



NJRWA Conference – Learning New Stuff Between Drinks

I just got back from my second New Jersey Romance Writers of America conference. I've got pages of notes, bags of swag, and a million new ideas to try out. And let's not get started on renewed inspiration!

I met several great agents and editors who, I'm sure, are just dying to represent me and publish my book respectively. I'm getting those query letters out as fast as I can, I promise!

I also learned more about writing (all aspects of it) from some really fine professionals. These are the type of people that especially deserve the respect of the writing community, so I'm calling them out whether they might like it or not (I didn't ask them about this, so I really don't know if it will embarrass any of them).

I go to this conference to hone my writing skills, learn more about marketing and the business end of selling my books, and to meet people who might help me in those goals. I'm selfish. I go and I take. (I mean, I give them money first, so I'm not that selfish.) But these presenters go and they give. They offer their knowledge to me and others like me, and in return they ask nothing more than to find out how we liked their classes. They are the people who keep writing alive by passing their knowledge along to the next generation of writers, who can improve and sell books and add their voices to the literary world.

I can't call out every presentation that really resonated with me (well, I could but I'm hideously lazy), so I'm going to note my two favorites:

Jen Talty: Upping the Stakes – Jen's talk about how to keep escalating the level of conflict for the main character – internally and externally – taught me how to keep my readers engaged by making my characters three-dimensional. She clearly explained how conflict drove both the plot and the actions of the main character. A great perspective on the topic, and very well-presented. <http://jentalty.com/>

Ann Rose: Quelling Your Query Conundrums – The goal of Ann’s talk (besides winning the “Most Tongue-Twisting Title Award) was to help us write those fricken-fracken query letters that we all hate but must do if we ever wish to sell a book. She broke the query down into its components, offered ideas on what to do (and not do) in each section, and explained how to make your query stand out among the others. Careful, though – she’s high energy! www.amroseauthor.com

To both of you and all the other presenters, I am appreciative of what I learned from you and encourage others to take advantage of these two woman who are both fountains of knowledge in their own right!

I can’t wait for next year!

Words With Wine

I like wine. No, I love wine. I drink it, I collect it, I sample it, I read about it, my characters enjoy it. Are we clear on the wine-loving?

I also like to write. I’m still fairly new at it (at least in regards to novels) but never realized how much I enjoy putting my thoughts on paper (figuratively) to make a story.

Finally, and like most writers, I am a voracious reader. I’m finally adjusting to the idea of using my Kindle, but for the longest time I was a regular at the local furniture store, as I bought yet another bookshelf to store the pile of new books I had obtained.

Based on all this, I’m going to stick to my strengths and introduce a new feature: **Words With Wine**. Every month, I’m going to feature a book for you to read and then suggest the proper wine to go with it. My hope is that by selecting a good book and a good bottle, you will enhance your enjoyment of both. (Actually, my hope is that you get so stinkin’ drunk that you immediately start buying all kinds of books – especially mine.)

I’m honored and privileged to do my first **Words With Wine** using *Everywhere and Every Way* by Jennifer Probst, the first book in the Billionaire Builders Series. Jennifer is an excellent and very successful writer, and I always look forward to reading her books.

On a personal note, we’ve been acquaintances for a very long time. Although she is in the upper stratosphere of success while I’m still trying to get off the ground, she has graciously given me advice and encouragement at every turn, so that makes her a wonderful person as well as a great author.

Within only a few pages I already had a good idea of the type of wine that matched this book.

To see my thoughts on her book and which wine you need to purchase before you read the first paragraph, go to the **Words With Wine** section on my website: <https://tinyurl.com/y9uepw9o>

To purchase **Every Where and Every Way** on Amazon, go here: <https://tinyurl.com/yc69vx9c>

The Tao (D'oh!) of Simpsons

Ahh, the Simpsons. This highly-dysfunctional cartoon family, none of whom have aged since 1989 after they upgraded from a short on *The Tracy Ullman Show* to their now iconic half-hour slot, has become as American as apple pie, Twitter, and Planking. In fact, it's so ingrained in our society that I, Exalted Grand Poohbah of All Things Grammatically Correct and Accurate, chronically use words like "cromulent," "kwyjibo", and "impossible." (Props to those who can define these words.)

Therefore, I've decided to adopt a new life-philosophy - The D'oh of Simpsons. Honestly, I can't think of a situation in life where a quote or an image from the Simpsons is not applicable. Just look at these real-life scenarios and the associated quote:

- When you wake up to find that last night's booze-fueled party caused a major problem, and you pop open another beer to forget: **"Alcohol. The cause of – and solution to – all of life's problems." (Homer)**
- When anyone serves you a salad at a cookout when you just want a burger: **"You don't win friends with sal-ad!" (Homer, Bart, and Marge)**
- When you are waiting for anything. **"Now we play the waiting game...Ahh, the waiting game sucks. Let's play Hungry Hungry Hippos!" (Homer)**
- Anytime you completely bungle a fairly easy statement of any sort: **"Me fail English? That's impossible!" (Ralph Wiggum)**
- When you are watching a hockey game, regardless of what happens on the ice: **"I moved here from Canada and they think I'm slow, eh." (Canadian boy)**
- When ordering a beer or talking about an attractive woman (with attractive being subjective): **"Actually, a woman is more like a beer. They smell good, they look good, and you'd step over your own mother just to get one! But you can't stop at one. You want to drink another woman!" (Homer)**
- When you can't do something but are giving it your best. **"Trying is the first step towards failure." (Homer)**
- When determining if you should eat something: **"Remember, if you're not sure about something, rub it against a piece of paper. If it turns clear, it's your window to weight gain!" (Dr. Nick Riviera)**
- When anyone comments on your hygiene in any way. **"I wash myself with a rag on a stick." (Bart as a fat adult)**
- When someone orders or eats a club sandwich. **"Oh, quit cogitating, Steinmetz, and use an open-faced club. The sand wedge." (Mr. Burns) "Mmmm....open-faced club sandwich." (Homer)**

I think it's pretty clear I've demonstrated that Simpsons characters offer at least one relevant quote for anything that can possibly happen to anyone ever. Therefore, I've decided to live my life only by responding to any and all conversations using lines from Simpson's episodes (or the movie – can't forget the movie).

Yes, it might make conversation a little tricky, but no one really talks to me anyway. It'll mostly be me walking down the street talking to myself – but I will have a Bluetooth in my ear so I can pretend I'm talking on the phone.

Writing Tip – Your Audience Isn’t Stupid, Stupid.

As writers, we always want to use our extensive vocabulary to describe an action, an event, a scene, a feeling, whatever. And that’s not a bad thing. We flex our word-muscles and sometimes the sentence or paragraph that comes out is gold – with great rhythm, timing, and our hearts just flutter with beauty and self-love.

But sometimes we go a little too far, and we overexplain until the cows come home. See if you can find the extra, unnecessary sentence in this exchange (bonus tip – it’s from my soon-to-be-released second book, *Binding Contracts*):

She hesitated for a brief second before complying. “Thank you for inviting me.”

He shook his head. “I didn’t invite you. I gave you an order and you obeyed, as you are supposed to.”

Denise took a deep breath. He was obviously taking to the dominant role very quickly.

(Theme from Jeopardy plays.)

Did you guess the last sentence? If you did, you’re better than I am, because removing it was one of the very last edits I made in this book, and I read that passage at least 12 times. It’s clear that the other, unnamed character, is assuming the dominant role based on the previous text. It’s simply not needed.

Our readers are morons (well, mine aren’t – I don’t know what kind of dopes read *other* books). In almost every case, they will understand what you are going for. Readers are intuitive – if you give them what they need. Books are journeys of the mind. Readers will develop their own mental image of what’s happening in the book, and if you bonk them on the head with the obvious when it isn’t needed, you’ll take them out of that headspace and out of your book. When you do that, you don’t get reviews that say things like, “I couldn’t put this down!” or “It pulled me in and didn’t let me go!” You’ll get reviews that describe the writing as “heavy-handed” or “overbearing” and that don’t sell books.

As an exercise, read some of your paragraphs after you type them. Write down exactly what each sentence describes or introduces – this can be emotions, specific items or actions, whatever. Once you’ve reached the end of the paragraph, review what you wrote. First, ensure that it conveys what you want it to. Then look for the redundancies. In short, if two sentences tell you the same thing, one of them should be removed.

I don’t recommend doing this all the time (unless you like spending 14 years on one book), but as an exercise once in a while, it’s a valuable tool in tightening up your writing. Try it and see how well it works for you.

Country Christmas Love Anthology

Unfortunately, this has been postponed until at least next year. I will keep you up to date here and on my website.

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