



July 2019

Issue 7

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.

2019 Leadership

President, Jeanne Estridge

Secretary, Sandra J. Kachurek

Treasurer, Stacy McKittrick

Program Chair, Aleta Dodson

Newsletter Editor, Rachel Dye

Membership Chair, Linda Rice

Social Media Chair, Andrea McConnell

Incentives, Julia Blaine

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.

- Membership with Romance Writers of America required.

Follow COFW

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

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

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

Central Ohio Fiction Writers

P.O. Box 24254 Dayton, OH 45424

Next Meeting: August 17th

Norwich Township Safety & Services Building

5181 Northwest Parkway

Hilliard, OH 43026

Time: Networking at 12:00 pm, Business meeting at 12:30 pm, Speaker at 1:30 pm

Topic: RWA National Recap

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.

To verify members are meeting and to stay in touch in between, we use this email:

cofwplot@yahoogroups.com

If you have questions, contact:

Andrea McConnell: fyrefly93@gmail.com

Saralee Etter: 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

Rachel Dye: juliette.r.hyland@gmail.com

Business Meeting of COFW
July 13, 2019
Firehouse 83, Hilliard

I. Welcome. WIP.

II. Minutes, Secretary Sandy Kachurek.

The minutes of the June 15, 2019 meeting were accepted as posted.

III. Reports:

A. President Jeanne Estridge.

1. Thank you to Karen Harper for judging the finalists in the Ignite the Flame contest. In gratitude, Shari Heinrich, ITF chair with Linda Rice, will present Karen with a jewelry set that she made. Also, a big thanks to the contest chairs, Linda and Shari, for their tireless work. The contest has gotten good feedback and will continue next year. Shari has agreed to be the chair for the 2020 contest.
2. The two plotting groups, East and West, continue to meet when members are available. Plotters East meet the first Wednesday of the month, 10 AM, at Panera on Taylor Road in Reynoldsburg. Plotters West meet the second Monday of the month at 6:30 PM at Panera in Huber Heights on Rte 202.

B. Treasurer Stacy McKittrick.

1. Cash on Hand: Checking: \$7063.19. PayPal: \$961.32. Financial Assistance: \$1519.69.
2. Current Membership: 48.

C. Programs, Aleta Dodson.

1. If you are attending 2019RWA National, please let Aleta know which session you'd like to recap during the COFW meeting on August 17.
2. Plans for the workshop with Damon Suede for November 2, 9-4, at the Dublin Recreation Center have been finalized. COFW \$75. All Others \$85. Fee includes lunch. Register now. The center holds 70 people. Currently, eight to ten people have registered. Thank you to Gina Smith for creating the graphics for Facebook and Twitter. We're hoping to get the info out to more people. It's in *Romance Writers Report* (RWR) and has been sent to Indiana, who are hosting Damon the weekend before he comes to Columbus, in hope that they will share it with their attendees. The info has also been sent to Cleveland, but they're struggling with how to get it posted.
3. The activity for September 14 COFW program will be an opportunity to plot and brainstorm your story ideas.
4. Alessandre Torres will be live on Skype to answer questions after her online presentation on October 19.
5. Karen Harper has a book release in June 2020 and would like to speak to members and guests. Aleta is considering a space for her to sell and speak in the Bexley area.

D. Ignite the Flame (ITF), Linda Rice and Shari Heinrich.

1. ITF has had great feedback on how timely we were with getting all 23 entries judged and back to the entrants. The top three entries are posted on the website. Karen Harper is reading and selecting the final winner. Linda brought up an oversight with two entries, and the error is being resolved. Members gave a

round of applause to Linda and Shari for their work. Jeanne said that because of this year's good foundation, good judges and good feedback, we should see more entries next year. Shari is contest chair for 2020 and says everything will be on Google forms.

E. Education, Erin Novotny.

1. Erin is getting confirmation for online classes for 2020 and working on details for others.
2. Tiered prices will continue: COFW \$25, RWA \$30, NonMembers \$35, except for the six-week course which will be \$5 more.
3. January-February. 6 weeks. Casey L. Bond's "Build a New World in the New Year." She's the award-winning author of the *Frenzy* series and fairy tale retellings, such as *Riches to Rags*, *Savage Beauty*, *Unlocked* and *Brutal Curse*. One of her books was included in the swag bags at the 2017 Oscars. She's known for her YA and Dystopian novels.
4. March. 4 weeks. Joanne Machin, freelance editor and Instagram Goddess. "Instagram Goddess for Authors." <https://www.instagram.com/heyjomachin/>
5. April. 4 weeks. Eliot Parker, associate professor at the University of Mississippi and recipient of the 2019 JUG (Just Uncommonly Good), WV Writers, Inc., "Being an Extroverted Introverted Writer and Creating Your Author Platform."
6. May. 4 weeks. Stacey Graham, an agent with the Red Sofa Literary Agency, "Writing Proposals for NonFiction and Fiction."
7. Classes pending:
 - a. June. 4 weeks. Linnea Sinclair and Stacey Kade.
 - b. August. 4 weeks. Query Letters.
 - c. September. Nonfiction and Fiction Proposals.
 - d. October. NaNoWriMo Preparation.
8. Erin asks for your input: if you have a program or love someone's program you've taken, please let her know. She's always looking for classes.

F. Incentives, Julia Blaine.

1. Julia passed out treats to everyone who had something to celebrate in their writing process, including a recipe for "Dangerous Chocolate Cake" and a story of her granddaughter who came to a meeting when she was 3 and now, at 18, has had the name "Julia" done in typewriter font tattooed over her heart.

G. Social Media.

1. Gina Smith was absent.

H. Newsletter, Rachel Dye.

1. Erin volunteered to be the recap writer.
2. Magic Word Count Winner: Stacy took possession of Eddie the Emu for the month, having accumulated the most points for writing at least 250 words per day and points for reaching her self-chosen goal of 16,000 words in one month.

IV. Unfinished Business.

1. Nominating Committee: Sandy is chairing the committee with Past President Jenessa McRoy and Social Chair Gina Smith. Many positions have been filled, giving an incoming president a good group to work with. A slate will be finalized for November voting. Most needed positions include president and programs chair.

V. New Business.

1. None.

VI. Announcements.

1. Shari had bags of material from her parents' house to give away.

Adjournment:

Business Meeting adjourned at 1:30.

Today's Guest Speaker: Laura Schnebly Campbell.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy

Sandy Kachurek

Secretary

Works in Progress/Attendance for July 13th

Attendance/WIP for July 13th, 2019

1. Aleta Dodson: continuing work on last story of novella trilogy.
2. Janice Beckett: finished second-round editing of third book in *Horses Heal Hearts* series.
3. Shari Heinrich: working on edits for "Once Upon an Acorn's Fall" for New Myths Submission; incorporating beta-feedback into YA *Queen of Wands*.
4. Julia Blaine: my granddaughter turned 18 and emailed me photos of her first tattoo. She'd put "Julia" over her heart in typewriter font because I am a writer!
5. Rachel Dye: editing *The Doctor's Star*.
6. Erin Novotny: *Sideways* is part of an anthology to be published at the end of August; editing a romantic suspense.
7. Rick Lakin, guest: writing book 3, *Cyberans/Galaxy Warriors*.
8. Stacy McKittrick: finished first draft of book 9 and started book 10.
9. Jeanne Estridge: started book 3 of *Touched by a Demon* series.
10. Jamie Farrell: *Lady Billionaire Inherits a Baby*.
11. Linda Rice: finishing work on ITF contest.
12. Sandy Kachurek: getting first three chapters done for *Going Home to Sweetbrier*.

New Releases:

COFW has a spreadsheet for new releases. With the demise of the Yahoo Group, please put your information on the spreadsheet:

<http://bit.ly/COFWNewrelease>

Meeting Recap for July 13, 2019

Laurie Schnebly – Creating your hero's fatal flaw

By Erin Novotny

- 1) Why we need fatal flaws– to create drama for your work.
 - i) Great stories need an internal problem/internal conflict
 - (a) This is the fatal flaw.
 - (b) Characters **MUST** grow and change throughout the book.
 - ii) Need to suffer throughout book for there to be a satisfying ending
- b) Conflict from within their personalities
 - i) Eanneagrams – 9 personality types
 - (1) Personality flaws are different in different cultures
 - (a) Ex) one culture may have more adventurers and less guardians than another
 - (b) But they are shared throughout humanity

All of us have a bit of each type of personality.

Quiz on Laurie's website with descriptions

- As author's we determine the personality of our characters
- 1) **Reformer** – improver, very high standards for themselves and the rest of the world. They do their best and want the rest of the world live up to their standards. Black and white – no gray area.
 - a. Avoid criticism and want to be found right
 - b. Hercule Poirot – Nathan Hale –
 - c. Moral courage – best attribute
 - i. Fatal flaw – anger
 1. Life upholding what's right and maintaining standards can be righteous and angry when someone doesn't live up to his standards especially angry at his OWN mistakes.
 2. Need to be more tolerant of imperfections
 - 2) **Nurturer**- helper, giver, focus on what others need rather than what they need. They can neglect their own needs and may feel like they are not appreciated. Look out for other people
 - a. Beth in Little Women
 - b. Love to be needed
 - i. Pride is fatal flaw
 1. Take pride in their care they give, pride in being necessary. Need to let go of pride and realize they are not the ONLY person that can help others, or the person can live without your help. She learns to let go and the world won't come to an end. When she stops doing for others as a way of fitting in, now her nurturing will come from strength of love rather than weakness of pride
 - 3) **Achiever** – performers, aware of the right image, act and project whatever the circumstance requires. Success, career matters to them. They look good, always
 - a. Motto: The world values a champion.
 - b. Avoids failure
 - c. Golden girl, good looking, smart, funny, popular
 - d. Great Gatsby,
 - e. Internal conflict fear of failure

- i. Deceptive – quit putting on perfect face and discover true self. Realizing their whole life has been a performance and self-examination and learn they can be accepted for themselves. Don't need perfect façade.
- 4) **Romantic** – love drama, tragedy, big feelings. Don't like feeling ordinary. Dream about perfect love and give whole-hearted sympathy when feeling low. Great teachers, translators of humanity. Big ups and downs, passion, excitement, drama, prefer intensity. All about feeling
 - a. Anne Rice's vampires
 - i. Fatal Flaw: Envy – scripting what they want to have happen next and end up envious when it doesn't happen, build on emotions and great scenarios and when they don't happen they have envy. Don't have to let go of larger-than-life expectations as long as they let go of the self-pity when it doesn't work out. Laugh at themselves – appreciate what they have instead of want more
- 5) **Observer** – analyzers – study and compartmentalize their lives. Guard their time and privacy and personal space.
 - a. Sherlock Holmes (not emotionally involved in world), Albert Einstein, Spock
 - i. Fatal Flaw: Avarice – greedy about their precious time and their personal space. Quit being greedy about privacy and learn to share. Hard time letting people in with their messy emotions. Never talk about feelings but talk to lover for the first time about feelings
- 6) **Guardian** – trooper, defender, get the job done
 - a. Mary Richards (MTMoore)
 - b. Loyal, aware of the rules and determined to keep or break the rules. (James Dean rebel type)
 - i. Fear is their fatal flaw – can't always guarantee safety
 - 1. Emotional, financial, physical, the fear of lacking that security keeps them from living life to the fullest.
 - a. A new kind of life offered, but afraid to risk security for better life.
 - b. Risk rewards with nice payoff
- 7) **Adventurer** – optimistic, not very self-examination – enthusiast, want new experiences, interested at everything and everybody at first glance, plan things – new activities and trips but may or may not actually do it.
 - a. Rhett Butler/swashbuckler/Peter Pan
 - b. Charming, not great over the long haul
 - i. Deadly sin – gluttony, want more experiences
 - 1. Commitment has its own rewards so they need to learn to slow down and find something that matters and requires them. So, they resist by wanting to do more but they learn “what they've been missing” with love.
- 8) **Leader** – self-confident natural leader, strong individuals and take it upon themselves to defend the weak
 - a. Defend the innocent in an unjust world
 - i. Scarlet O'Hara – there to save Terra but not likeable
 - 1. Fatal Flaw is a lust for control: doesn't want to give control back, never wants to be vulnerable, needs to learn to compromise, share control, take a step back, wants relationship on their terms, must learn compromise to have real relationship.

- 9) **Peacemaker** – want everyone to get along, dislike conflict, go with the flow, may choose comfort, and can ignore their own feelings, easy to get along with.
 - a. Garrison Keiler – like woebegone, Nick, Great Gatsby
 - i. Fatal flaw – sloth – like their comfort
 1. Must give up comfort of neutrality and take a stand. It's dramatic because after a lifetime of never choosing they must declare themselves – what they want, what they need, what they think, never put themselves in a position where they had to make a decision, Must take an action.

Adding conflict between the couples – Marriage counselors identified seven basic issues that cause problems.

- 1) Gender roles –
 - a. Expectations of what a man or woman should be and act
 - b. If either party doesn't quite fit the mold, how to do you handle situations?
- 2) Loyalties –
 - a. To family/work/home
 - b. Ranking of loyalties can change between couple and cause strife
 - i. He's a momma's boy who wants him to spend afternoon with her and they were supposed to go to best friend's barbecue
- 3) Privacy –
 - a. When one partner wants to spend ALL their time with the other
 - b. The other partner may need their own emotional, mental, or physical space. Need time to themselves.
 - c. Conflict when one partner doesn't want privacy and other does.
- 4) Money – **the most frequent cause of issues in marriages**
 - a. Standards regarding earning, saving, spending,
 - b. Issues with career or inheritance coming in
- 5) Power – or control
 - a. Can show up in other areas – who controls the money, who controls the kids.
- 6) Sex –
 - a. When, where, how, what, etc.
 - b. When they don't agree it can cause conflict
- 7) Children --
 - a. Have or not have
 - b. What to do with step kids?
 - c. Parenting differences

Many other conflicts can arise. Issues can change depending on where the couple is in their relationship. For example, privacy not an issue when they are falling in love.

Danger signals that a relationship is headed for trouble:

- 1) Contempt
- 2) Withdrawal
- 3) Defensiveness
- 4) Criticism

These four danger signals may make your H/h unlikable, but if we've seen the rest of the book that H/h is a good person, and the reader understands why H/h is concerned/defensive/etc it makes it forgivable.

The Goals of Misbehavior: Character has need not being met, so they misbehave

- 1) Getting attention –
 - a. Response is usually annoyance – they won't admit they're wanting attention.
 - b. Respond but give attention when they are behaving well.
 - c. It won't happen right away, has intensified misbehavior first.
 - d. When character involved in something (game on TV) and other character intervenes with silly question.
- 2) Power –
 - a. Challenged by partner, clue they are misbehaving.
 - i. To solve – step back
 1. If both parties challenging, withdrawal is acceptable
 2. Can't grab power away from a rival if power given
 - ii. Doesn't mean withdrawing from the relationship
 - b. When relationship is older/more mature/past first dates then you write a power struggle scene
- 3) Revenge –
 - a. Feel hurt by whatever the partner just said. Couples can be really good at this without really intending to him
 - i. Usually person angry at someone else but takes it out on partner
 - b. Solve – by announcing you feel hurt. "That made me feel bad." Acknowledging the hurt stops the behavior
 - i. Misbehaving person will feel guilty and try and make it up ☺
- 4) Assumed disability – really not a great idea because it makes the person unlikable
 - a. "I have nothing to live for"
 - b. If you feel defeated, like there's nothing you can do, they are misbehaving
 - c. Solve with extra encouragement to person

Ingredients for a lasting love

- 1) Work – true love isn't always easy, requires compromise
 - a. Maintaining healthy relationship
- 2) Encouragement – automatically do that in the beginning
 - a. Keep up habit of encouragement even during rough spots
- 3) Communication – goes on all the time, 70% non-verbal
 - a. Non-verbal communication shows couple is close
 - b. Clear communication is important, and if the conflict can be solved by one honest conversation isn't enough of a conflict
- 4) Mutual respect
 - a. Respect one-another and themselves
 - i. If you don't respect yourself, it's a conflict for relationship
- 5) Acceptance –
 - a. Accept differences about each other
 - b. We expect people to be pretty similar to ourselves and conflict can arise when we learn someone is very different and have trouble accepting it.
 - c. Differences help keep people from being stagnate

For a romance, a HEA is satisfying when conflict is resolved by characters themselves. They've learned and grown. (Police didn't step in and solve at the last minute, etc.)

- 1) Need to grow to be able to resolve the conflict
- 2) They "save the day" when all is lost.
- 3) What they've learned about themselves, because of their interaction with the other character, is what is required to solve the external conflict, and the internal conflict.

COFW now has goal sheets!!!

Thanks to Erin Novotny & Arianna James for setting this up.



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>

June Winner: Stacy McKitrick 439 points, 16951 words

The winner gets Eddie!

Looking for a way to hit those goals: Did you know that studies have shown you're up to 66% more likely to achieve a goal if you write it down and up to 95%(!!) more likely to achieve a goal if you tell someone else what it is and have a deadline by which you need to meet it. List your goals here and Arianna will check in to see if you've hit them: <http://bit.ly/2HJoDNq>

Updating Your RWA Profile Information:

The new RWA website (rwa.org) is two different software packages. One is for communicating information about what's going on at RWA. (aka the RWA website). The other is used for chapter portals (We have one of these: cofw.rwa.org) and microsites (We don't yet have one of these). Each of these sites has a spot for profile information for members.

You can update your profile at: www.rwa.org and the forum profiles at: <https://community.rwa.org/update-profile>.

You can also access the profile update page by logging in to rwa.org and selecting "Update Profile" at the top of the page.

1. First update your RWA membership profile.
 - a. Click on the pencil beside the little silhouette.
 - b. In the "change picture" dialogue box, click Select.
 - i. From your computer, choose a picture with a file extension of one of the following:
 - .GIF
 - .JPG
 - .PNG
 - .BMP
 - ii. Click Open
 - iii. Click Save & Close
2. Click on the "About Me" tab and then click on the little pencils to update each section. Save each section after completing.
3. Click on the Preferences tab to update your communication preferences. Be sure to save your changes.
4. Review the other tabs to ensure the information is correct. If it's something you don't have access to change, click on Contact RWA at the bottom of the page to send Donna Mathoslah an email.
5. Update your RWA Community Profile (You should still have the original tab with the links to both profiles open)
 - a. Click on the little silhouette and upload your picture.
 - i. On this page, you have the option of pulling in a picture from your computer or Facebook or Instagram or Dropbox or a host of other places. Load your picture and save it.
6. Update your My Profile information:
 - a. Click on the little pencil next to Bio and share a little about yourself.
 - b. If you've been a finalist or winner in any contests, enter that under Honors and Awards.
 - c. If you belong to other professional organizations, enter the information under Professional Associations.

- d. Add or update your social media links.
- 7. Some information was loaded from the old website. Verify everything is correct and up-to-date.
- 8. Click on Communities and then choose My Communities. You should see an entry for Chapter: Central Ohio Fiction Writers (along with any other communities you belong to, such as PAN).
 - a. Click on Central Ohio Fiction Writers.
 - b. Click on Settings and set up your preferences for the discussion forum.

As of January 1, 2019, Treasurer's Reports, Meeting Minutes and presentation documentation will be posted in our COFW community on the RWA site.

Reminder: On June 1, the Board will stop posting to the Yahoo loop and we will stop monitoring the Yahoo loop. Please have yourself set up on RWA COFW discussion loop prior to that date.

Why Should You Enter a Contest?

By Shari Heinrich

Why would you want to enter a contest? If I hadn't entered the New York City Midnight Short Story Challenge (NYCM SSC) in 2015, investing the \$30 (at the time) entry fee, I wouldn't have:

- Met awesome online writer friends who beta my work, encourage me to grow.
- Started my writing resume: I'm a semi-finalist 2 out of 5 years; a finalist in 2 out of 5 years, where this year I placed (18th).
- Created two main characters my critiquers liked so much that I turned them into the second and third novels I've written.
- Joined COFW.

The First Contest

In 2015, I'd been in my new home for a year and a half, and it had indeed given me the creative space I craved—a view of the outdoors. Sitting on an acre of property, it's my mini slice of heaven. I entered the New York City Midnight Short Story Challenge after the ad popped into my Facebook feed. The contest has three phases, and you have to place high enough in your heat in each of the first two rounds to become a finalist. Pressure rises with fewer words and days in each round:

- 8 days, 2,500 words, top 5 advance, heats now of 31 or 32 people (used to be 25 when I started)
- 3 days, 2,000 words, top 3 advance, heats of 25
- 1 day, 1,500 words, top 20 receive prizes, with winner netting more than 5,000 between cash and software.

When I entered the first contest, I'd been focused on my first novel for two years; prior to that, I had a monthly column in my bicycling club's newsletter; and had last tried a short story for Half Price Books' "Say Goodnight to Literacy" contest a dozen years earlier. I entered NYCM SSC because I remembered a writing activity I'd always enjoyed—word games first with a cousin when I was in college; and a teacher friend after graduation. A combination might look like this: Adjective, Noun, Weather Pattern, Place, Color. Something about my brain being asked to create a story from bones always fired up my creativity. While I'd turned out blah short stories for my college courses, I *loved* the concepts I formed from these random pairings.

I thought, "let's see whether the prompts inspire me."

In the Short Story Challenge you receive a character type, a subject, and a genre when prompts drop at midnight. For 2015 I drew "Flight Attendant," "Invention," and "Action/Adventure." It took me a day to figure out my character, who had no memories from before age eight but had psychic visions of others' childhoods; the invention a scientist stole to protect it amplified abilities; and that my main character saw the world through a math-based lens. Problem was, my brain was in novel mode, so I created this complex back story that took 6.5 days to create.

That gave me 1.5 days for the short story I entitled “Solve for X.” ARGH! I also didn’t know about beta readers, and even if I had, I wouldn’t have asked for help.

Forums and Critiques

This contest offers a forum where participants can post their stories. That first year I heard a pattern there: great main character; I sort of understand your plot; holy cow, you crammed a novel into this short story; I’d like to see this as a novel.

I dove into the forum and began returning reads and critiquing those same writers who had hit my story. Then, I searched for the crits that showed maturity, integrity, concern; they invited a writer to improve. I still had a lot of room to grow in that department, and they gave me a better model to aim for. Once I reviewed their story, many dove into mine.

I didn’t move on, but I’d had fun, and I had a bonus exceeding the entry fee: I built friendships with amazing critiquers. They complemented the local writers I’d met from North Columbus Fantasy and Sci-Fi. This online set taught me about beta reads, and their power. They taught me to trust sharing my ugly first draft.

I’d been taking writing workshops while I wrote novel one, and by this time I realized it needed a ton of work. Thanks to the pre-writing I’d done for the contest, I had a wealth of research for novel two, I knew my main character and her problem, siblings, and antagonists. I got to work on YA *Solve for X* (currently tabled while I edit novel three).

Try, Try, and Try Again

2016, I entered again. I drew the dreaded (for me) rom-com; school nurse; letters. I didn’t spend nearly the time in world-building, I spent a little time figuring out my MC, the love interest, a red herring, and the high school where she worked. I researched, learning dark rom-coms were much fewer. My online friends had taught me this rule: ditch your first three ideas. Odds are, others are finding them. Mine your later ideas for the gem. I came up with a character so unlike any I’d written before—a sadistic nurse with her torture-chamber basement, and her wanna-be lover, the masochist who chooses “mashed potatoes” for his safe word. Beta readers suggested where and how to push the envelope, elements of the rom-com they loved, and likewise, stumbled; if they could put their finger on it, the *why* of stumbling. Gold. I wrote this synopsis:

“There will be no logline from Nurse Gertrude unless you submit to the broken bones and lesser pain she dishes out as regularly as ibuprofen. Pick your safe word now, before you get in over your head.”

To my surprise, I took second in my heat. In round two, I drew the dreaded (for me) romance; one-eyed man; last will and testament. I came upon the unlikely combination of a thief who falls for her mark after robbing his family of the will, thereby depriving him of his inheritance. She had a grandmama who had worked extraordinarily hard to teach her *not* to fall in love. She falls for him in a cemetery. I felt I had another off-the-wall piece, “Stolen Heart, Stolen Will, and the Wisdom to Know the Difference,” which won its heat:

“Angela accepts a contract for a simple snatch-and-grab of a will, not expecting anything more than walking away with an easy twenty grand. But when one of the marks steals her heart, she can’t resist attending his father’s funeral for just one more look.”

From this contest comes my third book, and my membership to RWA. I’d never imagined writing romance, or rom-com. But here I was with a 2nd place and a win. I had some talent, and I knew I had a lot more to learn. I didn’t want to write a true romance, but I did want to write a story with romantic elements. I’d learned about COFW from Karin Shah two years earlier, knowing her husband from my bicycling club. I finally looked up the chapter, fell in love with the members and the workshops, and joined.

In 2017 and 2018, I made it into the second rounds, but not the finals. Each time, I wrote stories that gave me ideas for characters, or helped me explore a novel I’d shelved back in the era where I didn’t understand my writing process. So, one year, when I drew historical fiction, I dove into the Civil War because my shelved novel had a ghost from the Civil War. I used the contest not in a desire to advance to the finals, but rather to learn *why* my ghost Mason had felt a need to stay on this earth. I loved the reason I came up with.

Then came this year. Round one, I drew historical, pregnancy, and an intoxicated person. From this I again decided I’d write not to advance but figure out the girl my ghost Mason must have loved, since I gave him a “girlfriend left behind” during the war. Here’s the logline for my YA “But for My Child”:

“Papa must never know that Mason and I did more than walk together the morning before the regiment’s train labored away from Kinston. Mama need not bear the burden of disgrace at raising a daughter with callused hands and loosened stays.”

My story took a middle-of-the-road third, strong enough to move me into the semi-finals.

For my semi-finals, I drew fairy-tale, a utopia, and a park ranger. This time, I wanted to advance. I love fairy tales, and I’ve enjoyed a few modern-day YA versions, like Jane Yolen’s *Snow in Summer*, set in the Appalachians. I decided on that road less traveled again, deciding few would take the risk of a modern-day story, and fewer still would try to write a brand-new fairy tale. So that’s the challenge I gave myself. I wrote my YA, “Once Upon an Acorn’s Fall”:

“**Hypothesis:** When a high school senior loves her dad as much as she loves their forest, she’ll fight to win a science fair scholarship, even if she doesn’t want a petrochemical career. She should have tracked her variables better, from the unlikely fairy godfather who plants an idea, to her dad who roots around in her memories.”

With a moral of “you have to take care of yourself before you can take care of others” and a microcosm utopia Fortuna’s trying to save (her family’s forest), I knew I’d stretched the limits of the prompts. My beta readers called out where the tale faltered, and boy-howdy, were they correct. Better, they called out **huge** chunks I could excise to save room for after the story’s turn.

I took second in my heat and advanced to the finals, where we drew prompts of open genre; side effects; gravedigger. I loved the piece I labored on for the full 24 hours, taking breaks every two

hours. I wrote the drafts fast enough to have betas on the second and fourth versions. Here's the logline for my YA "Digging My Own Grave":

"Between the "Eau de Formaldehyde" clinging to her hair and the stigma of living across from the cemetery, shy Evie Oller endures chronic mocking while evading her high school's cliques. But when her dad speaks at career day, she'll wish she could dive head-first into one of their fresh graves."

After another six weeks, we received our results. My piece, up against the ninety who remained from the original 4,650 writers, scored 18th.

Even if I hadn't placed, I'd still have said, I win every year with this contest. I hone my craft. I create more backstory for future novels. I meet new characters. This year, online friends recommended markets for my second and third round stories. I'm days away from submitting one to *New Myth* before their submission window closes on July 31.

If you're looking to mix up your writing and see what it does for your craft, I hope you'll consider entering one of the [New York City Midnight contests](#).

Shari Heinrich is an award-winning author. She writes young adult fantasy where magic drives her characters. Filled with sass and heart, those teens won't back down when it comes to protecting their friends, their family, or their dreams. She has been published in *Conclave*, and her most recent award is placing 18th of 4,650 participants in the 2019 New York City Midnight Short Story Challenge.

