

The Oak Leaf

August 2011 issue

Charter Oak Chapter # 194 Romance Writers of America

From the Editors Desk:



With the negative news in the publishing industry of lines folding and bookstores closing, there is some good news, especially in electronic book publishing.

According to Publishers Weekly, Bantam's Love swept imprint, one of the most popular romance imprints in the 1980's and 1990's are reviving Love swept, as an E-only Imprint. Scott Shannon, senior v-p, publisher, Digital Content, Random House Publishing Group, says "Ballantine Bantam Dell has a treasure trove of romance classics they want to share with a new generation of readers. Major publishers, who have been slow in accepting e-Books are finally jumping on the bandwagon. A "Research

Firm," e-marketer predicts that by the end of this year there will be around 21 million e-Readers in use and another 24 million computer tablets available. This is a dramatic increase over 2010 opening up countless opportunities.

If we've been lax during the summer, it's time to grab on to these opportunities by getting back on track. A good way to begin is with our September retreat at Genesis. Be sure to check the **RETREAT NEWS** in this issue.

A big thank you to all who so willingly contributed to the CORW newsletter. We are still in need of someone to edit/proof read before each issue (4 quarterly) goes out. You can contact me at irisstjames@gmail.com Thank you.

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President's Corner



Here we are in the days of beach umbrellas, blotchy tans, and vibrant colors in our gardens, and those manuscripts that want to take a summer vacation. Bringing a story to fruition is like raising a child. It's not enough to give birth to them; we have to nurture, correct, encourage, and

then release them into the world with pride, watching them take wing, then stand on their own.

We wouldn't allow our offspring to idle through the summer months, so it's time to dust off the pages of those stories, look at them closely, and make them be something satisfying and reflective of the way we "brought them up". Of course, with any luck, they do not take as long as our children

do to mature. What takes eighteen years for a child, takes mere months (all right, sometimes a few years) for a story. Our novels have to go from infancy to adulthood in a fraction of the time it takes to produce a functioning person, but the satisfaction can be the same. We want both to meet the approval of the people who count and make us proud.

If you are reading this by the pool or after a trip to the mall to take advantage of the summer sales, it's now time to dry off or put those packages in the closet and pick up that tale where you left off. We're fortunate to

have the Book in Six Weeks and the Edit in Six Weeks programs to provide support and to cheer us on. We can rely on them to lift our spirits and incite enthusiasm as we raise our "children". Of course, after these incentives are over, we can also run on our own energy, so let's get to work and watch our babies grow. I wish the best of luck to everyone as word counts are increased, paragraphs are added, and chapters are created during this sunny season.

Melva Michaelian – President



Charter Oak Romance Writers Retreat at Genesis House September 30 – October 2, 2011



The deadline is fast approaching (August 6th) to register for our writer's retreat at *Genesis House* in Westfield. The weather is hot now but by September 30th we should be in for some cooler times and lots of writing encouragement. Judging from last year's retreat at Wisdom House many people came away with exhilaration to create and a better sense of our fellow members. This year promises to develop further the camaraderie

and friendships. The program will encompass the infamous fireside critique, yes, in our own room with a working fireplace. In addition, we will have presentations by *Karen Rappleyea and Heidi Ulrich* on *Brainstorming for Characterization and Plot* and *Sandra Martin* will present on *Voice, Character and Dialogue*. We hope to have a *Most Often Asked Questions* session and maybe one other member speaker TBA. There will be time for writing between, and if you choose not attend the planned activities, that is fine, too. There are plenty of nooks and crannies at Genesis including a silent meditation room in the loft of the carriage house. It overlooks the gardens.

The weekend commences at dinnertime on Friday, September 30 and ends on Sunday, October 2 at lunch time. A more specific schedule will be forthcoming after registration closes and I receive the contract from Genesis. Remember there are several options for participation. They are outlined on the registration form attached below.

I hope to see many members in Westfield and if this communication is delayed for some unforeseen reason beyond the scheduled deadline of August 6th, I will keep registration open for a few extra days. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call or email me at [413-596-4057](tel:413-596-4057) or kristinecrimmins@gmail.com. Kris Crimmins

TO ALL MEMBERS participating in the Fall Retreat at Genesis House . . .

One full payment is due Saturday, June 4 through Saturday, August 6, 2011. Remember first come first served. If you signed up for a single room be sure you get your payment to me quickly. I will accommodate your requests as best I can as the payments are received. If you did not sign up, you can still join us.

Please fill out the form below and include it with your check (made out to CORW) ... sorry *no* pay pal. Mail both the registration form and your check to me:

Kristine Crimmins
20 Brookmont Drive
Wilbraham, MA 01095

Accommodations

- A. Commuter (Friday and Saturday + 3 meals) ... \$80
- B. Commuter (Saturday + 2 meals) \$56
- C. Commuter (Friday + 1 meal) \$45
- D. Double (two nights + 5 meals) \$202
- E. Single (two nights + 5 meals) \$229

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Name _____

Address _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Accommodation/Payment type (A, B, C, D or E) _____

Room mate's name _____

Do you have dietary needs? _____ If so, what are they? _____

Do you have stair concerns? _____

I agree I will be responsible for any loss I may have while participating in this event.

Signed _____ Date _____

Please Leave Blank		
Payment _____	Date Received _____	Type _____

For almost a year, I've looked out the window at those stones. In the early morning I take my coffee and walk the yard, casually touching this rock or that one.

Last week I picked up a rock from the pile and placed it on top of the wall. Not a huge rock, a double handful, would be my guess. So...Everyday this week I found a couple more rocks I could move and placed them on my wall.

Today I pointed out several large rocks that my husband help me move. He grumbled he has better things to do, but I know he'll help.

I also finished another manuscript this year and it's with my editor. The next is half done.

Do you think the wall is a symbol to me? Naw. It's just a wall, but I feel wonderful

Barbara Edwards

Riveting Romance With an Edge

www.barbaraedwards.net

<http://barbedblog.barbaraedwards.net/>

for Barb'Ed Comments

http://twitter.com/barb_ed

<http://www.Facebook.com/BarbaraEdwards.Author>

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CORW Tape Library By Anna Bowling



How to Revise Without Getting Sick of Your Manuscript

Instructor: Sylvie Kurtz

Format: mp3 on CD

#361, Dallas 2004 Nationals, Disk One

With many of us wielding red pencils for the first Edit in Six Weeks venture, Sylvie Kurtz's "*How to Revise Without Getting Sick of Your Manuscript*" can be an extremely useful tool. In this one-

hour workshop, Sylvie Kurtz breaks the revision process down into three steps: macro, medial, and micro. While it's easy to tell that the macro step will cover the larger view of the manuscript and the micro is all about the finest details, most of the process is likely to be spent in the medial portion.

The revision process is our inner critic's chance to do what she does best; handle the details of that rough gem the muse spit out. When done right, instead of frustrating us, revision can give us the satisfaction of turning something tarnished, and polish it to a sparkling shine.

Without looking at your ms, can you tell what the most and least interesting passages are? Do you know how to make that uninteresting passage straighten up and fly right? Do you know what the three most important sentences are in your entire book? What does white space have to do with the reading experience and how do you make sure your manuscript has enough of it? How much narrative summary is enough? What counts as action? How do you find your pet pitfalls and ways to avoid them? That one, at least, is easy. Borrow this workshop from our tape library and see how revision can work for you.

Anna C. Bowling

[Orphans in the Storm](#) historical romance from Awe-Struck E-books



INTERNET PITCHING by Susan Vaughan

The following article was published in the July 2011 issue of *Mainely Romance*, the newsletter of the Maine chapter of RWA.

Having difficulty enticing agents and editors to attend conferences to take pitches from writers, if so you might want to follow the lead of the Maine RWA chapter--pitching on the Internet - face to face with video conferencing.

Users will need computers with a web cam and a microphone, high-speed Internet, and software applications. We chose SKYPE. The pitch coordinator should be familiar with SKYPE as well as technologically savvy or else have a troubleshooter on hand.

- Schedule a test session with the agent/editor so any connection issues can be handled.
- An Internet connection via Ethernet cable rather than wireless usually results in smoother video.
- Have a back-up plan in case the Internet goes out or is too slow for SKYPE. Possibilities are a cell phone with lots of minutes or a second computer.
- The pitch coordinator or assistant should remain in the room during the pitch sessions in case of glitches.
- Allow three or four minutes between appointments for transition.

- Email the agent/editor ahead of time with the schedule including the writers' names.

With that advice guiding us, the rest of our planning entailed the same steps for booking in-person pitch sessions. We made a list of the eight-minute slots during the two-hour pitching session and allowed retreat attendees to sign up. At the retreat, our laptop for the sessions was set up in one of the suites, away from distractions and noise. The pitch coordinator connected with Jessica ahead of time to be certain the connection was fast enough. The hotel's Internet speed was a little slow, blurring her features slightly, but she had no problem seeing us. We allowed four minutes between pitches to allow for a settling-in time for writers. Our back-up plan was to arrange ahead of time that if the technology failed, Jessica would accept three chapters and a synopsis from all those who had signed up.

So what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of video conference pitch sessions?

Advantages:

- Editors/agents taking pitches can take pitches from their home or office. The arrangement saves them expenses and time.
 - Geographically remote and small organizations can involve more editors and agents, thus widening the possibilities for their functions.
 - Writing organizations aren't faced with reimbursing agents/editors for travel expenses or hotel rooms.
 - Writers doing the pitches may feel less nervous talking to the computer, or if they are nervous, their shaking hands won't be seen.
 - Writers can keep their notes beside the computer rather than holding them.
 - If a writer forgets her pitch or stumbles, there's no chance of running into the agent/editor later and feeling embarrassed.
- Eight minute sessions were a bit long, as were the four minutes between. Six minutes might be long enough, with only two minutes for transition.
- The pitch coordinator should be comfortable with SKYPE. This will make the writers feel comfortable and less nervous.
- Treat virtual pitches the same as in-person pitches and keep to the timetable.
- Train writers on pitching etiquette as well as how to pitch via video conference.
- Touch base with the agent/editor a day before to be sure the appointment will be kept.
- Do have a back-up plan if technology fails. Be sure to have the agent/editor's phone number. We felt our arrangement with Jessica to accept submissions of three chapters

and a synopsis was more workable than trying to conduct the pitch sessions via cell phone.

- Arrange ahead of time with the agent/editor the contact information. They can send you business cards with their email address or state preferences.
- Before the sessions begin, email the agent/editor the list of writers pitching to them.
- Ask the agent/editor afterward for an evaluation.
- Send a small thank-you gift.

Recommendations for writers pitching via video conference:

- Say hello, how are you. Say how pleased you are to be able to talk to him/her about your project. You can't shake hands, but you can smile.
- Look at the screen, not down at your notes. The agent wants to see your face, not the top of your head.
- The pitch should be brief, no more than two to three minutes. Identify your story by title, genre, sub genre if appropriate, word count, setting, targeted line if appropriate. If the manuscript is completed or not, state that. Then give a quick sketch of your story's main characters and the plot conflicts. Less is better. Leave the agent/editor time to ask questions and/or give feedback.
- If the session ends with time left, there are three options. One is to yield the time to the next writer. Another is to ask if it's all right to pitch a second story. And the third? If there's a burning question you've wanted to ask an agent or editor, here is your chance!
- Whether you get a request or not, say thank you and leave with a smile on your face.

Conclusion:

Our SKYPE pitch sessions went well with no technical problems. We had expected the "pitchers" to feel awkward talking to "the lady in the computer," but the reverse was true. The writers said they felt less stressed and nervous because of the apparent distance between them and the agent. Personally I think some of that was due to Jessica's low-key and warm manner. She was pleased at how well the sessions went but suggested shorter times. She felt some writers weren't well prepared and their pitches were either too limited or too detailed. While we would prefer to have agents and editors attend the retreat, we know our limitations. But now that we've experienced success with video conference pitching, it's on our list for next year's MERWA Retreat.

Susan Vaughan is a multi-published author. Her books have been an RT Book Reviews Magazine Reviewer's Choice Nominee and a finalist for the Daphne du Maurier Award, and is the current president of the Maine Chapter - <http://www.susanvaughan.com>.

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Member Interview

Kristine Crimmins



Kris joined RWA ten years and ago, and became a member of CORW at the same time. Since joining, Kris has served a treasurer under Laurie Adams for two years; was coordinator for the Golden Acorn contest for a year and helped run the all day workshops for two years. Kris has also served as a judge in the contest every year since then; has been a member-at-large on the board for the past year and a half and has organized the fall retreat at Genesis House. Kris is looking forward to passing on these duties to another energetic member come December.

Kris is currently active as a visual artist, and previously was an elementary reading specialist. She took over as treasurer and served under Laurie Adams for two years, then served as a coordinator. She has been writing for about twelve years and has been published in Southwood Magazine. You can find her articles on their website.

She has a large collection of books on writing, but says what she finds the most helpful is always the novel she is currently reading.

“I wrote a review at Barnes and Noble online for a fellow children’s writer on his latest 6-9 year old reader series called the Ballpark Mystery series,” she said. “The author is David Kelly and the book is called *The L.A. Dodger*. Granted it is a book for little kids ... but it is well written and has all the elements needed for an adult novel. Call me naive but it lays out exactly what needs to be in a book plus it gives me samples of format I hope to incorporate into my own beginning reader/chapter book series. David Kelly spells it out loud and clear and I really need to have visuals.”

Tell us about your “work space” for writing.

“I just cleaned my office a week or two ago, tossing years of saved papers, notes and class information. It felt good to purge and make room for writing. I thought, too, that stacking projects in baskets was a good idea, but it all got out of control and now everything of necessity is neatly in files where I can actually find it. My office is the fourth bedroom in my home and it’s the smallest, but hmmm, has the nicest view out of both windows. I can see many trees and hear the brook rushing down behind my property. So I have a great setting to stare into when deep in thought. As for the actual work space, I have swing-arm lamps on either side of my computer so I can see the ergonomic keyboard. I have a pen holder, timer and the caller ID on the computer desk along with a box of tissues. I have a crystal bookworm that watches me as I write. The

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telephone is up on a shelf away from temptation. My chair is comfortable. It is adjustable and spins, again, good for contemplation, plus I can turn myself to either side to do something by hand at either side desk. So I am basically centered in a U shape with work spaces encompassing me. Book shelves holding reference books are at close range. I really have no reason to get up and walk away from the task at hand.”

When you're stuck in your writing, what do you do to get “unstuck?”

“I usually spin around in my chair, stare out the window and then go get something to eat or drink or do laundry. I find I can come back and settle down refreshed.”

What was the last book you read that you would recommend to others?

“It's David's book above. But I also just read *A Big Red Dot* to my grandkids. It is a fold out, paper craft picture book. What impressed me was that my four year old grand daughter actually went back to reread.”

What inspires you to write?

“My inspiration comes from many sources. For example, a friend sent me information on yet another class. This time it was a quilting class for writers, well, more like writing like you were making a quilt. I love quilts and as I said before I need visuals and I am very tempted to take it, but I also surmised, and I do this with any class (just let me learn one thing from this experience), and low and behold, I learned (without taking the class) that I could use the concept of quilting in my novel. So I basically can hear or see or witness anything and have it spark an idea for me. Over the years I've tried to train myself to watch for signals. I may be over analyzing, but it works for me. I have journals and sketch books full of ideas.”

PERSONAL INFO:

“At this stage in my life, I am happily grand mothering my son's two beautiful little girls aged 4 and 1 ½. The baby is a riot and I spend a lot of time laughing and watching her try to trick her older sister. My daughter is getting married in September and a private destination wedding in Anguilla is planned. They just bought a beautiful home in South Carolina which I hope to see soon.

“I live in the little devastated town of Wilbraham in Massachusetts, but long to be in Italy. I'd settle for the Cape if I knew anyone would come and visit.

Any goals or dreams either personally or professionally?

I'm hoping to continue working toward publication for my children's as well as adult stories. I'm always working on an art project, too, the latest being the *Planes over Chicopee* project. I have a giant replica of a C5-A cargo plane sitting in my garage right now. I have been painting it for two days and am not nearly done. It's a fund raiser for the Chicopee Senior Center. They seem to be doing loads of these art projects in the surrounding towns lately. I applied and was one of twenty artists awarded the privilege. Public art projects aren't really on my list of goals, but it sure has stirred up a lot of interest and down right fun along with challenge. It's a project that shows the younger generations ... anything is possible and it reminds me that I need to stay aware of opportunities and grab what I can because you never know what's around the corner.

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Books for Living and Giving By Ellie Sullo



A Broken Heart Still Beats: after Your Child Dies

by Anne McCracken and Mary Semel is a grief book I've gained so much from since losing my 38-year-old son to

heart disease some years ago. The authors, one a journalist, the other a substance-abuse counselor, got together accidentally after each had lost a son, and was still seeking a way to express and understand her grief. The two women realized their own words could never say well enough what grieving parents need to hear, and so they mined the wealth of already existing literature to come up with a touching, moving, and exquisite paean to grieving the loss of a child. Such a universal experience! Short excerpts, whole poems, brief short stories and essays from the great writers whose names we recognize (and some we don't) and who lost a child to early death fill the pages: Mark Twain, who lost two daughters, Shakespeare, Ann Morrow Lindbergh, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others.

The writing of these selections is so vivid, so powerful and poignant; I find I can only read two or three pages at a time. It's a book someone like me MUST own--to go back to,

time and again, and find in other people's well-chosen words a reflection of my own mute sorrow, and hopefully, the healing to come. **A Broken Heart Still Beats** is rich food for souls impoverished by the death of someone dearest to them--their own child. It would make an exceptional gift for a grieving parent or grandparent, even sibling, and certainly an insightful text for ministers, counselors or others who must console the grieving.

At my slow pace I may never get to the final pages or to completely dry eyes, but I am reassured knowing the book is close by, and so grateful these hurting mothers made the tremendous effort to put it together. What a gift.

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Highlights from National

Sandra's Highlights from National: We (Presents authors) always have a great time together. This year, we came to NYC from the USA, from England, from Australia and from Ireland. Tuesday afternoon, we had a personal tour of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and then had lunch at author Kate Hewitt's apartment. That night, we were all at my annual Wine and Pizza party at the hotel. Wednesday, we went to Jane Porter's Tea at the Plaza. That evening,

we joined. Susan Stephens for Champagne in The View, the revolving cafe at the top of the Marriott Marquis Hotel. Thursday, our editors gave us a wonderful lunch at an elegant restaurant, Le Chat Noir. A few of us (including me) went by stretch white limo. Very, very posh! Thursday evening, my editor, Senior Editor in charge of Presents Joanne Grant, took me to dinner at the Waldorf Astoria's Bull and Bear Restaurant. The restaurant was elegant, the food was delicious, the wine was great--and Jo and I talked and laughed, non-stop. Of course, Jo and I both wore black because after dinner, we went up to the Starlight Roof, to the Harlequin Black and White Ball and hours of dancing, champagne and desserts and an all-around super good time straight through to midnight. "Somehow, I also managed to find time to discuss my next contract with my editor."It was, all in all, an amazing week!

General Highlights: Lots of buzz about Harlequin's announcement that they're digitizing

author backlists. This is great news, especially for those of us with large backlists--like me. I just completed my (gulp) 85th Presents!

Daniella's Highlights Brodsky dipped her toe into the self-publishing game with her ex-Penguin title, *Diary of a Working Girl*, filmed as *Beauty & the Briefcase*, starring Hilary Duff. In the new edition, entitled [Diary of a Working Girl, Special Edition](#), Daniella included a bonus chapter, which meets up with the heroine after the story has concluded. Daniella also dabbled in the new technology available and filmed a few segments about the real-life story inspirations. Here's one: <http://youtu.be/mQ8jdoy1ZIM>

