

Novelists' INK

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

Professional Jealousy

Jealousy is one of those affective states, like grief, that may be ascribed as normal. . . .

— Sigmund Freud

By JUDI LIND

While we can argue whether jealousy is as normal as grief, we can all agree it's certainly a pervasive emotion. Few of us are immune from that green-eyed monster. At one time or another, many of us have felt jealousy's ugly sting when something wonderful happened to one of our writing colleagues. Others have been the victim of another's envy.

So what causes these flare-ups of professional jealousy? And, more important, how do we stamp them out?

The first time I was consciously aware of my own resentment was when a writing friend called one afternoon to share not one, but three separate bits of exciting news. I was awaiting publication of my first book, but my editor had turned down my next offering and I was in a terrible funk. My single sale, I was certain, had been a fluke.

Nevertheless, I dredged up some phony enthusiasm and congratulated my friend.

My poor sainted husband, Larry, was sitting on the sofa, mouth agape, watching/listening to my half of the conversation.

"Oh, a three-book contract, how exciting!" I said, a black scowl distorting my features.

"And a bidding war! You must be so jazzed," I cooed just before I mouthed a foul expletive at the telephone.

"And a national promotional campaign. I'm so happy for you," my lips enthused while my middle finger rose obscenely in the air.

When I hung up the receiver and stared glumly at the television, Larry innocently asked, "Who in the world was that?"

The expression on his face when I admitted the caller was one of my closest friends was enough to convince me that I needed to take a second look at my own feelings. My professional jealousy was just a teensy bit out of control.

In self-defense, please understand I didn't want to take anything away from my friend. I just wanted something positive to happen in my career, too.

But feelings can't be regimented or denied. What can we do to still those ugly little mutterings in our subconscious?

I chose to deal with my envy head-on. I saw my friend at our critique group later that week and re-enacted my half of our phone conversation, including snarls and finger gestures. By then, I was able to laugh with them and the group therapy helped defuse my resentment.

I can honestly say that the next time this same friend had wonderful news, I was able to share her success without envy.

(continued on page 7)

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

PRESIDENT'S Column: Who is a Writer?	2
Elections Notice	3
LETTERS to the editor	4
INTROducing	6
Educating the Masses	10
Atlanta Conference Update	11
the NEXT PAGE	12
Membership & Subscription Information	12

Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne †
Janice Young Brooks †
Jasmine Cresswell †
Maggie Osborne †
Marianne Shock †
Linda Barlow
Georgia Bockoven

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

1994 Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

Evan Maxwell
P.O. Box 187
Anacortes WA 98221

VICE PRESIDENT

Julie Kistler
P.O. Box 1584
Champaign IL 61824-1584

SECRETARY

Judy Myers
6341 Shadow Hawk Drive
Citrus Heights CA 95621-8307

TREASURER

Joan Johnston
1621 W. Sandpiper Circle
Pembroke Pines FL 33026

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

JoAnn Ross
43 E. Boca Raton
Phoenix AZ 85022-4713
FAX: 602-863-6812

ADVISORY COUNCIL

REPRESENTATIVE

Marianne Shock
251 Lothrop
Grosse Pointe MI 48236-3405

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON

Suzanne Simmons Guntrum
2814 Meadow Stream
Ft. Wayne IN 46825-7109

CENTRAL COORDINATOR

Randy Russell
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 1166
Mission KS 66222
(816) 561-4524

Send Address Changes to the P.O. Box

† Founder

Copyright © 1994 by Novelists, Inc.
All rights reserved. Permission to
quote from or otherwise reproduce
these contents in any fashion is ex-
pressly denied.

PRESIDENT'S column

Who is a Writer?

For a guy who makes his living from words, I'm notoriously bad at definitions. "Writer," for instance, seems like a perfectly straightforward noun. It ought to be particularly easy for me to define since I is one.

But "writer" turns out to be remarkably elusive. Twice in the last thirty days, I've confronted situations where I needed to define it with precision, and twice, I've had trouble.

I first started wrestling with the question during the on-going efforts by ten writers' groups to allocate the so-called "reprographic" or xeroxing royalties collected in our behalf by Norway.

This process has been torturous and, in truth, only two things have kept us at it. One is the fact that we are talking about a substantial amount of money—\$320,000 for one year from Norway alone. The other is a suggestion by some publishers that ten writers' groups will never be able to agree on anything and that, therefore, the \$320,000 will eventually pass back to them.

At the moment, the groups are trying to draw up bylaws for the coalition. The process is made considerably more difficult because each of the groups has its own definition of "writer."

Novelists, Inc. turns out to have the most stringent membership qualifications. A member must have written two book-length works of fiction, one of which has been published in the last five years. Other groups, like the Authors Guild, require only one book, some will accept journalistic-length pieces, and several of the largest organizations have no criteria whatsoever. If you say you're a writer, you're by golly a writer.

It turns out that two of the largest organizations in the coalition, the Romance Writers of America and the National Writers Union, are among those groups which require no proof of competence for membership.

Having once been "unpublished" myself, I know that one doesn't spring from the womb and begin publishing. You become a writer

by writing and bleeding and swearing and then writing some more. The distinction between unpublished (I hate that term almost as much as "prepublished") and published is arbitrary, but I think it is necessary to separate those who want to write from those who want to have written.

That's why I am among the coalition delegates who want so-called writers to demonstrate some competence other than possession of paper and pencil. It seems to me difficult to assert a claim to lost xerox royalties if you've never published anything that could be copied in the first place.

However that issue is resolved in the next few months, it will just be the opening round in the battle of definitions. The coalition will still have to differentiate, for instance, among types of writers whose works have been copied without payment.

Non-fiction writers, particularly academic and textbook writers, say they are entitled to a larger share of the xerox royalties because their works are copied much more frequently than the works of novelists.

Figures from the Norwegians seem to bear out that contention, but the world is in flux. Computer downloading and other forms of reproduction are developing with mind-numbing speed. I heard an expert suggest the other day that in the future only one copy of any book will ever exist. It will reside in the Library of Congress and all other copies will come via the information highway to us, the readers.

With that kind of change possible in the future, I'm reluctant to adopt any criteria for royalty allocations that might put us fiction writers at a disadvantage. I'll keep you apprised.

Besides the coalition discussions, though, I had cause to examine the definition of "writer" in the context of our own organization. Several members have raised questions about the application for membership of a writer who also happens to be an editor with a New York publishing house. The application

sparked objections from authors who felt our Novelists, Inc. discussions of publishing problems might be inhibited by the presence of an executive from a house that published the work of a substantial number of our members.

As a writer, I can understand these objections. Novelists, Inc. is a networking organization. Writers live isolated lives. We all need a forum where we can candidly discuss professional problems. There are times when candor might seem embarrassing, even dangerous.

But the longer I have been involved in this organization and in publishing, the more I have come to feel that our only real future lies in candor. I don't think we can expect to have an impact on publishers if we don't speak openly and directly to them. That's why I try not to say anything about the business in private that I would not and do not say in public.

Several changes have been made in Novelists, Inc. in recent years to open up our proceedings. Last year's Board of Directors did away with the "inside pages" of the newsletter. Early on, this year's board specifically committed itself to openness on membership issues and eligibility. We wanted to make sure that potential members are judged only on specific and clear criteria. The application from the editor was examined using those criteria and found to be sufficient.

In passing, it should be noted that the founding members

adopted the criteria after careful consideration of exactly this scenario. Editors, agents, even publishers were all potential members, so long as they were writers, as well. No good reason could be found to exclude them.

We should all remember that Novelists, Inc. has membership requirements that are among the most stringent in the country. They are also among the most straightforward. For me, that ought to settle any question about the application of an editor, or an agent or publisher, as well. So long as the applicant meets the primary two-book requirement, we ought to welcome him or her.

As for inhibiting us, I doubt that was the intention, and I certainly don't think it will be the effect.

Novelists, Inc. has accomplished one important task in the last five years. The organization has acquired the power of collective action. Publishers and editors do listen to what we have to say.

That power is a relatively new thing for many of us. All writers are far too used to feeling solitary, isolated and powerless.

In the past, that was probably true, but not any more. Now we can speak from a position of growing strength. It is time we also learn that we can afford to speak openly and responsibly. We can't do that if we treat ourselves as a secret-handshake club where complaints are voiced behind closed doors and never registered with the people who need to hear them most.

— Evan Maxwell

Elections Notice

Proposed Slate of Officers for 1995:

President.....	William Bernhardt
Vice President.....	Julie Tetel Andresen
Secretary	Victoria Thompson
Treasurer	Joan Johnston
Newsletter Editor.....	Claire Bocardo

Proposed Nominees for 1995 Nominating Committee:

Mary Balogh	Deborah Gordon	Barbara Keiler
Dorothy Cannell	Karen Harper	Meryl Sawyer
Robyn Carr	Joan Hess	Lass Small
Lynne Scott Drennan	Leona Karr	Joan Wolf
(Amanda Scott in Roster)		

As set forth in Article VII, Section 4 of the Bylaws, additional nominations may be made in writing if signed by the nominee and at least 10 active members who have not signed the nominations of any other person for the same position. Such nominations must be made by August 20, 1994. Mail all written nominations to Evan Maxwell, P. O. Box 187, Anacortes WA 98221.

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.

Private Relations Strikes Chord

I had to write in after reading Diane Chamberlain's article "Private Relations and the Writer." Nothing I've read in *Novelists' INK* has ever struck such a chord. Why? Because I could have written the same article. The exact same scenario happened to me.

I was married for thirteen years to a man I claimed was the most supportive husband in the business, and I truly believed that he was as happy about my flourishing career as I was. Then one day I woke up, when I discovered that he had found another woman with no skills and no education, a woman who had just turned twenty-one, a woman who needed him desperately...just like I had been when he married me. His reason? All those years, as I devoted myself to my career, he felt neglected.

Yes, I have to take a lot of responsibility for the fact that I did bury myself in my work. I've paid a terrible price for it, and so have my children. But I can't forget all the times when he asked me if I could squeeze one more book in that year, because we needed more money. And I can't forget that when he was unemployed and I was writing my first big mainstream breakout book I still managed to produce four books that year to take up the slack. I keep remembering all the times I wished and prayed that his employment would stabilize so that I could slow down, but there was always that mortgage to pay, two car payments, and the credit cards we had to rely on when his checks weren't coming in. There was a great double standard in the fact that, while he was feeling neglected because I was working so hard, he was pushing me to work harder and earn more money.

I am now remarried to a wonderful man who talks to me when he feels neglected, and I've made drastic changes in my schedule. I never work weekends or holidays. I finish my work around three every day. I even usually take off Decembers and a lot of time in the summers. If something comes up within my family that puts me behind in my schedule, I really don't sweat it anymore. I've realized what's most important. My husband does occasionally feel neglected anyway, not because I'm glued to my computer, but because he says I'm so focused on my work even when I'm not working. This could be an occupational hazard, but I'm trying to work on it. I don't want to lose another husband.

Let's face it. Many of us do neglect our families in favor of our work. We approach our books with a spiritual devotion, and

treat our careers as if they're religions. When we're not writing, we're reading. When we're not reading, we're networking on computer bulletin boards. When we're not doing that, we're traveling to writers' conferences, or going to meetings, or talking on the phone. Of course we have unhappy husbands. Of course our children rebel. And what is the remedy? Getting our priorities straight, and realizing that our work cannot be our first priority. It's my job to make my husband and family feel that they come before anything else on this earth, and if they don't, then I'm failing, even if I've just hit the number one spot on the *New York Times* Bestseller List.

My husband read Diane Chamberlain's article and had a slightly different reaction than I expected. He felt that Diane was letting writers off the hook by saying that her husband's insecurity about her success was as much of the problem as her neglect of him. He said, "What if he was just lonely and missed his wife?" His contention was that, as long as writers can use their spouses' supposed jealousies and insecurities as their scapegoats, they won't correct the real problem.

I'm afraid there are a lot of writers' spouses out there, both male and female, who are lonely and miss their partners. For those of you who still have a marriage intact, it's not too late to make changes. Remember, no matter how happy you are, or how happy your family seems, if you're not putting them before your writing, your failure is inevitable. I've tried to learn from my mistakes, but marriage is never a free ride. It takes work—more work than writing a book. That's why I try to give mine more time.

—Terri Herrington Blackstock

Writer's Comfort Level Pricked

I meant to write and say thank you to Barbara Bretton for her terrific article on burnout, but I was "too busy" to take the time. This month, when I read Diane Chamberlain's moving account of the failure of her marriage, I once again recognized far more of myself in her story than was comfortable. My husband and I have been having teasing discussions for three years about taking a vacation. He wants to go on a luxury cruise in the Mediterranean. No phones, no laptops, no faxes. Every so often, he'll show me a glossy brochure, advertising two pampered weeks dedicated to experiencing the culinary, artistic and architectural delights of the region. I smile (because we're joking) and tell him I'm not old

enough yet to take that sort of a cruise. Besides, I have a deadline. He smiles and points out that I always have a deadline.

I'm not suggesting that I expect the imminent breakup of my thirty-year marriage. On the contrary, I think I'm trying to say that writers run special risks, however happy and well-ordered our lives may be. I suspect some people read Diane's article and decided that the problems lay more in the fundamental basis of her relationship than in the fact that she's a writer. That might be a comforting view, but I think it's mistaken.

It's true that workaholics and obsessive-compulsives gravitate to all sorts of jobs, they don't just become writers. And it's even more true that insecure, power-hungry men (and women) marry doctors and bus drivers as well as writers. But surely no profession other than writing has such an intense disconnection between physical presence and spiritual/mental presence, and this must affect the foundations of any relationship, however solid.

Dinner time rolls around and the busy doctor calls home and says she'll be late because a patient has cut his knee open; the school bus driver calls home and says he'll be late because the engine overheated and he's waiting for a tow. The writer stares vaguely into space, then blinks and realizes his/her spouse is in the room. "Did you say something, honey?" s/he asks. Can you imagine how infuriating that inward focus must be to the non-writer? How do we convey the message to our family and friends that the more comatose we look, the harder we're working? And that when our writing's going well, we genuinely have no sense of the passage of time?

Anyway, I'm grateful to Barbara and Diane for making me reflect for a while on my personal priorities. And I'm also grateful to JoAnn Ross for consistently putting together a newsletter that addresses so many of the hard questions professional writers must face on a day-to-day basis. The problems of being a writer aren't limited to the difficulty of finding the perfect agent and the fine print at the bottom of our contracts.

— Jasmine Cresswell

Scots' Spin to Conference Weekend

I have greatly enjoyed and benefited from the two NINC national conferences I have attended, and am looking forward to Atlanta, y'all. I just wanted to point out, though, that there is actually one more reason for some of us historical writers to attend than the 1001 reasons already given.

For those of us who love and hope to use again the popular Scottish Highland settings, a wee bit of Scotland is coming to Atlanta the same weekend we are there. The Stone Mountain Highland Games and Scottish Festival will be held in that Atlanta suburb on the 13th, 14th and 15th. What a perfect place to really live your research.

Events include pipe and drum bands, Scottish Highland and Country dancing, sports, the gathering of the clans, exhibits, books, food, etc. (For information write Stone Mt. Highland Games, Inc., Box 14023, Atlanta GA 30324 or call 404-303-9234.)

All this is held under the magnificent setting of the larger-than-life cliff carving of the Civil War southern generals. Historical writers—Atlanta that weekend is a business write-off times ten!

Scots wha hae! Enjoy!

— Karen Harper

Member Conflict of Interest?

Will someone please explain the meaning of the following phrase as published monthly in the *Novelists' INK* column, *INTROducing*: "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."

Until this week, I have always assumed that the meaning of that was self-explanatory. If a present member of NINC had a valid and justifiable reason for opposing a proposed applicant's acceptance to Novelists, Inc., then that applicant would not be allowed to join the organization.

I have never based my assumption on anything so flimsy as personalities or dislikes or that dreaded of all diseases, "professional jealousy." I can pat myself on the back and say that the basis for my thinking has been grounded on things more concrete, such as conflict of interest. If that does not constitute a "legitimate objection" to an applicant's acceptance, then I don't know what does.

Yet this week, I learned that an executive editor at Zebra has applied for membership...and it can't be denied to her on the grounds that to do otherwise would be discriminatory.

If I'm forced to live with that, and I've been told that I must, then so be it, but I'm not happy. I'm basing my complaint on the issue I brought up earlier, conflict of interest.

Editors, agents and publishers have specific jobs. If they choose to expand their professional horizons to include author, more power to them. But how can we justify this when it's at our expense? An editor is privy to the kinds of inside information the rest of us will never have. When getting his/her book published, how can he/she not act on that inside information? It's impossible, and therein lies a true conflict of interest.

Still, this reasoning wasn't enough to be interpreted as a "legitimate objection." Read between the lines here and you'll see a huge sigh of frustration.

Until now, NINC has provided its members with a forum, a safe harbor, if you will, for authors to air their gripes, express their concerns and share their glad tidings. It's sobering to ➤

LETTERS to the editor

think that a self-stylized editor/author, someone who has real influence on authors' careers, is going to be allowed to join the ranks. How open and candid can we now be? Personally, I don't trust any publishing executive to the extent that I'd willingly air my grievances without fear of reprisal.

I'm not stupid enough to believe that editors et al aren't aware of the happenings of NINC. It's been going on since NINC's inception, but not because we, the members, embraced the practice. Our exclusivity as authors was one of our real powers and that has now been stripped from us, and I resent that.

I think we need to stop throwing the term discrimination around like some self-righteous banner. We already discriminate when we insist that our members have two books published, one within the last five years. Let's not play semantics and call that a distinction or a prerequisite. It's a mandatory requirement that excludes certain people. Harsh terms but true, and I'm all for it because it characterizes an organization made up of professional authors.

If we're not going to protect the very nature of the organiza-

tion that made it so attractive to begin with, then I say we just chuck this holier-than-thou practice of supposedly screening an applicant and open the membership to anyone. Personally, I'd prefer we look at our bylaws and do everything we can to reaffirm our commitment to what NINC is supposed to be.

— Name Withheld.

Ed. Note: Evan Maxwell addresses this issue in this month's *PRESIDENT's Column*.

Characterization Analysis

I found the following pop-psychology book to be a helpful tool for characterization, and think other authors might find it useful, as well:

How Can I Get Through to You?, D. Glenn Foster and Mary Marshall, Hyperion, \$19.95 (hardcover)

This book, written by two experts in interpersonal communication, details a gold mine of specifics on four basic personality types—Feelers, Drivers, Analyzers and Elitists. The authors show how personality affects everything from the way a person enters a crowded room to why people react in entirely opposite ways to identical situations. The authors illustrate with examples of well-known people, both real and fictional. They also show why the personality types misunderstand each other and how they can overcome their conflicts.

Simple charts and anecdotes make this an easy-reference handbook for fiction authors, and the information can be applied to either contemporary or historical characters.

— Deb Smith



Preparing for last year's NINC Conference in San Antonio had me feeling a bit down, even apprehensive. I'd spent the past year moving from one coast to the other and building a house, and hadn't had a book out for awhile. I was feeling fraudulent and "out of it," professionally speaking. Would anyone even remember me? I wondered. Silly me.

The minute I walked into the conference I remembered why I'd joined NINC in the first place. This was my family. By the time I left San Antonio, I felt like a writer again...but also that it was perfectly okay to take some time to build a house.

— Kathleen Creighton

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:

Carol Bruce-Thomas, Scarborough, Ontario
Jean Anne Caldwell, Colorado Springs CO
Gail Crease, Palgrave, Ontario
Elizabeth Hill, Denver CO
Debra McCarthy-Anderson, Scarborough, Ontario
Barbara McMahon, Pioneer CA
Erica Spindler, Mandeville LA
Dona Vaughn, Lake Jackson TX

New Members:

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

Professional Jealousy

(Continued from page 1)

So, that's one possible solution for resolving our own jealousy: Face it, admit it, and get past it.

Author Julie Tetel generously offered her own experience and how she dealt with it:

"About five years ago, a book marketing analyst informed me that a best-selling romance author's latest book was not selling well. I had not read it, but I was aware that it was getting poor reviews and equally poor word-of-mouth. I recall expressing to the market analyst my rather repressed, certainly gleeful—and, now that I come to think of it, jealousy-inspired—satisfaction that this author's book was not doing well.

"I experienced an instant attitude adjustment when the analyst pointed out to me that: 'A rising tide floats all ships. You had better hope that all her books are wonderfully well written and sell well, because one good romance sells another.'

"From that moment on," Julie writes, "I can honestly report that I have hoped every one of my fellow romance writers writes the very best book she can and that the booksellers sell well. My professional health depends on the health of the industry as a whole. Generally good industry health is generally good for me."

Solution No. 2: Recognize that one writer's success lifts us all.

But isn't envy normal? As human beings, aren't we destined to give in to jealousy now and then? As long as we don't verbalize it to others, what's the harm?

Barbara Keiler points out one danger. "If I experience professional jealousy, it is really a self-directed thing." Barbara says that while she doesn't envy the success of her fellow writers, whatever negative emotions she does feel are turned inward. "I assume I haven't achieved what the other writer has because I'm not as talented as the other writer, or not as disciplined, or not as attuned to what the market is looking for."

The problem with turning disappointment and frustration inward is that by doing so, we can sabotage our own careers. Undermining our own self-confidence starts an erosion process that can result in tentative, bland prose or even in a severe case of writer's block.

Fortunately, Barbara reports that once she's finished beating herself up, she handles the situation by working harder, and recommitting herself to her own professional vision. "I can't control what's beyond my control," Barbara says. "I can only control what I do."

Solution No. 3: Recommit yourself to your writing. That's

one aspect of this business we can control.

I used to think my occasional pangs of jealousy were due to my own modest success. Surely, I thought, when I'm more successful, when I've published a dozen books or so, then I won't feel envious any longer.

Not so, according to multi-published author Lori Copeland. When I asked if she'd ever experienced professional jealousy, Lori wrote, "Yes, yes, a thousand times yes! I have experienced professional jealousy. I'm not proud of it, but it happens. It isn't a mean-spirited jealousy, only a deep ache to be similarly recognized and rewarded for my work. And let's be honest. The 'stars' act and are treated differently. It's apparent from simple book store signings to national conferences."

Another well-known author who admits she's felt professional jealousy is Debbie Macomber: "It's difficult to continually put forth effort, book after book, struggling each step of the way and then watch another writer achieve success. Someone else's successes seem effortless, don't they?"

When we take the time to listen to one another, to hear the concerns of our colleagues, we learn not to compare our careers. When we see writers given special treatment, or watch others climb a seemingly effortless ladder of acclaim, we're only seeing the public side of their success.

A famous actor once said he worked the dinner theater and off-off-off-off Broadway circuit for nine years before achieving "overnight" success.

Although our struggles may not be apparent to outsiders, I'm firmly convinced that in one way or another, the vast

majority of us "pay our dues."

But what happens when someone is just Lucky? Isn't it normal to resent the author who attains immediate success?

Perhaps. But Julie Tetel found a different attitude to be more rewarding. "Last year, a fellow author with one book to her credit (and the number of my titles in double digits) revealed that the advances on her 2nd and 3rd books were at least 3-4 times the advances on my 11th-13th books." Julie says she felt equal parts interest and surprise, but because she'd reached a certain professional maturity, her reaction was free of jealousy.

She knew that in this business great disparities in advances do exist and for a variety of reasons. Because Julie wasn't resentful, she was able to engage this author in a dialog that focused on answering more useful questions: How did she do it? Would what worked for the first author work for her?



Professional Jealousy

(Continued from page 7)

The answer came down to a winning combination of talent, a good agent, and the right book proposals to the right editor. A combination that Julie says should work for all of us—all things being equal.

Which, of course, they never are.

As Julie says, "All of our careers are different. All our talents are different....All of our lives are different."

Phoebe Conn echoed this sentiment. "I think we all envy the super successful writers, but there is an admonition in 12-Step Programs, 'Don't compare your insides to someone else's outsides.' " Phoebe believes that is wise advice and adds, "I truly believe anytime a writer is successful, it inspires more people to read and helps us all."

Solution No. 4: Never compare your career with that of another author. You might be using different measuring devices!

Another, more painful side effect to professional jealousy can be lost friendships. This is such a lonely, disconnected business that we should cherish and nurture one another. But too often we chew the poisoned fruit from the Tree of Envy.

Is your best friend a writer? If so, do yourself a favor and initiate a conversation about professional jealousy before it becomes a problem in your relationship.

When author Sharon Ihle and I first started going to conferences and doing booksignings together, we set rules for our friendship. We determined early on that we would never, ever fight because we were so much alike that we were liable to kill each other!

We are on separate career paths and we try never to make comparisons.

Debbie Macomber and Linda Lael Miller have a similar agreement. As Debbie reports, "Years ago when Linda Lael Miller and I first became friends, we knew our friendship could be ruined by petty jealousy and were unwilling to allow that to happen. At the time, we were both getting ready to enter the RWA contest, and on our daily walk around the high school track, we talked about our fears. What if one of us should make the finals and the other not? It could get sticky. You can imagine how hilarious we found it when, for the first time since we'd both been published, that was the year neither of us made the finals."

Solution No. 5: Talk it over—and keep your sense of humor!

◆ ◆ ◆

Okay, fine, we'll watch our envy level and laugh off the dis-

parities in this business. But what about when we become the target of vicious barbs?

*Sticks and stones are thrown only
at fruit-bearing trees.*

Saadi

There is some comfort in the mere realization that jealousy is a left-handed compliment; after all, no one is jealous of a failure.

But envy and avarice are like pumice stones, grinding away our egos and eroding our good will. How do we learn to protect ourselves against jealousy and what—if anything—can we do to stop its spread?

Elaine Coffman wrote in an essay in the July *NINK* "... every author, however modest, keeps a most outrageous vanity chained like a madman in the padded cell of his breast."

So what happens when we inadvertently wound another author's vanity? How do we handle it when someone else's envy takes the form of a sharp knife and slips neatly between our shoulder blades?

Phoebe Conn says she just ignores it. Jean Auel says she's never felt it, and Barbara Keiler, while admittedly a bit of a Pollyanna, isn't aware of any professional jealousy directed her way. Likewise, Julie Tetel says, "I do not believe that I have ever been the victim of professional jealousy. The reason is simple: I have never won any prizes or awards, and I do not currently receive jealousy-inspiring advances."

If only it were that simple. If we could find the roots of envy in the acceptance of an award or large advance, the green-eyed monster would be easier to defeat. But the motivations for jealousy are more complex.

An author with 15 category books to her credit may not see herself as successful if she bases her image of "success" against that of Nora Roberts or Sandra Brown. But to the author who has only published one or two books, and struggled to find a home for each of them, the writer with 15 category novels will seem enormously successful.

Our own modesty can fan the flames of malice. I can't even sell my first book and she acts like ten sales are no big deal.

By disparaging our own success, we've unintentionally demeaned someone who is still struggling toward that first (or tenth) sale.

Solution No. 6: Realize that misplaced humility can be just as devastating as braggadocio.

Too often, our paths up the mountain to the crest of Bestsellerdom are jagged and filled with potholes. We slip and fall backward dozens of times before we reach the pinnacle. Some of us

***There is some comfort
in the mere realization
that jealousy is a left-
handed compliment;
after all, no one is
jealous of a failure.
But envy and avarice
are like pumice stones,
grinding away our
egos and eroding our
good will.***

Judi Lind

never do. So when we have a good day and take a giant step forward (a good review in *PW*, for instance) it is only natural to want to share our good news.

Unfortunately, this seems to be a situation that separates friends from acquaintances, as Debbie Macomber discovered: "Recently, I shared some exciting career news with someone I consider a friend. The person was the kind of friend one talks contracts and money with. There was a short silence and she asked, 'When is it going to be my turn?' She said this as if I'd shoved her out of line and taken her place. Frankly, I was stunned."

Debbie learned a painful lesson from that conversation. "First off, not everyone is going to be thrilled with my good news. For my own part, I need to be more sensitive to another writer's feelings. Hearing detail after detail of someone else's fabulous contract makes fertile ground for resentment. I don't discount my success, but there's no need to shove it down anyone's throat, either."

Solution No. 7: Be sensitive to someone else's career when talking about your own.

Paradoxically, withholding good news can also lead to **problems**. I recently chose to withhold some good news of my own because one of my close friends is struggling in her career right now. Eventually, of course, my news became common knowledge and my friend was rightfully hurt because she'd heard it through the grapevine—instead of from me.

When we discussed the situation, I told her that I had only been trying to spare her feelings. That since I'd been in her shoes, I knew how she felt. "Well, that's not how I feel," she responded. "In the future, how about letting me have my own neuroses?"

Solution No. 8: Take care that your discretion isn't perceived as condescension.

But what if you've done everything within your power to keep from hurting others, and you still hear of malicious rumblings from your colleagues? How do you handle undeserved enmity?

Elaine Coffman chooses kindness. "When I'm on the receiving end of jealousy, I try to remember that jealousy is close to insecurity. Often others see themselves when measured against their fellow authors.

"By recognizing jealousy as an insecurity, I can be less upset and hurt. Whenever I feel the sting of petty jealousy, I tell myself that writing well is the best revenge."

Solution No. 9: Sympathize with the underlying motive of your detractor, but go forward with your own career.

In corresponding with the generous writers who contributed to this article, one truism seemed to merge. The main cause of professional jealousy appears to be the lack of control we have over our own careers.

If one takes an entry level job at IBM, there is a distinct career path to follow. If the entry level clerk wants to move up the corporate ladder, he or she can go back to school, take specific cour-

ses, work hard and wait for the right job to open.

To reach the top in publishing, however, we must constantly strive to improve our skills, get great reviews, work diligently to increase our output, bankrupt ourselves in self-promotion, and pray John Grisham decides to retire in Bora Bora. Even if all these events miraculously transpire, there is still no guarantee that we'll be selected by the whimsical gods of publishing to scale the *New York Times* bestseller list.

As Lori Copeland pointed out, "... no matter how 'outstanding' a house or editor touts certain titles or authors to be, there is only one truth: no author, however talented, can make it 'big' without strong house support, co-op dollars and a powerful marketing commitment to build that author to her full potential."

It is that very lack of career control that feeds our insecurities. If an author writes a fabulous novel and the art department sticks a muddy brown cover on it and it dies on the shelves, who suffers? The art director? Never. The author's sell-through? Always.

Lori goes on to speculate: "Maybe if authors understood the rules there wouldn't be so much confusion, frustration and disappointment within the industry."

"What magical, mystical spark does a house see in a particular author that others don't? Is it purely political? Is it the author with the most powerful agent? Is it the editor? Is it the type of book one writes?"

Ahh, my kingdom for the answer to that query, Lori.

But until someone in publishing shares the "rules" with us, professional jealousy is going to be an unpleasant fact of our lives. Perhaps by gleaning a better understanding of what motivates this envy, we'll be able to shrug it off with more ease and continue to grow as writers.

Elaine Coffman passed on this quote from Francis Bacon: "In taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over he is superior."

As Elaine pointed out, our goal isn't to be superior to another author, but to our previous selves.

Writing well is the best revenge. **INK**

Judi Lind is the author of contemporary romance and romantic suspense novels as well as short stories and articles for a number of magazines. Her upcoming titles include: Veil of Fear, Harlequin Intrigue, Jan. '95 and It Would Take a Miracle, for Zebra.

◆ ◆ ◆

So writing is not just writing. It is also having a relationship with other writers. And don't be jealous, especially secretly. That's the worst kind. If someone writes something great, it's just more clarity in the world for all of us.

Natalie Goldberg
Writing Down the Bones

Educating the Masses

By LIBBY HALL

Picture this: Jane Doe gets a call from an editor. "Hello?" says Jane. She's trying to prepare dinner, which is spaghetti for the third time in ten days, but she's using a new recipe from a popular magazine, so maybe the family won't notice.

"Jane, this is Edith Editor. I've finished your manuscript and found it just delightful."

Stunned silence. Jane wonders if this is a crank call and waits for the punch line. If this is somebody's idea of a joke....

"We want to buy it," the editor continues.

Jane's hands go clammy, her heart races and her mind becomes hazy. "You do?"

"Yes. It's a charming story, full of warmth and tenderness. We're offering you five hundred dollars advance for the manuscript. How soon can you get me a personal bio for the back cover—something short, say, two hundred words. I'll need it by tomorrow."

"Oh, yes, fine, I can write a bio right away and express mail it in the morning."

"Great. I know it's going to be fun working together. This is really a super story. I'll be talking to you soon about the changes we'll need, just a little fine tuning to make it perfect."

"Yes. Fine. All right," Jane says, trying to take it all in. **THEY WANT TO BUY MY BOOK! I'M GOING TO BE PUBLISHED!**

They say goodbye and hang up. Jane hugs herself and does a little dance around the kitchen. When she's able to think clearly, she calls her husband, then her best friend. Finally, she thinks of a writer friend who told her to call if she had any questions about the publishing business, so she rings her up and tells her the wonderful news, too.

After congratulations and exaltations are over, the writer asks Jane what kind of advance she got on the book. Jane sorts through her muddled memories of the conversation. What did the editor say? She hesitates. She has a niggling suspicion that she might have sold her "wonderful" story a bit short. "The average," she says.

"Good. Three to six thousand for a first book seems to be the going rate. Congratulations on your sale. May it be the first of many!"

As they chat, the writer mentions the average royalty rate paid on most paperback books and how she did on her last book. She asks Jane about the royalty rates at the house where Jane sold and where the "split" is.

Jane doesn't know.

The writer asks her when the book is scheduled to come out. Jane doesn't know.

The writer asks her about how extensive the changes are. Jane doesn't know.

They laugh and hang up.

"Well, it is my first sale," Jane tells herself. She'll make up for it later. Her next book will be so good the editor will offer her a zillion dollars for it!

When the editor calls to go over the changes, Jane asks about the royalty rate. "It's two per cent," the editor says. "How soon can you get the changes to us?"

"Two weeks?" Jane asks.

"Fine."

"Uh, can you tell me when the book will come out?"

The editor tells her it is tentatively scheduled for sixteen months from then. Jane thanks her and they hang up.

When Jane gets the contract two months later, she runs into clauses that mean nothing to her. She signs the contract, feeling vaguely uneasy now the euphoria of being a PUBLISHED AUTHOR has simmered down a bit.

She doesn't know if the contract is a good deal. Worse, she doesn't even know if it's a fair deal. She does know, thanks to her writer friend's comments, that her advance was the pits.

If this story sounds surreal to a lot of us, we haven't been listening or paying attention to the stories coming from the trenches. Most published writers admit they were totally in the dark when they signed their first contract...and their second...and their third.... The following is an account of discussions which took place at the San Antonio conference, not in a formal workshop, but while we were sitting around "chewing the fat" or strolling the lovely River Walk.

"Until I met some other writers who were willing to answer questions, I didn't realize I'd started way below industry averages," one popular writer of historical romances admitted in one such discussion. "I had to change houses to move up to the average advance most publishers paid for first novels."

Once a writer signs on for bottom-of-the-barrel amounts, that is where she tends to stay—at the bottom of the barrel. Several authors agreed.

Another, also in historical romances, believes the publishing house sees you as a "cheap" writer, one they don't have to do anything for...that you'll write for practically nothing.

"The first advance thrown at the writer, and sometimes the first royalty rate, is rarely the one the editor expects to settle on," one savvy, long-time author added. "A couple of houses are known for offering extremely low rates, but will move up to better rates if the writer balks at the amounts."

But...doesn't a low rate mean they don't want the book very much and so you'd better take it?

Not necessarily. Like all companies, including self-employed writers, the publishing houses have to watch their cash flow. The book they just bought will take an average of nine months to a year to get through production. The less they have to pay out up front, the better their cash flow.

That's their bottom line.

Don't Miss this Career-Building Opportunity

By VICTORIA THOMPSON,
Conference Coordinator

We already believe Novelists, Inc's conference is the best one around, and we have worked very hard this year to make it affordable, too. We have obtained lower room rates at the hotel, and we have cut the conference fee. For our members under deadline, we have also shortened the conference by one day (which also helps reduce expenses) while shortening the meeting time by only one hour. And for those who wish, we also have a roommate matching service.

The only thing we can't control is the cost of transportation to the conference, but we are happy to report that airfares are traditionally lowest in August, so now is the time to shop for travel bargains. PLEASE don't decide you can't afford to come to NINC until you've checked with your travel agent. You will be amazed at how anxious airlines are to attract customers in the fall.

So come to Atlanta where you will be inspired and informed, where you might make a deal with an editor who isn't too busy for a conversation, and where you might find a new direction for your career or simply new impetus for the same direction. Treat yourself to the experience of a lifetime at NINC!

Editor, Agent Updates

We are pleased to announce that Judith Stern will be representing The Berkley Publishing Group at the conference, Ruth Cohen will be representing the Ruth Cohen Literary Agency, and Ethan Ellenberg will be representing the Ethan Ellenberg Agency.



What we're addressing is the writer's.

After talking to several writers at the San Antonio conference, it seems that if you start low, you stay low. One who started at \$1,500 was only able to get \$500 increases in advances at the same house where another who started at \$3,000 got \$1,000 increases with each advance. It took a flat-out refusal to sign another contract and a willingness to move on before the publishing house got the idea the writer wanted a decent advance, which seems to be about half what the book is expected to earn out.

Even more important is the royalty rate. It doesn't take a math genius to know that on royalties of \$6,000 at 4% you'd earn \$9,000 for the same book at 6%, or 1-1/2 times as much.

This discussion led to other questions: What, if anything, do we as published writers owe to those writers who haven't sold yet? Should we let them discover the cold, hard facts of the business on their own...like most of us did? Does letting them know the facts lead to better contracts for all writers?

In talking with some "oldies," it was discovered that ten years ago, the standard advance was \$6,000 for a contemporary series romance, even on the first book. Now it seems to be \$2,500 to \$3,000 for first timers.

Less than ten years ago, the standard royalty rate was 6% and went up a point for each 100,000 books sold. It has eroded to 4% at some publishing houses. Several writers said they'd heard that some people had even gotten 2%, although no one admitted to signing a contract for that amount.

"When I started," stated one writer over lunch, "series books sold through the book club earned 6% for the author."

There were gasps around the table. "When did that change?" asked another.

"When the publishers found out we'd take whatever they decided to give us because we didn't know better."

"Right," agreed another. "It isn't for nothing that they push book club and foreign sales with lots of ad campaigns and free gifts."

"Bought with the money they don't pay the writers."

"Anyway, I sold my first book very low. I wish I'd had someone to tell me what was what," one of the younger writers confided. "I'm doing okay now. I got a savvy agent...mostly by luck since I didn't know anything about agents, either."

Big laugh and general agreement all around.

The above discussion is a composite of many that took place over the entire conference, which was a wonderful learning experience as we shared information and ideas.

The Conclusion? Most writers agreed that we need to educate all writers on the basics of the business. In giving workshops to the unpublished in the future, several decided to include, along with "how to write a selling synopsis," some of the hard facts of writing for a living. **NINK**

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.

Comas, Mary Kay: *Wait for Me*, Bantam Loveswept
Crisswell, Millie: *Mail-Order Outlaw*, Harper Paperbacks
Di Benedetto, Theresa w/a Raine Cantrell: *Darling Annie*, Topaz/Penguin USA
Gellis, Roberta: *Joanna*, Leisure (reissue)
Gideon, Nancy w/a Dana Ransom: *Texas Destiny*, Zebra Lovegram
Hagan, Patricia: *Love and War*, HarperMonogram historical (reissue)
Harper, Karen: *River of Sky*, Dutton (hardcover)
Harper, Karen: *The Wings of Morning*, Signet
Hunter, Jillian: *A Deeper Magic*, Pinnacle Books
Kauffman, Donna: *Bounty Hunter*, Bantam Loveswept
Kleinsasser, Lois w/a Cait London: *Fusion*, Silhouette Desire's Man of the Month
Kleinsasser, Lois w/a Cait London: *The Daddy Candidate*, Silhouette's By Request, "A Baby on the Way"
Osborne, Maggie w/a Margaret St. George: *The Drop-In Bride*, Harlequin American
Pickart, Joan Elliott: *Amber, Sing Softly*, Pinnacle Historical, Denise Little Presents
Roberts, Doreen w/a Kate Kingsbury: *Eat, Drink and Be Buried*, Berkley Prime Crime
Ross, JoAnn: *Scandals*, Harlequin Temptation

Stone, Katherine: *Happy Endings*, Kensington Publishing (hardcover)
Sweeney, Joan w/a Marlene Suson: *Devil's Angel*, Avon Books
Wisdom, Linda: *Double Jeopardy*, Zebra
Zirkelbach, Thelma w/a Thelma Alexander: *True Texas Love*, Zebra To Love Again

For a one-year subscription to *NOVELISTS' INK*,
send your request and \$50.00 to:
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 1166, Mission, KS 66288
For membership information
and application,
send your request to the P.O. Box.

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.

Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby

Novelists' INK

Novelists, Inc.

An organization for writers of popular fiction

P.O. Box 1166

Mission, Kansas 66222

FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FARGO, ND
PERMIT # 281