



February 1, 2018.

Volume XXX. Issue 01.

Welcome to Central Ohio Fiction Writers Newsletter

Contents

01. COFW Basic Information.
02. President's Message by Jenessa McRoy. "COFW as Community."
03. Minutes, Treasury Recap, Attendance/Works in Progress for January 13, 2018.
04. Upcoming February 17 COFW Meeting on Social Media by Andrea McConnell.
05. Guest Presentations in Place for 2018 So Far.
06. COFW Fiction Plotters and If You Need Financial Aid for COFW Activities or Dues.
07. January 13 Special Guest Recap by Saralee Etter. "Goal Setting, Motivation and Productivity in the New Year 2018."
08. New Member, Courtney Hilbert. "Inspired by God."
09. Notes from 2017 Romance Times Book Lovers Convention by Linda Rice.
10. New Release by Lita Lawson. *A Valentine Reunion*.
11. New Release by Sophie Jacobs. *Match My Heart*.
12. "Getting the Word Out: COFW at Upper Arlington Library's The Write Stuff" by Sandra J. Kachurek.
13. "A Writer on Jeopardy!" by Saralee Etter.

Newsletter Editor, Sandra J. Kachurek

Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW) <http://cofwevents.org> is a non-profit professional association for romance writers and a local chapter of the Romance Writers of America (RWA) organization that offers monthly meetings. Since 1987, COFW has promoted excellence in fiction writing, encouraging writers to grow and gain knowledge in their craft. Members provide a networking system to share knowledge and support the goal of becoming published.

February 1, 2018/Issue 01/Volume XXX/1

♥ Central Ohio Fiction Writers ♥
Proud Chapter of the Romance Writers of America®

2018 Leadership

President, Jenessa McRoy <jenessah1@gmail.com>
Secretary, Susan Heino <susan_gee_heino@yahoo.com>
Treasurer, Jeanne Estridge <jeanne.estrIDGE.author@gmail.com>

Program Chair, Aleta Dodson <aletawrites@hotmail.com>
Newsletter Editor, Sandra J. Kachurek <sandrajkachurek@gmail.com>
Membership Chair, Linda Rice <lindarice05@gmail.com>
Social Media Chair, Andrea McConnell <fyrefly93@gmail.com>
Incentives, Julia Blaine <julmassie@aol.com>

Meetings

First "Teen" Saturday of the Month.
Social: Noon to 12:30. Business: 12:30. Guest Presentation: 1:30.

Location

Norwich Township Building
5181 Northwest Parkway. Hilliard, OH 43026

Dues

Renewal before January 31: \$25.
After January 31: \$30.

Follow COFW

Twitter <https://twitter.com/COFWriters>
Facebook <https://facebook.com/COFWriters>

Central Ohio Fiction Writers

P.O. Box 24254
Dayton, OH 45424

COFW as Community

By Jenessa McRoy, COFW President

We all know publishing is an ever-changing landscape and we are constantly working to stay relevant both as a chapter and in our writing careers. We have all heard the current keywords over and over: social media, hybrid, diversity, promotion, outreach, digital fatigue, audio books.

As a chapter, we have covered the craft of writing and will continue to do so, but in my second year as president, I would like us to change our focus a bit. Don't get me wrong; we will still discuss all those keywords and review craft in our ultimate goal of writing and publishing.

I want to reintroduce a keyword that is the reason we all joined: community.

Whether your goal is self-publishing, traditional or just becoming a NaNoWriMo professional, your world of writing is a strange dichotomy between the lonely hours of keyboard clicks and the entire village it takes to get a professional product on the market.

Let's be the ones to ignite that spark of imagination for each other. Let's be the first stop when one of us needs to know if our main character "lay" or "laid" that secret love letter down. I want to see that 2:30 AM cup of coffee on your Instagram because you have a deadline.

Community is why we are here.

We can Google "lay" and "laid." We can take a million online classes, but none of that is why we go to meetings. We want to connect with people who have the same goals, the same challenges.

Let's make each other our focus this year.



Members pose with Lisa Cooke, guest in April 2017.

Minutes, Treasury Report, Attendance for January 13, 2018 Norwich Township Building, Hilliard

President Jenessa McRoy convened the meeting at 12:55 p.m. Start was delayed due to weather.

Introductions:

Our newest member, Lauren Connolly, found us while looking for conferences/workshops.

Treasurer's Report:

Balances include: Checking \$9417.90; PayPal \$489.99; Financial Assistance \$1561.64.

Programs:

The Board hasn't met yet, so no budget has been established for programs.

Under Consideration for 2018:

Member Input:

Please review the questions Jenessa has posted on the Loop and respond with your thoughts. She would like to get the temperature from the Chapter before the Board makes decisions.

Communication Changes:

We need to migrate away from Yahoo loops because it's no longer supported. RWA has loop software. Linda Rice suggested maintaining our own group email and using that. Without some kind of software, each member would have to maintain and keep current a list of members' emails. Group loop functionality is available from Gmail but is not free. We would also like to move away from paper records to electronic.

Conferences/Workshops:

Jenessa mentioned we don't have volunteers to run a conference or large workshops. Linda Rice is willing to work on these. Conferences will be part of the Board discussions about the future of the Chapter. Member burnout and lack of volunteers suggest conferences may be too burdensome.

Suggestions:

Value of meetings:

Jane Connor suggested we need to pick one thing to focus on this year--possibly meetings and how to deliver value to members during the monthly meetings.

Membership numbers:

Andrea McConnell thinks membership numbers is the root of the problem.. Our numbers have dropped substantially over the past few years.

Appeal/Relevance to younger people:

It was suggested that younger people communicate differently and don't rely on face-to-face

communication. How can we address this? Andrea suggested updating the website and logo to be more appealing to a younger generation. Saralee Etter agreed.



Member Shari Heinrich spent all of January 13 digging herself out of a storm that dumped and drifted inches of snow and ice. The storm caused many members to cancel attendance at the COFW first meeting of the year. (Photo by Shari.)

Communications and Social Media:

Andrea asserted that successful communicators transition seamlessly between various forms of media, in-person events and other forms of communication, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Even newer are Snapchat and technologies yet unknown. To appeal to a new, younger demographic, COFW needs to stay on top of these new social media platforms. Andrea feels we need smaller, more frequent interactions but doesn't have the time to do this. Lauren Connolly volunteered to help.

There was some confusion around internal communications (e.g. Yahoo Loop) versus external facing marketing efforts (other uses of social media). Andrea clarified.

Meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Treasurer Jeanne Estridge, filling in for Susan Heino.

Attendance and Works in Progress

01. **Jeanne Estridge** is finishing a second draft of *The Demon's in the Details*.
02. **Stacy McKittrick** is working on *In Love with a Vampire*.
03. **Lauren Connally** is working on *You Only Need One*.
04. **Andrea McConnell** entered the Golden Heart® and is editing *The British Captain*.
05. **Linda Rice** is writing in a diary.
06. **Aleta Dodson** entered two book covers in the Huston Bay Area RWA Chapter's "Judge a Book By Its Cover (JABBIC) Contest" and has a new novella, *A Valentine*

Reunion, releasing in February in the box set, *Love Me Hard*.

07. **Jenessa McRoy** is making progress on a paranormal series.

08. **Saralee Etter** is working on a Victorian romance.

COFW Guest Presentation for Saturday, February 17 Andrea McConnell on Social Media

Still not sure about social media and how it can promote your brand? Do you know the difference between Facebook, Instagram and Twitter? If not, this month's COFW presentation is for you.

We will discuss the basics of social media and how they work with your author website.

Bring your mobile devices and laptops. After an initial discussion, volunteers will work one-on-one with you to set up your accounts or just to check out how different sites work.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to learn about this powerful resource and how authors use it to engage with their readers.

What's Shaping Up for 2018: COFW Guest Presentations

March 17, Saturday, Sara Portman from Toledo.

"Creating Female Characters for Historical Fiction."

August 18, Saturday, Members' Recap.

2018 Romance Writers of America® Conference in Denver, Colorado, July 18-21.

September 15, Saturday, J. Leigh Bailey from Chicago.

"Mastering the Meet-Cute Workshop."

COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly

If you find you can't get your protagonist out of a hole you've written her into, or you're not sure whether the antagonist is antagonizing enough, or you merely need a boost with a story idea that has yet to see words on a page, consider stopping by the COFW Fiction Plotters group.

They meet the first Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Panera Bread in Taylor Square in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, 43068.

To ensure members are meeting and to stay in touch in between, they use this email:

cofwplot@yahoo.com

Saralee Etter can also answer your questions about the group: saralee_etter@yahoo.com

Financial Aid Available for COFW Activities and Dues

1. COFW maintains a fund to be used by qualified applicants for the payment COFW Chapter Workshops, Conferences, other events or COFW membership dues.
2. Funding is obtained from member donations and is kept separate from RWA chapter funds.
3. To qualify for an award from the fund, an applicant must be a member of COFW for one full calendar year prior to applying. The applicant will submit the required form stating their need for assistance to the Chapter President. The letter shall contain a statement of the applicant's financial need as well as a description of the applicant's serious pursuit of a writing career.
4. An individual needing financial assistance may be awarded up to \$75.00 from the fund once every three calendar years.
5. Funds are to be distributed by the Board on a first-come, first-served basis; "first" being defined as the first applicant to submit a letter to the Board following the guidelines.
6. Funds shall be disbursed only to the extent there are available funds and qualified applicants. There shall be no limit to the number of applicants who receive funds in any year.
- 7. Requests will be reviewed by the Board President and Treasurer and are confidential.**

Goal-Setting, Motivation and Productivity in the New Year 2018

By Saralee Etter

This is the time of year when we wonder: Is it a whole new year already? Where did last year go? This year, let's decide to set our goals and meet them.

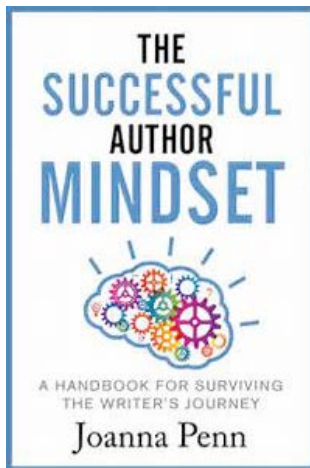
Get your head on straight.

Your mindset is critical to your success. "Mindset" means your fundamental beliefs about your capabilities and the likelihood of reaching your goals. From your mindset comes your motivation – the emotional energy that lets you keep working toward your dreams.

A book that's helped me is *The Successful Author Mindset* by Joanna Penn.

What do you want?

First, you must define your own idea of success. Book royalties? Recognition and bestseller status? Creative freedom? Once you know what success is for you, it's time to dream big. This is your ultimate destination. If you know where you want to go, then it is much easier to plan how to get there.



What's holding you back?

When we set goals that are too big, we might quit when we feel overwhelmed. Big, audacious goals can seem like insurmountable mountains—much too tall to climb. That's where problems like Perfectionism and Imposter's Syndrome can raise their ugly heads and hold us back.

But as the Tao Te Ching says, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." So let's break those big audacious goals down into small steps that can be carried out on a daily basis.

Perseverance is the key, and building habits helps us maintain productivity and motivation throughout the entire year.

As Bill Gates, former CEO of Microsoft, said, "Most people overestimate what they can do in one year and underestimate what they can do in ten years."

Books to read: *Finish* by Jon Acuff and *Playing Big* by Tara Mohr.

Do it for you.

Setting goals is a way for you to stop waiting for others to give you permission to pursue what you love. It's about being honest with yourself about what you want. We set goals to honor our deeply held desire to create something that lasts, and clearing the path to get there.

Setting goals is not about rigid planning but about developing a system that lets you wake up every day knowing what you need to work on, instead of checking Facebook or news first thing in the morning.

Habits are better than Willpower.

We all know about willpower. It's that strength that keeps you from eating the wrong foods when you're on a diet, and the determination that keeps your butt in the chair and fingers on the keyboard when your fear tries to talk you out of it.

But willpower is limited. Researchers have found that our willpower is drained by every single decision we make. When you work hard to avoid that tempting snack, you're actually lessening the amount of decision-making strength that you have on hand to avoid distractions and focus on writing your story.

Don't waste your precious reserve of willpower on trivial decisions like what to have for lunch or whether to go to the gym today. Instead, develop systems and habits that put minor decisions on autopilot.

Book: *The Creative Habit* by Twyla Tharp.

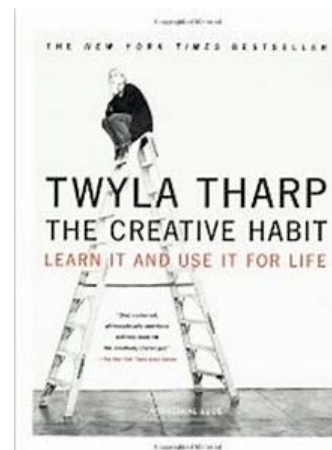
How to set great goals.

Now that we've discussed the issues of mindset, we must identify our goals, decide on the most important goals and act on those goals.

Identifying your dream goals.

If you could wave a magic wand to have, be, or do anything you want, what would it be? Go ahead and write down what your life would be like. Address all the parts of your life, including health, family and love relationships, wealth, career and enjoyment.

If it seems too hard to do, pretend you're writing a Christmas Newsletter to send to all your family and friends – Dear So and So, this year was so great for us! Here are all the exciting things that happened



It's all right if these goals are pretty outrageous. We're going to give ourselves several years to work on them because we know that transformation takes time.

Refine the dream list.

Now that we have our "magic wand" list, we are going to examine each item according to the fivefold why.

That means asking yourself why do you want this item on your list. If you say, "I want to write three books in 2018," why do you want that?

Let's assume your answer is to make money and contribute to your family income. Next, ask yourself why you want to make money and contribute to your family income. Repeat this process at least five times. This will help you drill down and find your most personal and meaningful reasons for pursuing a particular goal.

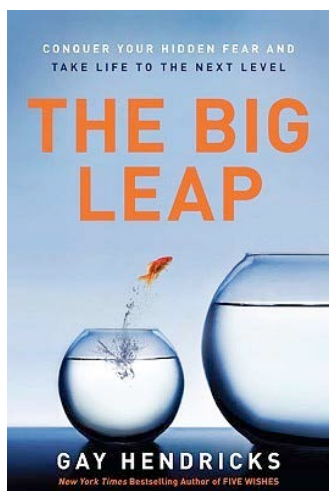
The most powerful goals are based on your deepest desires—that is where your most potent motivation comes from.

PICS.

Make sure your goals are **P**ositive, **I**mmEDIATE, **C**oncrete and **S**pecific. If your goals are vague and general ("I want to be a bestseller." "I want to make some money.") then you'll never be sure you've reached them.

AME.

Effective goals also must be **A**mbitious, **M**eaningful, and **E**xciting. In *The Big Leap*, Gay Hendricks quotes Dr Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, who said, "Fear is excitement without the breath." What he meant, Hendricks explained, was that the things that excite us also can cause fear, and our fear can be transformed into excitement by breathing fully into it.



If we try to hold our breath when we are challenged, we are giving fear a foothold. Learning to breathe deeply can help to dispel fear and give us that tingly feeling of excitement.

Focus your efforts.

When we try to do too many things at once, we are likely to fail in our efforts. It's better to focus on goals one at a time. Business coach Todd Hermann, in his "90-Day Year" program, explained that research had shown that even switching from one project to another can result in a loss of time as the worker re-focuses on a new task.

So instead of writing three books in a year, pare back to a single book in a year.

Act.

Once the main big goal is settled on, it's time to break that big goal down into steps.

For example, if your goal is to write a book in a year, consider breaking the book-writing down into Plotting, Drafting and Editing. Each of these three steps would be allotted four months.

Then you'd break down those three steps into monthly steps – for instance, Plotting could be broken down into one month each, for First Act (January), Second Act-Part One (February), Second Act-Part Two (March) and Third Act (April).

After setting the monthly steps, it's time to break the work down into weekly steps, and then daily tasks that could be completed in about 15-20 minutes. Australian business coach Julia Bickerstaff of The Business Bakery (<https://www.thebusinessbakery.com.au>) calls these daily tasks “micro-actions.”

Micro actions.

Carrying out your big goal plan is easier when you've broken it down into baby steps. Tiny tasks aren't as scary and don't bring up the same level of resistance as a big job. (See Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art* for more on resistance.)

Julia Bickerstaff, mentioned above, advises people to start with a list of 100 micro-actions that they have brainstormed in advance, eliminating the need to make a decision at the moment you sit down to work on your book. Make them so small, you can carry out the task in 15 to 20 minutes.

Build the habits.

Eliminate your blank-page fear by setting the mood before you write.

When we read a book, we put ourselves in a kind of mild trance. The same thing happens when we write. To get into that focused state, develop pre-writing rituals. Examples: Work in a specific spot every day. Light a scented candle. Set a timer. Wear certain clothes.

The “tiny habit” approach, a technique developed by BJ Fogg (<http://tinyhabits.com/>) can help to build habits quickly and easily. He has a TED talk that's available on YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdKUJxjn-R8>

A writer friend kick-starts her writing by opening her WIP document every day and changing or adding one word in the document. She tells herself she only has to change one thing, but now she

finds herself drawn into her writing every day.

Setting a schedule and making a writing appointment is another way of honoring your commitment to writing. Time-management blogger Laura Vanderkam (<http://lauravanderkam.com/>) encourages people to find time in their daily schedule to do the things that they want to do. On her website, Laura has charts and other downloadable tools that a person can use to track their time and set up a working schedule.

“If you’re unhappy with your progress,
you have three different dials you can adjust.
The goal. The timeline. The actions.”
~ Jon Acuff. *Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done*.

Apps and tricks and tips.

Other organizational applications are available for free or for a small cost that will help you get control of your day.

Evernote <https://evernote.com/> is an app that allows you to take notes on your phone or other device and sync it with your other devices. It’s great for taking notes on the go.

Workflowy <https://workflowy.com/> is a very simple app that lets you create lists. I use it for my to-do lists.

Dropbox <https://www.dropbox.com/> is a service in the Cloud that allows you to store pictures and documents that you can access from anywhere.

Trello <https://trello.com/> is a web-based productivity app with a premise very similar to the old school method of using index cards on a cork board. For a writer, the possibilities are endless. You can use a Trello board to make to-do lists, prioritize submissions, even to track research.

Online coaching is also available from <https://www.coach.me/> .

More apps.

To break through procrastination and speed up your writing, try the following apps:

Write or die <https://writeordie.com/>
Pomodoro <https://zapier.com/blog/best-pomodoro-apps/>
Writer’s block buster app (iOS only. Find on iTunes.)

Grammarly <https://www.grammarly.com/>

Music and mood.

And if you need calming practices, or like to write with music on, the following apps are available for you:

Calm app <https://www.calm.com/> (meditation).

Noisli app <https://www.noisli.com/> (ambient sounds).

Pandora <https://www.pandora.com> (music).

Youtube search for “music for studying or concentration.”

Anti-social.

List of apps that can block those distracting social media sinkholes include:

Freedom <https://freedom.to/>

Cold turkey <https://getcoldturkey.com/>

Anti-social app (Find on iTunes.).

Rescue time <https://www.rescuetime.com/> (This app tells you where you spend your computer-based time – very helpful.)

Others are mentioned in this online article: <http://99u.com/articles/6969/10-online-tools-for-better-attention-focus>

Over the years, I have read a lot of books and blogs and articles on the subject of time management and productivity. These are some of the best resources that I’ve found. I hope they help you, too.

"Clear a path by walking it, boldly."

~Tara Mohr. *Playing Big and Ten Rules for Brilliant Women.*



Saralee Etter is the author of three traditional Regency romances. Her next book, coming during summer 2018, will be part of the *Legend to Love* Regency romance series, with a protagonist based on the legendary Irish hero Cuchulain. She is still working on *A Short Sharp Shock*, the first book in a Victorian-set mystery series featuring sleuth Lucy Turner and her friends, William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan.

Visit her on the web at www.saraleeetter.com or check out her blog, *A Fine Mystery Indeed*, at www.saraleeetter.com/blog1

New Member Courtney Hilbert Inspired by God

Courtney, writing as CE Hilbert, heard about COFW through the RWA Website and has joined us to expand her exposure to other writers and their processes.



Q: What are your favorite genres to write in?

A: I write Inspirational Romance – both contemporary and suspense. I prefer contemporary as the situations lend themselves more to humor. I enjoy writing suspense because it pushes me out of my comfort zone (making awkward situations less tense with silly jokes) and forces me to research beyond my every day experiences.

Q: What is your favorite writing regimen?

A: I generally write on Saturdays or specific spans of time when I am off of work. I tend to light candle(s) because the aroma helps to place a setting for me. I also often listen to music while I write. As an auditory learner I find it helps me process through different scenes.

I tend to write in my living room, either in a chair or on the couch – disturbed often by my nine-year-old golden retriever Daisy. When I'm on vacation I love to write at the beach – with music.

Q: What/who inspires you to write?

A: I am inspired to write because of my relationship with God. I believe we are called to write and I feel blessed to share Him with readers in a real and tangible way. I love romance, partly because I believe the Bible is one giant romance novel.

Q: What one writing goal do you hope to achieve this year?

A: My goal is to complete the first draft of my current novel by the end of January and to have it passed to the publisher by the beginning March.

Q: Who's your favorite author?

A: My favorite romance writer is Judith McNaught, but Julie Garwood is a near second. I love the work of John Jakes.

Q: What are your favorite books?

A: From a romance perspective, I tend to lean into books I've read so often I've needed to replace my copy. I love *Once and Always* by Judith McNaught and *The Villa* by Nora Roberts.

Q: What are you reading now?

A: I just finished *Troubled Waters* by Susan May Warren and *Threads of Suspicion* by Dee Henderson.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

A: I work in fashion retailing in retail analytics. Basically my job is to tell people their ideas didn't work – in a very nice way.... so I smile a great deal as I deliver bad news. I've been volunteering in youth ministry nearly twenty years. And I am single.

I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to connect with other writers and learn.

Visit Courtney Hilbert:

Website: WWW.CEHILBERT.COM

Facebook, CE Hilbert, author

Instagram & Twitter: @cehilbert



Notes on My 2017 Romantic Times Book Lovers Convention Experience

By Linda Rice, Founding Member of COFW

In May 2017, I attended the Romantic Times Book Lovers Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, a 30-year anniversary of my first RT Convention in New York City, and the 34th convention for RT. It was a great party, and I enjoyed seeing people I had met in 1987, as well as the enthusiastic new stars of romance.

Each day offered all kinds of helpful workshops for writers, both on craft, on writing and on marketing. Many free handouts were available. Because of my physical limitations, I was not as able to get around to all the events.

Following are a few helpful sites from some of the exhibits:

01. audiobooks.com. Books on tape.
02. Audiogo.com. Books on tape.
03. audiofilemagazine.
04. Beetifulbookcovers.com. Premade and custom book covers.
05. Beetifulthings.com. Merchandise for book lovers, readers, writer, librarians.
06. Beetifulwebs.com. Websites for authors and their books.
07. Bookpage.com. Romance reviews, interviews and giveaways emailed to you each month.
08. draftyourbook.com. Start, write and finish a draft of your book for a fee.
09. firstromance.com. New romance retail store for readers, including books, weekly releases, favorite authors, value for money.
10. passionflix.com. Turns favorite romance novels into movies and series on demand.
11. romancenarrators.com. Audiobook narrators.
12. tibbsdesign.com. Graphic design services, including book covers, formatting, audio, Facebook headers, banners, bookmarks, business cards, ads, website design and more.

The Romance Times Book Lovers Convention will be in Reno, Nevada, at the Peppermill Resort, May 15-20, 2018. For more info: <https://www.rtconvention.com>.

New Release by Lita Lawson



A Valentine Reunion

Lita's latest novella, *A Valentine Reunion*, will be available February 2018 in the *Love Me Hard* box set, a collection of steamy contemporary romance stories.

What's the sister of the bride to do when the stripper hired for the bachelorette party cancels? She finds a replacement. But during a rare ice storm in Nashville, Whitney Jefferson discovers that good looking men in the cozy hotel bar are few and far between. And the only man available happens to be the one who broke her heart almost ten years ago.

Hunter Campbell, a former one-hit country singer, will do anything to reconnect with the one woman he can't forget. Will Hunter's performance convince Whitney to risk her heart again?

Lita Lawson fell in love with romance and alpha males when her mother took her to see *Gone With the Wind*. An avid reader since she was young, her passion for love stories evolved when she decided to try her hand at writing one. She hopes you enjoy her stories, from the first kiss to the happily ever after. Lita is a member of Romance Writers of America® and lives in Ohio with her husband and three cats.

A **COFW member** off and on for over 15 years, Lita says, "I love COFW as we have so many great speakers at our monthly meetings, annual conference or workshop. COFW has an amazing group of authors willing to share their experience in writing romance. COFW rocks!"

www.litalawson.com

<https://www.facebook.com/authorlitalawson>



New Release by Sophie Jacobs

Match My Heart

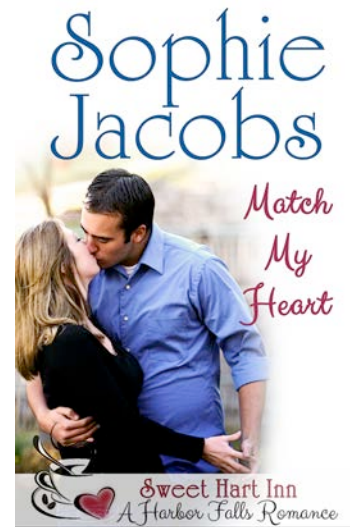
A Harbor Falls Romance, Book 5: Sweet Hart Inn

Suzie Hart Matthews is hard at work on her new cookbook, *Perfectly Matched*, when she asks the local wallflower, Mary Lou Picketts, to help her with a project.

Mary Lou fantasizes about falling in love with country music star Nash Rhodes but is ready to settle for Barry Phillips down the street. After all, Barry has actually popped the question, and the likelihood that Nash Rhodes ever will is slim-to-none. Nash Rhodes is nothing more than a celebrity crush waiting to never happen.

But when Nash comes to Harbor Falls for a music benefit organized by Suzie's husband, Brad, Suzie wonders how she can perfectly match this miss-matched couple. After all, she managed to hook her little sister, Shelley, back up with her old high school boyfriend, Matt, didn't she? Can she do it again?

Preorder now. Releases January 30.



Sophie Jacobs is the author of Harbor Falls Romance series. She writes small town contemporary romance and woman's fiction. Visit her at www.sophiejacobs.com.

Sophie Jacobs, aka COFW member Maddie James, finds networking with other romance writers one of the best aspects of being in COFW.

Getting the Word Out: COFW at Upper Arlington Library's Write Stuff

By Sandra J. Kachurek

With expertise from COFW founding member Karen Harper, the Upper Arlington Library and the Upper Arlington Cultural Arts Division sponsored "The Write Stuff" on January 20 at the Main Library.

Last year, Karen was the keynote speaker and was honored to be asked to be a part of the planning committee for this year's Write Stuff.

Free registration made the all-day event accessible to aspiring and experienced writers and welcomed a diverse audience of high school age to older.

Attendees chose from any one to all nine sessions, including using storytelling as a method for developing written story by national storytelling consultant Dr. Kevin Cordi, and travel and food writing by author, cooking teacher and tour host Shawnie Kelley of Wanderlust Travel Press and Tours.

Mindy McGinnis, Edgar Award-winning

author and blog host of *Writer, Writer Pants on Fire*, was keynote speaker. Her session focused on dealing with drugs, sex, language and violence in YA writing.

"It's surprising what you can get away with when you write it well," she said during a short break in the afternoon. Her voice was barely a whisper from the day's interactions.

The final session offered a panel discussion on publishing and marketing. Panelists included Karen along with Suzanne Jaffe, editor-at-large for a NYC publishing house, former director of Thurber House and author, and Sandra Gurvis, author and freelance writer.



Members Andrea McConnell and Terra Rogerson welcome visitors to COFW during Write Stuff at the Upper Arlington Library.



Member Shari Heinrich (right) participates in "Using Storytelling to Develop Story."

Over 40 people attended the final question-and-answer format.



From left to right, Karen Harper, Suzanne Jaffe, Sandra Gurvis and a library staffer conclude Write Stuff with a discussion on publishing and marketing in Q&A.

In a spacious, sunlit atrium on the library's main floor, an expo of the session authors and other organizations, such as Thurber House, Sisters in Crime of Columbus (SiCCO) and COFW, welcomed all who stopped by their tables.



Some of the members who came out to manage the COFW table at Write Stuff include Terra Rogerson, Shari Heinrich, Susan Heino, and front row Robin Gianna and Karen Harper.

COFW passed out info postcards and chocolate kisses. According to member Donna MacMeans, many people stopped by our table and expressed an interest in attending a COFW meeting.

A Writer on *Jeopardy!*

By Saralee Etter

*“You were on **Jeopardy!**? Wow, you must be smart! I could never do that.”*

I’ve been hearing that a lot lately.

However, two of those three statements are not true: Yes, on January 2 and 3, 2018 I did appear on the long-running TV game show, *Jeopardy!* But I don’t think I’m all that smart, and many people could be *Jeopardy!* contestants, if they chose.

It’s easy to think that *Jeopardy!* contestants are born, not made. That somehow, some people just have a ton of little-known facts at their command and have lightning-like reflexes that allow them to answer.

But just like writing a novel, the finished product – my appearance on the show – was not just a sudden, lucky accident. Like any other goal that we set for ourselves, there may be some luck, but being a contestant on *Jeopardy!* mostly depends on how hard you’re willing to work for it.

So let me tell you how I worked to get on *Jeopardy!*

Like many people, my husband and I have watched the show almost every night of the week for years. We’ve got a little friendly rivalry going on, coupled with a healthy respect for each other’s strong suits—he excels in sports trivia, numbers and American history. I’m good with literature, languages, food and opera.

So when host Alex Trebek announced that the show was offering an online test as the first step toward being a contestant, we both decided to take it. Why not? Later on, I learned that about 70,000 people around the country took the online test when we did, at the end of June.

A few weeks later, I got an email inviting me to a regional audition on August 11 in Pittsburgh, about a three-hour drive from our house. My husband was a bit disappointed not to be chosen, I think, but also relieved not to have the pressure of being a contestant.

I was thrilled. I eagerly accepted and then scurried off to the Columbus Metropolitan Library.



Saralee Etter meets host Alex Trebek during her taping of Jeopardy! in October 2017. (Photo provided by Saralee.)

“Help me!” I begged the librarians. “I’m going to try out to be on *Jeopardy!*. What should I study?”

The librarians loaded me down with almanacs, atlases and resources of all kinds. I read, took notes and researched online. Lists of US Presidents and Vice Presidents. Ken Burns’s Civil War and Vietnam War series. Grammy winners and celebrities. Mnemonics and mind palaces. It’s cool—I enjoy learning new things, which is the key to being a trivia buff.

About 30 people gathered in the hotel conference room for the regional try-outs. I learned that out of the 70,000 people who take the online test, only about 2,000 are invited to a regional in-person audition.

After given a presentation about the inner workings of the show, we took another 50-question test. Then we were called up in groups of three to play a mock game and do a little interview. After that, we went home to wait some more. I still studied and learned, just on the off-chance I’d get on the show. Heck, who knew?

Then, to my delight, I got The Email. I was invited out to tape on October 24 and 25. Of the 2,000 people who are invited to a regional audition, only about 400 per year are needed for the show.



Viewers at home don't see what Saralee sees, strips of lights running down each clue panel on the 10-12 foot tall clue board on the actual Jeopardy! set.

Jeopardy! contestants pay their own travel, hotel and meal expenses when they go to Los Angeles for the show. However, even if a contestant winds up in third place, the \$1,000 they make will probably cover most of the cost.

And hey, for the rest of your life, you made it to The Show. It’s worth it just for the experience.

My fellow contestants were young and old, male and female, white and black. Everyone was bright and friendly and ambitious. It reminded me of my first day at law school – I felt confident because I knew I was pretty smart. Then I discovered that everyone else was pretty smart, too.

At the studio, which is on the old MGM lot, the friendly contestant coordinators gave us papers to sign and explained all the rules -- no cell phones, no contestant is ever left alone, you're escorted and watched all the time, like a sequestered jury. The make-up artist made everyone up, someone else checked on our stories for our chat with Alex, and then we went out to the stage to rehearse.

Being on the *Jeopardy!* set gave me shivers of delight. The clue board is huge, like 10 or 12 feet tall, and there's a strip of lights running down the edges that lights up when it's time to ring in --

you can't see those lights at home because the individual clue takes up the whole TV screen. But those lights are key because you don't want to ring in until Alex finishes speaking and the lights go on.

We rehearsed, and then they called the first contestants of the day: Not me. That was a relief. They tape five games a day -- a whole week's worth -- and it takes about 40 minutes to tape one game. Really, really fast.

I'm not shy. I think that I'm pretty sturdy. I've performed in community theater, sung in my church choir, and given presentations in front of groups. I expected the rush of adrenaline when I stepped up in front of the studio audience. But this experience was much more intense than community theater. By the end of the game, my hands were shaking and my knees were wobbling like I've never felt before.

It takes a surprising amount of energy to concentrate and focus for 30 minutes. There are a total of 61 questions, about a half-minute per question. You have to read the clues faster than Alex is speaking them, decide whether you know the answer or not, and wait for the lights to light up. If you ring in too early, you get locked out. If you wait too long to ring in, someone else will beat you to the answer. If you ring in when you don't know the answer, you risk being wrong.

Breaks in the taping occur at the same points where there would be a break in the aired episode. During each break, people swarm in to touch up your make-up and give you water to sip.

The coordinators tell you how great you look, how much fun it is to watch you play, how much they love, love, love you. Then the game starts again.

Alex is a remote, god-like figure. He is handsome and dapper, kindly but cool. It's hard to believe he's 77 years old.

He doesn't talk to contestants except for a few brief remarks because he can't. He knows all the answers and there must be no hint whatever that he might be showing favoritism. But the nice thing is that when he talks to you, he is focused completely on you. I love the way he listens.

You don't really see your opponents because they are to your sides and you are too busy focusing on answering to worry about them. So that's good.

For "Final Jeopardy," you must choose your wager after you see the category but before you see



Jeopardy! swag include a Jeopardy! ball cap and pens. Here, Saralee celebrates her Jeopardy! debut and first day win with a viewing party at her home.

the question. For that first game, the category was “Novelists.”

Novelists. Hah. I’ve read hundreds and hundreds of novels, in a wide variety of literary traditions and genres. But instead of betting that I knew the answer, I followed the strategy which my husband had patiently explained to me. My bet was modest, assuming that I would get it wrong.

And I did get it wrong. But so did everyone else.

To my utter surprise, I won!

After the game, the coordinators hustled me down to change clothes and then back on the stage to play again. I played a second time, but I was exhausted and the Force was no longer with me. Another player barreled through the categories and I was glad to end the game in a dignified second place position.

Playing *Jeopardy* was a real roller-coaster ride. But still, what a ride! I’m so glad I did it. I’m proud of myself for the effort I put in and for being a contender.



Saralee Etter is the author of three traditional Regency romances. Her next book, coming out during summer 2018 will be part of the *Legend to Love* Regency romance series, with a protagonist based on the legendary Irish hero Cuchulain. She is still working on *A Short Sharp Shock*, the first book in a Victorian-set mystery series featuring sleuth Lucy Turner and her friends, William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan.

Visit her on the web at www.saraleeetter.com or check out her blog, *A Fine Mystery Indeed*, at www.saraleeetter.com/blog1