

Novelists' INK

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

The Man in Charge of Stereotypes

By AMANDA SCOTT

In 1989, during the first Soviet attempted coup, President Bush saw President Yeltsin on the top of that tank on CNN. And later, according to what Marlin Fitzwater told NINC's luncheon speaker, Ed Turner, executive vice president of CNN, "President Bush called President Yeltsin and said, 'What can I do to help?' and Yeltsin said, 'Go on CNN and tell the leaders of the rest of the western world that I need their support.' So the White House called me and said, 'Can we have some time for the President' and I said, 'Well, of course'."

We know what happened next, and it's just one example among many of the power of CNN. Having defined himself during lunch as "the man in charge of stereotypes," Turner (no relation to Ted) pointed out that CNN, like other communications media—including books—has little time to catch a consumer's attention and can best do so by building and exploiting stereotypes. The business of news, as he outlined it in his speech, is no longer defined in G.K. Chesterton's terms, as "telling the world that Lord Johns is dead when most of us did not even know he was alive."

"It is possible," Turner said, "that when historians assess our generation for its contributions made to society that the free flow of information will be noted as the single greatest cultural change that was created."

Turner told us that he always wanted to be a writer, but his body of work consists mostly of memos. He said, "The language of electronic news is written and spoken the way the mind thinks, as opposed to the more artificial mannerisms of the press.... We cut to the chase.... We incorporate the strongest story-telling devices yet, except for the personal salesman.... And as much as I admire and respect, and revel in, the works of the great Southerner, Thomas Wolfe, I don't think he would have been a very good television journalist. He was once found in a rather boozy state, shouting to no one, 'I wrote ten thousand

words today; I wrote ten thousand words today.'"

"Lean and clean, free of verbal excess, built like the body of a sleek airplane or automobile, are the kind of sentences I like for television—for the eye and the ear, and recognizing that people, being people, are not going to be paying that close attention to our every syllable and nuance."

Turner talks to leaders from all over the world for CNN. "In South Africa this spring, at the time of their elections, President Mandela told me his people were short of patience; they want results. This last week in a meeting with Yasser Arafat in Gaza, he said—in a very bleak mood—he had only a limited time to deliver. From Jordan's King Hussein, I heard the same. Tokyo to Tunis, it's the same, change and urgency. Seven days ago in a refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman, Jordan, a leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the PLO, told me that events are too accelerated for him to digest. He said it—meaning his new nation, peace, change—is all too fast."

But Turner's job on behalf of CNN is "dealing with change, instant, unrelenting, inexorable change.... The great difficulty is being smart enough to catch it as it's happening.... There is, for example, no small school of thought that says, in the wake of the brutality and the rapes in Bosnia, the growing battering of wives, the attack on Nancy by Tonya's friends, the bad habit of Mrs. Bobbitt, the alleged murder of O.J.'s wife and friend, the incredible and beyond words cruelty of Rwanda, there could be said to develop a chain that leads to an international awareness of how we treat each other; and, if you're a politician, or an adviser to politicians, the knowledge and emotional awareness of these events could be useful in building popularity, or better yet, useful in terms of creating better lives for the governed."

He spoke of politics and government, and the changing role of journalism: "National political parties in this country have evolved from running the government to just raising money. Many of their former functions are left to us in journalism, and we're not very well designed for that job, nor should we be. Our job is to report, not to proselytize. Government has become enormous in many of our societies—remote, distant, ineffective, arrogant, incomplete, bloated. Governments in many of these nations have ceased to work for anything but their own perpetuation."

Turner spoke of the responsibilities of a journalist: "Journalism is society's mirror—the working draft of history—and it's a terrible and wonderful responsibility. In much of the western world—certainly in the US—we in the press, radio and television are under the sharpest attack in decades. We are accused of being arrogant, of pandering, of

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EDITOR's corner

Stay Tuned....

Since this is my last issue of *NINK* as editor, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who took time from their own work to contribute an article during 1994; you are truly appreciated. Thanks also to those of you who kept the pages lively with your letters.

A few topics garnered so much response that some scheduled articles have been bumped into next year: members sharing book tour survival tips, Brenda Hiatt Barber's humorous, insightful article on writers' quirks, and the piece on buying back a book.

Since I enjoy getting mail every day, I'll continue to compile "the NEXT PAGE" listings. And, if we can work out the logistics, I'll be accumulating a monthly list of members who appear on various regional bestseller lists. If you have access to such a list and would like to contribute, please write to 43 E. Boca Raton, Phoenix, AZ 85022, call (602) 863-9768 or fax me at (602) 863-6812.

I know Claire Bocardo, *NINK*'s new editor, has several other projects in the works, so stay tuned.

— JoAnn Ross

Upcoming in *NINK*...with your help

Electronic Highway

In the spring, we'll try to help members get on the information superhighway without becoming roadkill. In order to do this, the author of the upcoming article—who putts along on modemless, two-lane country roads—needs input. If you are a regular participant on one or more computer bulletin boards, please phone/fax Patty Gardner Evans, (505) 293-8015 or write to 14201 Skyline Rd. NE, Albuquerque

NM 87123-2335. All that will be asked of you is to fill out a 15-20 minute questionnaire in January.

Research Tips Needed

We are planning an article on research to which we would like you to contribute. Please submit your favorite research tip, shortcut, source, find, book, service, etc. to: Victoria Thompson, 563 56th St., Altoona PA 16602. Phone (814) 942-2268, Fax (814) 946-4744.

Coming in January....

Further reports from the 1994 Atlanta Conference.

Future Correspondence

Send your letters to the editor and other information, unless otherwise listed, to 1995 *NINK* editor Claire Bocardo, 3312 Sherrye Drive, Plano TX 75074-4671.

MEMBERSHIP

For a one-year subscription to *Novelists' INK*, send your request and \$50.00 to Novelists, Inc., P.O. Box 1166, Mission KS 66222-1166.

For membership information and application, send your request to the P.O. Box.

Watch for your membership renewal form and renew promptly!

To obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting, send \$2 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer's Report, send \$1 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.

LETTERS to the editor

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

Process and Obsession

So here I was the other Saturday talking to unpublished writers about process and results. Our work, I said, is not judged—commercially or artistically—on what we do to get the words on the page. How hard we work or don't work, whether we write from a detailed outline or from the seat of our pants, whether we revise a lot or almost not at all, whether we're slow writers or fast writers, or any similar measure of "process" doesn't amount to a whole lot when it comes to bestsellerdom or critical acclaim. Consider the mega-bestseller supposedly written in two weeks...and the mega-bestseller that took years to complete. Consider the critical success that was written in one draft, during a burst of creative energy...and the one that was revised and revised and revised. Consider the bestselling mystery writer who works each morning, writing five pages, because he's only published once a year—has only ever been published once a year—and that's all it takes for him to maintain his career...and the one who puts in ten hours a day, virtually seven days a week.

I'm bringing all this up in light of recent discussions in the newsletter about balancing our personal lives and our professional lives and the goals and sacrifices and compromises one must make as a result. In my view, it's a mistake—not to mention presumptuous—to make assumptions about another writer's personal priorities based on her level of "success." A *New York Times* bestselling writer doesn't necessarily work harder than a writer who'll never be on the *Times* list. Nor did she necessarily "neglect" her family, her friends or herself to get there. (And, by the way, I do mean *she*: it's almost always in reference to a woman when we hear this kind of "yeah, but she has no life" talk, isn't it?) By the same token, a non-bestselling writer doesn't necessarily not work hard, and might indeed "neglect" family, friends and self.

My point is, bestselling and non-bestselling writers alike can be totally obsessed by their work, to the exclusion of all else. They can also lead balanced lives, with a strong commitment to their work, interests beyond it, and families and friends they care about and who care about them.

— Carla Neggers

Fear of Agents

Generally, I prefer a discussion to either (a) teach me something or (b) to lead to some course of action. I cannot say that our agent discussion group at the conference did either, yet at the same time, it stirred a rather interesting reaction that may need further study.

At some point during the discussion, we hit upon the word "fear" when talking about relations between authors and agents. I am perfectly aware that our organization has a large number of self-confident members who firmly believe that agents are the employees or at least the partners of authors. They are capable of calling up an agent and actually interviewing him/her before deciding which one

they wish to choose. It is possible, at a certain level of achievement, that this may be possible. On the other hand, there seem to be a great number of our members who are terrified of either agents in general or just the need for an agent search, so terrified that they didn't dare speak out during the discussion. It was only after I opened my big mouth and admitted my insecurities that I heard the whisperings and rustlings of others in the same boat but who would not broach the subject out loud. After the discussion ended, I still had people coming up to me saying that I had hit a nerve center, but with a panel of leading agents available, not one of them dared to speak up to clarify their fears. In a group of people as aggressive and outspoken as ours, this is not a good sign.

Aside from the agent survey, I doubt there is any action we as a group can take to totally eliminate those fears. Until the day comes that there are more agents than authors, agents will always be in a position to accept or reject clients—which negates the agent-as-employee theory. (When was the last time you were in a position to reject an employer?) The agent as partner may be more realistic, but everyone knows partners are quite capable of sticking their hands in the till and running off with the proceeds of the partnership, which induces another set of fears. The agent survey can address objective points as to whether an agent answers calls or takes 10% or 15%, but it cannot tell you which agent is going to make or break your career or abscond with your money.

I think what we are dealing with here is fear of the unknown. We have learned to live with rejection. I'm not particularly afraid that an agent is going to reject me as a client. I *have* been afraid that I won't find the agent who suits my needs who will take me as a client. Even after I have found an agent and been accepted, there are other fears, mostly because of my perception that an agent has a terrifying amount of power over where my career is going next. Just pinpointing some of my fears has been helpful. The more we know about ourselves and the world around us, the better off we are.

In some way, I'd like to see us as a group address our fears of the author/agent relationship. The agents were inclined to dismiss my very real fears, but they can't be unaware of their power. That power is the greatest source of fear. We need to identify what we are afraid of, how we've handled (or mishandled) our fears in the past, and how we can deal with those fears in a more productive manner.

Other than waiting for the next conference and having a knock-down, drag-out session where we force people to speak out, preferably without agents present, I don't have any creative suggestions. I just don't think fear this pervasive should be swept under the table.

— Patricia Rice

Conference Diversity Lacking

I've just returned from the annual conference in Atlanta. I have always considered this *the* conference to attend, and enjoyed it more than any other conference. Right now, though, I am mostly irritated and impatient.

I want to *learn* something from this conference. I've had such high hopes for Novelists, Inc., thinking that an organization dedicated to the concerns of popular fiction writers of all genres would be both entertaining and enlightening. I want to know about other fields of writing, I want people with expertise in various fields of interest brought in to tell us about their jobs. Instead, what I sat through was one bitch session after another.

Yes, there is a place for that. Most of us are solitary creatures

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LETTERS to the editor

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who need, occasionally, to vent our spleen among people who understand *exactly* what we're saying. But every workshop? Hour after hour of it? Surely we could do that during the members-only sessions and then manage to convey some level of professionalism once we are joined by the editors and agents.

More than one editor was amazed by the amateur's concerns displayed by our members. By the stringent criteria for membership in this organization, you would think that we'd be past the stage of needing our hands held all through the process of getting a book written and on the market. You have a problem with something that's happening? PICK UP THE PHONE AND CALL YOUR EDITOR! If she's in a meeting, leave a message and she'll return your call. If she's swamped and can't talk right then, she'll return your call. If she's in desperate need of the bathroom, she'll *return your call*. Don't worry about whether or not it's a good time to disturb your editor. Disturb? Where did that word come from? I don't think of it as disturbing my dentist when I call to make an appointment, or disturbing UPS to call and trace a shipment. That's what they're there for!

This is a business. We're creative people, but that's no excuse for not getting a grip on the business side of the writing process. Get over the hurt feelings, stop taking every edit as a personal rejection, learn to evaluate every change objectively, without emotion. I was astonished at the *fear* some people feel concerning their editors (?) and agents(!). Fearing an editor won't change that editor's response to your next book. All you can do is try to write a better book each time, and to do that you have to learn more about the craft of writing. *That's* what our conferences need to focus on, for roughly three-quarters of the workshops. We need to learn, we need to grow as writers. We need more information on different subjects, so we can give our books energy and feeling.

Let's have a bitch session at every conference. Let's call it that: the Bitch Session. Let's get it all out, get the understanding and sympathy of our peers, the advice of our more experienced members on specific problems, and then spend the rest of the conference learning more about the business and process of writing, and with those wonderful research workshops. That's what I come to the Novelists, Inc. conferences for, what I didn't get this time.

— Linda Howington (Howard)

PS: The day trips aren't included in the above assessment. That was the only time I did learn anything. More!

Beware of Contract Tampering

I have recently had an alarming experience with a publisher which your membership may find instructive. Please bear with me, as the story is lengthy.

Last year, I sold the science-fantasy novel *Metropolitan* to Christopher Schelling at ROC/NAL/Signet/Viking/Penguin, henceforward Penguin. I left a perfectly good publisher to do this, and for two reasons: Penguin showed considerably more enthusiasm for this particular proposal than my previous publisher; and they backed this with considerably more enthusiasm for writing large checks. I contracted for an advance, which sum I will refer to, algebraically, as N. 1/2N was paid to me on signing, with a further 1/2 N due on acceptance.

While I was engaged in writing the novel, Chris Schelling went on three months' compassionate leave in order to deal with the death of a loved one. The very day he returned, he was fired by NAL publisher Elaine Koster.

The sudden (and apparently unmotivated) loss of my editor was

unnerving, but Chris was replaced by Amy Stout, with whom I have always had a pleasant relationship, and I soldiered on. By that point I decided I wanted to write a sequel to *Metropolitan*, and I was looking forward to a long relationship with Penguin on that account.

I finished the book in March of this year and sent it to New York. In May, Amy read the book and accepted it. On the strength of that acceptance, my fiancée and I made an offer on a new house. One day later, May 17, my agent Ralph Vicinanza called to tell me there was a problem.

Elaine Koster had apparently decided that 1/2N was too large a sum. (Mind you, she had approved the contract a year earlier—it is her job to approve contracts—but apparently the sums didn't seem so impossible then.) Before she wrote the check, Ms. Koster wanted Ralph to supply up-to-date sales figures for all my books.

Ralph said No. We had a signed contract, valid in New York, the United States of America, and the World at Large. The book had been read. It had been accepted. 1/2N was due.

Less than 24 hours before, I remind, I had signed a purchase agreement for a large house. A purchase agreement, no less than a novel contract, is legally binding. I was *required* to make a down payment of a certain sum by a certain date. Now it was possible that I would not have the money.

A week later, Penguin made an offer. They were willing to write the check for 1/2 N for *Metropolitan*, provided that I sold them a sequel for a total advance of 3/8N and agreed to jointly account the two books. In other words, I would be getting a total of 1-3/8N for *two* books.

Ralph said No.

A day or so later Ms. Koster phoned Ralph, stating that she was shocked—SHOCKED!—to discover that *Metropolitan* was—brace yourself here—CATEGORY FICTION, rather than the “mainstream, breakthrough novel” which she had been led to expect.

Now let us consider this remarkable statement. I, a science fiction and fantasy author, sent the proposal to an editor who edited science fiction and fantasy, and who worked for ROC, an imprint that publishes nothing but science fiction and fantasy. And, lo and behold, the publisher is shocked to discover that my work is a category novel!

Not to mention that the same publisher had approved the contract, wherein it was stated explicitly that *Metropolitan* was a “science fantasy involving magic.”

Doesn't sound very mainstream, does it? And naturally the word “breakthrough” was never mentioned anywhere in the contract or the proposal.

Ralph advised Ms. Koster to put her objections in writing, which was done in a letter containing another offer. Either I could resell the novel elsewhere and pay back my initial advance out of proceeds, or they would publish the book as a paperback original for the 1/2N they'd already spent, and never pay me the second half of the advance as specified by contract.

Both these alternatives were unacceptable for obvious reasons. I had signed the contract and written the book in good faith, and I saw no reason why I should allow it to be published halfheartedly (and with half the money); nor should I give back money that, to my mind, I had earned, and on which I had paid taxes and an agent's commission.

Since, from all the wriggling over the advance, it was clear that all they cared about was money, I was damned if I could find a single reason why I should give a single dollar back to them.

The fact that both Ralph and I knew we could resell the book about ten minutes after it reappeared on the market was something of a consolation—and that's about how long it took, by the way—but still, it would be difficult to sell a book to Publisher A if Publisher B claimed they own it

I won't go into the maneuverings that followed. SFWA Griefcom was informed and gallantly offered assistance, but the procedure simply would have taken too long, so in the end I hired my own attorney to resolve the problem quickly.

The upshot is that Penguin will get some, not all, of their money back. I got the novel back, and sold it to Christopher Schelling at HarperPrism, along with its sequel, for a sum somewhat exceeding 2N.

I call this a victory. I get to keep a whole fistful of the weasels' money, and I've resold the book to a publisher who's willing to pay me even more than Penguin had agreed to pay me even when they were willing to write the check, and they love the book and intend to treat it very well indeed.

But. But. Even though my case ended happily, I found out from Sheila Finch at Griefcom that my case is not entirely unique. Penguin is not the only major publisher that has been refusing to honor its contracts when the time has come to pay agreed-upon advances. The author-victims are well-known writers, not neos or unknowns, since it is these who command an advance worth breaking a contract over. (I will not mention their names here, though if they wish to contribute their stories to any debate, I think their experience may prove instructive.) Authors with a career less secure than mine, when treated in this outrageous way, may have no alternates but to bow to publishers' demands and let their work be published for less than the agreed-upon sum, or resell the book for a smaller advance and end up having to use most of it to repay the first publisher.

I have also heard an unconfirmed rumor that Elaine Koster used the same tactic on another NAL writer, and that it succeeded. Apparently this poor victim allowed his book to be published for half the contracted advance.

It would appear that this behavior is dangerously close to becoming standard in the industry.

Quite frankly, what made the difference in my case is that I was able to afford a lawyer. Elaine Koster may never have heard of SFWA or Griefcom, and I suspect would not have concerned herself with any negative publicity in a market that favors publishers anyway. But the credible threat of a lawsuit put the situation in a different light and made a significant difference in Penguin's attitude.

I hired an attorney local to New Mexico and paid less than a thousand dollars for a settlement that made me many times that.

I would like to mention that, to the best of my knowledge, ROC editor Amy Stout has behaved honorably throughout the whole episode. She was in a difficult position and so far as I could tell handled it with complete professionalism. We can all, and should all, still be her friend. I fact, I encourage you all to go to Penguin's parties and drink up the weasels' money.

— Walter Jon Williams

Ed. Note: Elaine Koster was invited to respond, but had not done so by the newsletter deadline of November 10.

Writer Survival

In answer to Pat Werner's query, according to a survey done by the Authors Guild several years ago, only 5% of all published, working novelists actually earn a living writing full-time. Scary, huh?

One of the problems in this regard is the antiquated royalty scale that the publishers continue to maintain. It's a bit difficult to earn a living when you get only 8% to 15% of your sales. This, and lower royalty scale may be okay with a new author. After all, the publisher is taking a chance there, but with old war horses who continue to produce books regularly, and who continue to sell, thereby making a profit for their publishers, collecting 85% to 92% of the profit is just a trifle piggy on the publishers' part. While paper costs may fluctuate, the

union printer is almost a thing of the past with automation in the industry. Still, the publishers claim they take a great risk when they publish a book. Almost makes you wonder why they're in business, doesn't it?

I think it is time that the guild, NINC, and the other authors groups begin to consider approaching this thorny problem. While I realize that there are thousands of would-be writers "out there" just dying to be published, it takes time to build a John Grisham, Danielle Steel, Heather Graham or Jayne Anne Krentz. And publishers are not, in my experience, particularly daring, or eager to lose money. Or have I been misreading them all these years?

Still, it might be interesting, and informative to take a survey of our members to see who writes full-time, and who part-time; and who earns their living, and who supplements the family's income. And perhaps the other writers groups would like to do the same. The Authors Guild figures may be out of date at this point.

— Bertrice Small

The Perils of Publishing

How can you handle the most common crises in publishing? We had a very lively crowd with a lot of opinions to offer, with most reporting at least some success standing up for themselves when push came to shove.

The first person who offered an opinion felt that there are no solutions, that anyone who wants to have a career as a writer ought to learn to live with the slings and arrows, period. But almost everyone else felt there were strategies, at least, if not solutions, and that there's even some value in just venting or sharing common problems. (It's the "you are not alone" feeling.)

Most common problems seemed to fall into two categories: publishers and editors who don't do enough (lack of communication, incredible delays, broken promises, orphaned books) and publishers and editors who do too much (overediting, massive rewrites done by the editor, unreasonable demands).

Some in the crowd indicated that they rely heavily on their agents, and that turning over these kinds of headaches to agents had worked very well for them. This seemed to be a bit of a hot spot, since several others felt it was unwise to turn over the reins of one's career too completely to an agent, that it promotes better communication between author and editor if the agent is not in the middle, and that many agents could not seem to get better treatment than the author had. This seemed to be a matter of personal taste and style as much as anything else, although it also depended heavily on whether the author was writing category books or single title releases.

Aside from tossing your troubles in the lap of your agent, many people recommended deciding what exactly your break point is, i.e., at what point you will stand firm, turn down a contract, give back the advance, or whatever is necessary. We discussed these break points, and (not surprisingly) they varied from person to person, with pseudonym policy, disposition of backlists, money, or the integrity of the book as the things individual authors mentioned that they would not compromise. There seemed to be a general consensus that "waiting your turn" is not as useful as speaking up, that you may actually get what you want if you are willing to risk walking away, but that you have to know up front where your own break point is.

— Julie Kistler

The Man in Charge

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being sensational, and the lowest aspects of the human character, of being remote and out of touch with the audience and leadership we are supposed to serve, or exploiting violence for its own sake, and being unable to say we're wrong when we're wrong.... And in many instances this criticism is absolutely justified. It is not our job, though, to be popular; it is our goal to be respected. It's not our job to make people feel good about themselves; it is our job to report the news, all the news, and not just those slices which show our worst sides. It is our job to be fair in the treatment of institutions and individuals. It is not our job to protect anyone or anything, except perhaps our frayed reputation for balance and truth."

Turner evoked laughter many times, particularly with his amusing anecdotes about the changing status of CNN. For example, "When CNN was very young, very new, I remember trying to get an interview with the then new Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, and I thought that because we were an entrepreneurial operation, it would be an easy acquisition, but we got turned down. I said to our bureau chief, 'No, go back, something's wrong. Find out why.' So the bureau chief did and we found out from Mrs. Thatcher's press secretary that Madam Prime Minister thought that because we were cable in America we were probably blue, pornographic. So I quickly sent over a reel of highlights to show that we were very straight-arrow and did the news with our clothes on. She agreed to the interview.

"So, fade to black, come up about twelve years later. President Bush is walking outside Number Ten Downing Street with Mrs. Thatcher. They've just concluded a summit meeting. And outside

Number Ten are the correspondents from the White House, and one of them was our guy, Bernie Shaw. And so President Bush brought Mrs. Thatcher over to the row of reporters and said, 'Madam Prime Minister, I'd like you to meet some of our White House correspondents. This is Bernard Shaw from CNN.' And Mrs. Thatcher said—and we have it on tape—'Oh, yes, my husband and I watch Mr. Shaw every night.' I thought to myself, what a difference a few years make."

He spoke of the public perception of CNN: "Critics of live global reporting say we become a part of the story because of our role in reporting on events as they unfold...but technology will not be disinvented. We will not suddenly go away. The ability to go live, nearly live, or on tape at great events will not disappear. The question really is how responsible will those using the equipment be? ...What is wrong with the people knowing what their government is all about? We should see that wars are dangerous to living things, and that people get hurt, even killed, in them. Because of journalists, the fax, the phone, the uplinks, the satellites, many are better off for it, and if the politicians can't keep up the pace, we'll have to consider getting a better form of politician."

In closing, he said, "At home, in one decade, we played a major part in what the people in the rest of the world do with their time, what they read, what they think, what they see, how they rear their families, how they run their governments, how they fight their wars, how they spend their money, how they've led their lives. This is not meant to be arrogant...it happened; it is happening... That is a victory not seen before in recorded history, and to prevail we must pass our values along to those who follow. Will we? I don't know. But at least I can say one thing for certain. CNN will be there to record it."

NINK

Atlanta Conference Summary

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Conference Coordinator

This year's conference set an attendance record with 112 members, 15 editors and 10 agents present. As you can see, the ratio of authors to publishing professionals was excellent, and lots of people made good contacts. Some of our discussion groups got a bit spirited,

and we believe this is a reflection of the frustration many authors are feeling in the shrinking marketplace. Still, the usual candid exchange of information occurred.

This was the third conference I have done, and people are always very complimentary, but this year I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of praise from virtually everyone I encountered. We must conclude that something really clicked this year for a lot of people, and we are very glad it did.

I'd certainly like to take all the credit for myself, but the truth is I was assisted by several people who did an awful lot of work for very little glory. My right hand was Carla Neggers, who handled the mammoth task of inviting editors and agents to attend, then answering their questions, arranging their schedules and solving their problems. She also lined up moderators and people to work the registration desk, so if you did something she asked, thanks to you, too. Helping Carla and me was our committee of three. Catherine Coulter did her usual yeoman's job in the quest for speakers. Nancy Knight called in a favor to provide our banquet speaker and then convinced her husband he had to lug a bunch of computers down to set up a display for us. And Sandra Chastain used a family connection to convince the brass at CNN that they needed to send someone important to our luncheon. My most sincere gratitude to all these women for their invaluable assistance

If you have a suggestion for next year's conference, please drop me a line or phone (814) 942-2268 or fax (814) 946-4744 me. We're compiling ideas right now to pass along, and we're always on the lookout for new ones. Again, thanks to everyone who helped out at the conference and to everyone who came. See you in Denver!

NINK

INTROducing

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

New Applicants

Jaclyn Reding, Chandler AZ

New Members

Denise Domning, Phoenix AZ

Donna Gimarc (Elisabeth Fairchild), Dallas TX

Anne Wolfe (Hillary Wolfe), Pittstown NJ

After-Dinner Tale-Spinning

On Saturday evening, Anne Rivers Siddons told us stories about her stories and entertained us in the best tradition of old-time front-porch after-dinner tale-spinning. In addressing the topic "Where Do Novels Come From?" for her banquet speech, Siddons could not have chosen a more appropriate subject for the membership of Novelists, Inc., and she approached her answer to that question from the perspective both of novels in general and of her own books in particular.

She said that all novelists have two things other people don't have. First, novelists have a blessed/accursed third eye that records everything, a particular editorial eye that continually sees and interprets. Second, novelists have inside a "scrambling, unholy gunny sack," as Siddons phrased it, where we put everything we see and experience and that we might well call our wise subconscious. From our eyes and our innards our novels are born. Our novels are seen, not thought of, and grabbed in passing. They bring order out of the chaos of our sights and experiences, and they always get started as "what ifs."

In recounting the "what ifs" and thematic textures of her novels, Siddons revealed the wide scope of her third eye and depth of her gunny sack which, in her case, is not only personal but also generational. In cadence and sensibility she is a Southern woman, meaning that for her past and place are inevitably and integrally entwined. In her third novel, *Fox's Earth*, she explored the relationships of Southern women with their past, present, and future, those seven generations of history coming down into the present, saying, "Be nice, be nice." In *Homeplace*, her fourth novel, she moved through a woman's displacement when her ancestral home was destroyed to make way for a freeway interchange, while in *Peachtree*

Road, a novel born from a conversation with her friend Pat Conroy, she wrote of the newly young, self-made city of Atlanta.

She admitted that her novels come out whole in a way that both scares and interests her. As she described those moments and experiences from which her novels are woven, it was clear that she is continually inspired and enriched by history. In *Outerbanks*, she focused on the reunion of a group of friends thirty years after their high school and college experiences together, and in *Colony*, she wrote of the power of memory, of old associations, of place, and of refuge. She repeated the "write what you know" dictum and enlarged it by saying that novelists also have to write what they love and understand.

Siddons is at work on a new book, *Epicenter*, which tells the story of three Southern women traveling in California. In this new book she shifts angle on the force of time and examines how three or four quaking minutes (rather than three or four unbroken generations) affect the women's lives. *Epicenter* seems to be an exemplary "what if" book, and Siddons wants this to be the story of generations of women trying to heal themselves.

She has more ideas coming down the line, and she has already projected a story about nuclear pollution run amok based on the conviction that we should not lose the wild inside us or outside us. In closing, she recalled an "utterly irresistible" episode involving an old man and a swan, wove one more story, and left us feeling wonderful about being novelists.

— Julie Tetel Andresen

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Writers see themselves as plain-talkers; editors want to be diplomats.

That is one conclusion to be drawn from the Saturday professional discussion group which asked the question: "What perks can an editor deliver and what kind of treatment can an author demand without alienating the person who may be his or her only friend in the publishing house?"

Nobody had a quick answer. Some editors didn't even like the question. Diplomats don't like to say that some books are more valuable than others. After all, there's no easy diplomatic reply to: "My friend's book got a step-back AND foil on the cover. I only got foil. How come?"

Some editors believed diplomacy was necessary because writers' egos can't stand blunt talk. Writers in the room disputed that, but the discussion did suggest that writers should learn to read between the lines, when they communicate with editors.

Some helpful suggestions about "editorial perks" were made:

No author has the right to expect "control" of cover art. However, a smart author submits a list of cover art ideas early in the process, perhaps even with the proposal and chapters. Often, the writer's ideas will stick.

Authorial input was appropriate in other areas, as well. An author's suggested flap copy may not be adopted word-for-word, but then again, it may. Editors are overworked; if they see a short-cut that works, they'll take it.

Let the agent mediate some of the tough questions about "perks"

and editorial treatment. Both agents and editors agreed that a buffer is a good thing to have, particularly for bad news.

Professionalism is a major issue in our business. Bad-mannered writers with unrealistic expectations can indeed hurt themselves. Undoubtedly, they can make life hell for an editor whose job it is to keep relationships smooth.

But one disturbing note was struck toward the end of the discussion. Several editors and agents suggested that writers ought to be careful about "networking." They believe that shared information, about money but also about other kinds of "perks," may stir jealousies and unduly inflate expectations.

Some networked information may be incorrect or misleading, the editors said, but their objections were more amorphous, as well.

"I don't share my salary information with other editors," one editor said. "It's simply unprofessional."

The exchange seemed uncomfortably close to suggesting that networking organizations like Novelists, Inc. do their members a disservice. What writers want—information about market conditions and publishing practices—may indeed make life difficult for editors.

Taken altogether, the panel was a reminder that writers and editors are part of the same process but that they are not always on the same side. The methods by which those disagreements are expressed and ameliorated will continue to be the mark of professionalism on both sides.

— Evan Maxwell

What Editors Wish Authors Knew

This discussion group was well-attended by Novelists, Inc. members and editors from a variety of publishing houses, including Warner, Bantam, Avon, Kensington, Dell and Harlequin. The discussion focused on problems that arise in the editor/author relationship. One NINC member suggested early in the discussion that editors might prepare a generic "Introduction to Publishing" document which could be distributed to new authors or authors new to the house, explaining how the editor works and what the author's role in that work should be. A few of the editors vehemently opposed this idea as unnecessary and unrealistic and chastised the membership for not being more informed about the business aspects of publishing. More of the editors seemed to believe it was not an altogether bad idea which, if not a miracle cure, would certainly not be harmful.

Many of the editors provided suggestions authors could adopt as "pre-emptive strikes" against problems that arise during the book publishing process. For instance, if an author is concerned about cover copy, many editors suggested that the author submit proposed cover copy with the manuscript. Similarly, authors concerned about their covers could submit cover suggestions, or even rough artwork, with their manuscript. While no editor could guarantee that the copy or cover suggestions would be implemented, they all felt they would be given considerable weight since they had, after all, come from the author of the book.

Other editors emphasized the importance of the synopsis, not just as a tool for the initial sale of the book, but for use by the publisher in-house during the process of preparing the book for publication. One editor said the synopsis went to the art department so that they could begin contemplating the cover art; another editor said the synopsis went to the publicity department so they could begin drafting cover copy. A quick poll indicated that this "synopsis distribution"

procedure was used in about half of the publishing houses represented. Therefore, at least at those houses, an accurate or well-written synopsis could help avoid later problems.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the discussion followed the question "When is honesty the best policy?" The editors unanimously believed that honesty was always the best policy for authors, and that authors should always be honest with their editors, specifically including circumstances in their personal or professional life which may affect their writing. Ironically, at the same time, virtually all the editors admitted that they do not tell authors everything they know that pertains to their books. Several of the editors insisted that this was not dishonesty, but simply the "withholding" of certain key information. This lawyerly verbal distinction may have satisfied some of the editors, but it clearly did not satisfy the majority of the writers in attendance. Many members felt that if editors reserved the right to withhold certain information "for business reasons," then authors were entitled to the same privilege.

Finally, several editors told "horror stories" about misunderstandings resulting from gossip or miscommunications. Some of these incidents arose from comments alleged related by third parties; some arose from misinformation communicated by computer services. "GEnie-bashing" was particularly prevalent. The editors' plea was simple: Don't assume that anything you hear from a third-party is true. If you have any concerns, ask me directly.

One common theme clearly emerged from the hour-long discussion: Communication. All of the editors urged their authors to contact them when they have concerns. When in doubt, pick up the phone.

—William Bernhardt

The Agent as Business Partner

This session proved to be surprisingly volatile. To kick it off, the authors present were asked to do a role reversal, pretend they were agents, and describe the "author from hell." Authors (acting as agents) mentioned such things as unrealistic expectations and demands on time. Agents were then asked to take on the role of authors and describe the "agent from hell." They mentioned problems such as late checks and poor communication. It was evident that both groups had a fairly clear understanding of the problems the other group faced, which made it somewhat surprising that the discussion grew so heated.

It quickly became apparent that there are real communication problems between some writers and their agents. A few writers expressed the viewpoint that they were intimidated by their agents and reluctant to ask easy questions, let alone the tough ones. While this didn't surprise most of the authors present, it did seem to surprise some of the agents. (Agents aren't easily intimidated themselves, so why should authors be? Isn't the relationship a two-way street?) It also obviously frustrated a number of the agents. (How can we as agents meet your needs if you don't even tell us what they are? It's not fair for you to grip about us behind our backs or—worst case—fire us, without ever confronting us with the problems in the first place.)

Several authors supported the agents, citing examples of other writers being too timid with their agents. An opinion was offered that authors should make a list of the ten things they want from their agent and then review this list each year with the agent to see if they've gotten them. (In defense of these less aggressive authors, good agents are in the business because they have powerful personalities and aren't afraid of confrontation, as witnessed by some of the exchanges that

took place during the workshop. Authors sometimes feel "mowed down" by those same qualities. "No matter what I say, my agent has an answer for everything.")

Not surprisingly, commissions figured heavily into the discussion. Agents present charged from 10% to 15%, with some charging expenses on top of the commission. Agents had a variety of points to make about why they charge the commission they do and each author should discuss this with his/her own agent. Many writers had been surprised to learn in a previous session that fees can sometimes be negotiated in a variety of ways, and this topic came up. How successful an author is, how long he/she has been with an agent, the projects involved, how much support the author needs, are a few of the factors that may determine bargaining power in negotiating commissions. Some agents said they absolutely will not do this, but others will. It was apparent that this is another communication issue that should be resolved between author and agent.

The issue of splitting checks was brought up. (Having publisher send advance/royalty check directly to author and separate commission check directly to agent.) Most of the agents present said they would do this, but reluctantly. Several agents stated that it was harder for them to determine whether or not their authors got their checks if they didn't send them out themselves. A few of the agents seemed surprised to discover that simply getting checks from an agent was even an issue for authors.

An editor who was present offered an interesting viewpoint on this issue. Although she said that she, as a publisher, is perfectly willing to issue split checks, this sent a strange message to her. If you

don't trust your agent to handle your money, how can you trust him/her to handle your career? (This is not a direct quote, but it certainly did provide food for thought to authors regarding the message they might be sending a publisher in this situation.)

There was a great deal of "hallway discussion" of this session afterward and some of it revealed subtle dissension between authors. A few authors paying 15% commissions felt that some of the comments made by those paying 10% were a bit insensitive. And commissions weren't the only subject of discussion. Newly published authors as well as those who do not view their careers as booming perceived themselves as having much less bargaining power than some of their more well-established peers, and a few were resentful of some of the advice they received. ("Easy for her to say. If I had her numbers, I could be as aggressive as she is in negotiating her terms.")

As moderator, I found the open discussion format that has worked so well in the past too unwieldy for the topic and personalities of the participants. The agents were understandably reluctant to have another agent speak for them, and they would almost certainly have preferred to be able to present their own position on each issue. This

was impossible in the time allotted. Some agents told me the session served as a good springboard to further discussion and several expressed regret that there was not more time to deal with the issues raised. One agent suggested we have a workshop next year centering on developing specific strategies for improving communications. Another agent indicated that he/she wished to hear more from the authors and less from the agents. Still another said afterward that most of the issues raised can only be dealt with and resolved in private agent/author discussions, and if the author is too afraid to do so, there is either a major flaw in the relationship or she/he isn't living up to her/his responsibilities as a professional. This agent also added that if an author genuinely believes that her/his agent does not add value to her/his work, but instead just takes a cut of author's hard-earned money, there is justification for seeking other representation.

It is my hope that this session will prod both authors and agents to make certain they have all the important issues between them open to discussion.

— Susan Elizabeth Phillips

Political Correctness in Popular Fiction

The discussion got off to a somewhat shaky start when one writer (who shall remain nameless) attempted to derail the session and turn it into a fashion show. This shameless effort to seize control was ruthlessly squelched by the intrepid moderator.

A spirited discussion of the issue of political correctness in popular fiction ensued. The group was composed of writers, agents and editors. The topics included sexual harassment, date rape, revisionist history, safer sex, racism, feminism, and point-of-view. Predictably, there was virtually no agreement on acceptable, uniform standards. One person's notion of political correctness was invariably interpreted as censorship by other individuals.

There was, however, some consensus that political correctness in certain women's issues such as sexual harassment was less of a problem in historical fiction than it was in contemporary fiction. Many members of the group felt strongly that, even in historical fiction, the writer had to put readers' twentieth-century values and sensibilities ahead of historical accuracy. Others felt that true historical accuracy should always be the bottom line. Someone pointed out that history was constantly being rewritten and absolute accuracy was impossible.

Limited consensus was reached when one writer suggested that good, solid characterization rather than caricature was the writer's best answer to the problems of political correctness. Most felt that when one created individuals rather than stereotypes, one moved beyond PC problems.

Some people suggested that readers were the ultimate censors and the marketplace should be the final arbiter. A few felt the editors

should act as gatekeepers and should eliminate offensive words and passages in books. This idea appalled many in the group who felt that asking editors to censor politically incorrect material was an invitation to disaster. It was clear that, while each person in the room had a strong sense of what he or she considered politically correct, no one else in the room was in complete agreement with any other individual present.

Several people remarked that we all self-censor to some degree and most agreed that each individual had to write according to his or her own sense of right and wrong. Most acknowledged that one's personal sense of honor and morality shaped the values in one's books.

Seeking closure, the moderator took a poll of those present. She asked for a show of hands to determine how many people felt they'd actually had problems selling a book due to issues of political correctness. The results surprised many, given the lively nature of the preceding discussion. The majority of those present said that, while they had all wrestled with their own personal PC demons at times and several had serious problems with what other people chose to write, no one in the group had ever had a major battle with an editor over a PC issue. No one in the room had been unable to sell a book because of a PC issue. No one present claimed to have had to do major rewrites because of such an issue.

It was clear that, so far as this group was concerned, censorship and matters of political correctness were personal rather than professional problems.

— Jayne Ann Krentz

Career Planning

We started off the session with the question of how many authors present actually had 3-year career plans? A half dozen did and we briefly discussed the necessity of being flexible with your goals, when opportunity struck, thinking through what you wanted, what the likely consequences would be if you made decision A as opposed to decision B, evaluating factors like money, house commitment, frequency of publication, etc. The bottom line is that when opportunity knocks, you've got to be ready and when you want to initiate the opportunity, then you've got to know what you want and be ready to take any necessary risks.

The bottom line is the book. It's the most important thing. It's in your control. You've got to be willing to take risks—you won't die if you fail. You do what you gotta do and DON'T WHINE.

We discussed changing genres—suggestions: write the book, keep your mouth shut until it's done. Also if you're in series category you might consider what Kay Hooper did. Her own house turned her down when she wrote a mystery so she sent the manuscript to another house with a pen name. It worked.

Writing for two houses can be good. If, for example, one house

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Career Planning

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gets out more books and has a higher sell-through, then the other house is likely to say, "Well, we can do that too. We can do better than that other house." This can't be a bad thing for the author.

Be realistic. Don't think, "Well, I've paid my dues." So what? What does that mean? Now you're ready automatically for the *New York Times*? Always remember that you've got to hit the right note. Those people who are successful have hit the right note, e.g., they are writing what they like and are lucky enough that enough people out there like to read what they write. It has nothing at all to do with any dues paying. Nothing.

Don't waste your mental energy or your time comparing yourself to other authors. You're doing yourself an injustice and wasting time and irritating other authors, not to mention editors and agents.

There's no such thing as a general career plan for authors. Every author is too individual. Every talent is individual. Don't wonder why author A is making more than you are when you write so much better. Remember that "right note" business. Again, be realistic. Don't ever let yourself slide into that pit where you go on and on about getting what author B is getting because you're better and it isn't fair. It isn't relevant. Act. Take risks. Write good books. That's in your control.

I think the session was positive, but who knows? I'd sure like people who attended to write in and say what they thought. Also, I certainly haven't hit all the goodies brought out in the session. Thank you all for participating and bringing all that yummy IQ and experience to bear.

— Catherine Coulter

The Changing Face of Bookselling

The newest trend in bookselling—which is either devastating or delightful, depending on whether you're in midlist or a best-selling author—is the move toward publishing all of an author's backlist books upon publication of a new book. Publishing houses have discovered it's more profitable to publish backlist of best-selling authors than to publish new midlist authors, and that's what they're doing. It cuts down the number of original books that manage to get onto the shelves.

Editors suggested that covers are the result of a lot of cooks stirring the broth, and that nobody really knows what will work. However, some publishers are willing to recognize when they've made a mistake with the cover that has resulted in poor sales and give the author the benefit of the doubt. Reps have actually taken a bad cover in with them when they sold the author's next book and said, "Look, we made a mistake and it cost sales. Look how much better this cover is...." However, the "bad cover" excuse for poor sales only works once or twice. If sales don't improve, the author is eventually the responsible party.

The new bestseller lists that show actual sales are reviewed by publishers, but they are not as influential as an author might hope. Editors take list position with a grain of salt because they've had the experience of a *New York Times* bestseller they know only had five-figure numbers, and a book that hit in the top 15 on the *USA Today* list that had less than a 25% sell-through. Lists don't show the whole picture, they concluded. Lists can, however, be useful at sell-in time to give a boost to a writer's reputation. "He was on the (insert proper publication) list at # _____."

Superstores are affecting buying of books by centralizing purchasing. It can hurt an author when the buyer doesn't like the cover. Also, computerization makes past sales figures immediately available that may influence a buy.

Most publishing houses are happy when an author is willing to spend his or her own money to publicize a book, but they aren't certain there are tangible results from the effort. "Anything under a million dollars won't do much to influence national sales," one suggested. There may be some influence on sales if an author spends four or five thousand dollars at the regional level. However, no publisher had statistics to show any improvement in sales from author expenditures on promotion.

Editors encouraged authors to check first with the publishing house before doing any promotion. That way efforts between the editor and author can be coordinated to do the most good. Some

houses have a publicist assigned to each book, others may not have a particular person assigned, but the editor can communicate the author's intentions regarding promotion and publicity to the house. Also, if the author has a "marketing plan," it is beneficial to share this with the editor early in the process. It never hurts for the house to know the time, effort and money spent by an author to promote his own work.

Editors attending the discussion group included: Jeanne Tiedge and Ashley Kraas, Warner; Carrie Feron, Avon; Candy Lee, Harlequin; Judith Stern, Berkley; Mary Ellen O'Neill, Dell; Denise Little and Sarah Gallick, Kensington; and Nita Taublib, Bantam.

— Joan Johnston

Hardcover vs. Paperback

We decided the following: the time to go into hardcover is when you have a publisher who will support that move; hardcover definitely expands your potential readership (some people only read hardcover, distribution to libraries, etc.) and probably enhances your profile in terms of subrights sales, reviews (assuming you want reviews!), and so on.

The most interesting aspect of discussion was the notion (held by varying numbers of the following folks—publishers, authors, agents, reviewers) that now that you're in hardcover you have to write a **bigger, better (!), more serious, different** book. If you have an established paperback track record, the dangers of this are obvious—losing your loyal readers for some (imaginary?) new group; losing your *voice*, because you're suddenly writing something that isn't authentically YOU; having a career that decays exponentially.

HOWEVER, change should not be resisted on principle. If your publisher can present a compelling if/then; and if you agree and feel you can convincingly make suggested adjustments in your writing without losing its authenticity, then you may choose to write that different book in the hope of attracting an even wider audience.

— Katherine Stone

Remember...1995 NINC membership dues are due! Save NINC the time and expense of follow-up contacts by sending your renewal back today! Thanks.

Our Best Conference Ever...or Our Worst?

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Conference Coordinator
and CARLA NEGGERS, Assistant Conference Coordinator

The 1994 Conference was the best of conferences or the worst of conferences, depending on who is giving the judgment. After the recent conference in Atlanta, we received a record number of compliments that were also notable for the high level of enthusiasm, but we also received a record number of gripes—from editors and agents as well as from our members. Many people had suggestions on how to make the conference better, too, so we thought we'd throw them all out to the membership for comment before we begin making plans for our 1995 conference in Denver.

First, the gripes:

Some authors, agents and editors felt attendance at the conference has grown to the point that the open discussion format doesn't work as well as in the past. Discussion groups—the Saturday morning professional groups with agents and editors in particular—are dangerously close to becoming free-for-alls due to the sheer size of some of them and their open format. Chaos, whining, repetition, tossing out issues that then can't be addressed thoroughly, strong personalities taking over, even none-too-subtle hostility were all cited as dangers.

Some editors and agents were so offended by the tone of some of the discussions that they vowed never to return. On the other hand, some authors felt that the editors in attendance “definitely had an ‘attitude’...It seemed to me (and to others) *most* of the editors were antagonistic, inaccessible and apparently wished they were somewhere else...Are these people annoyed that we put them on the spot, that we expect them to answer the hard questions? Or is it that the present market is making writers expendable and they just don't care who they might alienate?”

Other members and some editors and agents feel the current format of the discussion groups is fine. We just need to make sure there are enough of them so that one isn't way over-crowded. We might limit size or add a third session. The “free-for-all” nature allows a great deal of issues to be thrown up for discussions that are then carried on informally during and after the conference. They're a way of starting conversations on subjects that can't be properly addressed in an hour. Also, some said the intensity of the professional discussion groups was just fine with them: “Editors and agents are used to talking to rooms full of unpublished people who hang on their every word,” said one author. “That's not us. The way I look at it, if they're unhappy, it's because they just didn't like our questions.” Some editors, however, said they didn't mind the questions, they minded the whining and the chaos, and some agents objected to what they regarded as hostility. Several said they were frustrated at not having a chance to answer, that they didn't mind tough questions, they just minded how they were asked. “I felt there were a lot of missed opportunities,” said one. “There just wasn't enough time.” The problems, in short, were more a matter of style than of substance. [Note: We did not know until early September that this year's conference attendance would be about 20% greater than last year, but as soon as we did, we realized that we should hold three sessions per hour instead of two in order to keep the groups smaller. By that time, however, the hotel did not have any additional meeting space available for us. We have already recommended this change for next year.]

Some members felt the authors-only sessions are leaning in the direction of becoming a “group encounter,” with too much of an emphasis on the stresses of writing and their impact on creativity, physical and mental health, and family and personal relationships. “Get rid of the touchy-feely stuff,” said one author. Another pointed out the dangers of “opening veins” without any means of closing them

back up again, and the resulting intensity and anxiety spilled over into professional discussions. “If we're going to do this kind of thing,” said one author, “we need to bring in professionals in stress management or whatever and let them run a workshop or a group session. We're way, way over our heads if we try to do it ourselves.” Another said, simply, “We're going to become known as the Dysfunctional Writers of America if we're not careful.”

Those were the complaints, but we got a lot of suggestions, too:

Tighter ground rules for the discussions. Moderators might be instructed to call for a raise of hands to control the discussion and to insist on an atmosphere of professionalism and mutual respect—of, as Stephen Covey would say, “seeking first to understand, then to be understood.”

Do the professional discussion groups “Oprah Style,” with a moderator interviewing editors and agents with prepared questions (possibly compiled during our authors-only sessions), then opening up the discussion to authors for comment and further questions. (One of the moderators tried this during one of the very crowded sessions this year and received a lot of positive feedback.)

Eliminate the “authors-only” session of the conference and permit editors and agents from start to finish. (Business meetings would, of course, be limited to members only.) Reasons: we're not saying anything editors and agents can't hear anyway; we'd like their input on some of these topics; the exclusion leads to unnecessary awkwardness and suspicion; we've “outgrown” the need to just be by ourselves—the conference will still allow for plenty of “author-only” time just by virtue of its size—even if all our members show up, it'll still be small for a national conference. We can still have small “night-owl” discussions, inviting editors and agents to attend if they wish, but without the expectation that they are there to be questioned or to dominate discussion. Ground rules could be different than for the morning discussion groups. [Note: Our members have always expressed great enthusiasm for the authors-only portion of the conference and have traditionally requested that we not have the publishing professionals present at all. Has this attitude changed among the majority of our members?]

Move the Sunday morning forums to Friday or Saturday afternoon or eliminate them or change them (by asking editors what would work best for them). Check-out and departure times get in the way of doing anything effectively on Sunday morning; instead, offer a continental breakfast from 7-9 a.m. for a sense of closure and a quick, easy breakfast before leaving.

Two free afternoons are too many. Optional field trips could be held opposite publisher forums, agent forums, smaller discussion groups with agents and editors, etc., thus preserving the retreat-like atmosphere for those who want it.

Add a promotional component to the conference. Bring in book people—booksellers, distributors, reviewers, etc.—in the host city for a panel discussion, a professional discussion group, or as our guests at a luncheon, breakfast, and/or the Friday cocktail party. We could also add a book signing. [Note: The Rocky Mountain Book Festival will be held in Denver the same weekend as our 1995 conference, and we are already making plans to take advantage of this.]

Include more discussions on specific genres, particularly with agents and editors. This might be part of an expanded format, on Friday or Saturday afternoon, with agents and editors discussing the market and their programs for various genres and even subgenres, depending on member interests. These sessions don't have to be crowded to be valuable.

Less emphasis on having a bestseller and more on maximizing your potential on whatever track you're on and enhancing your value as a writer. “I'll never be a *New York Times* bestseller, and I don't

Our Best Conference Ever...or....

(Continued from page 11)

care," said one author, "but I want to do the best I can with what I'm doing." [Note: At this year's conference, we had a discussion group on just this topic, and it turned into a discussion of how to write a bestseller!]

Finally, bring the conference to New York in 1996. We'll likely get more agents, editors, publishers, marketing and publicity people and so forth to at least stop in and see what we're about. [Note: The 1995 Board of Directors will be selecting a site for the 1996 conference early next year and New York is certainly one site we'll be considering.]

After talking with many members, editors and agents, we have decided that, in most cases at least, those whose careers are going well

enjoyed the conference thoroughly and those whose careers aren't going so well heard nothing at all encouraging so they *didn't* enjoy the conference. Also, we believe the "hostility" that some people sensed was actually the anger and frustration many authors are feeling in a tightening market where experience sometimes seems to be a disadvantage. NINC can't do anything about the marketplace, but we can make changes in the conference to make it more beneficial for our members. Please let us know what you think about the issues we have raised here.

Write or fax: Victoria Thompson, 563 56th St., Altoona, PA 16602, fax (814) 946-4744. We will pass your comments along to next year's conference committee.

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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.

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Conn, Phoebe: *Beloved*, Zebra

Connell, Susan: *Rings on her Fingers*, Bantam Loveswept

Cooke, Deborah A. w/a Claire Delacroix: *Roarke's Folly*, Harlequin Historicals

Davis, Suzannah: *A Christmas Cowboy*, Silhouette Desire

Dodd, Christina: *The Greatest Lover in All England*, Harper

Douglas, Carole Nelson: *Cat on a Blue Monday: A Midnight Louie Mystery* (mass market edition), Forge (Tor)

Douglas, Carole Nelson: "Christmas Magic," in *A Dreamspun Christmas*, Topaz

Emerson, Kathy Lynn: *The Green Rose*, Harper Monogram

Garrod, Rene J.: *Divine Inspiration* (novella) Zebra Historical Christmas Anthology

Gideon, Nancy: *The Forgiving Season* (novella) in *A Christmas Embrace*, Zebra Historical Christmas anthology

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MacDonald, Elisabeth: *Voices on the Wind*, Avon Books

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Osborne, Maggie: *The Wives of Bowie Stone*, Warner

Palmer, Linda Varner w/a Linda Varner: *Believing in Miracles*, Silhouette Romance (Book #2 of the *Mr. Right* trilogy)

Pappano, Marilyn: *Regarding Remy*, (*Southern Nights* trilogy, Book #2), Silhouette Intimate Moments

Pappano, Marilyn: *Room at the Inn* (reissue), Silhouette Intimate Moments

Rotter, Neff w/a Elizabeth Neff Walker: *Heart Conditions*, Signet

Small, Lass: *An Obsolete Man*, Silhouette Desire *Man of the Month*

Stewardson, Dawn: *I'll be Home for Christmas*, Harlequin Intrigue

Taylor, Janelle: *Three Novel Collection—Bittersweet, Forever and Savage Conquest* (reprint), Hardcover, Wings Books, Random House

Tetel, Julie: *Sweet Surrender*, Harlequin Historical (sequel to *Sweet Seduction and Sweet Sensations*)

Wilkins, Margaret w/a Margaret Moore: *Vows*, Harlequin Historical, *Weddings, Inc.* series

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Woods, Sherryll: *One Step Away*, Silhouette Special Edition

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