

# ROSA Annual Report | 2017



## Message from the Chairperson

In our third year as a registered non-profit organisation, ROSA introduced several exciting new initiatives, including the Cape Retreat, an expanded Imbali Awards, as well as the new Strelitzia Awards for unpublished writers.

We are very encouraged that our membership has grown, proving that the organisation is offering a valuable service to writers, and that word is getting out about who we are and what we offer.

We congratulate all our members who have published during this last year, both through traditional and through self-publishing. The increasing success of all our authors is a huge source of pride, and we wish you all well.

I would like to say an especially big thank you to Rebecca Crowley, Peter Barker, Suzanne Jefferies, Cindi Page and Elsa Winckler, as well as the rest of the ROSA Executive Committee, for their help in running this organisation over this past year.

I hope that the 2017-18 year is a year of tremendous growth, not only for ROSA but for all our writers on a personal and professional level.

Thank you for your support,

*Romy Sommer*

**ROSA Chairperson**



## Our Vision

ROSA's stated mission, as per our constitution and website, is:

- To provide support, encouragement and professional development to romance writers, especially to writers resident in Southern Africa and of South African descent.
- To enhance and promote the various types of romantic fiction and to encourage good writing.
- To support writers of romantic fiction through networking, information, resources and an online community.
- Represent the genre of romantic fiction within Southern Africa.

During our 2016-17 year, we have furthered these aims through the following initiatives:

## Membership

Since the time of our AGM last year we have grown from 34 members to 46, a significant increase in comparison with the previous year.

Our membership is currently spread across 5 provinces, with the vast majority in Gauteng. The breakdown per province is below. We also have 4 members who live outside of South Africa – soon to be 5 with the emigration of our 2014-2017 Deputy Chairperson.

Gauteng – 25 members

Western Cape – 10 members

Kwazulu-Natal – 4 members

Mpumalanga – 3 members

Limpopo Province – 1 member

We still have many more people signed up to our mailing lists who have not registered as members. As agreed in the 2016 AGM, we sent out a **survey** to those people to ask why they have chosen not to join. Of the 91 people we sent the emailer to, we had responses from 19.

58% of respondents were from Gauteng, 1 was from outside South Africa, and the remaining 37% were spread across 3 provinces. 58% are already published, and 42% are still aspiring authors.

The results to the question as to why they had chosen not to join were as follows:

- Membership is too expensive – 35%
- Plan to, but haven't got around to joining yet – 24%
- Not writing Romance – 18%
- No chapters close by – 11.5%
- Not a joiner – 11.5%

We will discuss these survey results more fully during the AGM to determine how we can address the concerns that were raised.

During this last year, we introduced a new level of membership – an **Associate / Corporate membership** for companies that provide services to authors (including publishers). The membership fee was set at R500 per annum. Associate Members will receive the quarterly members' newsletter, be able to promote their brand on our website and blog, and receive discounted member fees for ROSA events (capped at three people per event). They are welcome to assist as volunteers, but will not be able to vote on ROSA matters or stand for election, in order to avoid a conflict of interest.

## Local Chapters

The **Johannesburg chapter**, with a mailing list of 64 subscribers, is still our largest chapter, however attendance numbers at events seldom exceed 12 at any one event. Also, without a dedicated chapter leader, get-togethers are sporadic, and we have not been able to survey subscribers to improve engagement. **A volunteer to arrange regular meetings, set up guest speakers, and canvas local writers for what types of events they would prefer, would be greatly appreciated.**

Following the successful Retreat in Somerset West in February, the **Western Cape chapter** has grown from strength to strength. With increased numbers, regular meetings alternating between the southern and northern regions, this chapter has rapidly become our most active.

The **Pretoria chapter**, run by author Marie Dry, has also grown in numbers, though meetings tend to be attended by only a small core group. They conduct regular monthly meetings at Waverley Library, and members are encouraged to write regularly. In future, meetings will alternate between serious writing sessions and more social get-togethers. This chapter also does sessions on pitching and submitting before major pitching events like Savvy Authors and the annual ROSA conference.

In 2017 a new **Durban chapter** was created when long-time ROSA member Kathy Bosman moved there. This chapter is still in its infancy. It has met once, and members had a marvellous time doing writing exercises, getting to know one another, and connecting with their 'tribe'. They plan to have one more meeting in late 2017, hopefully with another fun writing exercise. The goal for 2018 is to meet on a more regular basis. If anyone has ideas for future meetings, please let Kathy know, and please also join the Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1986680804912531/>

## Website & Blog

The ROSA website ([www.romancewriters.co.za](http://www.romancewriters.co.za)) is hosted by Hetzner, who also maintain our domain registration. The site is managed via Wix, a free online web design service, however we have a premium plan in order to link the Wix domain to our own custom domain. These expenses are covered by the income from membership fees.

The blog has been maintained this past year by Cindi Page, who has kept the blog active with regular posts (at least two posts per month). The series she created, interviewing ROSA members, has proved to be especially popular. **Blog ideas, and a commitment from our members to contribute posts, would be welcome. We are especially interested in technical content about romance writing from our experienced authors.**

The website also displays our members' most recent published works. If you would like your new released displayed on the website, please email a high quality version of your book cover and a link to your home page to [admin@romancewriters.co.za](mailto:admin@romancewriters.co.za). Please also send an email if you have a new release and would like your listed books updated. The volunteers who manage the website and blog do not have the time to keep track of all our members' individual releases.

Both the website and blog were revamped during this past year to present a fresher, more contemporary, and more professional look.

## Social Media Communities

The **Yahoo group**, our original community, has grown inactive but the **Facebook group** remains active. The Facebook group is an open group with many non-ROSA members and many non-active 'lurkers'. The greatest challenges with the Facebook group are monitoring new requests to join (we still get a lot of requests from foreign men) and ensuring that the site remains a community group and is not inundated with promotional posts.

The **free forum** hosted on Activeboard is still very much under-utilised. The forum has both public and private areas, and therefore guarantees members safety and privacy, which Facebook does not. There are also special interest areas for local chapters and sub-genre writers to communicate.

Members are encouraged to make use of this forum, which can be found at

<http://saromance.activeboard.com>.

We have Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube channels, however **these remain largely under-utilised and would benefit from a volunteer to keep them active.**

## Newsletters

ROSA currently uses the free online Mailchimp service for newsletter distribution. We have over 100 subscribers to our general ROSA news list (including official ROSA members). We also have lists for the local chapters, though chapter leaders maintain their own lists as well. We urge everyone to sign up to the applicable newsletters (and please check your spam filters, and approve [admin@romancewriters.co.za](mailto:admin@romancewriters.co.za) as a sender) as this our first line of communication.

Registered members of ROSA receive a quarterly newsletter containing news on members' new releases, industry-related articles and links, book reviews etc. **We would very much appreciate contributions from members for these newsletters.**

## Professional Development

As in previous years, our primary project aimed at developing South African authors is the **annual conference**. In 2017 we again welcome a celebrated international keynote speaker to the conference. Over the two day program, we have 16 speakers covering a multitude of topics.

In 2017 we have introduced a **scholarship program**, to enable two romance writers who could not otherwise afford to attend, the chance to attend the conference. The winners of the scholarship places will be announced in early October.

While we have seen some growth in our attendance year on year, we have not yet attracted sufficient numbers outside Gauteng to justify holding the annual conference in any other province, nor do we yet have the numbers to book a larger venue. In 2017, while we had more early interest, our number of confirmed bookings at this stage (with only 2 weeks left in which to register) is lower than in 2016.

As it was agreed at the 2016 AGM that it was not economically viable to holding the annual conference outside of Gauteng for the foreseeable future, we instead decided to host **smaller one-day retreats** in other parts of the country. The first Retreat was held in Somerset West in February 2017, with New York literary agent Louise Fury as the main speaker, and the event was a huge success. We will host another retreat in the Western Cape in early 2017, and hope to start similar retreats in Durban once that chapter has established itself.

Though it was agreed at the 2016 AGM that ROSA was not yet ready to initiate a training or mentorship program, two of our experienced authors kindly agreed to run a **pilot mentorship program**. Two aspiring writers from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, who had contacted ROSA via the website, were paired with these authors. While both aspiring writers were very keen at the beginning, neither was able to see the year-long commitment through for various reasons.

What we have learned from this pilot project, is that aspiring writers need to have steady access to a computer, an email connection, and also need to commit to taking part. Whether ROSA tries something like this again will be discussed at the next AGM in October 2017.

## Quality Control and the Pursuit of Excellence

As stated in our Mission Statement, ROSA aims to encourage *good* writing. In order to acknowledge South African romance authors who are mastering their craft, we initiated the **Imbali Award** for Excellence in 2016. This inaugural award was won by Suzanne Jefferies, with her novel *The Joy of Comfort Eating*. Our thanks go to Annemarie Gaertner, who administered the contest, as well as the panel of judges.

In 2017, we extended these awards to an Afrikaans category as well as an English category, each judged by a separate panel of judges. All entries were first published between January and December 2016. In 2017 we had 9 entries for the English award, and 8 for the Afrikaans award.

We were very much encouraged by the support of our Afrikaans judging panel who all undertook to read a large number of books enabling the entries to receive at least 4-5 reads each. However we remain short on judges in the English category, and several entries only received the minimum of three reads.

This year, we also introduced the **Strelitzia Award** for our as-yet-unpublished authors, which was judged by a panel of ROSA's published members. We received seven entries. Again, our biggest challenge was attracting enough judges to ensure that all entries received the minimum number of reads to ensure that judging was fair and balanced.

Once judging is complete and the 2017 winner's announced, the new Contest Committee will look at ways in which to improve these contests in future years, both for entrants and judges.

## Outreach

In line with our mission statement, ROSA is keen to promote literacy in addition to promoting the Romance genre in Southern Africa. As yet, we have not initiated any outreach projects. We invite our members to come forward with suggestions on how we can attract new members, how to increase public awareness of ROSA, to extend our outreach into disadvantaged communities, promote literacy and engage with readers, bearing in mind that these projects will need to be run on a volunteer basis until ROSA has the financial means to invest in these projects.

## Financial Management

ROSA's third financial year ended on 30 June 2017. Upon approval of the financial statements attached to this report (the Asset & Liability Statement, as well as the Income & Expenditure Statement), these statements will be submitted to SARS. ROSA does not yet have an official accounting officer, so all recommendations will be greatly appreciated.

Our expenses during this last year include the website domain and hosting costs, bank charges, and the contest costs (manufacture of trophies, postage etc), with the bulk of income and expenditure being for the annual conferences and Cape Retreat.

Thank you very much to Clare Loffler who has managed our memberships for the past year, and to our Treasurer Peter Barker for compiling our financial statements.

## Looking Forward

Our organisation relies heavily upon volunteers. We are only as strong as the members who are active within the organisation, and so we encourage all members to volunteer. Since most of us have day jobs, as well as trying to write, the more people who pitch in, the easier the workload!

Thank you for your time and your support.

The End.