



January 2020

Issue 1

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.

2020 Leadership

Board

President: Janice Beckett.

Secretary: Sandy Kachurek

Treasurer: Stacy McKittrick

Non-Board Positions

Newsletter Editor: Rachel Dye

Programs Chair: Vacant

Education Chair: Erin Novotny

Social Media Chair: Gina Smith

Incentives Coordinator: Julia Blaine

Ignite the Flame Contest Chair: Shari Heinrich

Monthly Meetings Facility Coordinator: Vacant

Equipment Inventory Coordinator: Robin Gianna

Meetings

First "Teen" Saturday of the Month. Social: Noon to 12:30. Business: 12:30. Guest Presentation: 1:30. Location: Check 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: February 15th, 2020; Discussion Regarding COFW's Future as and RWA Chapter

February 15th, 2020 - Business meeting at 12:30 pm, Discussion at 1:30 pm
Norwich Twp Safety & Services 5181 Northwest Parkway, Hilliard, OH 43026

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

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

Minutes of the Central Ohio Fiction Writers

Norwich Township Fire Station 82. Hilliard.
January 18, 20120

12:30 PM.

I. Welcome:

President Janice Beckett opened the meeting, directing members and guests to sign the WIP/Attendance list.

II. Minutes:

The minutes of November 2019 were accepted as posted in Forums Library.

III. Reports

A. President, Janice:

In lieu of a report, Janice will direct discussion of COFW's position within RWA, the discussion being the last item on the agenda.

B. Treasurer, Stacy McKittrick:

Cash on Hand for December 2019:

Checking: \$6455.10

Undeposited Funds: \$60.00

PayPal: \$2059.40

Total: \$8574.50

Financial Assistance: \$1519.75

C. Programs, Janice:

With the stepping down of Aleta Dodson as chair of programs, a sign-up list to encourage members to provide a monthly program was passed around. Pay will be \$50.

D. Ignite the Flame (ITF), Shari Heinrich:

Shari shared responses from a survey taken by some of the participants in the 2019 ITF contest. Results will also be posted on the Forums loop.

Motion: Jenessa McRoy made a motion to continue the ITF contest for 2020. Erin Novotny seconded. Motion passed.

E. Education, Erin Novotny:

Erin reviewed the events of the current January digital class "Instagram" with Alana Albertson. She had an issue with COFW being an affiliate of RWA and RWA making money from the proceeds of the digital class, thereby espousing the alleged negative practices of RWA. After COFW stated in the class that RWA will make no money from the class, Alana began as instructor. Comments from members taking the class were highly positive and praiseworthy.

The instructors of the digital classes for 2020 are currently unconfirmed, given the changing fallout as a result of the actions of the RWA Board.

Lisa Cron, author of *Wired for Story* and *Story Genius*, is a speaker many members would like to see for a workshop presentation later this year.

F. Incentives, Julia Blaine (absent):

Notables: Janice has begun selling her second book in an Audible format; Rachel Dye received the cover of her first book and sent the MS of her second book to her editor; Shari is presenting today's program on diversity and participating in a short story contest.

Rachel took home the Emu prize for most improved word counts for December.

G. Social Media, Janice:

The following is the Letter of Declaration by COFW:

The Central Ohio Fiction writers believe in the inherent right of all romance writers' voices to be heard. We stand behind diversity, equity, and inclusion as the fabric weaving our chapter together. We commit to taking actionable steps to increase our chapter's diversity. We understand that the greater the diversity, the greater the opportunities for all of us to form an unequalled writing community.

H. Newsletter, Rachel:

Erin offered to do a summary of today's program on diversity by member Shari. Rachel reminded everyone who has a new release in January to get her the basic info.

IV. Unfinished Business: none.

V. New Business:

A. Going Forward with RWA:

RWA. Discussion began with Rachel sharing a timeline of events by the 2019 RWA Board, leading up to RWA's state of affairs today as we best understand them. Members added information to the timeline. Other items of discussion included the 2020 RWA National Conference, slated for San Francisco, being a required event, according to RWA Bylaws. A discussion of the fallout included agents and editors from companies such as Harlequin, Avon and Entangled pulling away their attendance and financial support of the 2020 RWA Conference. Workshop presenters have pulled out of not only RWA's national conference but also, local chapters; for example, the Chicago Spring Fling 2020.

COFW. At the end of 2019, COFW had 53 members. As of today's date, January 18, 30 have renewed their local membership. The renewal deadline is January 31. Some members, whose RWA membership (a requirement to be a member of COFW) needs to be renewed in later 2020, expressed a "wait and see" approach to what RWA will be doing at that time before they commit to continuing with RWA. Questions arose regarding what power the RWA Board currently holds when they only have two board member left from 2019. Five people sit on the RWA board but in a temporary capacity with no one as president.

How will the dust settle for RWA?

RWA's financial outlook is a major key to their future, as well as their currently losing battle with public relations. Chapters are disassociating themselves from RWA.

Questions by COFW:

Where is RWA in COFW's future?

What do we receive from being affiliated with RWA?

What do we give to RWA?

Committee to Examine Cause and Effect:

Erin Novotny, Jenessa McRoy, Andrea McConnell and Shari Heinrich volunteered to serve on a committee to examine the cause and effects of COFW remaining with and disassociating from RWA. Their findings, vetted through Janice, will help COFW determine its position for public statements and its direction into the future.

Deadline: Saturday, February 15.

The committee will share its findings during the next COFW meeting February 15. At the meeting a vote will be taken on whether COFW is to remain with or disassociate from RWA.

Following a brief break: Program on diversity by Shari Heinrich.

Adjournment: 2:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy

Sandy Kachurek

Secretary

Attendance/WIP for January 18, 2020

1. Linda Rice: research
2. Erin Novotny: final edits to *Marina's Risk*
3. Rachel Dye: plotting/editing
4. Jeanne Estridge: *The Demon Collects a Soul* [working title]
5. Stacy McKittrick: *Ghostly Protector*.
6. Shari Heinrich: *The Presentation; Queen of Wands*
7. Jenessa McRoy: school 😞
8. Jessi Rauh: plotting a contemporary series
9. Andrea McConnell: research/craft books
10. Arianna James: *Heart's Gamble*
11. Robin Gianna: researching
12. Sheri Adkins: present
13. Emily Adkins: present
14. Sandy Kachurek: first draft of a woman's fiction story
15. Janice Beckett: on book 3 in Horses Heals Hearts series, *Her Forever Love* [working title]
16. Donna MacMeans: present

January Recap: Acts of Compassion: Feeling our Way by Shari Heinrich

Recap by Erin Novotny

Her slide deck and other resources can be found in our RWA forum here:

<https://bit.ly/30Ehx5H>

Shari asked us to consider times when we, as women, have had our symptoms ignored by doctors. She told the story of a friend who had intense pain during her periods, but doctors suggested over the years her pain was normal. However, after years of severe anemia one doctor finally listened and discovered that her friend had fibroids that were so large they pressed a vein against her spine, causing most of her pain symptoms.

Doctors' medical training is based on research on white men, because at the time they believed they must decrease the number of variables in their data population and did so by excluding the hormonal variations of women, racial variations, etc. leaving them with a pool of white men. Because of this, their medical training and research has lacked how symptoms may present themselves differently in women, or people of other races. The result is that unintentional biases has infiltrated the entire medical system. Shari then asked us to consider times we've gone to the doctor when our symptoms have been considered unimportant, just part of life, rather than our doctor looking to find an actual reason for our symptoms.

Shari asked us to consider how we would prefer to be listened to. She then moved the discussion to what we hear as romance writers. Comments such as, "So you write bodice rippers?"

How are we received when we tell others who are not in Romancelandia what we write? We're a billion-dollar industry and account for 1/3 of all mass market fiction sales. And yet, we often hear our genre dismissed. So, what can we do about it? We had a discussion about educating people who were willing to listen. Jeanne Estridge said that when people dismiss our genre that she says "I understand. Because romance is the most complex form of fiction. Every romance contains a minimum of four arcs, a plot arc, a romance arc, and two character arcs; one for the hero and another for the heroine. Each of them has to grow into a better person to earn their happily ever after. And these four arcs have to work together to create a cohesive story. In a mystery novel, there's just a plot arc. The investigator doesn't have to mature into a better person to solve the crime, he just has to put the clues together."

I love Jeanne's answer and I'm going to memorize it and have it ready.

The next question is how do we feel when we respond and someone tells us that we "are too sensitive," or "they were just kidding."

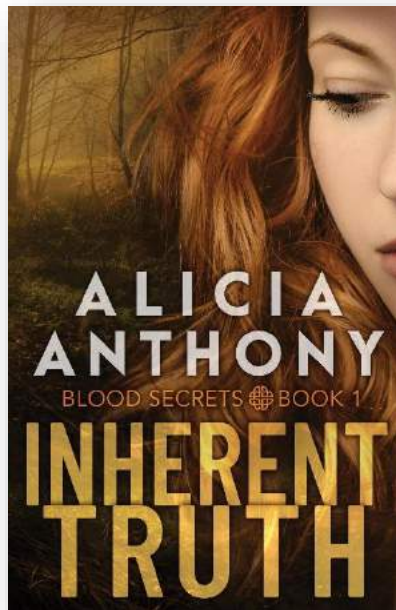
Shari's point was those "bodice ripper" statements are microaggressions. The "don't be so sensitive" would be tone-policing. In other words someone can say something to

you that you find rude and when you call them on it they suggest you're not allowed to have that opinion. This is what are marginalized authors in RWA have been facing for a very long time.

Using the example of comments from people regarding our romance genre Shari asks us to consider how we feel when our experiences are dismissed, our objections are trampled, our concerns are minimized, the pain or harm we experience is brushed off, and if our point of view isn't even included in the conversation to begin with. At Central Ohio Fiction Writers we are a white homogenized group. We are missing diverse authors and if we wish to show that we are compassionate we must interact with writers and marginalized communities. Shari recommends watching the video she's put up on our COFW RWA forum loop and encourages us to read the many resources in the DEI forum library to help us achieve our goals of including marginalized authors into our group.

Shari left us with a Maya Angelou quote, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you knew better than when you know better, do better."

New Releases:



Inherent Truth by Alicia Anthony

A woman with buried secrets...

An agent with an impossible mission...

An inheritance that will destroy them both...

When Liv Sullivan's grandmother beckons for help from beyond the grave, the reluctant psychic returns to her small Ohio hometown. Scrambling to make sense of the clues left by the vision, Liv finds herself face to face with undercover agent, Ridge McCaffrey.

Assigned to protect a woman whose gifts unnerve him, for a covert psychic intelligence operation he doesn't understand, Ridge struggles to place duty over desire. But when a gruesome discovery is unearthed at Sullivan Farm, the truth becomes clear...

Some family secrets are best left buried.

Inherent Truth is the first book in the gripping Blood Secrets psychological thriller trilogy about the cost of truth and the price we pay for love. If you like pulse-pounding page-turners laced with a touch of romance, and shocking twists that will leave you dying for the sequel, Alicia Anthony's thrilling debut is for you.

Available now!

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>

COFW now has a goal sheet!!!

Thanks to Erin Novotny 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>

December Winner: Rachel Dye!

The winner gets Eddie!

One Salty Chocolate Caramel at a Time

By Shari Heinrich

Chocolate is my favorite comfort food. I love its texture, its varieties, how it combines with other flavors (especially peppermint). It's my writing reward. My self-soothing when I'm stressed. My treat when I'm triumphant. When I review books on my blog, I use a "five-chocolates" scale.

Recently, however, I've started working with a nutritionist. I'm no longer allowed to celebrate or binge away discomfort with chocolate. She's right; I'm 51 and I have osteoporosis of the spine. A combination of early menopause and the crappy job my body has been doing absorbing calcium are good reasons to limit my chocolate intake.

The nutritionist showed me the evidence: chocolate is a problem for me. Its chemical composition interferes with calcium absorption, and my body produces insulin to deal with the sugar - which then produces cortisol to put the brakes on the insulin. Cortisol interferes with calcium absorption.

It's a cosmic injustice. My body *needs* calcium. And my soul needs chocolate. Well, OK. maybe "needs" is strong. But *wants* feels so weak.

Change is never comfortable.

Comfortable. Comfort. Comfort food. Dang it, where's my chocolate?

Argh! No! Nutritionist says no chocolate. So how do I cure my discomfort?

At first, I justified.

Reducing my chocolate will help. I don't have to quit altogether. There, see? Definitely better!

Except.... I know I'm supposed to be stopping altogether.

The first week was my taper - and a good thing, too, as that was the week of my writing competition. I sure needed my comfort then!

This second week, I'm supposed to be off of it. *But...surely one little ounce here and there won't hurt?*

We call that "cognitive dissonance." That distance between the fact that I know, and the thing that I choose to believe, because it serves me.

I *know* I need to cut out the chocolate, but that means I have to change. Adjust my behavior, redirect my rewards, find a new way to comfort myself. Or I have to change my attitude, be willing to sacrifice some quality of life in order to keep my chocolate.

So I allow my attitude to shift. I haven't stopped eating chocolate, but I *have* cut down my intake by easily 80%. And I *am* doing better, so my calcium absorption will be *better* than it was. Instead of aiming for "as healthy as I can possibly be," I have changed my target to "as healthy as I can happily be."

Alternately, I could change my belief: chocolate is a ridiculous thing to blame for how my body absorbs a nutrient. Except - oops - all that pesky research that proves otherwise. Facts are *facts*, even if they're uncomfortable.

And *why* did my nutritionist have to share the name of the main character in my WIP? Every time I see my character's name, this tricky little voice in my head mutters: "Quit fooling yourself. You need to *stop* with the chocolate." (How about I stop until Saturday? Yeah, yeah, I can do that.)

RWA: The flavor of controversy

There's a lot happening right now that has us all reaching for the chocolate. And we're each doing it in our own way: Some are taking sides. Some are taking up arms. Some are crawling into their shells like turtles. Some are climbing on soap boxes.

"Reasoned deliberation!"

"Tone Policing!"

"Bullying!"

"Championing!"

"Cancel Culture!"

"Ostrich Mentality!"

"Leave it alone!"

"Burn it to the ground!"

"Be glad for what you have!"

"We demand better!"

In short, we're polarized to the point of paralysis—not because we're so different and so far apart that we simply can't find common ground, but because we're being confronted with facts we don't want to see, don't want to know.

The chocolate is *bad* for us. And we want our chocolate. Cognitive dissonance, playing out on a national scale and made worse by the fact that some of us aren't just being presented with the inappropriate actions of others. In shining a spotlight on today's events, we're forced to re-evaluate our own pasts. Things we might have said or done—or seen, and not intervened.

We're good people, and we never intended to do anything but good in this world. And these events are forcing some of us to see that no matter our intent, we may have done some ill.

But I'm not evil! Not malicious!

Neither is the baby hippo Fiona, but at her current weight that won't keep her from crushing her feeder's toes if she accidentally stomps on a foot.

We're nice ladies. Nice White Ladies (NWLs). All of us.

All of us are nice ladies, it's true.

And despite our intentions—diversity, equity, inclusion, acceptance—all of us are white ladies on the face of it, too.

If I wanted diversity, why didn't it occur to me that all I saw were white faces in our meetings?

So, it's all my fault?

What would your pants look like if you had three legs?

Not something most of us have pictured, right? Why not? Because we've never seen a three-legged person. Our world is populated with two-legged people, and there's never been any reason for us to imagine having three.

Our world - the world of the NWLs—is populated with other people who look like us, from next door to the cover of *Vogue*.

Well, OK, maybe the cover of Good Housekeeping.

Financially in good shape, Christian, without visible disabilities—and white. That's what the "ordinary" of our society looks like, and we've never really seen anything else. That doesn't make us bad people.

And the people on our National Board are also like us. We don't want to believe they've done something evil. Sure, they may have totally failed the policy and process—but it has to be an honest mistake. Otherwise, that would mean that they did something really horrible.

They did.

In allowing an ethics complaint when it clearly didn't meet the criteria to be heard, they discriminated against Courtney Milan. That statement hurts more because it's not the first time we have heard that RWA has discriminated against writers in minority communities.

Where DID I hide the chocolate?

To behave that way is vile. And we know that they aren't vile people. The chocolate is bad for us. But we love the chocolate.

The chocolate isn't evil, and neither are our national board members. But the chocolate *is* toxic, and we need to manage it or it will poison us.

It's not our fault, or theirs, that we inherited a climate full of toxins. It's not our fault that, like the frog in the boiling pot, we've lived comfortably in this water for so long that we didn't feel it heating up to scald us.

It *is* our fault if we don't hop out of it.

Jumping out of the warm water into the cold air won't be comfortable. But if we don't jump, we'll sit in that cozy hot tub until it boils us to death. It's not our fault that the water is hot and the air

is cold. It's not our fault that we didn't notice, because we didn't know any other way to be. But now that we know? It *is* our fault if we don't jump.

We're going to have to work through our issues.

What issues? Those are RWA's issues, not mine.

I thought so, too. If everyone around me was just like me, it wasn't because I was excluding anyone. They just didn't want to come around, when I (of course!) was eager to welcome them.

I'm not racist. My parents raised me to treat everyone the same, to not pay any attention to color or class. I'll treat you the same whether you're the janitor or the CEO.

Then someone said to me: *Why do you think it is a good thing to be color-blind? To treat everyone the same? To ignore, subvert, erase the immense diversity of thought, experience, and perspective?*

And in that moment I realized that to say in a social media post that an African-American writer who presented was "so articulate" or to tell my trike-riding friend Kevin who could pedal with only one leg because of his cerebral palsy, "you seem normal to me" is to tell someone I respect or value that the person they are *inside* is not-normal, not-acceptable. Like the guy shopping for routers beside my dad and me who said to my dad, in a surprised tone, "Listen to her. She knows what she's talking about." What I heard, I've heard before: "You're smart for a woman." With the corresponding implication that it makes me unusual, some kind of circus sideshow.

I thought about how those comments make me feel. How I shut down, say polite and meaningless things in reply, and mark that person as someone with whom I should never let down my guard. How they thought they were complimenting me when in reality they were just ... identifying themselves to me.

How I must have sounded to people whom I cared about, and then couldn't understand why they didn't show more interest in being friends. How *I* was hurt by *their* rejection when, in fact, it was I who had unknowingly rejected them.

In other words, I've been coming to grips with the realization that I'm a Nice White Lady.

I've made my NWL mistakes, no question. Hearing someone talk about the hurt they've endured and crying "but... what about *my* pain?" Believing that the pain of being rejected by someone that I wanted for a friend is somehow as important as what that friend experienced when I absently dismissed the value of her true self. Talking, insisting on "being heard" because I felt that "others showing sympathy for me" was a higher priority than hearing that voice I had silenced so that I could speak.

I'm working hard to learn, to identify, the NWL things that I do. And I'll keep making mistakes when working with writers from minority communities. Those mistakes aren't my "fault." They're a by-product of the world we were both raised in.

But they *are* my responsibility.

I've got to be ready to say "I'm sorry." Even if I didn't act with malice, I need to be genuinely sorry that I hurt someone, whether I intended to or not. And if that someone doesn't accept my apology? I've got to be able to accept that just because I owe them an apology, doesn't mean that they owe me their forgiveness. If I *listen* to what that person has to say, they may show me the path I can walk to try to make amends.

And that, really, is what it's all about

For us as members, and for us as an organization, it's about examining ourselves and our actions, and asking whether we have lived up to our ideals, or whether we have stumbled blindly along on the familiar path without examining our surroundings.

It's about examining how we treated (LGBTQ+ Chinese-American RWA Ethics Chair) Courtney Milan versus how we treated (Heterosexual Cisgender white American Publisher and author/editor) Suzan Tisdale and Kathryn Lynn Davis.

Statistically, most of us are Christians, or were raised with generally Christian morals. That includes the admonishment to go out of our way to care for those most in need. Did we do right by those who—based on power and privilege—were most in need of our protection and our fair and just deliberation?

Some of us are friends with national members who may have been a part of these actions. Our instinct is to protect our friends, not to engage in conflict with them. We put the *Nice* in Nice White Ladies. Our job, our very place in our society, is to smooth things over, de-escalate conflict, get things back to normal. We are the hostess, trying to make sure our friends are happy and comfortable.

But ladies—our friend's slip is showing. Her shoes look *awful* with that dress. And she's missing a button. No, *two*.

We can smile and tell her she looks fabulous. She'll be happy with us in that moment. But a real friend would never let her walk out the front door looking like that.

A real friend would step between her and the front door and say "Uh-Uh, girl!"

As a real friend, I'm telling you: that chocolate is bad for you. It's sapping your health, and you may think it is making you happy, but it's killing you one innocent piece at a time.

So—let's toss that chocolate in the bin, help our friend with their buttons (and can someone *please* run into the bedroom closet and get her a different pair of *shoes* for heaven's sake?).

I can't do it. Throwing away perfectly good chocolate. Even though I splurged on *Godiva* chocolate, of all things.

Be my moral support, okay? Tell me to slip some of the wrapped pieces into the Incentives basket? Then shake your head if I reach for it after I've shared my latest writing win or challenge.

How long a walk is it to the cafe? Let's sit down over a cup of coffee and start talking about what it takes to become the women we want to see in the mirror.

* The views expressed by newsletter articles are those of the author.

