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a professional
organization for
writers of
popular fiction

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Novelists' Ink

THE POWER OF NEGATIVE REVIEWS

(or What to do Instead of
Suffering Meltdown)

By SHERRY-ANNE JACOBS

This all started when I got a bad review recently and wrote to the editor in charge to complain about it, because it seemed unfair. If you write books in the "clogs and shawl" sub-genre of UK women's historical fiction, as I do, then your work has to contain certain elements, the main one of which is an "agonised female," a heroine whom life does not treat at all kindly. This reviewer complained loudly that the heroine had to endure far too much and the book was downright miserable. If it was another sort of book, yes, she would have a right to complain about that—but mine was simply being true to its genre, and y'know, her criticisms really stuck in my gullet. Even the journal editor (new since the review had been done) admitted that she wouldn't have given that sort of book to that person. Hah! I don't find that any consolation whatsoever.

What does console me is that the book sold out even before it hit the shops and had to go into reprint. Now, if someone will tell me that reviewer's address, I'll go and ram that information down her throat. (Only kidding. Well, only half-kidding. Sadly,

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Evan's Swan Song

As is my habit, I sat down at the computer today and reached into a cubbyhole where I stow clippings and printouts and letters that I gather each month, the raw material of this column.

The damned cupboard was bare.

Well, not quite. There were a couple of clippings I had been saving for a rainy day, the kinds of material that used to be called "time copy" in the newspaper business. The term is misleading, since these stories are, literally, timeless. They fill the columns of the Christmas shopping sections and if there isn't room in December, they will still be good for that oversized Easter weekend issue.

Among the stuff I had squirreled away were a couple of *Publishers Weekly* stories about the demise of that much-overrated merchandising practice, the author tour. Seems that most publishers have discontinued the month-long, mall signing and independent-bookstore-wining forced marches that were first made popular by Jackie Susann and which sapped the creative energy of every major commercial writer since.

Remember, friends, when we all aspired to the tour. It was a rite of passage, sort of like the Grand Tour of Europe that Henry James made famous. Gone, gone, gone. Too expensive and

not efficient enough in this media age.

There are still some road warriors out there, authors who are trying to crack new markets. And there are a few writers who do it on their own nickel, probably for the sake of their own ego, but not to boost sales.

But the author tour seems to be going the way of the buffalo and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

And reading the *PW* clippings I had been saving made me realize that I was in danger of doing the same thing. That, friends, is why this will be my last "East of the Hudson."

Now wait, wait, don't start telling me I'm the best thing since sliced bread. Don't tickle my already inflated opinion of my own scribbling. Don't tell me I'm the first thing you turn to in the newsletter.

Because if that's really true, we are both in trouble. I've sat down 12 times a year for the past five years, six if you count my old President's column, which is where this whole little exercise began. I have ranted, not as furiously as Den-

**EAST
OF
THE
HUDSON**



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Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I promised our intrepid editor that I would write my November column on the plane home from Savannah. I didn't do it. Instead, I chatted with the stranger next to me about the conference I'd just been at and how much I enjoyed it.

So I want all of you (and Terey) to know it's not my fault if I didn't do my work and write my column. I was still drafting off the terrific experience of the Savannah conference and I just couldn't bear to let it go.

Okay, so now I'm back home and trying to get back into my Responsible Person mode, the one who writes columns and books and that sort of thing. It isn't nearly as much fun as socializing with all of you, but I'll try.

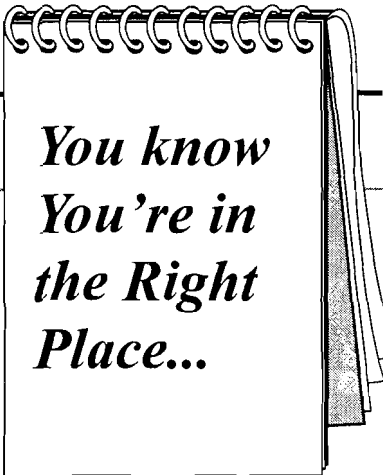
First off—we all need to say thank you to Conference Coordinator Victoria Thompson and her marvelous committee for their efforts on our behalf. Remember—these people are all volunteers as well as working writers. How they manage to do it all—and do it so well—is beyond me. But they do. So kudos to Vicki, who oversaw the whole shebang, and also to Jasmine Cresswell, who contributed a simply amazing program (the kind where you keep having epiphanies crashing on top of each other and run, do not walk, to the next room for the next session); to Sandi Kitt, who tracked down, cajoled, and organized a great roster of editors and agents (and one Secret Service/CIA/FBI expert); to Vicki Hinze, who kept registration and nametags and everything else we creative types are supposed to be so lousy at humming right along; and to Ellen Taber, who generously shared her hometown info on what to do and see in Savannah.

Ah, Savannah. Part of the conference's appeal was the setting—I think we all fell a little in love with Savannah (even if I never did track down Robert Redford or Matt Damon, wherever they were filming that movie). Another big part of it was the company. Our members are funny and smart and compassionate and sharing. I haven't laughed so much in a very long time, especially when Kathy Lynn Emerson remarked that trying to keep a bunch of writers on track is like herding kittens. Which tells us not only that we are a somewhat energetic and uncontrollable bunch, but also that (at least one of) our members knew how to come up with just the right metaphor.

I guess that was the overriding feeling I came away with. That we're all writers, we all know what this business is, and we share many of the same feelings and hopes and dreams, whether we're at the top of the ladder or just trying to reach the third rung. When someone like Ann Maxwell is willing to share her joy and enthusiasm with an inspirational luncheon speech, when someone like Jayne Ann Krentz is willing to theorize about trends and markets as "coalescing hurricanes," when the people you sit next to in a session are willing to let you fill their ears with your latest lightbulb moment about what it means to be a success and how to set goals to get there... You know you're in the right place.

Which means we'd all better start saving our money and energy for next year in Vancouver. It'll be here before you blink!

It also means you'll need to write a check and renew your dues this



*You know
You're in
the Right
Place...*

minute—or at least the moment you receive your December newsletter; the dues renewal form will be inside. You won't want to miss a minute of what comes next! A new millennium without NINC? I don't think so! That's not a place I want to be (especially when I see people like Carla Neggers and Barbara Keiler ready and able to take on the presidency. They are high-powered forces themselves, and what they come up with to send NINC into the 2000s promises to be very exciting! So remember to look for the dues renewal attached to the next newsletter and fill it out immediately. Immediately!)

In the news—"Members Only" at www.ninc.com

We've added a new area to the NINC Web site (www.ninc.com) that I'm hoping you'll all zap onto the Net to try out. So far, this "Members Only" area includes archived newsletter articles plus a mass of interesting resources and other information. We'll keep adding to it—on tap for next year is an interactive agent guide—so you'll want to get to it and apply for a password today. And if you have a great idea for something to add to the space, be sure to let someone know. The more the merrier!

Swan Song on the Hudson

It's common knowledge that we all flip to "East of the Hudson" before we read anything else, so I figure you probably all know this by now. Nonetheless, it's pretty painful to have to tell you that Evan Maxwell has decided to let his marvelously informative and thought-provoking "East of the Hudson" column fade into the sunset. I told Evan I feel bereaved on behalf of NINC, to lose such a

valuable asset, and also personally, as a fan who eagerly awaits that column every month. Evan's column made us all feel like insiders, which is a rare commodity indeed. But I can't blame him for choosing to retire after five years of monthly columns, jam-packed with punditry and astute industry observations. He has books to write, horizons to conquer, and a new cupboard of insights to store up.

The good news is that Evan has promised to continue to write a little here and there for us, so if we can't get "EOH" every month, maybe we can still hear that distinctive voice of wisdom every once in a while. Although *NINK* editor Terey daly Ramin knows she won't be able to replace Evan, she also promises to think up some entertaining and intriguing new features to make the loss less difficult to bear. Goodbye, East of the Hudson. And thank you, Evan!

— Julie Kistler

You, Too, Can be a *NINK* Superstar...

With the dawn of the New Millennium we're looking for new writers to contribute to *NINK*'s columns and articles. Got ideas? Know that *NINK* pays its writers? Okay, we're trying to put a brave face on Evan's departure, and we do have ideas, but like everything else in Novelists, Inc., we're at our best with collaboration. So let us know what you have to say.

TdR

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 masthed for addresses.

Messy Desk a Personal Statement

Wow, do I disagree with the time management guy quoted in the October "Online" column. My messy desk is a part of me. Do I waste hours looking for things every day,

as Mr. Expert claims? Heavens, no! I know where everything is. Well, maybe except the Post-It notes that always seem to go missing... Am I a fire hazard? Probably. Do I admit anyone else to my office as long as my desk looks like that? Um, no. But I don't care. I've had a clean desk (working for a corporation will do that when you know the big bosses stroll through late in the evening to see a) who's still there, and b) who has a messy desk they can snoop into.) But I hated that clean desk. It was a sign of oppression to me. My husband has wanted long hair ever since his parents made him get crew cuts every year when he was a kid, and I have wanted to be as messy as I want ever since my parents made me clean my delightfully disheveled room. I try to clean out my office—okay, shovel out my office—every time I finish a book. And then I can't find anything...

— Julie Kistler

COLLABORATIVE FILTERING VS.

MARY GAY SHIPLEY OPINION BY PAT HOLT

Sometimes I think the whole point to the Internet is to give everybody an excuse to stay home. Sit at your computer all day and you'll never have to risk your feelings or your looks or your thoughts in the presence of other people—in fact, you'll never have to talk to another soul again. At least that's what Malcolm Gladwell seems to be saying in yet another article (this one in the October 4 issue of the *New Yorker*) about embracing computer technology to improve or replace personal life. In "The Science of the Sleeper," he actually uses the example of independent booksellers to prove the point.

Gladwell writes with such wonderful conviction about the quiet genius of bookseller Mary Gay Shipley at That Bookstore in Blytheville, Ark., that you can't believe he's going to end up stealing her thunder and her humanity as a bookseller. But he does, and with nothing less than a computer formula called "collaborative filtering."

Shipley, he makes clear, is one of those great booksellers whose very presence defies the declining market share of independents. So instrumental has Shipley been in the launching of such authors as Rebecca Wells, David Guterson, Terry Kay, and (way-back-when) John Grisham, that American literature could not bear up without her.

"People like Mary Gay Shipley don't merely predict sleeper hits," he declares; "they *create* sleeper hits."

Such pronouncements ought to make the heart swell, but just when Gladwell could say to the reader, "and you know what? There's probably a Mary Gay Shipley in *your* neighborhood," he shifts gears and says forget about the human element.

"What if there were a simple way to build your very own Mary Gay Shipley?" he asks. "This is the promise of a new technology called collaborative filtering, one of the most intriguing developments to come out of the Internet age."

And of course it *is* intriguing, at least in the example Gladwell provides, which is a movie filtering system called Movie Lens (he doesn't provide the website address, but it appears to be <http://www.movielens.umn.edu> although the system was not working when I tried to log in).

With MovieLens, Gladwell supplied the names of 15 movies he had seen and ranked them on a scale of 1 (awful) to 5 (must see). Since tens of thousands of people have sent in their own 15 movie titles ranked to personal tastes, the computer was able to sort through and match Gladwell's tastes with those of others and...Voilà! Out bounced a list of additional movies he was bound to love, based on the choices of "his" group.

The more he plugged in movie titles with his ranking, Gladwell says, the more "I began to notice that the rating that MovieLens predicted I would give a movie and the rating I actually gave it were nearly always, almost eerily, the same. The system had found a small group of people who feel exactly the same way I do about a wide range of

popular movies."

All right, then! Collaborative filtering sounds as fun as one of those Sunday magazine quizzes where you put in all your favorite and detested things and then rank them and count up the points you've scored and find out at the end that you never needed that surgery and should change your hair color and it's okay to have that affair. But collaborative filtering is no game, says Gladwell. It's not only statistically accurate, it shows why a company like Amazon (a dinosaur by comparison in terms of interpreting data) is 1) presently making those hilarious errors by telling people who buy camping guides they'd love to read *Mien Kampf* and 2) will soon figure out a way to use collaborative filtering for those "eerily" perfect matches that will astound customers.

What certainly is fascinating for anyone in the book business is the potential of collaborative filtering to reverse the growing dependency on big numbers and star authors and blockbusteritis that currently plagues our industry. According to Gladwell, collaborative filtering looks for the small and specific, the "cultural neighborhood." No longer bewildered by too many books by unknown writers, "customers now have a way of narrowing down their choices to the point where browsing becomes easy again."

What a dream for the serious reader and the serious publisher: As e-commerce consultant and author John Hagel puts it, collaborative filtering "favors the smaller, the more talented, more quality products that may have a hard time getting visibility because they are not particularly good at marketing."

So this is the promise of the Internet fulfilled: Big numbers easily sorted, small audiences uncovered that are voracious for books they find meaningful. Instead of searching for these readers in various pockets on the Web and trying to post notices or customize marketing in bookstores, publishers can now sit back and let their customers find them.

But what about the Mary Gay Shipleys of the world? Why, they are essential to the process of discovering and launching the books to begin with—and they are expendable!

Indeed, Gladwell seems to feel that once automation replaces any part of the human factor, we should all step aside for technology. The human being may hang on for a while but we're sorry, we must turn now, with affection and thanks to the more efficient (and less expensive) system before us.

Gladwell is like the son of the company founder who's trained for a few weeks by workers that he comes to love—and learns just enough to automate them all out of a job. He too becomes an automaton, missing the vital connections that only human beings can bring to business—especially when it comes to the delicate timing and balance of art and commerce.

But the worst aspect to this article is that for all his research, Gladwell seems to know nothing of the Herculean effort it takes for independent bookstores to survive against the chains, the Wal-Marts and the Amazon.coms of today's book industry. He sees no stake in "the bookstore wars" himself, buying his fiction from Barnes & Noble and work-related or gift books from Amazon. He seems to purchase "most of my nonfiction" from secondhand bookstores.

Nothing is mentioned in this article about the thousands of independents that have already closed, the loss of thousands of Mary Gay Shipleys all over the country, the key role customers can play in supporting those who remain. One

wants to shake this man. This is literature we're talking about. You can't automate it. There is no "simple way to build your very own Mary Gay Shipley." Books are written by human beings, edited and sold by human beings, believed in and loved and spread around by human beings. Use technology to complement, not replace the Mary Gay Shipleys of the world, and maybe we'll have a book business worth saving. **NINC**

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EVAN'S SWAN SONG

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nis Miller rants about O.J. Simpson, perhaps, but certainly with enough vigor to draw a sharp rebuke from Walter Zacharius, one of the grand gentlemen on our end of the bookshelf.

I have vented my own frustrations, and there have been plenty. I have said nasty things about people who didn't deserve them on a personal basis, people like Alberto Vitale.

(I gave Mr. Vitale a number of cheap shots over the years, in part because he was at the helm of two major publishing operations during their "downsizing." I thought that was bad for the business. I knew it was bad for a couple of series mysteries that I co-wrote with my wife. So I selected a human target named Al, turned him into a symbol, and then whacked that symbol like a redheaded stepchild.

(My action didn't change the trend of our business. It didn't bring Fiddler and Fiora any particular success. It probably didn't even irritate Mr. Vitale, since I doubt he was even aware of my blatherings.

(But it did make me feel a little better and I guess it amused a few of you because I heard snickers in the gallery.)

I did some other wild and crazy things in the past 60 or 70 chapters of "EOH." I taunted the people who were supposed to be my partners in the selling of books, the independent book merchants of the world. I tweaked editors and marketing directors and sales managers. I excoriated critics, just as they excoriated me. I analyzed technological trends. I even handed out kudos, although usually they were the kind that responded very well to penicillin.

In other words, I did what writers are supposed to do; I wrote, and in the process of writing, I figured out what I thought about the world. I also discovered that I had more to say about things than I ever would have dreamed.

And you, my colleagues, listened. You even laughed politely, usually at the right times, which is gratifying. Although individual members of NINC, and leaders of the organization, may have disagreed with what I said, or the way I said it, nobody ever got in the way of these words. Nobody ever suggested that I was making life difficult for the group by name-calling and editor-baiting. Nobody ever suggested I tone an item down or reconfigure a sentence so that it

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BREAKING NEWS

NEW VIRUS ALERT courtesy of Eric Lilleor, Editor-in-Chief of ScreenTalk—*The Journal of International Screenwriting*...A new and destructive virus is circulating the Internet masquerading as a Y2K countdown timer, named Y2Kcount.exe. It is a Trojan virus called COUNT2K, and normally arrives as an e-mail purporting to come from Microsoft. The e-mail has an attachment "Y2KCOUNT.EXE" of 124,885 bytes. **DELETE THE ATTACHMENT, DO NOT EXECUTE IT. IT IS A REAL NASTY.** Further details have been posted on McAfee's Anti-virus Info Centre at: **<http://vil.mcafee.com/vil/tro10358.asp>** and they also have removal/cleanup instructions, if you have opened such a thing without checking first. **DELETE IT!**

PW SUBSCRIPTIONS can be had cheaper through RWA, so NINC will not be offering the service until we can get subscriptions for our members at the same price RWA members can. We'll also have to leave it off our benefits list until we've got someone who's willing to handle the group subscription process, whatever that may be...

And speaking of PW... Publishers Weekly is proud to introduce *PW Rights Alert*, the first international e-mail newsletter for agents, scouts, and editors worldwide.

Published twice a week, Tuesdays and Fridays, beginning on October 5, *PW Rights Alert* presents exclusive information on the most recent book, movie, TV, and other licensing deals. *PW Rights Alert* is written by John F. Baker, Editorial Director of Publishers Weekly and "Hot Deals" columnist for the magazine. From

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EVAN'S SWAN SONG

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made more sense. Nobody ever second-guessed me.

Not even my wife, who sometimes even sharpened the needle for me.

That is why I have thoroughly enjoyed the last six years and why I feel some genuine pangs of regret as I type away on this swan song. The experience has been genuine fun, and it has made me think in a more organized way about what was happening to me, to my writing colleagues, my publishers, and to the book business in general. In that sense, "East of the Hudson" has been more valuable for me than for you, and I thank you all for the privilege of self-immolation you have provided.

This has been a fascinating, grinding, amazing period in the history of authorship. Vast changes of the sort that happen only once or twice a century have forced us all to examine and reexamine our options as writers. Markets have dried up, lines of genre novels have disappeared, dozens of men and women who used to make money telling stories have suddenly found themselves without voices, if you will.

At the same time, new opportunities have presented themselves and are continuing to crop up every day. The Internet is here. It is a fact of life and it will do nothing but get bigger and more varied. I am convinced that the future of popular culture lies in the Digital Kingdom. Writers and artists will be freer in the next decade to blather on than they have ever been in the history of mankind. The problem is not going to be in telling stories; the problem is going to be in the ways those stories become monetized. (That's business/nerd jargon for turning e-goods into green stuff, currency, shekels, euros, dinero, and whatever else we use to pay the grocer and the bookseller.)

In other words, the world has changed. It will never be the same for us as it was when there were 15 or 20 potential publishers vying for material to put between hard boards or paper covers. But I am convinced that the world has not come to an end. There are still opportunities out there and those opportunities will expand, not contract.

Some of us aren't able to make the living we once did; others, as it turns out, are making more money than they ever thought possible. Both outcomes are part of the same process and to curse the process is as futile as cursing gravity. Stuff happens, all over the world, all the time, and one of our obligations as writers is to look at stuff and describe it as honestly as we can for others.

One of our colleagues said to me the other day that she thought the worst was over. "It's like the ship has hit the iceberg," she said. "The hull sank, some people went down, the rest of us managed to cling to our own individual pieces of the wreck and to stay afloat."

I thanked her at the time for that comforting analogy

but she's probably correct. I'd even carry it a little further. I don't know of anyone who perished in the shipwreck called late 20th century publishing. I know some folks who got into lifeboats. Others found floating timbers or planks and still others continued to swim until they found dry land of some other sort. One or two I know even got hauled aboard the captain's gig with the officers and the ship's orchestra and are continuing to party on. But nobody I know of sank beneath the waves. Humans are more buoyant than that and, after all, writers are first and foremost human.

A long time ago, the writer I sleep with said about all the politics, passions, and disappointments of publishing: "Writers write. The rest is bullshit."

Which is why I am committing this minor act of affirmation by retiring "East of the Hudson," at least for the nonce. I've said everything I needed to say about the agonies of publishing. This has been a grand vent, but now it's time to blow off another kind of steam. I am stepping aside with gratitude for the opportunity, with faint regret for some of the feelings I may have offended, and with great satisfaction that I was permitted to say things that other writers might have thought but could not freely say.

Now it's time to get to work on a project that has been lying half-finished in the drawer for some time. It's a good story and although I'm still not sure how it ends, I know that nobody else but me can write it.

So thanks and we'll see you in the funny papers. If they are still being published.

— *Evan Maxwell*

NOTICE to all MEMBERS:

**Your 2000 dues renewal
notice will be enclosed in the
December *NINK*.**

**Be sure to watch for it
and renew promptly!**



BREAKING NEWS

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October 1 to December 1, you can sign up for a free trial offer. After December 1, the annual subscription cost will be US \$399. To sign up, go to <http://www.publishersweekly.com/rightsalert>

Random House Children's Books and **Yahoo! Broadcast Services** (www.broadcast.com) have joined forces to bring families a weekly Web broadcast of noted children's authors reading from their works. The Webcast will be streamed via RealAudio and debuted September 29 at 7 p.m. EST with Stan and Jan Berenstain reading *The Berenstain Bears Think of Those in Need* and *The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room*. Each Wednesday Webcast lasts approximately 45 minutes and will include a brief interview with the author in addition to a reading. Books featured on the program will also be sold through Yahoo! Broadcast Services online merchant partners such as Amazon.com.

Barnes & Noble added to its collection of bricks-and-mortar stores when it agreed to acquire the video game and entertainment software store chain Babbage's Etc. for \$215 million. The purchase price consists of \$189 million in cash plus the assumption of \$26 million in certain liabilities. The deal is expected to close within the month.

iPage, Ingram's Web site featuring the Ingram database and Books in Print, has added several new features, most significantly, the ability for booksellers to order through the site. In addition, iPage now lists the top 200 selling titles; offers excerpts from some titles as well as more than

NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Continued from page 1

it'd cost too much in fares to go and do that.)

Australian Hazel Edwards feels the most frustrating aspect is "the etiquette of not being able to reply even when the reviewer is factually incorrect." Hey, I didn't know that. Why did no one ever tell me there was an etiquette about these things? And what's more, I don't subscribe to it, so I'm starting my own review etiquette revisionist splinter group.

Certainly you need to keep your cool if you do reply to a bad review, but I think it's your right to speak out. And whether or not you get a reaction from the reviewer or organisation involved, responding helps vent your annoyance. I feel perfectly calm about that bad review now—well, actually I don't. I still feel angry. But I do feel a tad better—and will feel better still when I get paid for this article.

Sophie Masson, an Australian author of both literary and popular fiction, doesn't agree with the no-reply etiquette, either. She says, "I think it's fair enough for reviewers to expect this—after all, like authors, their work is there in the public realm." I'm with you, Sophie, girl!

Looking at negative reviews generally, I gather from feedback that we've just about all had them. Congratulations if you've never received one—you're probably also able to walk on water.

Some people seem able to accept bad reviews and carry on without a blink. Eileen Wilks feels that, "Once my books are out there being read, they aren't just mine anymore—they belong to the readers as well."

Denise Dietz says cheerfully: "My usual reaction is 'different strokes' and I deal with it." (Drat her, I just can't stay cheerful about them, however hard I try!) Sandy Huseby insists, "you gotta take any and all reviews with a grain of salt. It's just one person's opinion and lord knows what their agenda, time of month, whatever

might be the day they write it." Do male reviewers have "times of month"? I can believe it of a certain Australian review person of the masculine gender who is my own *bête noire*.

Other people have a quick reaction to a bad review, then get over it. Nina Beaumont says: "I go into a deep, dark depression for about 45 minutes. Then I say, 'screw them, they wouldn't know a good book if it bit them' have some chocolate or maybe a glass of wine (or both) and life goes on."

As an author, Jane Toombs has decided that: "I don't believe it's profitable to try to correct any reviewer, so I never try." However, she adds, readers have the option of going to a site like Amazon and posting their own review of the same book.

Readers having a public say about books instead of just writing to the author is a new phenomenon—maybe that needs an article all of its own, because it's also open to abuse by people with a negative agenda, as we have heard from time to time. Nothing's easy for writers, is it?

Barbara Sheridan says: "I doubt I would ever publicly respond to a negative review unless it was a truly nasty personal type attack. My feeling is generally—I don't care if you don't like it. I'm proud of my project and besides, the publisher's check cleared the bank."

But what if a review is—or feels like—a nasty personal attack? What if the author doesn't have the sangfroid to ignore it? Then reviews can strike hard and really hurt you. A particularly dreadful review made Pat Roy admit, "I felt sick when I read it. Every time I think about it, I find it hard to swallow . . . It's not that I think everyone is going to love every word I write . . . but I was stunned to find someone would say mean-spirited things about me in a public forum."

I think it's the public nature of these reviews that



BREAKING NEWS

▶▶▶▶ 54,000 author biographies; and allows Bible searches by feature. Stating that the changes are allowing “a powerful database” to become “a dynamic merchandising tool for the book industry,” Jim Chandler, president of Ingram Book Co. and chief commercial officer of Ingram Book Group, noted that the new ordering capability is especially useful for international customers as well as booksellers who prefer to order off-hours at home. For more information, go to <http://www.ingrambook.com>.

Congratulations to Debbie Macomber, who made the *NYT* (at #14) for the first time. Way to go, Debbie!

In other member news...While Randy Russell, our intrepid central coordinator for seven years, works on new fiction projects, he's also been collecting southern ghost stories. His second nonfiction book of ghost stories with his wife, Janet Barnett, is called *The Granny Curse* and features ghosts and legends of eastern Tennessee. He and Janet toured from Bristol, VA, to Chattanooga and recently moved to Asheville, NC, where they're working on a ghost story book covering the entire south. The research can get a little unnerving—Randy had his first run-in with a ghost while researching *The Granny Curse*! Next we'll see how this affects his fiction...

Rock-Solid Six Months for Bricks-and-Mortar: *PW* reports that sales for the four largest bookstore chains in the US (Barnes & Noble, Books-a-Million, Borders, and Crown) were up 10% in the first half of 1999. Borders and Books-a-Million reported the heftiest increase, while Crown dipped precipitously in the ▶▶▶

NEGATIVE REVIEWS

▶▶▶▶ *Continued from page 7*

makes them hurt so much. They won't affect people who know how wonderful we are, i.e., our mothers, but who knows how they'll affect all those strangers and potential readers out there? And bad reviews can be downright humiliating, too! I had a short story in an anthology. The in-house editor liked it best of all the stories the anthologist had gathered and took the trouble to ring and tell me so, but the reviewer (old *bête noire* striking again) went out of his way to say mine was the worst story of the whole anthology—and he said this in a major national newspaper, too. One feels so helpless. OK, I'm a wimp! Over-sensitive. I admit that. But I still cringe when I remember that review.

Judy Pella says “I can get several good reviews, but it is the bad one that seems to count, somehow negating all the good ones . . . I mull over it and whine. Must be insecurity. I'd like to know the cure.”

On the other hand, what if you get a good review from a reputable publication and they get the authors' names completely wrong? In a review from *PW* of the recent anthology, *Charmed*, it stated that Lori Foster and Eileen Wilks were two of Jayne Ann Krentz's “lesser known pseudonyms.”

Sometimes you just can't win.

Some reviewers don't even seem to read the book in question, or to read only part of it, and that irritates the hell out of the authors. This sort of reviewer does things like talking about a romance hero dying early on in the plot—when actually the heroine only thinks he's dead. As Denise Dietz, author-victim of this laziness, says: “I mean, who in their right mind would buy a romance where the hero dies halfway through the book???” Another reviewer griped “why do all these books have heroes who are ex-FBI agents living in Montana?” As the book in question

was set in Wyoming and Pat McLaughlin's (w/a Patricia McLinn) hero wasn't ex-FBI, she was understandably bemused. And Australian Astrid Cooper, who writes fantasy romances (deliberately!) got taken to task for mixing genres by a reviewer whose work was full of spelling mistakes.

Barbara Miller had a similar experience: “. . . what really rubbed in the salt was that it was obvious to me the reviewer had read only the first fifty pages. If they don't want to do the reading, these people should not take the job.” And Jane Tombs had a reviewer of her five-generation historical saga complaining that “Characters die.” Wow! Couldn't they have taken more vitamin tablets?

It's equally perplexing that, “I've had rave reviews on one review list, and hate reviews on another on the same book.” But that at least has its compensations. As Juliana Garnett says, “Of course, I always agree with the rave and disagree with the hate!”

Authors are not totally paranoid. We can agree to disagree with reviewers. Barbara Sheridan is not worried by a negative review “if it's well done with a sort of ‘This didn't work for me because . . .’ tone.” A review like that made her ask herself why her point had not come across for the reader and how she could improve her work in the future. A reviewer who wrongly took Jo-Ann Power to task for failure to use accurate historical background made her first “squeal with outrage” then work to get recognised as an “authority” on historical research. Her techniques included public speaking on research and including author notes in her books.

Well, my friends, I just read the last paragraph and I have decided that I am paranoid about some things. I can even cringe at a good review if it says, “This is the write stuff.” Ugh! I have paranoid friends, too. Sophie Masson reacts in various ways “a. I get mad: muttering under

my breath, what an idiot, etc., etc., and then writing that on the review before I stick it in my scrapbook; b. I ritually immolate it, and c. I get even."

I did try to write this article with a balanced viewpoint, well, I tried half-heartedly, anyway. I'm only human and couldn't resist the chance to vent my spleen. I therefore contacted a reviewer friend of mine. Loren Teague is a well-known New Zealand reviewer, who writes with pride about what she does—she was a contender for the New Zealand national Montana Book Reviewer of the Year last year. Her comments include: "I would never condemn a book outright because there are always positive and negative parts to a book. And every author and reviewer should accept this." And: "Reviewing is a skill/art and it can be learned. For every reviewer I take on, I give guidelines and help."

She gave me a new perspective, too, when she added, "We need more articles on book reviewing in writing magazines. It is an area in its own right. We need to emphasize the importance of balanced reviews. We need to emphasize that authors

won't stand for reviews which are badly put together. In other words, raising the standard of reviewing is the responsibility of us all." She finished her comments by submitting three of her own book reviews as examples of good work. I was impressed by her whole post.

I'd like to sum up with some powerful, incisive statements, but I have to confess that I haven't come to any real conclusions about negative reviews except that they're definitely wrong, and chocolate does help.

And maybe Jenny Crusie is right. She got her first negative review last year. "Then I found out the truth of reviews: it doesn't matter what they say. People will hunt out books that got crummy reviews [because] they want to see what got the reviewer's panties in a twist. The NYT reviewer did me the immense favor of being appalled by all the sex in the book. This did not hurt my sales."

PS: I'm a fairly gentle person, but if my own *bête noire* reviewer should ever fall down a deep hole and not be seen again in print, I would not mind in the slightest.

NINK

NINC 2000

ELECTION RESULTS

The Novelists, Inc. Board of Directors is happy to release the following results of the election and announcements at the Annual Business Meeting in Savannah:

2000 NINC Board of Directors

Carla Neggers, President
Barbara Keiler, President-Elect
Jane Bonander, Secretary
Debbie Gordon, Treasurer
Terey daly Ramin, Newsletter Editor
Georgia Bockoven, Advisory Council Representative

2000 Nominating Committee

Julie Tetel Andresen, Brenda Hiatt Barber, Kathy Lynn Emerson, Barbara Samuel, and Amanda Scott

The new Board of Directors will take office as of January 1, 2000, and the new Nominating Committee will begin work in April 2000.

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

Olivia Rupprecht (*Mallory Rush*),
Tallahassee FL

New Members

Susan Macias (*Susan Mallery*),
Redondo Beach CA
Larry Jay Martin, Clinton MT
Lorna Tedder (*Lauren Shelley*),
Niceville FL
Kathleen Givens, Laguna Beach CA
Cheryl Kushner, Melville NY



BREAKING NEWS

wake of store closings and restructuring.

PW notes that "Crown is believed to be close to officially emerging from bankruptcy."

Below is a press release prepared by the Authors Guild and the ASJA in the wake of a major court victory for freelancers' electronic rights: If you believe any of your freelance works have been posted onto an electronic database such as Nexis or a CD ROM without your permission, please contact the AG's Contract Services Department if you would like assistance in protecting your interests.

New York, September 28, 1999—Thanks to a decision of the United States Second Circuit Court of Appeals issued last Friday, the publishing world has been turned rightside up, according to the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA) and the Authors Guild. Reversing a lower court's decision in the case known as *Tasini, et al. v. The New York Times, et al.*, the appellate court reaffirmed freelance writers' full copyright ownership of their work. It struck down the practice by many publishers of licensing work that had appeared in their publications to Mead Data Central's Lexis/Nexis database and University Microfilms International's CD ROMs without the writers' permission.

The court based its decision on two factors. First, the databases containing the articles were not, as the publishers claimed, "revisions" of the original publications in which the articles appeared but were impermissible re-uses. And second, there were no written agreements between the individual authors and publishers that permitted the transfer



BREAKING NEWS

to the electronic databases.

"This decision is wonderful news for freelance writers, because it reaffirms our right to reap our fair share of the financial benefits from electronic uses of our works," said Letty Cottin Pogrebin, resident of the Authors Guild and a freelance contributor to numerous publications. "From now on, when negotiating their contracts, writers must make sure to protect all rights stemming from the new technologies so that such disputes do not arise in the future."

"For too long," said ASJA President Samuel Greengard, "some publishers have been serial infringers. This Appeals Court ruling is common sense recognition of the strict and explicit requirements that govern the use of a freelance writer's work. I salute Jonathan Tasini, his fellow plaintiffs, and the National Writers Union for pursuing this case."

The Tasini suit primarily affects work published after 1978 and before the mid-1990s, when many publishers began issuing contracts asking authors to grant electronic rights. Since then, authors' organizations have been waging a vigorous "rights campaign" to empower writers to negotiate fair contract terms and encourage publishers to issue fair contracts. One of the most effective tools in the campaign is the Authors Registry, a nonprofit organization established by the Authors Guild, ASJA, and other organizations. The Registry has enabled parties to efficiently and easily disburse re-use fees due to any of the 30,000 authors listed in the Registry database. From May 1995 to the present, the Registry has distributed to individual authors over one million dollars in revenues.

With the Tasini decision firmly

asserting freelance authors' rights, ASJA and the Authors Guild call on all segments of the publishing industry to affirm the importance of sharing the benefits of electronic uses of published works with the authors who create them.

MARKET: *Publishers Weekly* reports "HarperCollins, Morrow Merge Children's Divisions"...Led by president and publisher Susan Katz, HarperCollins Children's Books will now consist of eight imprints, down from a total of 16 that were operating when HarperCollins and Morrow/Avon were separate entities. Reporting to Katz are four senior vice-presidents and publishers: Susan Hirschman (Greenwillow Books), Joanna Cotler (Joanna Cotler Books), Laura Geringer (Laura Geringer Books), and Kate Morgan Jackson (in charge of HarperCollins hardcover, paperback, and novelty imprints).

Jackson's group consists of the following imprints: HarperCollins, HarperFestival, HarperTrophy, Avon, and Tempest.

Reporting to Jackson are Elise Howard, v-p, director of paperbacks; Mary Alice Moore, v-p, director of brand publishing; and hardcover editorial directors Barbara Lalicki, Robert Warren, Alix Reid, and Phoebe Yeh. Among those let go in the reorganization: Jazan Higgins, v-p, director of marketing; Nancy Gallt, v-p, director, subsidiary rights and international rights; Paulette Kaufmann, v-p, editor-in-chief of Mulberry, Beech Tree, and Tupelo; Susan Pearson, v-p, editor-in-chief of Lothrop, Lee & Shepard; and Andrea Curley, senior editor, Morrow Junior Books. Closed imprints include Morrow Junior Books, Lothrop Lee & Shepard, Michael di Capua Books, Beech Tree, Mulberry, Tupelo, Avon Flare, and Avon Camelot.

Kaylee N. Davis has been named v-p and marketing director to oversee the combined marketing efforts of all imprints. Davis was previously v-p of television brand marketing and publishing at Lancit Media, and prior to that was director of marketing at Golden Books. Virginia Anagnos,

director of publicity, will be responsible for publicity of titles published by all imprints.

With the acquisition of Morrow and Avon, HarperCollins will now be the country's third largest children's trade publisher. According to Katz, the group will publish about 500 titles per year, down from a combined 600. Katz said that all books currently under contract with either company would be published. "The plan is to go forward as the pipeline is committed," she said. "The only reason to delay publication would be if a book is not ready." The HarperCollins children's staff will be relocating to the Morrow offices at 1350 Avenue of the Americas at the end of October. Changes to the structure of the sales force will not be announced until November, Katz said.

News from Frankfurt (via Reuters): Booksellers at the world's largest book fair hailed the Internet as a welcome ally in the international expansion of publishing. Book sales have led the electronic retail revolution on the Internet, in turn giving a welcome sales boost to the book, one of the oldest technologies in the world. The Frankfurt Book Fair attracted 6,600 publishers from a record 113 countries. One in four exhibitors at the last fair of the millennium now offer electronic publications. Internet book sales account for up to 15 percent of the total in the United States. In Britain it is two percent and rising fast. Roland Ulmer, president of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, said technical development in the publishing industry was both swift and exciting. "Internet bookselling plays an important part at this book fair," he told reporters at a Frankfurt news conference. "Even if the term 'e-commerce' dominates the headlines, it's really about nothing more or less than the good old-fashioned book."

NINK



ONLINE...

To turn off a computer or not to turn off a computer? That is the question that has plagued users since the dawn of the personal computer era. Rumors abounded: it took much more energy to turn on the computer than to leave it running constantly. A computer's life expectancy was shortened if it was turned on and off too frequently. If left for hours, an image would burn itself onto the screen of a monochrome monitor.

The question now has an answer. Today's computers are more energy efficient so turning off the computer is no longer a significant issue. Today's monitors are not as susceptible to burn in. Screen savers, most with constantly moving images, also help prevent burn in.

What is the best search engine to use when researching information on the Internet? Yahoo? Lycos? Alta Vista? Info Seek? Now, you no longer have to spend your time using different search engines. MetaCrawler at www.go2net.com/search.html does it for you. It accesses the information from ten search engines to help you find your information more easily and quickly. You also have the option of customizing the search if you don't want all available search engines used.

Trying to determine whether or not you can claim travel expenses as a business write-off? Visit the Tax Prophet at www.taxprophet.com. Although the Tax Prophet does carry a disclaimer that it is not offering legal advice, it can provide you with information regarding taxes on various issues which might benefit you in the business of writing, or it can at least guide you toward the issues you may want to research further before filing your taxes.

Netlingo located at www.netlingo.com is an informative and fun site designed to help people who are new to the Internet. The site contains an online dictionary with thousands of words and acronyms associated with the Internet. Additional practical and useful information about technology and the online world is available. One extremely helpful feature is the Pocket Dictionary. When you go to netlingo, you can activate the Pocket Dictionary and the popup window will stay on your screen as you browse the Internet so that you can look up any familiar words you come across without having to return to the netlingo site.

Curious as to what people are saying about you or your books on the Internet? Visit EgoSurf at egosurf.com. The site searches for Web pages that include your name, or any name you provide. The perpetual search gathers new links daily. If you don't have time to visit the links it provides, you can ask it to pull the excerpts where your name is provided and it will e-mail you the excerpts.

John Weaver is the editor of an online literary website

and newsletter called Page ONE at www.pageonelit.com, which was featured by *Writer's Digest* as one of their best resources and sites on the Internet. Page ONE has over a hundred interviews with novelists as well as writing tips and other related useful information.

Ivan Hoffman, BA, J.D., an attorney at law, has a wonderful website at www.ivanhoffman.com which has great articles for writers and publishers, particularly on contracts. The site is definitely worth checking out.

The Author Illustrator Source at www.author-illustrator-source.com is a good site to visit if you are looking for speakers for schools or professional speaking engagements. The site does charge a \$90 annual fee to authors or illustrators who wish to be listed but it doesn't charge you to tour the site and find someone to speak at your function.

Texas is often a popular setting for novels. Now a joint project by the General Libraries at University of Texas at Austin and the Texas State Historical Association has helped to make researching the great state a little easier. (Yes, as a long-time Texan, I'm biased.) At www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/ The Handbook of Texas Online provides over 23,000 articles on the people, places, and historical events that shaped Texas and its culture.

An interesting site for Western writers is American Western Ezine at ReadTheWest.com. The site has articles, photos, poems, trial subscriptions, and other areas of interest.

Recently, I've heard authors mention that they've begun to work at their computers while standing because of the pain they experience while sitting for long stretches of time. The Stand Up Desk Company at www.erols.com/standup explains that Sir Winston Churchill and Ernest Hemingway are among a list of people who worked while standing. The site's owner, Marty Burns, designs custom computer furniture geared toward the needs of individual clients. If you're experiencing pain, you might want to check this site out.

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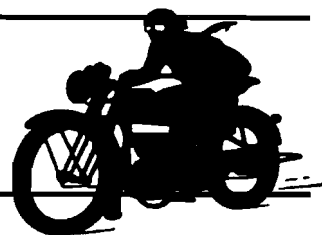
If you have sites to share that you think would be of interest to Novelists, Inc. members, please e-mail me.

— Lorraine Heath
(LorraineHe@aol.com)



DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

Dispatches from the Front is a "war stories" feature. If something funny, black comedy to slapstick, happens to you, send it in. Anonymity will be preserved, of course, if you desire it.



Why Y2K???

By LAURA RESNICK

For at least a year, I've been reading detailed warnings, helpful hints, alarmist predictions, vague reassurances, and even apocalyptic panic about what will happen come the millenium. Everywhere I turn—including the pages of *NINK*—people are discussing the worldwide chaos which, many fear, will ensue at 12:00 a.m. on January 1, 2000.

So, okay, let's assume the worst for a moment: Everything goes haywire, total chaos ensues, everyone's stuff breaks down, and all the nastiest predictions come true. On that basis, one thing still perplexes me about all this mass hysteria as we approach New Year's Day 2000:

How will any of this be different from my normal daily life?

For example, I've heard that computers will short-circuit and implode in their confusion. Well, that's happened to me three times just this year; and longtime readers of *NINK* may even remember the time my monitor actually exploded in flames and filled the house with smelly black smoke for a whole day. Can anyone tell me what will be different about my computer's temper tantrums in 2000? (In any event, I don't anticipate a Y2K-specific problem, since my computer currently thinks this is March of 2006.)

Yes, I've heard that, as a result of computer failure, banks will misplace everyone's money. Big deal. Last year my bank suddenly claimed that neither my account nor my money existed. A week of exhaustive confrontation with surly bureaucrats finally revealed that they had, for reasons best known to themselves, relocated my account to Toledo and listed me as a retail business. When I had the impertinence to explain that I was a writer, not a storefront, and lived in Cincinnati (some 200 miles from Toledo), they

suggested I consider becoming a retail business in Toledo to save them the trouble of doing all the paperwork it would require to adjust my account to my situation. I'm not making this up.

And, yes, I've heard that the Y2K chaos in international banking could destroy the world's economy. Well, cry me a river. Three years ago, I wrote to Barclay's Bank in London to point out that they had failed to send me a bank statement for over a year, and I asked them to please do so. Barclay's Bank wrote back to say that, as an American, surely I didn't really need that bank account, and so they thought we should just forget the whole thing. (No, I'm not making this up.) Last year, it took some German bank half a year to determine that I'm not a federal criminal and therefore they could safely pay me the money I was owed for a two-book sale there. So I cannot agree with anyone that the international banking standards of the 20th century are something we want to carry over into the 21st century.

Some say that, come the millennium, the IRS will lose all its records and assume that no one has paid their taxes.

Uh-huh. And your point would be?

Nary a year has passed, since I became a writer, that I have not received threatening letters from the IRS about some payment they claim I haven't made or some paperwork they claim I haven't filed. In every single instance, they were wrong, and I promptly proved it by sending them

photocopies of the cancelled checks or the paperwork in question, along with photocopies of the certified mail receipts for those items. Following my assertions of innocence, I invariably then become the recipient of two separate sets of weekly mailings from the IRS. The first set makes increasingly dire threats about all the horrible things the IRS will do to destroy my life if I don't send the money or paperwork they claim I haven't sent. The second set of letters advises me to ignore the first set. (I'm really not making this up.)

Call me a misty-eyed optimist, but I trust the IRS to maintain this level of performance regardless of Y2K.

Moving right along, I've even heard that computerized household appliances will stop working on January 1, 2000—and perhaps even explode or go into meltdown. (So you're saying it wasn't normal when my telephone, my TV, my stereo, my hair dryer, my portable radio, my VCR, my curling iron, and my coffee maker all did this in the 20th century?) Cars will stop running, probably in the middle of eight-lane intersections. (The way mine did three times in 1997 and once in 1998?)

Airports will descend into complete chaos and airplanes will be grounded. (Apparently I haven't mentioned that it took me 36 hours to fly from Baltimore to Cincinnati in 1998, and that the last 200 miles of my 500-mile journey finally took place on a chartered bus in the middle of the night.)

Investment portfolios will crash and burn. (What's an investment portfolio?) Publishers will lose track of monies owed to their authors. (And the noticeable difference would be?) Utilities will fail. (And would this be for longer, I ask, than the weeklong power-outages often suffered by huge portions



of my city in mid-winter?) Water supplies will be unreliable. (I've fought a camel in the desert for water—and won, of course—so you're not going to scare me with this one.)

In short, chaos and panic will ensue come January 1, 2000.

Yes, I got that part.

And the big fat hairy deal would be?

Laura Resnick aka Laura Leone, award-winning author of SF/F and romance, lives in a perpetual state of mass hysteria and is pleased that, come the millennium, she will no longer be alone in this respect.



We Couldn't Have Done It Without You!

Now that Novelists, Inc.'s Tenth Annual National Conference is a pleasant memory, it's time to acknowledge all those who made the event such a great success. First of all, many thanks to my very talented and dedicated committee, who worked through deadlines and personal crises to tie up all loose ends and make sure every detail of the conference was perfect. They are:

Program Chair Jasmine Cresswell, who was responsible for one of the most interesting, provocative and relevant programs we've experienced.

Editor/Agent Liaison Sandra Kitt, who tackled the enormous task of inviting all the publishing professionals, following up with them, convincing them to attend the conference, and getting them placed on the conference schedule.

Vicki Hinze, who flawlessly handled our conference registration process and kept track of the ever-changing list of attendees.

A special thanks goes to Ellen Taber, who prepared the guides to Savannah that gave NINC members an insider's view of the city and its sites.

We also could not have put together such a crowd-pleaser of a conference without the support and input of the NINC Board of Directors. They previewed every idea and gave us the benefit of their collective wisdom (not to mention their opinions!). My particular thanks to President Julie Kistler who went above and beyond in providing ideas and support.

As always, our guest speakers were outstanding, particularly our own Ann Maxwell, and we'd also like to thank those members who served as moderators for the various conference sessions, as volunteers at the conference registration desk, the people who sent

suggestions for the conference program, and those who just pitched in wherever they were needed. Thanks to every one of you.

The NINC conference is always the sum of many parts, and each of those parts is contributed by a NINC member. This is truly 'our' conference. If you missed Savannah, you will get to read some of the highlights in upcoming issues of NINK. We hope it will make you more determined than ever not to miss next year's conference in Vancouver. See you there!

— *Victoria Thompson, Conference Coordinator*

Looking Ahead...

Loved Savannah? Didn't make Savannah due to other commitments? Here's an early heads-up for October 2000—and you can check out the information at www.ninc.com.

Where we'll be: Vancouver, BC, Canada
Where we'll stay: Waterfront Centre Hotel
When we'll be there: Oct. 25-29, 2000

Plus you can check out the following sites for more information:

Hotel info: www.waterfrontcentrehotel.com
or www.placestostay.com/Vanc-WaterfrontCentre/


And here's the one for Tourism Vancouver in general: www.tourism-vancouver.org

Also, don't forget: Vancouver has one of the world's premier Lasik centers. You can attend the conference and come away without glasses at the same time! <http://www.gimbel.com/>

— TdR

Money Matters

By MEENA CHENG



Y2K Investment Plan Depends On Level of Concern

One of the things I started teaching my children early on was cooking. Personally, I feel there are few things more satisfying in life than enjoying a home cooked meal with family and friends.

I didn't exactly grow up in the kitchen. As a matter of fact, it wasn't until I was in college when I did anything more than boil water in the kitchen. Even then, it was not as much a calling as an instinctive act to survive.

One of my first cooking endeavors, and disasters, was making a soufflé. It was as much the elegance of the dish as the inexpensive ingredients that appeal to a starving student's heart and soul. I figured a few eggs here, a few tablespoon of sugar there, follow a few simple steps, and I should have something that looks exactly like the picture in Martha Stewart's glossy magazine.

Needless to say, my first soufflé did not set the world on fire—except in my kitchen. It was only through years of trial and error that I learned the trick of making soufflé is not to beat the life out of the egg whites. Like children, it needs some room to breathe so it can rise (to the occasion) in the oven.

Timing is such a big part of cooking. A minute too long here or a minute too little there can make or ruin a dish, not to mention one's appetite or turn into a health hazard. As we enter into the next millennium, we are faced with the biggest timing challenge known to mankind—the infamous Year 2000 (Y2K) fallout.

At the heart of the Y2K problem is the computer code written decades ago by programmers to recognize only the last two digits of a year when storing dates. When the year 2000 starts, the computer is going to confuse the date with the year 1900, bringing chaos and confusions to all walks of life.

Potential implications of Y2K are unknown. Some view it as more of a nuisance, while others preach doom and gloom. Like many other things in life, reality is probably somewhere between the two views.

Investment pundits are at odds over the implications of Y2K issues to the financial market. Lacking precedents from which to base some types of forecast, the advice many financial planners give to their clients is to do what each prudent investor should do: develop an investment strategy that best fits their investment goals and level of risk tolerance.

But how do I know what strategy is best for me?

I remember a recent interview Julia Child gave on her philosophies on cooking. She was asked if there is such a thing as a perfect recipe or a perfect dish—like a perfect boiled egg.

She answered the question in her trademark voice by saying: "Who is it to judge (a perfect dish)? I want my boiled egg softly but perfectly set (in the middle) and the white is thickly liquid. Others don't."

Personally, I think her answer has poignantly illustrated the fact that there is no such thing as a perfect investment strategy.

Most people know how they feel about Y2K—very concerned, not concerned, or moderately concerned. It would make sense to develop an investment strategy and allocate investment assets according to "how you feel about Y2K."

If you are the "low concern" type, there is probably little you need to do with your investments. Just stay the course, maintain diversification, and focus on large companies with visible earnings.

If, after some soul searching, you believe you are the "high concern" type, or you will be needing money from your investment account to buy a home or other large purchase, you may want to reduce your exposure to stocks, especially international and small caps. You may also want to reallocate a portion of the funds to either high quality bonds or simply to cash.

To help put together an action plan for Y2K based on your degree of concern, I have put together a chart to help you navigate in this unprecedented market environment (*see facing page*).

As Senator John Glenn once said, "... The greatest antidote to worry, whether you are getting ready for space flight or facing a problem of daily life, is preparation.... The more you try to envision what might happen and what your best response and options are, the more you are able to allay your fears about the future."

Meena Cheng is an investment professional with the Bellevue office of U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray, one of the nation's premier investment firms. Securities products and services are offered through U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray Inc., member SIPC and NYSE, Inc. a subsidiary of U.S. Bancorp.



Item	Low Concern	Moderate Concern	High Concern
Outlook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Low likelihood of extreme outcomes; U.S. and international commerce will continue at its current pace ▼ Overall economic activity will remain equal to or only slightly slower than 1998 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Isolated instances of extreme outcomes; U.S. and international commerce will continue, but at a more moderate and delayed pace ▼ The U.S. will avoid a recession, the economic woes in areas such as Asia and Latin America will continue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Ample instances of extreme outcomes; chaos and confusion will be commonplace ▼ Economic activity will plummet, resulting in a global recession including the U.S.
Market Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ U.S. equities will perform similar to historical norms ▼ Yields on fixed income securities will remain relatively flat with current levels ▼ Real Estate values will remain largely unchanged ▼ International securities funds will continue to rebound from their lows in 1998, with performance being highly varied from country to country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Increased market volatility and varied performance among different investment classes can be expected. ▼ U.S. equities will perform at or below historical levels; large caps will likely outperform small companies; performance will be noticeably varied from sector to sector. ▼ Real estate values, in general, will remain flat to downward trending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Equity prices will decline, most likely beyond the lows of 1998; p nearly all sectors will experience weakness. ▼ Fixed income securities will outperform as a result of significantly lower interest rates. ▼ Real Estate prices will decline reflecting weak economic conditions.
Investor Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Stay the course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Err toward caution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Become defensive
Asset Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Growth 40% U.S. Large Caps 23% U.S. Small/Mid Caps 11% International* 25% Fixed Income 1% Cash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Growth & Income 37% U.S. Large Caps 16% U.S. Small/Mid Caps 6% International* 40% Fixed Income 1% Cash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Income 35% U.S. Large Caps 0% U.S. Small/Mid Caps 0% International* 65% Fixed Income 0% Cash
General Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Maintain diversification, based on return expectations for given risk levels and portfolio objectives ▼ Focus on large companies that are industry leaders and have globally dominant businesses; focus on small/mid-sized companies that enjoy unique and proprietary positions ▼ Reduce exposure to "losers" and/or companies with generally poor earnings visibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Reduce equity exposure. ▼ Internationally, err toward developed versus emerging markets. ▼ Increase fixed income exposure, primarily government and municipal issues ▼ Sell "losers." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Reduce equity exposure; err toward large companies that generally offer predictability of earnings. ▼ Eliminate small/mid cap and international exposure. ▼ Buy bonds, primarily government and municipal issues; be selective among high yield corporate bonds. ▼ Sell "losers."

Excerpts from U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray "Prepare for the New Millennium" 1999.

*Please be reminded: International investing involves special risks not associated with U.S. investments, such as foreign currency exchange rates, differences in financial account practices and possible political or economic instability.



NINC Members on the USA Today List

Compiled by MARILYN PAPPANO

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 number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: pappano@ionet.net. Internet surfers can find the list at: <http://www.usatoday.com>.

Member	Title	Sept 2	Sept 9	Sept 16	Sept 23	Sept 30
Jill Barnett	<i>Wicked, Jove</i>		76n	40	71	
Sandra Brown	<i>Unspeakable</i> , Warner	5	5	10	21	32
Sandra Brown	<i>The Alibi</i> , Warner		11n	9	22	22
Lois McMaster Bujold	<i>A Civil Campaign</i> , Baen	181	135			
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Target</i> , Jove	61	75	124		
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Edge</i> , Putnam	85	104	132		
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Countess</i> , Signet			254	42	13
Claire Delacroix	<i>The Heiress</i> , Dell			176	105	117
Tess Gerritsen	<i>Bloodstream</i> , Pocket	49	59	64	115	
Leigh Greenwood	<i>The Cowboys: Pete</i> , Leisure	124				
Tami Hoag	<i>Still Waters</i> , Bantam	8	9	14	29	44
Kay Hooper	<i>Haunting Rachel</i> , Bantam		86n	92	131	141
Linda Howard	<i>All the Queen's Men</i> , Pocket	137				
Iris Johansen	<i>The Face of Deception</i> , Bantam	119	109			
Iris Johansen	<i>The Killing Game</i> , Bantam		50n	87	145	125
Andrea Kane	<i>The Silver Coin</i> , Sonnet		85n	72	132	
Jane Ann Krentz, et al *	<i>The Private Eye/Beguiled</i> , Harlequin	84	116			
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Remember Summer</i> , Avon			44n	15	28
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Chain Lightning</i> , Mira			204	142	
Debbie Macomber	<i>Promise</i> , Texas, Mira			37n	17	25
Cathy Maxwell	<i>Married in Haste</i> , Avon	146				
Judith McNaught	<i>Night Whispers</i> , Pocket	36	41	56	92	126
Mary Jo Putney	<i>The Bargain</i> , Signet			239	60	37
Nora Roberts	<i>The Reef</i> , Jove		63n	6	6	7
Joan Wolf	<i>Golden Girl</i> , Warner		121n	106	98	142

* et al: indicates that the book was written with other authors who are not members of NINC

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