



October, 2017.

Volume XXIX. Issue 9.

Welcome to Central Ohio Fiction Writers

The September meeting spotlighted tips and techniques of self-publishing with advice by long-time COFW member Aleta Dodson writing as Lita Lawson and guest Kat Sheridan. Lita's journey into indie publishing was the backdrop for her presentation on editing and formatting one's own work. Kat focused on writing the best book description, also called the blurb or back cover copy.

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COFW 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.

Volume XXIX. Issue 9/1

Lita Lawson and Kat Sheridan: Essentials of Self-Publishing

Recap by Saralee Etter

The September COFW meeting focused on tips and techniques on self-publishing with advice provided by Lita Lawson and Kat Sheridan.

Longtime COFW member Aleta Dodson writing as Lita Lawson shared her writing journey with the group. Aleta 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.

Writing as Lita Lawson, she tells steamy romantic tales featuring her beloved alpha heroes. One of the multiple-author box sets she was in, *20 Delicious Wedding Nuptials*, reached *USA Today* bestseller status in April 2017. Her novella, *Kentucky Bluegrass Wedding*, is the follow-up story to *Foolish Gamble*, her first published book.

She submitted her work to Harlequin Romance and although she received a number of requests for full manuscripts, she didn't get a contract. With her husband's encouragement, she decided to self-publish her books. Three of her works are available now: *Foolish Gamble*, *Candidate for Love*, and *Kentucky Bluegrass Wedding*. A new story *Ice* will be available soon.

The changes in the publishing industry that have allowed Lita to pursue an indie author career have given her insight into some aspects of publishing that traditional authors usually don't know about, but a savvy self-publisher needs to learn. Among them are making sure the book is properly edited and choosing the best formatting options.

Lita explained three types of edits: Critique partners' input, Content or Developmental Edits, and Line Edits or Proofreading.

Critique partners and critique groups usually swap stories, allowing all participants to get feedback and editing for free. Since the members are all writers, they have a certain level of skill in writing and identifying issues with a manuscript. Sometimes authors who develop a following will have beta readers or fans who, for the privilege of getting a first glance at a favored author's story, are willing to read an advance copy of a novel and comment on it.

Content editors, or developmental editors, vary in what they do. Some help an author work on



Lita Lawson shares her expertise in self-publishing.

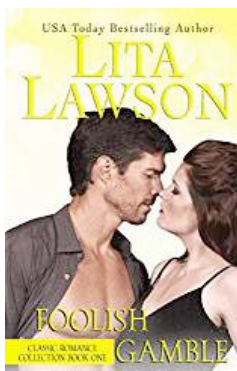
story structure and plot issues including timeline and continuity; others focus on style and clarity of the writing, and some do both.

Proofreaders or line editors make sure the grammar and spelling are accurate.

What types of editors does an indie author need? All of them, Lita says. Being a self-published author can get expensive since the writer is taking on the role of publisher too, but she warns writers not to skip this step.

Even if you have talented critique partners reading your work, you need a professional content editor. A decent price range for a content editor to work on a 50K-word manuscript would be \$500, she noted.

There are many ways to find an editor. Recommendations can come from other authors or writing groups, or a trip to the Amazon/KDP online author forums can turn up a number of good candidates.



Lita's first self-published book.

Formatting the manuscript for e-publication is the next task. For those who are not technologically inclined, it may be best to pay someone to do the formatting. If a writer is publishing only on Amazon, it is a lot easier than publishing “wide” – that is, offering the book for sale on multiple platforms, including Kobo, Createspace, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords, or other places. For those who plan to do their own formatting, Smashwords has a free guide on formatting, which is helpful.

Some options for writers wanting to hire a formatter include Formatting4U, a service provided by Judi Fennell, and Enterprise Book Services, run by Stacy McKittrick’s husband.

The writing program Scrivener has a feature that allows the user to format books for epub, PDF and mobi. For Mac computer users, the Vellum program creates beautifully formatted books.

Lita hasn’t made a lot of money yet, but there are other satisfactions to being a published author. “I’m still a starving artist, but my stuff is out there – and it’s fulfilled a goal of mine.”

Next, Kat Sheridan discussed how to write a book description, or a blurb, for your books.

Kat is a self-published historical author who is addicted to gothic novels and any romance that includes storms, castles, bat-shit crazy villains, and a high body count. Heroes and heroines must be larger than life. She is excessively fond of shiny things and bourbon and is non-functioning until she's had her coffee. Her latest release is the Victorian Gothic Romance *Echoes in Stone*.

Kat is also the author of a non-fiction book, *Blurb Your Novel*, where she offers help to authors

struggling to write their book blurb: also known as the back cover copy, book description, or blurb.



Writing blurbs was what Kat Sheridan did for friends before it became a business.

Many authors do struggle with this task. Kat explained that in a recent survey, 21.9% of those responding indicated that they were afraid of dying; 49% responded that they were afraid of public speaking. It goes to show that people are more afraid of public speaking than they are of dying.

Add to that the fact that most writers are introverts, and it's clear that writers are often less than eager to engage in the marketing, selling and promotional activities that are so necessary for their books' success.

"Your blurb is your second-best marketing tool," Kat said. After the book's cover image, which is the most important marketing tool for a book, the book's

description is the way to reel a potential reader in, to take them from the curiosity, which was piqued by the cover image, to actually feeling a need to buy and read the story.

A good blurb, Kat said, is like an ad for a striptease joint: Reveal enough to entice the customers but hide enough that the customer wants to pay to see more. It's not a road map, but an invitation to begin the journey and discover the path. Most of all, a good blurb creates an emotional response in the reader.

Luckily, there is a framework for writing blurbs, basic elements that are always there. Those elements include:

Main Character can be described in a two- or three-word phrase (adjective-noun-character name). For example, "Starfleet Captain James T. Kirk" gives you his job title plus a hint of the science fiction setting and genre. "Manhattan socialite Gilda Goldengirl" tells you where the story takes place and what her position in society is, hinting at her character.

GMC or Goal, Motivation, Conflict can provide the reader with a quick understanding of the story's direction. GMC can be stated as "The character wants (*goal*) because (*motivation*) but can't have it or get it because (*conflict*)."

Time/Setting of the story should be mentioned in some way.

Key Words that your target audience will understand and identify with.

Inciting Incident, known as the event or confrontation that gets the ball rolling.

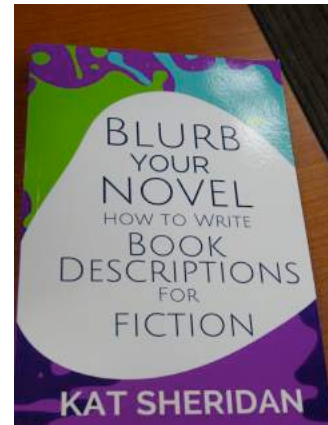
Vivid Words. The colorful and dramatic prose can be used to one's best advantage here.

Killer Last Line or a call to action at the end. How will this obstacle be overcome? (Not "can" the obstacle be overcome because most genre conventions require that the obstacle will be overcome somehow--the pleasure of the story is finding out how the solution happens, not if.)

Tone and Voice should match the blurb to the book. Don't have a dark and eerie blurb for a romantic comedy. Don't have a bouncy, upbeat blurb for a tragedy, such as *Romeo and Juliet*.

When you have a romance novel with two protagonists, which character should be mentioned in the blurb first? Start with the character who has the most at stake. Then mention their partner. Follow with explaining how each of their conflicts come into, well, conflict. Finally, end with the central question: How will they both get what they want and live happily ever after?

After explaining the before-and-after versions of two blurbs, Kat offered lists of do's and don'ts.



Kat's expertise is available in her book on Amazon.

Do use present tense and active voice. Do be clear, concise, and compelling. Do proofread, proofread, proofread. **Don't** list the entire cast of characters. Don't give away spoilers. Don't tell the readers how to feel. Don't forget to proofread, proofread, proofread!

For more information, Kat Sheridan has published a helpful guide, *Blurb Your Novel*, which is available on Amazon.com.

If trying to write a blurb still seems daunting, you can hire Kat to write the blurb through her service at blurbcopy.com. No need to send her the whole book because a questionnaire on her website will provide Kat with all the information she needs to write the blurb.

The publishing world has surely changed over the last decade. Thanks to Lita Lawson's and Kat Sheridan's presentations, authors wishing to explore their publishing and promotional options have more insight into the world of self-publishing.



Recap Writer, Saralee Etter. After years of writing newspaper articles, public relations releases, and legal briefs, Saralee Etter published three sweet Regency romances and a sexy contemporary fantasy. Now she is working on a Victorian murder mystery series with sleuth Lucy Turner and featuring Gilbert & Sullivan. The first book *A Short Sharp Shock* will be coming soon. You can find Saralee at <http://www.saraleeetter.com> and at her blog, A Fine Mystery Indeed, www.saraleeetter.com/blog1

Minutes for September 16, 2017, Norwich Township Building

The meeting began with a welcome and call to order at 12:35 p.m.

Stacy McKittrick approved the July minutes, seconded by Julia Blaine, and approved by members. Aleta Dodson w/a Lita Lawson approved the minutes from August, seconded by Julia and approved by all.

The Nominations Committee requires three members, one of which is the current chapter president. President Jenessa McRoy will serve. Two more are needed. Members are to email Jenessa if interested.

Recent Board decisions included the following:

Changes in COFW dues structure to make it easier for the treasurer:

For 2017, new membership costs \$25.

For 2018, new membership increases to \$30.

Renewal for current members is \$25, if paid by January 31.

After January 31, the cost is \$30.

Events Chairs will report to the Program Chair, eliminating the need for event chairs to attend Board meetings.

Conference/Workshop Fee Reimbursement language in the *Policy and Procedures Manual* (PPM) clarified. If more than one chair is hosting a conference or a workshop, COFW will split the registration fee reimbursement for the workshop as well as the conference.

Old website material needs to be removed. Jenessa will contact Romance Writers of America (RWA) to see if they can help us. Her personal email address is still on display on the old site.

The 2017 *Ignite the Flame* contest participants and revenue were down from 2016. Surveys will go out to entrants from the past two years, seeking input by asking what was good and what was bad about the contest. Discussion followed.

Donna MacMeans suggested allowing published authors to enter without restrictions. The survey might include whether published authors would participate if this was the case.

Robin Gianna suggested replacing the current contest with a cover art contest. If the survey indicated a preference for a cover art contest, the contest chair title may change from *Ignite the Flame* Chair to Contest Chair in the PPM. The contest would be reformatted if survey results indicated the change to increase entries.

Jenessa discussed the amount of inquiries she's received regarding upcoming meetings. For

consistency, all inquiries should be forwarded to the Chapter Secretary listed on the website. She would explain the two-meetings-before-joining rule, the many excellent programs COFW offers, and a welcome to people to join us.

Treasurer Stacy reported \$8,579.34 in Checking; \$2,496.10 in PayPal; \$1,564.47 in the Financial Assistance Account for a total of \$11,075.44 available for expenses.

Workshop Chair Linda Rice provided an update for the October 21 Workshop with Larry Brooks. She is waiting for info from Larry Brooks for promotion. Currently, 29 have enrolled, which is normal according to past history. Most attendees enroll just before the workshop. Linda will ask webdeveloper Rachel Conner to add "Space Limited" to the website to create a sense of urgency.

Secretary Jeanne Estridge will ask Sharon Short to promote the workshop in her Sunday Arts column of the *Dayton Daily News*. [Ed. Note: This suggestion has been done. Jeanne also asked Fred Marion, who writes a popular weekly local writing newsletter, to promote the workshop and he will.]

Julia Blaine will chair the raffle for the workshop. Contact her to donate a basket. Please remember that raffle baskets help offset the cost of the workshop.

Incentives Chair Julia recognized the following:

Jeanne received the first draft of her new author website from Spark Creative. Shari Heinrich's (absent) manuscript reached 56K, and she registered for Write Now conference; Aleta Dodson w/a Lita Lawson submitted a manuscript to Harlequin but was rejected. Amalie Berlin had two releases. Stacy served on "The Vampire Diaries" panel during DragonCon. Rachel Dye's book proposal was accepted by Harlequin. Eva Gangloff signed a contract with an agent. Julia sent a proposal to SoulMate Publishing. Donna noted that Karin Shah (absent) can sing -- karaoke at 2017 RWA National Conference.

Social Media Chair Andrea McConnell explained that sometimes other organizations approach COFW about advertising their events. Generally, we don't do this. If we advertise, it implies endorsement. If we do advertise, it is nearby chapter events and RWA-sponsored events. She reminded everyone that she'll promote releases, blog posts, etc. for all members.

The membership brainstormed ideas to improve COFW's social media presence. Ideas included: thinking outside the RWA box and attracting non-romance authors; possibly creating a shared blog, a topic Robin will add to the November agenda, which will be on brainstorming ideas to enhance COFW; anyone writing articles for the newsletter (other than speaker recaps) can also have them posted on the blog; the situation would need a blog chair unless it became a part of the responsibilities of the social media or newsletter chair.

On behalf of Programs Chair Sheri Adkins, Robin updated programs for the rest of the year. November's program will be a sharing session and small group brainstorming. The holiday party

is set for Saturday, December 2, noon, at Robin Gianna's home. The location will be posted on the email loop and not the website.

Newsletter Chair Sandy Kachurek thanked Saralee Etter for being recap writer for the day's speakers. She asked to receive info about new releases from members and reminded the authors to include a response to "Why are you in COFW?" in their new release material. Articles in the newsletter pay \$15. Non recap articles can be republished in other chapter newsletters, which may or may not pay. COFW does not pay for republished articles posted in the newsletter.

Ignite the Flame Contest Chairs, Jane Conner and Nancy White, were absent.

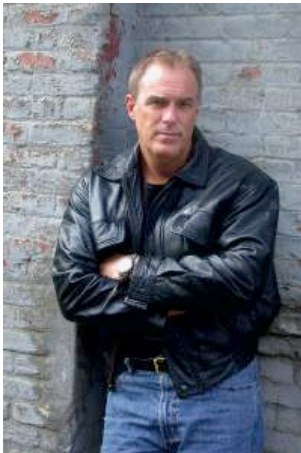
With no further questions, the meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.



COFW Secretary Jeanne Oates Estridge writes paranormal romance she describes as "dark, snarky and happy every after." Her first novel *The Demon Always Wins* won the RWA® Golden Heart® in 2015 and will be released in September 2018.

Works in Progress and Attendance for September 16, 2017

1. Jeanne Estridge: editing *The Demon Always Wins*.
2. Stacy McKittrick: *Ghostly Interlude*.
3. Sandy Kachurek: revamping an old short story.
4. Rachel Dye: *Finding His Way Home*.
5. Aleta Dodson: rejection from Harlequin, second novella box set being published in 2018.
6. Julia Blaine: "Angel Cat" sent to SoulMate Publishing, hoping to hear back in a week.
7. Kris Branch: working on book 2, starting and halfway through chapter 10.
8. Linda Rice: working on plotting.
9. Donna MacMeans: now that *Seduction of a Duke* is out, back to writing new stuff.
10. Amalie Berlin: medical book 2.
11. Robin Gianakopoulos: revising book 11 and starting 12 with Amalie.
12. Andrea McConnell: deciding what to do with *The British Captain*, tradition or self-publish.
13. Jenessa McRoy: making progress on a paranormal series.
14. Linda B. Munn: *Kajik a Flickertail Saga: Sons of Ista Shiu--Flickertail Saga: Rough 13 years; Alaina* (e-self-pub).
15. Kat Sheridan: *Derring Manchester*.



***Saturday, October 21, 2017**

All-day Workshop. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

with

Larry Brooks

*Author of **Story Fix** and **Story Engineering***

Location: The Courtyard Marriott 2350 Westbest Drive, Columbus.

Fee: COFW Members: \$55. Non-members: \$75 (includes continental breakfast, lunch, raffle).

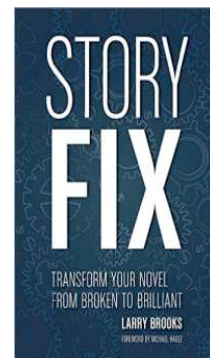
To Register and Pay: COFW Website: <http://www.cofwevents.org/workshop>.

Workshop Topics:

- ☆ The Hidden Secrets of Story Structure.
- ☆ The Beautiful Collision of Concept and Premise.
- ☆ Dramatic Arc as the Key to Everything (Including Character).
- ☆ When Every Month is NanoWriMo.

Larry Brooks is a career writer from the corporate sector who had nourished a fiction-writing dream the entire time. He's published six novels and two best-selling books on writing, *Story Engineering* and *Story Physics* and the 2015 release *Story Fix*, all through *Writer's Digest*.

For Questions: Linda Rice. [http://lindarice05@gmail.com](mailto:lindarice05@gmail.com)



***Note: COFW will not hold a regular meeting in October.**

Making COFW Stronger

Brainstorming
Idea Sharing

Join Us.

Attend the COFW meeting on November 18 as we engage
in small and large group sharing.

Voice your opinion.

Express your needs as a writer,
yet-to-be published and published.

How can COFW help you?

Be a part of the discussion.



Holiday Party

Saturday, December 2, 2017, Noon

Home of Robin Gianna.

COFW Members Only.

More info to come on COFW Yahoo Loop.

A Whirlwind of Inactivity

by Leslie Marshman, *In Print!* Editor

The following article first appeared in the September 2017 issue of In Print!, the monthly newsletter of Huston Bay Area RWA. Permission granted to reprint.

Hurricane Harvey was bearing down on the Texas coast. I evacuated during Rita and Ike, so this would be my first time since moving here that I had to ride one out. I set about making preparations – I filled the car with gas, figured out how to start the generator, stocked up on bottled water and non-perishables. I had my Kindle charged, booklight batteries replaced, Scrivener on my iPad. I felt ready, especially since I'd been snowed in in Colorado plenty of times.

If I got rained in for a week, I would just hunker down and write, write, write. Right? Wrong.

Oh, I got rained in, all right. Hours upon hours of isolated time, yet I didn't put a pen to paper or fingertip to keyboard. What I hadn't counted on was the creativity-killing stress from a storm like Harvey.

For more than a week, the local TV networks were all Harvey all the time. At first I watched for information. Safety. Watches and warnings. Soon it became an obsession. Social media was a lifeline, a way to stay in touch, find out which friends had water in their houses, lost power, been evacuated. Even when reading, the electronics were on ... just in case.

We had 148 tornado warnings in three days. The phone/TV-blasting, hide-in-the-center-of-your-house type of warnings. Stressful.

Water edged closer to my door, lightning turned the night sky into a constant strobe light, thunder shook the house, winds brought down tree branches – all stressful.

Then evacuations by boats. Rescues by helicopters. Curfews. National Guard trucks cruising the streets at 3 a.m. Stress. Full.

Once the sky cleared and the waters began to recede, I took stock and was ashamed of myself for wasting a whole week of productivity. Especially as I'd been lucky enough to make it through Harvey unscathed. But after talking to my fellow writers, I found I hadn't been the only one unable to write. The stress of the storm had sucked the creativity from all of us.

Stress is distracting. It affects our ability to focus. Even if we weren't worried about ourselves, our concern for those who lost everything didn't leave us with enough mental energy to create.

Life will never be the same for thousands of people in Texas. But we're working toward recovery.

Like many other people and organizations, our RWA communities in Houston have donated money, furniture, clothing, and food. Those of us physically able have helped friends clean up damaged homes. The sun is shining. And we're finally starting to put words on paper again. It's a start.

Leslie Marshman writes contemporary romance and suspense, and her publishing credits include short stories. Leslie called Denver home until she married a Texan without reading the fine print. She now resides halfway between Houston and Galveston. She's the editor of HBA's *In Print!* newsletter and contest coordinator for HBA's Judge *A Book By Its Cover* contest. lesliemarshman.com @lesliemarshman



A gathering of members and three new guests came out to hear Kat Sheridan and COFW member Lita Lawson share their experiences in self-publishing.

On the Craft and Business of Writing

♥ Fiction Plotting with COFW Members

- ~First Wednesdays, 10 a.m.
- ~Panera Bread, 2374 Taylor Square Drive, Reynoldsburg, 43068.
- ~Sharing and discussing plots. Giving constructive advice on improvements.
- ~Between meetings, attendees stay in touch and ask questions via cofwplot@yahoogroups.com

♥ Live Q & A on Facebook with Author Assistant, Melissa Jolly

- ~Every Wednesday, 2:30 p.m. Eastern
- ~Request to be her Friend on Facebook. Click on it when it pops up in your feed. Or go to her page and click on the "play" icon hovering over her picture.
- ~She takes questions for 30 minutes or until people stop asking.
- ~To ask your question, simply type.
- ~If you can't make it during that time, email her at [melissa\(at\)authorrx\(dot\)com](mailto:melissa(at)authorrx(dot)com) -- melissa@authorrx.com. She'll try to answer your question during one of her weekly chats.

Melissa has spoken at COFW meetings and regularly presents workshops at RWA Conferences. She's been an author's assistant for many years and would love to share what she knows.

♥ Financial Aid Funding

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.**

2017 COFW Leadership

Executive Board

President: [Jenessa McRoy](mailto:jenessahl@gmail.com) (jenessahl@gmail.com)
Secretary: [Jeanne Estridge](mailto:jeanne.estridge.author@gmail.com) (jeanne.estridge.author@gmail.com)
Treasurer: [Stacy McKitrick](mailto:cofwtreasurer@gmail.com) (cofwtreasurer@gmail.com)



Committees

Programs Chair: [Sheri Adkins](mailto:sherirenaeadkins@gmail.com) (sherirenaeadkins@gmail.com)
Newsletter Editor: [Sandy Kachurek](mailto:sandrajkachurek@gmail.com) (sandrajkachurek@gmail.com)
Membership Chair: [Linda Rice](mailto:lindarice05@gmail.com) (lindarice05@gmail.com)
Social Media Chair: [Andrea McConnell](mailto:fyrefly93@gmail.com) (fyrefly93@gmail.com)
Incentives: [Julia Blaine](mailto:julmassie@aol.com) (julmassie@aol.com)

Ignite the Flame Contest Coordinators

[Nancy White](mailto:nancywhite0529@gmail.com) (nancywhite0529@gmail.com)

and

[Jane Conner](mailto:djconner@earthlink.net) (djconner@earthlink.net)



Central Ohio Fiction Writers

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Dayton, OH 45424

<https://twitter.com/COFWriters>
<https://www.facebook.com/COFWriters>

Meeting Days:

The first "teen" Saturday of the month.
The October meeting will be on the 21st of October.



Dues:

For 2017, new membership is \$25.
For 2018, new membership increases to \$30.
Renewal for current members is \$25, if paid by January 31.
After January 31, dues will be \$30.