

A place online for writers to social-network

Prominent area names on roll call of contributors to redroom.com

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Novelist Amy Tan, author of "The Bonesetter's Daughter," blogs weekly there. Poet Ishmael Reed graces the homepage with an essay about boys reading in his Oakland neighborhood. And Terry McMillan, Maya Angelou and Maxine Hong Kingston all helped to get it going.

"There" is redroom.com, an online social network for published authors. Bay Area writers started the site two months ago, and it has now swelled to 400 members.

One of the latest to join is Barack Obama, author of "The Audacity of Hope" and "Dreams from My Father" — and, oh, a presidential candidate.

Like college students on FaceBook sharing thoughts about their days, these authors share their musings about getting words on the page, about what they do with the rest of their time, and what they care about besides their books.

Ayelet Waldman of Berkeley, author of "Love and Other Impossible Pursuits" and other novels about relationships, blogged about Obama and why she supports him.

"I love anything that connects readers," Waldman said in an e-mail about why she joined redroom.com.

Tan, who has written seven novels and has lived in Oakland and San Francisco, blogs about driving to Tahoe.

McMillan, whose seven published books include "How Stella Got Her Groove Back," blogs about how that book started as a poem but kept growing.

And readers can comment.

"Most writers I know," says the San Francisco native Ivory Madison, who started redroom.com, "are intimidated by technology and would feel uncomfortable putting their own Web sites out there." Many authors typically rely on publishers and publicists to start sites and therefore have a walled relationship with readers.

Madison, a writer and business start-up consultant, started the RedRoom Writers Society group in San Francisco five years ago to help writers get past procrastination. She decided to turn RedRoom into a virtual — and larger — meeting place. Now some 400 published authors have pages on redroom.com as members and about 500 are waiting for the applications to be processed, Madison said.

Madison's first novel, "Huntress: Year One," is being published this spring. To become members, authors have to be published and be "community builders," Madison said, adding that means "something about you or your work adds to the community."

Authors also must list their favorite charities. As the site develops and attracts advertising, redroom.com plans to send a small portion of its advertising revenues to those charities.

Readers can also join, but they do not get pages.

Its function as a community of writers seemed to be put to the test last month. When author Patry Francis found out she had cancer just before a scheduled road tour to promote her book "The Liar's Club," other redroom.com authors took over the promotion by blogging about it.

"Patry's heartfelt words have both touched and inspired me as a writer and a person," blogged April Sinclair of Oakland, author of "Coffee Will Make You Black" and "Left My Back Door Open."

Redroom.com was launched with \$1.25 million from angel investors in the venture capital and business community, Madison said, including Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist.

VentureBeat, a publication about new start-ups and venture capital investment, cited redroom.com as part of a trend of niche social networks.

"It seems well positioned to exploit its niche," the publication said, "because it's giving a community without much tech savvy an easy way to start marketing itself."