

Novelists' INK

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

Private Relations and the Writer or

Where to Put Your Marriage on Your List of Things to Do

By DIANE CHAMBERLAIN

I PREDICT that three categories of readers will decide to skip this article: those who, by virtue of being unattached or male, do not see how it applies to them; those who know very well that it applies to them but are skittish about addressing the issue; and those who are certain that their marriage or serious relationship is so solid and secure that reading this article would be a waste of time.

If you're in that last category, please don't turn the page yet. You're part of that group of women I'm most interested in reaching. You see, not so long ago, I was one of you.

She was nineteen and a college sophomore when they met, and she was agoraphobic. Sitting in her classes brought on severe panic attacks, as did attending meetings or dances or nearly anything that took her outside the safe confines of her dorm room. Her grades reflected her turmoil.

He was twenty-one and a senior at a technical college. He was a straight-A student, captain of the soccer team, president of numerous campus organizations and listed in Who's Who in American Colleges.

They fell in love. He left the East Coast for Berkeley and graduate school, and she, unable to tolerate the classroom any longer, dropped out and moved to Berkeley as well, where they began living together. The year was 1971.

I have vivid recollections of attending my first Novelists, Inc. Conference in October, 1991, and hearing other women writers

talk about how little support they received from their partners. They were referring not only to help with household chores and emotional support, but to their partner's general negative attitude toward their writing careers. I, on the other hand, sang my husband's praises. He did more than his fair share of house and yard work so I could write. He played soccer and golf and fished on the weekends when I was working—which was always. He never—not once—uttered a word of complaint over the time I spent writing. Instead, he bought me reference books, accompanied me on research trips, helped me master my computer and stood at my side during book signings. He embarrassed me by announcing the release of my books in his company newsletter. He told me constantly how proud he was of my success, how much he loved me, what a great life we had. I called him several times from that conference to tell him how much I appreciated him after hearing the tales of woe from my fellow attendees. He already knew I appreciated him. I told him all the time.

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PRESIDENT's column

My Kind of Town. Not!

I just got back from the American Booksellers Association convention.

In Los Angeles.

They tell me this is the last time the biggest annual event in the American book business will venture west of the Rockies. Great! Chicago can't be any worse.

(In case any of you have forgotten, I moved out of Southern California one glorious year ago. No regrets, except perhaps that there are no BMW mechanics in Skagit County, Washington.)

Here are some impressions I gathered during three days of wandering a building big

Such is the life of today's writer of popular or commercial fiction. We control damned little of our own destinies.

enough to house five Goodyear blimps. I inflict them on you only because everybody should know what it's like to spend five days close to the heartbeat of the book business.

First of all, business is good. Every salesman and every publisher I talked to said so. Business is great, much, much better than last year, in Miami.

Of course, Miami was much, much better than the previous ABA in Anaheim. And Anaheim was much better than...where was the ABA three years ago, anyway?

In truth, I believe them this time, mainly because I saw orders being written. That's the good news.

The bad news, and this is just a personal opinion, is that there didn't seem to be a great deal out there worth buying. Maybe I'm jaded by my life in the Pacific Northwest (cq Northwet) but I saw damned few packages I wanted to grab off the shelf and tear into.

Interesting books, maybe, but none that suggested innovation, new insight or a different direction in either nonfiction or fiction.

Lots of safe, corporate buys, lots of care-

fully selected and test-marketed packages, but little that stirred me up.

That general impression was underlined by one of the two saddest things I saw inside the confines of the Los Angeles Convention Center. On the first day, I sought out the booth of one of America's most important and commercially successful publishers, hoping to bag a bound galley of the new book by a mystery/thriller writer whose work I enjoy immensely. (I'm not going to use names. The poor writer has enough troubles without me rapping his new book before it's even set in type.)

"Sorry," the smug New York salesman at the booth said, "that's an October book. No galleys yet and 'no, I won't put you on the list to get one' because you aren't a bookseller, you're a writer."

He did let me see a blowup of the cover. It was heart-breaking—a skim-milk-white background with black block letters for the author's name and the title and a few smudges that looked like they might be fingerprints scattered across the whole mess.

Very mysterious, because I couldn't tell what the cover was supposed to represent. Very thrilling, only because I realized that thousands of corporate man-hours had gone into a cover that may well kill the book.

In a couple of words, bloody awful.

This is a book by a writer who just jumped from one house to another, undoubtedly with the promise of big money and a gigantic career boost. What he got was a shot in the foot and he didn't even have the pleasure of pulling the trigger himself. I will buy the book and read it because I love this guy's stuff, but I will also worry that his career may have been done irreparable harm by elements that are completely beyond his control.

Such is the life of today's writer of popular or commercial fiction. We control damned little of our own destinies.

The second sad sight at the convention? Dr. Timothy Leary, guru of the LSD generation. He looked at least 100 years old, wore white cotton gloves to hide some kind of der-

matitis on his hands and had to use rubber bands to hold up his socks because his legs were so thin.

Honest.

His mind's still sharp. He got into a hassle with convention security for trying to sneak a smoke inside the hall and he gave as good as he got. But he should have been home, sitting in the sun, not being shunted around a public arena by some corporate publisher eager to make one last media splash with a book by a misguided icon from another generation.

I know, I know, what makes it my business?

On the other hand, I thought somebody ought to say something. I'll never forget the sight of those rubber bands.

Other sights and sounds, forgettable or not:

➤ A small booth in a side hall where the salesman for a remainder paperback distributor extolled the "12-month continuity" and "high profit margins" of his wares.

Those wares just happened to be backlist titles from relatively well-known authors. The titles are current and the covers are just like front-line books, except they've got holes punched in them.

One other difference. The authors didn't get a nickel, not a penny out of the sales. That's how the "high profit margins" are attained. The publisher declares the books to be overstock, sells them out the back door to a distributor and recoups costs of manufacture plus a small profit without ever having to report the sale on a royalty sheet.

It's all perfectly legal under the contracts most of us sign.

But it's also a dark, grey area full of potential dangers and abuses.

What's to keep an unscrupulous publisher from inflating a print run, selling off part of it and then backdooring the rest? What's to keep him from running a second printing (the first has already allowed him to recover his above-the-line costs), punching holes in the cover so the books can't be returned for credit, then pushing the second run out through distributors like our friend in the side booth?

Conclusion? Remainder sales have always existed in the hardback trade. They are spreading to the paperback business, creating a grey market in books quite like the one that exists in cameras, computers and other, artificially priced goods.

We all would be well-advised to pay attention.

➤ Another sight. A dirty, disheveled bookseller trying to convince an airline clerk that his ticket, along with his clothes, his money and his credit cards, had indeed been stolen from a car outside the hall on the first day of the meeting.

The poor devil apparently had a hotel room but no change of clothes and no money to buy one, so he wore the same outfit, unwashed for five days.

And I thought writers were hard up.

➤ How about the blue carpet of the Harlequin booth, emblazoned with stars that contained the names of several Novelists, Inc. members?

"I know her," I said, "and her. Her, too, but I feel kind of funny standing on top of them."

Conclusion: I always knew that publishers like to walk all over writers, but now they are inviting the public to wipe their feet, as well.

➤ Headlines in the local papers about the ABA suing five publishers over pricing practices that allegedly favor the chains over small independent booksellers.

Comment: Booksellers and writers both have cause to fear large publishers. On the other hand, I would hazard a guess that more of my books are sold in chains than in independents.

Conclusion: You can't fight progress.

You can't fight regress, either.

➤ Los Angeles hasn't changed. We, the conventioners, schmoozed and boozed in gleaming hotels and fancy eateries. I had four of the most magnificent meals I've had in a year. At one, I could look around the room and see more beautiful people than there are in the entire city of Anacortes, WA.

And at night, I could sit in my room and watch Rodney King zoom up and down Wilshire Blvd. in a 100-mph Hyundai, pursued by Roy Scheider in *Blue Thunder* and Stacy Koon in a worn-out squad car.

Conclusion? We in the book business regard ourselves as hip and thoughtful and aware and concerned.

But none of us wanted to be in town when the verdict came down on Rodney's suit for punitive damages.

Overall, it was quite a weekend. I was reminded of why I left Los Angeles. Smog, crowding, tension, irresolvable anger. Those things are all still there.

I was also reminded why writers should never venture so close to the centers of power. Every time I saw a publishing executive, I wanted to bitch about my royalty statement; every time I saw a bookseller, I wanted to ask why he or she hadn't stocked my last book.

In other words, we writers shouldn't be allowed out of our garrets. We haven't been trained to live in the rest of the house.

— Evan Maxwell

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.

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.

Overcoming the Lonely Side of Writing

I thoroughly enjoyed Joan Johnston's article, "Adventures in Paradise" (May '94 *Novelists' INK*), because I once thought, while visiting Wyoming, that I would like nothing better than to live there. But that was in the summer, and my Norwegian husband warned I would never be able to cope with the harsh winters in that particular part of the U.S.

Instead, we moved to the western North Carolina mountains, where we can go from wilderness to the Asheville mall in forty-five minutes or less. Fax machines keep me from being out of touch when we are snowed-in, which doesn't happen often. The wildlife is abundant, and the scenery is breath-taking.

I agree wholeheartedly with Joan that writing is a solitary profession, but that is something impossible to get around. However, I have found a remedy for my "mountain isolation" by working as a volunteer in a hospital emergency room one night a week. Not only is it good physical exercise, running up and down the hall taking patients to their rooms, for x-rays, lab work, etc., but it also nurtures mentally by putting me in focus with people coping with multifarious situations. I have always maintained when teaching writing that it is of paramount importance for an author to understand and experience as many facets of human nature as possible in order to create believable characters.

On a lighter note, my work in ER can sometimes be an ego trip. Only first names are used on name tags, so no one knows who I am. One night I was sent to wheel a woman up to Labor & Delivery. I saw that she was reading my most recent book from Harper—*Orchids in Moonlight*. Of course, I innocently inquired as to whether it was a good book, and she replied cheerily, "It must be. It's keeping me from thinking about being in labor." Now what greater compliment can an author receive?

But perhaps the most rewarding aspect of my medical volunteer work is that it makes me feel good about myself to think that, if only for a little while, I was able, in some small way, to make pain and suffering a little easier for someone to endure.

Yes, the mountains can be lonely. And writing IS lonely. But panacea for any situation can almost always be found if we only look around us.

— Patricia Hagan

To Novelists, Inc. members:

We are in the process of preparing a retreat for genre writers. Having purchased a plateau of seventy acres in Tennessee—part-

ly cleared, the rest wooded, and situated in the heart of the Cherokee sacred land—we are now funding to build a library and writers' cottages thereon.

There has already been assembled a library of research and reference books numbering more than ten thousand, plus a video library of the best known films in several genre fields.

Writers in residence would pay nothing for their quarters and the use of the library. They could stay from four to six weeks—longer time can be negotiated.

Since this establishment will be wholly for the use of writers in the genre fields, we are asking for what support you can give us. We are tax exempt so any contributions may be subtracted from income taxes. Further information will be supplied upon request.

— Andre Norton
1600 Spruce Avenue
Winter Park FL 32789

Lessons Learned

I think I must finally be approaching maturity. Those lists that start with "You know you're getting old when—" don't strike me as funny any longer. Too many of 'em are true! Another indication is that now, instead of going ballistic over every issue that comes along (reversions, secondhand book stores, early stripping, reissues, book clubs, etc.), I'm inclined to check out a few different points of view.

Several years ago I got my bloomers in a twist over the matter of reversions. I have a lot of "mature" books, and somehow I got the notion that the rights should be turned over to me.

Thank goodness for Isabel Swift! As soon as she got my letter listing some dozen or more books that had aged out of Harlequin's copyright, she called and talked me back down to earth. The books were mostly unagented. And let's face it, I'm not the hottest writer on the market. If I'd reclaimed my "rights," I would have put an end to those books' earning power. As it is, most of them have gone on to earn a tidy sum (a little hyperbole there) in foreign sales and reissues. Granted, Harlequin has probably earned a lot more than I have, but a small percentage of something is better than a large percent of nothing.

I think my Don Quixote days must be on the wane.

— Dixie Browning

Private Relations ... and the Writer

(Continued from page 1)

One month after that conference, my marriage was over.

She got a job in a bank, but upon her arrival at work each morning, the panic would set in. Most days, she stuck it out, but on those occasions when the anxiety was unbearable, she made up excuses to leave. She was fired after six months for being unreliable. She rarely left their apartment after that. She went on food stamps, watched I Love Lucy reruns and made macrame belts.

He excelled in his graduate program. He was also a teaching assistant, bringing in the \$300 per month that supported them both. She was proud of him. They joked about his future, how one day he would be famous for some scientific discovery.

They did not joke about her future.

This is a very personal essay, and only one woman's story, but I believe it's possible to make some generalizations from my own experience.

A man's dissatisfaction with his partner's career is often a hidden problem, because husbands and wives are anxious to maintain the facade of a perfect marriage for outsiders, for each other and even for themselves.

Since the break-up of my marriage, I have done a great deal of research into the phenomenon of broken relationships between successful women and their significant others, and I have watched the marriages of too many of my writing friends crack and crumble—and in some cases, disintegrate—in the wake of my own divorce.

They married and moved to San Diego, where he landed an excellent position with a prestigious company. She knew she would have to work to make ends meet and was terrified by the prospect. She discovered a self-help group which taught her behavioral techniques she could use to counteract the panic. She worked hard at getting well, and accepted a job in a bank. Using her new skills, she was able to work steadily for nine months, at which time she felt ready to return to school. It was hard at first, but she began to feel not only comfortable in the classroom, but excited to be there as well.

He was climbing the career ladder, enthusiastic about his

work and receiving praise from his superiors. He was clearly a young man destined to go far. He was proud of his wife, and her new grip on her agoraphobia allowed them to do things they had never been able to do before, such as attend movies and travel.

Problems can occur in any two-career marriage, but marriage to a writer presents some special challenges. As Rita Mae Brown says in *Starting from Scratch*, "It takes a very unusual woman or man to live with and love a writer." At first, your significant other may find your fledgling writing career exciting and he may be willing to take on some of your household tasks to help you get on your feet. But he may soon discover that his payback is decreasing amounts of your time and attention. Even when you are not at your computer, you're imagining scenes and fleshing out characters. Resentment seems inevitable.

Remember when your mother told you not to beat your boyfriend at ping pong to avoid humiliating him or damaging his ego? Many of us of a certain age were raised with that mindset, and many of our men were socialized to feel threatened if they did not look at least as powerful and competent as the woman at their side. No matter how liberated we become, those old tapes are still spinning around in our heads. Few men want to be outdistanced publicly by their women—and a successful writing career is a very public endeavor.

Men, though, are not the enemy. Both sexes are at the mercy of societal and personal expectations that are inherent in a two-career marriage. Most of our partners did not marry writers. They married women who wanted to be wives and mothers or who were involved in some other, more traditional, career. Our husbands must think we changed the rules on them when we began to grow and evolve. They're confused about how to respond to our transformation, and it is up to both partners to find a solution to the dilemma.

At the age of twenty-six, she began graduate school in social work. She was a devoted, enthusiastic student, wanting to make up for all the years school had been her enemy. She made new friends, threw herself into academic activities and soon rose to the top of her class.

He spent an increasing amount of time alone because she was always studying. He never complained though; he was her staunchest supporter, emotionally and financially. Besides, he was busy with his own career.

Women have traditionally been dependent on men for economic security. When women start making decent money,

Private Relations

(Continued from page 5)

their partners may get a little nervous. If she doesn't need him for money, she might not need him at all. She might outgrow him. Abandon him.

She started a job as a medical social worker. It was challenging, exciting and rewarding work, and her skills and self-confidence grew.

He was beginning to feel some dissatisfaction with his job, asking himself, "Is that all there is?" He decided to go to law school at night.

A writing career is time-consuming, psychologically draining and totally absorbing. It is also stimulating and gratifying, and most of us are in it out of choice because there is nothing we would rather be doing. How many of our partners can say the same thing about their careers?

Those of us in the earlier years of "mid-life"—let's say thirty-five to fifty—are very vulnerable when it comes to suffering problems in our marriages, whether one of us is a writer or not. A man's "mid-life crisis" often coincides with the peak of his partner's success. Many of us have come to writing as a late or second career, after we've had some time to think about what we really enjoy doing. And many of us have had the economic support of our spouses to keep us going when we couldn't sell that first book. Most men, on the other hand, were asked to decide at a very early age what they wanted to do for the rest of their lives—and they had better select a career with which they could support their family forever. If it turned out a few years down the road that they were unhappy with the occupation they chose, that was too bad—their kids had to eat. Frequently, it is not the money or time that is the source of resentment—although it may be expressed that way—but the fact that the successful writing wife is following her passion, while the husband is wondering where his life has gone.

One day, she picked up a pad and pen and began to write a book. Possessed by the muse, she could not stop. She told herself it was only a hobby, something to fill the hours when he was at law school or traveling with his work.

He got a good job offer in Virginia. It meant he would have to quit law school and she would have to leave her job, but they were hungry for a new adventure. Once in Virginia, she began working part time in a hospital, taking a tremendous cut in salary so she could spend more of her time writing.

In 1986, she sold her first novel. They celebrated for days, his joy as boundless as hers. She quit her job and opened a private psychotherapy practice, making her own hours so she could put maximum effort into her writing.

Some men react to their mid-life doubts by belittling their partner's success, refusing to help with child care or household

chores, withholding affection, or demanding more time and attention. This sort of reaction is at least overt. It allows you to take a step back and say, "Something's wrong with this picture; let's figure it out." But what about that marriage where all is well—blissful, as a matter of fact?

A man's dissatisfaction with his partner's career is often a hidden problem, because husbands and wives are anxious to maintain the facade of a perfect marriage for outsiders, for each other and even for themselves. Women brag about their supportive husbands; husbands publicly praise the success of their wives. Why do men behave in a supportive way when deep down they are hurt/resentful/threatened/angry? Because they know they are supposed to. They want to be good guys, and they're trying hard, but that effort can take a terrible toll.

At a slow but steady pace, her career began to rise. He seemed thrilled by her success, never complaining over the hours she spent communing with people who existed only in her head. He shared the joy of every triumph with her, comforted her when she received rejections.

She was listed in Who's Who in America.

He began introducing her to people this way: "This is my wife. She is more interesting than I am."

What can you do if you know or suspect that your relationship is in trouble? Start talking. Communication is the key, as it is in solving every other problem in a marriage. But these issues are difficult to discuss, particularly for a man who wants to be supportive or who may not even recognize the existence of his negative feelings. He may keep his own unhappiness tucked deep inside himself, but it will come out eventually. It will do damage in some way, to you or to him or to the relationship. So push a little. Ask him to read this article. Let him know you can't fix a problem if you don't know that it exists.

His father died, then his mother, then two of his friends—men his own age. He was no longer content with his work, but he seemed to lack the motivation to find something else.

There are many husbands of writers out there who have taken the supportive role to the max. They may manage your career, carry your luggage to conferences, publicize you and try to anticipate your every need so you are free to write, write, write. Perhaps this works very well for you; but frankly, it terrifies me. It brings to mind the "old days," when a supportive little woman stood behind every successful man. And that little woman was sacrificing her own needs, living through his successes, and losing her identity in the process. Is this what we want for the men in our lives? If that is what's happening in your marriage, please take a long, hard look at the situation to be sure you both understand and are willing to live with the possible consequences.

. . . and the Writer

Suppose your significant other can tell you clearly what's bothering him. Then what? Then you negotiate and compromise, and you reprioritize. You must get a clear picture in your head of what you want out of life. I think if I had read this article three years ago, I would have been rather critical of what I'm now saying. My career was everything to me then, and I would not have been willing to consider slowing it down. Maybe you feel that way as well. It's your *work*, damn it. Your partner should learn to live with it, just as women have learned to accept their workaholic husbands. You're certainly entitled to feel that way, but you may have to pay a price for it. Male or female, you can't give ninety-five percent of your energy to your career and expect your marriage to thrive—indeed, to *survive*—on five percent.

I don't mean to imply that marriage is the only path to happiness. Many women are more than content outside the confines of a binding relationship. If, after exhaustive discussion and negotiation with your partner, you come to the conclusion that the only way to keep your marriage alive would be to give up your career or curtail it to an extent you can't accept, then you'll need to weigh the benefits of holding your marriage together against the personal and professional loss you would suffer. Only you can make that decision.

The galleys for her fourth book arrived and she eagerly showed him the dedication: To my husband, for remaining now and always, my very best friend. She was perplexed when he did not seem as pleased with the words as she'd thought he would be.

The following day, she discovered a photograph of a woman in his appointment book, and twenty years of marriage came to an abrupt end.

She had neglected him, he said.

Although I could never condone the path my husband took to resolve his unhappiness, I believe I was "neglecting" him. I felt guilty when he'd go off by himself to do something on a Saturday while I wrote. When I asked him if it bothered him, however, he always responded with some supportive comment and made it easy for me to continue the pattern.

I have forgiven myself, because I couldn't solve a problem he denied existed. And neither can you. But do not be lulled into thinking his support implies satisfaction on his part. After our breakup, my husband told me he had started having negative feelings about our marriage when I was in graduate school—fifteen years before he uttered a word about being unhappy! In other words, when I started being more independent, outer-directed and self-confident, he began to feel unneeded and left behind. But there were no clues. None. He was that good at keeping up the facade.


I'm in a new, two-year-old relationship now, and I'm deter-

mined to handle it differently from my marriage. It's meant some radical changes for me with regard to my work. Most notably, I no longer work into the night and on weekends—except as a deadline approaches. When I used to work 'round the clock, any leisure time spent in non-writing activities made me feel guilty. What a horrible way to live! Instead of writing for a set number of hours each day, I now produce a set number of pages, and there are some glorious days when I have those pages done by noon. Yes, that mode of operation does take some of the magic out of writing, but it also reduces procrastination and leaves my evenings guilt-free.

If you choose to make your relationship a priority, it will take more than simply shifting your work schedule around. I am not suggesting you greet your man at the door wearing plastic wrap or cook his favorite foods every night. This is a shared problem requiring a shared solution. Consider planning regular, set-in-stone weekly dates with each other. Take turns surprising one another once a month with some adventure. Spend half an hour every day just talking and catching up. And, except for the very rarest of occasions, do not let either of your schedules interfere with these plans. If the thought of putting that sort of effort into enlivening your relationship makes you groan, ask yourself how much of an effort you'd be willing to make if your partner suddenly announced he was leaving tomorrow. Work on your relationship now, together, before either of you is put in the position of having to answer that question for real.

My current partner knows how important our relationship is to me. Although I certainly verbalized those feelings often enough to my husband, I'm not sure my behavior conveyed that message very well. I want a healthy partnership this time around, and I'm learning as I go. That's all any of us can do.

The truth is, I am very glad my life took this turn. It was the most extraordinarily painful experience I've ever endured (and it certainly taught me the true meaning of writer's block), but what came out of the experience is a strength I never dreamed I had, a rekindling of friendships with women who had remained supportive and loving despite the neglect they'd suffered as I focused on my career, the discovery that I can indeed live on my own and take care of myself, and a new partner who is willing to work toward a relationship in which personal growth is seen as an asset rather than a threat.

Living "happily ever after" required little effort in the stories we grew up with—indeed, in the stories many of us write!—but this is real life. Each of us has to decide for ourselves what is most precious to us and nurture it, preserve it. We may not be able to have it all, but we can at least make certain that what we do have is worth keeping. 

Coming Out of the Closet:

Confronting our Insecurities as Writers

By ELAINE COFFMAN

Perhaps it was my own vanity that wanted me to say I had no insecurities as a writer, for I read once that *every other author, however modest, keeps a most outrageous vanity chained like a madman in the padded cell of his breast*. Vanity is a second cousin to self-confidence—something you should have as a writer—for one of the first things a writer must learn is to believe in himself. Yet, we have to be very careful here, for there is such a fine, thin line between self-confidence and over-confidence, that often it is difficult to know when we have stepped over the boundary from what motivates to what destroys. Confidence tells us: *If you think you can win, you can win*, for assurance keeps an even pace with ability.

But this isn't an essay on vanities or confidence, but insecurities, and if I must open a vein and write about things I am sensitive to, then I will begin by saying I can lump all of my insecurities as a writer together under one title: Fear.

Fear comes to us as writers in many ways: Anxiety, self-doubt, jealousy, and, yes, even timidity—something I find myself hiding behind now and then.

There are times when fear is good, for it tends to keep us awake and at the heart's controls, and while it can often be painful, the advantage is that wisdom can be gained for my pain. Some of life's hardest lessons are those we remember best—remember and learn from. But fear can also be our enemy, for it robs the mind of its power. Thankfully, for most of us, fear is something that pays us a visit now and then, but doesn't come to stay—which is simply another way of saying we all have our ups and downs, our bouts of euphoric bliss and our pits of despair.

Steinbeck once said, *The profession of book writing makes horse racing seem like a solid, stable business*. Everything about writing is, I suppose, basically an insecurity, a fear. For the beginning writer the biggest fear is, *It won't sell*. For the published author, we fear this book won't be as good as the last, or we're afraid it will *only* be as good as the last, when we so desperately wanted it to be better. I find it strange that the same common sense that makes an author write good things, makes him dread they are not good enough to deserve reading. And then there is the fear of rejection, the fear of bad reviews, or the fear of poor performance. And, if you are really into worrying, then I suppose you could even worry that you just penned the great American novel and died before it was published.

Fears, worries, apprehensions—they only lead to more frustration and insecurities, so we learn to deal with them, to recognize them for what they are: necessary evils, for they do keep us on our toes. Without fear and insecurities we would become bloated with

self-confidence and that often paves the way to overconfidence and mediocrity.

One of the biggest insecurities I have observed is how we see ourselves when measured against our fellow authors. Too many of us have taken the Country & Western song for our sad lament: *She got the gold mine. I got the shaft*. Too often, we fail to ask ourselves why?

Walter Savage Landor said, *Authors are like cattle going to a fair: those of the same field can never move on without butting one another*. This butting can and should be called competition, but uncontrolled, it too often becomes jealousy. Now, competition is as American as apple pie, and it can be a wonderful tool to motivate, but if not harnessed it degenerates into bickering and back-biting. One of the biggest mistakes I see writers making is thinking that by tearing down another writer they elevate themselves. This is a fallacy. The only way you elevate yourself as a writer is by hard, dedicated work. We are all in the same business here, so let's be honest with each other. God created all men equal, but suffice it to say, all authors are not on the same level. Like it or not, some are better writers than others, some have larger followings, and some—regardless of how wonderful your book is—have higher sales. You cannot judge your worth or value by comparing yourself with your fellow writers. Leave that to the critics, the reviewers and, most importantly, to the readers.

"Writers," wrote Saul Bellow, "seldom wish other writers well." It seems to be a long tradition to take one's fellows apart. Aristophanes did it to his contemporaries, as did Pope, and Byron's pen was thought, at times, to be filled with poison. While I can understand the tendency, I don't understand why we give in to it. Our philosophy should be, *Never stab anybody, for we all know how life-denying it is to be stabbed*. But criticism seems to be a part of life, as much as it is a part of writing. When you feel the sting of criticism and petty jealousy, then remember one thing: writing well is the best revenge.

One of the first lessons I learned in life was hard work. I'm one of those people who can say nothing ever came easily for me. I've had to work and work hard for anything I have ever accomplished. I learned at an early age that whining, complaining and scapegoating would not get me anything. How vividly I remember my freshman year in college when my mother looked at the B I made in Chemistry and said, "Why didn't you make an A?" I whined something about that there were only two A's in the whole class. "Then you should have been one of them," my mother replied.

Hard work, not criticism, will get you where you want to go. There is nothing noble about being superior to another person. True greatness comes by being superior to your previous self.

I try to remember that the art of writing and the act of publishing are two separate things. One, I love; the other I tolerate. Whenever I'm in the muddle of publishing, I try not to lose sight of the joy I find in writing.

I often like to compare writing to giving birth, but the similarity ends there. When you have a baby, everyone stops by to admire it; to make you feel like the goose who laid the golden egg. No one ever comes by and says, "My, what an ugly baby!"

Once you complete a manuscript and your book is finished, the insecurities begin to creep in. Our books are like ourselves—clever and dull, brave and cowardly, beautiful and ugly. For every brilliant bloom of thought there will be a page that trails after you like a shaggy, wet mongrel anxious to shake itself and leave your spirits soggy. The moment it leaves your hands and you see the Federal Express truck turn out of your driveway, you want to shout, "Bring it back! Let me revise it, or better yet, let me burn it. Don't let it out in the unfriendly cold in that condition."

Steinbeck wrote something that expresses perfectly our insecurities with publishing:

EDITOR: The book is out of balance. The reader expects one thing, and you give him something else. You have written two books and stuck them together. The reader will not understand.

WRITER: No, sir. It goes together. I have written about one family and used stories about another family as—well, as counterpoint, as rest, as contrast in pace and color.

EDITOR: The reader won't understand. What you call counterpoint only slows the book.

WRITER: It has to be slowed—else how would you know when it goes fast?

EDITOR: You have stopped the book and gone into discussions of God knows what.

WRITER: Yes, I have. I don't know why. Just wanted to. Perhaps I was wrong.

SALES DEPARTMENT: The book's too long. Costs are up. We'll have to charge five dollars for it. People won't pay five dollars. They won't buy it.

WRITER: My last book was short. You said then that people won't buy a short book.

PROOFREADER: The chronology is full of holes. The grammar has no relation to English. On page so and so you have a man look in the World Almanac for steamship rates. They aren't there. I checked. You've got Chinese New Year wrong. The characters aren't consistent. You describe Liza Hamilton one way and then have her act a different way.

EDITOR: You make Cathy too black. The reader won't believe her. You make Sam Hamilton too white. The reader won't believe him. No Irishman ever talked like that.

WRITER: My grandfather did.

EDITOR: Who'll believe it?

2ND EDITOR: No children ever talked like that.

WRITER (*losing temper from despair*): God damn it. This is my book. I'll make the children talk any way I want. My book is about good and evil. Maybe the theme got into the execution. Do you want to publish it or not?

EDITORS: Let's see if we can't fix it up. It won't be much work. You want it to be good, don't you? For instance, the en-

ding. The reader won't understand it.

WRITER: Do you?

EDITOR: Yes, but the reader won't

PROOFREADER: My God, how you do dangle a participle. Turn to page so and so.

There you are. You sent them a box of glory and end up with a lump of damp garbage. And from all of this, a new character has emerged. He is called The Reader.

THE READER

He is so stupid you can't trust him with an idea.

He is so clever he will catch you in the least error.

He will not buy short books.

He will not buy long books.

He is part moron, part genius and part ogre.

There is some doubt as to whether he can read.

Industry News

In order to get a bookseller's view of the ABA, held in Los Angeles over the Memorial Day weekend, I spoke with Mary Lynn Baxter, owner of B&D books in Lufkin, Texas for the past twenty-three years and Janet Carroll, who's worked at Book Emporium in Long Beach for the past ten years, eight of those years as a buyer. Mary Lynn, while being a published member of NINC, attends the ABA as a bookseller, not an author.

To counter competition from superstores, both bookstores stress personal service, hand selling titles to their customers. As Mary Lynn said, "Our customers are spoiled and we love them to be spoiled."

Both agreed that the mood this year was decidedly upbeat. "Wonderfully fun," was how Janet put it, adding that there were good books coming from all the houses. There were a lot of people on the floor and publishers were busy writing orders. Mary Lynn did comment that there were not all that many blue badges, denoting booksellers; Janet concurred, estimating the ratio of publishing representatives to booksellers to be approximately 3-1.

They said the logistics surrounding the signings could have been done much better, a statement I've heard from others. Understandably, readers' copies were especially popular; Janet, who described the competition for them as a "feeding frenzy," stressed that if she has an opportunity to read a book prior to ordering, she can order more and sell more.

Next year, rather than moving around the country as it has in the past, ABA will settle into a permanent home in Chicago, which Janet suggested may make it more likely that midwestern booksellers will become predominant at the conference, since it will make the trip more expensive to attendees from both coasts.

—JoAnn Ross

Atlanta Conference Update

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Conference Coordinator

The deadline for this issue of *NINK* came just a few days after we sent the conference brochure off to the printer, so we don't have anything new to announce that you didn't just read in your brochure a few weeks ago.

We are still working on a few additional publishers who weren't able to make a definite commitment before the brochure went to press, and we hope to be able to announce their names by the August *NINK*. In the meantime, though, my very able assistant, Carla Neggers, and I have decided that we just want to tell you one very important thing: Come to the conference; it's fun!

You've probably heard this before, but NINC's conference isn't like anything else you've ever attended. NINC is the one conference where you can really corner an editor

and have a private (and possibly fruitful) conversation. NINC is the only place where you can voice your problems aloud in a group and find someone else who not only had the same problem but survived it and perhaps even triumphed over it. At the very least, you'll pick up tips on how to cope and deal and even succeed in this crazy business.

At NINC you can hear about new trends in the market and even make a personal contact with the editor who is starting that trend. You can also compare notes with other writers so you won't be in the dark the next time you negotiate a contract. I know I learned an awful lot at last year's conference (Stuff I sorely wish I'd known before I signed on the dotted line!), and I expect to learn even more this year.

If knowledge truly is power, then NINC is the place of empowerment. You'll leave feeling invigorated. How many other conferences can make that promise? **AMNH**

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 *NINK* issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants:

Patricia V. Bannister, Kirkland WA
Carol Cail, Longmont CO
Carolyn S. Hall, Madisonville LA
Sarah (Sally) Hawkes, Little Rock AR
Peggy A. Hoffman, Milwaukee WI
Dan McGrit, Arlington VA
Sabine Naujoks, Parksville, British Columbia
Mary Johnson Rodgers, Seabeck WA
Margaret Wilkins, Scarborough, Ontario
Jessica Wulf, Aurora CO

New Members:

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

Editor's Corner

We now have enough authors willing to discuss buying back a book to run the article, but we can always use more. If you'd like to contribute (responses will be kept confidential), please contact the editor.

For those movie moguls who can't wait to get their hands on reviews of our books (so they can scoop us up before the competition learns about us and turns us into blockbuster box office hits), *PW* is offering something called ADVANCE FAX. Described in an advertisement in *Variety*, as "the one wake-up call you can't afford to sleep through," the service, which supplies subscribers with *PW*'s complete book review forecasts before the magazine goes to the printer, costs \$745 per year.

Talk about your rights reversion horror stories...As reported in *Entertainment Weekly*, despite the fact that Myran Haley, widow of Alex Haley, had filed for divorce prior to her husband's death, a Tennessee court has granted her the right to complete two of his unfinished novels.

NINK Stress Test

Think back over the past few months. Have you noticed changes in your attitude? In the people around you? Prolonged, unrelieved stress can lead to accidental injury, insomnia, family problems and serious illness.

To learn if you're in danger of letting stress get the better of you, assign a number from 1 (for little or no change) to 5 (for a great deal of change) to each of the 15 questions below. Allow about 30 seconds for each answer.

1. Do you find yourself feeling more and more irritated by little things? Are you impatient? Do you snap at people?
2. Do you go to bed exhausted, only to wake up feeling tired?
3. Do you suffer early-morning waking? Oversleeping?
4. Do you feel lethargic? Is just getting through the day an effort?
5. Are you working harder than ever, but feel as if you're spending much of your time merely spinning your wheels?
6. Do you feel overwhelmed more and more often?
7. Are you unusually moody? Tearful? Do you suffer from unexplained fears and anxieties? Are you overly sensitive to criticism?
8. Are you suffering physical distress: headaches, stomach aches, backaches, aching jaws?
9. Have you lost your sense of humor? Are you forgetting to smile? Do people, upon seeing you, ask "What's wrong?"
10. Are you getting out less? Avoiding friends?
11. Do you find yourself procrastinating more than usual?
12. Are you more forgetful? Are you making more and more mistakes lately?
13. Are you unable to make a decision?
14. Have you experienced a loss of appetite? Are you over-eating?
15. Are you drinking too much? Smoking too much?

How did you do? See the scoring sheet below.

"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 Rolofson

Scoring Sheet

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 0 - 25 | Congratulations. You're doing just fine. |
| 26-35 | Not bad, but there are warning signs of stress buildup. |
| 26-50 | You could be a candidate for stress-induced burnout |
| 51-65 | Watch out! You're rapidly approaching stress overload. |
| Over 65 | You're in a dangerous emotional state and need to make some crucial changes now, before stress gets the better of you. Begin by turning off that "inner critic." Go back and reread Barbara Bretton's wonderfully helpful "This Worked for Me" in the February, 1994 issue of <i>Novelists' INK</i> . Be kinder to yourself and accept that you can't control everything. In other words. . . "Don't Worry. Be Happy." |

— JoAnn Ross

the NEXT PAGE

At least two months preceding publication, please send publication information to JoAnn Ross, 43 E. Boca Raton, Phoenix AZ 85022-4713. You're welcome to submit this information as soon as your publication date has been confirmed.

Broadrick, Annette: *Impromptu Bride*, Silhouette Romance
Bittner, Rosanne: *Wildest Dreams*, Bantam Books
Browning, Dixie: *The Security Man*, Silhouette (reissue)
Bushyhead, Anne w/a Nicole Jordan: *The Savage*, Avon Books
Connell, Susan: *Captain's Orders*, Bantam Loveswept
Gerritsen, Tess: *Peggy Sue Got Murdered*, Harper
Hagan, Patricia: *Starlight*, HarperMonogram historical
Harper, Shannon w/a Madeline Harper: *Christmas in July*, Harlequin Temptation
Hart, Carolyn G: *Dead Man's Island*, A Henrie O Mystery, Bantam (paperback edition of 1993 hardcover)
Kaku, Louzana w/a Christina Dair: *Deadly Desires*, Harper Monogram
Kitt, Sandra: *Serenade*, Arabesque, Zebra Books
Mason, Connie: *Tears Like Rain*, Leisure
McCaffrey, Anne: *Power Lines*, Del Rey (hardcover)
McLaughlin, Pat w/a Patricia McLinn: *Rodeo Nights*, Silhouette Special Edition
Phillips, Susan Elizabeth: *It had to be You*, Avon

Rice, Patricia: *Texas Lily*, Topaz
Rice, Patricia: *Indigo Moon*, Signet (reissue)
Nora Roberts, *Hidden Riches*, Putnam (hardcover)
Rolle-Berg, Ramona w/a Sierra Rydell: *Homeward Bound*, Silhouette Special Edition
Stockenberg, Antoinette: *Embers*, Dell
Stewardson, Dawn: *Hunter's Moon*, Harlequin Intrigue, *Timeless Love* mini-series
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