

# Novelists' INK

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

## "East of the Hudson" Market Watch

By EVAN MAXWELL

*"East of the Hudson" premieres as a bimonthly feature keeping an eye on developments in the publishing business.*

**N**ew York, New York, it's a heck of a town... Too bad we all live so far away. On second thought, maybe it isn't too bad. I consider the commission I pay my agent a small price for living west of the Hudson.

But all of us are stuck with the simple truth that we find out most of the news about our business by rumor, innuendo, and slow-moving snail mail. By the time a hot flash from Manhattan hits northwestern Washington—or Colorado, or Texas, or Florida—it's usually pretty lukewarm. I'd like to propose we all do something to change that: namely, this column.

"East of the Hudson" intends to become a regular, bimonthly feature of *Novelists' Ink*. It will contain items of interest to the authors of commercial fiction, including notes, announcements, and speculation about personnel changes, publishing programs, and bookselling trends.

There probably won't be a great deal of what is called "enterprise reporting," since most of the information important to us will already have appeared in the publishing press; but since many of us don't have direct access to *Publishers Weekly*, the *New York Times*, and other such publications, it presumably will be valuable, even if it is compiled from secondary sources.

We do have a source of additional material, however. You.

Often, the authors' network carries information from New York as fast as Ma Bell will allow. The only problem with that approach is, it doesn't reach all our members. In other words, this columnist would greatly appreciate news tips, clippings, notices, and just plain gossip. All submissions will, of course, be checked as closely as possible and will be treated professionally, but if you know something that may or may not be officially announced, feel free to pass it on to us for consideration.

There are lots of writers in the world, but surprisingly few writers of commercial fiction. In our business, we deal with a small number of publishers and a relative handful of editors. Our books are sold in thousands of outlets, but good sales figures in a surprisingly small number of stores can propel a career over the moon. In other words, we have a small universe to watch, so let's all watch it together and try to make sense out of it.

**O**ne additional thought: Publishers are welcome to communicate with the column if they wish to do so. After all, publishers know lots of things that can be helpful to writers.

Communicate with the column by writing to P.O. Box 187, Anacortes WA 98221, by calling (206) 293-8068, or by faxing (206) 293-1835. And rest assured, we'll cover publishers who have a presence in commercial fiction but do not have their main offices at the far end of the Holland Tunnel.

Now, here are a few items from the end of 1994:

**Karen Solem**, an editor with an extremely long and successful tenure in romance and women's fiction, has left Harper Paperbacks, where she was associate publisher, vice president, and editor-in-chief. Solem played a critical role in establishing the Silhouette line at Simon & Schuster, and ran the same line after it was acquired by Harlequin. She had been in charge of the Harper women's fiction and romance line for more than four years.

Solem's departure was unusually (continued on page 6)

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## PRESIDENT's Column

# The Writer's Advocate

**A**s I write this, we are looking for a new chairman for the NINC Advocacy Committee. The Advocacy Committee investigates issues of import to novelists, formulates positions, and takes appropriate action. To my mind, this may be one of the most important jobs in the entire organization, because when all is said and done, this is what Novelists, Inc. is all about.

NINC should be our voice, our watchful eyes, and, if necessary, our clenched fist. NINC should make the world a friendlier place for all the hard-working professional fiction writers who, in the past, have found the decks stacked against them.

Ezra Pound said that writers are the antennae of the human race, and a race that destroys its antennae cannot survive. Not that I'm partial, but I think he's right. A culture that treats its writers poorly, that makes them feel defeated and futile and impoverished, is going to be a pretty sorry culture.

People babble on endlessly about politics and current events because, they say, these are "important" matters that affect our lives. In truth, I think the arts—and especially the written word—have a great deal more influence on culture than politics ever has or ever will.

So why are writers so often treated so poorly? The answer to this question is not simple, and it is intrinsically linked to the nature of the publishing business, the concentration of power, and at the risk of sounding pompous, capitalism itself.

Let's face it—the publishing industry is a small, closed-door community. Giant conglomerates control almost all of the major publishers. To the CEO of the corporation, novels are "software," and authors are contract laborers. His continued employment is dependent on one thing—the bottom line on the ledger. And as any good businessman

knows, you keep profits up by keeping costs down. That means not paying any more than necessary to your contract laborers. Us.

What's the result? You already know. Boilerplate contracts, which get worse and worse every year. These contracts are so unfavorable to the author that, even after the best agent on earth bickers and dickers for months, the terms still don't come close to giving the author what he or she deserves.

Where is it written that an author can only receive X% of the profits? Why do publishers have the right to cancel books, without cause, and demand the return of advances? Why are they so slow to pay? Why is bookkeeping so erratic? Why are royalty statements so uninformative?

Why do most writers have to hold day jobs (because the average writer makes less than \$10,000 a year)? Why do publishers hold all the trumps? We're the ones who write these things! They cannot survive without us. And yet we remain unable to force the adoption of a fair minimum contract. This, as my three-year-old son is fond of saying, stinks.

As I mentioned last month, we need clout. But we also need advocates. We need to formulate our positions and discover a way to make them stick. Enter the Advocacy Committee.

Here are just a few of the areas the Advocacy Committee should investigate:

**Used-Book Stores:** I mentioned this last month, but I'll mention it again, because there may be no other single entity (other than publishers) that deprives writers of more income.

Don't get the wrong idea—I love used-book stores. I just think they need to pay writers an appropriate royalty when books are resold. I know of one used-book store that has

undertaken this chore voluntarily, but most do not.

We need to raise public awareness on this issue, to shame booksellers into doing the right thing, or to facilitate the passage of legislation requiring royalties to be paid. A few states have recently passed artist-friendly laws, including laws requiring payment to artists whenever their paintings are resold. Writers should be treated no differently.

Incidentally, this wouldn't bankrupt the used-book sellers. They could either collect an extra dime or so for the royalty when they acquire the book, or charge an extra dime when they sell the book, much in the way that sales tax is collected now. Call it the starving author tax. Distribution of proceeds would be a problem, but not an insurmountable one. It's worth doing.

**Electronic rights.** I would like to hear from other NINC members about how these rights are being handled in their contracts. We've all heard about the Random House boilerplate contract which gives the author a whopping 5% on all electronic rights sales. Is it the same elsewhere? This is an issue on which NINC should take a firm stand.

As you probably know, electronic publishing is the wave of the future, and to paraphrase those immortal words from *Plan Nine From Outer Space*, the future is where we are going to be spending the rest of our lives.

Books are already on CD-ROM. We have on-line electronic publishing. Books have been uploaded onto the Internet, some without authorization. Books will soon be delivered to bookstores via print-on-demand, meaning they can be electronically transmitted to the bookstore,

printed on a high-speed printer, and bound on the spot for the customer.

Wouldn't it be sad if the publisher decided that all those sales were "electronic," and thus, we only get the paltry 5%? Obviously, this area needs some attention.

**Copyright laws.** As you may know, last summer the Authors Guild opposed proposed laws that would stiffen penalties for violations of the "fair use" rule—that is, use of someone else's writing without permission. This baffled me. How, I wondered, could the Authors Guild oppose stiffer copyright protection? After some investigation, I discovered what I believe to be the answer.

The Authors Guild membership is in large part composed of nonfiction writers, particularly textbook writers, writers of history books and biographies—those most likely to be quoting at length from other works.

To me, this illustrates the great need for an organization like Novelists, Inc. This is a clear instance in which our interests as fiction writers are simply different. It will always be in our interest to have as much protection for our work as possible; when all is said and done, copyrights are our bread and butter, and no one has any business using our words without obtaining permission and/or paying an appropriate royalty.

I've barely scratched the surface. I think the work of the Advocacy Committee is important, and I hope you do, too. If you're interested in serving on the committee, please contact me or one of the other Board members.

We need you.

— William Bernhardt

## ***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.

### **Board Responds to Resnick Letter**

In the January issue of *Novelists' Ink*, Laura Resnick wrote about a member whom she believed Novelists, Inc. had treated unfairly. The Board has investigated the matter to determine exactly what happened in this case and whether or not we need to make any changes in the way we handle lapsed memberships.

Currently, our procedure is to send out dues renewal notices in early November. (They were not mailed until late December this year, but for 1994 they were mailed in November, 1993.) Members who have not renewed by January 31 receive a second notice. Those who have then not renewed by the end of February receive a telephone call from a member of the Membership Committee. Most of those called have simply forgotten to renew and are glad for the additional reminder. Some have decided not to renew at all, and the committee reports their reasons to the Board so it can determine whether we are failing in some way to meet our members' needs. A few of those the Membership Committee calls each year are unable to renew because of financial hardship. The Committee offers to pay these members' dues through the Benevolent Fund, to which members are asked to contribute each year when they renew their memberships.

This service is available to all NINC members who need it and may be used once every five years. The Membership Chair is also authorized to grant extensions for ➔

# LETTERS to the editor

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(Continued from page 3)

payment of renewals until May 1. In May, six months after renewal notices have gone out, our Central Coordinator deletes from our membership list the names of those who have not yet renewed and publishes a new membership roster for distribution to our members.

The member about whom Laura Resnick wrote received a telephone call from the Membership Committee in March, 1994. At that time, she said she would be sending in her renewal as soon as she could. She did not indicate any inability to pay her dues, and therefore was not offered the use of the Benevolent Fund. She did not request and was therefore not granted a formal extension. She finally mailed in her renewal on July 13, fully eight months after the renewal notices had been sent and more than two months after her membership had officially lapsed.

In accordance with established NINC policy, our Central Coordinator returned her check (which was for the wrong amount) and instructed her that, like any other lapsed members, she must reapply for membership. We require lapsed members to submit proof of publication of two books, at least one of them published in the past five years, to demonstrate continuing eligibility. Lapsed members who reapply within one year and demonstrate eligibility are automatically renewed and do not have to go through the approval process of having their names published in the newsletter. Virtually all organizations require lapsed members to reapply for membership, and we do not feel our policy places an unfair burden on people.

When the person in question received the notice that she would have to reapply, she wrote to our then-president, telling him what had happened and that she would not be rejoining NINC. She did not ask that any action be taken. Because she requested no action, because our president could not determine that anyone in NINC had done anything wrong, and because she had already made up her mind to withdraw from the organization, he chose not to respond.

We are always sorry to lose a member, particularly when that member feels s/he has been ill treated. We have managed through the years to keep our attrition rate below 3%, so we must be doing something right, but we are always open to suggestions on how we may improve. If our members have any suggestions, any member of the Board would be happy to hear them.

— Victoria Thompson, Secretary

## Setting the Record Straight

Regarding your cover story in the January '95 issue, "Togetherness, Working with a Partner"—Serita Stevens is apparently recycling an old article. She did not solicit my approval to use my name in the article prior to its

publication. I stopped trying to collaborate with her about two years ago, and formally broke off the collaboration by letter in March of 1993. I would like to make it clear that I am not collaborating with anyone and write only under my pseudonym of Laurie Grant.

— Laurie Miller

## Writers' Retreat Worth Support

In re Andre Norton's writers' retreat, I'd like to add a suggestion to help it get on-line as quickly as possible.

Many conventions have added a charity auction to their list of events. And what better charity could there be for writers than a retreat such as High Halleck, designed for genre writers and with a library to die for? So for those of us who have any influence with convention committees, who are planning our own con or are invited guests at other cons, a little nudge in the right direction might result in a nice, fat check to help this retreat become real.

How to convince the convention committee to have the auction, I leave up to NINC members. If you know someone on the committee, you will know the best approach better than I.

If a con has not had such an auction before, here are a few tricks that can help make it successful—once you have convinced the committee it is needed, and that High Halleck should be the charity of choice. (Some cons now have two auctions: one for a local charity, and one to benefit books or writing.)

The first is to schedule the auction far enough in advance that all the guests are made aware of it and can bring donations. Signed manuscripts and galley proofs do well; books do well; tie-in memorabilia and so forth are all graciously accepted.

The second tip is to choose a good time, with nothing important competing with the auction, and put a large notice in the program book and short guide, if there is one. People can't come and bid if they don't know the auction is happening.

The third is to find a good auctioneer. Creative people such as writers and artists do well at auctioneering, and by asking around the committee can often find an experienced or even professional auctioneer. If they don't know one and want to invite a professional who likes writers' conferences and is a very popular SF/F Big Name Fan guest, they can contact Jan Howard Finder (he never capitalizes his name) at 164 Williamsburg Court, Albany NY 12203. His phone number is 518-456-5242.

Finally, there is one small "failure of communication" in the article on the retreat. The plans are for four to six writers *per cabin*. I don't know how many cabins are to be built, but I suspect it will be as many as the budget will bear.

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And that is all the more reason we should get behind High Halleck and give it all we can. If our conference committee starts planning an auction for it now, we can donate a good sum after our next conference.

— Marj Krueger

## Stop Insidious Bias in NINC

If there is a genuine concern about maintaining and expanding the membership of Novelists, Inc., might I suggest the organization stop its insidious denigration of the chosen genre of a majority of its members?

The last three issues of *Novelists' Ink* blatantly stated that male applicants who write in other genres are more desirable recruits than female romance writers. Although I can certainly see the benefits of diversifying our membership, I am both baffled and amused by the antiquated implication that little can be accomplished without grunting men in breechcloths marching into battle before us. The notion is insulting to both women and men.

Although I earn an annual income of six figures, have been blessed with healthy print runs, and write damn good novels, I'm supposed to blithely accept that I have less clout in the industry than a sci-fi or western writer who may earn an advance of \$2,000, a print run of even less than that, but who just happens to be a man. Don't get me wrong. I adore sci-fi, westerns, and men. (Not necessarily in that order.) I also made a whopping six thousand dollars in the first five years of my career. I'm not implying that I'm superior to those writers, but nor will I pay fifty dollars a year to be labeled inferior. I'm a working writer. I can be insulted for free.

I look forward to the day when I can once again recommend Novelists, Inc. without reservations, but if the organization continues to imply that any of its members are second class citizens, then I'll continue my grueling (but ever hopeful!) search for an organization interested in meeting the needs of the published romance writer. Until then, we all need to remember that we'll never win the battle against chauvinism until we stop playing by the hierarchy's rules.

— Teresa Medeiros

## Atlanta Conference Reflection

I was extremely interested in the numerous comments made in the December newsletter regarding our most recent conference because I, too, found Atlanta to be different from all the other NINC conferences I have attended. In mulling it over, I have come to the conclusion that it was the *tone* in Atlanta that was so different, not necessarily the actual topics offered for discussion. In the past, an atmosphere of "we few, we happy few, we band of

brothers (sisters?)" has always prevailed at a NINC conference. There was always a feeling of good will, of willingness to share and to learn. This year that feeling of fellowship was largely lacking.

As Linda Howington pointed out, a great deal of counter-productive whining went on. And (at least in the sessions that I attended) the moderators and/or participants showed little interest in discussing ways to resolve the problems. It definitely was more of a bitch session than a thoughtful, problem-solving discussion.

I read Vicky's comments on the conference, did some further thinking, and came to the conclusion that several things contributed to this atmospheric change, some of which are beyond NINC's control (like the fact that the mid-list is closing down), and some that we might be able to rectify.

I think the chief culprit was the size of the meetings. When I think back to other conferences, and I remember the discussions that I found most valuable, they were *always* the discussions with a small number of people. Every discussion I went to in Atlanta was absolutely jammed. This was not an atmosphere that is conducive to the give-and-take necessary for genuine sharing. This is an atmosphere conducive to people climbing up on soap boxes—which they did!

I suggest that whoever takes over the conference next year make it a priority to keep the discussion groups small. This is the atmosphere professionals need to interact with each other purposefully and usefully. This is the atmosphere that will allow the barriers to fall between author and author, author and editor, and author and agent. Such arrangements will probably call for some creativity on the part of our conference chair, but—hey—creativity is what we're all about!

— Joan Wolf

## NINC Note

*NINK* is planning to compile a monthly listing of members who appear on regional best-seller lists. If you have access to such a list and would be willing to help, please contact JoAnn Ross, 43 E. Boca Raton, Phoenix AZ 85022-4713, fax (602) 863-6812, or e-mail to JoAnnRoss@aol.com.

# “East of the Hudson” Market Watch

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abrupt, even by East Coast standards, and no one seems willing to discuss the situation. Harper sources do say the change will have no impact on the direction of their publishing program, but it is hard to imagine that will be the case, so stay tuned. At the very least, Solem's track record in publishing would suggest she will appear at some other publishing house in the near future.

**Publishers Weekly** now estimates that the romance genre generates \$884 million a year. Those are small potatoes, as Fortune 500 companies go, but romance is still a large and growing sector in American fiction and publishing. Now, do you suppose the critics and culture mavens will ever begin to treat the genre with the respect it commands in the marketplace?

**Hearty thanks** to a sister organization, the Authors Guild, for catching a Sept. 26, 1994 blurb in the *New York Times* in which a Harlequin spokesperson announced that the romance giant has optioned its entire 16,000-title backlist to CBS for movie development.

It seemed to come as news to Harlequin and Silhouette authors, each of whom is supposed to benefit from the sale of movie rights. Any writer who has backlist with the Toronto publisher has some interest in such a deal, but details from Harlequin seem unusually scarce. The Guild is advising its authors to inquire about the terms of the sale/option.

**Doug Stumpf**, recently an executive editor with Villard, has joined *Vanity Fair* magazine as a senior articles editor. That may open up *Vanity Fair* as a market for crime writers, but it suggests that Villard, which once had a respected mystery list (this correspondent included), is no longer much of a market prospect.

Nothing new there. The publishing options have been shrinking in all genres. But with the axing of Otto Penzler's imprint in the Simon & Schuster wheel and other cutbacks, the mystery market had a dismal 1994.

**Novelists, Inc.** has not given much official attention to the bookselling business in recent years. Other writers and organizations have busily taken sides in the war of words between independent bookstores and the so-called “superstores,” but we have kept our mouths shut. Maybe that's just as well. No writer ought to unduly antagonize the salespeople who can make or break a book.

But we may want to think about the business, since it is changing so radically. One such change was announced last month in the reorganization of the Borders-Walden operation, which is owned by K-Mart. In the reorganization, Walden's headquarters in Stamford, CT will be closed down and overall operation will be

controlled through Borders, the superstore people.

Industry observers saw the move as an endorsement of superstores and a slap at Walden's, whose outlets are located mostly in suburban malls and shopping centers. Malls are losing business, according to the conventional wisdom in marketing; superstores are the wave of the future.

There's truth in that wisdom, no doubt, and it can have an effect on our business: mall stores have always been heavy supporters of genre authors, particularly in romance, mystery, and science fiction. Superstores, with their big inventories and wide selection, are seen as “real” bookstores, tonier and more of a threat to independent booksellers.

Before we mourn the passing of our primary set of outlets, though, the Walden's/Borders shift should be put in some perspective. Borders superstores recorded sales of \$253 million in the first three quarters of 1994, while Walden's sales were almost \$700 million.

In other words, Walden's sales were nearly three times those of Borders. The big difference in conventional perception was a function of the fact that Borders sales were up 83% for the period, while Walden's were down three percent.

It's a trend to think about, but bookselling is still a pretty big elephant. Some blind prognosticators have hold of the trunk, while others seem to have grabbed hold of quite different appendages.

**Addendum:** Walden's is discontinuing sale of its best-seller lists to individual authors and is refusing to renew existing subscriptions. From now on, authors will have to rely on their publishers for information about placement on the lists.

That's too bad. There's lots of good information to be gleaned from best-seller lists, but only when you have several to compare. Access to the Walden's list was very helpful. ☐

## Harlequin Sales Soar

According to the *Financial Times*, a weekly newspaper out of Toronto, Harlequin's parent company, Torstar Corp., has reported a third-quarter net income of \$4.9 million, after a \$1.9-million loss experienced during the same period last year. The company credits the improvement to “the reduction in newspaper losses and higher book publishing profits,” including those of Harlequin, whose third-quarter operating profits were \$18.6 million—up 27% from the previous year.

Thanks to Judy Corser for the information.

# Tour Tips From the Trenches

By JOANN ROSS

*(Author's Note: When reprinting the American Crime Writers League's Code for Publicity Persons in the October and November issues of NINK, I asked a few Novelists, Inc. members to share their experiences on the book tour. The following was originally written as a sidebar to the two-part article; thanks to everyone who participated.)*

**N**ora Roberts advises anyone hitting the road on a book tour to stay calm. "Whatever goes wrong can be fixed. Or it can't."

She suggests that if you can't carry everything on the plane, at least to take along a complete change of clothing, **make-up** and hair stuff. "Will your luggage be lost somewhere along the route? Is this America?"

When traveling alone, to save on nail-biting brought on by big-city taxi drivers, Lori Copeland prefers a driver to deliver her to and from airports. She uses room service for any meal that isn't eaten outside of the hotel, and she reminds writers attending any event that involves wearing a badge to remove the badge before leaving the hotel so as not to look like a tourist.

Since you won't be eating at regular intervals, more than one travel-wise writer suggested carrying food. As publicist Joan Schulhafer once told Roberts, "If you have time to eat lunch, it means you didn't get on the noon news."

Another hint is to sleep whenever you can, especially since late arrivals seem to be the **norm, rather than the exception.**

Bertrice Small once arrived in Cleveland at midnight and was taken to her hotel, where she was handed a key to a room on the nineteenth floor. Having a fear of heights, Small asked for the lowest floor possible. The desk clerk told her that nineteen was their lowest available floor.

"I must have turned pea green," Small reports, "because the next thing I knew, the PR lady was handing the guy back his key and assuring me she had a great little hotel for me, which she did."

Small was subsequently checked into a room on the third floor of a small hotel called Swingels (popular with the show business crowd passing through Cleveland), and the following morning she shared an elevator with Bob Hope.

"God bless that PR lady, whose name I don't even remember," Small writes. "If it hadn't been for her, I would have spent the night in the lobby of that other hotel—the one with the floor-to-ceiling glass walls and rooms starting on the nineteenth floor."

Karen Robards was surprised when, on a midnight arrival at Seattle's SeaTac airport, she was met by a group of fans. She appreciated the gesture, but being unwarned that they would be there, she wasn't dressed for the occasion. The fans drove her into the city to her hotel, which, because her publicist had forgotten to confirm an after-six arrival, had not held her reservation.

Unfortunately, the hotel—and the city, due to a large convention—was full, which left Robards and her assembled fans to spend the next three hours driving all over Seattle in the middle of the night, looking for a room at the inn.

In yet another late-hour story, Roberts tells of arriving in Memphis at two in the morning after a full day "who knows where, and having to check out by six in 'full lady' dress and make-up." When she started to undress so she could fall face down into bed, she discovered that the zipper on her brand-new silk suit had become stuck.

She tried to rip it off. She prayed. She considered selling her soul to the devil, if only that damned zipper would go down.

"Before I could make the deal," Roberts relates, "it slid down as smooth as, well, silk. One of God's little jokes, I guess."

Robards points out that since there will always be snafus, it's important to get a number (several numbers) where your publicist can be reached at any and all hours of the day or night. She also suggests that, if possible, you take your publicist or (better yet) your editor on tour with you.

This will not only educate both into the true exigencies of a book tour, it will provide other responsible parties to deal with snafus as they occur!

Roberts reports another experience that underlined the importance of being able to reach your publicist at all times: a cancelled flight between cities. A call to her publicist at Putnam started gears turning, and within thirty minutes she was in a cab, being driven for the next couple hours and making her bookings with no problem at all.

Rebecca Brandewyne warns writers to ensure that their books will be available in touring markets. Several years ago, when arranging her own promotional tour, →

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— Karen Robards

# Tour Tips From the Trenches

(Continued from page 7)


she received an entire half-page article in the Houston Chronicle, after which the newspaper's switchboard was flooded with calls from readers wanting to know where they could buy her book. Although she'd apprised Warner Books of her schedule, there were no books to be found in the Houston marketplace, so all the publicity she received was virtually wasted.

It's important to remember that many publicists have never set foot outside New York City and are unfamiliar with any geography west of the Hudson River.

Robards was once booked into a hotel in St. Louis when she was speaking that same night in Kansas City. After all, the publicist thought, these were sister cities; she could surely get from one place to the other via a quick taxi ride! Another writer had much the same experience when

a publicist booked two speaking engagements an hour apart in Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington, because the two cities were "only an inch apart on the map." In fact, they are 175 miles apart.

Although touring is admittedly grueling work, Roberts reminds writers not to whine too much. "The publicist, unless he or she is an idiot, is doing everything possible to make the tour work, and to keep you alive."

Summing up, Robards, who definitely advises keeping a sense of humor, believes book tours help authors develop self-reliance. After thirteen years of being sent cross-country by dozens of assorted publicists, she proudly boasts, "I can now get myself from San Diego to Penobscot, Maine, by camel if necessary, and arrive in time for my 7 a.m. interview." 

## Atlanta Conference Reports

### Finding Your Own Rhythm

This Night Owl Session began very quietly, but by the end of the hour, I had to call time. We could have gone on for another hour at least. One of the first things we learned was the reluctance of writers to reveal that they may have problems which will interfere with their career. Those who spoke up—those who even *showed* up—had to be the bravest folks at the conference. However, many of us, who have been observing such things, have noticed that for the past two years, the articles in the newsletter touching on writer's block, burnout, stress, working when you are ill, etc. are the ones which have provoked unexpectedly heavy response. The results of our discussion produced some interesting conclusions:

The most important discovery for many of us was to learn that we are not alone with our problems. That was also the most encouraging breakthrough for many of us—you could see the faces light up as the realization dawned. Someone else out there has a worse, or as bad, a dilemma as you have and it boosts you to learn how they're surviving.

Then there are publishers out there who are compassionate and understanding, who realize that often

during your most productive years, you can be faced with adult-life crises, i.e. divorce, death in the family, demands of growing children, illness. Most will understand. But they also have crises, plus business deadlines, and the pressure is there for them, too. So give them as much time as possible to rearrange their own schedules.

None of us wants to gain the reputation of being undependable, of not producing when we say we will. In fact, I believe this is the reason that many of us will not discuss the subject and often let the pressure and stress build to the bursting point. *Find your own rhythm, set it, and stick to it.* You want to regain that love of writing you felt when your first book was published, don't you?

So set reasonable deadlines; Being prolific is wonderful—if you're made that way. If you aren't, don't fight it. Set your own pace. And consider writing the entire book as one or two of the session participants have decided to do.

Give yourself permission not to write if you have a bad day; do something different. One of the quotes from the workshop was particularly apt: Just as you can't stand over a flower and shout at it to grow, you can't force creativity.

Space prohibits more examples but I do want to echo



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the many voices from the workshop who insisted that no one knows your abilities as well as you, yourself do. Be honest with yourself. Take on what you can handle, push yourself occasionally, but don't let the pressure take over your life.

After all, you do want to endure, don't you?

— Marion Smith Collins

## Writers and their Relationships

We merely scratched the surface of this controversial and occasionally discomfiting topic which affects most of us in some way. Concerns seemed to fall into two general categories.

For some of the writers present, equitable division of labor in the household, meeting the needs of others without sacrificing their own needs, and overall equality in the marital relationship were of most importance. Feelings were strong as to how we should go about achieving those goals.

Others (primarily myself and a few other writers who have either lived through this experience in the past or who are currently living through it in the present) were more focused on the toll one partner's success can take on a relationship when the other partner's dreams of professional success are fading.

Both categories of concern generated good discussion on a topic that I believe merits further exploration.

— Diane Chamberlain

## Careers and the Disappearance Of the Midlist

That this was a topic of concern to many authors was evident by the large number of people who turned out for the session. The main question addressed was: Now that I am no longer a neophyte, delighted just to be published, what are my options as a genre writer? Is it possible to simply stay in midlist, or do I have to "aim for the stars?"

There was general agreement that midlist is shrinking rapidly. In some ways, in fact, it's easier to get that first book published than it is to remain in midlist for an extended period of time. Once you begin asking for advances that equal or exceed what your publisher can make on your book, then you are in trouble. On the other hand, no one is really satisfied to keep on making the same amount of money book after book after book.

Joan Wolf told of a conversation she had recently with her agent about one of his writers, a very good mystery

writer, whom the agent cannot sell anywhere these days. A few years ago, the agent said, that writer could have counted on selling 20,000 hardcover and 100,000 paperbacks. When Joan commented that she wouldn't mind settling into that niche herself, the agent's response was that there was no such niche any more. Books are either published very small or very big. There's virtually nothing left in the middle.

Catherine Coulter made the point that publishers can't eliminate their genre midlist altogether or they will have no place to find their future stars. But there is no doubt that a writer whose numbers do not grow but continually remain the same may find herself in trouble.

So the question remains: Is it possible to have a successful career (successful defined as being able to support oneself) as a midlist writer? Part of the answer depends on the numbers, on what your house defines as a "decent" sale. Is it 60,000 books? 80,000 books? 150,000 books? Different houses look at numbers in different ways and, like so much else in publishing, this question has no easy answer.

— Joan Wolf

## Promotion

Bookmarks. Do they do any good? Are too many fans collecting them without buying books? Are too many booksellers trashing them for lack of counter space or because they compete with \$ bookmarks? No conclusions were reached. Postcards? Many readers will consider buying a book brought to their attention by a well-designed postcard. Others ignore them. In all cases, a targeted mailing list is invaluable.

Co-op advertising was discussed; the conclusion being that different publishers have different policies. Some welcome author efforts, others prefer that authors stay out of it.

There was considerable discussion on the advantages of finding a local angle and working with area media; however, the large picture is seldom affected by a hometown blip. Hooks can sometimes be used to interest specialty publications. Creative promos and giveaways have been found to be highly effective, especially when they gain the eye of the national media.

As for advance reader copies, whether or not dealers and distributors have time to read all they receive, it indicates a greater-than-average interest by your publisher, which is always a good thing.

— Dixie Browning

# Marching to Our Own Drums

By BRENDA HIATT BARBER

**D**o we writers have quirks that other “normal” people don’t have—at least in such abundance? During the course of an e-mail “conversation” among the published romance authors on America Online (many of them Novelists, Inc. members), several of us began sharing our idiosyncrasies, both writing and non-writing related. As the list mounted, we noticed some intriguing similarities between us—and some interesting, even amusing, differences. More than thirty published authors on both AOL and GENie confessed their personal oddities, and most of them even gave me permission to use their names, brave souls, so that I could share them with NINC. Thank you all!

Among the writing-related eccentricities, one that appeared to be almost universal is the need to have a title, even if it’s a working, temporary title, before writing word one—or even, in many cases, before beginning to outline. Character names were another “must-have.” No one could start without names for their principals, and many of us admitted to being stopped cold until we could come up with a name for the bellhop who carried the hero’s bags to his room.

After that, though, the quirks became much more individualized. More than one writer admitted she must have all pencils on her desk sharpened, even though she does all of her writing on a computer. Many have to have all of their notes arranged according to their own strict system, though the systems varied wildly, ranging from almost nonexistent (I keep everything on a clipboard) to disgustingly organized (like Rebecca Brandewyne’s three-ring binders and Debra Dixon’s colored folders).

One of the more interesting pre-writing exercises was Laurie Miller’s. She does chapter summaries of three lines—no more, no less—with the hero’s viewpoint underlined in blue and the heroine’s in pink. Susan Wiggs does all of her first draft writing in longhand, using special peacock blue ink and her “magic” fountain pen. And Barbara Samuels is a “method writer,” picking up the characteristics of her current heroine, even to the extent of how she dresses and wears her hair, or carrying candles to light her way.

Our writing “routines” were even more varied. Some writers simply cannot begin their workday until they’ve

showered and dressed, while others work in a bathrobe, with their second mug of coffee on the desk. But whatever it is, most of us do have a routine, often a rigid one, and we tend to believe that following it helps our writing to flow. Hey, whatever works, right?

Non-writing quirks were yet more diverse. Quite a lot of us alphabetize our books and spice cabinets (though our offices and desks may be disaster areas), but only Rebecca Brandewyne admitted to alphabetizing her canned goods(!). Most of us had strong feelings about which way our toilet paper hangs or our closets are arranged, though no one claimed to vacuum with any regularity. When I put my silverware away in the drawer, I not only have to put every piece in the right place, but I have to do it in a certain order...just don’t ask me the last time I scrubbed my kitchen sink. Others were compulsive about the arrangement of their kitchen cabinets or refrigerators.

Most of us are inveterate list makers, probably because writing seems to fry our short-term memory circuits. And nearly all of us have a favorite glass or mug we always drink from.

Some of the more intriguing quirks I heard: Linda Hilton always puts exactly eleven ice cubes into her big plastic cup before pouring warm soda over them. These ice cubes are never reused. Monique Ellis prefers five ice cubes. Kasey Michaels, eating a steak sandwich for lunch, always cuts the meat and bread into eighteen pieces each. She once had to explain

this to someone else doing the cutting for her when her arm was in a sling! Fayrene Preston builds a “nest” of pillows when she sleeps, even when travelling (which necessitates calls to housekeeping for extra pillows). Jessica Summers (Lyn22) sets her table for dinner at 10 a.m. rather than risk interrupting her writing time later.

As varied as these habits are, I noticed a common thread: most of us are slobs with perfectionist tendencies. Kasey Michaels was the first to suggest that perhaps it’s a control issue—our need to create tiny pockets of order out of chaos. And maybe that’s why we became writers, too. It’s one place where we have ultimate control—at least until we put the manuscript into the mail. Kay Hooper suggested that our eccentricities may be part of the creative process—a theory borne out by the fact that two artists (one the husband of a writer, one a friend) exhibit the same “compulsive slob” characteristics. Reassuringly, one writer quoted a study claiming that eccentrics live

***I see us as strong writers who just march to our own drums—only slightly out of step with the rest of the world.***

— Kasey Michaels

one writer quoted a study claiming that eccentrics live longer, happier, healthier lives than conformists. Isn't that comforting?

Of course, we're not talking about clinical obsessive/compulsive behavior here. As Kasey Michaels so eloquently put it: "We are talking eccentricities; the silly little things we do that seem perfectly normal to us but make the rest of the world giggle....Einstein slept inside his rolltop desk..."

"Odd is someone who could walk over a dead horse in the den and not notice, but refuses to have the toilet paper roll from the bottom (or top). Odd is handing your three-year-old a fresh box of Rice Krispies and a spaghetti strainer and telling her to go have fun sifting dry cereal all over the downstairs so that mom can talk long distance to another writer (I have done this. I'm not proud of it, but I've done this.) Odd is drawing up meticulous plans for lawn sprinkling systems but only cutting the grass when children and other small mammals are no longer visible above it. Odd is not allowing a broken bone/flood/earthquake to keep you from writing but being utterly stymied by the lack of a title. Odd is going to the wall over something small and handling big things that would destroy others without breaking stride.

"(Awful thought...but did you ever notice how many of us have, basically, pretty darn tough lives? I mean, lives that are worlds harder than those of our friends and neighbors. Yet we cope where others fall apart. I don't know why, but we cope. Maybe we're stronger. Maybe we hate to lose more than other people. Maybe it's the 'dreamer' in us that helps us through...but that's another subject, huh?)

"Odd is not caring how you look half the time and sobbing over it the other half. Odd is (to the 'normal' world) speaking of ideas and ideals when all around them


are speaking of people and events. Odd is actually exclaiming, in public, 'I've got it! She'll kill him in the garden!'—when the people you're with are talking about raising petunias.

"All my life, I've been a dreamer, forced to live in and cope with the real world. That, to the people around me, makes me odd. Being published, according to my mother, turned me into an eccentric...when it comes to our writing habits, we're as diverse as we are alike—which always slays me when asked if we exercise first, face east, use what computer, etc. I never wanted to write like anyone else, and I developed my writing 'posture' on my own—as did we all, right? We all have our little 'quirks.' What seems to set us apart from the "normal" world is that our quirks are very often as original as we are ourselves.

"Different. Odd. Unique?? Yeah, that's the ticket. We are unique. Yet, as unique as we are, we all possess this common/odd thread that makes us understand and relate to each other in ways the 'normal' world just doesn't get. I don't see that as compulsive, obsessive, or

control-freaky, or even genetically superior/inferior/striving. I see us as strong writers who just march to our own drummers—only slightly out of step with the rest of the world..."

I'll end with these words of wisdom from Kay Hooper: "Yeah, we're us. I like us. I like our compulsions/habits/oddities/eccentricities/uniqueness — and our humorous way of viewing both ourselves and the world around us. Haven't you ever noticed? Most every writer I know tends to see the world as ever-so-slightly tilted toward the absurd. Personally, I think that's a damned healthy way of looking at things!"

So do I. 

***'Most every writer I know tends to see the world as ever-so-slightly tilted toward the absurd. Personally, I think that's a damned healthy way of looking at things.'***

— Kay Hooper

## Introducing

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

### New Applicants

Ann Marie Fattarsi, Stockton CA  
Joyce Marlow, Klickitat WA  
Carol Devine Rusley, Englewood CO  
Terri Valentine, Lancaster OH  
Steven Womack, Antioch TN

### New Members

Nancy Cohen, Plantation FL  
Diane Fox, Cairo GA  
Kate Freiman, Toronto, Ont.  
Lori Handeland, Theinsville WI  
Arlene S. Hodapp, Pawpaw MI  
Sharry C. Michels, Lloydminster, Sask.  
Patricia Wynn Ricks, Austin TX

It has been determined that Deb Stover is ineligible for membership at this time.

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.

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.

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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.

Bruce-Thomas, Carol & Debra McCarthy-Anderson w/a Debra Carroll: **Obsession**, Harlequin Temptation

Bocardo, Claire: **Lovers and Friends**, Zebra To Love Again  
Bushyhead, Anne w/a Nicole Jordan: **The Warrior**, Avon Books

de Jong, Daphne w/a Laurey Bright: **A Perfect Marriage**, Silhouette Intimate Moments

Eagle, Kathleen: **A Class Act**, Silhouette "Men: Made in America" reissue

Emerson, Kathy Lynn w/a Kaitlyn Gorton: **Hearth, Home and Hope**, Silhouette Special Edition

Feddersen, Connie w/a Debra Falcon: **Midnight's Lady**, Pinnacle

Ferguson, JoAnn: **Ride the Night Wind**, Harper Monogram

Gaffney, Patricia: **To Love and To Cherish**, NAL Topaz

Gideon, Nancy w/a Dana Ransom: **Wild Texas Bride**, Zebra Lovegram

Harper, Shannon (with Madeline Porter) w/a Madeline Harper: **The Trouble with Babies**, Harlequin Temptation

Kauffman, Donna: **Wild Rain**, Bantam Loveswept (sequel to Black Satin)

Lind, Judi: **Veil of Fear**, Harlequin Intrigue

Macias, Susan w/a Susan Mallery: **Marriage on Demand**, Silhouette Special Edition

Macomber, Debbie: **Same Time Next Year**, Silhouette Special Edition

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

Scott, Amanda: **Highland Fling**, Pinnacle, Denise Little Presents

Siegenthal, Deb w/a Deborah Simmons: **The Vicar's Daughter**, Harlequin Historical

Taylor, Janelle: **Destiny Mine**, Kensington (hardcover)

Tetel, Julie: **Sweet Surrender**, Harlequin Historical

Tracy, Marie w/a Audra Adams: **His Brother's Wife**, Silhouette Desire

Woods, Sherryl: **Stolen Moments—An Amanda Roberts Mystery**, Warner Books (reissue)

Zirkelbach, Thelma w/a Lorna Michaels: **The Reluctant Bodyguard**, Harlequin Superromance

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A writer's problem does not change. He himself changes and the world he lives in changes, but his problem remains the same. It is always how to write truly and, having found out what is true, to project it in such a way that it becomes a part of the experience of the person who reads it.

— Ernest Hemingway  
*The Writer's Quotation Book*

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Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby

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