

# Novelists' Ink

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

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## Re-Writing Your Career

By LILLIAN STEWART CARL

*My thanks to Janice Young Brooks, Carole Nelson Douglas, Kathy Lynn Emerson, Jayne Ann Krentz, Laura Resnick, JoAnn Ross, and Joan Wolf for their help.*

**M**embers of Novelists, Inc. write a wide variety of books—ranging from nonfiction for both children and adults to mainstream fiction, historical fiction, mystery and period mystery, science fiction, fantasy, romantic suspense, romance (historical, contemporary, Regency, series, category, futuristic, and fantasy) and short stories in several of the above areas. Since many of these genres or sub-genres overlap, changing from one to the other should be easy, right?

As if anything in the writing business is easy. An author who wants to change genres often finds her- or himself fighting the publishers' tendency to pigeonhole books and authors alike. How many times have you been told, "Do the same book again, only different"?

Sometimes a story idea simply doesn't work in one area but will fit better in another. Or you grow frustrated writing book after book within a certain formula and feel that a change will keep your writing fresh. Perhaps writing different books will help you to write more books and earn more income. A story idea can be "ahead of its time." Or, in the worst instance, a publishing disaster might close off your usual field and send you searching for another one. Seldom do we plot and plan a change in direction. Usually it just happens.

Jayne Ann Krentz finds the changes in her writing inspired by her own moods and interests. She found little market for futuristic romance when she first started writing it. But the experience made her realize she would enjoy writing historical romance. That led her into her "Amanda Quick" career, which she finds tremendously satisfying.

For Kathy Lynn Emerson, the problem has not been trying something new, but doing the same thing over and over. She says, "I always figure I am whatever kind of writer the last publisher to offer me money said I was."

Carole Nelson Douglas's pilgrimage through the genres stemmed from her need to figure out how to write books that deal with issues important to her and are still marketable.

An editor might go along with an author's wish to change, or might not. When Carole wanted to try a book in a different genre, her romance editor introduced her to the house's science fiction/fantasy editor.

Joan Wolf's editor, on the other hand, tried to dissuade her from doing a book about King Arthur, which was not a genre book but which Joan had been dreaming about for years. Even

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

### Dream in the Rubble

**A**s has happened before in the aftermath of the most horrific era-defining tragedies, Oklahomans will always remember where they were and what they were doing when they first heard of the bombing. I was at the office, rushing to finish an incredibly important project that didn't seem important at all once I heard the grim news. A thousand thoughts raced through my brain, of my family, and God, and the seemingly endless capacity for human cruelty. I spent the rest of the day watching the television in shock and horror, thinking continually of everyone I knew who might have been there, seeing my own little boy's eyes in the face of every child pulled from the wreckage. I followed each false alarm and startling development, searching for answers while the rescuers searched for survivors, hoping it was not as bad as it seemed. But it was.

I did not, to my knowledge, know any of the people who were killed in the explosion. But I can't help but wonder who they were, what they were like, what they would have done with their lives. Did one of them smile at me, perhaps, during one of my many visits to that office building?

Did one of them make change for me, or give me directions, or let me make a left turn against traffic, or bestow one of the other daily kindnesses we all take for granted? The scope of this immense catastrophe extends well beyond its immediate victims; its virulent tendrils snake out and touch others in insidious and devastating ways. I know a judge in the OKC federal courthouse who used to gaze out his office window and watch the children playing at the day care across the street. Now all he can see out that shattered portal is rubble.

I am pleased that so many have been so generous with their time and their efforts. Events of this magnitude bring home unsettling truths to writers because, as Voltaire observed after the earthquake at Lisbon, in the face of disaster, words seem particularly puny. It is deeds that matter now, not what we can say but what we can do to reach out to the bereaved ones, to

make the world a better and kinder place, and to ensure this does not happen again.

I have written about hate groups, ideologically polarized cliques that hide away and stockpile weapons and draw up plans for using them. When *Perfect Justice* was

*Several of you were thoughtful enough to contact me and to inquire about my family and loved ones after you learned of the bombing. We're all fine. But on the day I had intended to write my President's Column on an entirely different subject, this came out instead.*

released last year, a few reviewers suggested that I was perhaps making too much of a few isolated wackos. That response, I suspect, will never be heard again; the world has changed. I wrote that book in part because I am of a generation that, in its naivete, thought we were witnessing the end of organized hate, that the old racists and sexists and extremists were dying out. It seems we may have rung the death knell too soon, and that saddens me, because this was our dream and no one likes to see a dream die. Still, we cannot let ourselves give in to hopelessness. Writers are, first and foremost, the shapers of dreams; if one dream dies, another must be discovered and pursued. And the foundation of that dream, perhaps, is a new and reinforced understanding that we are all connected and can take no one for granted, that compassion must overcome callous disregard, that we must all think less of ourselves and more of each other.

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and foremost, the  
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*...we are all  
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for granted.*

Throughout the evening of that tragic Wednesday, I turned to CNN, hungry for updates and information. At one point, my three-year-old boy asks me, "What's going on, Daddy?" but I can think of no words to explain it to him. He knows nothing about government or bombs. He knows nothing about hate, except in relation to broccoli. He knows nothing about death.

At last I take him upstairs for his bath, read *The Runaway Bunny* for the kajillionth time, and tuck him into bed. My son has only recently become aware of dreaming, has only just realized that those images and minidramas he sees when he sleeps are not real, or perhaps they are, in a way. After the third read-through, I ask if it's time to turn out the light. He beams up at me, his marble-green eyes shining, and says, "Okay, Daddy. I'm ready to dream again."

I smile back down at him, my heart trembling in my chest, and I think, So am I, Harry. So am I.

— William Bernhardt

## 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.*

### Echoing Call for Diversity

Regarding letters in the April *NINK*, I have to agree with Marj Krueger, who urged diversity for NINC. As a charter member of this group, and one who was at least involved in discussions about what we wanted to be long before we even had a name, I distinctly recall that our aim was to have a professional organization for writers of popular fiction. Hey—take a gander at the heading of *NINK*; that's the definition of who we are as a group.

That's the group I joined. So what if the majority of our members are romance writers? Since we represent such a high percentage of the popular fiction market, is that surprising? I don't think so. And it's hardly surprising that our "roots" are in romance, since it was the disappointment and disillusionment of published writers in RWA that spurred the formation of NINC. But we never intended that this group be limited to romance writers.

I find our growing diversity a true pleasure, and I only hope we gain many, many more writers outside the romance genre.

Also, I wanted to comment on Sylvia Baumgarten's letter about romance writers coming from abusive backgrounds. On this topic, all I can say is that my background is perfectly normal and abuse-free, and that I sincerely hope no effort is made to categorize romance writers as a group in this manner.

I doubt that the percentage of us coming from dysfunctional backgrounds or lives is any higher than in any creative endeavor and, to be honest, why we do what we do doesn't particularly interest me. I write because I love it. Period.

— Kay Hooper



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 3)

## Online Here to Stay

Great issue of *NINK*! I enjoyed Bill's column (I love reading about busy people who stay sane) and *East of the Hudson* by Evan Maxwell.

I was disappointed in the article on online services. Despite the fact that writers experienced in the medium were surveyed (thanks, Patti! [sic]), the tone of the article was overwhelmingly negative. I guess I'm not surprised. People who are trying to talk themselves out of trying online services dwell on the cons—"flaming" (which I've never experienced and which frankly doesn't intimidate me), cost, and time (both controllable). I'm reminded of writers who, fifteen years back, loudly proclaimed, "I'm never gonna give up my trusty Smith Corona for one of them new-fangled computers!"

Far more helpful to me was the March '95 issue of *Sisters in Crime*. This writers group understands that online services are not going to go away; they're only going to get bigger, faster, and more comprehensive. SinC has assigned online "liaisons," added e-mail addresses to their roster, and is starting a Q&A column in their newsletter to help members with online questions. I would hope that rather than quailing in fear, NINC would take this sort of proactive stance with online services.

Now, wouldn't it be nice if I could have e-mailed this letter to you? No one but me would have to type it!

— Susan Wiggs

## Happily Paddling

The addition of Evan Maxwell's *East of the Hudson* column is a great addition to *NINK*. Having always enjoyed his President's Column, I'm pleased the newsletter didn't lose his talents when his term ended.

As a writer who's also happily paddling in the "backwater" of romance, I do have a question regarding his statement about numbered books having become "secondary" to noncategory books. He can't be referring to sales, since certain series writ-

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ers can earn higher numbers than other "mainstream" authors. And, of course, vice versa.

Surely he's not comparing quality of series writing to noncategory writing? I can't imagine putting less effort into my series books than I do my single title novels. And the same can be said for the other writers I know working currently both sides of the fence in romance and science fiction.

I sincerely hope that series writers—whatever our genre—will not be made to feel the need to defend our work within the NINC family of writers.

— JoAnn Ross

**Editor's Note:** *The non-backwater Wilson Library Bulletin, May issue, spotlighted the romance genre in three articles, one of which discussed the benefits of libraries building series (those "numbered" books) collections.*

## NINC Broadens Horizons

Sign me in as an author who joined Novelists, Inc. because it was an organization formed for multi-genre published authors. I want to widen my horizons, not narrow them. I also belong to RWA and neither need nor want another romance organization. If it came to choosing between RWA and NINC, I'd have to choose NINC.

One of my favorite things about NINC is the newsletter. On the day it arrives, I always sit and read it front to back. I can do this because *NINK* is rarely longer than 12 pages, with print big enough to read. *NINK* is informative and concise. Keep it that way. There is no need to try to cram so much in that the print can't be read and the newsletter ends up a book with a lot of dull, bickering parts.

— CurtissAnn Matlock

## Handbook Proves Invaluable

I just wanted to extend my thanks to all the authors who participated in the agent survey. I found the resulting handbook to be invaluable in my recent search for representation. I also found those authors whom I contacted for additional information to be extremely willing to talk frankly, and this willingness to share is much appreciated and really helped me make an intelligent, informed decision.

If this assistance regarding my agent search is the only benefit I ever received from NINC, it would still be worth the price of my membership.

— Pat Kay

# Re-Writing Your Career

(Continued from page 1)

though the editor liked the first seven chapters, she was uneasy about what she could do with it. But Joan's agent encouraged her to continue. When the editor realized that Joan was going to do the book anyway, she bought it and the company decided the only thing to do with it was to put it in hardcover.

And then there's JoAnn Ross's experience. She began writing "glitz" mainstream novels after editorial changes at her series house made it more difficult for her to sell her stories. Unfortunately, her editor and agent then expected her to write nothing but glitz. When she tried a sensitive homespun story, she was told by her then-agent that she didn't want to send it out because *Cosmopolitan* wouldn't buy it, and JoAnn would lose her "Cosmo spot." As she comments, "That may have been wise advice from a marketing standpoint; however, it was not very fulfilling creatively."

Joan Wolf warns against investing an inordinate amount of time in anything that you have doubts about selling. "If you're a professional writer, you need to consider the marketplace before you sit down at your computer."

Study the genres and determine the main focus of each. Then analyze your own work and determine its primary focus. Get the advice of a writer or preferably agent who not only knows your target genre but is familiar with the houses which publish it. This might mean changing agencies.

Several authors emphasize that it's vitally important to have a good agent to see you through a change. If you want to write in more than one genre, you need an agent who's a generalist, not a specialist. An agent who sends your new mystery novel to your old fantasy editor is at best wasting time, and at worst setting up future marketing problems.

Many genres offer short fiction opportunities. A few short story sales will build contacts and name recognition, so that by the time you submit your novel, publishers will have heard of you.

Sometimes an author who wants to try her or his hand in several areas will take a while to find out what he or she is best suited to. It may take time to sell a new book. If your writing is all over the map, you can't build a reputation as quickly. Of course, publishers will rarely cooperate by buying

books in the order you want to write them!

Crossing-over within a genre—going from Regency romance, for example, to contemporary romance—doesn't present as many problems as trying a book that's in a completely different genre. Or one that belongs in no genre at all—at least a publishing house will know how to market a genre book. General fiction almost always has to be hardback, but most houses print fewer hardbacks than paperbacks.

JoAnn Ross cautions that if you want to abandon your original genre, that's great. Just understand that you might not bring your readership with you. You might get smaller print runs and smaller royalty checks.

And Janice Young Brooks counsels, "Make sure you really enjoy the genre you're switching to. If you're successful at it, you have to keep doing it and if it's not a 'great love' it will be a horrible job."

Once an author gets a toehold in another genre, it can lead to more opportunities. But, Carole Nelson Douglas points out, each genre has its own prejudices—when she moved from romance into science fiction/fantasy, she was looked down upon as a romance writer. When she moved from sf/f into mystery, she was looked down upon as a sf/f writer. In situations like this, Laura Resnick says, good manners are essential. Remember that your success in one genre doesn't automatically give you bragging rights in another.

When you try to sell a book in a new genre, that book is regarded as a "first novel." But you're not really starting over. Laura Resnick makes the point that your experience as a published writer with a good track record, awards, etc., can give your agent bargaining power. He or she can point out that you've proven your staying power and will, given the chance, develop a new audience in your new area. Not to mention bringing your old audience with you—which is why it's probably not a good idea to use a pseudonym in a new genre.

Carole Nelson Douglas has tried to remedy the cross-marketing problems of writing in different genres by seeking romance writers' cover quotes for her mystery books and a fantasy writer's cover quote for the reissue of a romance. In both the sf/fantasy and mystery fields, she finds genre conventions and publications to be very helpful in working within the existing network. By touring the mystery bookstores, mystery writers can get onto their bestseller lists, which are sources →

*"...crossover  
is much more  
possible  
these days."*

— Carole Nelson  
Douglas

# Re-Writing Your Career

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for national lists. Carole adds, "It's costly to keep up with multi-genres in both time and money, but a writer can't afford to ignore the networking and proselytizing possibilities."

While "There is nothing that you can do for yourself that makes up for what your publisher isn't doing for you," Carole believes that promoting and documenting reader enthusiasm for your work can influence publishers to earmark your books for a genuine build and the Great Breakout—whether in one genre or several.

Carole concludes that crossover is much more possible nowadays: "Romance has escaped limiting formulas and evolved many hybrid forms.... The upsurge in American women mystery writers has in-

jected more relationship issues and romance into a once romance-phobic genre. Women fantasy writers, handicapped for years by sf/fantasy field sexism, are moving into mystery, as are some romance writers."

As Laura Resnick says, "If you want to [make a change], then just do it. Why

wouldn't you? Because an editor tells you not to? Please—as we all know from bitter experience she's probably going to disappear in a year or two, but you've got to live with your career.... Or would you hesitate because your agent disapproves of your attempts to grow? Uh, who works for who, here, gang?"

We can all think of many examples of writers who are successful in more than one genre. It must be true: do what you love, the money will follow.

But then, what if you don't want to make a change? An author who is working happily in one particular genre might find her- or himself booted out of it, with no choice but to start over again elsewhere.

We're all only too familiar with the multitudinous ways an agent, editor, or publisher can drop the ball on selling and/or marketing a book. Houses swallowed by other houses, with a corresponding decimation of their lists. Lines discontinued. Buying freezes. An over-controlling or couldn't-care-less editor. An editor fired or quitting, with the subsequent editor not liking or mishandling the books he or she has inherited.

Sexism—which cuts both ways. Rejections despite past success. Long delays. Underpayment.

Confused royalties. Being dumped by a publishing house. Being dumped by an agent. An agent quitting or even dying. An agent who encourages you to write a book on spec and then can't sell it.

And even if you do everything right, there is still plain dumb bad luck, like the first book of a series appearing the same month a war breaks out and sales plummet across the board.

It's the dictatorship of the marketplace. Through no fault of your own, you can find yourself like Marley's ghost, dragging around a poor track record. A change of direction becomes the only way to survive.

While the thing to do in this situation may be, as one author jokingly suggests, to reach for the Valium and copious quantities of wine, there are other more positive steps to take.

Remember that no author is successful in *any* genre if she or he doesn't have staying power. Kathy Lynn Emerson recommends. "Keep plodding along. If the next contemporary doesn't sell, then the next historical might. Diversify. Don't give up. Don't throw anything away. Don't blame anyone personally, least of all an editor. Remember you're a published author, and it's unlikely to be your writing that's at fault for whatever happened."

Jayne Ann Krentz advises, "Problems occur in all careers. The key is to be flexible. Be willing and able to move on."

Laura Resnick says, "The moment someone says, 'I can't take any more rejection,' you know they're finished in this business. Keep writing. Keep submitting. Nothing can get better if you don't keep trying."

And Carole Nelson Douglas concludes, "I've found that a writer who continues past such unjust catastrophes will not only survive, but may thrive."

A case in point is Janice Young Brooks. Knowing she liked mysteries, Janice's agent suggested her name to an editor who was looking for a new mystery series—even though the agent didn't personally like or see much of a future in the genre. When the market for Janice's historicals died, she already had her mystery line up and running. Her "new thing" is now working out better than her old.

There are times, of course, when you yourself are your own worst enemy. One author remembers the time she agreed to accept a lower advance than the one she'd gotten for the previous book because she

*There are  
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enemy*

needed money. With less publisher investment, her new book dropped to a lower place in the catalog and had fewer sales.

Another author admits to underestimating the amount of sexism, general prejudice, and moments of breathtaking stupidity she would have to overcome. (In general, though, it's best never to attribute to malice what can be explained by sheer incompetence.)

Kathy Lynn Emerson admits to spending too much time trying too hard to make what she wanted to write fit into a particular niche. "We're talking square peg in round hole here." If it isn't working, she says, it may mean it should be abandoned in favor of something that will. Or it may mean that it's time to take the material somewhere else, to a line or genre where it *will* work.

Staying with your original publisher too long could be a big blunder. So could sticking with an agent too long. Personal affection has no place in a business decision. On the other hand, JoAnn Ross feels that she's made her worst mistakes listening to her head instead of trusting her gut. "Whenever I've chosen logic over instinct, it's turned out to be a terrible mistake."

Jayne Ann Krentz acknowledges that it's difficult to learn from mistakes in this business because situations rarely duplicate themselves exactly. It's more profitable to look back, she says. See what you did right, and try to repeat it.

The one thing all authors can count on is that there will be problems ahead. Increasingly huge print runs are being given to fewer and fewer people. The midlist is being pushed off the shelves by a coterie of "brand name" authors. As Joan Wolf says, "There ain't a damn thing you can do about it except try to become a brand name yourself."

JoAnn Ross and Laura Resnick also see the elimination of the midlist and the bottoming out of the market as a growing problem. Laura thinks that writing in more than one genre, as she does, is an excellent solution. She always has another choice, another place to go.

Laura knows a writer who writes in two different genres and gets a considerable cross-over audience. One of her publishers recently decided to approach the other about some cooperative marketing strategy. Is this the wave of the future? Let's hope so.

Kathy Lynn Emerson feels that flexibility is the key to facing the future. It can help ease the trauma if the kind of fiction you most love to write is suddenly "out." Do something else while you're waiting for it to become popular again. And she adds, don't

give up on the book you love. When you've had enough time away from it to be objective, go back and rewrite it. (New title and character names are a good idea.) "While you're trying something new you can keep on working on the something old until it's right."

Jayne Ann Krentz feels that the best thing that could happen to popular fiction would be an expansion of the audience. She sees a real need to lure more potential readers away from television sets.

Similarly, Janice Young Brooks points out that there's a lot of competition for what little free time

readers used to have. She thinks this is one reason publishers are sinking so much money into non-book books—celebrity bios, etc., which appeal to the lowest common denominator.

Carole Nelson Douglas sees survival as the biggest problem ahead, regardless of genre or gender. "We must produce books routinely, have print runs and sell-throughs significant enough to keep our backlist in stock and our frontlist performing well, and sell enough books to earn sufficient money to live on to write another day."

And how to survive? Carole thinks that being prolific is not enough. Now midlist authors must become marketing/publicity specialists. "This means attending distant book conventions, networking locally and at long distance, underwriting promotional materials and creating mailing lists.... Promotion, promotion, promotion is to publishing what location, location, location is to real estate." Carole recommends researching each genre's promotional opportunities, such as the career-building strategies of *Sisters in Crime*.

So you want to—or have to—re-write your career. Hang in there. It can be done. As Laura Resnick explains: Writing is "not a profession for the poor-spirited or faint-hearted. I don't recall anyone ever once suggesting to me that being a professional writer would be smooth or easy."

And she finishes, "At the lowest point in my career...I finally came to the conclusion which kept me going. There's only one good reason to write—the work itself. No other reason. Just the work itself...If not for the sheer love of the work, why would anyone put up with this business?"

Amen to that.

*Lillian Stewart Carl is the author of Garden of Thorns.*

*Don't give up  
on the book  
you love.*





*We in the U.S. frequently forget we aren't "North America." The United States does share the continent with two other nations, and what happens in the one to the north has quite an impact on the publishing industry and our incomes. Some of the impact comes from a very large Canadian publishing house, but far more impact, which hits every NINC member, comes from the great number of trees that live—and die—there. Fortunately, some of our Canadian members have been sending news south so NINK can report what's happening due north of most of us.*

## *Pulp Facts*

By MARGARET MOORE WILKINS

**A**s much as writers would like to believe that we alone supply the raw material for the publishing industry—and should therefore be compensated accordingly—there is another supplier of raw material equally vital: the pulp and paper industry. Paper accounts for between one-quarter and one-third of the cost of book, magazine, and newspaper production. The bad news for writers is that paper prices have shot up drastically in the past year and show no sign of falling.

Northern bleached softwood kraft pulp, the type used to make many types of fine paper (including that used in books) has risen from \$390 a tonne (U.S.) in late 1993 to a current price of \$825; it is predicted to cost \$910 by June, and more than \$1,000 a tonne by the end of the next eighteen months. The price of newsprint rose from \$411 per tonne to \$675 (US) per tonne.

### *There's a major shortage of wood . . .*

MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., the largest forest products company in Canada, tripled its annual profit to \$180.2 million (Cdn. \$), and Abitibi-Price Inc. posted a profit for the first time in four years.

But to put their recent profits into some perspective, it was only four years ago that newsprint was cheaper than it had been since the 1920s.

Why the sudden jump? Supply and demand. At present, there is a far greater demand for paper

products than supply, and the manufacturers are reaping the benefits. The low dollar (both U.S. and Canadian) means that European and Asian buyers, who still find the price of North American paper low, are purchasing much of the North American supply.

At the same time, there's a major shortage of wood. Governments are responding to environmental concerns, and, while this is good news for environmentalists, the shortage has gotten so drastic that mills in British Columbia are trying to buy wood from Alaska; some companies are searching areas already logged for leftovers, and other companies are talking to Agriculture Canada about pest-control rules applicable to wood from as far afield as Chile.

While Canada is feeling the pinch right now, it may be only a matter of time before the U.S. does, too. Although British Columbia has some of the most stringent logging rules in Canada, they lag behind the U.S. in several areas. In other words, logging is only going to get more restricted as time passes, decreasing the amount of available raw material, so high prices can be charged for the available wood products.

Then there's the Kobe catastrophe. Natural disasters such as the earthquake in Japan, or Hurricane Andrew, mean that there is much rebuilding to be done. Wood is in greater demand and less is available for the pulp and paper industry.

It's no wonder that the price of paperback books has risen.

The increased costs facing publishers also helps explain the disappearing midlist. It doesn't make much sense from an economic point of view



to publish lines that fail to meet an acceptable profit margin.

Or to take risks of any kind, lest those of you no longer in the midlist feel complacent. There's a noticeable trend to "big name" publishing, i.e. publishers sticking with a few tried-and-true authors. If you're one of them, great—but will print runs continue to be as large, or will a conservative economic mindset suggest smaller ones? Will the editors be amenable to letting an author try something new and/or different, or will caution rule? Will publishers try to increase sales per title by limiting the number of books released per author, thereby creating greater reader anticipation? Such considerations could affect all authors.

In the case of Harlequin Enterprises Ltd., the rising cost of newsprint will directly affect its parent company, Torstar. Indeed, although the *Toronto Star*, the newspaper published by Torstar Corp, has already switched to a smaller format, Torstar expects to be hit by an extra \$35 million in costs from the increase in the price of newsprint. Their profit margin is going to be affected, and it's not unlikely that Harlequin will be influenced, too.

## *Increased costs helps explain the disappearing midlist...*

Publishers are, not surprisingly, less than thrilled by this rise in their costs and have taken some action. At the annual convention of the pulp and paper industry in February, Stephen Golden, vice-president of New York Times Co., called a meeting of leading U.S. publishers and paper producers with a view to rebutting some of the charges made by environmentalists. While they claim that the intent of their joint working group is not to counterattack environmentalists, they feel it is pertinent to provide a more detailed view of the paper industry and its importance to the public.

And all was not rosy for the pulp and paper industry, despite their profits. Forest products industries were troubled with mechanical breakdowns and the necessity of switching from one type of burner (for sawdust) to another. Strikes have also played havoc with production. MacMillan Bloedel recently negotiated a contract that allows the company to use workers who are not affiliated with the building trades council in an effort to control construction costs. In return, MacBlo agreed to pay higher wages and benefits to open-shop contractors.

What will be the result of these rising prices, a trend expected to last until 1998, at least?

Publishers will probably seek other places to cut costs, including editorial, cover art, advertising, and advances to authors. They may grow more conservative in both their output and their purchasing decisions.

Cover prices will continue to rise as high as the market will bear, meaning higher royalty pay-

## *Cover prices will continue to rise...*

ments for authors, since they are based on cover price. Unfortunately, direct mail may become even more attractive, Zebra is now starting a book club, "Kensington Choice." And direct mail generally means lower royalty rates.

There doesn't seem to be much that can be done about this, unless we want to go back to the bad old days of clear-cutting.

Or unless somebody comes up with a viable and cost-effective way to recycle stripped books.

*Margaret's next book will be The Welshman's Way, a Harlequin Historical, in December.*

**Ed. Note:** A seedling of hope among the dead stumps—International Paper Company is bringing a new papermaking machine online by early summer. The new machine will be capable of producing 370,000 tons/year, and the additional output is expected to guarantee supplies of printing papers and may possibly begin reversing the rise in prices.

## **People's Choice**

NINC member Clive Cussler has long been promoting the idea of a People's Choice Book Award. Similar to those given to movie and TV stars, the awards would go to writers of popular fiction, as opposed to the awards now given only to literary fiction which few actually read. Clive has found a production company willing to bring the project to fruition and asked NINC to endorse the idea. He already has received endorsements from most of the other major writers' organizations, and NINC will be adding theirs at the next Board meeting.



## Dinner Speaker Confirmed

**H**ollywood story consultant, author, and lecturer Christopher Vogler has been confirmed as our dinner speaker at the 1995 NINC Conference in Denver. As story consultant to Walt Disney Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Warner Brothers, and Twentieth Century Fox, Vogler has advised on films including *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *The Color of Money*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and many others. "A Practical Guide to The Hero With A Thousand Faces," an article on the mythological patterns in movies, became required reading at a number of studios.

Vogler's book, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*, won the 1994 Kraszna-Krausz book award in England for the "best book on the moving image." A specialist in myth and fairy tales, he was consultant to Walt Disney Imagineering, designing a program of lectures and seminars for their writing staff. Vogler holds a Master's Degree from USC School of Cinema and Bachelor's Degree from University of Missouri School of Journalism. He will speak after dinner and will also conduct an afternoon session at the conference.

We'll keep you posted on other panels as they are finalized. Editors were invited last month, so as our confirmed list rolls in, we will publish it here. Plan to meet with the editor of your choice, or chat casually with editors at one of the social hours we are planning.

For those who like to combine promotional opportunities with conferencing, you will be happy to know that the usual Thursday night opening event will be a cocktail buffet for us and major booksellers, distributors, and sales reps from the New York offices of our publishing houses in town for the Rocky Mountain Book Festival.

The Rocky Mountain Book Festival is gaining national recognition—last year's attendance was equal to last year's ABA attendance and RMBF attendees actually read our books—but if you want to make sure your house knows about the Festival, contact Patty Gardner Evans for an information packet you can send on. In addition, two booksigning events have been organized for us that will receive wide publicity. Details will follow next month.

And, just in case anyone is interested, the Denver Broncos will be at home, playing the Raiders Monday night, October 16. Be sure to mark your calendar and plan to attend NINC October 12-15.

— Patricia Werner

### Coming Attractions

- ☐ Research bibliography from amoebae to women's—and men's—underwear
- ☐ Science the easy way
- ☐ Home office tips and tax breaks
- ☐ Keeping the (writing) spark alive when the honeymoon's over

President Bill Bernhardt has a great letter to send out, inviting potential members to join NINC. The problem is he isn't getting enough names to send it to. Please send names of potential members to the NINC P.O. Box address.

# Don't Wait for Your Ship To Come In—Swim Out to It!

By DEBORAH CAMP  
Advocacy Committee Chair

**T**he Advocacy Committee is off and running and you need to be a part of it.

What is the Advocacy Committee you ask? You mean you've never served on it, utilized it, or even posed questions to it? For shame! The Advocacy Committee is where things happen—it's where all the movin' and shakin' goes on. It's where cages are rattled and brains are picked. In short, it's where you are needed and wanted.

If you are feeling left out or distanced from Novelists, Inc., this is where you can get back into the swim of things. In the next issue of *Novelists' Ink*, I will make an important call-to-arms to which I hope at least half of the total membership will respond. Am I reaching for the stars and expecting miracles? You bet I am! I'm betting you'll come through for me, for you, for all of us.

The Advocacy Committee's purpose is simple: To Advocate for the Membership. The committee has decided to concentrate its efforts this year on getting a handle on some vital statistics. We need to know exactly where we stand in a couple of areas: How many retail sales are we losing in used books stores through the rental of early shipment series books and through the rental of hardback novels and ARCs? And are all genres being fairly represented in the new "super" book stores springing up all over the country? These are

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At the May Board meeting, it was decided to spend part of the Author Coalition money on payment upon publication for lead articles for the newsletter. Beginning with the June issue, NINC members who write a lead article will receive \$150 as partial compensation for taking time away from their own career to help ours. There are generally two lead articles of 2000-3000 words per issue. Send your ideas and proposals to the Editor.

vital questions, and next month I'll ask you to help us obtain the answers to them.

As for now, you can do a couple of things to help yourself. First, may I suggest that you list the 800 numbers of mail order book warehouses in all your publicity or mailings to your readers? Places such as Bookrak and Manderley offer wide selections of titles, and books ordered through them pay the author *full retail royalties*. If you would like the 800 numbers of these and can't find them, write or fax me and I'll get them to you. Another plus for this type of service is that the customer may select those titles he/she wants instead of simply taking the entire line. My own readers have sent thank you notes to me for providing these numbers on my mail-outs.

You can also help yourself right now by thinking of the Advocacy Committee as your personal hot line. If you have heard of questionable agent practices, want to lodge a complaint against an agent, have troubles with editors, odd royalty statements, or any other "red flag" area that concerns you, then please write to the Novelists, Inc. post office box and direct the letter to my attention. My committee will look into each and every issue and get back to you.

Also, if you are simply *dying* to help us even more, get into the trenches with us. Our foxhole is friendly and feisty and we'll be glad to have you join us. Fax or write me to volunteer.

Deborah Camp, P. O. Box 14324, Tulsa OK 74159-0324. Fax 918-592-0882, 11 a.m. until midnight, E-mail d.camp@GENIE.geis.com

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## 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

Annegret (Anne) Hansen (*Anne Peters*), Newcastle WA  
Shirley T. Hailstock, Plainsboro NJ



## EAST OF THE HUDSON

### So What Else is New?

Since last we met, the Authors Guild has surveyed its 7,000 members. (Actually, their membership isn't really that large, since they carry members for a year or two, even when they don't renew.)

The 1,300 Guilders who replied must not be the sorts of writers I know because only 17 percent said they were so unhappy that they wanted to leave their present publishers. Presumably, that means 83 percent are happy and would reenlist.

Funny, but close to 83 percent of the writers I know are mad as hell and would leave their publishers in a hot minute, given a real alternative. The problem is that there's no place to go that looks much better.

That's one of the real dangers in this publishing climate. We are headed for a situation where authors of all sorts will have about as many choices as your typical category romance author: "Write for us or don't write at all." The corporate publisher would like that, but the rest of the world would be the poorer for it.

### The Tail and the Dog

Seagram Co. and its CEO, Edgar Bronfman Jr., plunked down \$4.7 billion for controlling interest in MCA, the entertainment conglomerate purchased five

years ago by the Japanese Matsushita Electric Co.

There was lots of media buzz about the transaction, lots of speculation about whether the Japanese were taking a big loss, lots of talk about the handsome young Bronfman and his love of Hollywood. To me, though, the crazy thing was that in all the coverage, there was virtually no mention of the fate of Putnam, MCA's book-publishing arm.

Putnam is one of the best commercial publishers in the country, yet it was clearly an appendage in the deal. True, Putnam has annual sales in the vicinity of \$250 million, which makes it about as big as the loss on the next Kevin Costner film, but surely Putnam's involvement was worthy of mention.

As the smoke began to clear after the wheeling and dealing, Putnam chairman Phyllis Grann issued a statement saying the firm expected to continue to be part of MCA.

Perhaps prophetically, Bronfman did not join in Grann's statement.

Stay tuned for further developments, but if manuscript response times begin to slow down at Putnam and Berkley, as though the publishers were marching in place, you'll have heard it here first.

### Bookstores and Superstores

Kmart is in the process of spinning off Borders, the book superstore chain, as a separate entity. The public stock offering hasn't drawn as much attention as

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## POINT/ COUNTERPOINT

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*Each month features a new POINT. Agreements and disagreements—the Counterpoint—will be published two months later to allow everyone time to respond. Points are always published anonymously to allow members to bring up controversial issues related to the writing industry without concern.*

In a recent *Publishers Weekly*, Michael Chabon, the author of *Wonder Boys*, advised not taking advances on books because they put too much pressure on you. My immediate reaction was, "You're nuts!" but after I thought about it, I'm not so sure he's not

right—and not just because not taking an advance can take the pressure off. I should add that Chabon's and my health are fine, so the uncertainty that one may not be physically able to complete a book on time is not an issue. The pressure to make a deadline is a killer sometimes, and I'm sure I would turn in a better book if I could take the time I want. My writing income isn't "pin money" so I'd be motivated without deadlines looming over me.

Taking no advance might also make it possible to get the publisher to put the upfront money into promotion, instead. I think Chabon may be on to something.



## EAST OF THE HUDSON

Barnes & Noble did when it went public, but amidst all the public disclosures involved in the Borders stock offering was this:

Every new Borders superstore involves an investment of \$2.6 million. Of that figure, \$1.6 million is for capital expenditures, \$800,000 in inventory, and \$200,000 in preopening costs.

No wonder independent bookstores shudder at the thought of going head-to-head with a superstore. I don't know of a dozen independent bookstores in the country that have \$800,000 in inventory, much less the rest of the investment a superstore represents.

I spend a great deal of money on books every year, as do most writers, and I can tell you that I split my expenditures among independents, chains, and superstores. I even spend money in used books stores, though some of my NINC colleagues shudder at that thought.

As a writer, I like all kinds of booksellers and I feel for the independents. The best of them are as dedicated as we are to the book craft. But lots of the independents don't carry my books; some because they don't want to and some because they can't afford to. Almost none of the independents carry romance, which has a hefty market share of the consumer book dollar.

As a consumer, I love to browse for books I don't know exist until I see them on the shelf, so if I have a choice between going to a store with \$800,000 worth of inventory and one whose shelves are nearly bare because the owner is on credit-hold with all the publishers in New York, I know where I'm going to end up.

That may be heresy, but I've been burned at the stake before. What does anyone else think?

### Critics

The National Book Critics Circle passed out its annual awards this year. Not one of the prizes went to a member of Novelists, Inc.

I suppose I should be upset, but I'm not.

### Editors

From *100 Leo's: The Wit and Wisdom of Leo Burnett*, the following wisdom about the advertising business:

"I have learned that any fool can write a bad ad, but it takes a real genius to keep his hands off a good one."

That applies to other word crafts, too, Leo.

### Changing Times

Anybody who published with Doubleday in the 1980s knew the company was in real trouble. There were still white-coated black servants in the executive dining room, lots of midlist literary fiction, and a great many many more misses than hits.

Then came Nancy Evans, who treated the operation like one big finishing school for Fairfield County, CT debutantes. Hers was one of the most disastrous reigns in recent publishing history. Lots of writers, including your present correspondent, were swept out with the debris.

But a measure of Doubleday's rebound came in the recent elevation of Steve Rubin, president and publisher for five years, to the newly created position of chairman and CEO of the international division of Bantam/Doubleday/Dell. The promotion came as a reward for Rubin's work in raising the company from the →

### Such a Deal

*Publishers Weekly* offers a group subscriber rate that is a considerable savings over the regular rate. If eleven or more NINC members sign up, their subscription rate will be \$109/year instead of \$139/year. (Canadian subscribers cannot participate at this time, unfortunately.) Those of you with degrees in math will instantly see that the \$30 savings pays more than half of your yearly NINC dues. Both current subscribers and new subscribers receive the group rate when they renew or first subscribe, and JoAnn Ross has offered to handle the paperwork. Current subscribers should send a photocopy of a mailing label and new subscribers should send their name, address—with 9-digit zip code, and check for \$109 to JoAnn at 43 E. Boca Raton, Phoenix AZ 85022-4713. The cutoff date for taking advantage of this deal is July 1.



## EAST OF THE HUDSON

(Continued from page 13)

rubble heap to respectability.

What was the real difference between the Doubleday of 1989 and today?

Does the name "John Grisham" strike a familiar note? Doubleday has had some other hits, but no single writer in the world can rival the Mississippi lawyer's impact on an international conglomerate's bottom line.

### More Critics

Losts of us, myself included, have wondered what it takes to get a rave review for a romance in *Publishers Weekly*. From the April 17 issue comes one answer:

"With a delicate but assured touch, (Jax Peters) Lowell's poignant first novel explores the meaning of love, family, and identity. Theo Bouvier is a successful New York caterer; Claire Hirsh is a highly acclaimed photographer. When they fall in love, all that remains to complete their happiness is the child Claire desperately wants. This is a bit of a problem since both Theo and Claire are women, but they embark on a careful, gently hilarious search for a father." Now,

all you have to do is try to get that plot summary past your Silhouette Special Edition editor....

### Agents

You can't let up for a minute in this business. Bury your head in the computer long enough to write a single book and when you come out, you discover that somebody's devised a whole new set of rules.

First, there's the "moral rights" clause that seems to have popped up as innocently as a gopher in a garden patch in the new Harlequin boilerplate contract. (See box below)

Then there's the new wrinkle I'm told has been introduced into the agency agreements of some New York literary reps. *It gives the agent a claim to a commission on a writer's option book with a publisher, even if the writer has changed representation in the interim.*

There may be some rationale for such a claim. Then, again, it may simply be a club to keep an author from changing agents. Whichever, as with the Harlequin boilerplate, writers need to be aware that such terms are not standard in the business. If presented with such rules changes, ask for the justification. Then agree or disagree, sign or don't sign. Every agreement and contract in the world involves two parties, not one.

### ....Breaking News....

A "moral rights clause" has begun appearing in Harlequin/Silhouette/Mills and Boon contracts. NINC has commissioned a formal opinion by a well-known literary lawyer on the clause and the implications of waiving it, as Harlequin requests, which will appear in the next issue. The three informal legal opinions we have now advise that waiving the right is not in an author's best interest, counter to an explanation from Harlequin's legal department. The best advice is to wait until next month's issue before you make up your mind.

### Winners and Sinners

If memory serves, *PW* was a little late this year in its annual report on books that made best-seller lists and books that did not. That feature, source of so much envy and cruel pleasure, usually runs in January but this year's didn't come until late March.

The Augean task of compiling and comparing sales numbers results can numb your mind if you try to read it all at once, but a couple of the figures are interesting.

First, there were 17 books that sold more than one million copies, hardback. But, as *PW* noted, "In



# EAST OF THE HUDSON

fiction, the name of the game is the name. A newcomer has almost no chance of winning...."

On the other hand, brand-names don't always get the job done. Among the year's biggest losers were books by Roseanne, Burt Reynolds, William Shatner, and Marlon Brando. Even Larry McMurtry busted out, writing with his lady friend, Diana Ossana.

There were lots of NINCers on the one million-plus paperback bestseller list, including Jayne Krentz as herself and Amanda Quick, Catherine Coulter, Nora Roberts, Julie Garwood, and Sandra Brown, all of them with two books apiece. That's the kind of consistency we admire.

One of the hidden questions in the numbers, though, had to do with the large and increasing numbers of books which reported very strong sales but did not make *PW*'s annual bestseller lists. This was particularly evident in hardback fiction, where a number of genre books, particularly romances, sold extremely well but didn't make an impression on the list.

An explanation is that such books sold steadily but not fast enough to fight their way into prominence in any particular week. Given the rate of sale for writers like Jayne Krentz and other romance writers, that seems unlikely.

There's another possibility, one that I know bothers the compilers of bestseller figures. They have begun to suspect that they may well not be counting sales in all the right places.

Nontraditional booksellers—discount clubs, grocery stores and the like—are retailing increasingly large numbers of some books, yet those sales may not be tracked by the traditional bestseller lists. That's particularly true of some of the best-known and most powerful bestseller lists, which are heavily and perhaps unfairly weighted in behalf of traditional (read independent) bookstores, which typically don't stock much commercial fiction.

Nobody knows for sure what's going on but everyone is coming to the conclusion that the book business is changing. Stay tuned.

## The Reason We Write

Sometimes the business part of this job gets to every writer. So, I'll leave you with something a little

more fanciful. The other day, aboard a British Columbia passenger ferry bound for Vancouver Island, I picked up a discarded newspaper and encountered a column by a soulmate, one Barry Broadfoot of Nanaimo, B.C.

Broadfoot has written 13 books, none of which I have read, but I like him already. Of our craft, he says:

"What a horrendous game. Where are the rewards? Most of those in publishing make coolie wages without the bowl of rice thrown in. How many successful writers of fiction even make a bare living? If time was money, who would work for 45 cents an hour? How many poets make a living? None really, not even our famous and most self-serving ones."

So why do it? Broadfoot provides an answer. "Writers write," he says. They have no choice.

"You'll have that love of words or you won't. A passage you read will make you cry. Don't be ashamed of those tears. You've got to look at the world around you, driving down the highway and seeing smoke coming from a lonely old cabin and wonder, 'Who lives there? Why?' And as the miles roll under, your mind is still on the people inside. What are their hopes and dreams? Or is the old codger watching porno movies while drinking his own moonshine? Your mind has to be active. Sometimes you feel your head is going to fly off."

That, friends, is why we write. Not to become John Grisham, not even to have a million copies in print, but because we wouldn't be ourselves if we didn't put words on paper, scenes in chapters, a story between covers.

I've never met Mr. Broadfoot, but I'll buy him a drink, next time I'm in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

— Evan Maxwell

Don't forget to send in your submissions for *POINT/COUNTERPOINT*, Dispatches from the Front, Online and Are We There Yet?.



# Honors and Laurels

**M**embers of Novelists, Inc. regularly are finalists for awards from national genre writer and reader organizations. It would be nice to take notice of these honors, since readers and publishers certainly do, but one person cannot keep up with all the members who are nominated for Edgars, Dilys, Macavitys, Anthonys, Shamuses, Agathas, Hammetts, and Nero Wolfs—and that's just the mystery genre awards.

Then there are the Newberys, Nebulas, Hugos, RITAs, to mention only a few of the young adult, science fiction, fantasy, and romance laurels. Please mail or fax appropriate finalist lists for announcement in *NINK* whenever you run across them.

◆ Carolyn Hart has been nominated for an Agatha for best mystery novel this year. Carolyn won the award last year.

◆ The following members are finalists for RITA and Romance Golden Choice and Lifetime Achievement Awards: Jill Barnett, Olga Bicos, Kim Ostrum Bush, Margaret Chittenden, Christina Dodd, Eileen Dreyer, Kathleen Eagle,

Diana Gabaldon, Patricia Gaffney, Kristin Hannah, Karen Harper, Tami Hoag, Julie Jay Kendall, Betina Krahn, Jayne Krentz, Susan Macias, Emilie Richard McGee, Kathleen Morgan, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Mary Jo Putney, Patricia Rice, Penny Richards, Nora Roberts, JoAnn Ross, Kathleen Gilles Seidel, Jennifer Smith, Susan Wiggs, and Cheryl Zach. Several members—Laura Kinsale, Anne Stuart Ohlrogge, Paula Detmer Riggs, and Jan Davis Smith—are double finalists, and one—Mary Balogh—is a triple finalist.

Apologies to anyone who was overlooked. Pseudonyms of members joining since the last roster was printed were not all available. A new roster, by the way, will be mailed out by August.

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.

*Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby*

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