

Success at Nationals

By Susan May

Romance Writers of America's national conference is bright lights, opportunity and knowledge for a PRO writer. I wanted to take advantage of it all, soak it up, and gain from it. So I made a plan. I listed what I wanted to accomplish and set out to reach those goals.

My first goal was to meet with the editor of the Presents line for Mills & Boon. Tessa Shapcott was very gracious, but asked me some difficult and thought provoking questions during our appointment. But I did get a request.

Under this same priority, I wanted to say hello to Shelia Hodgson, who is Mills & Boon's medical line editor. We'd met in Atlanta during nationals and she had requested the first three chapters of a book, which I submitted but had to withdraw when my nonfiction book was contracted. I wanted her to know that I'd resubmitted the chapters and they were on her desk waiting her return to London. She made a note to look for the material. Put a big check by this goal. Plus a smiley face.

My second priority was to volunteer so I could get to know some new people. It is easy not to branch out and meet others

when you are attending a conference with friends. I love my friends, but a conference is the time to broaden horizons. I volunteered to help with the literacy raffle and worked all day. During that day, I met other volunteers and some extra nice people who work really hard to keep the huge membership of RWA happy. Not always an easy task. Because I was the autographing area before the hordes of people arrived, I got to speak to authors who are writing in lines I would like to break into and received some advice. I even got to have a conversation with Nora Roberts.

I found out the next day that during the madhouse time of the raffle I had worked with and bossed around one of the published authors/workshop presenters. You never know who you might meet when you volunteer.

I also volunteered an additional time to help set up for the luncheon where Eloisa James spoke. Two books, a handout and a bookmark had to be placed in each chair. Not a difficult task, but there were 2,000 chairs. It was work. It was well worth the exercise, sweat, and worry it wouldn't get done in time. This volunteer opportunity did come with a perk. I had a front row seat, surrounded by New York bestselling authors, to hear a wonderful inspirational speech. Another check on the list.

The next goal was to meet and reacquaint myself with people I'd met at other conferences. I'm a member of the Heart Beats chapter of medical writers. The group had a luncheon which gave me a chance to meet a number of members that I only knew by name. It is always fun to put faces with names. I also spoke to editors, agents and authors that I had met before as I crossed the lobby. Put another check on list.

Learning something new was an additional goal. Promotion and getting a handle on conflict was my focus. I made attending workshops that covered these subjects a priority. From each workshop I learned something new. The best one I attend was entitled Chemistry, presented by Sherry Thomas. She is a new author and did an excellent job of sharing her material. I'm far enough along in my writing that I don't always hear something new, but when it is presented in a different way - I experience a light bulb moment. Check off improving my craft.

When I arrived home I review my list. By all standards I'd had a successful conference. The icing on top was that I was rejuvenated by attending. I came home excited about writing and ready to go to work. Next year, I plan to be a PAN when I attend national and have a different list of goals.

1. Lunch with my editor..