

Words of Paradise

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President's Place

Time to Write

by Lynn Raye Harris

As I sit down to write this month's column, I've got what seems like a million other things to do. I'm getting stressed. I have a church newsletter to edit—and man, after doing it for nearly a year, I have immense sympathy for Michael, our *Words of Paradise* editor. Do you have any idea how hard it is to get a quality newsletter ready by a certain date when you've got to chase down the folks who owe you material, write your own article, and make sure everything's spelled right and formatted correctly?



Ahem, where was I? Oh yeah, newsletter to edit, thesis to finish, book to write, articles to write, blog to keep updated, website to maintain, house to clean (do I have to?), laundry to do, blah blah blah. Life seems to get in the way of the one thing I want to do, which is write.

I need a maid, a personal assistant, and an unending supply of money. I'm not getting any of them, however, so I have to set goals and prioritize.

As you know from last month, one of the things I like to do is read certain blogs. Yes, they can be a time sink and yes, you have to be careful. I am, though I sometimes get sucked in deeper than I'd like to be. (That's another story.) But an interesting conversation cropped up this week. J. A. Konrath, author of the Lt. Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels mysteries from Hyperion, asked how often you do things like watch television, drink alcohol, go to a movie, eat at a restaurant, sleep more than eight hours, etc. At the end of this list, he said, "How many hours per day/week do you engage in [these] activities? And yet you can say with a straight face that you don't have time to write? Your book won't get finished by itself. Thinking about writing, talking about writing, and writing about writing are not substitutes for writing. Writers write. Now move your ass."

Words of Paradise

**Aloha Chapter
Romance Writers of America
www.rwaaloha.org**



*President: Lynn Harris
Vice President: Leslee Ellenson
Treasurer: Sally Sorenson
Publications: Michael Little*

Wow. Writers write. What a concept. How many days do you sit down to write and discover ten other things you need to do first? How many times do you get up and do those things instead of pushing them aside? Some things *must* be done. You have to eat and you have to pay the bills. Shopping and working are probably the best ways to do that, unless you can get that maid and personal assistant I was talking about before. But how often do you decide to run out to the coffee shop for a latte or browse the new books in Barnes & Noble?

The truth is that writing is hard work. It's easier to plan to do it than to actually do it. But the *only* way you're selling your stories is by finishing the darned book and starting another one. Editors don't want one book from you. They want several. They want you to produce consistently, whether it's one book a year or ten. They are investing in a commodity and they want to know they can count on you.

You are a professional. Professionals act a certain way. They take their writing seriously and they make goals for themselves. They produce to sell. They may have moments of procrastination like the rest of us, but they get around it. They put their butts in the chair and they write.

Now, professional that you are, take out your notebook and write down *your* goals. The *New York Times* list in five years? A completed novel next month? Ten submission packages mailed by next week? Whatever it is, write it down. Don't be afraid to dream big. Next, decide what you have to do to get there. If you want to complete a novel by next month, how many pages a day do you need to write? Write it down. Set goals, figure out the steps it takes to get there, but most importantly, sit down and write. If you don't do it, you'll get to watch your friends (and maybe even your enemies) sell books and build careers. Do you really want to be left behind? I don't.

So, though I promised to talk about setting up and listing your own blog in this column, I have to put it off until next time. This particular topic was more important to me and now I'm out of time. I'd love to stay, but I have 5 pages to write today. I'm a writer, so I have to go write.

Aloha,
Lynn

Aloha Chapter News



Dark and Stormy Night Writing Contest

Because everyone was so busy in February watching the figure skating, snowboarding, and curling at the Winter Olympics, the deadline for the Aloha Chapter version of the Bulwer-Lytton fiction contest has been extended to the end of March.

The challenge is clear. Write the opening sentence of a bad novel (romance or other genre). Submit contest entries to mlittlehi@hotmail.com by **March 31**, so we can pass them on to the judge. Winners will be announced at the April 8 meeting.

Multiple entries are welcome. Books and publication for the winners. For inspiration and the 2005 national winners, runners-up, and dishonorable mentions, visit www.bulwer-lytton.com.

CataRomance Award to Morag Pippin

Morag Pippin has won a prestigious SingleTitles bi-yearly Reviewers' Choice Award for *Blood Moon Over Britain* from www.CataRomance.com. Congratulations, Morag!

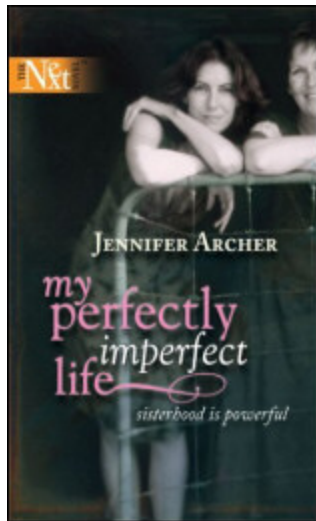
Lynn Harris a Finalist in Great Expectations Contest

Lynn Raye Harris has been named a finalist in the North Texas RomanceWriters of America 2006 Great Expectations contest. Lynn was honored in the Steamy Hot category for her *Seducing Evangeline*. For more on the contest, see www.ntrwa.com/contest.html. Congratulations, Lynn!

Pen Women Writers' Conference March 31-April 1

Maxine Hong Kingston will be the keynote speaker at the biennial writers' conference in Honolulu on March 31 and April 1, presented by the National League of American Pen Women, Honolulu Branch. The conference will feature workshops on Biography, Description, Screenwriting, Memoir, Humor, Romance, Slam Poetry, History, Book Proposals, Book Marketing, Open mic, and Self Publishing. Aloha Chapter member **Michael Little** will lead a workshop on writing about romance entitled "Romantically Challenged." The workshop takes its inspiration from famous romantically challenged couples, from Romeo and Juliet, to Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, to our contemporaries Ross and Rachel. The conference brochure, schedule, and registration information are available at www.nlapwhonolulu.org/2006writersconf.html.

Jennifer Archer Book Signing March 25



Jennifer Archer will be signing books at Barnes & Noble Ala Moana on Saturday, March 25, from 2 to 4 p.m. Afterward, if anyone wants to talk shop, ask questions, etc., Jennifer invites them to move into the coffee shop and coffee is on her.

Publisher's Weekly proclaims Jennifer Archer to be a writer who "captures the voices and vulnerabilities of her characters with precision." Archer, author of eight novels, is a two-time finalist in Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart competition and has been nominated this year for a Reviewer's Choice Award by *Romantic Times Bookclub Magazine* for her novel *Sandwiched*. *Sandwiched*, a July 2005 release, was a launch title for Harlequin's new "NeXT" line of mainstream women's fiction. *The Me I Used To Be* followed in October 2005. Future novels include *My Perfectly Imperfect Life* in March 2006 and *Off Her Rocker* in August 2006.

A frequent speaker at writing workshops, women's events, and creative writing classes, Jennifer enjoys inspiring others to set goals and pursue dreams. She resides in Texas and holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from West Texas A&M University. Jennifer can be contacted through her website www.jenniferarcher.net.

2006 Aloha Chapter Meeting Dates

Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon
Aina Haina Library

January 7

February 4

March 4

April 8

May 6

June 3

July 8

August 5

September 9

October 7

November 4 (luncheon, Hale Koa)



Part Two: The Abandonment

The great, grotesque monster lay on the bed, its hideous underbelly slit open. The yawning aperture seemed to sneer at Mephistopheles Cat as he froze in his tracks in the bedroom doorway. His degagee attitude was quickly replaced by terror as he realized what this obscene ogre portended. Then Mama bustled out of the closet with several items of clothing slung over one arm. He watched with dread as she carefully folded the garments and placed them inside the beastly creature.

Who would watch over his subjects when they left his kingdom, the King Kitty wondered? Despair washed over him as he speculated how many days and nights he would be without warm laps, comforting cuddles, and sweet voices telling him he was a handsome, darling boy. Then of course, there were the practicalities of being deserted: stale food and a polluted kitty box.

The water however, wasn't bad at all — a few days actually gave it a bit of character. Perhaps he could persuade Mama and Papa to stay home — if not they would take part of him with them! With these lovely thoughts in mind he bravely bounded straight into the jaws of the Creature, his landing cushioned by a pile of neatly arranged garments. He nosed and kneaded these before raising imploring pale blue eyes to Mama.

"Mepher! Now your fur is everywhere!" Mama began brushing frantically at the orangey, white fluff now decorating her apparel.

Nutmeg Cat, grooming her sleek tabby coat in the midst of a treasured sunbeam before the living room glass door, stopped short at Mama's distressed voice. She valued a serene environment, but it usually paid to find the reason for anxiety before hiding.

Horrors! They were being abandoned! Something must be done. Immediately. Drastic measures must be taken. She must keep Mama too busy to pack! Leaping on the bed and chirping in her most charming voice, she gave Mama insistent head-butts. "Mama you must see what an enchanting little dear I am. How can you leave me?"

Apparently, Mama wasn't as enamored as she should have been. Nutmeg was crushed when she was gently shooed. She retreated to a forbidden pillow to closely observe the unfolding drama.

"Aren't you ready yet? Hurry! What's keeping you?" Papa inquired as he entered the room. "You know how I hate leaving the kitties. The sweet babies are helping me pack." Mama glanced affectionately at Nutmeg and stroked an ear belonging to Mephistopheles.

"Sweet babies nothing," Papa said cheerfully. "They're nothing but furry little bags of sh--."

"Don't you dare say such things in front of the darlings," interrupted Mama in an affronted voice. "I don't know how you get away with treating them so carelessly. They adore you. While I must work so hard for their affection: feeding, watering, and littering the little fur rascals."

At this Mephistopheles Cat placed a proprietary paw on Mama's hand. "And we love you for it Mama," he purred. "Nobody could take such excellent care of us as you do."

"Cute little pussy cats always love me," said Papa suggestfully as he leered at Mama. His gaze dropped to the suitcase. "Listen to the motor on that tank. Certainly matches his size." Normally Mephistopheles worshipped his Papa, but this irreverence was too much at such a distressing time. He treated his Papa to

an indignant glare before whisking himself from the room. He headed to his favorite dining room chair to wait out the Departure. It was time for the Show of Indifference.

Pendragon was nearly knocked off his paws by Mephistopheles Cat's sudden flight. He comprehended at once what was occurring as he peered into the room. He immediately wailed his terror at being left alone. (One couldn't possibly count two cheeky mongrels as company). "No, no please don't leave me Mama and Papa. MEEOOOWW, MEEOOOWW."

Why, who would give him treats at bedtime? Who would provide a warm, cozy lap? Who would scratch his chin and tell him what a gorgeous, but annoying Cat he was? He knew of course, that he wasn't really annoying. Pure seal point Himalayan Cats couldn't possibly be anything but a model of the Perfect Pet. It was just something silly Mama and Papa told him. They were always saying silly things. It was just one of those idiosyncrasies one tolerated from one's People.

"MEEOOOWW. MEEOOOWW." Uncomfortable with the charged scene before her, Nutmeg Cat bounded down from her pillow to sharpen her claws on the prized Persian rug.

"Naughty, naughty, naughty cat Nutmeg." Mama made an unsuccessful grab for Nutmeg as she dived under the bed.

Pendragon was incensed that a mere Tabby Cat should steel his thunder in the middle of one of his magnificent wails. He hissed in warning.

Nutmeg peeked from her hiding place to growl right back at him. "You can't intimidate me you ridiculous creature — you have no claws!"

Pendragon swished his tail and raised his chin. "And I survived quite nicely, too," he bragged. "I lived in the Wilds for months after my former People lost me. It's really not surprising considering my superior pedigreed intelligence." He preened himself before giving forth a triumphant yowl.

"Wilds?!" The only hunting you did was choosing from which neighbor's bowl of milk to drink before Mama and Papa brought you home. And your People did not 'lose' you — they escaped from you!"

"Why, what a jealous—"

"Out cats! We're leaving now so get out from under foot." Papa led the way to the outer door, practically dragging Mama with him. She managed a farewell before being hauled over the threshold: "I'll miss you sweeties. We'll be back soon."

Hearing the lock click into place, a melancholy Mephistopheles Cat developed a sudden urge to demonstrate his Dominance. He did so by sauntering casually over to the round scratching pad and covering it with his not inconsiderable bulk. He then proceeded to groom himself as if he hadn't a care in the world. It didn't do to wear one's emotions on one's paw — after all, he was King.

Princess or not, poor little Nutmeg Cat experienced such anxiety she could only creep behind the couch to hide. Once there, she made herself as tiny as she could manage.

And the Pendragon Cat. Ahh, the Pendragon Cat. Why, he indulged in his favorite pastime, of course: he howled and howled and howled.

The Abandonment had begun.

**10 Ways to Jump Start
Your Writing Discipline**
by Susan Cooper-Berg

Editor's Note: The following article first appeared in the February 2006 issue of the *LARA Confidential*, the newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors chapter of RWA®.

After the holidays, my threadbare discipline made eking-out even one page on my neglected manuscript near impossible. The few remaining Godiva chocolates, courtesy of my sister, and an annual five-pound gain, courtesy of said chocolates, fueled my sloth. Topped by my living arrangements aboard a 40-ft sailboat floating in Ventura Harbor, and a writing space consisting of a 2-foot-by-2-foot navigation table in my 11-year-old daughter's cabin, I was useless. Do you feel sorry for me?

Don't.

We all have our fond ways of avoiding writing. I've read about people who can't write unless their walls are pink or who must have total quiet. That always makes me chuckle as I stare at the electrical switch panel while my daughter snores lightly in the berth behind me.

January found me playing with a wind-up jumping monkey while my laptop featured a blank page. How did I get back on track? It wasn't easy. Here are some ways I've learned to rebuild my writing discipline while working full-time and managing a family:

1. Write down your goals. Start with a long-term goal and work down to your daily goals. My goals look like this:

- Yearly Goal - write and submit one book a year.
- Mid-term Goal - finish my first draft by the end of February.
- Monthly Goal - write 100 pages.
- Weekly Goal - write 25 pages.
- Daily Goal - write 5 pages. Review these often.

2. Start slowly - think of writing as a type of physical workout. You may want to run a mile, but you start by walking one block. Start with one page a day and work up.

3. Record your progress. Keep a pocket calendar or record your daily progress electronically. NO cheating! I use ½ page increments.

4. Don't answer emails until after you meet your daily quota. This goes for loops and chats. In fact, don't answer anything - phone, spouse, kids, etc. If this isn't realistic, please note the following technique.

5. Get up early and write before dawn.

6. Pick a unit of time, such as one hour, as a daily minimum. This time should facilitate reaching your goals.

7. It's far better to write something instead of nothing. If you are stuck in a writer's block, keep going forward without looking back. Remember, you can fix anything later.

8. Shoot for a contest only if it will make you write to meet a deadline. Don't use a contest entry as an excuse to rewrite your first 10 pages (for the 20th time) unless you've finished your book and met your goals.

9. Schedule your writing time like an appointment and then show up.

10. Invest in an Alphasmart or Quickpad that will enable you to write no matter where you are. My favorite places are cafes and doctor's offices.

The experts say it takes five weeks to establish a habit. Hang in there and force it. I believe writing is much like working out. You have to tolerate the pain to enjoy the gain. Work on those writing muscles and you'll be in shape again in no time.

Susan Cooper-Berg is a member of LARA and RWA®. Although not published in the romance novel genre, she has published several freelance magazine and newspaper features.

Take Five
Winter Olympics for Writers
by Michael Little

It happens every four years. The Olympic Winter Games take over my life, and the lives of many others. I didn't make it to Turin this past month, but I was there in spirit. Following the closing ceremonies on Sunday evening I spent a couple of hours ungluing my eyes from the television screen. For two weeks I was totally involved in the human drama of this great event, each athlete a story, each day a new opportunity for glory. We watched them fall, then rise again to fight for redemption, as figure skater Sasha Cohen did in winning the silver medal with her amazing performance.



The Olympics always teach us something about participating and competing. I was fortunate to catch an interview with Sarah Hughes, the gold medal figure skater from the 2002 Salt Lake Games. She was asked if she gave advice to her younger sister before Emily Hughes went out on the ice in these 2006 Games. Sarah said that when you train and compete you just have to find what works for you and then stick with that. She said that Emily would follow her same routine, including sleeping for nine and a quarter hours the night before the competition. How precise! Obviously Emily has discovered exactly how much sleep she needs each night.

Nobody said it then, but this seems to be good advice for writers as well. Find what works for you. Then stick with it. This implies a writing routine, one that works in your life, deciding when to write, and how to write, what kind of outline, or no outline, and so on. Then it's all about discipline. If you give yourself to the discipline you will discover the freedom to grow, as one might lock oneself in a writing room all morning, only to discover that there are no locks on the imagination, and no walls to confine the creative spirit.

I learned other valuable lessons from the Winter Games this time around. You can learn a lot by watching a person slide a 42-pound granite stone (or "rock") down a long sheet of ice, with two teammates walking in front of the stone and sweeping hard, or lightly, or not at all (with what Lynn calls "those little sweepy things"), as the stone makes its way to the target (or "house"). Yes, it's curling! I used to believe that the world was divided into those who loved anchovies and those who would rather starve than eat one. Now I am convinced that the world is divided into those who don't get curling, those who love curling, and those who would love curling if they only gave it a chance.

Curling is that strange girl in your high school English class who was from another planet, but her charms were only waiting to be discovered. Once enchanted, however, you could not resist her. One of the Olympic commentators said that curling is like peanuts, that once you start it's hard to stop. All I know is that I found myself waking up at 5 in the morning, without an alarm, knowing only that a curling game was on TV at that very moment. The siren call pulled me down the stairs, still half asleep, turning on the game, and the coffee, and curling up on the sofa for yet another date.

Midway through the Olympics I knew enough about the sport to have an opinion about the tactics of each rock. Curling has been called "chess on ice," an apt description. The captain of the four-person team, called

the skip, is the mastermind, thinking several turns ahead and mapping the team's strategy. The skip also throws the last two rocks in each of the ten ends (innings), so he must perform well at these critical moments.

It is instructive to watch the closeups of the eyes of the curlers as they slide and release the rock. Eyes steady on the target, the picture of concentration. The next time I need to focus in my writing, I will see those eyes. I will also see the USA skip, Pete Fenson, from small-town Minnesota, owner of Dave's Pizza. If Pete were in a Western movie he would be the leader of an outlaw gang, the one you would call "a cool customer," telling the guys just what to do and when to do it, then riding into town to rob the bank. In Turin, Pete and his gang rode out of town with bronze medals to chants of "USA! USA!"

The team's female fans also serenaded them with "Jeepers, creepers, where'd you get those sweepers? Jeepers, creepers, where'd you get those guys?" Curling fans wear crazy hats too, but that's another story. After watching the fans during the games, I have a hunch that most, if not all, of them love anchovies too. Next time I'm in Bemidji, Minnesota, I plan to drop in at Dave's Pizza and order a pizza with extra anchovies. Shouldn't be a problem.

Bemidji is also the home of the USA women's curling team, which struggled during the Olympics but was still just a few good shots at critical times from bringing back medals. The young women on the team are from northern regions — Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Alaska — and have those fair complexions and clear eyes that seem just right for the sport of curling. Like the men's team, they were good teammates, together in victory or defeat. I wish them well. Perhaps they will make it to the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver. Maybe by then there will be a Curling Channel on cable. Stay tuned.

Michael

