Novelists' Ink

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

Volume 9, Number 2 **February 1998**

Inside:

NINC Now Offers Health Insurance

In February, each member of Novelists, Inc. will be receiving an informational enrollment packet that explains our new group health insurance plan. Yes, you read that right, NINC is now in a position to offer health insurance! This six-year-old plan belongs to the National Writers Union, which has recently agreed to expand the plan to offer benefits to smaller writing organizations that could not secure group health coverage on their own. It is a true group plan, which means everyone is accepted at group rates regardless of pre-existing conditions. Those rates are extremely competitive and the coverage is comprehensive. Some highlights of the program include:

- Full Hospitalization
- Lab work, X-rays, Doctor Visits (check-ups, etc.)
- Traditional Dental Coverage
- Vision Coverage
- Fitness Reimbursement
- Well-Care

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Used Books: Second Class Rights

Editor's note: *After watching several often heated cyber-debates on the issue of used bookstores, it quickly became apparent (to me, at least) that most of us haven't a clue as to what laws govern the operations of used bookstores and their sales of "our" used books. Often writers suggested we needed to take legal action to protect "our rights" and to force the used bookstores to compensate us for their reselling of our creations, yet no one knew what action was needed, or if any action was even possible.*

On the premise that accurate information is essential if authors are to engage in intelligent debate on the issue, NINK *asked Elaine English, a lawyer with extensive experience in publishing law, to clarify the situation for us. That clarification is even more important in the wake of a recent article in* Publisher's Weekly *which reported on the growth—and growing importance—of used bookstores, and the phenomenal increase in revenues to those stores from the sale of used (pre-read?) books.* **AH**

By Elaine P. English

Many of you must have had this experience. Someone calls or e-mails to tell you that they've just seen several of your books advertised on the Internet. You check Amazon.com (or one of the other services) for yourself, and, *Yes!*, there you are, listed as the author of several books which, according to the instructions, are available for purchase. You sign off, quite pleased with your discovery, only to think days later, *But half of those titles are out of print!* The initial publishers have long since retired the books and you have, in fact, reacquired all rights, including copyright.

How, you might ask, can these books still be sold, and (perhaps most importantly), why are you not getting royalties from these sales?

The "first sales" doctrine is the answer.

As most of you know, a copyright owner holds the exclusive right to control six specific aspects of a property she has created—its reproduction, distribution, performance, display, and the preparation of derivative works based upon it. The first sales doctrine, which is embodied in Section 109 of the federal Copyright Law, is a limitation on those exclusive rights.

This doctrine states that the owner of a particular copy of a work that is lawfully made under the copyright laws is entitled to sell or otherwise dispose of the possession of that copy without needing the authority of the copyright owner.

This is the same theory technically under which a distributor is able to sell a copy of a book to a retail store and the store is then *(continued on page 4)*

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

This Month from the President:

Insuring Ourselves & Thanks, Anne

It's enough to make you sick...

One of the biggest problems any working writer faces is the dilemma of health insurance. I can (vaguely) remember a time when health insurance wasn't such a big concern in my life. I can even remember when I didn't care if I had any insurance, period. After all, as a young man I was—as the country music song says—"ten-feet-tall-and-bullet-proof." Besides, what's a doctor visit cost, anyway? Twenty, thirty bucks? Throw in a few bucks for medicine and you're on your way. No big deal....

Hell, I once took flying lessons without having any insurance coverage!

Those days are way long gone. Forget major accidents or illnesses; even a minor malady can be financially devastating now, especially for self-employed people with no safety net. Health insurance is critical; no one should be without it.

As we all know, though, health insurance is just one way in which self-employed people get nailed by the system. Not only do we not have the bargaining power of a large group or corporation and have to pay more in premiums, the insurance companies also go over us with a fine-toothed comb for pre-existing conditions. When I was in corporate life, I didn't have to have an HIV test or a cholesterol count to get coverage. It's now standard practice on individual policies.

So I'm thrilled that starting February 1, NINC members are now eligible to participate in a true group health plan. By now you all should have received my letter announcing the benefits, accompanied by a letter from Bethany Tani, the Benefits Coordinator for the plan. In these letters, we briefly outline what the plan covers. For those of you who are behind in your mail, these are:

- health, life, and dental coverage for you and your dependents
- a $25,000 term life insurance policy
- vision coverage
- infertility treatments
- doctor visits, lab work, and X-rays

All of these benefits, and others, are available at group rates that are extremely competitive, and no one can be turned down for pre-existing conditions.

Now here's the catch: the plan will close on March 1, 1998. If you're not on the train by then, you'll have to wait another year for a ticket. So if you're interested, get busy. In the envelope along with the letters from Bethany and me, you'll find an adhesive computer label. Write your name and address on the label and return it in the envelope provided. Bethany will send you an application package and that will get you started. If you've lost your label, then write: Ms. Bethany Tani, Benefits Coordinator, CSS Inc., ABM, The NWU Health Insurance Plan, 25600 Kelly Road, Roseville, MI 48066.

Adieu to Anne

On another note, with this issue of the NINC newsletter, we bid farewell to Anne Holmberg, who has been our editor for the past year. She's done a great job and we'll all miss her. Taking hold of the reins will be LaRee Bryant. I can't think of a better person to fill Anne's shoes. And from all of us, Anne, thanks.

— Steven Womack

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.*

Love Note to Laura

Laura Resnick has to be one of the funniest women in the world. All last year the first thing I read in *NINK* was her conference reports—not because I was so undyingly interested in the conference, but because the reports were so damn funny. (Let me haste to add that I went to the conference and it was terrific.)

Laura's recent article on her bookselling experiences was so good that I was prompted to write this note of appreciation. Keep them coming, Laura! We love ya.

— ***Joan Wolf***

Aussie Member Questions NINC E-fficiency

I would be surprised if this letter was printed. But it would do something to restore my faith in Novelists Inc. if you could at least get around to acknowledging the receipt of it.

I have been a member of NINC for just over a year now. Each month I look forward to reading the newsletter. It is a fascinating insight into the way Americans do things. As an Australian writer with little experience of the U.S. I feel that I have learned a lot. By the way, I am not Austrian: Austria is in Europe, Australia is that large island in the South Pacific to the left of New Zealand.

I have written several e-mails to your column "On-Line" requesting information and asking for advice. I have never even received a standard form letter reply. (Except one peculiar e-mail which came to me about six weeks ago stating that, as Austria was a non-English speaking country I was not eligible for membership. I hope you will forgive me if I didn't take it very seriously. My command of English is improving though, wouldn't you say?)

I have, quite frankly, received more help and advice from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Guild and other U.S. writers organisations over the last year than from NINC. And I am not even a member of any of those other groups!

Is NINC getting too big to handle the concerns of the rank and file? Or are your U.S. members the priority? Those much maligned U.S. publishers seem to be able to find the time to write to me. Why can't the organisation which claims to represent me send off a simple e-mail?

Last year when several e-mails to the president remained unanswered I decided to contact a few of the foreign (at least you don't refer to us as aliens anymore) authors. Every one I heard from could attest to being most efficiently and completely ignored by NINC. One author informed me that she had received an e-mail from someone claiming authority, who more or less poked fun at Aussies for being so vocal. After all, the authority figure went on to say, taken as a proportion of the membership we aren't that significant.

Thanks guys. I can't tell you how good it feels to be a member of your exclusive club. To all members; good luck with the new committee.

— ***Caiseal Mór***

Editor's Note: As of publication, *NINK* had not yet received a response from Mór detailing the questions for which he needed answers, but we did receive a second letter stressing that he'd received no response to his e-mail requests for assistance. Unfortunately, no requests were ever received by the person to whom they were sent. E-mail and the Internet are wonderful, but they're not infallible (I'm on a loop with writer friends in two countries, and I know! It's common for someone not to get a message, even though the sender never got a notice saying the message was undeliverable. Somewhere in the universe, someone must be reading those lost e-mails...but it isn't us!). If you or another NINC member you know have not received responses to e-mailed questions, try sending the request to someone else who can connect with the person you're seeking or—I hate to say this—try sending a letter. One of them is bound to get through.

As for the comment on Austria vs Australia...we suspect another communications glitch. Since the last president had an agent from Down Under, she was quite aware of the difference—and it wouldn't have mattered, anyway. NINC has never had a policy which excludes qualified writers living in non-English-speaking countries.

Novelists Inc. is an organization of over 600 multi-published writers of genre fiction. It was formed to share information and provide mutual support to writers through the monthly newsletter, the yearly conference, and, now, the NincLink, which is available to any interested member with access to the Internet. (The "Online" column always includes instructions for signing up.)

That said, we would like to hear from anyone (including the authors referred to in Mór's letter) who feels they have been unfairly or rudely treated because their mailing address lies outside the North American continent. While limitations of time, resources, and geography prevent NINC from fulfilling everyone's needs, every member of NINC deserves to be treated with courtesy and respect and to have his or her concerns listened to. Anything else just isn't acceptable.

AH

Used Books: Second Class Rights

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able to sell that copy to the consumer (although the initial royalty paid to the author certainly is seen as taking into consideration that chain of sales). It also is the theory under which you can buy a book and then lend it to a friend to read, donate it to a charity, or even sell it to a used bookstore for resale.

The first sales doctrine reflects the basic distinction between ownership of a physical copy of a copyrighted work and ownership of the rights in that work. As everyone knows, he who acquires a physical copy, without more, acquires just that, the copy. He cannot make copies of his copy, or prepare derivative works from it without getting the approval of the copyright holder; however, under the first use doctrine, he is allowed to dispose of his copy in any way he chooses.

The first sales doctrine, therefore, is a limitation on the distribution right and no other.

The owner of a particular copy of a work that is lawfully made under the copyright laws is entitled to sell or otherwise dispose of...that copy without needing the authority of the copyright owner.

This is the same theory... under which a distributor is able to sell a copy of a book to a retail store and the store is then able to sell that copy to the consumer.

One of the challenging issues of applying copyright to the computer age asks: how does the first sales doctrine apply to a lawfully made copy downloaded from a computer? In the classic printed book situation, when you sold or gave away your copy, you were left with nothing. In the computer context, even after you have downloaded the copy onto your own computer, the original still remains. How should the first sales doctrine apply?

Without answering that question, since only time and subsequent court decisions can tell, let me further explain there are two recently enacted exceptions to the first sales doctrine. Based upon amendments added by Congress in 1984 and 1990, the owners of a copy of a sound recording and the owners of a copy of a computer program may not sell, lease, lend, or otherwise commercially profit from the disposition of their copies of those works without the authorization of the copyright owner. (Both provisions expressly allow the rental, leasing, or lending for nonprofit purposes by a nonprofit library or educational institution.)

Why this difference in the treatment of intellectual properties? There is no simple answer. A tension between the rights of authors (to have their works protected to the maximum) and the rights of the public to freely receive information underlies all copyright protection. U.S. laws have never tried to secure all rights for all times for authors.

The laws in other countries strike different balances. For example, moral rights are strong in France where the author's property rights in his/her creation are seen as paramount. Several European countries have enacted public lending rights by which authors are compensated through royalties whenever a library patron borrows a book. (Denmark has recognized such a right since 1946.) But in the U.S., copyright laws are generally balanced in favor of public access and the consumer/user of intellectual properties.

Why then treat sound recordings and computer programs differently? Well, in both cases a strong argument was made to Congress that a secondary sales or rental market would so undercut the commercial viability of sales that there would be no incentive for creators to make and sell such products. Congress was convinced and "protective" legislation was enacted.

Should the same be done for books? At this point, the case has yet to be made that the secondary sales market is so commercially valuable that it will have any impact on the creation of new works. Until recently, used books were sold in dusty stores where potential customers manually searched high and low to find gems of forgotten works.

Computers, however, are changing that. Not only does Amazon.com offer used books, but Web services, like Bibliofind and the Advanced Book Exchange, now offer consumers easy access to second-hand books. However, until such time as there are commercial reasons to change the law, it seems likely that a used book will continue to be bought and sold without any limitations and without any further remuneration to its author.

Elaine P. English, an attorney and partner with the recently established firm of Graybill & English, L.L.C., in Washington, D.C., specializes in media and publishing law.

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

Investing for Writers and Other Eccentrics

...We can find ourselves "retired," "downsized," or "dispublished" tomorrow

By JOHN-ALLEN PRICE

QUESTION: "What do you call a writer who doesn't have a girl friend?"
Answer: "Homeless." Or as my friend and fellow SF writer, Mike Stackpole, would quickly add: "John-Allen Price."

"Do you want fries with that?"

Now I know the next question you might ask is: "Why are you calling this Stackpole a friend?" That is an interesting question, perhaps best answered by saying, "One day, Mike, I'll get even." But the salient point of this joke is something a lot of us have been discussing and experiencing for years: it's now more economically precarious than ever to be a writer.

For myself, it's now been five years since I last sold a book. More than three years since I last made more than even a few hundred dollars from my stated profession. And while I can't say I'm living high off the hog, I've avoided the mundane job by not being stupid with money when I got it and creating something most writers have, alas, looked upon as equally mundane: an investment portfolio. Learning how to do this hasn't been easy, I haven't always made the perfect choice, much of what the so-called (often self-anointed) experts have told me has not proven true for my situation, and in a few instances, they've plain lied to me.

However, I haven't lost money with my choices, and even the lies have proven useful. For the last four years especially I've journeyed in this dry, arcane, and often eye-glazing world. While I can't claim to be master of this domain, I know what to avoid, what works for me, and how it can work for other writers.

The Big Questions (God? Existence? See Lifestyles Section)

The most important question we could ask ourselves when we invest or plan to invest is often the last one we think about, perhaps because we're afraid to: *"Are we really so different from other investors, even other self-employed, that we have to do things differently from them?"*

Yes. The differences aren't many and they might not seem too profound, but they are there. I know many other self-employed types (musicians, painters, store owner, etc.), and while their income flow can rise and fall dramatically, most still get a regular dribble of dollars.

For us, our income flow can shut off completely for months or even years. Our careers can falter or end at the whim of an editor, a marketing geek, and their perception of a change in readership. Even in the good years we might not see more than half a dozen or a dozen checks, though some might be whoppingly large compared to the average paycheck.

We also get money from unexpected sources, especially foreign sales, movie and TV rights, and other media rights. And this is even more true if such sales are handled by the publisher and not by our agent(s). It's literally pennies from heaven, and I don't know of many other self-employed professions where this kind of income occurs with the frequency it happens to us.

So yes, we are different and we better accept it. This becomes very critical when one of us prepares to commit any significant amount of money to an investment. There's a tendency for us to get timid, nervous, even frightened. And there's that broker or agent calmly suggesting we really should put our money in what all his/her other clients are buying (the current number one rated mutual fund, his company's stock pick *du jour*, etc.). But we're not like his/her other clients, so he/she can take an express walk out an airlock.

The second most important question we should ask ourselves is the one the broker/agent/manager will usually ask, then try like hell to get us to change our minds about because it doesn't fit what they're selling to everyone else (but remember, we're not like everyone else): *"What is the long-term goal of our investment portfolio and strategy?"*

For most people (flaming mundanes and others), the goal of their portfolio and overall strategy is to provide for a good retirement. Unless you're receiving substantial income from a flaming mundane job on the side, this strategy would be dangerous for most of us.

Why? Let me rephrase the first paragraph of this article: we writers now live in an age where this year's best-selling author can become next year's has-been and the following decade's whatever-became-of? Mike Stackpole put it more brutally: "We're all one publishing disaster away from asking 'do you want fries with that?' "

So we can find ourselves "retired," "downsized," or "dispublished" tomorrow; which means, unless you really do have that flaming mundane job on the side, you had better be investing most of your portfolio assets in vehicles which can give you an immediate tangible return should you need it, *not* in something you can't touch until age 60 or for a long, fixed term like 20 or 30 years.

Income (tax free or not) should be your portfolio's main objective. Immediately after it should come preservation of your principal (the amount you first invested). Much further down on the list of objectives should be growth (usually called Net Asset Value growth). What would be especially desirable is income that's convertible into NAV growth, as in rolling over dividends and capital gains.

You should set a minimum investment level for >>>

Investing for Writers and other Eccentrics

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your portfolio to achieve: that is, the lowest dollar amount of investments needed to produce an income on which you could live comfortably. This depends entirely upon what your nominal expenses are and the kind of luxuries you feel you need to live with (or without). A good starting point would be in the low six-figure range ($100,000 to $200,000, *much* higher in Canadian dollars).

You should also decide which groups of investment vehicles you'll buy into and what overall percentage of your portfolio they should eventually occupy. Again, the choice here is yours, but, if you're serious about preserving your principal, you should keep no more than 1% to 4% of your portfolio in High Risk vehicles.

The Vehicles (Wheels Not Included)

Now that we've touched on *why* you should invest and what your goals should be, it's time to look at *what* you can invest in. These are what the agents/brokers/managers call "vehicles," one of many euphemisms for what you can throw your money at. Other euphemisms include "instruments," "investible properties," etc. I'll stick with "vehicle(s)," since too many euphemisms spoils the hyperbole...or something.

Here are the Twelve Apostles, or Principal Vehicles, of investing. They've been grouped and rank ordered according to risk.

Low to Moderate Risk

1. Bank Savings Accounts
2. Money Market Accounts (Funds)
3. Certificates of Deposit (CDs)
4. Annuities

Moderate to High Risk

5. Bonds (Government and Corporate)
6. Convertible Debentures
7. Stocks
8. Limited Partnerships

High Risk

9. Real Estate
10. Collectibles
11. Commodities Futures
12. Derivatives (Stock Market)

There are two salient features of this list you should've noticed: 1) There are no *exclusively* low risk investments. Sorry, not even your bank account is totally safe from some loss. U.S. Savings Bonds are probably the only true low risk vehicle. But they have to be considered as part of the whole bond category and there's plenty of high risk vehicles in it.

2) Where are the mutual funds? Aren't they investment vehicles as well? Yes, but.... They deserve separate consideration as they're the only vehicle which can (and does) invest in all the other vehicles. Annuities, CDs, and money market accounts do so to a limited extent (please note their rankings on the Risk Scale), but they don't approach the staggering diversity of mutual funds. So before we mention them, a few words about the Twelve Apostles.

Descriptions, and Stuff

1) Bank Savings Accounts: About the safest place to put your money, and with the easiest access. Problems: universally low interest rates (3$ to 4% max.), growing service charges (ATM use, etc.), and increasing minimum deposit levels. And not completely safe—banks do fail (one of mine did).

2) Money Market Accounts: These actually are a type of mutual fund, only very widespread and offered by many outfits who don't have mutuals. They have no load fees, no withdrawal fees, nominal $1.00 per share price, minimum investment levels of $1,000 to $2,500, check writing privileges in some accounts and a variable interest rate of 3% to 6%. These funds universally invest in AAA-rated bonds.

3) Certificates of Deposit: Technically, these are called "debt securities," like bonds. They're similar in that you're loaning your money to a bank or other financial institution for a fixed period of time (31 days to six years) and at a fixed rate (currently 4% to 7%). Interest is usually rolled over into the CD, and you can't withdraw your money prematurely without a penalty.

4) Annuities: There are two kinds and they're available through insurance companies. With fixed rate you're loaning your money to the company (like a bond), while variable rate means you actually own part of the company (like a stock). The "fixed" and "variable" part refers to the interest rate you get, which can either change year-to-year or remains set in stone for the term of the contract (usually ten years, but it can be shorter). Unlike CDs, you can withdraw part of your money without penalty (usually 10%), and if you don't withdraw anything, then what you earn is tax-deferred.

5) Bonds: The most varied kind of "debt security" available. They range from the ultra-safe U.S. Savings Bonds to the ultra-risky junk bonds. There are two basic types of bonds: corporate and government. Government bonds (and the broadly similar Federal Treasury Notes) generally offer the longest terms (up to 30 years), and a narrower range of interest (yield) rates, but some are tax free (within certain parameters). Corporate bonds generally have shorter terms, a wider range of interest rates, but also greater risk. Both types use the same rating system:

AAA (the best) to F (the worst), and all possible gradations in between.

6) Convertible Debentures: A unique type of vehicle. These are bonds or promissory notes secured only by the assets of the issuing corporation and can be converted at a later date to stock shares. They're an ideal investment, but we can't afford them because you need *really* large sums of money to buy them. So why list them? Because mutual funds love them.

7) Stocks: Technically these are called "equity properties," and here you're not loaning money to a company, but owning part of it. You earn money through both dividends (the tangible stuff) and NAV growth (the share price increases). Risk ranges from average to *very* high and dividends anywhere from 0% to 15% (very rarely). There are two types of stocks: common and preferred. Preferred are much safer, but must be bought in round lots (100, 200 shares, etc.) and have certain other restrictions on them.

8) Limited Partnerships: This vehicle allows you to buy into a company which doesn't have publicly traded stock. Like stock shares, you can buy limited partnership shares from a stock broker. Generally, there's a minimum number of shares you must buy. Dividends can vary widely but tend toward the higher end of the stock range (8% to 10% and up). Problems: your shares will depreciate greatly in price after purchase (like a new car) and could be difficult to sell (like an old one). If the company fails, you could take a bath, *but*, if the company grows and switches to a publicly traded stock issue, then you'll make a handsome capital gain (which, as I've found out, is taxable).

9) Real Estate: One of the most common investment vehicles, and one which carries so much risk it gives the whole idea of investing a bad name. In fact, there are so many problems inherent with owning property (other than your own residence) that the best way to describe them all is the old saying: "Real estate is a piece of land in which you bury your money."

10) Collectibles: Forget mutual funds, stocks, real estate, or even savings accounts; this is the commonest and most widespread of all investments. We all do it, we all have collections of something, yet it is among the riskiest and least financially rewarding. Collectibles don't pay dividends, they have to be kept in good condition, and their capital gains are often illusory. No matter what the official or book value of your collection is, it's only worth what someone else is willing to pay for it.

11) Commodities Futures: Like moving up the number on the Richter Scale, we're now in the truly dangerous realm of investment vehicles. Here, you're literally betting on the futures of various staple products (and it's not just food items). If you win, your profits can be tremendous. If you lose—and it's highly likely you will—then you could lose a lot more than the money you initially committed (depending upon the language of the contract you signed).

12) Derivatives: What commodities futures are to staple products, derivatives are to the stock market. Here, you're betting on the rise or fall of the market, or various sectors in it. These are new and particularly foul creatures. Dangerous and alluring they are, but strong with the dark side of the Force. Avoid them you must, eat your money they will. And you'll only have yourself to blame.

Keep no more than 1% to 4% of your portfolio in High Risk vehicles ... There are NO exclusively low risk vehicles ... Even banks fail.

That Other Big Question

What's a Mutual Fund? Now that you have a list of the other vehicles, it's time to mention mutual funds. They've become the ascendant investment vehicles for tens of millions of people, though few have much knowledge about them.

Basically, they are holding and financial management companies with few assets other than the vehicles they've bought with investors' (*i.e.,* our) money. Both Godsend and something of a bane to the small investor, they're a completely separate realm from the Twelve Apostles. They deserve not only separate consideration but a separate article to describe them. Maybe several.

The Other, Other Big Question

Do I need a Financial Manager/Adviser? Be *very* careful here. Be specific when you go to these people, especially those big financial/brokerage houses like the infamous Merrill Lynch. Or the almost-as-infamous Smith Barney. Or even the not-nearly-so-infamous-but-still-trying-hard Advest. You need advice, not management, and there is an important difference.

An adviser can tell you what he or she thinks would be best for you, leaving the choice and decision to you. With a manager you're often ceding some control of your money to this purported professional, but ultimately none of the responsibility because it's still your money.

The managers' mantra is "don't worry, we know what's good for you." Do they? They're neither trained nor have the inclination to understand iconoclasts and eccentrics whose careers could end tomorrow (*i.e.,* writers). They understand the investor who's building a retirement portfolio or (their favorite) someone who wants to be a player in the markets.

Actually, they're the ones who want to be players, Big Time Division, and to have the luxury of doing it with other people's money. They don't like taking orders, or explaining details they don't feel you can understand, or investing in vehicles they haven't recommended, or ultimately taking responsibility for their mistakes. They'll blame you, the market, or an underling, whom they'll gleefully fire (their favorite targets are secretaries).

If you've detected hints of anger and sarcasm in the comments above, then I guess I must redouble my efforts at diplomacy (*Diplomacy:* The fine art of saying "nice doggie" until you get the right rock). Every possible problem I mentioned I've either experienced firsthand or heard > > >

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from people I trust. And I haven't even gone into the disinformation, scare tactics, and scams these financial managers have pulled and tried to pull on me. So avoid these people, especially the ones who've added "personal" to their title. If you do encounter them, then remember the ancient adage "Ignore them, for they are bungholes, and understand us not." (Beavis 3:18)

Now, advisers are a different story. If you limit their influence, use more than one (which is a good way to limit influence), and let them know up-front you'll be in charge of your own portfolio, then you should not have many problems.

How to do this? 1) Insist all stock certificates, personal copies of contracts, and statements of opening account balances be sent to you. 2) Insist that all dividend checks, capital gains checks, regular account statements, 1099 forms, annual reports, and voter information (if any) also go to you. 3) Use at least two advisers and keep their areas of expertise (hence influence) as separate as possible. 4) *Do not* sign up for any investor management services, programs, or account. These promise to combine all your regular checks into one (or worse yet, a bank-style account), turn all your regular statements into one easy-to-read document, etc. This they'll do, as well as delay access to your money, create a subtle form of disinformation, and charge you still more fees for these "services."

Son of the Other, Other Big Question

What kind of equipment do I need to become an investor? Here's an area where people happily go overboard in the mistaken notion that more toys makes them a better investor. The essential equipment you need is information, and getting it in a reasonable and timely manner. Does this mean you need a computer, a modem, AOL access, and some high-priced software to get stock quotes, instant market data, and make transactions in cyberspace?

This is an easy answer. No. Remember, you're an investor, not a market player. The vehicles you buy you'll hold onto for years, maybe decades. Income, not Capital growth, is the overriding objective of your portfolio and you'll have little need for up-to-the-minute market information.

So if you don't need a computer, AOL, and fancy software, then how about a subscription to *Money, Barron's, The Wall Street Journal*, or other financial publications? No, not even those, though they are interesting to read and if your local library carries them I'd make it a habit to regularly check on them.

A few basic "how-to" books about stocks, mutual funds, and other investment vehicles would be a better choice, if you don't mind extremely dry reading. However, your best information tool is a good daily newspaper. Here's how to identify one. Does the paper have a real business/financial section instead of just a business page? When it lists stocks, does it just give the closing price and the day's price change for each issue traded? Or does it give each issue's yearly dividend, latest P&E points, number of shares traded, the day's high price, low price, closing price, and finally, the share price's change from the previous day?

If it lists mutual funds, does it give each fund's latest NAV price per share, its latest "buy" price (NAV + sales charge), and the monetary change from the previous day? Does it have a steady dribble of financial/investment articles from local and wire service sources? In its Sunday Edition, does it repeat all this information, except it shows what all the stocks and mutuals have done for the week? And at the beginning of the year does it tell how well all these vehicles did in the previous one?

If you've said "yes" to all these questions, you have a good paper. It won't be as informative as *The Wall Street Journal*, but it'll be cheaper, easier to read, and the Sunday comics are in color. If you still wish for some instant market data, then the cable channels CNBC, CNN-FN, and CNN Headline News can provide useful if spotty information.

Other materials you'll need will be a calculator, a ledger or writing pad of some kind to keep track of both the vehicles you have and the ones you're interested in, and a small fire-retardant documents safe. The safes cost as little as $20 to $30 and, while not as secure as a safe deposit box, they're cheaper in the long run and more accessible to you. Keep all your contract copies, stock certificates, yearly statements, and other valuable papers in it.

The final item you need is truly intangible: the Will (the backbone) to carry out your investment strategy. This is more difficult than you think. More difficult than building alien worlds, changing the timestream, or creating a fantasy realm. Why? Because there are more people who think they know the secrets of investing than there are people who know they could be really good writers—if only they could get us to actually write their novels. And we all know how many of those there are....

The strategy you create for yourself you'll have to follow for years. Through market reversals, lean times, and people telling you they got a faster, foolproof way to meet your goals. In other words, a get-rich-quick scheme. Something alluring and risky, which leads us to the Last Big Question.

The Fallacy of Risk

The riskier the road, the better the profits.
(Ferengi Rule of Acquisition, or something.)
There are few lies greater in investing than this one,

other than those "Personal Financial Manager" titles. The potential for greater profits and/or returns *does not* go up commensurately with increasing levels of risk. What does go up commensurately are the chances of seeing your investment fluctuate dramatically, if not lost altogether.

Remember, as a group, we writers don't have the luxury of throwing money at get-rich-quick schemes and hoping it pays off. Jumping in and out of the various markets is for market players, not us. If we go into it, we're in it for the long haul, and we have to pick vehicles that are relatively immune to market forces. How do we do this? How do we know when we're buying a solid vehicle and not getting sold a bill of goods? Where do you learn these secrets? Stay tuned....

***John-Allen Price** is the author of seven action-adventure novels and one sf novel, his most recent:* Mutant Chronicles II: Frenzy. *He is presently at work on a proposal for a big techno-thriller while tending to the investments that have enabled him to survive the ups and downs of the publishing business.*

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 NINK *issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:*

New Applicants

Sharon Antoniewicz (*Shari Anton*), New Berlin WI
Patricia Knoll, Tucson AZ
Jackie Manning (*Jackie Summers*), Waterville ME
Carla Peltonen (*Lynn Erickson*), Aspen CO
Linda D. Ward (*Alana Clayton*), Louisville KY
Kathleen Webb, Brentwood Bay, BC, Canada

New Members

Susan Bowden, Winnipeg, Man, Canada
Annette Carney (*Marie Bourdon*), Reno NV
Laura Lee Guhrke, Eagle ID
Carole Ann Hughes (*Ann Charlton*), Upper Mt. Gravatt, QLD, Australia
Jonnie Jacobs, Redmont CA
Barbara Joel, Woodland Hills CA
Kathryn Pearce (*Kathryn Jensen, Nicole Davidson*), Baltimore MD
Susan Plunkett (*Susan Coon*), Sunnyvale CA
Patty Salier, Los Angeles CA
Kathleen Yapp, Gainesville GA

Group Health Insurance Now Available

(Continued from page 1)

- Maternity
- Infertility Programs
- An Out-Of-Network option (freedom of choice in doctors)
- A $25,000 Term Life Insurance Contract

The plan is underwritten by Aetna/US Healthcare and will be administered by Customer Service Solutions (CSS). While it is a national plan, it does vary slightly from state to state. Some states allow the option of using the plan as an HMO with a small co-pay; others allow only Major Medical with deductibles. The information for your particular state will be in your packet along with premium information and enrollment forms.

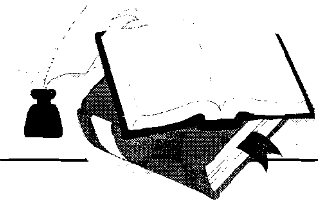
To enroll in this plan, you must first be a member in good standing with Novelists, Inc. If your membership lapses—for any reason—you become ineligible for the plan. If you become in arrears in your dues to NINC, you will receive a letter from CSS that states you must pay your dues within 30 days or risk losing coverage.

The second requirement for inclusion in the plan is enrollment in the National Writers Union Associate Benefit Membership (ABM) program. As an Associate Benefit Member of the NWU, you are eligible only for the health plan, you will not receive any other services of the union and will not be a voting member.

Although any member of NINC who meets the NWU requirements is eligible to join the NWU at full membership dues, the ABM membership is not transferable toward a full membership. The annual fee for joining the NWU's ABM program is one-half the lowest dues rate for full NWU members. At the present time, this is $45 a year. As with NINC membership, if a plan participant's ABM membership lapses, plan benefits may be forfeit.

So, be on the look-out for the informational enrollment packet from CSS. The materials included will cover the all the benefits of the plan in greater detail. The Plan Administrator, Beth Tani, will be willing and able to answer any questions you have about coverage. Contact Ms. Bethany Tani, Benefits Coordinator, CSS Inc., ABM, The NWU Health Insurance Plan, 25600 Kelly Road, Roseville, MI 48066.

— CANDACE SCHULER, NINC Secretary



How I Write...an Exercise in Futility

By SUSAN WIGGS

Each morning, I wake up bright and early at the crack of noon, blinking like a bear coming out of hibernation. If I'm lucky, Jay has taken Elizabeth to school and made coffee; on unlucky days I make it myself and it never tastes nearly as good. Every other day, my neighbor Kristin—every bit the writing diva I am—and I go to Step Aerobics, otherwise known as "Stoutness Exercises" or "The Longest Hour." I come home invigorated, unforgivably sweaty, and ready to work.

Well, almost ready. First, I have to take a shower and see if Jay brought home any fresh bagels because as we all know, an hour of Step Aerobics burns off more bagels than surfing the Internet. Sometimes the phone rings. If it's a fellow writer, I can usually count on a good forty minutes of energetic and self-delusory chatter about our books, our careers, George Clooney, and the importance of carbohydrates in an athlete's diet. Then, because I really can't put it off any longer, I have to Go to the Office.

I do this, I really do. We have guest quarters on our property and that's where my cozy little office, decorated in lighthouse kitsch, is located. Trudging twenty-six steps through sleet and snow to the office makes me feel very professional. I fire up my computer and can already feel the creative juices starting to flow. But I have to have the perfect environment or it won't work.

My water—in a 64-ounce squeeze bottle—needs to be exactly 45 degrees to the starboard tack and parked on the "She Who Must Be Obeyed" coaster. My mousepad—the one with the picture of the burning martyr who looks eerily like Yrs Truly—has to be on the left, because I'm left-handed and right-buttoned. My picture of Jay and Elizabeth has to be above the desk propped against the RITA statue, who holds a tiny sled that says "Rosebud," (to remind me of the importance of plot devices). My picture of Ralph Fiennes—for some reason twice as big as the family photo—is leaning against the lamp.

Oh, and last but not least, my Positive Reinforcement Devices have to be poured into a bowl on the desk.

When I was in graduate school I took a course from B.F. Skinner, the famous behavior scientist, who taught us the importance of PRDs in self-motivation. He suggested rewarding increments of work with single kernels of popcorn. We artistes substitute M&Ms for popcorn because, really, how motivating is dry popcorn, anyway?

Now I'm almost ready. I have to make sure everything on my computer is in working order so I zip through a quick game or twelve of Solitaire. And then, just because it's my Vital Link to the Outside World, I have to check my e-mail and read the latest from my far-flung friends, family, editors, and critique group, and jot down a few of those solicitations for cybersex because, being a shut-in, I have no life.

When I can't possibly put it off any longer, I take the plunge, opening my work-in-progress. Before I can write a word, I have to glance quickly over the last chapter or twelve, just to make sure the story's on track and—wouldn't you know it?—there's a little glitch in Chapter 8. I likened somebody's orgasm to the eruption of Krakatoa, and now I'm starting to wonder...just when did that volcano erupt? If it was after 1884, then it postdates my story and I can't use it.

Being a cutting-edge sort of writer, I zip into my Internet Explorer and go online to sleuth out the answer because, really, how can I possibly compose a new chapter if I don't have the whole scoop on Krakatoa? Aha! Yahoo found a bunch of sites matching my query, and off I go. Well, look at that. Did you know that the eruption (1883—whew!) caused a 50-foot tidal wave and 36,000 deaths? Man, that was some orgasm! Just looking at this site gives me at least a half dozen story ideas. Isn't the Web a blessing?

Since I'm already connected to the Web, I might as well surf over and check out the latest Ingram's list. If my book's not on it, I'm slitting my wrists, because it means no one's requesting it. If my book *is* on it, I'm slitting my wrists because it means the distributor is out of stock and I'm losing sales by the second. Thoroughly demoralized, I coast to that snippy book review site where they love to trash books, and I get even more demoralized to see an animated dagger repeatedly stabbing into my latest title.

To cheer myself up, I scoot onto the *ER* site and download some stills of George Clooney, and then it's time to shop for that Green Day CD I've been wanting and...Oh, damn. Got the dreaded "Integer Divide by Zero" error message. Don't you just hate when that happens? You'd think a computer would know better than to try to divide by zero.

I'd best get back to work. Eat a couple or twelve M&Ms to get my brain revved up, and we're off! My fingers fly across the keys. And then they fly backward as I make copious use of the delete button. Two words forward, one word back, that's the rhythm. The anguished yet manfully attractive Hunter is just about to bare his...well, soul...to the hopelessly prim yet deeply conflicted Emily. It's a great scene, all two paragraphs of it.

Flush with triumph, I lean back, smile at the monitor and reward myself with a few or twelve more M&Ms. My fingers feel a tad cramped, so I zip over to Solitaire for a double-or-nothing round. We've all heard the warnings about sitting for too long—ten minutes is a long time!—so I get up and wander around the office, decide the Edward Hopper print needs to be a little higher, fetch a hammer and raise the nail. Oh, and then my book order arrives in the UPS truck, and for the next half hour, it's like Christmas in...What month is this, anyway? One of the books is something I've been dying to read so I just take a peek, then let myself read the first chapter or twelve, just to see if it's as good as I'd hoped.

Uh-oh! My little sticky-note reminder program pops up on the screen. Today's my day to drive carpool, and wouldn't you know it, school's out already. Now it's time to get dinner and help with homework and play duets on the piano and bond with the daughter and drink a bottle of cabernet with Jay and watch *Dharma & Greg*...Heavens, where did the day go?

At about two in the morning, when even my computer won't talk to me, my characters will. My brain doesn't even crave the M&Ms. Zombie-like, in some sort of beta fog, I pick up my notebook and the Magic Pen (the one with all the words and paragraphs up inside it) and I begin.

And that's how I work. I really think I should write a book on this method. It's a real winner.

Author of around 18 novels and one or twelve works-in-progress, Susan Wiggs swears to God she actually gets two historical romances written a year. Her latest book is The Lightkeeper. *Wiggs lives on an island in Puget Sound with her husband, her child, an Airedale, and a lifetime supply of M&Ms.*

EAST OF THE HUDSON

The Great Divide?

The change came so late in the calendar year that it slipped by, but watersheds are often like that. I'm talking, really, about two events that took place over the span of a few days. Taken together, the two suggest that publishing has become a new, or at least different, game.

First, there was the night the National Book Award for fiction went to Charles Frasier for a Civil War novel called *Cold Mountain*. Frasier's first novel, 13 years in the writing and disdained by several of the Bigs, was published by Grove/Atlantic, a medium-sized house with a small and idiosyncratic list. It was the dark horse in a race that included Don DeLillo, one of New York's literary lions, who is currently published by Simon & Schuster.

Then, at almost the same time, Harold Evans left his post as president of Random House. The circumstances are at best unclear. Evans claimed his departure was voluntary, but no one at Random House went out of the way to confirm that reading.

As is often the case, Evans, husband of the fashionably powerful editor of the *New Yorker*, Tina Brown, claimed he was really returning to his first professional love, tabloid newspaper publishing. But talk about choosing love over position! Evans traded one of the most visible and powerful posts in New York book publishing for a somewhat ill-defined job at one of New York's less influential newspapers. Not much of a bargain for a 69-year-old man, to my way of thinking.

Whatever the real circumstances, Frasier's win and Evans's shift are linked in my own mind because they mark the end of a cycle in the book business. A couple of New York's giants have stumbled. At last, the pygmies, who prefer books to corporate power, have won a round. The philosophy that dominated New York publishing houses for the past five years has cracked. Bigger and flashier may not be better.

Allow me to expand.

First there is Frasier's book, remarkable for its modesty if not for its impact. Part harsh war story, part hard-edged and attenuated romance, it was a word-of-mouth book that vaulted onto the bestseller lists last summer and continues to hold on.

Grove/Atlantic's publisher, Morgan Entrekin, and the book's editors put almost as much work into *Cold Mountain* as its author did. They genuinely liked this book.

But a mid-sized publisher's buzz generator is small and weak compared to those that can be brought to bear by the corporate giants of publishing. Nobody in the business expected the novel to hit and stick for more than six months on the lists. And everybody on the rocky little island of Manhattan expected Frasier to come second behind DeLillo, whose obtuse, postmodernist literary tomes are much-beloved by the literati and ignored by real people.

Not this time. A book that garnered a $100,000 advance will probably earn its author several million bucks and its publisher a great deal more.

The *New York Times* used the Frasier win to honk the horns of mid-sized and specialty publishing houses, the

East of the Hudson

(Continued from page 11)
kinds of publishers who are seeming to enjoy solid success at a time when the Bigs are flailing. Doreen Carvajal reported that the Christmas season's biggest books include a surprising number of tomes like *Daughters and Mothers*, from Courage Books, a branch of Running Press; *The Pleasure Prescription,* from Hunter House; and *Girlfriends*, from Wildcat Canyon Press.

The analysis may not be entirely heartening to those of us who write novels, since *Cold Mountain* was the sole fiction on its publisher's list. But the dispersal of publishing clout to independent presses, many of them outside of New York City, is welcome. You don't *have* to be big to play the game.

Which brings us to Mr. Evans, who was one of the real swells of New York Publishing in recent years. Harold, along with his charming and highly visible wife, exerted great influence and control on the agenda of American publishing from his post at the helm of the largest privately owned publishing house in the country.

The beady-eyed Brit with a long history in London tabloids was a bit of a ham. Recently, he had taken to hosting literary breakfast discussions at Barney's of New York, a fashionable (and bankrupt) clothing store. The morning following his announced departure from Random, he was to have led a book club chat on Marcel Proust, but alas, the meeting was canceled.

He also presided over some of the biggest and most visible flops in recent publishing. He did publish *Primary Colors*, the controversial and popular political novel which became a big book, but he was most noted for publishing books that he, and the New York publishing establishment, thought were already big. His list of costly acquisitions that failed to earn out included Gen. Colin Powell's autobiography, which didn't earn back its $6 million advance, and Dick Morris's $2.5 million political kiss-and-tell about the Clinton campaign, which was as big a dud as Hillary's medical plan.

Harold Evans was a big proponent of blockbuster celebrity books, the kinds of books I think of as Christmas tree ornaments—big and flashy and overblown and terribly fragile. Evans probably acquired a taste for sensation during his newspapering days, and he tried to carry it over to books. Push that story, make it bigger than life. Push those books, get them out into the B&N superstores and media momentum will take care of the rest. Unfortunately, by the time Evans's books hit the stores, the public had often moved on to other interests.

In tabloids, he can toss an Extra off the tailgate of a news truck hours after a jury acquitted the British nanny, but hardback books still take too long to produce and distribute. The rhythms of books are different than the rhythms of the penny press, and Evans never understood the difference, even after seven years at Random.

He has moved on now, but the jury is still out on several others who surfed into prominence on the wave of big-book publishing. Take, for instance, the individuals who shelled out six million bucks for *Book*, the Whoopi Goldberg entry in the 1997 celebrity bestseller stakes race.

Or the hyperventilating executives who plunked down $3 million for Paula Barbieri's reminiscences about her relationship with O.J. Simpson. Or the characters who took a $4 million flier on prosecutor Marcia Clark's version of the Simpson case.

Or the ambitious overachievers who threw a million bucks at the nonfiction writing-class maundering of a Kansas great-grandma who was a very nice old lady but who didn't know symbolism from Metamucil.

Flops, all of them, costly goose eggs that were cold before they hit the ground. The inflated price tags were a tribute to the philosophy that "big" books are natural winners, particularly those that can be merchandised on television and in other mass media.

I've said before, and undoubtedly I will say again, that I have sympathy for the editors and publishers who lay out that kind of money. They are engaged in a gigantic poker game, and as in most poker games, there are a great many more losers than winners.

As you know, I'm no great fan of "literature" in its most grandiose sense. I come from the storyteller side of the writing camp. I stayed away from *Cold Mountain* for weeks, fearing that it would be too *litrary* for my plebeian tastes. But my contempt is even deeper for the purveyors of celebrity books. Actually, those things aren't really books. They aren't so much written as they are cobbled together by hired-gun wordsmiths and marketers seeking to cash in on the momentary fame of celebrities who may or may not even be literate, much less the subject of literature.

The problem with "big books" is that the writer is left out of the equation. Writers are too risky, unless they are already brand-name writers. Too much can go wrong when a publisher tries to peddle a book by some poor shlub who has never been published before.

Or worse, a book by someone who has been published once or twice and who didn't crack the big national lists in the process. Writers are simply too risky. Their failure rate is much higher than the failure rate, for instance, of retread

Laker cheerleaders who flatbacked with celebrity murderers.

Or that was the case while folks like Harold Evans were in charge.

Maybe the most heartening note is that Evans's post at the head of Random House was taken by Ann Godoff. Her idea of a good book? *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.* Like *Cold Mountain*, John Berendt's story of Savannah started out as a book and became a phenomenon, not vice versa.

How many editors does it take to change a light bulb?
Only one, but first they have to rewire the whole building.

Monkey Points

Stephen King ran a bluff. It remains to be seen whether he won or lost, but he sure upset Manhattan in the process.

King (Do I really need to come up with a quick phrase to describe his place in the publishing pantheon? I don't think so.) came to the end of his contract with long-time publisher Viking and decided to go shopping for a new deal.

That was big news. It isn't often that a truly big-name author goes out to auction. But there was more. King wanted a monster of a deal. Reports circulated that he was asking for the moon as well as the stars and a couple of comets thrown in. The Beasty Bard of Maine was said to be demanding a contract that would put him back on top, more money than Clancy or Grisham, maybe more money than both of them combined, I don't know.

News stories about the shopping expedition contained a lot of catty sniping from publishers, some of whom told reporters, off the record, that King's sales were flattening and that he wasn't even worth the money he had been making at Viking.

I have it on good authority that publishers often make comments like that when they are trying to jawbone an author of King's stature down to size. (Yes, I think that publishers use the press every chance they get, just like everybody else does.)

At any rate, the mega-deal never took shape. Instead, according to *Publishers Weekly*, King signed with Simon & Schuster for a much smaller advance than the $16-$17 million he had been getting at Viking. But don't worry about Mr. King. He may only be drawing down a couple million bucks as an advance against royalties, but he will be receiving approximately half the profits of his books.

Profit participation deals like King's are not new. Hollywood has been cutting them with the biggest stars for years. Powerful and bankable actors often agree to take short money up front, particularly on projects they like. In return, they suck up most of the profits at the back end of the deal. The gambit can work very well if the project turns out to be a smashing success, but most Hollywood types still prefer to take their money up front, thus transferring the risk to the producers.

Actually, I have even done a participation deal or two during my limited career in Hollywood. I have two percentage points in the net profits of a film called *The Border*, starring Jack Nicholson, and two more points in the television movie that was made of my most recent novel.

I've never seen a check from either of those profit-participation contract clauses, though. Makes me think net profit points are what Magic Johnson, the famous round-ball philosopher, called "monkey points."

I doubt that Stephen King will go broke with this new deal. He's a smart guy, after all. He singlehandedly reworked our business a while ago with his serial novel, *The Green Mile.*

But if he cut the deal in an effort to convince the world he is still on top of this game called publishing, he may well be reaching for the biggest bunch of monkey points in the world.

How many art directors does it take to change a light bulb?
Does it have *to be a light bulb?*

How many copy editors does it take to change a light bulb?
The last time this question was asked, it involved art directors. Is the difference intentional? Should the other instance be changed? It seems inconsistent.

The Big Cucumber?

Revenge is sweet. Two years ago, when my backwoods telephone exchange became one of the first to be switched into an area code that didn't use a "1" or a "0" as the middle digit, I dropped off the face of the earth.

At least that's how it seemed to some of my Manhattan friends who could no longer reach me because their corporate switchboards were programmed to treat the 360 area code as a dialing mistake.

"What kind of hick place do you live in, anyway?" one of them asked me when he finally found a pay phone that would allow him to communicate with western Washington.

In the interim, dozens of new area codes have been promulgated by the phone companies. Matter of fact, Manhattan has finally been forced to accept an adjunct to its precious and prestigious 212. The new code, 646, should come on line this year.

But there is a gimmick in the new system, a gimmick that tells you a lot about symbolism and power and prestige.

It seems that Manhattanites were so frightened of losing face that they forced the telephone company into some remarkable contortions in setting up the new code. The easiest way to bring about the change would have been to split the island in two and assign the new code to one half. That's how they did it out here in the sticks.

But that would have deprived part of the Big Apple of 212, the most powerful area code in the country. The new area code would have resulted in a net loss of prestige. After all, how would you feel as a writer if you had to dial your editor in an area code that was just three even digits.

Unthinkable.

So now, everyone with the glitzy area code will be allowed to keep it and all new phone lines in

> > >

East of the Hudson

(Continued from page 13)
Manhattan will be assigned the 646 code. Two things will result:

First, there will be a whole lot of confusion when people have to deal with an office which has a 212 phone line and a 646 fax number.

Second, the entire island of Manhattan will pay, over and over again, for their symbolic victory because all phone calls in Manhattan, even those from one 212 phone to another, will now require that the entire ten digit number be dialed.

T'will be a reminder, I hope, of the hollow value of symbolism.

Footnote: I am constantly reminded of how much Manhattan reminds me of my little hometown, Anacortes. Around here, you can distinguish the locals from those damned ex-California newcomers real easy. The good people all have numbers in the 293 exchange while the recent immigrants get 299 numbers.

Anacortes, shake hands with Manhattan. You are both small towns at heart.

How many proofreaders does it take to change a light bulb?
Proofreaders don't change light bulbs. They only query them.

How many authors does it take to change a light bulb?
Does it have to be changed?

This Just in to the Newsroom

The *New York Times Book Review* has announced that it intends to publish, online, a list of bestsellers in the independent bookstores of America.

Charles R. (Chip) McGrath, editor of the *Review*, admitted that the new list is a sop to the independents who were incensed when the *NYT* struck an Internet alliance with the archenemy of all decent, right-thinking booksellers, Barnes & Noble.

"We decided to start this list as a way of showing independent booksellers...that we do understand and value their importance," McGrath said.

Last summer, the *Times* established a link between its online reviews and the B&N online bookstore, allowing readers to order books with one mouse click. Independent booksellers reacted like jilted lovers, lashing out at the newspaper with what McGrath characterized as "passion and emotionalism." Between 50 and 100 of the bookstores stopped reporting sales figures to the *Times* bestseller list and several efforts were made to establish an alternative (and presumably untainted) independent bookseller list.

Immediate reaction to the new *Times* list, which will only be available online but which may someday be published in the weekly review section, was mixed.

Hut Landon, a Northern California bookseller who led the boycott campaign, called the measure "a very small bone" because few independent booksellers maintain a presence online. "People looking on the Internet are more likely to go to BarnesandNoble.com or Amazon.com," Landon said.

Other independent booksellers said they would wait and see the new list, which probably would look more *litrary* than its commercially tainted sister, which contains superstore and independent distributor sales figures as well as those submitted by independent booksellers. Several booksellers told *Publishers Weekly* that they would begin discounting books on the independent list instead of the main national list. My question: Shouldn't the main national list now exclude sales results from the independents? I mean, if distinctions are going to be made, why not make them...distinct?

The culture wars continue. Stay tuned.

How many publishers does it take to screw in a light bulb?
Three. One to do it and two to hold the author down.

(All the light bulb jokes came from Dominick Abel, the best man in Manhattan. He takes ten percent of my royalties, which is more than fair since his willingness to endure the harsh environment of New York means I don't have to. Dominick claims to have gotten the jokes from someone at Random House, which I sincerely doubt. Publishers do not have a sense of humor.)

— ***Evan Maxwell***

Editor's Note: The jokes Evan quoted this month seem to be making the rounds on the Internet—they were posted on NincLink recently, among other sites. According to one source, at least, they are the creation of Tor editor Teresa Nielsen Hayden. The post on the Link included one further joke that's simply too good to pass up:

How many booksellers does it take to change a light bulb?
Only one, and they'll be glad to do it, too, except no one shipped them any. They also didn't know you had any light bulbs coming out this year—and what are you doing in the store, anyway?

NINK Publisher Sandy Huseby adds yet another:

How many IDs does it take to change a light bulb?
What's a light bulb?

ONLINE

As those of you on NincLink have probably heard by now, I've been persuaded to take over as E-mail Administrator, a job Elizabeth Thornton has performed with remarkable aplomb over the past two years. Those won't be easy shoes to fill, but I'll do my best! Essentially, my role will be to keep discussions on the Link running smoothly (i.e., preventing flamewars <g>) and stepping in to enforce the guidelines if necessary.

So, in a burst of enlightened self-interest, this month's column will be dedicated to making my new job easier by making it easier for all of you to remember those guidelines so I don't *have* to step in. You should have received a copy by e-mail when you first subscribed (or resubscribed) to the Link, and you can get another copy any time by sending an e-mail to **Majordomo@ninc.com** with "intro NincLink-Digest" (without the quotes) in the body of the message. If you're like me, though, you're more likely to pull out an old *NINK* issue to refresh your memory, so I'm going to print them right here for easy reference.

NINCLINK GUIDELINES

1. POSTS: Posts may be informational, controversial, supportive, chatty, pose questions, etc., just as long as they are of interest to authors. Politics, religion, and other such topics are best kept for other media. Just use your discretion.

2. SELF-PROMOTION: This is not the place to promote your books. We're all published writers, all trying to sell our books. However, the NINC Website provides home pages for authors as well as links to authors' home pages. That's where to promote your books. And we all have e-mail addresses. If we want to know more, we can ask you, one-on-one.

3. GETTING TO KNOW YOU: Home Pages serve another useful function besides the promotion of authors' books. The biographies help us get to know each other as colleagues. If you have a home page, do let us know about it. If you wish, you may sign off your posts with the title of your latest book, and/or your home page address, or you may identify yourself by your genre and publisher. We don't regard this as self-promotion but a way for authors to identify each other. Keep it simple.

4. RHETORIC: What we want to encourage on NincLink is free and open debate in a climate of good manners and professionalism. When stating your point of view or taking issue with someone else's, choose your words carefully. Do not become offensive. Personal attacks and flame throwing will not be tolerated.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY: The discussions and views expressed on our list are confidential and may not be made public. The exception is industry news that is of interest to all writers. In the same way, subscribers should refrain from posting and/or debating anything of a sensitive nature from other lists or sister organizations. No one may send someone else's post to another list or show it to anyone outside NincLink or the NINC Board without permission of the author. Anyone who is found to have disregarded this rule may be removed from NincLink subject to the Board's approval.

These guidelines can be summed up in a few words: Professionalism and Good Manners. That's all you really need to remember.

And now, here's the NINC Board's official position on Copyright Infringement for NincLink.

"COPYRIGHT: Copyright is the LEGAL RIGHT to determine where, when, and by whom intellectual property may be COPIED.

"There are many interesting and informative items posted on the Internet, just as there are in books, magazines, and newspapers. It's tempting and easy to pass them on to friends and digests like NincLink.

"But it's illegal.

"Copyright means the author of the work has created a piece of intellectual property, which is just as much a property as a house or car or furniture. It is owned by the author who created it, who is free to share it with others. Others are not free to steal it from the creator and pass it along without written permission.

"There are severe legal penalties for copyright infringement, which can be imposed not only on those who distribute the copyrighted work, but on anyone else who officially condones the act. In the case of NincLink, that means the volunteer administrators of the list, the individual members of the Board of Directors who authorize the list, and the organization itself.

"Copyright law is not negated by good intentions or by ignorance of the law. Nor is it considered 'harmless' if the infringer doesn't make money on the theft. As a professional association of working writers, we are deeply indebted to this law, which is the only thing that allows us to earn our livings. We absolutely must respect it.

"In future, any copyrighted material that is posted without a copy of the written permission of the original author (and make sure the person who posted it to you *is* the original author) will cause the poster to lose access to NincLink.

"If you see something on the Internet that might be of interest to other members, merely give a short summary of the content and the http address so others may read it for themselves."

Whew! That doesn't leave me room to do more than mention just a very few of the topics we've discussed over the past month on the Link. Serious topics included what "sell-through" really means and wills for writers, while

ONLINE

(Continued from page 15)

more fun discussions centered on grandparent nicknames, conference faux pas and recognition impairment (a malady an awful lot of us seem to share!)

Remember, to subscribe to NincLink, all you have to do is send an e-mail:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

Subject: Your-Ninc-Membership-Name (as it appears in the roster)

Body: subscribe NincLink-Digest Your-E-mail-Address

Once subscribed, post messages To: **NincLink@ninc.com**

If you have any online news to share for this column, or have any questions about the above guidelines, please e-mail me at BrendaHB@aol.com. See you online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber **:)**

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**. Internet surfers can find the list at: **http://www.usatoday.com**

Members who write under pseudonyms should notify Marilyn at any of the above "addresses" to assure their listing in "Fast Track."

Member	Title	Dec 4	Dec 11	Dec 18	Dec 25
Sandra Brown	*Tidings of Great Joy*, Bantam	138	123		
Sandra Brown	*Temptation's Kiss,* Warner Vision			137n	
Julie Garwood	*Come the Spring*, Pocket	88	130		
Linda Howard	*Kill and Tell,* Pocket			41n	74
Iris Johansen	*Long After Midnight,* Bantam	99	102		
Jayne Ann Krentz	*Deep Waters,* Pocket	133			
Nora Roberts	*Captive Star,* Silhouette	75	139		
Nora Roberts	*The MacGregor Brides*, Silhouette	82			
Nora Roberts	*Sea Swept,* Jove			16n	22

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