

I'm getting ready to go to the national RWA conference and asking myself why. Why am I spending all this money? It usually runs about a thousand dollars by the time I pay for the conference itself, hotel (even sharing a room), food, transportation and the all-important wardrobe. In the past I might have had a new book to promote. This year I'm signing a December book and my next book will be self-published. I'll promote it but haven't given myself a release date yet. Bad, Gerry. I'm hoping for the end of August but can't bring myself to make a firm commitment. Anyway, it's hard to rationalize that the book signing will bring me lots of new readers. It never has before. I know a couple of long-time fans live in the San Antonio area who plan to come meet me at the signing. I'm glad of that but don't think that's worth the expense or time involved. So why am I going?

Well, maybe I'm just eager to get out of town. Yes, that's part of it. A road trip is always welcome, and San Antonio and the river walk are a fun place to visit. But in July? The heat is horrible and the walk crowded with tourists. So that reason won't wash. There's the meeting with my agent. We email back and forth and I'm not sure there's much new to say in person. However, I do enjoy seeing her face to face. Getting industry news is good. Or bad. I know that paranormal sales are abysmal these days. I should write something else. Too bad my brain is full of vampire stories. There's a great cocktail party put on by my agency though, so I'm looking forward to that. Lots of big name authors will be there. I'm such a little fish in that pond.

There are workshops I could attend. A day just for published authors. I will go to the ones that can inspire me. I will scour the agenda looking for topics that address my own concerns. Like how to get my name out in a crowded field when you self-publish. I'm pretty particular about workshops too. The presenter had better be someone with major success or I won't listen to what they have to say. Can you blame me? Forget the craft workshops. If I don't know how to write after more than twenty years in this business, then it's too late to teach me how. But I hope

new aspiring writers will crowd in there. It's a discouraging truth that the ease of self-publishing has led some people to think craft doesn't matter. Trust me, it does. It's the first thing that matters. It's critical. If you're going, absorb as much of that stuff as you can. The first few years I attended national conferences, I went to every one of the master classes I could. They are taught by the geniuses in the field out there. I may hit one in the PAN schedule. Because I DON'T know everything and am willing to learn more. Yes, I said that.

I'm not a bar person. My tolerance for alcohol is limited by my propensity for headaches after the second glass of wine. I know this has hurt my networking opportunities. But that's okay. I've learned over the years that the friendships forged in the bar may not be lasting. I've made good friendships with the people next to me at the book signings and in workshops. I've even hooked up in line trying to buy breakfast and offered to share a table. It's great to have writer friends and share war stories. That's the real value of these conferences. Touching base with pals you've made over the years. Hearing how others are faring in their careers and maybe getting an introduction that may lead to a sale or a P.R. opportunity.

But I guess the real reason I'm going is to get away from my everyday life and just enjoy a change. Being in the company of writers, and there will be over a thousand of them, energizes me. I always come home full of ideas and with a new enthusiasm for writing. So no matter what the news from my agent or editor turns out to be, I'm happy to be going. And I'm wearing sandals and maybe, I don't know, shorts. Because it's San Antonio in July, people, the Texas version of Hell.