



# COFW

*Professionals, Writers & Friends Perfecting the  
Happily Ever After*

May 2021

Issue 5

## Welcome to Central Ohio Fiction Writers Newsletter

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**Newsletter Editor:** Rachel Dye

**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.**

## **2021 Leadership Board**

President: Bernie Miller

Secretary: Shari Heinrich

Treasurer: Michelle Orloff

### **Non-Board Positions**

Newsletter Editor: Rachel Dye

Programs Chair: Vacant

Education Chair: Vacant

Social Media Chair: Vacant

Incentives Coordinator: Vacant

Ignite the Flame Contest Chair: Vacant

Monthly Meetings Facility Coordinator: Vacant

Equipment Inventory Coordinator: Vacant

## **Meetings**

First "Teen" Saturday of the Month. Social: Noon to 12:30. Business: 12:30. Guest Presentation: 1:30. Location: Check [www.cofwevents.org](http://www.cofwevents.org)

## **Dues**

New Members: \$35

Renewal before January 31: \$30. After January 31: \$35.

- Dues run January to December
- Membership with Romance Writers of America required.

## **Follow COFW**

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

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

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cofwriters/>

Closed Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/177462723049177/>

**Central Ohio Fiction Writers**

P.O. Box 24254 Dayton, OH 45424

## **Next Meeting: June 19, 2021; Scrivener Lessons with Gwen Hernandez**

*Business meeting at 12:30 pm, Discussion at 1:30 pm*

*Our meeting will be held at The Forge Tavern, <https://theforgetavern.com/> at 1375 Bethel Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220. There will also be an option for attending via Zoom. The password will be posted on the Central Ohio Fiction Writers Group page which can be accessed via the Romance Writers of America website under the Forums tab. If anyone has any questions, email [cofwpresident@gmail.com](mailto:cofwpresident@gmail.com)*

## **COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly - East**

Need a boost with a story idea that has yet to see words on a page? Can't get your protagonist out of a hole you've written her into? Not sure whether the antagonist is antag-ging enough? Consider stopping by the COFW Fiction Plotters group. We meet the first Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Panera Bread in Taylor Square in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, 43068.

If you have questions, contact:

Andrea McConnell: [fyrefly93@gmail.com](mailto:fyrefly93@gmail.com)

Saralee Etter: [saralee\\_etter@yahoo.com](mailto:saralee_etter@yahoo.com)

## **COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly - West**

All the same fun as above but located in Huber Heights. We meet the second Monday of the month at 6:30 pm at the Panera Bread off I-70 exit 36.

If you have questions contact:

Jeanne Estridge: [jeanneestridge@gmail.com](mailto:jeanneestridge@gmail.com)

Rachel Dye: [juliette.r.hyland@gmail.com](mailto:juliette.r.hyland@gmail.com)

## Minutes of the COFW Meeting via Zoom

### May 15, 2021

The May Meeting of Central Ohio Fiction Writers was brought to order at 12:31 PM.

#### I. Welcome

#### II. Attendance/Works in Progress

Approximately 10 Members in attendance, with a quorum of voting members. One guest also in attendance.

##### *WIP Highlights*

- Sandy—worked in sprints last night! She worked on newspaper articles, for writer's workshop. This got her to stop dragging her feet. Finished one, and started the 2<sup>nd</sup>. And needs folks to register.
- Shari—editing her YA shifter book *Chihuahua Tales*, D2. Created a calendar of what to do now through end of August. Read her article in the last month's newsletter.
- Rachel—her 6<sup>th</sup> medical; 4<sup>th</sup> comes out next week. 6<sup>th</sup> is the first one that's a duet, and has to make it so the other author can pick up her half of it. Wrote 3 chapters and synopsis for the Viking one, so her editor, no comments, sent it on to historical acquisitions team.
- Michelle—racing this weekend, 3<sup>rd</sup> book due to editor on Monday! w/a Michelle McCraw
- Stacy—*Ghostly Protector* far too long! Hard, with all that is going on.
- Julia—Finally getting her boxes unpacked, and is on to the one with writing. She's thinking!
- Linda—doing a lot of work, but not much progress. But she's sticking with it.
- Janet—All works in progress are related to Ohio State, a million people got awards, several retired faculty passed away, and she's been doing all that for work, but tries to work in those stories about the folks. When she retires, that's probably when she'll get back to fiction.
- Jeanne—*Demon's Secret Baby*, moved past page 80! Still some problems, but she can finally move forward. Been sprinting 1-5 PM, 5x a week, with a partner.
- Bernie—Fantasy, and the rom-com with the person in London. She writes, and he edits, about 3 chapters left in that romcom.

#### III. Minutes from April Meeting—Minutes are accepted as posted in the newsletter.

#### IV. Reports

##### 1. President Bernie Miller, nothing new

##### 2. Treasurer Michelle Orloff

Michelle shared the April treasurer's report ahead of the meeting, on the COFW loop of RWA. This is a recap of the high points:

At the end of the month our current assets were as follows:

- Checking = \$6,872.28
- PayPal = \$250.00
- Available cash = \$7122.28
- Balance in the Perseverance Fund = \$1,519.90

Changes to account balances this month:

- Expenses of \$200 for April meeting speaker.
- Expenses of \$30 for newsletter articles.

Membership for March remained steady at 31 members.

We gained one new member, which will be reported next month.

During Michelle's report, a question came up, since Julia's membership has lapsed from RWA. Could our perseverance fund be used to assist with that? Answer: No, because the current rules of the perseverance fund have requirements that include the person be a current COFW member, which one cannot be without also being an RWA member.

3. **Programs Chair Jeanne Estridge**, assisted by Shari Heinrich

- May—Growth Hacking a Bestseller, Liz Pelletier. 1:30-5:30 pm, 4-hour workshop. Cannot be recorded; we cannot charge for it, but we can encourage non-members to join.
- June—Scrivener, Gwen Henandez
- July—Beth Barany, Using Brain Science to Finish your Novel. She's charging the non-profit rate, so we cannot charge any attendees.
- August— The Case for Diversity and Inclusion, Jordyn Blanson (this is a presentation on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access)
- September—Trope Your Way to a First Draft, Rachel Dye.
- October— Sexual Tensions, Jeffe Kennedy
- November—Shari mistakenly reported in the meeting it was open, and she'd look, entirely forgetting Patricia Sargeant will likely present, and that she had to finish coordinating topics with her.
- January 2021— Priscilla Oliveras, potentially, and to be confirmed, topic still TBD based on the Facebook poll.

4. **Ignite the Flame—contest not being held this year.**

5. **Education Chair—position vacant.**

As reported by Bernie: Lori Cooper of Pubcraft and Erin and Bernie met, so Lori is putting together a list of potential educators. She'll run and moderate the events. Bernie will share list once he has it.

6. **Incentives**

- Rachel—relatively new podcast, The Categorically Romance podcast, by two bookstagramers with Youtube channels, and she let them know she enjoyed it, they don't know medicals, so she's going to be on it talking medicals! And she's going to send them some books, after they said their local store doesn't carry any medical romances.
- Linda—attended the Crime Writers conference by Kiss of Death. Very involved, very interesting, too bad she doesn't really like to write about murder. But really good conference.
- Shari—got rejected by *Cosmic Roots & Eldritch Tales*, so waiting for *New Myths* submission window (6/1-7/31 subs, 1.5 cents/word.)
- Shari won the tracking spreadsheet for April—she was the only participant. Rachel is kicking butt in May.

7. **Newsletter Editor Rachel Dye:**

*Program Writeup:* Sandy Kachurek will write up today's program, which is Liz Pelletier, "Growth Hacking a Bestseller."

Need to figure out a Mailchimp replacement—it's causing issues again. No longer provides scheduling without paying for Mailchimp; the templates are no longer there. She's moved her stuff to MailerLite, but you need an email address. (e.g., She can use it because she owns a domain).

Rachel's RWA membership expires this summer. So we'll need to figure out what to do to fill the editor's position.

## V. Unfinished Business

In person option for our meeting, coming in June, and we will still Zoom it. Plotters East, are they still meeting? No, not presently. It kind of fell apart, and others go west for that one. Julie had some questions about Plotters East, which the chapter answered, and after the meeting a member volunteered to provide her with more information. It was mentioned Saralee might be interested in Plotters East, if it resumed.

May 18<sup>th</sup> is the HUBER Plotters group, at Panera, if you would like to join, 6 pm.

*Any additional updates on the Dayton-area location for meetings?*

- Sandy: a couple of new events places opening, but prices high. Springfield might be a nice halfway point between Dayton and Columbus.
- The Forge Tavern, the Columbus location until otherwise announced as well as being Zoom meetings. Bernie's friend is willing to host there each month, until we get a Dayton location. He needs just a few days' notice if we're not holding it. He has kindly agreed to even make a small selection of food available for purchase, although he's not open at the time we will meet.
- The Forge Tavern, <https://theforgetavern.com/> at 1375 Bethel Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220.
- *Correction to what was announced at meeting:* the June Plotters West will *not* meet at The Forge Tavern due to a scheduling discrepancy. Bernie will finish testing out the audio-visual capabilities at a different time.

*RWA chapter affiliation status*—From the Heart Romance (FTRW) is voting about disaffiliation, and they did their 30-day notification last week, of the anticipation to vote. Board recommended the disaffiliation. Their vote takes place 1<sup>st</sup> week of June. Passionate Ink has disaffiliated, as has one of the inspirational ones; (Faith, Hope, and Love). Beau Monde? (previously disaffiliated, and is now a different name. They left last year). Would we still be romance writers, if we disaffiliated? This is a safe space for romance, and that's why we like it. Yes, that's the feeling in the room. The energy in the room at a romance writers convention is wonderful.

If we disaffiliated, we'd create our new bylaws. (When COFW started, it WAS for anyone who was interested in writing)

We would surrender 25% of our treasury if we disaffiliate.

**Sandy Kachurek** Motioned that COFW vote on disaffiliation from RWA, following RWA guidelines. Rachel Dye seconded. Shari will perform the 30-days notification to the chapter. The board meets on Thursday (5/20) and will work out more details about the vote and communicate the voting method to the chapter as soon as it is known. Motion passed unanimously.

## VI. New Business—none.

Rachel motioned to adjourn at approximately 1:20 PM; Shari seconded. With no objections, the meeting adjourned. The Program begins at 1:30 PM, Growth Hacking a Bestseller, by Liz Pelletier of Entangled Publishing. This is the 4-hour program.

Respectfully submitted

Shari Heinrich  
Secretary

***Be an Entertainer and a Listener:  
Liz Pelletier's How to Growth Hack a Bestseller***

by Sandy Kachurek

Six hours sitting in on one Zoom call is a long, long time. Whoever would be able to keep the attention of their audience for that length of time would have to be someone special, an expert.

An entertainer.

For COFW and friends, Liz Pelletier was that person.

Non-stop after her "hello" with one 15-minute break at the two-and-a-half hour mark, Liz shared her experiences and expertise with us in her presentation "How to Growth Hack a Bestseller."

And time seemed to fly.

Software engineer for 20 years, employee for eight companies, cofounder of Entangled Publishing in 2011, publisher of over 2700 books, personal editor of 180 of them of which 80% have become bestsellers, Liz knows things.

She knows how to make money selling books. Your books.

But you have to write the books that make the money. Growth hacking a book is not about writing the book you love or the book you've always dreamed of writing. No. To growth hack your books into bestsellers, you have to write books for the money they generate or because books are the products of your career choice.

If you want to be that debut star, that writer of bestsellers, put a concrete goal on a sticky-note and paste it to your computer monitor. Example goals include: *To sell twice as many books as I did the last time. To make \$100,000 writing books. To make \$50 an hour writing books.*

With the written goal right in front of you, you'll be more apt to remain on the lookout for the next opportunity to attract buying readers and more apt to learn how to incorporate the latest best idea into your book.

"Authors are always looking for the next book, next brand, the most current changes in genre," said Liz.

When you know what the latest buzz is in the reading world, you have to make choices about what you're writing and in how you're branding your books and branding yourself as the author.

The choices aren't often easy.

If cowboys are the thing, can you update your brand to cowboys? If "soft" not alpha billionaires are on every romance reader's must-buy list, can you pull out your past published alpha male books and make him softer? Resell the updated books to your "old" audience as well as your new? Can you cut out the opening of your work-in-progress to make it a small town love story rather than a detective one? Can you throw out a story all together and start new to fit your audience's current buying trend? Even if it's a story you love? For Liz, your answers should be "yes."

Say an author made \$500 on her book, which was one of one million books published in 2017. Say it took her 60 days to write that book. She'd be getting paid \$1 per hour. "You need to push that per-hour goal higher," Liz said.

### **To get to a higher-per-hour pay rethink your approach to writing.**

"It's not 'what's in my head' but 'what's going to sell' that's key." Liz related stories of when authors didn't want the book cover that the marketing department created because it wasn't the way their characters looked. "Ask yourself, 'Will this cover sell this book, even if the cover model isn't like the character I created?' That's what's important to growth hacking a bestseller."

What is a growth hacker?

"A growth hacker is a person whose True North is growth (aka selling)." As such, the person is focused on sales and the ability to leverage each sale for multiple additional sales, explained Liz.

She takes a few tips from her father who's a professional blackjack player. "Raise when in favor. Lower when down." If *enemies to lovers* is riding high, focus on it. If it slows and *false engagement* is going up, write that story. "In book terms, every book you sell then sells five more books for you."

Liz said to always push book one in your series because book three is the one that begins to show "a more profitable place." Sell more with each book as you're reselling the old ones. Even if it means rewriting old books. "Don't be afraid to rework or repurpose anything."

Out of her reading and research, Liz listed four points on how to "Focus on What Matters for Growth."

Point 1, Learn from Instagram. Liz related the story of a company called Burbank that started out targeting ocean surfers to its eventually becoming Instagram. Their growth illustrates the need to take out what's **not** selling.

Ask yourself these questions every time you finish your book: Will this book get me more sales? Would I bet my paycheck on this book? "It's how to truly evaluate your book." What if a book doesn't sell? "One 'soft' book is okay," said Liz. "Two 'soft' books and you're gone."

Point 2, Shadow Test, is about being noticed in a crowded marketplace. To do so is to understand how the majority of the public thinks and reacts. "People don't like change," said Liz. "If you've been going to Starbucks that's three miles away for a couple years and an equally good coffee shop opens a half mile away, you'll keep going to Starbucks."

The shadow test for books is if readers like book one, they'll like book two and book three. But if book three and book four is "soft," they'll move on, cautioned Liz.

Point 3, Instill Viral Appeal, is about ads, social media, going where your audience goes to make sure everyone touches your book. "Word of mouth is 80% of selling. If your readers are on Instagram or Pinterest, go there. You need to be seen to go viral."

Point 4, Iterate. Repeat yourself. Keep going at it. Learn from bad reviews. Read them with dispassion. Are they spelling out a trend you're missing? For example, if they don't like your heroine, how can you write her better? Read good reviews with the same dispassion. If they say they love the suspense, put more suspense in the next book.

AirB&B is a good example of Iteration. The B&B company saw that people were uncomfortable sleeping on strangers' couches and eating strangers' breakfasts. So out went the B&B and in came AirB&B where you can rent the whole house to yourself. The point here is to "keep iterating your books, but make each one fit what people want, even when it means making changes," said Liz.

## **What makes a book a bestseller?**

Liz defines a bestseller as a book read in one sitting. "Unputdownable." She elaborates by asking what is it about the book that causes people to want to connect to it. "Why do readers read on in spite of the kids making noise in the background? Why do they call in sick to work because they pulled an all-nighter to read your book?"

It's the storytelling.

"You are a storyteller. You are an entertainer," said Liz.

Try reading aloud your first chapter to someone, such as your kids or your sister. What's their reaction? When do they pause? When do they roll their eyes? When do you lose them?

"It's why you don't open your book with the weather, the alarm clock, a big description of the conference room table, or have too many characters," said Liz. "You've got to ask yourself if this is the most entertaining way to tell the story."

How do you entertain?

Start with a high concept. Maybe take a familiar high concept and give it a twist.

Popular high concepts include *snakes on a plane*, *orphan discovers he's actually a wizard and the only one who can beat the big bad guy*, *Cinderella*, *asteroid about to hit Earth*, *new girl falls for a dangerous vampire*.

A twist on Cinderella could be "what if Cinderella got pregnant?" Liz's point is to keep it simple. "Simple sells. It should take less than 10 minutes to sell the concept."

### **To create fresh high concepts brainstorm responses to "What's going to sell in a year?"**

Liz gave an example in commercial fiction using a high concept about the wall to keep out immigrants. "What if we built a wall to keep immigrants out and 10 years later the wall is keeping all Americans in?" That's putting a twist on a popular headline.

Liz added that blue collar billionaires are very hot right now. So are romcoms, cowboys and sports romance. Small towns opening up to new residents is happening more frequently lately-- could the next bestseller involve that concept?

Other high concepts she gave as examples include *people escaping the noise of America*, *people wanting to belong somewhere*, and *Australian men are still hot*.

Where do you find high concepts?

One place is an app that Liz uses called Flipboard, which gives her her selected preferences on headlines and trends. Another way is to ask your critique members and anyone who might read your book if they want to read a story about \_\_\_\_\_. "If you don't get an overwhelmingly excited response, reevaluate your book," said Liz.

A romance reader is a good source for evaluating your high concepts. Liz said the average romance reader buys six romance books at a time.

With the high concept chosen, character is also key to creating a bestseller.

It's a universal trait for humans to find how we relate to others and how they relate to us. "The universal character, therefore, is likable, sympathetic, empathetic, misunderstood, marginalized," said Liz.

These same traits work for males as well as females. "Cinderella works for everyone."  
**Brainstorm your first and second characters.**

Who is the main protagonist? Who would be the best foil for her or him or them?  
"Opposites attract. The main character and the foil should have opposite goals, ideologies, etc."

If in doubt, ask others if they would read a story about \_\_\_\_\_. "Keep it simple," Liz reminded us. "Simple always sells. Create the simplest situation. Spend more time on the people."

Meet-Cute is a must-have element of a romance's two protagonists. What kind of a meet-cute leads to a book being a bestseller?

Liz gave examples of meet-cutes. *Least attractive woman at a wedding is caught on a kiss-cam kissing the hottest guy in the room. Woman runs away from the city to write cowboy romances when the landlord sees her list of story-boyfriends and mistakes them as her own husband-to-be shopping list.*

"The focus should be on making the **people** interesting, not the scene," said Liz. She pointed out *The Negotiator* by Avery Flynn as an example where "soft" billionaires are hot not alpha ones.

How do you arrive at meet-cutes? Jot down possibilities. Ask others which meet-cutes they'd love to read about. Keep it simple.

Getting immediate feedback is important. Using a critique group is good, though Liz cautioned against getting chapter by chapter feedback. She related a story by Apple cofounder Steve Jobs about a rock tumbler where rough, knobby stones go in and the friction of the tumbler makes them come out gorgeous. "You need that immediate feedback as to what isn't going to be loved by your readers."

### **Good books need good conflicts.**

To arrive at conflict ideas ask yourself, Why can't your protagonist win? Why can't he/she/they be together? In what way can the antagonist win and how do you make the antagonist sympathetic? The conflict must be believable.

Liz pulled from the *Twilight* series for her example where the main conflict is *it's not safe for vampires to be with humans*. About midpoint, the human protagonist is playing a game of softball with the "good" vampires and everything is happy, but soon the hunter vampires show up and the story is back into its conflict.

"At the midpoint, the characters need to think they are going to win, when they are most confident. It's also the point to illustrate why they feel everything is going to be okay," said Liz. To get to your midpoint, imagine what every main character has to sacrifice to win, and include the antagonist.

Liz said a great climax contains emotion, a sacrifice, is unexpected (even if only expressed through dialogue), and is difficult.

### **Whether pantser or plotter, what you do before you start to write your bestseller**

**counts.** What is necessary is beginning with some foreknowledge of your story.

Jot down these six basics or beats: 1) the high concept, (2) the hook, (3) the set-up, (4) the meet cute, (5) the midpoint, and (6) the climax.

These six beats, said Liz, "make up 20% of your book. They affect your sales. They cause your book to go viral. Nail these six beats and you'll write an amazing book."

"Even if just two of the points, your set-up and climax, are the most amazing out of the six beats, your book will be excellent," she added. "Even an excellent climax alone can sell a mediocre book."

And once you've got those six beats in your head or on your list? "Pants away," said

Liz. What if it takes you a long time to write? What if you deviate? Liz offered some

answers.

Be a bracket writer. To speed up the writing time, use brackets and a tiny detail to signify a spot you'll go back to later; for example, bracket "creepy ass castle" and then move on. Bracket where a simile or metaphor will go and move on. Bracket what you most hate. For Liz, it's choreographing scenes. "I'll put in brackets and write 'head on hand' and move on."

On the subject of deviating from the story, it's fine as long as the idea behind each planned element remains.

Don't give out your chapters one at a time to be evaluated. When the entire book is done, Liz suggests you ask someone to read it from start to finish. Then have them write a harsh Goodreads Review and make it emotional. "The Worst Book Ever by Goodperson," could be its title. Use the negative comments to make the book better.

Liz also cautioned authors not to write one chapter then edit it before writing the next chapter. "With every edit, you lose your voice, the story has no breath, no oomph, or too much voice or too many similes or metaphors."

**Liz's Editing Handbook will continue to perfect your bestseller.**

At this point in her presentation, Liz began to offer many, many points to use as a guide to perfecting your story to bestseller status.

Her editing system contains six steps: 1) Simple is Better; (2) Entertainment; (3) Fresh is Best; (4) Edit Less, Write More; (5) You Can't Make More Time; and (6) Pacing is Priceless.

Highlights of her system include:

- ~If your book starts too slow, do a new beginning rather than tweaking the old.
- ~Look at what's missing. The best scene may still be in your head.
- ~Don't be afraid to cut, cut, cut.
- ~Don't be afraid to change the ending because you may not have written the perfect ending yet. But wait until all changes in the book are made before looking closely at the ending.

In step four, Edit Less, Write More, Liz recommends four passes:

- ~First pass is all holistic reading, it's not about the words.
- ~The second pass is line editing but ignoring all but the most serious of craft issues.
- ~The third pass is the writing craft line edit.
- ~Fourth pass is the line edit to note mistakes in grammar, syntax, timeline, etc.

Beta readers are important, too. Liz offers these questions to ask of your beta reader:

- ~What is or isn't fresh and memorable? (Is it interesting enough to be told to others?)
- ~Does each character have no other choices?

- ~Are you ever bored? (The story can be complex without being complicated.)
- ~Can you see what will happen next?
- ~Are the characters likable?
- ~Is the story likable?

### **Voice is another challenge to writing a bestseller.**

Voice is created through "word choice," said Liz. It involves style and phrasing and results in a "narrator you can't stop thinking about." Point of view helps to differentiate each character's voice.

Does each character have a unique vocabulary? unique phrasing?" Does the work, as a whole, have quotable moments? "Similes and metaphors light up the brain. You want to place them where you want your readers to care. Where they get the 'gut punch,'" said Liz.

To rev up the voice, enhance its likability and make scenes memorable. Comedy scenes need space to develop a joke. An example of a good comedic book is *Butterface* by Avery Flynn (The one where the not-so-pretty girl is on a kiss-cam with the hot guy). The book "curves the language." An example of curving the language is seen in a memorable *Seinfeld* episode that takes the description of a chef who makes the best soups but has a nasty temper with customers and curves it up to where the Seinfeld cast refers to the chef as a "Soup Nazi."

The story's beginning, the first three pages, needs a strong voice. That strong voice needs to be

likable, relatable, memorable, authentic, start quickly, and grip readers. "Even if your hook is not directly related to the story, use it and transition later."

### Fixing Character Flubs

To make a character more likable, soften the verbs. To make a character more interesting and less weak amp up the verbs. Have her walk not stalk. Set the cup down instead of slamming it on the table. Ask questions, not demand answers. Adding internal thoughts as if spoken is another method to increase likability.

If your character is boring, maybe the struggle isn't understood clearly enough or maybe the character needs to be more sympathetic. Add more internal dialogue, add more quirks and character flaws, more obstacles. Make her/him/them more everyday and relatable.

Liz used an opening from a book to illustrate how to make a scene more interesting using techniques called Bookends and Instalove. It also points out that hopes and dreams have to matter later.

Defined, Bookends means having the final scene in some way mirror the opening scene (a good thing). Instalove is the perception by the reader that the romance isn't convincing (a bad thing that needs to be fixed).

An example of Bookends: in the opening scene, the protagonist spills out a bag of M&Ms, picks out the green ones, puts them in a plastic bag and tosses them into her freezer, which has a few other bags of green M&Ms. A nice hook and the reader forgets about the M&Ms until later at the Moment of Vulnerability when the character reveals to her love interest that her mother, who recently died, only ate the green M&Ms. The character's struggle here with the concept *enemies to lovers*, is her difficulty in moving on. The Aaaah Moment (and the Bookend) in the end is when we see she has put the green M&Ms on his office desk.

To create an empathetic character, ask yourself, did we feel their pain? A lead character must be "unforgettable," said Liz.

To fix an un-empathetic character:

- ~add visceral reactions (heartbeats)
- ~limit initial drama. Readers will put up an emotional wall if we think something is going to be painful.
- ~limit reactions: not too much falling, sobbing, heart-ripping; instead, silently stare in the distance while falling apart inside

To fix a problem with the character being too annoying:

- ~make actions have believable motivation and the reactions consistent with the character
- ~avoid autobiographical characters
- ~use consistent phrases for reaction beats, such as saying "dammit" whenever the character is stumped; the moment they don't say it will really stand out

To fix pacing issues, be sure your plot is well structured, there's enough white space on the page, and the stakes keep escalating.

Liz emphasized the need to know your story's beats for good pacing. "They affect sales." To illustrate, she showed a visual diagram that balanced seven areas of every story. Using 100% as her total, she divided her sections this way:

- 01 Meet-Cute, 10%
02. Challenge Accepted, 10%
03. Heart of the Story (If you have a problem in your romance, it's here), 30-40%
04. Midpoint, one page
05. Pulse of the Story Beat (A pacing problem will be here.), 30-40%
06. Epic Fail, (They lose everything.), 10%
07. Sacrifice (Demonstrate that they really changed.), 10%

### **Beginnings are very important.**

Here are some No-Nos:

- ~No more than two-three characters max on the first three pages
- ~No backstory or info dumping
- ~Avoid clichés or overused situations (waking up to an alarm, looking in a mirror, getting fired) ~Don't make things too convenient or coincidental
- ~Avoid too much exposition and description. (The reader learns the world as the character does.) ~Avoid too much set-up
- ~No boring or convoluted beginnings
- ~Avoid overly complicated beginnings

Liz has probably read and dealt with every possible problem stopping a book from becoming a bestseller. She continued to offer fixes for when your beta reader says certain areas weren't positive.

Pacing is an area where problems can exist. If your reader says a character is "boring" or the story is "slow," consider these areas to turn the negative to positive.

### **How to Fix Pacing**

- ~Add a ticking time bomb, a character getting a goal or losing a goal, a deadline
- ~Remind readers of the stakes or increase the stakes
- ~Look for clichés, predictable or unoriginal scenes
- ~Make sure every scene ends in disaster and know when to pause
- ~Kill something or someone important
- ~Cut every scene not important or central to the Pulse of the Story
- ~The Midpoint ends in foreshadowing
- ~Make conflicts seemingly impossible to overcome
- ~Add more white space by shortening paragraphs
- ~Trim dialogue

## **How to Fix End of Scene Hooks**

Liz said every end scene must leave the reader wondering what happens next, give the reader something to worry about, make the reader anticipate a disaster. How can you do great end of scene hooks? Liz used the movie *Leap Year* as her illustration for fixing Romantic Arc issues.

~In Instalove, you have to have a scene where the characters have a moment of vulnerability for them to believably fall in love.

~If Instalove is off, most likely a scene is missing from the Heart of the Story ~Repurpose an existing scene or add a new one in the Heart of the Story to reveal something personal

~Repurpose or add a new scene in the Heart of the Story where the reader sees what life might look like after the book is over

~Add an epilogue that's two years into the future

## **How to Fix Endings**

Check to ensure your bestseller's ending contains these elements; Growth, Sacrifice, is Fresh, is Unexpected and Bookends the story well. Liz used the movie *Jerry Maguire* for the best illustration of a perfect ending.

When you are through with the entire book, not just a chapter or two, and it's time for an outsider to critique your book, Liz said to give it to one or two people at a time. Have the readers mark where they stopped. Examine those stop-points for why and correct them.

Liz explained, "Work smarter. Not harder. It's better to sell 10,000 units of one book than 1,000 units of 10 books." You can't afford to mar your LCV, Lifetime Customer Value. "Two stinkers and you lose customers. If you have two or more stickers, take them off the market."

## **Back to Marketing**

Liz returned to where she began her presentation, the marketing of a bestseller and how you can be a growth hacker for your books. "Publicity is free" said Liz. "You risk losing all your money if you don't have enough publicity before your book ads begin to run." Marketing, on the other hand is paid. "Readers need to believe someone else believes in a product before they'll try it."

Understanding the market makes your own creation of free publicity successful. There are points to consider when looking at how best to publicize your book. They are also the points that marketing teams look at in the book-buying world. Remember the number one point in the marketing world for romance books: the need for entertainment.

Find out what to incorporate in your publicity by discovering:

~What books are selling now

~Who'll want to buy your book (and go to those people who **will** buy it)

~What they'll get in your book (a laugh, a personal triumph, love)

~How they'll respond to your book (laughter, tears)

Define the Targets: Your Brand + Your Books + Readers' Age Group + Readers' Social Media Platforms.

The answers you get begin the step of packaging the idea of your book and selling it. "Make the idea simple, concrete, experiential (what you imagine it to be), recognizable, and cohesive," said Liz.

Human behaviors, particularly the human tendency toward commitment and consistency, are applied to marketing and publicity strategies for book readers/buyers. The terms include:

Theory of Mind: to predict or explain readers' thoughts, desires and intentions and producing the book that matches

Mental Stimulation: what readers get out of your books; for example, laugh til you cry, a kind of a hero. Put it in terms of the outcome if they buy your books.

Reciprocity: people feel indebted when you do them a favor. It's how you can get more reviews. Favors can be contests where you award the winner and acknowledge the non-winners.

Compliance: when we are uncertain, we look around to see what others are doing. Using language for your books, such as "Over One Million readers ..." creates that feeling of "if all those readers are buying your book, I should, too."

Authority: people want to follow the lead of real experts. Use high-profile quotes and awards on your covers.

Liking: people say "yes" to those they know and like, which makes social media an effective influencer of sales. If consumers know and like the author or know and like similar things the author likes, they will buy the author's books.

Scarcity: people like to want things; the more rare, the more uncommon, the more people want it. "Limited time only" is useful. Apply a limited time period for access to your deleted scenes, your give-aways, your ARCs.

Keep in mind, readers need to see something 20 times before buying it.

### **Connecting with Your Audience as an Introvert or Extrovert**

"Find your natural comfort level," said Liz. If you love photos, use Instagram for connecting to your readers. If actual participation with your audience is comfortable for you, head to the social media platforms that encourage interaction.

When out with your audience, never say anything you don't want others to believe. If you Instagram about coffee a lot than mark your coffee drinkers as your core audience. Mingle. Find out similarities. Join online groups. Be on Pinterest.

What are your social brands? You don't have to put something out there that's new every time. Overlap them online. Rotate topics. For example, Monday love dogs; Tuesday tolerate kids; Wednesday coffee; Thursday tacos; Friday couch crash; Saturday and Sunday socials. Readers won't notice the schedule of topics.

Realize that blogs and websites are for "old ladies," said Liz. But keep your website updated and focus on your social media presences, keeping them updated along with testimonials on Amazon.

Whatever you do, use your publicity with engagement. Use videos and photos. **Psychology of Advertising**

Liz concluded her presentation, "How or Growth Hack Your Bestseller," showing book ads and explaining how the positioning of the people, objects, shapes and words helped draw the reader's attention. With everything else you do to sell your books, the psychology of human behavior applies to advertising.

Overall, Liz's message is to Act, Evaluate, Act, Evaluate.

Core target demographics. Add those demographics to your interest data and preferred social media. Compare those lists and find the similarities. Create a weekly list of participation guidelines. Keep a notebook of newsy items. Keep a list of positive phrases for your book's brand. Find key influencers in the market. Outline your giveaways and align them to your tasks.

Remember, Liz repeated, NO ONE goes to websites anymore for their author and book information. They're going to social media and Amazon testimonials. Make sure when they get there, they will find everything they need to buy your books.

Key takeaways to growth hacking your bestseller are to "make the next book better than the last book." Focus on quality, not quantity.

To Bookend her presentation of how to growth hack a bestseller, Liz repeated the importance of being an entertainer and a listener. She used the image of a person tapping out a song on a tabletop and asking someone to identify it. It's almost impossible because the tapper is making un-identifiable sounds. Liz doesn't want you to be a tapper for your books. Be a listener. Listen to your readers. Listen to what they want to read and make sure they will find it in your books.

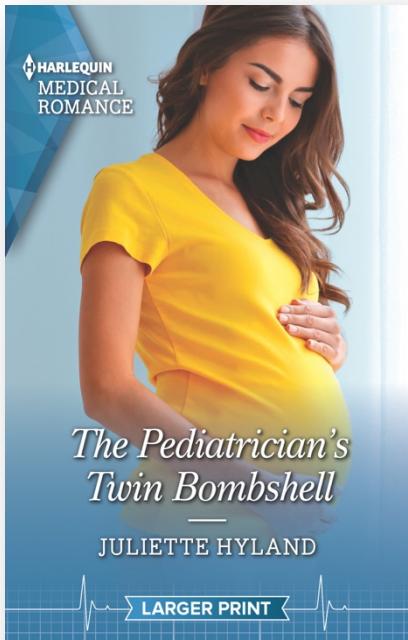
## New Releases:

### *The Pediatrician's Twin Bombshell* Juliette Hyland

**The wrong time...  
...to meet Mr. Right?**

Why is pediatrician Tessa all work and no play? Well, she's far too used to people not believing in her. Still, Tessa can't resist one—*incredible!*—night in nurse Gabe's arms...and the chance to *feel wanted*. But it's not just Tessa who is battling her past. Widower Gabe has his own scars to heal. So when Tessa discovers she's pregnant, he's determined to look after her! But is Tess ready to trust Gabe?

**Available Now!**





Want to track a daily word count and compete with your fellow COFW members for the highest point total? Add your name and goals to our Magic Spreadsheet here: <https://bit.ly/2Wprwt0>

April Winner: Shari Heinrich  
The winner gets Eddie!

## **Introducing MARCIE, an A.I. platform developed for authors**

Notes captured by Shari Heinrich during the presentation

During the social prior to the May meeting, Nikhil Shah, husband of our Karin Shah, spoke about the A.I. marketing software he is developing. Nikhil needs help with beta testing, which is why he's approaching us, giving us "first look."

Marcie would help with book discoverability; make it easier on us to market, and more cost effective.

Origin: He saw the difficulties Karin went through in getting her books discovered by readers, and converting those who see it into purchasers.

Traditional conversion factor is 100 views, 1 buyer.

Marcie is a mix of AI, automation, marketing. IF Ironman can have Jarvis, why can't writers have the same kind of assistance to get them writing?

Yes, others are attempting something like this, but he's trying to develop it for promotion, to get those sales.

Your promo, does your book get recognized? What format of promo worked best? Did you gain more followers? Driving actions through analytics means you spend LESS time marketing, and more time writing. Promote as many books as you want during beta, so Marcie can keep learning.

We would tell him feedback, what worked for us, what didn't, if we had *x*, that would really make me use it, and so on. Features are still in development, so features won't be 100%. Your feedback will help him figure out what else to add, to modify.

Amazon has this kind of technology, but individual authors, *you* don't.

How long will test go on? Rest of year, continuously, but he'll rotate authors in and out of the queue.

How often will we need to give feedback? Once a week, he likely will provide feedback to *you*, how you're doing. (His tech will also "listen" to conversations online, to see what hashtags are currently hot.)

He'll automate to hit hot times of twitter, so *you* don't have to do it.

For published authors. Could be novels; could be, as Shari asked, published in anthologies.

He'll send output through emails—no user interface for us yet. Probably in spreadsheet format.

He'll start with auto-tweeting, so your follows will find it. (and then eventually get onto other platforms, like Pinterest)

As shared in the slide deck ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1\\_j3AAowCQPwA3fU-I2W8mQ60tFcB8xi8/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_j3AAowCQPwA3fU-I2W8mQ60tFcB8xi8/)), you can reach him at [nikhil@dataproduct.company](mailto:nikhil@dataproduct.company). You'll fill out a form to register, and sign a confidentiality agreement.

# COFW

*Professionals, Writers & Friends Perfecting the  
Happily Ever After*

