

# Novelists' INK

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

## We're on the Same Side... Aren't We?

By **CLAIRE BOCARDO**

*Author's Note: Writers interviewed for this article were Michael Allegretto, Georgia Bockoven, Lillian Stewart Carl, Catherine Coulter, Kathryn Lynn Davis, Nancy Holder, Ron Montana, Kathleen Morgan, Nora Roberts, Serita Stevens-Barr, and others. Editors are Kent Carroll, of Carroll & Graf; Jean Cavelos, Dell; Ann LaFarge, Zebra; Hilary Ross, Penguin; Jennifer Sawyer, Zebra; Isabel Swift, Silhouette; and Jennifer Weiss, St. Martin's. (Four others did not return my calls.) Their genres include fantasy, horror, men's action-adventure, mystery, romance, SF, thrillers, and women's mainstream fiction. I am grateful to all those who spoke so candidly with me for this piece. C.B.*

**I**deally, writers and editors are working toward the same goal—better books—and both state the same desires for their relationships: clear communication, prompt responses, skill, tact, and honesty. One would expect cordial relations between them: relations marked by professionalism, enthusiasm, and mutual respect. That does happen; more than half of the writers I spoke with for this article stated that they'd never had serious trouble with an editor. However, others told me that their editorial relationships have often been derailed, and some disastrously. How does that happen, and why?

"One writer's angel is another's devil," Lillian Carl says. Personality differences, philosophical disagreements about writing, or unfulfilled expectations can derail any writer-author relationship. Since trust is a key element on both sides, false expectations can be a real killer.

### What should we expect?

Editors have to do much more than acquire and edit books, and each one may have to do it for as many as sixty authors. Editing the manuscript is the only area in which the editor has anything approaching complete control; every other part of the job requires in-house cooperation and, nearly always, compromises. Many new authors, said one with many years' experience, have un-

reasonable expectations of what an editor can (and therefore, they believe, should) do for them. I asked editors about that problem.

"Editing is only about 10% of the job," says Jennifer Sawyer of Zebra. "People lose sight of the day-to-day work." Because the editor is the liaison between author and house, she explains, authors sometimes expect miracles in scheduling, covers, advances, and so on. But the editor doesn't have final say on those things; she only consults on them. And Lillian Carl adds, "While you're trying to get one book out and wonderful, she's trying to get fifty out and wonderful!"

"The editor can support the book, convey her enthusiasm, and try to get others in the house excited about it, too," says Dell's Jean Cavelos, "but even when review copies are sent out, we can't make anyone review the book. The publicist, market person, and sales people are all involved. I would love to be able to dictate to them, but I can't."

"An editor is the author's cheerleader in the house," says Jennifer Weiss of St. Martin's Press. "The editor goes out on a limb by buying the book; that's a real vote of confidence. After that, the author needs to give her the ammunition to sell the book. They need to cooperate. Nobody knows the book like the author, but nobody knows the business like the editor."

### The awful truth

"The editor's doing her job," says Isabel Swift of Silhouette. "She has to do what will make the house the most money. Some editors are incredibly dedicated; they bust *(continued on page 9)*

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# ***PRESIDENT's column***

## **On The Road Again**

**S**ummer is over, friends. It's time to get on with the rest of the year. So let's clear up a few items that have built up during the dog days.

First, the money matters. Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find a survey form asking you to list the kinds of writing you have done during your career. The survey has an important purpose: it will help us claim our rightful share of the money that is being collected in several countries for the xeroxing of copyrighted material.

Right now, Novelists, Inc. is in line for some portion of \$320,000 that has been collected over the past several years by the Reproduction Rights Organization of Norway (Kopinor). Germany and Sweden are creating similar organizations to collect royalties for material photocopied by schools, libraries, and government institutions. In other words, there is real money on the table for us and for other writers.

So please, take a minute and document your résumé for us. It will be worth real money for the entire organization.

\* \* \*

Speaking of the Authors Coalition on Reprographic Rights (that name was made up by lawyers, not writers), we can expect bylaws and apportionment in the next month. Novelists, Inc.'s Board of Directors has appointed your humble servant and Marianne Shock to attend the two-day session in New York where the final draft of bylaws will be hammered out.

We have run into a couple of problems in the past few months. First, Marianne and I have developed the painful medical condition called "telephone ear" from the three-hour conference-call meetings. Nothing serious but it is annoying to have to learn a whole new protocol of social interaction. ("Who was that who just spoke up from the void without identifying themselves?")

More irritating, though, is the provincialism of some of our colleagues on the coali-

tion. Nearly all of them live within sight or smell of the East River. It was understood from the beginning of the process that the organizational meeting of the coalition would be held in their ball park, Manhattan, for everyone's convenience.

Then, during the last conference call, the New Yorkers all banded together and decided that individual member groups would have to absorb the travel costs for the meeting.

The rationale was that the rest of the world would just love to come to New York in the middle of August, so why should the coalition pick up the tab.

"You're getting the bennies of the trip so you should pay," one of the Big Apple contingent told me.

Ninety degrees and ninety percent humidity. Just what I always wanted. My editor is in Woodstock and my agent is on Fire Island. I can't even find somebody to buy me a drink and these are "bennies?"

Novelists, Inc. can't afford to let the East Coast dictate the bylaws of the coalition or we might find ourselves faced with a coalition in which all writers are equal except New York writers who are more equal. Therefore, we have decided to pay our own way. It will be recouped from the first payments, so we will come out money ahead.

But the stunt was a niggling little reminder of why we exist as an organization. Somebody has to protect us provincials from New York. Normally, we have to watch the publishers but now it seems we have to keep an eye on our fellow scribes, as well.

Provincialism of that sort has been a recurring theme in this corner, but every time I think I've said my final word on the subject, Gotham rears its ugly head and sets me off again.

Grrrr.

\* \* \*

Speaking of respect and lack of it, there is a bit of heartening news to report. Novelists, Inc. member Patricia Maxwell, who writes as

Jennifer Blake, passes on a clip from the *Library Journal*. Those fusty old curators of Carnegie collections all over the country have shown their truly progressive nature by beginning to review romance novels as though they were (gasp) real books.

Imagine that. Next thing you know, those romance writers will be expecting real money, in advance.

And honest contracts.

And a little less sneering, if you please, from the rest of the culture industry.

I have said it before: The world's disdain for romance fiction is a major issue for all practitioners of "popular culture." Romance is the strongest single genre in publishing. Disdain for it is disdain for all kinds of popular fiction. As an organization, we ought to resist it, whether we are romance writers or the creators of the hardest hard-boiled detective stories on the shelves today.

I applaud the *Library Journal*, published by the American Library Assn., for helping to legitimize romance fiction. I also applaud *Publishers Weekly* for its increasingly thoughtful reviews of the genre. *PW* Editor Nora Rawlinson told our convention last year that change was coming and she seems to have been good to her word.

Now, if the rest of the publishing world would just join the twentieth century before it turns into the twenty-first, we could all spend our time in more productive pursuits.

\* \* \*

Speaking, as we were, of New York, I leave you with one last summer tidbit. If you missed the summer fiction issue of the *New Yorker* (a real tree-killer comprised of the June 27 and July 4 issues rolled into one snooty volume), run down to your local library and check it out.

Some of the leading lights of literary (cq) fiction in America today dug through their desk drawers and dusted off short stories that are published in that lively little self-congratulatory way that is the magazine's most irritating characteristic.

"Stories get published here because stories please us and although we've never taken any polls or convened any focus groups on the subject, we gather that they please some of our readers, too," chirped the ever-so-trendy editors in their introduction to this issue.

The imperial "We" was never more cloying.

Granted, there's an Elmore Leonard story that I've laid aside for a rainy day, so the issue isn't an entire loss, and the cartoons, many of them about writers, are very good. But there is a feature in the issue by some high-brow chap named Anthony Lane that is the most astonishingly inbred essay I've read in months.

Mr. Lane waxes poetical and perceptive about a subject close to our hearts, best-selling fiction. Not that he reads the stuff as a normal matter. He's entirely too taken up with important things for that.

But as an experiment, mind you, and only because he was well-paid, he bought the top ten books on the *New York Times* hardback fiction list for May 15, 1994 and read them all, back to back, without coming up for air.

The reason he didn't come up for air was that he was holding his nose the whole time.

Oddly, our friend Lane found a couple of things he liked. That

certainly never would have happened in the old *New Yorker*. He rather enjoyed Sue Grafton, for instance, but then everybody likes Sue Grafton, even me.

Most of the rest of the ten he cared for not at all.

Nothing wrong with individual taste, mind you. That's Lane's prerogative. That's what they paid him all that money to do. However, buried in the middle of his ten-part review and commentary, Mr. Lane lets slip with a comment that speaks volumes.

In discussing Robert James Waller's *Bridges of Madison County*, he says, and I quote, "I don't know anyone who has read the book; I don't know anyone who knows anyone who has read the book."

There, in a nutshell, is the reason New York and I are on diverging trajectories. Five million copies of the book in print, for better and for worse, and this guy, who claims to be a well-informed man of American letters, says he is not even guilty of bad taste by association.

Good God, man! Get a grip. You won't die from reading Waller. Lots of us have done it and survived. It ain't high culture but it ain't HIV-positive, either.

There, now. I feel better. See you all in Atlanta and I'll tell you all what I really think of New York. — Evan Maxwell

## MINUTES summary

### Highlights of the Board Meeting of July 22, 1994

1. President Evan Maxwell reported that a final organizational meeting for the new Authors Coalition will be held in New York City on August 15-16. One of the main purposes of the Coalition is to oversee distribution of monies received for foreign reprographic rights to the ten Originating Member organizations (of which Novelists, Inc. is one).
2. Conference Committee Chair Victoria Thompson requested that a formal written disclaimer be circulated to make it clear that attendance by an agent or editor at the annual NINC conference does not constitute an endorsement of that agent or editor by Novelists, Inc.

— Judy Myers

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For membership information  
and application,

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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

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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.

## Chamberlain Sheds Light

I read Diane Chamberlain's "Private Relations and the Writer" with a fair amount of interest at first, the dim bulb at the back of my mind growing brighter and brighter as I got deeper into the article. By the time I finished it, all I could say was, WOW—I think I see the light, and not a minute too soon! Not only did this writer open the veins of both wrists to pour her personal anguish out for all to see, she even made the complacent among us sit up and take notice.

I, for one, am very grateful that she did. Although my personal biography is nothing like Ms. Chamberlain's, much of the progression of my 30+ year marriage is very similar. Nobody has been more supportive of my career than my wonderful husband, Larry, a man who cannot herald my triumphs enough, and never fails to hold my hand over the rough spots. He is the solid gold core in what I consider to be a secure and very happy marriage. Other writers have seen him at conferences and booksignings shamelessly promoting me and my work, but few other than myself know how supportive he's been on a more personal level. No point detailing the many ways he helps keep my life less cluttered so that I can devote more time to writing, but he does it all with a smile—one, I hadn't realized, that was hiding a bit of a frown of late. Not over me and my career, mind you, but over some unhappiness of his own in that area.

I think I probably wouldn't have paid much attention to that frown, or given it more than a cursory, "cheer up, things will get better," pep talk before reading this fine article. After all, I spent most of the last thirty years rooting him on in his career, did I not? It's about time he did the same for me. Yes...and no.

Had Diane Chamberlain waited another three years to write this piece, I'm not going to say that my marriage would have fallen apart, but then I've never been one to press my luck either. Or take a bad bet. Thank you, Diane, for shining the light of "pre-need" in an area of my life I sometimes take for granted. I hope the other contented writers out there took the time to read it, too.

— Sharon Ihle

## Blessing in Disguise

I want to let Diane Chamberlain know how impressed I was with her article. It must have been very difficult for her to write, and that she chose to do so says a great deal about her generosity of spirit. Not everyone is willing to expose her own mistakes in order to keep others from falling into the same trap. It was courageous and kind, and it makes me realize anew why I belong to Novelists, Inc.

Ironically, Diane's article, as well as the chilling article on burnout, made me realize that my own well-documented lack of time to write might in fact be a blessing in disguise. For years I have felt that it was some kind of a moral flaw in me that I put in only two to three hours a day at my computer. Now I am beginning to think that perhaps that "moral flaw" is what is keeping my writing fresh and my marriage healthy!

Hmmm, if I actually cut my time back to an hour and a half a day, I'd have time to go for a nice long trail ride....

— Joan Wolf

## Women Writers in Priority Trap?

I read Diane Chamberlain's article "Private Relations and the Writer" and found it to be food for thought. Then I read Terri Herrington Blackstock's response, and my toes began to curl.

Yes, we should be sensitive to the needs of those with whom we co-habit—to a point. Blackstock writes "...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." I recently read a profile of Michael Crichton in *Vanity Fair*. When Crichton is deep into a book, he goes to a different house to write it. I can't imagine him uttering the sentiments Blackstock has. Not that we should emulate Crichton, but let's consider why the publishing world is now and always has been dominated by men. I contend it's because most male writers do make writing their first priority.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf addresses this issue and concludes that women's devotion to husbands and children has short-circuited their writing greatness to an astonishing degree. That we have any well-known women writers is amazing, given the caregiving duties society expects of women. Perhaps we're not all destined for greatness, but if we don't make writing a priority, how will we ever know? Writing is important to me. Very important. Yet when my husband and children express their needs, I abandon my work and rush to satisfy those needs. I'm trying to break that distressing habit, not glorify it. I'm in no real danger of forgetting them—my own devotion and fifties-era training runs too deep for that to happen. What I need, and I suspect

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most women writers need, is more encouragement to pursue my dream, not a call to remember my responsibilities to my family.

— Vicki Lewis Thompson

## CD ROM Search

I read, about a year ago, of a CD ROM which included, among other things the OED, Roget's Thesaurus, and the Americana Encyclopedia. If anyone knows anything about these, please contact:

— Jane Malcolm

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## The Orgasm Paragraph

Most of us authors know that when we are interviewed for local newspapers that the interviewer usually has a very lopsided interest in the parts of the book that are sexual in nature. You may have written a four-hundred-page book, and out of that some ten pages may deal with lovemaking, but to the interviewer that doesn't make any difference. They want to zero in on those ten pages and ignore the rest.

I've had that happen to me enough that I expect it. My usual response is to say, "Do you mind if we discuss the other three hundred and ninety pages?" However, while being interviewed for *The Met* here in Dallas, I had a most unusual experience. The young man conducting the interview actually asked me if I would write a scene for him describing an orgasm. Well, when I picked myself up off the floor, I was torn between ordering him out of my house and picking up the nearest lamp to bash him over the head with. Trying to maintain my cool, I said I would think about it. He gave me his fax number and asked me to think favorably, and to please fax the "orgasm paragraph" to him.

After he left, I began thinking about the quote, *The pen is mightier than the sword*, and that inspired me. I decided I wasn't going to ignore him, nor was I going to get angry. I was going to give him exactly what he asked for. The paragraph I gave him was:

*She began to feel impatient, restless, as if she were waiting for something...something which had no memory, no name. Without looking at his face, she knew he was waiting too, that he was watching her, waiting for something to happen. It happened.*

I added a postscript that said, "I think what you asked for is in here somewhere. Did I forget to mention I love to write humor?"

Who said pens may blot but they cannot blush?

— Elaine Coffman

## Defining the Legitimate Writer

While I should not know Evan Maxwell if he appeared at my door clutching an invitation to tea, I shall certainly miss his wry and full-of-common-sense *PRESIDENT's Column* when he steps down this autumn. William Bernhardt has some clever shoes to fill.

And if I might inject my two cents into the "Who is a Writer?" debate: Some clever Frenchman once said that writing is like prostitution. First you do it for yourself. Then you do it for a few friends. And then you do it for money. Robin Davis Miller, Executive Director of the Authors Guild, is quoted in this summer's bulletin as saying in response to some silly editor who told her she should be writing because she loves writing, and not because of money:

*Write love letters because you love writing, write stories for your kids, and your friends because you love writing, but for God's sake, don't write for a multi-million dollar corporation without thinking about the money.*

A writer is someone who writes for a legitimate corporation, or publication for cash on the barrelhead. Now as for what is legitimate, I shall leave that conundrum for cleverer minds than mine.

— Bertrice W. Small

## Jealous Is as Jealous Does

Judi Lind's article on professional jealousy was great. I'm so jealous!

— Victoria Thompson

## Green-Eyed Monster Killer

Had an interesting moment of synchronicity this morning after reading Judi Lind's fine article on professional jealousy. Upon completing August's issue, I turned to some affirmation reading, and just happened to open to page 201 of *Walking on Alligators, a Book of Meditations for Writers* by Susan Shaughnessy (Harper San Francisco ISBN 0-26-250758-3). I'm enclosing a copy of the quote because I found that Marie-Louise Von Frantz's words not only paralleled Ms. Lind's article, they offered a strong lesson to snap me back into shape when (agony) I'm tempted by the green-eyed monster. They're also a helpful explanation as to why people act the way they do on occasions when I'm on the receiving end of poor behavior.

*One of the most wicked destructive forces, psychologically speaking, is unused creative power...If someone has a creative gift and out of laziness, or for some other reason, doesn't use it, the psychic energy turns to sheer poison. That's why we often diagnose*



# LETTERS to the editor

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*neuroses and psychotic diseases as not-lived higher possibilities.* — Marie-Louise Von Frantz

By the way, *Alligators* was a gift from friend and fellow Novelists, Inc. member Linda (Varner) Palmer, who should have skipped this page because she was born without a jealous or conning bone in her body. Credit goes to her for sharing this treasure of a book.

— Helen R. Myers

## "Deep Cover" on Book Reviews

Since New York book reviews seem to be an ongoing topic, I thought a panel discussion during last fall's meeting in New York City of the Women's National Book Network might be of interest. My informant, "Deep Cover," is an editor I know only very casually who prefers, understandably, to remain unnamed. The discussion topic was—what else—book reviews, and panel members included Margo Jefferson, *New York Times*; Diane Roback, children's reviews, *Publishers Weekly*; Penny Kaganoff, then paperback reviews, *Publishers Weekly*; and two from *NY Newsday*. Jefferson said the best thing about mass market is the covers, that paperbacks are a "package" as opposed to literature. 5000-7000 books come in a year for review, she said, and she looks for what's "new." Chosen books are put in stacks of eight, the number of review heads. Presuming books have already passed the "new" test, they must also pass the "acid test": they must not be a romance. (Deep Cover here related a story about a reviewer for a major paper who was reviewing the romances by one of the paper's reporters and was told "don't review those little books again, or you'll be fired." The publisher's wife, it seems, was having no luck finding a publisher for her magnum opus.)

Kaganoff stated that the standards of literary and commercial fiction were very different. Deep Cover heard an aside from someone on the panel that "academic (literary) writers were less and less able to write in the English language" but the reviewer still didn't like commercial—read popular—fiction. Roback commented it seemed the best way to get reviewed is to write a

small press book about a bizarre topic. No one, apparently, disagreed. She admits she does give more space to small children's presses and first books, but assumes any book is good until proven bad. A reviewer should critique, she added, but not savage or be snide. After such a radical statement, she was probably savaged or "snided" by some of her peers.

Deep Cover reported that none of the reviewers, *PW*'s included, talked about what their readers wanted—only what they wanted. Commercial fiction and non-fiction get poorly reviewed generally yet these are the backbone of bookselling, and booksellers need reviews for ordering decisions. Before we consider hitpersons or book bombs, however, Deep Cover cautions that we also consider where the reviewers live. Deep Cover is from the East Coast but even she was shocked by life in NYC. The first three months, she saw two people killed, and the first time she tried to use her coupons at the small (and only) grocery near her apartment, the owner/checker threw the coupons on the floor, stamped on them, then spit on them for good measure. In the debate on which is more influential, heredity or environment, the latter may have won in New York.

— Patricia Gardner Evans

P.S. This seemed to be my month for covert intelligence. Somebody else reported a comment by a male NINC member that he thought NINC had more potential than any other organization to become the most powerful force and voice for writers. However, he added, that couldn't happen with our disproportionate romance and female membership. To that I respond that I've recruited at least five new members, two of them non-romance but all female, I admit. Of the gentle complainer and the non-romance/male contingent, I must ask: how many male/non-romance members have you recruited? You guys have contacts in other genres and organizations the majority of us don't as well as participation on different computer bulletin boards. NINC does have the very real potential to become the leading writers organization, but everybody has got to work to recruit more members, *especially* the non-romance/male crowd.

## Member's "Conflict" is Opportunity for All

Regarding the objections to admitting Ann LaFarge to membership in NINC (since only one executive editor at Zebra has been admitted, it seems foolish to tip-toe so carefully around her name), I willingly confess that when she asked my opinion last May, I encouraged her to join us. "Name Withheld" is unnecessarily frightened; no one person could bring down an organization of 500 members even if she wanted to, and bringing us down is the last thing I believe Ann wants. Making her one of us (besides one of "them") seems to me a magnificent opportunity. Let us



*If you can go to only one conference a year, NINC is the one—the only one dedicated to the business of writing, the only one where published writers talk face to face with publishers, editors, agents, and each other. It's gloves-off, straight talk—worth every penny, every mile, every effort to attend. See you there!*

— Amanda Scott

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welcome Ann with our arms wide open and make an ally of her.

Having just written the interview article on writer-editor relations that leads this issue, I am fully aware of the paranoia some of us feel about editors, agents, and publishers. However, since we all know who Ann is, I don't see how it would be possible for her to act as a company spy—and she must have a fund of useful information to share with us on how things look from the other side of the table. Granted, I am by choice a habitual optimist and a trusting soul. But in the two years of our acquaintance, I have found Ann to be not only an unusually forthright and outspoken person, but also one who expects and appreciates frankness in others. (God knows she's had plenty of it from me, and my career is still alive.) Casting as Mata Hari a woman who speaks her mind as freely as Ann LaFarge does is simply laughable.

Ann has earned her membership. She is a writer with several books to her (pen) name and, believe it or not, unsold projects—just like the rest of us. As a writer, she needs the society, support, and advice of other writers—just as we all do. And as a serious writer (dilettantes don't produce multiple titles), she has the same problems we all share. Joining a group that concerns itself with the business of writing (as opposed to a literary society) demonstrates her recognition that writing, no less than publishing, is a business and not just a high-class hobby. When she's spent time among us listening to our concerns and being listened to, who knows? She might even be able and willing to use her terrifying inside knowledge and clout to help solve some of the problems we spend our lives worrying about!

Excluding prospective members because they're not professional writers makes good sense. Excluding them because they're professional editors makes no sense at all. Until we limit our membership to persons whose sole source of income is writing novels, we have no right to dictate how our members earn their living.

— Claire Bocardo

## Open Dialogue Accomplishes Change

In view of the flap over having a writer who also happens to be an editor at a major publishing house join NINC, I'd like to point out that we have had another editor from that same publishing house, Sarah Gallick, as a NINC member for over a year now with no flap at all. Surprised? You may also be surprised to know that we might well have some members—multi-published authors all—who also happen to be agents, as well as other editors on our roster. We do, I am told, have several members who have joined under their pseudonyms without revealing their legal names at all so no one really knows who they are. But so long as these people meet the NINC membership requirements, should we even care? A writer is a writer, and NINC is for writers, no matter what else they might do for a living.

NINC has come a long way from our founding when our newsletter was private to members only and our conference sessions were closed to editors and agents. If we have learned one thing in the last five years, it is that the only way we can change anything in publishing is through frank and open dialogue with other publishing professionals. Last year we held such discussions at our conference for the first time, and everyone involved learned a lot. This year we will be holding more such discussions and learning even more about what can be done to improve an author's lot in this crazy business.

But if some of those authors also happen to be editors and agents, should we exclude them from author-only discussions? Or should we accept that they have the same needs as authors that the rest of us do and allow them to meet those needs as NINC members? I am confident that our members will choose the second alternative, and I am also confident we will be glad we did.

— Victoria Thompson

## "Conflict" Destroys Safe Harbor

After reading Evan Maxwell's column regarding a request for membership from an Executive Editor, I feel compelled to express my own concerns. I agree with the member who offered a strong objection in a letter published in *Novelists' INK*. It was this member's contention that it's a conflict of interest.

You bet it's a conflict of interest! While I agree with Evan Maxwell that speaking openly and responsibly is more gainful than speaking behind closed doors, I, for one, want to have a chance to express my concerns and viewpoints—test them, if you will—in a safe place before making them public. While I willingly talk about career problems, family matters and writing concerns to my colleagues, I'm much more selective in the things I let my publishers know. This is simply using good common sense.

Most editors are sent to conferences on company time and at company expense. Can we really be so naive to think that anyone working for a publisher won't feel obliged, no matter how good her intentions, to defend her company or possibly "report" back? And what if one of her own writers happens to grumble about a contract clause? More important: who would dare?

While it's true that this editor has met the two-book requirement, her experiences as a writer are not the same as the average writer, most of whom have never stepped foot inside a publishing house prior to being published, and don't have the advantage of watching a personal manuscript go through the various stages to becoming a book. I don't think this editor would be deprived by having her membership denied, and considering the possible conflicts that could ensue, we might even be doing her a favor. The real loss would be to members of Novelists, Inc. who ➤

# LETTERS to the editor

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will find their "safe harbor" no longer exists once the doors are opened indiscriminantly to editors.

True, we're talking about a single editor, but there are others following in her footsteps. One editor just won a RITA. I know of several other editors who have had book one published and are working on a second. It's quite conceivable that sometime in the future, an editor might choose to run for office. This very thing is happening in another writers organization.

If we can't get our members to do so much as sign their names to a letter written for our own newsletter, how do we get them to express an honest and open opinion in front of a publisher's representative? Perhaps we best change the name "Novelists, Inc." to "Politically Correct Inc."

— Margaret Brownley

## "Conflict" Opens Yet Another Door

*Editor's Note: Having always appreciated my predecessors' avoidance of editorials, I'm uncomfortable about using NINK as a forum for my personal views. However, as a member of Novelists, Inc., I can't resist commenting on the editor/writer controversy. That being the case, I now find myself in the odd position of writing a letter to myself:*

In my ongoing belief that publishers and writers can ac-

complish more by talking with one another, as opposed to talking about one another, last fall, at a conference in Phoenix, I encouraged the editor in question to encourage her publishing house to subscribe to *NINK*. Had I known she qualified for membership as a writer, I would have pressed my case even harder.

Who among us has not suffered that horrible attack of self-doubt that makes us want to race after the FedEx truck and grab back our manuscript to save ourselves from abject humiliation? Are we to believe that just because someone is an editor, she possesses unlimited self-esteem when it comes to something so personally close to her? Novelists, Inc. was formed to provide a support network for writers. All writers. Including those who hold down day jobs as waiters, professors, cops, attorneys and yes, even editors.

Although I respect Margaret Brownley, I have to question points raised in her letter. I do not believe that watching a manuscript go through the various stages to becoming a book gives an editor an edge over a multi-published author. Writers who have not visited their publishing houses and met all the people involved in the process of getting their novels to the bookstores, should. Also, there's a lot to be said for an editor experiencing first hand many of the problems we share: waiting for manuscripts to be read and either approved or rejected (yes, it happens to them, too), waiting for the contract, waiting for the checks.

Last year I sat in on a conversation with an editor/writer who expressed surprise at how long it took to receive her advance. Having admittedly not given the matter a great deal of thought when she was sitting on the editor's side of the desk, she assumed the check was written as soon as she turned the request in. Needless to say, she discovered that wasn't always the case and now tries to speed up her end of the process. In addition, I've worked with a writer/editor and much prefer her writing her own book rather than trying to rewrite mine.

As for a writer not daring to grumble about a contract clause, how on earth will the publisher know you're unhappy if you don't express your discontent? There is one clause in my contracts, supposedly written in stone, that I have routinely grumbled about to everyone involved, from my editor, to the senior editor, to the editorial director, on up to the editorial vice president.

I've informed them all that I will continue to complain—and encourage other writers to do so as well—until the day the house either agrees to compromise, or my dissatisfaction with the clause as it is written finally becomes a deal breaker. Although I'm admittedly an incurable optimist, after steadily chipping away, I believe I'm beginning to see some erosion.

Like our president, I try not to say anything about business in private I am not willing to say in public. And as to Brownley's last point, I would no more consider not expressing an honest business opinion to an editor than I would consider not signing my name to this letter.

— JoAnn Ross

## INTROducing

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*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:

Joyce Anglin, Jenks OK  
Zita Christian, Manchester CT  
Chelley Kitzmiller, Tehachapi CA  
Bonnie Jeanne Perry, St. Louis MO  
Lauraine Snelling, Martinez CA

### New Members:

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



# On The Same Side....

*(Continued from page 1)*

their butts, working on their own time, to help authors they believe in. But if you aren't famous enough and selling well enough, you don't have the clout to change her mind."

One editor called her job a sort of literary triage: like a doctor, she sees many "patients," and she has to tell people who's going to make it and who's not. "For the doctor, it's just one patient," she says, "but for the patient, it's his life." It can be devastating for a writer to learn that she's not her editor's pet, she adds, but ultimately, publishing is a business and must be done in a businesslike way.

## Talking business

People on both sides of the fence stated that business talk between author and editor can damage their relationship. Zebra's Ann LaFarge resents having to talk to authors about money, production, covers, marketing, and the like. She strongly prefers, she says, to "talk bookish matters with writers and business matters with agents."

At the same time, several editors sounded ambivalent about agents.

"Sometimes agents foul the waters," Sawyer says, "accidentally or on purpose." LaFarge agrees: "Pushy agents can tick off the house," she says, but "when push comes to shove, we buy the book we can sell and pay enough that we can make a profit on it."

"Talking business with the editor can pollute the relationship," Carroll says, but in recent years, "agents have insinuated themselves into the relationship and taken much of the editor's responsibilities. Some writers' loyalties are strictly to the agent, and that can have a detrimental effect on the collegial relationship between editor and author."

"All this stuff about what the editor thinks and what the agent thinks is simply distraction," one editor said. "Let us fight our stupid little squabbles, and just sit home and write your book."

Some writers who have chosen to be their own agents see this "shut up and write" attitude as paternalistic.

"They want us to feel crass when we ask for more money," one writer said, "as if we should be in it for the love of writing alone. I have a living to make. They're not in it for the sheer love of art, and neither am I!" Her strongest wish in editorial relations is, "TALK to me!" She wants to know about changes in covers or pub dates, promotional plans, sales, and other business details.

"It drives me crazy not to know how a book is doing," she says. "It's a control issue: they seem afraid to let you know how well you're doing for fear you'll ask for more money or perks." Many editors, she notes, seem dismayed at how much writers have learned through networking. "I just wish the houses would see us as equal partners," she adds. "Instead, they want to keep us silent and stupid."

Many writers prefer to leave business matters to their agents and concentrate on strictly editorial matters with their editors. Others simply don't want to mess with the business aspects of their

work; that's why they hired an agent in the first place. "How can you feel like cooperating with your editor on the book," one asked, "when you've just had a major fight about money or promotion on your cover?"

## The "difficult" writer

But some fear the attitude of one editor who said aloud what others had only hinted: "There's a million authors out there. If you have too much trouble with one, there are plenty of others. It's not worth the heartache to deal with a very difficult author."

The statement reminded me of things I'd heard said at our San Antonio conference. One writer there spoke of the feeling that when a house has used up all its writers, it "just opens up another can of writers." And someone else said, "There are ten writers standing in line behind every one of us, waiting for our jobs!"

I quoted these remarks to Jennifer Weiss, who responded, "Writers have to measure themselves by themselves. If they have a contract, somebody loves their work." Put yourself in the editor's place, she suggests: who would you rather deal with? Sales influence the editor's tolerance; the more successful the writer, apparently, the more he can get away with. But if an author is "not growing as a writer" and is a prima donna (or don) besides, editors have little sympathy.

Hilary Ross of Penguin, USA, offers some comfort. "There are very few really difficult writers," she says, noting that in more than 20 years, she's had only about six. One was a drunk who breathed heavily on her, some called continually and wouldn't let her off the phone, and others were extremely demanding and "drove every department crazy." She made it clear that she was not talking about the ordinary questions, problems, and objections that are part of the dialogue between writers and editors; these people were "a pain in the neck about everything."

## About editing

Catherine Coulter comments, "There are jerks in every calling," (including ours!) and speaks of three kinds of editors: "Closet writers," who "monkey around with your text," rewriting it to suit themselves; line editors, who pay infinite attention to the mechanical details of writing and ignore its content; and "the good kind," who make "qualitative changes using the minimum amount of your time." These editors leave mechanics to the copy editor and concentrate on the larger issues of plot, characterization, and structure, flagging problems and letting the author correct them in her own way.

Other writers added a fourth kind: the control freak. The editor who silently changes the copy and doesn't let the author see it again until it's in galleys or (worse) printed and bound is a fairly benign member of this class. Others are flat-out manipulative, undermining their writers' confidence with one hand and building it up with the other, praising and threatening at the same time in an effort, as one writer said, to demonstrate that "you can't do it without me." More than one writer confessed to needing ➤

# On the Same Side....

(Continued from page 9)

psychiatric counseling for depression or anxiety after a long stint with a manipulative editor. One answer is simply to accept the editorial support and ignore the mind games.

Worst is the editor with ego problems—too much or too little—who thinks her opinions are facts, brooks no disagreement, and uses her power against writers for spite. “The editor has the whole company behind her and can destroy the writer’s career,” one author comments. However, counsels Lillian Carl, “Never attribute to malice what can be accounted for by stupidity.”

Rewriting appears to be a big problem for some of us. Some editors seem to feel that in order to earn their salaries, they must “put their mark on” every book, and they choose to do so by revising heavily in their own style. One writer told of a friend who’d had two rubber stamps made: one said, “Stet,” and the other said, “STET, DAMMIT!”

**S**ome writers deeply resent being rewritten, while some seem to welcome it. LaFarge reports that when Zebra changed its policy to permit authors to see their edited manuscripts by request, “hardly anybody requested it.” Swift says that the degree of rewrite depends on the author, the author-editor relationship, and the kind of book that’s being produced. She expects both parties to “park their egos on the side” and do what’s good for the book.

“I myself am perfectly willing to let the writer do all the work,” she says, but adds that not all authors can do it; some are wonderful storytellers, but not very good at the actual writing. “We can line edit and teach a writer the techniques, but we cannot teach anyone to create a touching and exciting story. The editor should be trying to encourage the author’s vision of the story; that’s what she bought it for.”

“Dumbing it down,” to use Lillian Carl’s marvelous phrase, seems to be a problem only in some genres. When an editor dumbs the text down, “Thunder rolled across the black sky. A flash of lightning momentarily brightened the porch, silhouetting the large, dark shape that lurked outside its rail. Ozone prickled Christina’s nose and she shuddered violently,” becomes “It was a dark and stormy night.”

Several complained that editors in some genres seem to think readers “can’t take” good writing; they demand an 800-word vocabulary and disallow metaphor, imagery, puns, and other figures of speech. One romance writer was asked, “Can’t you take out the style?” and told, “Our readers just want their four orgasms. They don’t need all this symbolism and shit.”

The practice seems less common in mystery and science fiction, whose readers are (falsely) presumed to be more intellectual.

“Twenty years ago,” says mystery writer Michael Allegretto, “it was enough to write flat characters in stock settings and rely on the puzzle and the action to carry the book. Now characterization has become more important, so the whole field is improving.”

What writers want most from editors is communication, responsiveness, honesty, and in-house support. They want their phone calls answered the same day, if possible (“but don’t abuse it,” Nora Roberts says), and they want quick feedback on their manuscripts.

Everyone in both groups agreed that the writer-editor relationship should be an equal and creative one. Several writers complained about changes being forced upon them—“It gets to be like a boss/employee relationship,” one said. “Where you feel you have to go along regardless”—but every editor I spoke to said that if the author disagreed with the comments, he ought to stand up for his own vision of the book.

Writers need to be tolerant, too. “Editors have their private hang-ups just like we have,” says Kathy Davis, “and they don’t make extra money from a best-selling book, as writers and agents do.”

If changes are required, most authors suggested, the editor should be specific: give the writer something to go on, without actually rewriting the text. “Vagueness can drive a writer crazy,” Roberts says. However, several others spoke of editors who were too specific. “Point out the problems and let the writer fix them,” one said. “Don’t order specific fixes, like a first-grade teacher,” with the implication of “my way or no way.”

“When an editor gives advice,” Kathleen Morgan suggests, “just write it down without comment and let it settle before you respond.” Tact helps, she adds, but the primary goal is a better book.

“It’s the writer’s book,” Kent Carroll, of Carroll & Graf, says. “All suggestions are his to accept or reject.” When a writer refuses a suggestion, he explains, the ensuing discussion often sparks an answer to the problem that neither would have discovered without talking it out.

LaFarge adds, “Editors should stop telling writers what to write and readers what to read.” She explains that in the 1980s, romance editors created their genre and made the rules. Now readers have become more discerning, and they want more. As a result, she rejects formulaic romances out of hand. “I want stories from the heart, not from the tipsheet,” she says. Tact is a great help, several note. “Stroking is not necessary,” Roberts says, “but insults and personal comments can be demoralizing.”

“It’s tough to offer criticism acceptably,” Swift answers, “and sometimes tough to accept it. The editor must keep the author motivated, and the author must understand, accept, and believe in the changes; otherwise, they won’t work. The heart of the book is in the heart, and if the writer doesn’t feel it, the reader won’t either.” If the writer doesn’t believe in the changes, she adds, she ought to say so and discuss them until she and the editor can find another solution.

## The orphaned book

Every writer’s nightmare is the orphaned book. A book

whose acquiring editor leaves the house before it's through production, and whose "inheriting" editor then treats it like a step-child, can wreck a career. I asked several editors the best way to save an orphaned book from dying of neglect, and all agreed that the first thing to do is to befriend the new editor.

If the acquiring editor left on good terms, Carroll suggests, you may be able to get him to help smooth the way with the new one: "Even if he's mad at the house, he's not mad at you or the book." He also recommends preparing for the possible loss of your editor by making friends with the sales, marketing, and promotion people. "If they know the writer appreciates them," he says, "they can help a lot. You can get a lot of mileage out of a simple 'thank you'." If the worst occurs, depending on the house and the situation (and your agent should advise you on this), it may be necessary to buy the book back and sell it to somebody else. But that is a last resort.

"It doesn't make that much difference in category," Isabel Swift counsels. "If your editor leaves, the senior editor for the line still knows your work." If you let the relationship go sour, she warns, it can become in many ways an "unfixable" situation. Most books take a certain level of commitment from their editors, and without it, the book suffers. "If you pull the book, it looks bad and makes the next project less likely to sell. If things aren't working out," she suggests, "write another book and submit it. If the house refuses it, submit it to the old editor at the new house."

"Befriend the new editor," Cavelos says. "Don't take an hour to chat; just let her know you know she's busy, and offer to help. Find out the book's status: Is it in production? Has the cover been started? What's marketing doing? Be helpful, not resentful; come with a spirit of 'let me help you catch up'." If the book is already through production, befriend the publicist. "Don't call the new editor's boss to complain," she cautions, "because then that editor will hate you and you'll get a reputation as a problem author."

So what's "good?" Writers who said they'd had good relationships with their editors cited mutual trust and respect, cooperation, and responsiveness as the keys. "Simple good manners—saying 'please' and 'thank you,' listening carefully, and cooperating can take you a long way," one said. Lillian Carl added, "Even if you get off on the wrong foot, you can still repair the damage with patience and cooperation."

Another writer's statement can give us all hope: "If I'd never had a bad editor, I couldn't appreciate the wonderful one I have now!"

"If you're talented," says Swift, "believe in your talent and keep working. Keep plugging, and hope good things will happen for you. Keep your eyes on the future, on the next book and how to grow as a writer." In time, you can become your editor's pet and gain all that goes with that status. **NINK**

**Coming in the October issue of NINK:** Further dialogue between Claire Bocardo and Carroll & Graf editor Kent Carroll on the writer-editor relationship.



*Novelists, Inc. is the best conference going. You want to be relaxed? This is the one. You want to meet with an editor, one on one? This is the conference. You want honest answers to sticky questions? Boy, is this the one! Everyone is an experienced professional, so the sessions are focused only on the concerns of the multi-published. It's at the top of my list of "must-make" conferences each year.*  
— Linda Howard

## Atlanta Update

### Home Stretch

By VICTORIA THOMPSON,  
Conference Coordinator

**W**e're in the home stretch on planning the Conference, and we've got a few last minute updates for you. We are pleased to announce the following additions to the list of agents who will be attending the conference. The agents will be available for private appointments. Members should call them to make arrangements.

Ruth Cohen, Ruth Cohen Literary Agency, 415-854-2054

Ethan Ellenberg, Ethan Ellenberg Agency, 212-431-4554

Also, our *Novelists' INK* publisher, Sandy Huseby, will attend the conference and will be available for individual consulting on promotion at no cost to members. She conducted the "Frugal Publicist" workshop at last year's conference. A sign-up sheet will be available at the conference. To make arrangements in advance, phone Sandy at Huseby Agency, Ltd. 701-235-0100, or write to P.O. Box 1726, Fargo, ND 58107-1726.

Those members who wish to attend the Highland Games and Scottish Festival which is being held at Stone Mountain, Georgia, at the same time as our conference can obtain further information by contacting Stone Mountain Highland Games, Inc., Box 14023, Atlanta, GA 30324, 404-303-9234. On Wednesday, Oct. 13 at 8 p.m. they will be holding the Military Band Tattoo, a 2-1/2 hour musical extravaganza with Pipe and Drum Bands, Brass Bands, Scottish Highland Dancers, Scottish Country Dancers, and International and American Bands. On Oct. 15 and 16, they will hold the Highland Games, Gathering of the Clans, exhibits, demonstrations, Scottish shops and foods, pipe bands and Scottish dancing. (Thanks to the several members who sent us information.)

Don't forget, if you plan to register at the door, let us know ahead of time so we can have your nametag printed and your conference packet ready for you! **NINK**

# the NEXT PAGE

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At least two months preceding publication, please send 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.

Baker, Madeline: "The Heart of the Hunter," *Enchanted Crossings* anthology, Leisure

Baker, Madeline: *Beneath A Midnight Moon*, Leisure

Beaver, Beverly w/a Beverly Barton: *Nothing But Trouble*, Silhouette Desire

Bittner, Rosanne: *Full Circle*, Zebra Books

Chamberlain, Diane: *Fire And Rain*, HarperPaperback

Cooke, Deborah A. w/a Claire Delacroix: *The Sorceress*, Harlequin Historicals

Di Benedetto, Theresa w/a Raine Cantrell: *Darling Annie*, NAL/Topaz

Eberhardt, Anna: *Sweet Amy Jane*, Pinnacle—Denise Little Presents

Feddersen, Connie w/a Debra Falcon: *A Man's Touch*, Pinnacle Books

Gordon, Deborah: *Runaway Bride*, Avon Romantic Treasure

Gregory, Kay: *An Impossible Kind Of Man*, Harlequin Romance

Guntrum, Suzanne Simmons w/a Suzanne Simms: *Made In Heaven* (reissue), Harlequin By Request *Marry Me Again*

Haeger, Dianne: *Angel Bride*, Pocket Books

Hart, Carolyn G: *Scandal In Fair Haven*, A Henrie O Mystery, Bantam (hardcover)

Keiler, Barbara w/a Judith Arnold: *Alessandra And The Archangel*, Harlequin Superromance

Kendall, Julia Jay w/a Katherine Kingsley: *No Brighter Dream*, Penguin, Topaz

Linz, Cathie: *One Of A Kind Marriage*, Silhouette Romance

Lowry, Harold A. w/a Leigh Greenwood: *Seven Brides—Iris*, Leisure

Madeiros, Teresa: *Thief Of Hearts*, Bantam Books

Martin, Kat: *Bold Angel*, St. Martin's Press

Myers, Mary w/a Mary McBride: *The Sugarman*, Harlequin Historical

Pickart, Joan Elliott w/a Robin Elliott: *Rancher's Heaven*, Silhouette Special Edition

Riker, Leigh: *Just One Of Those Things*, HarperMonogram

Small, Bertrice: *A Moment In Time*, Ballantine (mass market edition)

Springer, Nancy: *Toughing It*, Harcourt Brace (young adult hardcover and simultaneous mass market)

Small, Lass: *Lemon*, Silhouette Desire

Verge, Lisa Ann: *Twice Upon A Time*, Zebra Lovegram

Williamson, Penelope: *A Wild Yearning*, Dell (reissue)

Woods, Sherryl: *Hot Schemes*—A Molly DeWitt Mystery, Dell

Woods, Sherryl: *The Parson's Waiting*, Silhouette Special Edition

Zach, Cheryl: *Paradise*, YA Suspense, Harper



*I am very far from being a dedicated meeting-goer, but I have not missed a Novelists, Inc. conference yet. I was in Stamford, Port Jefferson, San Diego, and San Antonio, and I can truthfully say that those conferences comprise some of the best-spent days of my career. The value of the conference lies in the very real opportunity it offers to network, and I am constantly amazed by the generosity of my fellow writers, who seem always ready—and happy!—to share a problem, to lend a helping hand. I am sure that other conferences have their merits, but for my money, you can't beat Novelists, Inc.*

—Joan Wolf

*Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby*

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