

Novelists' INK

The official newsletter of Novelists, Inc. — a professional organization for writers of popular fiction.

Guerrilla Marketing:

Lessons from the Front Lines of Popular Fiction Selling

By KATHLEEN EAGLE

Lesson 1: Collaboration among writers, publishers, and distributors

Guest speakers at the Midwest Fiction Writers April '94 "Creative Professional" conference included Erik Sakariassen, owner of Saks News, a Bismarck-based independent distributor serving North Dakota and bordering states, and Debby Tobias, Director of Distributor and Field Sales for Avon Books. Friends since

their college days, Erik and Debby put together a presentation that they are slated to reprise at the Western Writers national conference. The program was geared toward educating writers about the marketing end of the business.

Erik, who, with his brother, Paul, took over the family business started by their grandfather, gave us a thumbnail history of the paperback book and its availability in retail outlets, from the days when it was sold mainly in drug stores through its present *presence* in supermarkets, discount stores, and bookstores. For many years bookstores sold only hardcover books. Even now, most paperbacks are sold through other outlets, and the stark reality there is the stiff competition for space.

The independent distributor's (ID) challenge these days is to persuade retailers that the space allotted for books in their stores earns a profit, often a much bigger profit than products (disposable diapers and greeting cards, for example) that take up more space. Books, unlike most merchandise, are fully returnable to the original supplier. The distributor is a middle-man, and unless he owns a book store—Saks owns two in North Dakota—the ID is competing for space which is owned by somebody else for merchandising our books.

Competition for prime retail space is becoming fierce. For example, Coca Cola is after that captive eye space (where our books have long been housed) next to the check-out counter in some of the major retail chains, and the soft drink giant is willing to put its big bucks into play for it. Computerized sales tracking often causes the ID a headache when books are categorized with, say, health and beauty products and the sales for the whole category are down. The retailer will decide to cut the space for that category even though the books and magazines have shown an increase in sales.

The ID must do his homework, arm himself with facts and figures and try to make his case for every bit of retail space in his territory, but often the retailer decides that it's easier to cut space than to re-program.

According to Debby, major publishers (*continued on page 6*)

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PRESIDENT's column

The Disorganization Man

I warned you all that I was a neophyte when I took over this job, but I didn't realize how much I had to learn. This marks the mid-point of my tenure, the sixth column in the cycle. Here is the most important thing I've learned:

An organization like this requires an enormous amount of work, not just from the president but from the board, the committee people, and from members who are drafted into all sorts of dirty little tasks that come up.

It requires the enormous energy and organizational ability of people like Victoria Thompson of Pennsylvania, who at the moment is organizing the Atlanta convention and scouting Denver hotels for a 1995 convention site.

This is Victoria's third go-around on the convention desk, with huge hours and no pay. Occasionally, she tries to beg off the task and write a book, but we all gang up and persuade her to do her magic "just once more."

Vicki, that's the price you pay for being an organized personality in a group of disorderly minds.

(The amazing thing is that Vicki manages to produce top-notch novels at the same time she organizes for us. Maybe there's a lesson in that for all of us.)

There's another organizational task that Robert's Rules of Order didn't tell me about: membership and retention. This year, Sue Guntrum, as chair, drafted Stella Cameron, Barb Keiler, and Jayne Krentz to call an unusually larger number of members who had failed to re-enlist. Vice President Julie Kistler pitched in as well, and among them the committee retained 34 members who might have otherwise slipped off the roster.

Nobody likes to play telephone salesperson, and every one of us has more calls to make and return than we need, but these five jumped in and did the job aggressively and effectively. We all owe them thanks.

I didn't know about retention calls when I started this job. I thought that conventions

just sort of happened by magic. I knew there was a newsletter editor, but I had no idea how much time and effort JoAnn Ross spends keeping us all in touch with one another.

Nobody gets paid. Most of these people don't even submit expense accounts to reclaim the cost of telephone calls. They all take time away from their writing machines to give something back to the craft by undertaking the scut work of this organization. That goes for the rest of the Board, for past officers and organizers and for "volunteers" who allow themselves to be dragooned into service.

So next time somebody asks you to take part, jump in. There are lots of jobs that need doing. We could use an extra fifty members, for instance. So if you don't have anything else to do, get out there and recruit.



An update on the so-called "reprographic rights" I mentioned in the last column. Those rights are the source of the funds that have begun to flow to American writers' organizations from European countries which are now collecting royalties each time a published work is xeroxed.

Novelists, Inc. is a founding member of the Authors Coalition, a collection of writers' organizations being formed to distribute this new source of income.

I sat through a three-hour conference call in early May, the purpose of which was to organize and draft bylaws. I was a little flippant about reprographic rights in my May column, but as part of my ongoing education I can now tell you the process of inventing an institution to distribute money is not easy.

There are nine other organizations involved, ranging from the Authors Guild and the American Society of Journalists and Authors to the Romance Writers of America and Mystery Writers of America. The Authors Guild, to its credit, has taken the lead

in creating the coalition, and the Textbook Authors Association, whose members' work is often copied, has been aggressive in the early going.

There are competing interests within the coalition. Nonfiction and fiction writers may be at odds over distribution terms, for instance. Much of our first meeting was taken up with trying to decide whether the National Writers' Union ought to be allowed to join, since a significant part of their funding comes not from writers but from the group's parent organization, the United Auto Workers.

But the process has begun. A whole new world, brave or craven, has just opened up. This is not some amorphous change for futurists to dream about. Reprographic rights exist; they are creating revenue for writers. On behalf of the coalition, the Authors Guild recently accepted the first royalty check from Norway. It was for a tidy sum, \$320,000.

That's for one year, from one small country. Sweden expects to weigh in soon with its first collection and the Germans, masters of anal retention, are coming on line with their own system soon.

This money is over and above the funds which are forwarded directly to individual authors and publishers. We are talking bucks, friends, big bucks.

For once, we as creators have common cause with publishers. We have all lost control of the publication process. A book used to be just a book; now it can be a xerox copy, a database entry, a downloaded copy from a high-speed printer or a set of electronic signals that can be viewed on a video screen.

But more importantly, we have common cause with other creators whose work is being reproduced without compensation. Writers and illustrators of all sorts are being deprived of income that legitimately is theirs. Mechanisms exist to remedy that situation. They are already beginning to work.

Novelists, Inc. needs to pay attention. If we don't, we will be overrun by progress. But we on the board need to know how our members feel. That's why we exist. So let us know your thoughts.

— Evan Maxwell

MINUTES summary

Highlights of the Board Meeting of February 23, 1994

1. The Board of Directors approved Denver, Colorado as the site of the 1995 NINC Conference and directed the Site Committee to interview an assortment of appropriate hotels.

2. *NINK* Editor JoAnn Ross provided the Board with an update on the how-to-write commercial fiction book proposal being

prepared for submission to Writers Digest Books as a fund-raiser for the organization. Chapter topics are being finalized.

— Judy Myers

To obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting, send \$2.00 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2.00 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer's Report, send \$1.00 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.


1994 Atlanta Conference Update

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Conference Coordinator

In the next few days you will receive your 1994 conference brochure. And we hope you will be as excited as we are about the program we have planned. We've made every effort to make the conference more affordable, too, but don't make your final decision about coming until you've checked the fares in August. Airlines traditionally lower their fares for the fall, and you'll probably be able to get a bargain rate if you wait to make your reservations.

Some of you may be considering bringing your spouse along, too. Atlanta has many activities, both outdoor and indoor. Stone Mountain Park has swimming, fishing, ten-

nis, golf, skylift and hiking, as well as sightseeing opportunities, and may merit planning an extra day for a visit. The Atlanta Historic Center, which we will be touring on Saturday, boasts the largest Civil War exhibit in the state, and be warned that men go into the exhibit and refuse to leave. Spouses will probably enjoy hearing our Friday luncheon speaker, Ed Turner, and touring CNN with us later that afternoon.

We're still looking for suggestions for Night Owl Sessions, so if you think of one we've missed, please let us know. And plan to come to Atlanta in October, where the living is easy and the editors and agents won't be distracted by thousands of aspiring writers! 

LETTERS to the editor

LETTERS to the editor is the most important column in our newsletter, since it is the monthly forum in which we can all share our views and express our opinions. Anonymous letters will NEVER be published in NINK. Upon the author's request, signed letters may be published as "Name Withheld." In the interest of fairness and in the belief that more can be accomplished by writers and publishers talking with one another rather than about each other, when a letter addresses the policies of a particular publisher, the house in question may be invited to respond in the same issue. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.

Support for Opening Communication Channels

I'm writing in response to two letters in the April issue. Patricia Gardner Evans' letter in support of publishers' responses to membership complaints should be re-read carefully and, I suggest, strongly supported by NINC. Agents could contribute to the dialogue as well. I know agents who would be happy to comment on various aspects of our business without all that condescending crap spoken in public for the benefit of unpublished writers and would-be writers.

Whenever we have a bitch as professional authors, a response from folks on the, uh, other side of the contracts is in order, whether or not they represent the specific company/agency with whom we have a disagreement. Responses to our complaints should be actively sought from publishers and agents. I haven't met people in this business—other than writers—who are afraid to stand up for their side of the argument.

Let me take this opportunity to comment on the propensity of some of our members to bitch in print about the lack of respect we, as talented, dedicated and quite bright authors, receive from the public at large. Who cares?

It is helpful, when reading these complaints, to substitute another profession for ours and see if the complaint holds up. In other words, do teachers, police officers, mail carriers, doctors, lawyers and plumbers, have the same complaint? Usually, the answer is yes. I don't understand why authors feel so shat upon when we don't garner oodles of respect from the public. Rather than rail against the outrages of an individual who thinks lowly of your life's work, use your unique position as an author to shred the person to pieces in your next book.

Nobody gets the respect they deserve. Except from colleagues. This is why Novelists, Inc. exists.

I had an affair with a person who, whenever we were falling asleep, would hold me warmly and whisper, "I know. I know." Whew. It took me ten years to break up with this person.

We know. Novelists, Inc. exists so you can have someone who understands you. My phone number is on the inside cover. Almost everyone else's is in the directory.

Now, just in case you think you want to talk, I'd also like to respond to Kathy Chwedyk's brave letter in response to Barbara Bretton's courageous article on burn-out. I get chills. No matter how much income we do or do not generate as authors, there is a dark side to The Life of a writer. It is an addiction that full-time, professional writers share and that others who publish book-length fiction may not. People who write books as a hobby are not the same people who write books as a way of life, as a career (especially when that career slips...or fails).

Kathy's seeking out lower-status employment to allow her more time to pursue The Life is evidence of the difference between us and the rest of the world. Doing books is my real life, folks. It may not be blood I'm pouring onto the blank page; but, then again, it probably involves sanity (or what I get by on in lieu of it).

I'm forty this year. I know as much about writing now as I did when I was eleven years old. What I knew then is that writing, right or wrong, was what I would do with my life. It is my primary function. That said, I think it would be just dandy were I to make a living at it.

Book-length fiction (because I can) is my chosen field. Writing is my life.

I don't want to sound too much like Steinbeck's haunting monologue from *The Grapes of Wrath* (and I'm certain I won't, since what I know of it is from the movie and not the book), but I do want to say something to Kathy as she writes seemingly alone at night, after working all day. Kathy, I'm there with you. All of us are writing against the odds to make a living at it, a life of it. We know.

And, Kathy, I do suppose that there is a life outside of The Life. It's just that, dammit, I don't know what it's any good for. Robert Frost wrote a line that "all of outdoors looked darkly in at him." That, kids, must have been quite a distraction.

Oh. If any of you just need someone to talk to, I'd rather you write.

— Randy Russell

Broadening Horizons Forestalls Burnout

In response to Barbara Bretton's and Kathy Chwedyk's letters regarding burnout, I am yet another voice raised in favor of broadening one's life to prevent an obsession with one's writing career to the exclusion of all else.

When I began to write romance fiction I was obsessed with keeping up with acquaintances who were more prolific and better established than I was. I, too, tried to narrow my interests and burn the midnight oil, thinking that if I killed myself I would "catch up" with those who I assumed were living the dream. If only I persevered, I would be able to give up any outside work and spend eight hours or more a day at my computer. However, it didn't get me anywhere.

Eventually I realized that my life didn't work that way. Maybe I was lucky that economics forced me to go outside the home for freelance work. By the time I began to produce a steady flow of books that sold, I no longer wanted to give everything else up. My job as a graphic artist at one of the country's largest natural

history museums began to captivate me during the hours I was there as much as the writing game did when I was home. And now I'm glad for it.

Now I'm able to move in and out of several different worlds including family obligations, volunteer work, museum studies, and writing. But I no longer pore over the latest writing gossip or stare at the paperback racks wishing my books appeared in the lead slots. I now appreciate the fact that there's more to life than writing romance.

I have two books left on a contract for Zebra, but recently I got ahead of their publishing schedule. Am I gnawing my knuckles, desperate to have more than one book out next year as compared to four last year? No. I now get a well-deserved break to catch up on reading, explore other genre possibilities, attend local critique group meetings and discover what *other* people are writing, visit small museums around the state and daydream. It's great, and I am mentally healthier than in the days when my thoughts and conversation revolved around nothing but my obsession to keep up with my more successful colleagues. If this means that I sit in the mid-list longer, or even reduce the number of books I write in favor of another career one day, so be it. I will have had fun doing what I did rather than making it some kind of competitive agony. And I will have left the door open for other possibilities to beckon.

As Barbara Bretton said, we all need to re-examine our goals every once in a while and put our writing into perspective. I would add that writing should enhance one's life, not strangle it.

— Patricia Werner

Burned-Up

I've collided once too often with a power hungry editor. Although the editor is gone and amends have been expressed, I'm reluctant to submit work to the publisher. I write in my head. I flesh out the outlines in my assorted sub-directories of my computer. I've completed several sample chapters, but still I hesitate. Do I really want to subject my characters, my plots and most importantly the creative side of my nature to more potential butchery? I write and publish nonfiction articles, but the truth is, I can't bring myself to send out my fiction work anymore. It's taken more than a decade of generally negative experiences to get to this point, and life's too damned short to let the rats drive you crazy, but what kind of a system puts the rats in charge?

What do other writers do when they find themselves so jaded that they don't want to sell their work? Give up? Crawl into their caves and be quiet? Go on to a better life? Doing what? Experiences of others brave enough to write about this problem would be helpful to read about. Surely I'm not alone. It isn't the same as burn-out. It's facing the reality that there are evil people in this world and some of them find their way into the publishing houses to play unethical and/or illegal havoc on writers.

— Name Withheld

Harlequin Filmdom

Regarding the announcement that a Toronto-based film company will produce movies based on Harlequin titles:

It concerns me that the fiduciary interests of the vast majority of Harlequin authors may be compromised by this kind of "sweetheart" agreement. I.e. How hard is H/S flogging video/film rights that Alliance does *not* want?

— Name Withheld

Consciousness Raising at PW

Thanks to everyone at NINC who took the time and trouble to let the folks at *Publishers Weekly* know we hated their romance reviews. I can hardly believe it, but the proof is right here in black and white. At last! Fair-minded critiques by reviewers who like and understand the genre! That's all we were asking for, and, by God, it looks like we've finally got it. Who'd have thought? Frankly, if it had been left to me, I'd have spent the rest of my life bitching about it. So let's hear it for Catherine Coulter, Jasmine Cresswell, Susan Wiggs and all the others who actually *did* something about it. The rest of us are in your debt forever.

While I'm in a grateful mood, I'd like to thank Barbara Bretton for the most compassionate and dead-on-target analysis of burn-out I've ever read. You probably saved some lives.

— Patricia Gaffney

INTROducing

The following authors have made application for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINC issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants:

Deborah A. Cooke, Toronto, Ontario
Marilyn Jordan, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Ann LaFarge, Millbrook, NY
Yvonne Montgomery, Denver, CO
Adrianne Lee Undsderfer, Maple Valley, WA
Gina Wilkins, Jacksonville, AR

New Members:

Vicki K. Hinze, Niceville, FL
Carla Luan, Houston, TX
Debbi Wood, Lincoln City, OR

Guerrilla Marketing

(Continued from page 1)

have responded to the crisis by forming a committee of marketing directors (Debby represents Avon) to take a cooperative approach to gaining retail space for the sale of books. They have found that the retail giants are receptive to the argument that the sale of books promotes literacy and that allocating retail space for books is actually a community service. (The reading teacher in me says that this is an approach with an objective we all ought to buy into in a big way. As part of its national conference, RWA hosts an annual

Literacy Reception, which is a joint effort on the part of publishers and writers. The proceeds and resulting donation to the Literacy Foundation have grown by leaps and bounds.)

During the Q&A portion of the session, writers, of course, wanted to know what they could do to help sell their books. Should we try to promote our own books, and what, if anything, is useful? Both presenters told us to write the best books we can.

Erik pointed out that genre fiction represents the bulk of the paperback sales for IDs, but there's a lot for the buyer to choose from, and she won't come

Erik agreed that writers should communicate with their publishers, work with their editors, and coordinate their promotion program. He buys more titles from publishers' lists than most distributors do, but he still takes less than half of what's offered. An author's sales track record is a key factor, but he's looking at sales figures for his agency. So he's not always buying right off the top of the list.

He knows his market, and he buys accordingly. It's up to the sales rep to talk up the titles that will sell well in his territory. He suggests that an author should know her publisher's local/regional sales rep. Introduce yourself to the paperback buyers at the local ID's. (My experience has been that you can sometimes meet the ID through the sales rep or vice versa). Don't be a pest, Erik says, but give them a call, offer to stop by, "do" lunch, whatever. Just let them know who you are. There is a great deal to be said for local author appeal and for building your readership in your own backyard.

I had published probably two or three books before I met the people at Saks News. At that time I was writing series romance exclusively, but it wasn't long before my series books began showing up on Saks News *Mass Market* Bestseller List. But North Dakota is such a *small state*, you say. A drop in the bucket in overall sales. If there's one thing I've learned in this business, it's that it's a *small world*, fellow authors, in more ways than you can count.

First, North Dakota buys more books *per capita* than any other state.

Second, Saks News is highly regarded as a model ID throughout the Midwest. I've heard this, now that I live in Minnesota, from big-time Minneapolis ID's. Paul and Erik Sakariassen, it turns out, are both active in the Upper Midwest Booksellers' Association. (Yup, booksellers have their networks, just like writers do.) In fact, Paul served as president a few years back. Third, everybody in sales who's been in it a while knows everybody else in sales. (Yup, same as us.)

You never know when the network chain will come around full circle. When I told Erik the news of my first Avon contract, the first thing he said was, "Great! Avon's got one of the best sales directors in the business. Went to college with her. She's from Montana. Yup, she's one of us."

So there you have it. I will drive from Minneapolis to Bismarck on the worst weekend in January (50 below *plus* wind chill)

Erik Sakariassen:
"*...writers should communicate with their publishers, work with their editors, and coordinate their promotion program.*"

back to an author who's burned her with a bad book. Two or three burns will turn a customer off a whole genre.

Okay, we said, we'll write great books. What else?

Debby strongly suggested that a writer try to work with her publisher. Talk with your editor, talk with the people in marketing, and tell them you're willing (if you are) to do some promotion. If you're printing flyers or postcards, the publisher may be willing (and if so able) to distribute some of those more effectively than you can, which will save you some postage. (Then—my aside—you can concentrate on mailing directly to readers, if you wish, or to booksellers you *know* to be interested, those you've had some kind of personal contact with.)

Giveaways (gift items offered at various levels from buyers for large accounts to point-of-sale freebies) are much more effective when they're sent by the publisher or, better yet, delivered in person by the sales rep. Avon gave away, at their expense, a large quantity of a small item (pens) for my latest book, *Fire and Rain*. I talked with my editor, Ellen Edwards, about what I might do to support the book. Ellen talked with Debby, and Debby suggested at that time that, rather than duplicate the effort with another small gift, I might do a desk item (larger gift, fewer in number) which the reps would give to key accounts. Moral: Talk to the folks. It never hurts to ask.

Debby Tobias:
"*Major publishers have responded . . . by forming a committee . . . to take a cooperative approach to gaining retail space for the sale of books.*"

to sign my latest books at Maxwell's, one of the Saks-owned bookstores, because there *will be* a good turnout for my signing, my book *will be* right up there near the top of Saks' bestseller list, and Saks backstocks my books, even the series titles. When I get letters from people asking where they can find my out-of-print books, I send them an order blank from Saks.

Among the points Erik and Debby hit home with in their presentation was that each of us has a job to do, but we're all in this together. We ought to understand how our popular fiction reaches the populace. There are some harsh realities, and we might as well be aware of them. There are also some bright spots, and most of those turn out to be people doing what they do well.

Our best hope individually might just be in getting those bright spots working together. Who knows? Maybe we'll form a beautiful, blazing Reading Lamp City. **INK**

Kathleen Eagle is the RITA-award-winning author of over 25 contemporary and historical romances. Her upcoming titles include: Defender, Silhouette Intimate Moments American Hero (Sept.); Brave Hearts By Request: But that Was Yesterday, Silhouette (reprint, Oct.); The Wolf and the Lamb, Harlequin Keepsakes Christmas Stories (Nov.); and Reason to Believe, Avon (Feb.).

Allies in the Marketing Wars

By JUDY BAER

Ask not only what you can do for your publisher—ask what your publisher can do for you.

Apologies to JFK for paraphrasing his inspiring quote. Still, the fact remains that publishers can and will provide you with promotional material for your books in the right circumstances. While it may be difficult to ask and receive much in the way of extra advertising for a single book within a line, there are times when it is both appropriate and effective to ask for help to publicize your books.

Case in point—I have my own series with Bethany House Publishers, the *Cedar River Daydreams* series, which is written for young adults ages 12-15. While it is a niche market, the readers of my books are enthusiastic and expressive.

When I began receiving up to 200 letters a month from fans, I turned to my publisher for help. Kids love book-marks—especially those with an author photo and autograph. Bethany developed a beautiful, four-color bookmark for me to use in promotion.

In addition to the bookmarks, I asked if they would be

**Lesson 2:
When
author &
publisher
work
together**

willing to print a newsletter to mail to my fans. We worked together to create *The Daydreamer*, a semiannual, two-color, four-page newsletter which is sent to each and every reader who takes the time to write to me (along with a bookmark and personal note.)

In addition, Bethany does color posters which I often send or take to schools when I am speaking or am asked to donate to a school auction.

If you are an author who is writing a series or has ongoing characters and have established a positive relationship with your publishers, approach them with suggestions. Flyers, imprinted t-shirts, pens or handkerchiefs (for those three-hankie reads) are all options, depending how much your publisher is willing to spend.

I would recommend, however, that whatever you use, it be an item that will advertise your line or series characters rather than an individual book. That way, you can take your material to many autographings and speaking engagements—not just those during the release of your current book. A promotional campaign which develops from a series should be as enduring as the series itself.

Judy Baer's newest series at Bethany, Live! From Brentwood High, launches in June with Risky Assignment and The Price of Silence. All 22 books in the Cedar River series are in print, as well as two books in the nonfiction series based on letters from her readers. She also writes as Judy Kaye for Harlequin Romance.

Guerrilla Marketing:

Pooling Resources

By SANDY HUSEBY

Lesson 3: Writers can make their own waves

D-Day comes four times a year for published authors in Minnesota, and their marketing strategy should be a fundamental guerrilla marketing tactic in every writers' group arsenal, no matter what its size.

When the burden of marketing books falls to the writer, pooling resources with other writers enables expanded marketing reach, provides opportunities for a more professional approach and keeps time-and-dollar investment manageable.

Case in point is *Novel Ideas*, the quarterly, four-page newsletter published by the Published Authors Network of Midwest Fiction Writers, a Minneapolis-based genre writers group.

The newsletter is mailed out to over 900 influence-makers in the marketing side of publishing, including bookstores, libraries, book distributors and media contacts. While the majority of the list is concentrated in the Upper Midwest, distribution is nationwide.

The list was compiled by approximately 18 participating authors. In the process, according to Mary Bracho, who edits the newsletter, they discovered individual authors had unique demographics to offer on lists they'd accumulated.

Kathleen Eagle's list was strong on regional booksellers. Candace Schuler, who'd organized previous local workshops for Midwest Fiction Writers, had already accumulated a comprehensive list of area media contacts.

The compiled list is maintained on a computer database program, My Label Printer (retail approx. \$35), and one person keeps it up to date. Each newsletter's mailing label area contains the imprint "Address Correction Requested." The 29¢ charge for this postal service assures savings on future mailings.

Novel Ideas follows a standard pattern that's geared to maximize the publication's useful-life span.

The front cover features books available for order at the time of mailing. These are books three to six months from release.

The inside spread presents books likely to be in stores at mailing time or shortly thereafter. Screen prints of bookcovers are included in the center pages, and, as feedback from bookstores has proven, the inside spread is suitable for posting in-store.

Booksellers also note, according to Mary, appreciation for the selling benefit of the brief descriptive blurbs accompanying the book titles.

In addition to serving as the mailing page, the back page lists titles more than six months from publication.

Each issue also features a short biography and photo of one of the participating authors. The author is determined, alphabetically in rotation, by status as a new author and/or who has a current release.

The holiday issue of the newsletter included an insert signed by all the authors with a full-year calendar of upcoming titles by release month.

Participating authors each contribute \$60 per year toward out-of-pocket expenses of the newsletter. The group raised additional funds by hosting a Booksellers Brunch and by conducting workshops before the regular meetings of Midwest Fiction Writers.

The authors also get together to share the time of labelling the newsletter and preparing it for mailing.

By investing a relatively modest amount of cash and people-hours, the participating authors have the opportunity to keep their names and book titles before the people most influential in developing readership.

The synergy of *Novel Ideas* is adaptable to any group of authors with a commitment to effective marketing. Plus, it offers the intangible benefit of networking and teamwork with other authors toward a common goal. **NINK**

Sandy Huseby is a public relations consultant and the publisher of NINK. She is published in nonfiction and novella-length fiction. She was a guest speaker at the San Antonio NINC conference... and, yes, Evan, she did give Mary the sales pitch to join NINC while she interviewed her for this article.

Editor's Corner

Writers wanted: *NINK* is interested in hearing from writers who have, for whatever reason, bought back books from publishers. Please contact the editor.

Coming in future issues:

Private Relations and the Woman Writer

What Writers Want from Editors and What Editors Want From Us

Members Discuss Professional Jealousy

Educating The Masses

Writing Ill (Will the person who wrote concerning SADD please contact the editor ASAP. Thanks!)

And, as always: More great conference updates!

Rocky Mountain High

1995 Conference Site Introduced

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Site Committee Chair

The NINC Board of Directors has chosen the gorgeous city of Denver as the location of our 1995 conference. Laura Resnick and I traveled there the last weekend in April to select a hotel to host our conference, and we chose the elegant Warwick Hotel.

The city of Denver is ideal for research, sightseeing, and just plain fun. The heart of the compact downtown area is the mile-long 16th Street Mall. The Mall is a city street that has been closed to vehicular traffic except for the free shuttle buses that run its length as often as every 90 seconds. All sorts of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities are available there, as well as the Larimer Square area which is a restored historic district where you can step back into the Victorian era. Die-hard shoppers will want to visit the Cherry Creek Mall, located just a few miles outside of town and home to such stores as Lord and Taylor, Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue. And nearby is the world-famous Tattered Cover Bookstore, a writer's paradise.


Also in the downtown area are numerous museums and historic sites, including the Unsinkable Molly Brown's house, as well as the Museum of Western Art, the Denver Art Museum and the Colorado History Museum. The Cultural Connection Trolley will take you all over town for a \$1 all-day-ride pass. Microbreweries abound and many give tours, or you can take a day trip to the mountains and visit the Coors or Anheuser-Busch breweries or even the Celestial Seasonings plant.

You'll probably be able to see the Rocky Mountains from your hotel room window, but if you want to see them up close and personal, the foothills are just a short drive away. Those who enjoy rock or mountain climbing will want to schedule a few extra days to enjoy the area's unique opportunities.

And what is our hotel like? Well, the Warwick is listed in "Elegant Small Hotels: A Connoisseur's Guide." The oversized sleeping rooms feature brass and mahogany furniture with an elegant European-style decor. Their rooftop pool probably won't be open in October, but hotel guests have free use of the health club facilities next door, including racquet ball, bicycle room, and aerobics. The hotel boasts 49 suites, but even the regular sleeping rooms feel like suites since they are equipped with a dining room table, full-sized refrigerator and wet bar. Nightly turn-down service features complimentary chocolates, and all guests receive a complimentary European-style buffet breakfast each morning.

The hotel provides complimentary transportation around the downtown area and to Cherry Creek Mall, and you can return to complimentary hors d'oeuvres during Happy Hour in the Lounge. All of this, and we've managed to keep the same low room prices as for 1994's conference.

You've probably been hearing about Denver's new airport (and its problems), but don't worry, they've got a year to work the bugs out of the luggage sorting system before we arrive. The new airport is designed to prevent the flight delays that have plagued Denver's current airport, and Denver is a hub for several airlines, which means direct flights are available from most major cities.

Laura and I were given a mini-tour of the Denver area by NINC members Kay Bergstrom and Pat Werner, and we can't wait to go back. We know our members will fall in love with the Mile High City just as we did. Mark your calendars for Oct. 19-22, 1995! 

Industry News

Avon has announced changes in its editorial department. Carrie Feron is now associate executive editor and Ellen Edwards is executive editor of women's fiction.

As reported in *Publishers Weekly*, Harlequin Enterprises, with the backing of parent company Torstar, will pay \$56 million to purchase Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc. According to David Galloway, co-CEO of Torstar, the company views supplementary education as an area having major growth potential. Schaffer, based in Torrance, California, publishes supplementary materials for grades K-8 as well as a teachers' magazine, *Schooldays*, which has a circulation of 70,000. As reported in the May *Novelists Ink*, Torstar recently gained a stake in Discis, Inc., a producer of CD-ROM multimedia products. The two companies are expected to be working together.

Cenetta Williams, formerly of Waldenbooks, has been hired by Paramount Publishing to sell MIRA books to Crown, Waldenbooks, B. Dalton and Borders.

"I can't say enough good things about last year's conference. I arrived exhausted from months of work, and within a few days I felt human again. I liked the "retreat" feeling the conference had. No rushing, no crowds, just friendly writers interested in sharing their experiences in this crazy business. I came home with new friends and lots of energy." — Kristine Rolotson

Protect Your Data (and Your Sanity)

By JIM THOMPSON

There are some new (and even a few old) computer products on the market that could save you untold misery and a considerable amount of money. With them, you'll practically never have to worry again about losing your manuscript due to power surges, power failures, hard disk crashes, or even as a result of turning off the computer without first saving your text. I'm not saying you can have a computer system that is safe from coffee spills, fires, floods, theft and sledge hammers, but you *can* buy a handful of hardware and software products for a total cost of about \$500 to \$600 that will reduce your chances of most disasters to levels of risk that I would call acceptable. And you don't need to be a scientist to put everything together by yourself.

As the resident computer expert for my author wife, Victoria Thompson, I've been continually expanding and upgrading her computer system over the past decade. The things I've been able to do for her computer are:

1. Use software to trick her 127-megabyte hard drive into believing it's a 310-megabyte hard drive.
2. Give her a tape-drive backup, on which I steadfastly make at least one complete hard drive backup on tape each week and an extra "emergency" tape backup once a month to cover her in case of a hard disk crash. (Being superstitious, she still also makes floppy disk backup copies of her daily writing stints.
3. Provide an uninterrupted power supply (UPS) battery to take over instantly in case of a power failure or power surge and tell her she has five minutes to save her files and shut down the computer until the electric company fixes things.
4. And, best of all, if Vicki deletes a file by mistake, it's no big deal. We have 14 days (longer if we'd like) to "undelete" it in perfect condition. Or if she accidentally turns off the computer power without saving the scene she was writing, not to worry. There's a "shadow" program always running that records every keystroke she makes to a file, even if it hasn't been formally "saved."

My computer knowledge is limited to what is known as the "IBM compatible, MS/DOS (disk operating system) and Microsoft Windows operating environment." (As you can tell, I am no longer terminologically challenged.) If you have an Apple computer, the vocabulary may be different, but the people at Apple Computer are also faithfully doing something about the problems that plague all writers, so you can probably get the same sort of software for your Apple, only under different names.

We began a step-by-step process of upgrading Vicki's computer system about five years ago, right after buying her second computer, which was known as the XT. Before worrying about the

items I'm going to discuss, you do need to have a computer with the most random-access memory (RAM) and the largest-capacity hard drive (megabytes) that you can afford. When finally we got all of that for Vicki, we found out our problems had only just begun.

One summer day while she was writing, there came a clap of thunder and the lights went low. Vicki quickly shut off the computer, but when things calmed down a bit she turned it back on again—just in time for a complete power failure due to a giant bolt of lightning hitting a neighborhood electric substation. Everything on her hard disk later looked like the contents of a Chinese phone book.

We were able to salvage less than half of what was on the hard disk, none of it literary, before having to perform what is known as a "low-level format." The way I understand it, doing a "low-level format" is sort of like having your old faithful blue-ribbon dog put to sleep and then going home with a new puppy.

The thunder-and-lightning episode taught us that having a smarter computer with a bigger disk drive only guaranteed bigger losses and headaches. The short-term solution was for Vicki to listen to nature while writing novels. If there was a hint of thunder (or if the dog's stomach growled), she would save her file, shut down the computer and go do something else. The long-term solution was a box called UPS, meaning uninterrupted power supply, which costs about \$190. To install it, you simply turn off your computer, unplug the computer and monitor and plug them into UPS, then plug UPS into the wall. *Viola!* UPS eats power surges, and it instantly takes over providing power to your computer when a power failure happens, and it beeps like crazy to tell you that it has. UPS is a high-tech battery system, and batteries do run low, so you do have to save files and turn off your computer in short order, approximately five minutes. But that's still better than trying to find your sure-fire bestseller manuscript in a hard disk crash, otherwise known as the electronic confetti maker. For another \$50 or so, you could have an UPS that would also keep your printer running during a power failure.

For about seven years, I had practiced an ancient religious ritual known as "backing everything up to floppy disks." The computer seemed to enjoy it, because it never quit talking: "Please remove diskette #325 from drive a: and insert diskette #326 and press return when ready." One time I needed two more floppies to finish the backup and all the stores were closed. I had to take my neighbor's cat hostage. The ransom note read, "If you ever want to see Fluffy alive again, you'll put two freshly formatted floppy diskettes into my mailbox immediately. Do not call the police unless they understand MS-DOS."

The neighbor later introduced us to our garbage collector, who has a computer system with a tape-drive backup system. Herb's

Hauling could backup about 100 megabytes onto a data tape cartridge in about 30 minutes. I whipped out my VISA card and called one of those computer catalog places and ordered a tape backup unit for \$170.

"Now," I told Victoria, "we are cooking. You have uninterrupted power supply protection, floppy disk backups of your chapters, and tape backups of everything that's on the hard disk." But I had the computer wizard's seven-year itch and wanted an easier way to resurrect those files that mysteriously disappear into the bowels of the computer, never to be seen again. It was time to move up to MS-DOS 6.0, known to "techies" as "six-oh," or "six-point-zero." The catalog people offered me an upgrade from DOS 4 for \$59, and the old VISA card groaned again.

While DOS 6.0 has many new features and advantages, I liked it because it has a system to help you restore files that have been deleted. This "Undelete" program has three levels of protection, and the user can decide how much disk space to reserve for hiding those deleted files. The system will purge old deleted files when you either reach the capacity of the space you set aside, or when your chosen number of days has expired. Another feature of DOS 6.0 is a program called "Defrag" which helps you de-fragment and organize your files and directories and speeds up disk operation. The final selling point for me on DOS 6.0 was a feature called "Double Space," which allows you to get *twice* as many files onto your hard disk.

"Double Space," and similar programs such as "Stacker," take redundancies out of your files, giving you more room. For example, the sentence, "The fat cat sat in the hat on Saturday," contains 38 bytes of data. "Double Space" sees the letters 'at' many times and tells itself to use another, single, character instead. It also sees 'he' twice. Let's choose \$, the dollar sign, for "at," and #, the pound sign, for "he." Your computer now remembers the above sentence as: "T# f\$ c\$ s\$ in t# h\$ on S\$urday," which contains 32 bytes of data (shorter to store than the original 38 bytes), but always sends it back to you in its original form. You save six bytes of data on just nine words. Do that on a book chapter, and you might save over 20 kilobytes on your hard disk.


Unfortunately I thought about the potential hazards of "Double Space" for too long a period and came down with a case of what I call "paralysis of analysis." What if I only wanted to uncompress one file or program and not the whole hard drive? What if somebody in the house didn't want their files compressed? So I didn't use "Double Space" at first. The answers to my questions arrived in the form of an advertising flyer from Vertisoft Systems, the company that designed "Double Space." For just \$29, I was able to upgrade Vicki's computer to DOS 6.2 and to use "Double Space" without any fear at all, because "six-point-two" allows me

to pick and choose which files are compressed and which are not. And I can change my mind whenever I want to.

In the same deal, Vertisoft threw in their "Space Manager" program, which packs files even tighter than "Double Space" does, and a program called "Last Resort," which constantly saves everything you've typed into a special "shadow" file, even if you don't save it yourself. So, if you lose a file that you've been toiling over but forgot to save, there's no problem. Except for control characters, mouse clicks, and function key entries, "Last Resort" will return everything to you in a text file upon request.

I spent \$448 for all of these safety features, plus some sales taxes and shipping costs. I did all the hardware and software installation myself, but if you do have to pay somebody to do it, you shouldn't pay more than \$50 per hour and it shouldn't take more than three hours. Setting up the UPS system is like plugging in a toaster. The software is very easy to install if you follow directions carefully. If you've ever successfully made a copy of files from one disk to another, you can probably install all of the above software on your own. Installation of the tape backup drive requires some technical knowledge and experience and should be handled by a professional. We also use Windows 3.1, which I highly recommend, but it is not mandatory for the above data protection features.

To upgrade your own computer, you could try calling a computer store and saying, "I want one of those things that Jim got," but getting a catalog for yourself might be a better idea. By the way, I'm not a computer technician. We have a friend who truly is a "techie," and I can call on him whenever I paint myself into a corner. We purchase something from him occasionally so he'll return our phone calls when we're at wit's end. But I do know a screw driver from a floppy disk, so I'm able to do a little bit of the work myself. I am sharing our computer story as a way of opening your eyes to some things you can do to prevent losing a well-written chapter to the gremlins.

Now I'm looking for ways to speed up computer operations. Vicki says I just like to spend money. She gets fan mail from inmates, and I get Fed Ex packages from computer places. Hey, we all need something to look forward to. 

"When you live in the only state in the union that has to put 'USA' on its license plates to prove that it really is a part of the U.S., the chance to get together with other people who do what you do is not to be missed. People who live in the other 49 states shouldn't miss it either."

— Patty Gardner Evans (New Mexico)

the NEXT PAGE

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