

# Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 8, Number 8

August 1997

## *Security...A Writer's Peace of Mind*

By  
**CHRISTINE PACHECO**

**W**hile we as writers would like to believe we quietly toil in anonymity, away from the hustle and bustle of stardom, facts often prove otherwise. Most of us will never have a terrifying experience like Tabitha King, who found a stalker in her kitchen, but our careers as writers do open us to risk...sometimes in ways we might never suspect.

Author Sandra Hill shares the following frightening, ongoing experiences. In July of 1996, she began receiving obscene letters at intervals of about two months.

The sender types her address and prints it onto a piece of notebook paper, then cuts apart the letters and pastes them onto the envelope. Hill states that the print indicates a high quality computer printer.

There has been no return address, but the postmark indicates a local mailing from her hometown. While she states she has received no overt threats, there have been indirect threats in the "See you around the neighborhood" or "See you at the next game" variety, implying that the sender is watching her.

Hill says that there are misspellings in some of the words, an apparent attempt to lead her to believe the writer is illiterate. The quality of the printer, as well as punctuation and the correct spelling of other words contradicts that impression, however.

The most recent mailing had a postmark from a city about 200 miles away. "The address was also cut and pasted on the envelope, but it was a greeting card envelope. And inside was a greeting card with a message taped inside." After a vulgar sentence, the sender finishes with this vague

threat, "Been away for a while but I'll be back soon. A BIG FAN."

Two Silhouette Desire authors have received vulgar letters postmarked from Honolulu, Hawaii. Although the content is not threatening, it is graphic, and signed, "I'm Dreaming." As one author states, "It's just creepy."

That same author showed the mailing to a police officer friend who said there was nothing to worry about since the person wasn't asking anything of her—or threatening her. The language seems to indicate the sender is male, just as in the case of Hill's letters. The other author, not wanting her family to see the letter, immediately destroyed it.

It's not just having our addresses available in our books that makes us vulnerable. A magazine printed Melinda McRae's name and address along with her letter to the editor. She received a response from a guy who, "Was a guest of the state of Michigan," she says. "Even worse, his hometown was only twenty miles from here."

"Fan" mail that is not necessarily threatening or vulgar can still be disturbing.

Deborah Wood has her fan mail sent to her publisher. She received a letter from a fan who said she'd tried to get Wood's phone number and address so, "her aunt and uncle could drop by and say Hi." Wood notes that the aunt and uncle live more than a four hour drive away.

This loyal fan also accused Wood's editor (or someone else at the publishing house) of stealing a gift the fan had sent to Wood. Wood goes on to say that the item was lost in the mail, but expresses concern that the woman could easily do something very unpleasant.

Although she has never received much mail from prisoners, Robin Lee Hatcher once received a letter in which a prisoner offered to pay for her to come down and see him at Utah prison. She declined the

**Perhaps one of  
the best things  
we can do to  
protect ourselves  
is to preserve  
our privacy  
before the fact.**

### **Inside:**

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| <i>President's Column</i> .....   | 2  |
| <i>Letters to the Editor</i> .... | 3  |
| <i>Conference Update:</i>         |    |
| <i>Promise Kept</i> .....         | 9  |
| <i>AAR Elects</i> .....           | 9  |
| <i>Promotion on</i>               |    |
| <i>the Net</i> .....              | 10 |
| <i>Online</i> .....               | 13 |
| <i>East of the Hudson</i> ...     | 16 |

*(continued on page 4)*

## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

### Advisory Council

|                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Rebecca Brandewyne†  | Linda Barlow      |
| Janice Young Brooks† | Georgia Bockoven  |
| Jasmine Cresswell†   | Evan Maxwell      |
| Maggie Osborne†      | William Bernhardt |
| Marianne Shock†      |                   |

† Founder

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

### 1997 Board of Directors

#### PRESIDENT Victoria Thompson

563 56th Street  
Altoona PA 16602-1233  
Ph 814-942-2268 / Fax 814-946-4744  
E-mail: VESTinPA@aol.com

#### VICE PRESIDENT Steven Womack

2525 Forest View Drive  
Antioch TN 37013-1333  
Ph/Fax 615-367-2674  
E-mail: dfblooz@aol.com

#### SECRETARY Candace Schuler

7 Tenby Chase Drive  
Voorhees NJ 08043  
Ph/Fax 609-753-3484  
E-mail: Schuler 776@aol.com

#### TREASURER Phyllis DiFrancesco

27 Stonehenge Court  
Burr Ridge IL 60521  
Ph 630-325-1624 / Fax 630-325-1625  
E-mail: phyllisdifrancesco@prodigy.com

#### NEWSLETTER EDITOR Anne Holmberg

2372 Vintage Dr.  
Colorado Springs CO 80920-3834  
Ph 719-592-9460  
Fax 719-592-9460  
E-mail: anneholmberg@juno.com

#### ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

Janice Young Brooks  
Box 1112  
Mission KS 66222-0112  
E-mail: cozybooks@aol.com

#### CENTRAL COORDINATOR Randy Russell

Novelists, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1166  
Mission KS 66222-0166  
Ph/Fax 816-561-4524  
(Call before faxing)

NINC/NINK correspondence  
can also be sent to the e-mail address:  
ninc1989@aol.com

Web site: <http://www.ninc.com>

Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

Copyright ©1997 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

### "I Want the Dirt"

We frequently receive requests from members who, after reading our *Guide to Agents*, want to know why we don't publish a similar survey of our members for the agents they no longer employ. Everyone wants to know who got fired and what they did to deserve it. Naturally, I don't for a moment believe our members are interested in mere gossip. I know they only want to know which agents can't be trusted, don't do their job, lie to clients, steal their money, or whatever. Actually, we all *need* this information so we don't, out of ignorance, hire an agent who has been guilty of those things. And NINC would love to provide this information. Unfortunately we can't, for very compelling reasons, which I will now list:

1. *We might (and probably would) get sued.* If we published a document detailing reasons why our members shouldn't hire certain agents, those agents could, quite correctly, accuse us of restraint of trade and sue our pants off. They'd probably win, too, even if we only told the absolute truth about them. Even if NINC won such a lawsuit, we'd be dead broke after paying our legal fees. Your board does not feel this is a risk worth taking.

2. *We might not be accurate.* When I was a newbie, I heard a lot of horror stories about a lot of agents. "Agent XYZ almost ruined my career!" was a common one. And then I began to learn that for every agent—no matter how reputable or successful or honest, clean, reverent, thrifty, or brave—there was an equal and opposite horror story about how he almost ruined somebody's career or lied to them or failed to submit their material adequately or...well, you name it.

In this business, things that happen are often a matter of interpretation. And let's face it, when an author's career is suffering a bad patch, the agent is frequently the easiest person to blame. And fire. You can't fire your editor, after all. You can't fire yourself, either. Who's left? And such a firing must be justified by some transgression. So sometimes agents get the blame for things over which they had no control. And they get fired. And they get maligned by angry, bitter, and sometimes even mentally unstable authors.

The truth is, if NINC published a *Guide to Former Agents*, all the same agents who appear in our other *Guide* would probably be in it, too, with far less flattering descriptions. Probably those unflattering descriptions would be accurate according to the people who made them, but they might also not be accurate in terms of the agent's overall performance.

So, what can we do? We can do what we've already done, which is to list in our *Guide to Agents* writers who are willing to answer questions about their former agents. I, myself, have three former agents (although I hate admitting it because I think it sounds somehow promiscuous), and although I fired all of them, I have actually recommended some of them to others. In a couple cases, the agents were simply wrong for me at that stage in my career, but would be infinitely right for someone else. So if you're considering an agent, check with members who fired that agent, too. And remember what I said about there being a horror story for every agent. Then weigh the evidence and make your decision!

**This Month  
from the  
President:**

*Controversies  
...Why we do  
what we do...  
or not.*

---

*"...the agents were simply wrong for me at that stage in my career, but would be infinitely right for someone else...."*

---

### No Copying!

We have recently become aware of a situation in which a well-known, bestselling author has been accused of plagiarizing another well-known, bestselling author. Some of our members have asked why NINC hasn't yet taken a stand on this issue. There has even been some discussion of NINC's devising a Code of Ethics to address the subject. Please allow me to make these things clear:

1. As if this writing (early July), the author who was the victim of the alleged plagiarism has not yet requested any

action from NINC. If and when she does, we will most certainly consider what our role should/could be.

2. The board doesn't feel we need a Code of Ethics to address plagiarism. Plagiarism isn't just unethical, it's illegal. If a law doesn't prevent an author from stealing another's work, a Code of Ethics probably wouldn't either.

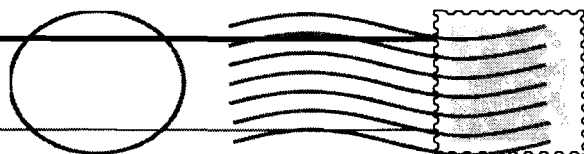
Do I have to say NINC strongly opposes plagiarism? We do. We also support any author who is the victim of plagiarism. We sincerely hope you already believed that.

— Victoria Thompson

---

## 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. Letters may be sent to the NINK editor via mail, fax, or e-mail. See masthead for addresses.

### Flood Libraries Need Flood of Funds

The Red River of the North along the borders of the Dakotas and Minnesota, and other northern rivers, have retreated back to their respective banks. Much of the damage they caused to lives and property remains. Since books are such a large part of my life, I was curious about the damage to area libraries.

According to the Minnesota Library Association Foundation, two public libraries in Minnesota were totally destroyed; one in East Grand Forks and one in Ada. A number of school libraries in the state were destroyed or damaged. The people of Minnesota have generously donated used books to begin rebuilding the libraries' resources.

The damaged libraries are not requesting more donations of books at this time, as finding storage while the buildings are cleaned, repaired, or replaced can be a problem.

However, if you would like to contribute money to help

repair/replace buildings or replace books, you may send your checks to:

Minnesota Library Association Foundation  
— Flood Fund  
2324 University Avenue  
108 MidTown Commons  
St. Paul, MN 55144

Other states and Canada were affected by this spring's flooding, too. And, of course, natural disasters have hit other areas of the nation—the devastating tornadoes in the western states and flooding in other parts of the country come to mind. If you would like to find out if libraries in these areas have been damaged, and how you can help, contact the respective state library association. These are usually located in the state's capital city — call information. Or ask the librarian at your local public library for the state association's number and address.

— JoAnn A. Grote

*Ed. Note: Our intrepid publisher, Sandy Huseby, informs us that if you prefer to donate books, several libraries up and down the Red River Valley will be able to put them to use. Libraries such as the Grand Forks library, which did not lose their buildings, did lose significant quantities of books which were checked out when the floods struck.*

*Several community and school libraries in both Minnesota and North Dakota have been affected, including elementary and high school libraries. All contributions will be appreciated.*

*Books may be sent to Sandy Huseby, Coordinator, Prairie Writers Guild Book Drive, P.O. Box 1726, Fargo ND 58107.*

# Security for Writers

*(Continued from page 1)*

invitation. Hatcher adds, "One never knows who the crackpots are. It isn't just writers who must be more careful these days, but because we romance writers deal with emotions in our writing, we tend to make our readers feel that they are our friends, and that can make us more vulnerable."

C.F. David of *In A Word Handwriting Analysis* offers the following information that may be useful if you have received an unpleasant letter. He stresses that the signs mentioned must be predominant in a person's handwriting. He also cautioned that we should not make judgments ourselves.

"Muddy writing, with loops and circles filled in with ink means the individual has strong sensual feelings. If the letters are leaning sharply to the left, these feelings are held tightly inside. If for any reason they come out, it will be with great force."

He also provides the following details, "Sharp changes in pen pressure from light to hard and back again—emotionally unstable; letters crushed and cramped, misformed—repression of feelings; extreme variety of slant left, to vertical, to right within one word—bi-polar; T-bars hooked, clubbed, slanting downward—internal turmoil.

"No margins, writing in margins, edge of paper—obsessive-compulsive; large writing—extravagance; wide spaced t legs—stubborn; downward pointing t-bars—aggression; large loops in t-stems—hypersensitive; clubbed t-bars (left to right, heavy ends right side)—cruelty, temper; heavy I dot—aggression; bent upper loop in lower case l's—emotional distortion.

"Angular loops (upper or lower)—aggression, rigid; lower loops involved with the next line—mental confusion; slurred writing—evasiveness; break in bottom of o's and a's—dishonest (embezzlers usually have this); and wide spaces between words, capitals in the middle of words and sentences—paranoia."

Unwelcome attention can come from other places, too. A member has been harassed online by someone she wouldn't necessarily consider a "fan." The person e-mails the member, accusing her of being someone named "Ed."

Author Jennifer Dunne, at that time "a newbie net user," had posted a synopsis of a work in progress on a mailing list. "That work later became a Golden Heart finalist, and I posted my good news (but not to the list server where the synopsis had been posted).

"I received an unsigned e-mail from someone

whose e-mail address I didn't recognize, saying, among other things, that if my book was published, I'd be cheating any reader who purchased it expecting a good story, and that the only way I could possibly have reached finalist status was by sleeping with the judges (which, considering the judges were all women, added insult to insult)."

Dunne finished with this caution to, "Remind people that with unrestricted list servers...you never know who may be lurking and reading your post."

## What to do if you're receiving threatening mail or phone calls.

"Using the US Postal Service for illegal activities such as sending threats, etc., is a federal offense," says Officer Lynda Cooper of the Wheat Ridge, Colorado police department. If you do receive threatening or obscene mail, Postmaster Carole Gurley advises, "Contact the Postal Inspector. Your local post office can give you the phone number for the Postal Inspection Service in your area." She adds that they'll need the actual letter and preferably the envelope.

Gurley and head clerk Dianna Kremheller also recommend contacting local law enforcement. Gurley stresses that the Post Office takes mail threats very seriously and added that Inspectors have a very high conviction rate once the person is found.

Sandy Emerson, an officer who worked for the county sheriff's department for 13 years and with the Department of Probation/Parole for eight, offers further details. He says, "First of all, suspicious packages and letters (especially oversized envelopes) with no return addresses, bizarrely addressed, or from anyone you don't know, should not be opened. Unfortunately there are kooks out there who may send small bombs to public figures (Yes, you are one!), which can maim or kill. If you suspect this, immediately contact the local police and the US Postal Service. Better to feel a bit silly than the alternative.

"Threatening mail should be documented as to nature of the threat, time of receipt, post office, etc. Avoid touching the media as much as possible as evidence can be collected from it. Report to the police and the Postal Service. Do not reply!" Adds Officer Cooper, "Paper is a wonderful medium to hold latent fingerprints and other physical evidence. Always be vigilant about keeping evidence pure for the investigators."

Sandra Hill waited to contact her local police until she "received a short, one-sentence message on my answering machine last November, stating

**If you are using a P.O. Box for business, i.e., sending out book marks, flyers, etc., the Post Office is legally bound to release your home telephone number and address to anyone who asks for that information, even if you have checked the square indicating you are not using the box for business purposes.**

what he'd like to do to me (vulgarism). His voice sounded drunk. It sounded like loud noise in the background, such as a bar. But who can say for sure?"

She notes that the police took all the information and took the threat seriously. "But there's not a thing they can do about it, barring a suspicious character in the area with whom they could compare fingerprints. I have not touched the inside of the letters since the first one in order to preserve fingerprints, if there are any. Police have taken all the originals. They advise me to take security precautions around my home."

Emerson recommends that the police be contacted if an author is being harassed via telephone. "Many states have statutes against this, although they are difficult to enforce if the perp can't be identified. Also notify your telephone company and document all calls as to time and content of the call. Listen for indicators such as background noises which might identify the place the call is coming from. Also pay attention to the voice to determine sex, regional accents, age, etc. Every bit of information is useful."

He adds, "Caller ID is helpful and relatively inexpensive." Sandra Hill has learned that "There is a service available through the phone company which can trace calls, even blocked ones, but you have to be able to call the phone company within a half hour of the call. So if I wasn't at home when the call came, it would serve no purpose."

Officer Cooper provides the following information: "Three types of calls are considered by US West (and most phone companies) to be "annoyance phone calls." They are:

1) *Threatening calls*. When a caller threatens you with physical abuse or property damage. Such calls may include threats of murder/assault, kidnapping, robbery, burglary, bomb threats, etc. These calls may require police intervention! To deal with them, first, hang up and make sure the connection is broken. Next, pick up the phone again and dial star (\*) 57 to activate an automatic call trace, or dial 1157 on a rotary phone. [Ed. note: check with your local phone company on all security issues. Call trace codes, etc., may vary from company to company.] If US West is able to get a good trace on the call origin, an automated message will instruct you to call the police. Jot down the time of the call, then call your local police non-emergency number (or 911 if you feel you are in immediate danger).

2) *Abusive, harassing, or obscene calls*, during which the caller's intent is to anger or terrify you through his language. When you receive these calls, it is imperative to take control of the call immediately by showing no emotion. As soon as you recognize the call as harassing, hang up immediately—DON'T slam the phone down. This reaction is a thrill to many perpetrators. If they call back, don't pick up the phone. You might consider unplugging your phone for awhile. If the calls persist, consider changing your phone number, or use the \*57 technique to trace the origin and pursue harassment charges with your local police department.

3) *Nuisance calls*. Prank calls designed specifically to irritate you, such as constant or frequent hang-up calls.

(Surprisingly, experience has shown that nuisance calls don't always come from strangers, but from acquaintances and business associates, too). Pranks are usually random, and if you don't give the caller any satisfaction by reacting, they'll move on to the next number. Anonymous calls during which the caller tries to glean information from you can be dangerous to you *and* to your financial security. Use your phone on your *own* terms. If someone asks, "Who is this?" Ask them, "Whom did you call?" If the call is not legitimate, the question will normally end the inquiry. *Make sure* you instruct your children about this, too.

## **Volunteering can also be a security risk to authors.**

Pamela Johnson, writing as Pamela Dalton, has taken out insurance that covers her volunteer activities. Johnson states, "One concern in Wisconsin has been when our addresses, which are listed in chapter newsletters, have found their way into the hands of prisoners in the state or federal prisons."

Johnson heartily sympathizes with the officers in the Washington, D.C. RWA chapter who have been sued. When she was president of a local chapter, she feared the same thing might happen to her. Johnson took out the insurance as protection for her family's assets after she encountered problems with a fellow officer.

Although she didn't get sued, she kept the insurance and was glad she did. "Later on," Johnson adds, "I was appointed chairperson of one of the chapter's committees, and I didn't even know I'd said yes."

Another member also expresses concerns about her phone number being public because of her RWA volunteer dealings, stating, "Haven't we all gotten strange calls from members we don't know, wanting to chat, wanting inside info, wanting to know if we can recommend them to our agent and editor?"

Promotion and publicity that brings us in contact with the public opens another opportunity for possible problems. Member Nora Roberts reports that, "All in all, the public appearances I do go pretty well. People are basically polite, friendly." Yet even she had an unpleasant experience at a book signing last fall. "This old woman in one of those little motor carts comes by and points at *Born In Shame*. She called it a filthy book. Went on and on. How could I write such filth? Drew a bit of a crowd. She was horrible.

"After trying to maintain that polite author mode, I gave it up. Particularly when she leaned forward, eyes gleaming, and told me she'd burned it. Burned the book. I leaned forward, eyes gleaming, and called her a Nazi. She finally left."

At a book signing in April, Christie Ridgway was approached by a man in his 40s who struck up a conversation about some flowers on the table. He went on to say that he'd seen her picture in the local newspaper and that she looked like a single lady. She responded that she was a mom with two kids and that she'd been married for >>>

# Security for Writers

(Continued from page 5)

12 years. "Then he wants to know if my book will help his love life."

Ridgway adds that, "A few minutes later, he's back, having bought my book. Then he tells me he wants to show me something, and pulls a ring box out of his pocket. He opens it with a flourish. Inside is a jeweled ring." The man told her he was going on a date that night and wondered what advice she had for him.

"The upshot is, this guy was major creepy." Three weeks later, she read in the paper that the man lost his license to practice psychology because of billing fraud and because he had a personality disorder that made him unable to do his job. "I no longer believe all publicity is good publicity," Ridgway states.

**When leaving book signings ...it is a huge and dangerous misconception that you can only be victimized at night....Be aware of your surroundings as you leave, and never, ever, ever walk out to your car overloaded with packages, bags, boxes of books, etc. If your arms are full, you are vulnerable.**

**There are some steps authors can take to protect themselves, however, and minimize, if not completely eliminate risks.**

*Post Office Boxes and other addresses:* Many authors use a Post Office Box rather than their home address as a form of protection. According to Eastlake, Colorado Postmaster Carole Gurley, this may not keep authors as safe as they believe.

If you are using a Post Office Box for business, i.e. sending out book marks, flyers, etc., the Post Office is legally bound to release your home telephone number and address to anyone who asks for that information, even if you have checked the square indicating you are not using the box for business purposes.

However, a representative from Mail Boxes, Etc. indicates that it takes a court order for them to reveal actual addresses of box holders. While private shipping stores may cost more, some may feel it is a worthwhile investment.

"I don't use my home address or a P.O. Box," says Nora Roberts. "I use my publisher or my publicist's return address." Other authors have chosen to do the same.

Susan Wiggs uses a P.O. Box that is not in her own home town. "Mine is 'Rolling Bay, WA', which is not on any map but is a tiny substation on the island. I have a friend who lives here whose P.O. Box is in California! They just forward everything once a week."

Colleen Faulkner uses her husband's office building for fan correspondence and maintains an unlisted phone number. "The older I get, the more public book signings I attend, the more I

realize that there are a lot of nuts out there and I don't want my family exposed to that." Sandra Marton uses a P.O. Box and keeps her telephone number unlisted, "Both for security's sake."

Perhaps one of the best things we can do to protect ourselves is to preserve our privacy before the fact.

*Bios:* Wiggs offers this advice, "Never put your hometown in a bio. I say 'Wiggs lives on an island in Puget Sound.'" Ridgway takes similar precautions, saying she lives in Southern California. If she's being interviewed by a local paper, she doesn't state where in the county she's from. She also will not use her children's names in any bio information and, "From now on, will extend that to my husband's first name."

*When you're a volunteer:* Ridgway had her name removed from her RWA chapter's roster. After the incident at the bookstore, the chapter also included a note on the first page saying that addresses and phone numbers were not to be given to anyone outside of the chapter. "The protocol is, if you want to connect someone (to say, a reporter) that you give the chapter member the reporter's number and the author can call the reporter back."

*Pseudonyms:* Security from fans is not the only reason to preserve anonymity. Sandra Marton chose a pseudonym when she first contracted with Harlequin/Mills and Boon 14 years ago. "People assume it was Harlequin's idea but it wasn't; in fact, my then-editor asked me why I didn't want my real name used. I explained that I'd spent a couple of years as an elected member of the Board of Education in the town where I then lived. We'd had some tough issues on the table—sex ed, a Holocaust curriculum—and I'd been treated to one too many terrifying phone calls for me to give out personal information ever again. I know using the P.O. Box and keeping my phone number unlisted are not foolproof measures of security, but they do give me some sense of anonymity and, therefore peace of mind."

"In the early days I was not so careful, but I learned quickly," says Amanda Scott. "The crowning moment came when I told a reporter my full name but asked that he not print it, since—for reasons of both business and privacy concerns—I preferred to keep the focus of such interviews on Amanda Scott, the writer. He promised he would not reveal it, then began his article with my husband's name..."

The reporter devoted two paragraphs to the fact he had "discovered" she did not write under her "real" name and that she asked him not to

publish her married name. Furthermore, he printed her name at least three times in the course of the article.

Ridgway confesses that her experience, "Has made me rethink the issue of the pseudonym (that I control). I almost wish I hadn't used my own name."

*Phone numbers:* Melinda McRae "Made a conscious decision to write under my own name, which I think means you have to be a tiny bit careful. I'm not listed in the phone book—my husband is, but since we have different names, it's like being unlisted." Robin Lee Hatcher has her address listed as "Boise" in the telephone directory, but adds, "I don't mind getting calls."

Mary Jo Putney went to an unlisted number when she moved three years ago. "While security is in the back of my mind, emotionally I do this as much or more for privacy, which is more likely to be assaulted than our physical security." Sherry-Ann Jacobs, who writes as Anna Jacobs, has her phone number in the book under her and her husband's names so it's obvious she doesn't live alone. Sandra Hill, however, never answers the phone herself. And she uses an answering machine to screen all calls.

*Internet:* As for the Internet, America Online allows a member to "block" e-mail from a specific user. While online, go into Parental Controls on the master account. The sender will receive a message to the effect of, "This member is not accepting e-mail from you." If you're receiving e-mail that's a concern, check with your ISP about what security measures they offer.

Ridgway pointed out, "I have a new worry...web pages. I don't have one, and just got a new computer with great Internet access. I started surfing around and visited a couple of friends' sites which included lovely pictures of them and quite specific bio information. It worries me."

In her current special assignment, Officer Lynda Cooper is responsible for business and neighborhood crime prevention training. She frequently speaks on personal safety issues for women and suggests, "Since most authors have their full names online, don't give the weirdos out there anything more than that."

"Refrain from including your date of birth, the city in which you reside, your marital status, or anything else out there that some psycho might latch onto. People are terribly easy to find these days. Just be smart about what you put out there. Remember, sometimes we feel cozy and safe on a board, but we're not!

"Never agree to meet anyone you meet online in person. And if some guy comes to your book signing and says he chatted with you online, worry. And, of course, alert the store manager and up your security."

*When traveling:* Robin Lee Hatcher, via her flight attendant daughter, gives these tips for tour safety, specifically in hotels. "When you arrive at your room, brace the door open with your suitcase and, before letting it close, check the closet and the shower and under the bed if the mattress isn't on a pedestal. Intruders are known to slip in while the maid is cleaning and hide in these places, then wait for the unsuspecting woman.

"Also be cautious what you say and to whom so that you

don't reveal that you are traveling alone. Have your key ready before you start down the hallway. If your instincts tell you not to get on an elevator with someone, turn around and go back to the desk and wait. You don't have to live in fear, but in today's world, you need to have common sense and be cautious."

Officer Emerson offers additional advice for traveling and book signings: "Make friends! It's cheap, effective, and fun! Try to go places in groups if possible. If you must travel alone, try to avoid places or situations where your safety or property could be compromised.

"Give someone you trust your itinerary and check in at pre-arranged times. Instruct the friend to report any missed contacts to police in both your home area and the area where you are traveling. Your friend should have a full description of you and any vehicle you may be using."

He adds, "Don't keep all your money or credit cards in one place. Don't wear ostentatious jewelry or obviously expensive clothing on the street. Try not to carry too much money or identification on your person. If you are robbed, give up what you have on you quickly. Do not attempt to resist a robber unless life-threatening physical injury is imminent. Concentrate on acquiring a good description of the person."

"Trust your instincts," says Officer Cooper. "When in the hotel, don't open the door to anyone for whom you didn't specifically call, even if they identify themselves as a hotel employee, even if you recognize them as a hotel employee you met earlier! Remember, perpetrators have to work somewhere, too.

"Another tip is, know where you are going and how to get there before you leave your room. Don't wander around a strange city looking lost. Women who are so focused on reading maps and street signs serve themselves up as ready victims. When you are walking around, look people in the eye. Let them know you are aware they're near you, and that you aren't afraid to look at them. Remember what they look like. If you look like a victim, you are increasing your chances of becoming one."

Officer Cooper continues, "Be cognizant of the fact perpetrators may use friendly questions about your books in order to get you off-guard and glean information about you that can put you at risk, such as your hotel/room, your itinerary, etc. Also, try to remember people you have seen. If the same guy (or woman) keeps showing up at your signing, the hotel restaurant, etc., keep your defenses up."

When leaving book signings "First of all, it is a huge and dangerous misconception that you can only be victimized at night," states Cooper. "These tips apply to leaving book signings—or anywhere else—at all times. Have an employee of the bookstore walk you to your car and wait with you until you are safely inside with the doors locked.

"If you are embarrassed to act so "paranoid," ask for help carrying your belongings to your car, then keep the person engaged in conversation while you get in the car and lock the doors. Keep in mind, this is not an unreasonable request, and if you are embarrassed, you need to get over it. Be aware of your surroundings as you leave, and >>>

# Security for Writers

(Continued from page 7)

never, ever, ever walk out to your car overloaded with packages, bags, boxes of books, etc. If your arms are full, you are vulnerable.

"Keep a mental picture of the people—especially men—who spoke to/watched/smiled at you during your signing. If you see them hanging around as you leave, don't leave alone, period. The hours of your signing will be well-posted, so if it seems too much like a coincidence, it probably is. If someone tries to engage you in friendly conversation—especially a man—don't let them. Pretend you left something in the bookstore, and go back for it. Then, alert the store manager, and have someone accompany you to your car.

"During your book signing, make sure your purse is secure—make sure! Your driver's license with address/hotel key/car key/etc. are all in there. Remember that. If you are so caught up in greeting your reverent readers and fans, it would be really easy for a perpetrator to snag your wallet and find out all kinds of things about you."

Officer Emerson offers a final word about contacting the police. "Having been there, I know that not all officers or departments treat reports or victims the same way. Unfortunately, some are less professional than others. You have the right to expect to be taken seriously! If you are dissatisfied with the response, ask to see a supervisor. Be persistent, but polite."

*If all else fails:* Sometimes our best efforts are not enough. In this case, Cooper recommends that if you think someone is following you, drive immediately to the local police station, park by the front doors, and lay on the horn until someone comes out. If that isn't an option, do the same thing at a well-populated public place, like a grocery store (bonus—they have security guards), convenience store, or gas station.

"In some states, there are problems with people rear-ending you just to get you to stop, then robbing or assaulting you once you do. If you get rear-ended and your instincts tell you this may be happening, keep driving until you get to a well-populated place before stopping. If it turns out to be a legitimate crash, then better safe than sorry. No police officer in his/her right mind will hold it against you if you tell them you kept driving because you are a woman alone, and you were in a deserted location when the crash happened.

"Now, let's say you are attacked/approached/grabbed from behind, despite all your careful planning. Here are my five tips:

1) *React immediately*, no matter what you're going to do. Don't waste precious moments thinking "Oh My God!" If you are going to scream, scream right away. Whatever you choose to do, and your instincts will tell you what you can do, react immediately.

2) *Fight back against the attack.* This doesn't necessarily mean physically fight, because sometimes you just can't or it wouldn't be advisable. But always "fight for your life," in the bigger sense. And along those lines,

3) *Never give up.* Never, no matter what, let your mind tell you, "this is it, I'm dead." If you are going to die, go down fighting. Never, ever give them that mental edge.

4) *Keep your head.* If you are panicky and weepy and hysterical, you are going to miss opportunities for escape. Do whatever you have to to keep your cool and figure your way out of this. Think of it as plotting.

5) *Remember everything.* Details about the suspect, his words, everything and anything that will help the police catch the scumbag after you get away. Notice the details that aren't easily changeable, like facial structure, identifying marks and tattoos, nationality (if you are certain, but don't guess), and other things. Remember where you came to on his chest, rather than estimating height. Short people tend to think everyone is tall, and tall people that everyone is short.

6) *When you get away, run toward safety, not just away from danger.* Think of all the bimbos on scary movies to remember this one. Run to a place you can get help, not into the creepy, dark boiler room of the hotel! And if you have been assaulted, don't shower or change/burn your clothes—don't even wash your hands or brush your teeth until the police have been called."

*A final word:* Perhaps the worst thing about any kind of harassment is the devastating affect on the victims. Sandra Hill reports being more cautious about locking doors and closing the blinds in her library if she's working late, and, "I look at friends and acquaintances suspiciously. I second-guess my writing, wondering if I might be doing something that would prompt these letters, almost like a rape victim wondering if she wore clothing that prompted the rape. I don't think I have."

She feels she's in a wait-and-see pattern. "I'm not frightened...yet. I'm not a psychologist and I'm not sure if these types of people progress to increasingly more daring activities if not caught. I suspect that is the case. This is what I envision as the next step. I believe he will enter my property...either our yard or the inside of my house when no one is home...then write me a letter letting me know he's done so. I have no sound reason for saying this...just my intuition."

Officer Cooper notes that, "No security measures are 100%, and if you are attacked or victimized, don't blame yourself. If a person is dead-set on going after you, they will, just like a burglar who is dead-set on getting into a house will maneuver around dogs, security systems, bars, and everything else. Don't fall into wondering if it was something you wrote in your book that set you up for this—that's not fair to you. The type of perpetrator who targets authors (or models or actresses or radio/TV personalities) does this regardless of what you write in your books.



And if you are the target of harassment/attack, it's okay and normal to experience post-traumatic symptoms. Get help, have a strong support system, and you will get through it!

Officer Emerson sums it all up by adding, "Personal security is not a matter of paranoia (although I have always said that a little paranoia is a good thing!). There are bad people in the world, but we shouldn't allow the fear of them to destroy our own enjoyment of our lives and careers! A few simple precautions such as those above will protect you from most trouble."

As the old saying goes, a ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. **NINK**

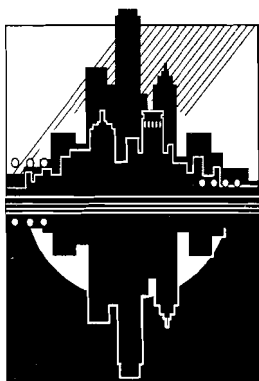
*Christine Pacheco writes for Silhouette Desire and, with a partner, for Silhouette Intimate Moments. Her upcoming releases are A Husband In Her Stocking, 12/97 Desire and One Night at a Time, Intimate Moments, w/a Christa Conan.*

*Ed. Note: Although this article has primarily addressed women, men should be aware that they are also at risk of harassing calls or letters, stalkers, or deranged fans, and that they, too, should be alert and take the appropriate precautions to protect themselves and their families.*

## AAR Announces New President

The Board of Directors of the Association of Authors' Representatives met Tuesday, June 17, to elect new officers for 1997-98. Virginia Barber was unanimously elected President of the organization. This is the first time a woman has been President of the AAR. Richard Parks will continue as Vice-President of the Literary Branch, Barbara Hogenson as Vice-President of the Dramatic Branch, Maria Carvainis as Treasurer, and Vicky Bijur as Secretary.

Donald Maass has just joined the Board. The other directors are Judy Boals, Sarah Douglas, Henry Dunow, Diana Finch, Maxine Groffsky, and Jean Naggar. Ken Norwick is the Literary Counsel to the AAR, and Elliot Brown serves as Dramatic Counsel.



## PROMISES TO KEEP

As you may have noticed upon reading your conference brochure

(which I believe should have arrived by now), I kept my promise and got you a new keynote speaker. The BoD rewarded me for this act of heroism by doubling my salary. (They got a bit testy, though, when I explained that twice nothing is still nothing...)

Thomas McCormack is the recently retired longtime President and CEO of St. Martin's Press which, thanks to his tenure there, publishes more fiction than any other house in the English-speaking world. We recently had a fascinating and enlightening conversation about the current state of the publishing industry, and I promise you'll regret it if you're not in New York to hear him speak.

I promise you'll also be sorry if you're not in New York to take

advantage of the fabulous and varied program planned by Pat Kay, or to talk to the many editors and agents that Deb Stover has invited to the conference, or to benefit from the extensive PR efforts that Binnie Cyril Braunstein is making on behalf of NINC and its members. Above all, I promise you'll be kicking yourself until next Easter if you're not at the conference to enjoy our first-ever art show, featuring the work of professional cover artists (possibly yours!).

I also promise that I'll be kicking you until next Easter if not enough of you volunteer to help on-site this year. A more ambitious conference means—you guessed it—more work. The main areas in which we'll need volunteers will be Registration, the Press Room, and the Art Show. You can contact me (Registration), Binnie Cyril Braunstein (Press Room), or Sandra Kitt (Art Show) in advance, or you can sign up for shifts when you arrive at the

conference. We'll need people to man the Press Room on Thursday and Friday, and the Art Show on Saturday and Sunday. We'll also need volunteers to help set up and take down the Art Show (the artists handle the art, we handle the equipment). In every case, we're talking about perhaps a two hour commitment.

Finally, having recently read some RWA conference preview articles in the *Romance Writers Report*, it dawned on me that perhaps some poor soul in NINC is waiting for me, too, to offer sage counsel about how to behave at this conference. Well, if your mother didn't teach you good manners, I'm not the best person to patiently explain the concept to you now. But I would like to pass along some good advice my grandpa gave me years ago, and which I have never forgotten or forsaken: Wherever you are and whatever you're doing, kid, you should always stop every 90 minutes to have a margarita.

So if you need me, I'll be in the bar. I promise. — **Laura Resnick**

# *Promotion on the Internet:*

## *How to Click with the People who Read Books*

By  
**SALLY SCHOENEWEISS**

**W**hen I first became involved with the Internet, it was as if a huge chasm suddenly opened at my feet. Although I needed to get to the other side, the thought of doing so was frightening and overwhelming. It meant not only leaving a comfortable environment, but learning new skills. Nonetheless, I jumped. Now I'm one of the 40 million adult users on the Internet (there were only half that number a year ago), proving that it's possible to overcome one's initial reluctance and successfully make the leap into cyberspace. For anyone still standing on the precipice, my advice is to get on the Internet, and get on now.

The reasons are simple. It's a fascinating and rapidly expanding world, a new economic marketplace filled with exciting possibilities to promote yourself and your books. The longer you delay, the more there will be to learn. The sooner you familiarize yourself with this new medium, the easier it will be to use its features to your own advantage. Retention marketing in cyberspace is alive and well; authors are successfully creating networks and building relationships with readers and reviewers.

### **Don't Think, Just Do It**

These days, everyone's too busy. There aren't enough hours in the day and "getting on the Net" is just one more item on an already overcrowded To Do list. But the Internet is a lot like swimming—jump in and you'll learn as you go along. The easiest way is to use a commercial online service, often initiated with an offer for free hours. Many users like these online services, such as America Online, for the established bulletin boards, chat rooms, and forums. Although limited, they're a good beginning place. (America Online, 800-827-6364; CompuServe, 800-487-9197; and Prodigy, 800-776-3449.)

Otherwise, there are many Internet providers to choose from. The main points to consider when choosing a provider are pricing, technical support, reliable connection, and software. Most offer unlimited access for about \$20 a month, although you can often find a more limited package starting around \$7-\$10 a month. An 800 or local number for technical support is preferable, especially one with 24 hour availability. Reliable connection means no busy signals (best to ask friends for a referral) and software, which usually includes a browser, e-mail program, and FTP (File Transfer Protocol) for sending large files. I particularly like the small manual my provider offers with its software.

### **There's a New Sheriff in Town**

Once online, it's easy to get hooked. With at least one e-mail address—and many have both professional and personal e-mails set up—users quickly discover the wonder of

communicating online with agents, editors, and other authors. Participation in a "loop" linking you with others in the writing community is almost immediate. Just

as quickly, another realization kicks in. Authors you know—and many you don't know—all have their own Web pages. Although you're not exactly sure why, you think you should have one, too.

Some of this reasoning is based upon having read or heard about Amazon Books' success with online book sales (totaling \$15.7 million by the end of 1996, up from just \$511,000 in 1995, and nothing in 1994), the book "wars" going on between Amazon and Barnes & Noble (not to mention the online presence of Ingrams and Borders), and reports regarding Diana Gabaldon's successful use of the Internet to promote sales of *Drums of Autumn*.

### **The Jury's Still Out**

Putting up pages is relatively easy. Besides free shareware programs readily available on the Internet that will allow you to convert your pages to HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language, a computer language for presenting content), there are others such as Page Mill for Mac's and Front Page and Word Assistant for PC's which will either automatically code your text for you or simplify the process. However, I recommend actually learning HTML—if you choose to create your own pages—so that you're familiar with it. Of course, this works for text only; you'll still need to scan images. The most important criteria is: build it right. There is no advantage to throwing up just anything if visitors don't like what they find. Study Web pages that you like and identify elements that appeal to you. Personally, I consider design extremely important and feel it is the key to distinguishing your pages from others.

Home page space allocation is often included with your online service or Internet provider. You can teach yourself to create Web pages and FTP them to your own home page space—at no extra cost to you. In this case, your Web address would be: [www.internet\\_provider/your\\_name](http://www.internet_provider/your_name). Another choice available to you would be to obtain a registered domain name (Cost \$150). Your address would then be [www.yourname.com](http://www.yourname.com). Hosting a registered domain is more expensive with costs ranging from a low of \$25-\$40 a month upward, and generally requiring a more sophisticated design. A third choice would be to have your home page at an already registered domain, where you have the benefit of existing content and, perhaps, association with other authors. Booktalk, my own domain site, is based on this third choice and is naturally the one I recommend.

A Home Page Tip: Try to avoid confusion and mistakes by keeping things as simple as possible. For Web addresses, you can safely leave off the <http://> that prefixes all Web

addresses and just start with the www. If you have a choice, try also not to have the tilde (~) character in your address as this is not a very common character, and will make your address appear less "user-friendly" than necessary.

With new Web sites going up at the rate of one per minute, having a Web presence becomes irrelevant if *no one finds you!* In terms of what works and what doesn't, the jury is still out. A knowledge of the Internet becomes important as you chart your course through this new terrain. For me, the buzzword of the 90's is *reinvention*. It certainly applies on the Internet as new ideas, new technologies, new design applications, and new marketing methods emerge—or fall by the wayside. Either you or your Webmaster/mistress need to be cognizant of new trends and thinking.

The one rule is that content is king. It's not enough to design your page; it needs to be continually updated and changed to be kept fresh because once someone visits, you have another problem: how do you get them *to come back?*

I employ and recommend these general principles for creating site traffic and return visits:

1. *Content.* Some sites are fortunate enough to have a budget and staff to provide daily site updates, the ideal scenario. I manage to have new material up weekly and often update pages as frequently as three or four days out of a week. It's crucial to offer visitors a reason to return.

2. *Giveaways.* I've sponsored three drawings: the first two were for a three day cruise, and I'm presently offering a drawing for autographed books and bookstore merchandise, a co-venture with a Borders store on Booktalk. Also, I've encouraged authors to offer something free to anyone who signs a guest book or mailing list. It was only during a study of site logs (detailed reports of site activity) that I realized many authors had a lot of traffic but I was the only one who knew it. If a visitor didn't sign an author's guest book or mailing list, she had no way of knowing they had even been on her page. Now Linda Lael Miller has wonderful results with her free bookplate offer as does Heather Graham, who has a monthly drawing for autographed books. If you give something away, people are much more likely to tell you who they are.

3. *Register with Directories and Search Engines.* You can submit to each individually, submit to several using software help, or employ an agency to do it. I register all authors on Booktalk with major search engines. (A search engine utilizes software called robots, or spiders, programmed to constantly "crawl" the Web in search of new or updated pages.) You can register with many more, but these reach 90 percent of the people on the Web.

4. *Advertise.* Site launches can be publicized with online press releases. Also banner ads, either

placed through an online ad agency or through an exchange program, are currently the most popular method of advertising. The use of an e-mail signature file (your name and a brief description of who you are, or book title and Web address automatically added to all your e-mails) is especially useful when logging on to your loop or newsgroups.

An absolute must is to include your Web address on all printed material such as press kits, business cards, promotional material. For instance, Booktalk author Joan Johnston just did a mailing of 15,000 postcards and 5,000 posters with her Web address on them. I also did a Booktalk five-minute promotional phone card which, much to my surprise, has been featured in three national magazines and one regional. In addition, it's important to coordinate your Web site with whatever else you're doing, from promotion to personal appearances. Linda Lael Miller did a wonderful Valerian sleepshirt (Spend the Night with a Vampire!) and recently a *My Outlaw* sleepshirt (Spend the Night with an Outlaw!). She included information about the shirts in her regular newsletter mailing, but also featured them on her Web site, and received a terrific response and many orders as a result of this cross promotion.

5. *Data Bases.* I've provided for this from day one and now, nearly a year later, I've accumulated an Internet data base of Booktalk visitors numbering in the thousands. The beauty of this is that with a keystroke, I can do the equivalent of a merge letter to everyone in my data base notifying them of a new author on Booktalk, a new book, or the winner of a contest. When you have an Internet mailing list, it is simple and economical to notify readers when a book is available—and much less expensive than printing and postage!

6. *Personalize.* I'm a great believer in personalizing author home pages. For me, this starts with custom designed graphics and continues with an author's personal note and signature. Depending on the author, you can view photo albums, a diary, read works-in-progress, or sneak peek a look at an upcoming bookcover. It's nice to create a personality and intimacy for your page so that visitors really do have the sense of having dropped in for a visit. Rather than having a lot of people visit a page, it's more important to concentrate on the *quality* of their visit.

7. *Name Drop.* Become active on the Internet. A newsgroup is an electronic bulletin board where people with shared interests can communicate. There are > > >

### Major Search Engines:

Alta Vista: <http://altavista.digital.com/cgi-bin/query?pg=addurl>

Excite: [http://www.excite.com/Info/add\\_url.html](http://www.excite.com/Info/add_url.html)

Infoseek: <http://www.infoseek.com/AddUrl?pg=Dcaddurl.html>

Lycos: <http://www.lycos.com>

Hot Bot: <http://www.hotbot.com>

Open Text: <http://index.opentext.net/main/submitURL.html>

Magellan: <http://www.Magellan.net>

Web Crawler: <http://www.webcrawler.com/WebCrawler/Help/GetListed/HelpAddURL.html>

Yahoo: <http://add.yahoo.com/fast/add>

Also, even easier is one-stop submission at sites such as: <http://www.submit-it>

# Promo Online

(Continued from page 11)

over 20,000 newsgroups on the Internet with millions of daily participants. Done right and with care, posting to a newsgroup can generate word-of-mouth. Visit Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) and Bookstacks Unlimited ([www.bookwire.com](http://www.bookwire.com)) and take advantage of their author interview features.

Encourage reviews and discussions of your book. Judy Cuevas did this very effectively this past year for the release of *Beast*. With a simple Booktalk Web page for her pen name, Judith Ivory, she did a select, limited mailing that included a Booktalk brochure and her new Web address. Judy spent hours on the Internet prior to the book's release—about 50-60 hours, as I recall. With *Beast* currently in a third printing, Judy feels that her efforts were very helpful. There is so much discussion regarding the Internet that it's a very attractive medium at the moment and an author has the ability to get a good "buzz" going. Judy says, "People on the Internet are connected with people who aren't. If people begin to talk about a book on the Internet, they tell those who aren't on and the word spreads."

8. *Linking*. I mention this only as an option, according to whatever route you choose to take for your own Web pages. There are three viewpoints on this: link to everyone and anyone in the hopes of building traffic; link selectively; and don't link to anyone. I've chosen to link very, very selectively—and strategically. I prefer to keep visitors on Booktalk rather than to send them elsewhere. I get a lot of traffic from Yahoo, Bookwire, and *Newsday*, for example, so I appreciate the value of links. However, the development of a Web site involves a tremendous amount of planning, time, and money, and I don't find it reasonable to freely give to some what others pay for.

For various reasons, I've held off until recently on linking directly to Amazon for book sales, but do feel they are doing everything right while others—with bigger staffs and more money—are slow to respond to a marketplace that demands that you keep pace with it or get left behind. With a few exceptions, if you have your own individual pages, this is a link you should definitely consider.

## Pros and Cons

Speaking entirely from my little corner of the world, marketing and promoting your Web pages should be considered long-term, rather than short-term. Concentrate on content, then building traffic. Consider your time, effort, and money a long-term investment in the site's growth, with little or no immediate payoff. If you only add one new name a month to your mailing list, respond promptly and consider that name a valuable contact. Building a relationship with readers and developing your Internet mailing list should be a priority, and is a major benefit to being online.

The Internet also allows you to showcase yourself. Nan McCarthy ([www.rainwater.com](http://www.rainwater.com)) self-published a book and promoted it on her Web site. She employed many of the

techniques already mentioned, one of which was to send an announcement to Dave Barry, the popular syndicated columnist and author. He answered her, and the rest is history. She's since sold her book to a publisher, recouped her initial Web site investment of \$5,000 by selling over 2,500 copies of her book online, and been written up in numerous publications including *People* magazine. One person, one book, one Website—way to go, don't you think?

The cons are, for me, the time involved. But it's really not a lot different from writing. You're essentially doing a lot of work on spec. You run the risk of spending time, money, and effort on something that might never work for you. And no one really knows where this new world of cyberspace is going. Words like Webonomics, e-zines, e-economy, e-promotion, and e-mail are fast becoming part of a new vocabulary pertaining to a system that could collapse from overload. Highly unlikely, in my estimation, when visionaries like Bill Gates are making significant contributions and investments for Internet expansion.

But however deep and wide the chasm, making the leap into cyberspace has an important benefit: you can cross one more thing off your To Do list! *MNK*

© July 1997 by Sally Schoeneweiss

*Sally Schoeneweiss helped start Florida Romance Writers, Inc., a chapter of RWA, and is a member of that organization, as well as of RWA and MWA. The author of two published novels, she launched Global Phone Talk, which encompasses many facets of promotion including the creating of a publishing Web site, [www.booktalk.com](http://www.booktalk.com). Schoeneweiss can be reached at that site as well as [www.globalphonetalk.com](http://www.globalphonetalk.com) (as president); phone, 561-883-1443; fax, 561-482-6504.*

## What Does It Cost?

Setup and maintenance costs of a homepage vary. Some authors have told me they paid a mere \$60 for creation, setup, and maintenance for a full year. They've also indicated a problem with follow-up updates, and even their webmaster's availability. Most people pay \$300 upwards for the above. I like to keep things simple and charge a flat \$395 for page creation, which consists of 10-15 pages, custom-designed author graphics, and an e-mail account.

Authors' Web sites might include reviews and excerpts from current books, and feature several back-listed books. Some authors offer bios, longer bibliographies, sign ups for mailing lists, a guest book, or the ability to send an e-mail to the author. Authors often have their own photo albums, list tour dates and appearances, works in progress, or talk about their hobbies and interests.

Monthly charges can vary greatly from site to site. I charge \$29.95 a month, or \$25 if paid six months in advance. This includes an hour of updates each month (though there may be no changes for several months, then several hours of work at once for an update), new scans, etc. Be sure to ask if your site fee includes regular updates, scans, or other services, or if there are additional charges for them. Custom-designed Web sites with their own domain names are more costly, with the average running between \$1500 and \$2000.

Again, most authors don't begin a book without a plot in mind and, generally, a well-outlined synopsis. The same is true with a Web site; you should have a definite, well-thought-out plan in mind before beginning.

## INTRODUCING...

The following authors have applied 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

Jo Ann Algermissen (*Anna Hudson*), Smithville TX  
Merline Lovelace, Oklahoma City OK  
Suzanne McMinn, Granbury TX  
Kimberly Morris, Houston TX  
Anne Marie Rodgers (*Anne Marie Winston*), Waynesboro PA  
Mary C. Schaefer (*Kathryn Shay*), Rochester NY  
Justine Wittich, Lancaster OH

### New Members

Lois Greiman, Dayton MN  
Stephanie Bond Hauck (*Stephanie Bond, Stephanie Bancroft*), Alpharetta GA  
Sandra Hill, State College PA  
Kathleen Klemm (*Kate Hathaway*), Baltimore MD  
Julie Pottinger (*Julia Quinn*), New Haven CT  
Patricia Ryan, Rochester NY  
Haywood Smith, Buford GA



## ONLINE

Does the Internet offer a solution to all of the doom and gloom we're seeing lately in the publishing industry? Maybe...

Space is tight this month, so I won't be able to expound at the length I'd hoped <g> but I want to share some of what I've found about online publishing and, especially, distribution.

Actual e-publishing is still in its infancy, and very, very few authors seem to be making real money at it—yet. Still, it's an avenue to explore, especially for those niche books that seem to have no home elsewhere. An example is our own Marilyn Meredith, whose Christian/horror novel is available only on disk. E-mail her at **mmeredith@ocsnet.net** for more information.

Another avenue that seems to be gaining popularity is publishing those hard-to-categorize novels through very small presses—or even self-publishing. In the past, distribution was the big drawback to this route, but now, with the advent of online bookstores and distributors, the playing field may be leveling. Check out "AllBooks—The Publishing Revolution" at <http://www.allbooks.com> to see what I mean. Especially check out their Publishing FAQ sheet.

The recent news that Barnes & Noble plans to give Amazon.com a run for its money as an online bookstore is very telling...

A flash for Harper authors: anyone concerned about current HarperCollins/Paperbacks contract cancellations, e-mail **MareByerly@aol.com**. She's putting together a loop of authors to exchange information and eliminate

the rumor mill, with the best interests of authors as the goal.

Ninlink is rolling along at a great pace, with about 40% of our membership subscribed at last count. If you're not in the loop yet (and want to be) just send an e-mail:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

Subject: Subscribe Your-Ninc-Membership-Name  
(this is IMPORTANT!)

Body: subscribe NinLink-Digest Your-Email-Address  
Once subscribed, post messages To: **NinLink@ninc.com**

No room this month to synopsise all of the great discussions we've been having there, but I do want to share this from Alysse Rasmussen, our list administrator: "The NinLink Internet Committee requests (begs, pleads, gets down on arthritic, bended knee... whatever works :) that *each and every subscriber* please send the following:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

Subject: NinLink Info I Need To Keep

Message: info NinLink-Digest

intro NinLink-Digest

help

end

Then, more importantly, when you get it back, please KEEP it someplace handy.

"Oh, yes, one more thing: Read it :) We don't expect you to understand it (we sure don't) ... but we have to read it before we can help you, so you might as well suffer with us :) --Alysse"

That's it for this month! Remember to send any online news to me at **brendahb@aol.com**. See you online!

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber :**)





## EAST OF THE HUDSON

### A Real Charlie Foxtrot

A professional soldier who is a friend of mine is a gold mine of colorful speech. My most recent favorite is his phrase, "Charlie Foxtrot."

Since the term is a kind of code for two other words, one of which is "cluster" and the other of which is a coarse Anglo-Saxonism, I won't translate. But Charlie Foxtrot does pretty well describe what seems to be going on in New York these days. Here's the proof:

Bruce Fergusson is a Seattle writer who seemed to be on his way to fame and fortune. His first novel was a thriller about a man who discovers that he is the blood son of a serial killer. It was titled *The Piper's Sons*. Good title, nice premise, the whole package had a real good commercial ring to it. So far, so good.

Fergusson has the gumption to complete an entire manuscript on speculation. Then he submits it to a Pacific Northwest agent named Natasha Kern. Another good move. First thing we know, New York is abuzz, as only New York can be abuzz, with word of a hot new first novel by an unknown author.

According to *Publishers Weekly* and several other sources, interest in the book was so high that Kern, the agent, declined two sure-fire offers, one for \$300,000 from Ballantine and one for \$350,000 from Dutton. Instead of taking either of the preemptive bids, she invited both publishers to take part in an auction. There supposedly were a dozen editors interested and the auction seemed like the best way to maximize the author's take.

*PW* reported that three potential bidders—Bantam, Ballantine, and Dutton—lined up for the May 19 soiree. Any author who has ever lived through a literary auction knows it's a crazy time, not at all for the faint-hearted. Strange things happen on the spur of the moment. In this case, the strangeness began when Ballantine and Bantam both decided at the last moment not to bid.

Literary auctions involve a lot of gaming. No one seems to know why the two promised bids didn't materialize. Publishers really hate auctions because projects usually end up costing more money, so maybe these two thought they could torpedo the proceedings and then sneak in the back door at a much lower price. Maybe they simply thought the project wasn't worth the price of the opening bid. Who knows? All we do know is that suddenly, there wasn't any auction because there was only one bidder, Dutton.

Actually, we know Dutton was all alone in hindsight. Dutton certainly didn't know it or they wouldn't have raised their bid to \$500,000 for two books, which is what they did.

The reason Dutton didn't know is that Kern, by her own admission, didn't tell them. Contrary to good sense, and probably contrary to all ethical standards in publishing, the

agent neglected to inform Dutton that the auction had come unraveled. She let them make their sweetened offer, accepted and, apparently, crossed her fingers that no one would ever be the wiser.

That was her second mistake. New York is a very, very small town. Within three days, Elaine Koster, publisher at Dutton, found out the truth, went ballistic (understandable), and canceled the deal out of hand. Dutton didn't want the book at any price. Neither, it appeared, did anyone else.

*Publishers Weekly* got hold of the story and printed it, complete with *mea culpa* quotes from Kern who was lunatic enough to hope that this little bit of chicanery would not ruin the name she had spent ten years trying to build in the industry.

*PW* did some further reporting on the matter, quoting Richard Curtis, well-known New York agent, in a way that suggested he was neither shocked nor appalled by the Kern Gambit.

"If she bluffed or lied to get an advance, it wouldn't be the first time an agent—or publisher—has done it," he opined. "When publishers reconcile the sales figures that they print in *PW* with the numbers they tell authors they have sold, for example, then they'll have more cause to complain."

That's when the second dose of Shinola really hit the fan. Publishers and even other agents swarmed all over Curtis for his apparent tolerance of dishonesty. The Association of Authors' Representatives, of which Curtis was president at the time, caught a lot of flak over the matter. At first, the group declined to investigate the incident. Then, a week later, it launched a formal probe. Curtis issued a new statement that seemed to suggest he was not condoning dishonesty at all and that he now regarded the allegations as a serious matter.

In the interim, Dutton did some backing down of its own, announcing that it would indeed take *The Piper's Sons* under contract and publish it sometime next year. The advance was not announced, but *PW* speculated that it was around \$100,000. In other words, Dutton came out of the mess paying 20 cents on the dollar. The big loser, in addition to Kern, was the author.

Oddly enough, *PW* interviewed a great many people about the mess, but they didn't talk to the author. But then, again, he was about the only one who wasn't part of the New York loop. He lives not far away, though. Maybe I'll call him up and buy him a drink sometime. It might be interesting to hear what he thinks of New York's ethical peregrinations.

### Credit Where Credit is Due

Speaking of Charlie Foxtrots, the *New York Times* reports that Penguin, the publishing arm of the British media conglomerate Pearson P.L.C., is suing its former credit director for embezzlement.

Pearson says the former employee, Christina Galatro, her husband, and a collection service operator who chased debtors for Penguin, all benefited from a scheme in which Galatro offered booksellers illicit discounts in return for paying their bills early...

...and directly to her bank accounts.

That's right. Here is a giant, modern corporation which

claims it is so poorly managed that a mid-level executive could siphon off millions of dollars for her own benefit, leaving what the *NYT* calls “a \$163 million black hole in its balance sheet.”

And what's more, the scheme was so successful that Galatro fooled her bosses, as well as their auditors, for years, all the while taking long expensive vacations and indulging a taste for diamonds and other trappings of the good life.

Not everybody is buying that version. The American Booksellers Assn., for instance, says that Galatro is really a “corporate scapegoat.” The ABA is pursuing a legal claim that Penguin offered illegal discounts to favored customers, and it claims the publisher is now trying to avoid justice by blaming an underling.

The entire mess will, undoubtedly, make a great many lawyers rich over the next several years.

At least no writers got in the way of that particular weed-whacker. On the other hand, Penguin is going to have to cover that \$163 million loss somehow.

Stay tuned.

## Where Do You Buy?

The most recent large-scale study of book-buying patterns showed that bookstores still account for the largest segment of book purchases in the country, with a 43 percent share of unit sales.

That's the good news for professional booksellers. The bad news is that the market share of independent and small-chain bookstores fell from 20 percent to 18 percent, according to the study, commissioned by the American Booksellers Assn. and the Book Industry Study Group.

The big winners in the 1996 sales race seemed to be mass market outlets—food and drug stores, discount and price clubs. Those retailers accounted for 20 percent of the sales, up from 18 percent in 1995.

*Publishers Weekly* reported that the so-called non-bookstores actually controlled a larger portion of the book market than did the independent bookseller/small chain.

The report also noted that the biggest share of the book market still belongs to large-chain outlets, which control approximately 25 percent of overall sales. Book clubs sell 18 percent, mail order handles five percent, and used bookstores account for four percent.

Sometimes I think statistics are just a way of numbing the mind, like wine or dope.

But then, sometimes I think my mind needs numbing once in a while, just on general principles, so pass me some more numbers to crunch.

## The Business of Books

Very interesting piece on publishing in the *Wall Street Journal*, brought to my attention by both Jayne Krentz and Mary Jo Putney. It pointed out that in the contemporary book trade, dominated as it is by superstores, speed of sale is almost everything. In show biz terms, if a book doesn't open fast, it's in serious trouble.

That, my friends, is true even if the publisher has pumped out hundreds of thousands of copies and papered

bookstores all over the country with promotional posters.

If a book doesn't become a media sensation, if it doesn't start jumping off the shelves within *days*, booksellers, particularly superstore booksellers, start losing interest. (So, too, do publishers, it seems.)

The stakes in this horse race are staggering and getting bigger. *The Journal* quoted Peter Osnos, a long-time publisher of public affairs and political books, as saying, “If you only print 60,000 copies of a title, they (booksellers) don't take you seriously.” An overstatement, I'm sure, but not a vast overstatement.

The problem of returns grows out of this need to be bigger than life. *The Journal* laid significant blame for the situation at the feet of the superstores. Independent booksellers, who presumably know their customer base better than superstore buyers do, normally sell through at 80 percent. Superstores sell less than 70 percent, and discounters like Wal-Mart at about 60 percent. The big losers in that situation, the *Journal* points out, are not the retailers but the publishers, who accept returns at full credit.

This old-fashioned retailing system is probably going to change, perhaps soon. *The Journal* quoted Stephen Riggio, chief operating officer of Barnes & Noble, to the effect that he would like to begin treating books like other retailers treat ladies' apparel: he'd like to start marking down books that haven't moved.

In other words, bookstores would stock a frontlist at cover price and hope that the books moved. If not, the price would be reduced, at first by 20 percent or so, then by half, then by 80 percent, and, finally, by whatever it takes to clear the shelves.

Now that's what I call a radical idea. In the book trade, it is sometimes called “remaindering in place” and it has already been tried in a few spots, to mixed reviews. Riggio says that publishers have resisted the idea, and the *Journal* noted that New York publishing believes “the practice ultimately diminishes the value of their products in the eyes of consumers, and causes them to put off their purchases as they wait for discounts.”

Maybe, maybe not. I know that retailing is in turmoil as traditional outlets for, say, clothing try to compete with discount stores and wholesale clubs. My local Nordstrom's appears to be holding its own with Price/Costco, but the competition is brutal; and in the process, the little men's clothier on Commercial Street in Anacortes is slipping beneath the waves like a salmon boat with a hole in its side.

That's what's happening from the retailer's point of view. From the writer's point of view, the sight isn't pretty, either. *The Journal* noted that one of the publishers which has done well in this new, aggressive environment is Warner. Last year, it published 68 hardcover books, the report said. That was down from 80 the year before, but ten of the 60 hit the bestseller list.

Those kinds of numbers are going to make the bean-counters very, very happy, and we who scribble for a living are at the mercy of the bean-counters, now more than ever.

Reality ain't always pretty, but it's pretty hard to eat dreams.

— Evan Maxwell





# The Fast Track

Compiled by **MARILYN PAPPANO**

## NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today top 150 bestseller list. (A letter "n" after the position indicates that the title is new on the list that week.)

Members should send **Marilyn Pappano** a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Marilyn's phone/fax number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: [pappanor@gorilla.net](mailto:pappanor@gorilla.net). Internet surfers can find the list at: <http://www.usatoday.com> (Et al.: written with other author(s) who aren't members of NINC)

| Member            | Title  | June 4 | June 11 | June 18 | June 25 |
|-------------------|--|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Jo Beverly        | <i>Something Wicked</i> , Topaz                |        |         |         | 131n    |
| Sandra Brown      | <i>Exclusive</i> , Warner Vision               | 10     | 8       | 16      | 15      |
| Sandra Brown      | <i>Fat Tuesday</i> , Warner                    |        |         | 27n     | 16      |
| Jayne Castle      | <i>Zinnia</i> , Pocket Star                    |        |         | 42n     | 53      |
| Catherine Coulter | <i>Rosehaven</i> , Jove                        | 45     | 76      | 110     | 136     |
| Julie Garwood     | <i>One Pink Rose</i> , Pocket                  | 36     | 59      | 83      | 91      |
| Julie Garwood     | <i>One White Rose</i> , Pocket                 |        |         | 9n      | 6       |
| Jill Gregory      | <i>Just This Once</i> , Dell                   | 114    |         |         |         |
| Joan Hohl         | <i>A Memorable Man</i> , Silhouette            | 134n   |         |         |         |
| Kat Martin        | <i>Nothing But Velvet</i> , St. Martin's Press |        | 60n     | 69      | 103     |
| Teresa Medeiros   | <i>Touch of Enchantment</i> , Bantam           |        | 70n     | 54      | 82      |
| Mary Jo Putney    | <i>One Perfect Rose</i> , Ballantine           |        | 67n     | 118     |         |
| Nora Roberts      | <i>Montana Sky</i> , Jove                      | 56     | 68      | 102     | 105     |
| Nora Roberts      | <i>Sweet Revenge</i> , Bantam                  | 63     | 95      | 164     | 123     |

Publishing Services by Sandy Huseby

Due to a typesetting error, two author listings were inadvertently merged in last month's Fast Track. The correct listings appear below. NINC regrets the error.

| Member                         | Title                              | May 7 | May 14 | May 21 | May 28 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Elizabeth Lowell (Ann Maxwell) | <i>Where The Heart Is</i> , Avon   | 65    | 102    |        |        |
| Pamela Morsi                   | <i>No Ordinary Princess</i> , Avon |       | 183    | 138    |        |

### Novelists' Ink

Novelists, Inc.

An organization for writers of popular fiction

P.O. Box 1166

Mission KS 66222-0166

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