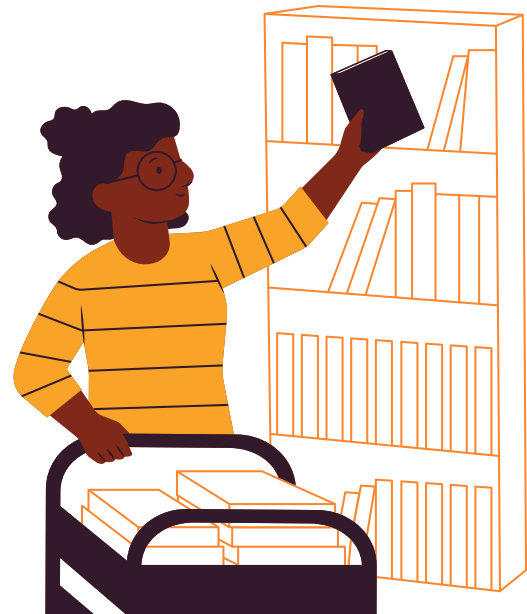
But in-between that image and when my first book published, Amazon arrived on the scene. The bookstores I loved closed and when I attended an author event as a reader at a big box bookstore, the seats weren't filled and there were no book signing lines winding around the store. I had to adjust what I thought writing success looked like for me.

My first book signing for my small town sweet contemporary series took place in a friend's newly opened shop that carried home decorations. Located in a small-town historic area forty miles outside of Seattle the setting fit perfectly with my small-town romance. My friend placed my small table of books in the midst of fall decorations and pumpkin spice candles. The cover of my book matched the décor and although there was no reading, I enjoyed spending a couple hours talking to customers, selling and signing a few books.

That first book signing taught me to think outside the bookstore for book signings.

Holiday Markets and Bazaars: There are all kinds

of holiday markets and bazaars from small events held at churches and community centers to large markets sponsored by local summer farmer's markets to bazaars held in high school gymnasiums with the table fees supporting school events and activities. Holiday bazaars can be found on Facebook Groups if you search under holiday markets or holiday bazaars and include your state. Or spend a holiday season



attending a few and get contact information for how to be a vendor. Usually sign ups happen in late summer or early fall and there is a small table fee which will often support a local cause, non-profit, charity or school team. At the event, it pays to make friends with other vendors. Often, the vendors know which markets to sign up for and which ones to avoid. Other vendors are also readers and will often buy your books or participate in a small trade with one of their items! I have traded everything from bath bombs to ornaments to holiday decorations for copies of my books.

Your table doesn't have to be decked out with every piece of author promo you own. Your books with great covers and something eye catching is enough to draw people into you. Sometimes tables will be provided with a simple white tablecloth and other times you will need to bring your own and a chair. I invested in a good solid, foldable table and bought a two-yard piece of holiday fabric from my local fabric store. You'll also need to figure out what type of payment you want to take. I use a square which now allows me to tap on the back of my phone to take payments! I also have a Venmo account and use a QR code. Other options include Apple Pay and PayPal. Each comes with their own fees so do your research before you decide. Markets can range from one day for five or six hours to two days. During a holiday bazaar, I will usually run a special on my series. Buy the whole four book series and get one book free type sales. My small town sweet contemporary series, with two holiday books, does well at holiday markets. Sales are usually steady with many books bought as gifts. Once you participate in a holiday bazaar or market you are placed in the early bird group to sign up for the following year. The markets often start in November and run every weekend until Christmas. When you sign up, pace yourself. It's fun to have a couple markets in the holiday season and really makes it a joyful holiday season.

Wine Shops: Wine Shops or tasting rooms can make great book signings, especially if the book has a scene with a wine shop or wine expert! In the town where I live, we have a great Wine Shop with a tasting room. The tasting room has comfortable couches, small tables and a little bar area. Friends of mine are owners of the shop and suggested I spend a couple hours on a Saturday after Thanksgiving talking to people about my holiday romance and sign and selling books. The

owner set me up in a small space and I casually chatted to people and sold books as they sipped their wine and did their tasting. I used my Square account and cash to take payments and gave a percentage to the owner of the Wine Shop.

Clothing Boutiques. Clothing boutique shop signings can be very successful especially if your story includes a boutique clothing shop or fashion! When scheduling your signing, think about including it with another event such an art walk night, a holiday open house, or other festive event. Also, be prepared to offer a consignment deal to the owner of the shop. I usually do a 60/40 split which is the same consignment percentage I use for my local independent bookshop. At clothing boutique shop signings, I have made connections with hospital gift shop buyers as well as readers who want me to attend their book clubs. Sometimes the owner will want to carry some of your books after the event so bring extra books.

Friend Groups. Tea Group. And last, don't forget about a book club, a crafting group or a tea group. I meet regularly with a group of women for tea, and they have been some of my best supporters, cheering me on every time I have a new book, buying multiple copies for friends and family, hosting me for readings and signings and asking when the next book will be released. One of my favorite ways to share my stories is by sitting in a circle of women and talking about how I build my small towns and characters! Book signings do not have to take place in bookstores, and I have readjusted my idea for writer success to be one in which I am connecting with readers, selling and signing books and bringing hope and joy to others through happily ever afters!

Research as the Backbone of Fiction

BY BELLE CALHOUN

Research has been the backbone of many fiction novels, including my own. As writers, we are blessed to be living in an age when information is literally at our finger tips. As a child who grew up across the street from a public library, I recall the rudimentary ways we had to conduct research for school papers and presentations. It revolved around card catalogues and the Dewey decimal system. For the life of me, I can't imagine currently conducting novel research in that manner. From what I remember, it was extremely time consuming and without the ROI of modern day research. As a lifelong lover of libraries I often think about how far they have come in my lifetime.

To date, I've written twenty books set in Alaska. It's a bit ironic since I've never stepped foot in that glorious state. How is that possible one might ask? Research research research. Whether it's the Alaskan climate or birds that are indigenous to the state, I immerse myself in all kinds of research. By doing so, I'm creating an atmosphere that feels authentic. In a perfect world we could travel to whatever destination we're creating on the page, but that's not always possible. Thankfully, we are living in an age where there are many research avenues that lead us to our destination.

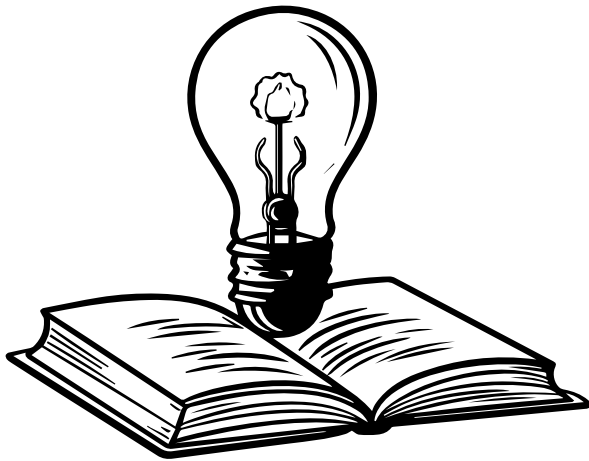
The accuracy of our research is essential to the process. There's no point in using the research you've compiled if the material or source(s) are

flawed. Anything we put out there as authors should be precise and above reproach. A few years ago I learned that lesson in a way that I'll never forget. I wrote a book set on a ranch, and although I grew up in New England and didn't know much about horses, I decided to wing it. My research was pretty basic. Unfortunately, I named a stallion (a male horse) a female's name. On page one! Readers sure let me know that I'd made a major gaffe. At the time I was incredibly embarrassed by the mistake, but it was a valuable lesson that I learned. Do your research!

Dr. Piper Huguley, an award winning historical author, says, "The two kinds of research sources, primary and secondary, both require asking questions about where they came from. For primary resources, consider what the circumstances were when the information was produced. For secondary sources consider that as well as who is producing the source. Asking these questions can save you from incorrect interpretations of the material you've discovered."

Primary sources can be diaries, photographs, autobiographies, interviews and letters—all firsthand sources of an event or a certain time period. Secondary sources offer an interpretation of primary sources—such as textbooks, encyclopedias, biographies. All of these can be utilized as research tools.

A few years ago I wrote a scene involving the Northern Lights in Alaska. The hero and the heroine shared their first kiss with an Aurora Borealis as the perfect backdrop. It was a very romantic scene and I was quite pleased with it. A copy editor determined that my description of the Northern Lights wasn't spot on, at which point I mentioned that while researching this phenomenon I had consulted with an Alaskan scientist. Knowing I'd done the research properly gave me a foundation and, in this situation, allowed me to confidently respond with the credentials of my source. He was a literal expert in Northern Lights. This experience highlighted the importance of consulting with experts, particularly in areas where we are not sufficiently knowledgeable.



Author Patricia Johns, who writes Amish themed novels for Harlequin, says,

“What is an author without her research? We can't only write what we know. If I only wrote what I knew, I'd write about middle aged women with dollhouse miniature hobbies. That's exactly one book. But I write about Amish communities, and while my own personal experiences might inform my writing, all those details about Amish life come from hours of research. Without the research, my books would either be unbelievable or dreadfully boring.”

Don't underestimate the power of connecting with human beings as one dives into research. Whether it's talking to friends who live in Alaska or reaching out to a college professor who specializes in African American studies, I always utilize my contacts for assistance. Patent attorneys. Law enforcement. Veterinarians. Scuba instructors. Make a list of acquaintances with special skills sets or ones that mirror a plot point in your manuscript. The possibilities are endless. Invite one of these experts to lunch or coffee (your treat of course), then pick their brains. Most of the time these individuals are happy to share their knowledge in order to help authors. After all, they're able to talk about an area of expertise while providing valuable information at the same time. As a thank you, I've mentioned them in my acknowledgements or sent them a special card in the mail. As a writer I feel it's important to acknowledge any and all help I've been given.

At the moment I am working on a top secret project that takes place in the roaring twenties. Libraries are amazing resources for author research. My first step was to order books from my local library after locating titles such as *Extraordinary People of the Harlem Renaissance* and *Harlem Stomp*. Most libraries allow you to browse their catalogues online and then place the materials on hold. This allows writers to access the catalogues and quickly find out if the material is available, which is a huge time saver. Librarians are also always ready and willing to help patrons find source materials. They are also very knowledgeable about interlibrary loans, e-books and streaming video. Because I live in Connecticut, roughly an hour away from New York City, I was able to find an amazing resource in a library called the Schomburg Center, a place that specializes in Black culture. The Schomburg,

which opened in 1925 during the height of the Harlem Renaissance, is rooted in the African America experience and the information contained within their walls is absolutely spectacular. Make sure to look for places in your community that can help you conduct your research. Museums. Galleries. Historical societies. Book stores.

Even if you have to get in your car and travel to another state, consider it as an educational field trip.

All in the name of research, I packed up my car and drove from Connecticut to Newport, Rhode Island. This trip paid off with visits to the Newport mansions, the church where Jackie and Jack Kennedy were married, as well as the places where *The Gilded Age* were filmed. The briny scent of the sea air and the rows of glittering mansions are quintessential Newport. After signing a three book contract with Hachette's Forever line set in Mistletoe, Maine, I knew that I had to revisit this beautiful state. Since I hadn't been back to Maine in decades, it soon became a destination for a family vacation. It was a win-win since I was able to immerse myself in the Maine ambiance and enjoy a fantastic trip with my loved ones. Maine lobster. Blueberry pancakes that melted on my tongue. Gorgeous beaches. All of the details ended up on the pages of my three book series.

Jo McNally, who has a series with Harlequin set in Cape Cod also conducted in person research for her novels. She says, "I think it's about the little things—not the tourist attractions, but the way the roads twist and turn. How the height of the trees gets lower the farther out on the Cape you go. It's like those hidden picture things—you have to look past the obvious to see the interesting



tidbits that make a setting feel authentic. And honestly, subscribing to (or following) a local website helps a lot. It gives me a sense of what the locals care about, and can also provide plot bunnies." McNally subscribes to the Cape Cod Times, which is a brilliant way to conduct ongoing research on a location. Go into the field when possible and enjoy yourself, while conducting the necessary research to enhance your novel.

It's important to note that research can be done from the anywhere you are around the globe, as long as you have a solid Wi-Fi connection. With YouTube, streaming videos and the Internet, it's just a few keystrokes away. Researching from the comfort of your own home has never been easier.

Author Patricia Johns says, "When I first started out writing fiction, my research was done in a library with physical books. I would scratch down notes, and photocopy pages. Now, with our modern online conveniences, I can watch videos from the places I'm describing, or even zoom in on satellite images of an area from Google Earth. I follow Amish related groups on social media, and get updated with newsletters from Amish research groups...all without ever stepping foot outside my home. Research has come a long way!"

Doing proper research while writing your next novel pays off in a variety of ways. It allows us authors to take a break from the mechanics of writing while still working on our novels. Most importantly, it adds a richness to the work that will resonate with readers



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The Romance Writers Report Committee seeks articles for all levels and tracks of writing. We welcome submissions from beginner to expert authors, and aim to include a diverse array of subject matter expertise, including craft, industry, marketing, business, and more. While articles of all themes are welcome, here are some areas that will be given specific focus in upcoming issues:

- *March 2025 - The 5 Senses (submit by January 31, 2025)*
- *April 2025 - Sagging Middles (submit by February 28, 2025)*
- *May 2025 - Writing difficult scenes using sensitivity (submit by March 31, 2025)*
- *June 2025 - Weddings-Getting to the Altar (submit by April 30, 2025)*
- *July 2025 - Writing authority figures (submit by May 31, 2025)*

How to Speak so Strangers Will Buy: Hand-Selling Your Book at Live Events

BY ADRIENNE DEWOLFE

Selling sucks. We all know it; we all hate to do it.

If you're an Introvert, nothing is scarier than the idea of facing your Reading Public at a live event. Extroverts feel the same way. We're just good at pretending.

As a Scaredy Cat, who dreaded rejection so much that it made me ill, I invented a motivational mantra. Perhaps it will help you:

"Fear of selling is the insidious Evil that has kept millions of writers in the poorhouse for hundreds of years."

(Feeling stronger now?)

Yes, fear of selling is the ultimate career sabotage. But here's the good news: hand-selling your book to a stranger is 90% enthusiasm, and 10% courage.

To inspire you, I'm sharing some (humorous) life-changing success tips.

Feel the Fear, and Hand-Sell Anyway

I had two options in life. Either I could work three jobs, whining about being a starving author, or I could learn how to hand-sell at live

events. After several excruciating years, I bit the bullet.

How did I rein in my terror and practice hand-selling to strangers?

I drove to a distant bookstore, stuffed my hair under a baseball cap, and donned dark glasses. I didn't want anyone to recognize me from my author photo. (Brace yourself. The shenanigans get worse.)

Lurking in the Romance section, I waited until some poor, unsuspecting shopper wandered into the aisle. Then I'd grab my book off the shelf and exclaim:



“OMG! This author is *amazing!* You can hardly find her books *anywhere!* They’re selling like *hotcakes!*” (Then I shoved my book into the shopper’s hands.)

Believe it or not, I actually sold a few paperbacks that way. Unfortunately, I was forced to ditch my disguise for live book-signings. That’s when my terror reached Def Con 5, and I sternly had to remind myself that hyperventilation didn’t pay the bills.

Out of desperation, I invented a new spiel:

“Hi! My name is Adrienne. I’m so excited! My book just got published. Isn’t this cover gorgeous?” (Once again, I shoved my book into the shopper’s hand.)

Strangely enough, my Cover Spiel led to several mind-blowing revelations:

- If you act like an adorable puppy, people are less likely to reshelve your book. (Guilt is a powerful ally!)
- With the right attitude (and plenty of Red Bull) hand-selling can be fun!

Hand-Selling Tips for Introverts

You know who you are. You probably pack your laptop to “do a little writing” at your book-signing. If you consider leaving your chair, you’re answering the Call of Nature.

How do I say this kindly?

If you think shoppers will wander over to your author table, because some nice retailer announced, over the loud speaker, that you’re signing your new book...

Then I have some lovely property in Death Valley for you.

True Story #1: Rescuing Jenny

A major bookstore chain was hosting a signing for the debut novel of a friend. I’ll call her “Jenny.” The manager set up Jenny’s table in front of the main entrance, where she could be seen and sell lots of books.

Unfortunately, this strategy backfired. Jenny’s anxiety was contagious. When shoppers saw her sitting so desperately alone, beside a mountain of books, they got the heebie-jeebies and fled to the magazine rack.

I decided that drastic action was required.

Playing the role of adoring fan, I walked over to Jenny’s table and gushed in my loudest voice:

“OMG! Are you Jenny Winslow? The famous Romance author? OMG! Are you signing your new book here, *today?!?*”

For the next half hour, Jenny’s table was swarming with shoppers.

If you would rather gnaw off an arm than leave your chair to hand-sell your book, you need helpers. Include at least one shameless extrovert in your entourage. This “hawker” should have no problem, yucking it up with strangers, and directing them to your table.

Now for the inevitable warnings:

- Your hawker should clearly understand that her job is to help you sell books, not to steal your limelight.

- *Never* sit behind your table with a helper. Shoppers won't have the courage to walk up to a "famous author" if they see her talking to "a favored confidante."
- Shoppers (especially your fellow introverts) will be reluctant to disturb you, if they think you're busy typing your novel, hand-writing your memoir, or eating your lunch.

When Someone (Finally) Comes to Your Table

Congratulations! You've attracted a shopper! Now you have to talk to that person. Your hawker becomes moot at this point. The sale is up to you.

As a seasoned hand-seller, I can tell you with absolute certainty, that no shopper will care about your book, until you prove that you care about the shopper.

SMILE. Look the shopper in the eyes. Shake hands. Be warm and welcoming. Show interest, by asking non-threatening questions. (Where are you from? Do you come to this store often? What do you like to read?) Make the shopper feel important.



By the way: *never* profile a shopper. (But that should go without saying, right?)

True Story #2: The Growly Man

A gruff, bear-of-a-man came to my book-signing table. He was dressed in spiked leather and chains. He looked like the stereotypical Harley rider. When he announced that he wanted to buy a Romance, I almost fainted.

Pasting on a smile, I grabbed my pen and said, "I'd be happy to autograph the book for your girlfriend. What's her name?"

Mr. Harley was highly insulted. As it turns out, he was the one who read Romance.

So how did I recover from this *faux pas*?

I put my hand over my heart, took a deep breath, and proclaimed with great enthusiasm:

"OMG! You are my *Hero!* I have never met a man who reads Romance! Thank you so much for taking an interest in my love stories. Who's your favorite author?"

Ten minutes later, Mr. Harley walked away smiling, carrying all of my signed titles.

So what's the takeaway?

- In a tense public situation, be gracious, not defensive. Your reaction will leave an impression on every shopper, who's secretly listening.
- No one will remember your words; they'll remember your attitude. Be sincere, but don't wallow in embarrassment.

- Dispel the tension as quickly as you can by focusing on your genuine pleasure to meet a Romance fan. Seek common ground so you can continue the conversation.

Hand-Selling Tips for Extroverts

Frankly, I have yet to sign enough books at a bookstore to recoup my travel and publicity expenses. My current strategy is to seek readers in less conventional venues: hair salons, craft bazaars, trunk shows, wine tastings, charitable events, etc.

These venues can be lucrative when you're not afraid to hand-sell. A published book will give you a certain celebrity-status. Everyone wants to meet the author!

True Story #3: Living the Dream

I scheduled a book-signing at Walmart, three days before Christmas. The store was mobbed by shoppers. Checkout lines stretched for miles. However, the manager set up my autograph table in the deserted book section. (Are you *kidding* me?)

In my most pleasant — but firm — voice, I told the manager to re-position my table near the checkout lines. After all, she wanted me to make sales for her store, didn't she?

Picture the scene. A captive audience stood a stone's throw away, fiercely guarding their positions in line. To think that one of them might make the pilgrimage to my author table was laughable.

I selected two books with the most gorgeous cover art and plunged into the crowd. The

shoppers had nothing better to do, so they humored me.

Within 90 minutes, I had sold 62 books. I could have sold more, but Walmart ran out of my titles.

Now you're probably wondering, "What did Adrienne say to make those shoppers open their wallets?!"

Master the Art of Chitchat

At Walmart, I broke the ice by commiserating about the long checkout lines. I politely inquired about the shoppers' Christmas plans. After a judicious period of chitchat, I asked the all-important question: "Does anyone on your Christmas List like to read Romance?"

"No" is Your Invitation to Pivot

Many Walmart shoppers preferred Mystery. I refused to be daunted. Lots of Mystery and Fantasy fans read Romance. More to the point, in several of my Historical Westerns, the hero and heroine solve murders. So at Walmart, I pivoted to a different selling strategy. I told the Mystery-readers that they might enjoy Romantic Suspense, if they didn't mind a little smooching. (That comment usually got a laugh and a sale.)

Go for the Gift

At Walmart, I was selling Texas stories to Texas shoppers. But a local setting is rarely sufficient to win a sale. If your story doesn't spark a personal interest in someone, pivot to a Gifting Strategy. For example, I often asked, "Do you know anyone who likes to read about cowboys?" or "Who do you know, who reads (or collects) books by local authors?"

An Indie Author's Guide for Getting More Book Events: Creative Book Events for Authors!

BY PENNY SANSEVIERI

Bookstore events, signings and author talks are always a great way to build support in your local community, build your fan base, and sell books. But as options for book events have narrowed, with dwindling bookstores and event space, authors often feel like they're out of options when it comes to doing book events. But that only means you need to dig in and get more creative.

When I was first in business (23 years ago!), we worked with a lot of indie authors who were persona non grata – in the early days of indie publishing bookstore managers were really discouraged from hosting indie authors, which forced me to find more unique places to host events.

I've had authors in restaurants (on their slower nights), in coffee shops (this includes Starbucks), Hallmark shops, even a Blockbuster video (I realize I just dated myself). The key to doing creative events is: alignment. So aligning your book with a place that "fits" the market. The Blockbuster Video event was an author who had a book on movie wine pairings, so which wine to drink with, let's say a night of *The Godfather* or whatever. It was a cool concept and we put her in a Blockbuster video on a Friday afternoon/evening and if you remember what video rental was like (back in the day) you know how busy those places got, she sold out of books in no time.

Planning Your Book Event in a Non-Bookstore Venue

Now I'm not saying to skip bookstores altogether, but what I am suggesting is to look outside of a normal bookstore venue to expand your options. But also consider what I mentioned above: alignment.

For example, if you have a book that's about gardening, why not consider an event in a garden store or a nursery? If your book is on home improvement, why not ask your local hardware store if they're open to letting you do a talk?

The same is true if you have a book for children. Yes you can go to local schools and that's great – but where else do kids hang on in your town? Maybe there's a play center, or a children's toy store that might be interested in hosting you.

The idea behind these unique events is not just because it opens doors, in terms of expanding your reach, but it's also a very low-competition market. If you do a book even in a bookstore, you're competing with every other book signings on their calendar, but if you do a book event in, let's say, your local Home Depot or Starbucks, it's a unique opportunity to capture a potentially much bigger audience because it's not

something they do every day. When I had an author do a signing in a Hallmark store it was such a popular event. The book aligned well with the store, it was a great gift idea – and what are people doing when they're in a Hallmark store or any card shop? They're likely looking for a gift and an autographed book makes a great gift!

The same is true for any novelty store, gift shop or even a souvenir shop. I know an author who wrote a book on the history of the mob in Vegas who did a signing at a local Vegas souvenir shop!

Pitching the Store and Getting a Yes!

When you pitch a non-bookstore outlet for your event, they may tell you they've never done this before and that's fine. I've heard this dozens of times for every unique author event I've planned. You'll need to walk them through the logistics of how this will work including book sales, etc. which I'll cover in a moment. The idea is to get a yes. Mention to the store that you'll do some local media outreach – we do this for all the author events we plan on the author's behalf. Let them know you'll be doing your own local promotion to help bring people into their store and any savvy business owner knows that the more foot traffic they get, the more they'll sell so that's always music to their ears.

Logistics, Book Sales, and More

Once you pique the stores interest, now you'll need to close the deal. Most stores may not be willing to stock your book, or add it to their inventory, but they may be open to doing something on consignment, which is easy enough to do. You bring the books, and they get a percentage. If you do it this way, I recommend leaving a few signed books behind that they can

sell. If you do a good job of getting the word out about your event, it's likely that you'll get stragglers drop by the location after you're done. Having books there that are signed is a nice way to let them get your book, even if they missed the actual event.

The next piece of this is the event promotion, and I don't mean pitching to local media (though that's important, too), what I mean is creating some bag stuffers and maybe a sign to display in the store. The bag stuffers are a fun way that the store can help spread the word about your upcoming event!



Planning for your Event

I mentioned local media before but let's drill down on that for a bit. I love doing local media for events, and events in unique places are even more fun so be sure to target your local radio, TV and print and let them know about your upcoming event. They may mention it on their broadcast, but be prepared if they want to interview you, too!

Getting creative with book events is a fabulous way to promote your book locally, and in very creative ways. It's also a really good relationship builder and if your event goes well, there's a good chance they might ask you back!

Your Book Signing Checklist

BY BARBARA M. BRITTON

Recently, a debut author emailed me asking what I brought to book signings. After I finished my response, I looked at the many paragraphs in my email and considered what her reaction would be. One of dread and panic.

Your book signing checklist will differ between small or large events, and how many books you are bringing to sell. You won't break your back bringing one book but try lugging ten books to an event.

There are numerous items that you can bring to an organized book event, but all you need to be successful is a smiling, engaging author, books to sell, a cash box, and a pen.

Let's look at what to pack for a book signing.

Books: Current releases are a must. Older titles may make the trip, but only if I have room on my table. How many books should you bring? There is no formula for how many books you will sell. A lot depends on the number of attendees, your location at the event, and what readers are looking for. Most likely, you will pack more books than you will sell. You can always refer readers to online booksellers if you run out of books.

Displays: With a debut novel, you may only need a book stand, or you can prop your book against a stack of books.

If you have several titles, I recommend a vertical book display, or have a handy friend make a tall

display out of wood. Vertical displays hold several titles, take up less room on your table, and they can show an entire series of stories.

Check with event planners to see if you can have a standing banner and in what dimensions. Upright displays can block other authors at an event.

Table runners, fairy lights, and other decorations are fun, but are not must-have items.

If you are attending a hometown event as a debut author or you are throwing a party for some other writing milestone, you may want to have help at your table. Friends like to celebrate your milestones. Extra hands can take money, greet guests, or oversee any food tables.



It's my experience that friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors will show up for a debut event. Plan to have several books to sell and a way to keep the line moving with an extra set of hands.

Swag: Most authors bring swag to a book event. I bring bookmarks, pens, and I have candy on my table. Authors may organize a basket giveaway to gather names for their newsletter.

Money: I accept cash, checks, and credit cards for my books. I have a cash box at the ready with small bills. I use a Zettle for credit cards because it is associated with PayPal, but other authors use various products. At my last event, all of my sales were cash sales, except for one check and one card sale. The method of payment may vary depending on where your signing is located.

Price your books for easy selling. \$15 is easier to manage than \$15.99 or \$14.67. Also check to see if the state you are selling in requires you to pay state sales tax. Make sure to keep track of how

many titles you sell and the cost of your books. Did you make a profit? You will need to know the profit you made for recordkeeping.

Dress: Wear comfortable shoes. I usually stand most of the time at a book signing. I have seen authors dress in costume, or in the era of their novel. I usually wear a dress, capris and a blouse, or whatever fits with the theme of the signing.

Miscellaneous: I use a rolling suitcase to house all of my book items. I bought the case at Hobby Lobby, and they usually have them on sale. Packed away in my carrier is hand sanitizer, scissors, tape, ribbon, rubber bands, "signed by author" stickers, signage for the price of my books, a cover reveal for upcoming releases, an extra tablecloth, nameplates from other signings, and a clipboard for newsletter signups.

Now, go have some fun and sell lots of books.



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Presenter: October K. Santerelli

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Fee: Member \$10 | Non-member \$15

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Instructor: Beth Daniels

Date of Event: Monday, February 5, 2025 – Friday, February 28, 2025

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Instructor: Tere Michaels

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Instructor: Jacquelin Cangro

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Confessions of a Contest Judge

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Date: Monday, March 3, 2025 - Friday, March 28,
2025

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###

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Welcome to RWA!

Debut Authors

**RWA congratulates the following authors on
the publication of their first romance
novel/novella**

###

*To submit your information for publication in the Debut
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Association Purpose and Ethics

RWA BYLAWS, ARTICLE 2, PURPOSES AND LIMITATIONS

The corporation is hereby organized for the following purposes:

- To advance the professional and common business interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy and by increasing public awareness of the romance genre; and
- To carry on such other activities as are permissible for Texas nonprofit corporations exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c) (6) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as the same may be amended or supplemented ("IRC").

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Bylaws, RWA shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under IRC Section 501(c) (6) or by a nonprofit corporation formed under the Texas Business Organizations Code, as the same may be amended or supplemented (the "Act").

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The RWA Member Code of Ethics ("Code of Ethics") serves as a code of professional conduct for RWA members. Its purpose is to encourage RWA members to exhibit integrity, honesty, and other sound industry practices, thereby elevating the professionalism of the RWA's membership.

The principles of this Code of Ethics are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision-making. The RWA Code of Ethics is a framework and is not intended to dictate behavior in particular situations.

Any member found to be in violation of the RWA Code of Ethics may be subject to disciplinary action pursuant to the Code of Ethics.

- RWA members support the preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights.
- RWA members strive for excellence and integrity in the profession of romance writing.
- RWA members strive to treat fellow members, RWA staff, and others with respect through adherence to the RWA Antidiscrimination Policy and the RWA Antiharassment Policy.

View the full Code of Ethics at <https://www.rwa.org/code-of-ethics>

RWA'S OPERATING VALUES

External Values

- Romance writers have the right to reasonable remuneration and preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights.
- Literacy is individually and culturally vital.
- Storytelling is fundamental to human experience: romance fiction explores issues of universal and eternal human interest.
- United, romance writers are a powerful community.

Internal Values

- RWA belongs to its members.
- RWA fosters an environment of creative and professional growth.
- RWA thrives through the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, and diverse career experiences. [n](#)

2024-2025 Board of Directors

RWA was founded in 1980
in Houston, Texas.

FOUNDER:

Vivian Stephens

CO-FOUNDERS:

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Rita Gallagher, Parris Afton
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Peggy Cleaves

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