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organization for
writers of popular
fiction

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Advocacy: Looking Ahead

By KAY HOOPER

When Terey told me it was time for an "end of the century" column for Advocacy, my first reaction was panic. End of the century? That makes it sound like I should have gotten an awful lot accomplished, and the truth is—I haven't. Yet.

I have a confession to make. You know those wonderful people who somehow manage to juggle six or seven things in the air without dropping any of them, while also standing on one foot and singing the national anthem?

I'm not one of them.

You can call it a lack of balance or merely an inability to juggle, but as it turns out, I'm the sort of person who does best when I concentrate on one thing at a time, pretty much to the exclusion of all else. Which is why when I'm hip-deep in a book, I eat over the keyboard (when I remember to eat) and eventually run out of clean clothes because I haven't done the laundry since Chapter 3.

That was one of the reasons I hesitated about taking on Advocacy Chair, but I told myself that I could handle it. After all, my publisher had me on a one-book-a-year schedule, and I tend to be a fast writer anyway, so there'd be lots of free time left over to devote to Advocacy.

Have you ever noticed that Fate has a way of snickering at you? Yeah, me too.

In one of those lovely surprises Fate likes to throw at us, shortly after I

got my committee together and we'd decided on our first project (the Frequently Asked Questions sheets, you may remember), a number of decisions were made that suddenly kicked my writing schedule into high gear. I won't bore you with the details, but suffice it to say that instead of having months between books, I very abruptly found I didn't even have weeks.

And I can't juggle.

Advocacy, unfortunately, got back-burnered, along with a few other things. The good news is that this state of affairs is temporary and, by the time you read this, likely to be over. I should be back on track with enough non-writing time to allow me to do some useful extracurricular stuff. Like Advocacy. And laundry.

So my long-suffering committee and I should be getting those FAQs sheets ready for you about now, honest.

As for 2000...well, let's look ahead for a minute.

The illegal sale and rental of ARCs is still going on, and while some individual authors have been able to persuade their publishers to scold (I refuse to use a stronger word) some bookstores caught in the act, nothing is really being done to abolish the practice. My feeling is that we'll have to somehow get the publishers off their collective duffs on this issue, because only they have

the clout to actually punish offenders.

And if anybody has any ideas on how to do that, I'd love to hear from you.

On another subject, some authors have been successful in regaining control of their backlists, but it continues to be an uphill battle and publishers are still prone to refuse to revert by saying a book is "still in print" in Outer Mongolia. (In which case, by the way, an author can immediately respond in writing by stating that she/he is requesting reversion of rights excluding the Mongolian license still in force.)

With all the available outlets now open to authors—electronic books online and on disk, print on demand, publishing companies founded by groups of authors—regaining control of our backlists, wherever possible, will continue to be important, I believe.

Which brings me to the Internet.

I don't know about the rest of you, but the 1999 Christmas shopping season definitely taught me that electronic commerce is here to stay; I think I managed to do about 85 percent of my shopping either online or through catalogs. I find I'm ordering a solid 90 percent of my books and virtually all my DVDs through Amazon.com. And when I need something from Office Depot (the nearest store is 45 miles away), going online is no longer an impulse but simply automatic.

The future is here, folks, and it's the Internet.

You noticed too, huh? Hard to miss, isn't it? *Cont. on Page 3* ▶ ▶ ▶

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PRESIDENT'S

NINC is
at its
best
when....

COLUMN...

Shortly before the Evan Maxwell called to after five years of writing "East of the Hudson"

course, on behalf of all of us NINC members. Evan's checked the ice for us. He's gone where we've thought better of going and brought us back stories, insight, witty commentary, and reminders—look back at his columns, they're always there—of what it means to love both writing and this often crazy business of publishing.

But even as I was heaping profuse and genuine appreciation upon him, it sunk in. The bastard's quitting on my watch! He's not calling me because I've slipped him tidbits from time to time—he's calling me because I'm the incoming president of NINC. Ex-reporter and brilliant writer that he is, Evan's easy to talk to. I told him I didn't know whatever had possessed me to take this job. He didn't take the bait and agree I was out of my mind and should find a way out ASAP. Instead, his answer resonates with me even now, weeks later. "You took this on because you think you have something to offer."

What Evan Said

I wasn't dragged kicking and screaming into this job. I was asked, and I said yes. To be honest, I wasn't thinking about what I could offer—I was thinking that the conference would be in Vancouver and I'd get to go. Nothing wrong with a little self-interest. When I renew my NINC membership, I'm hoping to get something for my \$65. A great newsletter, a great conference, a roster of names, numbers, e-mail addresses of authors I can contact, Ninlink, ninc.com, a board and committees that work on behalf of authors. Evan's words, however, reminded me that NINC is a professional organization. It's not like being a member of your local museum. We don't even have a real, paid staff.

Certainly Evan had plenty to offer when he served as president and then as a columnist. So have all those who've served NINC so ably and tirelessly in various capacities for the past ten years. Janice Brooks, Marianne Shock, Rebecca Brandewyne, Jasmine Cresswell, Maggie Osborne, Georgia Bockoven, Linda Barlow, Bill Bernhardt, Steve Womack, Julie Kistler, Victoria Thompson, Robyn Carr, Anne Holmberg, Randy Russell, Joan Johnston, Phyllis DiFrancesco, Deb Gordon, Candace Schuler, Sandi Kitt, Terey daly Ramin, Becky Barker, Vicki Lewis Thompson, Vicki Hinze, Kay Hooper, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Catherine Coulter, Jayne Ann Krentz, Ann Maxwell—and that's by no means everyone.

Me—well, I was thinking I was nuts. I didn't want to offer anything to anyone. I wanted to coast. I have a demanding writing schedule, a child at home and another in college—I have a huge extended family, aging in-laws, a widowed mother with a tree farm to tend. I have a house I'm fixing up. I have books to read, places to go, things to do. And I have writer friends who tell me I'm dissipating my energies by serving as an officer in a writers' organization.

But here I am, president of Novelists, Inc., at the start of its second decade and a new millennium. I've experienced many of the peaks and valleys of this business. Still, I come to this job with no axes to grind or any sense that I know more about writing and publishing than the next writer. I come instead with an enduring love of writing and an affection for writers

that is soul deep. I come with the firm belief that NINC can be a positive, constructive force not only for its members, but for popular fiction and the industry as a whole. For books, for readers, not just for individual writers, agents, and editors.

I'm not cynical...but I'm not naïve. I don't believe all agents are scum. I don't believe all editors are nitwits who read too much Sylvia Plath in college. Nor do I believe that, as writers, we're just a bunch of whiners who think our publishers could make us all bestsellers if only they would. Most of the agents, editors, and writers I've dealt with since I sent off my first manuscript are dedicated professionals who love books and want to see publishing thrive. That doesn't mean we don't have different agendas. It doesn't mean there aren't thieves and sharks among us. Publishing is, after all, an intensely human enterprise not exempt from human failings. I believe, however, that NINC is at its best—at its most powerful and most compelling—not when we're operating out of a sense of scarcity, entitlement, and pessimism, but out of a sense of abundance and optimism, with a strong commitment to what's fair.

Now, back to you with what Evan said

What we accomplish this year or any year isn't up to any one president or board or committee—it's up to all of us. We all, I believe, have something to offer. That's what makes NINC work. Maybe you have a question that galvanizes us into action: "I'm having trouble getting my rights back to a couple of old books—is anyone else experiencing this?" Maybe you have an answer to another writer's question on Ninlink about science fiction...or medieval armor...or deadline food. Maybe you can take a

phone call from a panicked writer who's just been dumped by her agent and doesn't know what to do...or an ecstatic writer who's just made the *New York Times* bestseller list. Maybe you can raise your hand at a Night Owl session and tell other writers how you came out of a slump...how you worked effectively with your agent when you changed genres. Maybe you can write an article for the newsletter or talk to a young writer expecting her first child about what it's like to write with babies about.

I'm not asking you to be a doormat or give away secrets—we don't want indiscretions, we don't want to dig into your personal business, we don't want anyone to give more than they can give. Sometimes it's the small things we do that resonate most. I'd be surprised if Evan even remembers what he said to me!

What the golf poster said

Your new board meets for the first time in early January. I have the privilege of working with smart, wonderful people: Barbara Keiler, president-elect; Jane Bonander, secretary; Deb Gordon, treasurer; Georgia Bockoven, advisory council representative; and Terey daly Ramin, newsletter editor. Call, fax, e-mail us and let us know what's on your mind. I'll get back to you in coming months on specifics. Yesterday I was in Staples and saw one of those inspirational golf posters: "Leadership is action, not position." So, let's get busy!

Meanwhile, happy writing, happy reading, and I hope your new millennium is off to a great start.

— *Carla Neggers*

ADVOCACY

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

So, in 2000, this final year of this century (Yes, I'm in that camp!), we really need to take a long, hard look at the situation as it affects writing and publishing. Not just electronic rights clauses in traditional contracts and contracts with e-publishers, but also things like how important (or not) it is for authors to maintain a presence on the Web through individual sites.

We need to know more about this virtually free promotional tool: is it worth the time and trouble to create various sites in the areas (AOL, Home-*stead*, Yahoo!, etc.) that allow users free space for pages—and will it increase our sales? Should we have our own domain names? Should we hire

someone to design and maintain our sites, or do it ourselves? Is it worthwhile to maintain an e-mail list of fans so we can send out global mailings to promote upcoming books?

Maybe you've already made up your mind on some of this. Maybe you have your domain name, and have or plan to have a snazzy Web site with all the bells and whistles and handy hotlinks to Amazon or B&N so readers can order your books easily. Maybe you have a counter in place, and already know how many hits your site logs each month. Maybe you run contests popular with readers, or post trivia questions with prizes. Maybe your site has won all kinds of Internet awards.

To those pioneers who have already braved the Internet and emerged with hard facts and useful experiences, I say—share! Let us know what worked for you and what

didn't. Lorraine's "Online" column is great and wonderfully informative, but with the potential benefits of the Internet, I think we need even more; having an occasional article or column written by one of you detailing your experiences online, either regarding Web sites or electronic publishing would, I believe, benefit our membership.

Obviously, what I'm advocating here is the sharing of information. It's something I feel is tremendously important and will be even more so in the coming years, especially as regards the Internet. This is such a new venture, not just for us but in and of itself; unless we share what we learn with each other, it'll be years, probably decades, before the pundits gather enough data to be able to tell us what works and what doesn't.

And by then, we'd better already know.

For so long, writers ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

ADVOCACY

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 3*

worked in virtual isolation, cut off from other writers, from information, from any ability to network, and we paid dearly for that in lousy contract terms and unfair "standards" within the industry. We didn't talk to each other,

and the publishers knew it and exploited it. We believed what we were told, and if we didn't believe it we had no more accurate information we could point to in any kind of dispute.

Let's not be put in that position ever again, guys, okay? Because if it happens from this point on, we have only ourselves to blame.

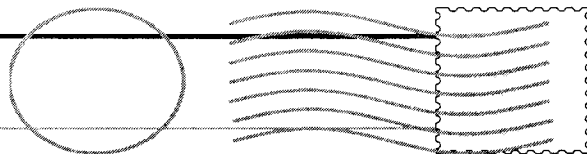
If you don't feel yourself able to do an article or column but still have

info to share, then please send it to me. I'll be glad to pass it on. And, as always, if there's something in particular you want your Advocacy Committee to kick around, let me know. (Khooper@aol.com or 828-247-1523)

I still can't juggle ... but I promise you I can get a lot accomplished just doing one thing at a time. It may take me a little longer, but I'll get there.

NINK

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.

Epilogue of Evan

I'm grieving. I miss Evan and his column.

— **Maggie Osborne**

Mira Testimonial

If you need more confirmation re: Mira's enthusiasm for their authors, (re "Wrap Up Reports—Friday, October 8 Up, Up And Away/Linda Howard") may I offer my own situation as an example? Dianne Moggy has been knocking at Doubleday's door continuously. Results? My March Mira (listed as Romantic Suspense) has been chosen as a Doubleday Featured Alternate.

She/They deserve a nod and double-hug for their efforts.

— **Helen R. Myers**

Do Authors Know?

I just received the most heart-warming letter from a reader and I thought I would share it with other NINC members. It was really meant to go beyond me.

"Hi, Joan. My sister and I are avid readers and treasure your books. Books like yours have given me so much over the years. I just wonder if authors know how much of a help they are to people. You reach out and touch the readers. I don't know how much you are getting for it, but in the spirit universe, you and other

authors give so much that cannot be measured. My sister gave me your books and I have given them to my friends, too. They were touched as I was. You think that the books just sit on the shelves in bookstores. You, who have given birth to these books, never know where they travel to, do you?

I have seen counselors and therapists and have talked to friends and have meditated and have read so many self-help books...but your books touch the core of my heart...and let me know that I exist...because I feel. Your books and a few others help me to hang onto the magic inside of us; magic from which we were born; magic that we are in that world of spirit and soul where no material things can be exchanged. I give you thanks for the books that come from you to me. Aloha, Yuko"

Isn't that a lovely tribute to writers? It certainly bolsters the argument in favor of the power of popular fiction.

— **Joan Wolf**

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

Shelley Cooper, Pittsburgh PA
Nancy Martin, Indiana PA

New Members

Kathy Marks (Catherine Judd), Tempe AZ
Mary Ann Mitchell, Mountain View CA
Gloria Alvarez, New Orleans, LA



1999 NINC Conference

Wrap-Up Reports, Part 2

REPORTS COMPILED BY
Vicki Lewis Thompson and
Jeanne Savery Casstevens

CONTEMPORARY SERIES ROMANCE

(Moderator: Vicki Lewis Thompson)

Writers in various stages of the journey wrestled with the question of whether a career in series romance is an oxymoron. Everyone agreed there are several common pitfalls.

Heading the list—editors leaving. Losing an editor—and it happens often in series romance—can heavily impact a writer. One writer credits the emotional support of an editor for helping to keep her writing fresh.

Although an agent can mitigate the situation, only about half the discussion participants had agents, and most agreed that the agent is no magic bullet, either. Self-reliance, assertiveness, and business acumen, it was decided, would probably serve a writer better than depending on either an editor or an agent to save the day.

Another pitfall involves maintaining freshness under the constant pressure to produce. This amazingly fresh group of participants offered several suggestions, including writing other things to clear the palate, taking a creative writing class, entering a contest in a different genre, associating with writers of other genres, and writing out of sequence or working on more than one project at once. One participant regularly engages in writing marathons with friends. Each person in the marathon sets a daily goal and reports—on the honor system—as to whether they've met their quota.

One writer suggested that asking how to keep freshness alive during a long category career is no different from asking how to keep sex alive during a long marriage. Her solution for both? "Try different positions."

Another huge pitfall mentioned by participants was delays caused by the

publishing company. Delays affect the spacing of books, cash flow, creativity, and sanity of the writer, who is usually powerless to prevent said delays. Writers have various ways of coping with the frustration. Some remind themselves of the horrors of previous jobs. "Or I strip wallpaper," said one participant. Another commented, "Who said it was supposed to be easy?"

One veteran emphasized that in a long category career there would be cycles, and that she'd made a "conscious effort to care about what I'm doing and making every minute count."

(Reported by Vicki Lewis Thompson)

HISTORICAL FICTION

(Moderator: Margaret Evans Porter)

Due to some excellent discussions on Ninclink, *NINK* is currently in the process of preparing a Taking the Pulse of... article on this very subject. Stay tuned...

SURVIVING TOUGH TIMES

(Moderator: Barbara Keiler)

By refusing to allow any sniveling, Barbara kept the focus on survival stories rather than disaster tales. The discussion began with an assumption that everyone in the room had suffered problems with family, health, finances, and creativity, and then moved immediately beyond that to universal coping strategies.

A majority of participants said they continued to write during a crisis. One person likened writing to exercising. During a personal crisis she cut back to a maintenance routine, knowing that she was not building new muscle but unwilling to lose the writing muscle tone she'd

worked so hard to achieve. Another added that we often buy into the myth that we must have eight uninterrupted hours a day to write, "that we're artists, for God's sake." When she was robbed of that kind of time, she learned to stay flexible and write in short stretches.

Journaling was a comfort to some, while a writing class raised the spirits of one participant. Besides being with people who were writing for the love of it, she got an unexpected ego boost when she discovered that most of her classmates couldn't write.

Although writing can be an escape from tough times, one participant escaped her personal crisis with such determination that her book lost all emotion in her attempt to frolic through the story. Most agreed with the paradox that tough times and emotional roller-coasters can threaten the writing but will eventually make for better writing. A writer who cuts herself off emotionally from life won't be able to inject emotion into her work, either.

Yet one person felt compelled to completely abandon her writing and her normal routine to fling herself into hard physical labor for three months, exhausting herself until she could find the mental strength to return to her computer. Others recommended breaks for walks, movies, and museums as a way to counteract stress.

Everyone seemed to agree that a creative person must lessen the impact of crazymakers and leeches in her life. One participant writes the names of the people who are a problem for her on a scrap of paper. If she has truly jettisoned them and won't have to deal with them again, she burns the paper. If she will have to deal with them again, she puts the scrap of paper in the freezer.

Close writer friends, what one participant called "little marriages," can help during tough times ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



1999 NINC Conference Wrap-Up Reports, Part 2

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ according to many, and in one instance a writer gained much through a weekend of “group plotting” with her pals. However, that same networking can backfire through giving us too much information about the industry and too much negative news, said another. Someone else mentioned that the Internet, one method for maintaining writing friendships, could also be a time sink.

One writer aptly distilled the discussion on surviving tough times by saying that if something “is not helping you mentally, spiritually, or physically, then get out.” *VLT*

PAST PERFECT/PAST IMPERFECT

(Moderator: Victoria Thompson)

The discussion of how much actual history an author uses when writing historicals depends, according to one author, upon whether you write for yourself, your editor, or your readers. Concerning readers: On the average, men prefer more facts and technical information than women, and mystery readers are used to detail and accept more than other readers—and you can’t please everyone. It was also concluded that accurate depiction of violence, filth, disease, etc., should occur only if necessary. A research discussion resulted in a librarian’s suggestion that one learn about the “full text data base” at one’s local library, specifically EBSCO, UMI Proquest, and/or Info Track.

(Economically reported by Jeanne Savery Casstevens)

SHOCKS, SURPRISES AND SERENDIPITY

(Moderator: Kathy Lynn Emerson)

The discussion opened with the subject of schmoozing to maintain a network, thus increasing the possibility

of serendipity. More esoteric methods were explored, such as following the muse, taking a creative risk, and even focusing vibes on the journey and not the goal.

However, the topic turned inevitably back to the schmoozing and networking option and one particular emotionally charged question: Are gifts and notes to editors the way to improve a career or the worst sort of kissing up, both or neither of the above? Some said they would never resort to such a thing, that they were certain editors would see it as bribery. Others demurred, saying that if a gesture is genuine, part of the author’s personality, there’s nothing wrong with it. But those who felt comfortable with gifts and notes agreed that they are not a necessary part of a thriving career.

As for schmoozing, some felt energy should be put into the books and not into cultivating editors, while another participant stated flatly that, for her, schmoozing booksellers sucks the energy from a creative project.

At least one writer in the group found that a disaster in the publication of one book resulted in her going in a completely different direction, one that has become extremely successful. Any writer looking for a new niche was advised to figure out what she does best by reading reviews, asking friends, going through rejections, and looking at what’s on the keeper shelf.

A certain amount of fatalism came out in the discussion, with comments made that everything happens for a good reason, breaks even out, trends are cyclical, and tadpoles become frogs. One writer suggested that a frog from a tadpole wasn’t much of an improvement, but

another was willing to wait for the frog to become a prince...with an exceptional tongue. *VLT*

Millennium Madness

(Moderator: Mary Jo Putney)

With the understanding that the millennium is not significant in many cultures and religious traditions, participants agreed that the concept is still having an impact on a vast number of readers. We seem to lose history in chunks, and as the year 2000 approaches, the World War II segment is dropping in significance.

Changes are obvious in television as shows become geared toward a younger, more action-oriented audience, but one participant noted that advertising might drive those changes. Advertisers must appeal to a younger audience in order to sell products. The general consensus seemed to be that publishing wasn’t nearly as responsive to changes as television, but the question remained as to whether this was a good or a bad thing. At least one writer thought it might be the responsibility of authors to help retain a sense of values in the millenium.

Romance, in particular, is seen as a more traditional genre, one writer said. Still, there are shifts, with historical authors moving to contemporary books and humor becoming a sought-after commodity.

Humor is also creeping into the mystery genre, and books with a “hip sensibility” such as the series by Janet Evanovich, were mentioned as examples of a new direction in publishing.

The question was raised as to whether authors are ready to meet the challenge of a new era and whether we’ve done enough R&D, enough experimenting. One roadblock

mentioned was the reluctance of editors to risk their jobs on innovative concepts. Editors seem to be playing musical chairs, and chairs are being constantly pulled away. Experimental books are a risk for the author, but are also a risk for the editor and publishing house.

Yet everyone agreed that fiction writers must change with the times, both to stay fresh and to keep readers. The consensus was to continue innovating, but to do so with finesse, slipping experimental elements into books in ways that won't make the editor or the publisher nervous. **VLT**

Whose Book Is It Anyway?

(Moderator: Becky Barker)

This session began with a discussion of book doctors. On the whole, the discussion was positive toward the use of this relatively new service. One author said her "doctor" made her look at elements of her work she'd not otherwise have given any attention. Some houses have their own special editors who "tweak" a manuscript into shape, but an author said one publisher, at its own expense, sent a manuscript off to a book doctor. Like most doctors, the book doctor is expensive. The biggest problem, of course, is weeding out the bad from the good. (Ed's note: at least one or two organizations have been mentioned in past "Breaking News" columns that can help the author find book doctors who adhere to an organizational ethics clause. TdR.)

The discussion then turned to hands-on agents. As with everything, some authors like this, some don't. Sometimes an agent's suggestions work, sometimes the agent's suggestions help sell the work, then the editor wants the author to do revisions that will change the book back to the way s/he originally wrote it. C'est la guerre. The major concern is that by accepting input from so many other people in order to possibly make a sale, one may lose one's voice, passion for the project and the work, etc.

When editorial requests for revision were discussed, it was advised that an author keep control of revision

requests, cooperating but refusing to be walked on (ye olde compromise, again). Some editors seem to feel they're not doing their job if they make no changes to a manuscript—regardless of how many books an author has written. **JSC**

Accentuate the Positive

(Moderator: Cheryl Anne Porter)

Early in the discussion someone offered the following analogy: Becoming a published novelist is like driving over a spiked parking lot grate. Once you get in, you can't back out.

While being trapped under penalty of complete deflation might not look like a positive point from which to begin, most participants agreed that it sums up the situation. There seemed to be a certain comfort in admitting that we write because we can't help ourselves, and because, no matter what the pitfalls, we'd rather write than do anything else to earn money. Once we accept the fact there is no escape, we can set about beautifying the parking lot.

To stay positive, some focus on the process of writing and the joy it brings them, while others consider themselves on a mission to entertain and enlighten readers. Reader mail indicates that genre books, through offering an escape, bring solace to people under stress.

"What I'm doing has value," commented one writer.

Several said that writing helps them grow as people. One said she gives herself lessons as she writes, because the heroine has to be wiser than she is. Another works her way through challenges by writing about them. The novelist can create a world that should be and, in the process, come to recognize her own self-worth, many agreed. Writing can breed an increased willingness to take risks and create what one participant called "cast-iron confidence." It also provides, fortunately for many of us, "a license to be eccentric."

Because the books are such a reflection of

► ► ► ►



BREAKING NEWS

A rousing thank you to all of you who have already remembered to send in your dues renewal! You're making Diane's life so much easier!

And a delighted HOHOHO! for our columnist Marilyn Pappano, whose book-to-TV-movie, "A Season for Miracles" ranked #2 in the Nielson ratings for the week of December 12. We are just too proud of you for words, Marilyn!

Some good news from Judith Bowen for Harlequin/Silhouette authors... "As many of you know, for the last six months, I have been working with a group of about 35 Harlequin and Silhouette authors (and some not published by Harlequin but who believed in this process) who have all sent me money to fund a New York literary attorney in his efforts to influence changes in the boilerplate in Harlequin's contract in an attempt to bring it up to current publishing standards.

"We have had very encouraging news. In a recent conversation with Anita Coit, of Harlequin's legal department, she assured me that all communications from authors regarding wished-for changes to the contract would be taken into consideration when the legal department reviews the contract early in the new year. This is a once-in-five-year chance to make a difference. The boilerplate is reexamined every five years.

"If you wish to be part of this process, I urge you to write or fax the legal department at Harlequin to register the kinds of changes you'd like to see in the boilerplate and contract. These letters and suggestions will be

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1999 NINC Conference Wrap-Up Reports, Part 2

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ a writer's inner life, they need to be books she's invested in, said one participant. She sees writing as an act of defining herself and said, "if I'm going to be rejected, it'll be on books I love."

One person categorized writers as healers, protectors, and redeemers. As such, we are touching people, she said. We can't do that without opening ourselves to the full range of emotions, both negative and positive. Someone else pointed out that even negative emotions like anger could be put to positive use by energizing the writer, who then creates something exciting.

"A good writer is a good self-examiner," observed another participant.

The session ended with positive vibes bouncing around the room which generated hugs all around. **VLT**

Left-brain Finance for Right-brain People

(Moderator: Debbie Gordon)

Speaker: *NINC* columnist Meena Cheng, a Certified Financial Planner and Assistant Vice President of U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray.

Cheng began by remarking that a book of the same title exists. She recommends it as a first step for the naïve, an introduction to the field, but not sufficient by itself. She continued with a how-to discussion that addressed the needs of individual authors present (you guys missed it!) as well as looking at general areas. She suggested authors begin by making out a financial statement that delineates their assets. Separate the good assets from the bad. (A house, for instance, is a bad asset because it earns no income and is an income drain.) Then she discussed how to manage cash flow. First, identify your expenses. Then identify your income. If your income is

intermittent rather than regular, manage it on a yearly basis rather than a monthly. To do this, determine your income, annualize it, and divide by twelve. She also discussed retirement planning, suggesting that one save by paying oneself first. If one wishes to make one's own investments, she suggested buying "market leaders," but then watch for changes in them! As to Corporate bonds versus Municipal bonds...Corporate may pay better, but Municipal are usually tax-free and the lower rate may wash out. **JSC**

Technology to the Rescue

(Moderator: Brenda Hiatt Barber)

Patricia Maxwell, AKA Jennifer Blake, shared her expertise in using a computer, scanner, and printer to create professional-looking letterhead, postcards, business cards, booklets, and brochures. She brought numerous examples of her creations, along with professionally printed materials for comparison.

Her major piece of advice was to create a style for yourself and stick with that theme. One caveat to the rule is that neon colors have been proven to draw attention. Although neon colors are not her style, she'll occasionally use fluorescent green or orange for a flyer because it gets noticed.

With standard software such as MS Publisher, WordPerfect 7.0, MS Word 6.0 (and up), and Lotus Wordpro, writers can master the art of creating their own supplies, Pat said. She's also found American Greetings software helpful and has invested in a Fiskars paper cutter for creating ornate edges. Her favorite mail program is Ultimate Mail Manager.

Pat noted that besides being more cost-effective, making her own business supplies means she can do them when she needs them without involving other people (i.e. a print shop) in the process. She can also print the exact number she needs, which eliminates storing unused supplies.

Participants traded opinions on hardware as well. Microtech flatbed scanners were noted as being especially sturdy and Hewlett Packard seemed to be the favored brand of printer. Those trading up from their current hardware were advised to check with Computer Renaissance, a company that buys used equipment. Or writers can keep their old equipment if they fancy becoming a collector or opening a museum in the basement. According to one participant, some early computers such as the Osborne [Ed's note: *No, not Maggie...*] are now considered antiques.

"Did you ever think we'd be excited about office machines?" asked one bemused writer at the conclusion of the session. **VLT**

Almighty Marketing

(Moderator: Catherine Coulter)

Participants included Eileen A. Hutton from Brilliance Audio, literary agent Ethan Ellenberg, Sarah Gallick from the Literary Guild, and Isabel Swift from Harlequin/Silhouette.

Isabel Swift opened the discussion by describing the process of getting a book into a reader's hands as leaping a series of hurdles. The agent, editor, and marketer are each trying to figure out a way to sell your book, Swift said.

Catherine Coulter then asked Swift if marketing ever says, "This is a sucky cover and we want it changed."

"I hate to break it to you, but everybody in the entire publishing company tells you your cover is sucky,"

Swift replied. She added that if an editor tries to do something and it fails, she has to go back to the author, admit the idea didn't work, and take some of the responsibility if the book doesn't make money.

On the book club front, Sarah Gallick said the main selection for the Literary Guild has to be a brand name, and the alternate selection must have a good cover and be summarized in two sentences. If the cover and/or the two-sentence description contains elements that don't sell well—music and Mexico, for example—then the book won't be ordered.

Ethan Ellenberg acknowledged the difficulty of presenting a "unique, unknown quantity," when the package is the only thing the publisher can use to connect with the reader. He feels the Internet may finally be the medium capable of bridging the enormous gap between the publisher and the reader, but warns that publishers can't give up on retail or "it'll be another disaster."

Ellenberg admits there's a "relatively small pool of resources." As authors go up the ladder, they will be awarded more resources, he said, but author expectations have to be consistent with the reality of the situation.

Coulter agreed, noting that there are "still places in the Midwest which have not heard of John Grisham." She pointed out that "publishers don't have as much (money) to promote a new book as Revlon has to promote a new lipstick."

Swift added that if books similar to the one being marketed haven't done well, the current book would be a hard sell, no matter how good it might be.

In the face of such daunting news writers might begin to feel powerless, but Linda Howard discovered an unusual marketing hook when the head buyer for Target asked to be put in a book. Howard put him in and she reported the book sold very well at Target.

Barbara Keiler described how she used her scheduled luncheon speech at the Romance Writers of America's national conference as a marketing

tool. Prior to the speech she readied a proposal and instructed her agent to have it on the desk of six editors who would probably hear her speak. When these same editors came up after the speech to congratulate her on doing well, she mentioned that her proposal was on their desk. Within weeks she had a sale.

Audio books are an increasing part of the market, according to Eileen Hutton. Audio sales have experienced a 75 percent growth in the past five years, Hutton said, outpacing book growth. Brilliance Audio always uses the same cover as the original book and takes a book based on what promotion the publisher is putting behind it. An audio book usually sells about 10 percent of what the print book sells, she said, adding that audio books work with more limited rack space than print books.

On the subject of self-promotion, Ellenberg compared it to picking up pennies with rubber gloves. "The whole goal is to make converts," he said, advising authors to cultivate bookstore owners and sales reps if they have significant encounters with them. Both Ellenberg and Gallick mentioned author Web sites as valuable tools, perhaps even a "magic bullet," Ellenberg said.

Ellenberg believes a power shift has indeed taken place and that the sales department has displaced editors. Hutton feels that in good publishing houses a balance is necessary, and Gallick suggested that small regional publishers—like independent producers in film—can pick up new authors who eventually go on to bigger publishers.

Carla Neggers returned to the theme of hurdles introduced by Swift, and wondered if at some point an author can become an Olympic runner who glides over the hurdles. "Or can we grease the hurdles, or chop them down in the middle of the night?" Neggers asked.

"We're all trying to do that," Swift replied. **VLT**



BREAKING NEWS

taken into consideration when the legal department makes the next set of changes. This is an invitation to all Harlequin (and Silhouette) authors and is not an opportunity for *your* agent to get something for *you*. The changes made to the boilerplate—or not made—will affect all authors. I do not believe a letter from your agent will have the same effect with the legal department as a letter from you.

"Please let other Harlequin and Silhouette authors know about this. This information may be copied, in its entirety. Time is rather short. The process of revision to the contract will take place early in 2000.

"Letters and faxes may be addressed to Anita Coit, Jan Grammick, Meghan Dillon, or simply: the legal department."

Committee Chairs approved for 2000...Janice Young Brooks—Outreach; Julie Kistler—Internet; Kay Hooper—Advocacy.

Credit Card payments in the works: We're currently in the process of making your lives easier by moving forward with arrangements to accept credit card payments. Although this won't be in effect for dues renewal this year, we should have everything in place for you all to make early arrangements to come to Vancouver...;-)

More editors...Silhouette's Karen Taylor Richman will head out on maternity leave about mid-January.

With On-Demand Machine, B&N's DC Looks a





1999 NINC Conference

Wrap-Up Reports, Part 2



Agents on Agenting

(Moderator: Julie Kistler)

Participants included Dominick Abel, Pamela Dean Strickler, and Karen Solem. (Reporter's Warning: Any "quotes" are approximate!)

When asked if it is more difficult to get an agent in these times, even with a contract in hand, Solem said she would turn down someone if she doesn't like the work or doesn't feel she communicates well with the author. Abel suggested that many agents already have full lists. Strickler feels it's necessary to have a good match with authors she takes on.

When asked about changes in the industry, Abel said consolidations have changed things. Editors are still looking for "different," (an odious word at best!) but often don't know what that is. When asked if the industry has narrowed, Abel said, "It's scary. We lost three major houses this summer." Harper/Morrow/Avon now has one editor where once there were three. Solem said one can still submit to the houses that lost editorial independence, but there is no longer the opportunity to arrange auctions, etc. She is optimistic, however, saying there are new opportunities with smaller companies. It was also suggested that now is the time for authors who have been orphaned to reinvent themselves. (Ed's note: we heard this a lot at this conference! TdR)

With regard to e-commerce, Solem said she doesn't want to get into it but is expanding her focus. Abel agreed that e-commerce wouldn't develop into a huge part of the market—at least not any time soon. When asked about print-on-demand, he said "it's nice for that occasional thing, but it's not a huge part of the market. Books are still most user-friendly."

Kistler asked the agents, "As a result of a tighter market, do you see

editors trying to put authors into boxes? Dare we push the envelope?"

Solem said there are innovators, but they've always been the exception, always taken the chances. Genre readers really do want the same book over and over, and some houses have very tight standards regarding what they want. Abel agreed. He added that new conglomerate publishers are more conservative and editors don't want to fight battles for projects for fear of losing their jobs.

Solem pointed out that occasional proposals come in that are "real jaw-droppers, and those are going to sell no matter what," so if you have a really good idea, go ahead and spend time and hone it to perfection. Strickler added that within categories and even in mainstream, "the editors want the new, the different but then are afraid of it when they get it." Strickler, on the other hand, deliberately looks for work that stands out.

When asked about contract clauses concerning e-publishing, print-on-demand, and the language of rights reversion in contracts, Solem said, "Publishers want to hold onto text." Abel discussed setting reversion rights in terms of specific numbers, i.e. the number of books sold, the dollar amount sold, etc. On the subject of getting back rights to one's backlist for resale, Strickler said that Harlequin/Silhouette doesn't want to give up those rights—but on the plus side, "if H/S reprints the books or makes foreign sales, who better to do it for the author?"

On the question of big versus small or independent literary agencies being able to do more for the author, Strickler thinks the small agency is best. "It has everyone you need (lawyer, accountant, etc.) and

hasn't become impersonal." Solem argues that it depends, for both agent and author. She's with a big house but works mostly from home. Abel is an independent agent and believes that what the question comes down to is relationship. "Ask yourself if you are comfortable."

When the agents were asked if they thought a five-year plan was important, Strickler said, "Goals are important, but a five-year plan? That's buzz words." Solem essentially agreed. She feels the author needs to have some sense of where s/he is going and prefers an author who knows her strengths and builds on them. Abel suggested that goals or plans could complicate things. "Creating the plan requires time and effort and then what happens if one gets this great notion that doesn't fit the plan?"

With regard to the etiquette of agents firing authors and vice versa, it was suggested that both should follow the relevant agency contract clause. Without such a clause, someone wondered, then how? By letter or phone? Solem believes in dialogue. "Perhaps," she said, "you can resolve your difficulty by discussing it." *JSC*

E-commerce and Other Innovations

(Moderator: Joan Wolf)

Participants included agent Steven Axelrod and Malle Vallik, Harlequin's Internet coordinator.

This session began by discussing Harlequin's Net site and others of similar ilk. To summarize what is in store at Harlequin: 1) Your romantic life; 2) Your romantic place; 3) Your romantic books and more. Harlequin proposes to institute an online bookstore, author Web sites, a reading room where ten original stories in 1,000 word segments will be serialized. Old reprints will be available, plus

there will be eight interactive stories in which the readers "vote" for the direction of the next chapter (Ed's kibitz: "Choose Your Own Adventures" for grown-ups <vbg> TdR). They will also try round-robin style stories.

The session continued with a discussion of the financial viability of e-commerce, i.e. the cost of postage plus the discounts offered suggest it may be negative. A discussion of author Web sites followed. Web sites were compared to the yellow pages in a phone book. Best advice? Acquire a webmaster unless you are really into do-it-yourself on the Net. You have to make links to other sites and the whole thing can become expensive. Nonetheless it was suggested that authors do more than they are comfortable with. All publishers will eventually carry author info/titles/teasers for new books. **JSC**

What's Hot and Why

(Moderator: Evan Maxwell)

Participants included literary agents Helen Breitweiser, Steven Axelrod, and Pattie Steele-Perkins and editor Marsha Zinberg from Harlequin.

"If we knew the trends we'd all be rich," Evan Maxwell said by way of opening the discussion. Nevertheless, participants soldiered on in an attempt to identify potentially profitable directions in the marketplace.

According to Helen Breitweiser, trends are created when people are bored with what's available. She mentioned Christian, cross-cultural, and erotica books as possible trends. Surveys show that 30 percent of romance buyers are African-American, she said, and the Encanto line, geared toward the Hispanic romance reader, already has 4,000 subscribers in its direct mail club since its September, 1999 launch.

Pattie Steele-Perkins believes that "parity will come" in advances and royalties for cross-cultural romance lines. She sees the Internet as a potential tool for increasing sales.

Marsha Zinberg asserted that trends originate with authors, so are therefore hard to predict. She'd come to the conference prepared with survey results from Harlequin's Consumer

Insight Team, but a spontaneous discussion with the female cab driver who picked her up at the airport seemed more immediate, so she offered that instead.

Like many romance readers, the cab driver likes country music and reads books to escape. A wife and mother of two, she'd rather not read about kids and prefers romantic suspense. She doesn't usually notice who wrote the book or pay much attention to the cover. Instead she looks for a dedication. She reasons that if a dedication appears, then the writer must care about the book.

As the authors in the room assimilated that straight-from-the-trenches information, Steve Axelrod suggested that trends could result when a publisher gives authors freedom to create stories that are fresh. Jayne Ann Krentz added that she doesn't believe one author can create a trend, but if she sees lots of people trying the same sort of thing, a movement can coalesce like a hurricane.

Several participants mentioned romantic suspense as an example. Authors were told ten years ago it wasn't viable and now it's a trend. But while romance writers may be able to add suspense and make it work, it doesn't necessarily follow that a suspense writer can add romance, according to Claire Zion from Warner. She knows of at least one thriller writer who tried to soften his books and it didn't work.

Isabel Swift from Harlequin noted that if a potentially trend-setting book fails, then the next book of a similar type will be harder to place in the bookstores. "It's hard to have a conversation in which you say 'Hi, I know the last book on Mexico sold like shit, but here's another one.'"

She recommended giving the sales force either a sword or shield. A shield would be to avoid saying the book is set in Mexico. A sword might be to say, "this (book) is going to be just like Harry Potter."

Axelrod agreed, and added his own analogy. "When somebody important to a



BREAKING NEWS

Little Like Ingram's...Continuing to ride the train it set in motion with the partial purchase of iUniverse, B&N has announced it would install an on-demand machine in its Jamesburg, NJ, warehouse. The machine will use IBM's technology, just as iUniverse does. B&N says it will be operational by spring. Presumably, out-of-print books will become available on B&N.com shortly after, though the exact number of titles remains to be seen. This is, of course, a boon to consumers, but Ingram, on the other hand, could suffer with the arrangement—with its Lightning Print operation (which also uses IBM technology), the wholesaler had been positioning itself as a fulfillment option for on-demand books. (Ed's note: We'll try to keep you updated on how this will affect our authors as developments occur. TdR)

Brand-name eBook Authors

Are Here...First chapter programs, where fans receive, say, an e-mailed chapter before the book hits shelves, are nothing new; John Grisham and a slew of mainstream authors have been doing it for years. But at the marketing department of major trade houses, perhaps no program has been as ambitious as hotauthors.com, S&S's new site for just that. The program has been enacted in conjunction with the non-profit Literacy Partners. Visitors are asked, but not required, to make a small donation in exchange for content. To allay concerns about piracy and intellectual property, the house has signed on with Reciprocal, which is handling digital rights management. **NINK**



1999 NINC Conference Wrap-Up Reports, Part 2

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ a (publishing) house gives them a difficult book, they say 'What good card can we use in this bad hand?' They don't want to reject the author, so they take a chance and it can be a success."

Carla Neggers made a distinction between a trend and a phenomenon. "Harry Potter is a phenomenon," she asserted.

"There's a phenomenon and then there's the rest of us," Axelrod added.

VLT

Inside the FBI

(Moderator: Sandra Kitt)

This two-hour presentation was given by Kenneth P. Baker, retired from the U.S. Secret Service and currently affiliated with The Academy Group, Inc., a forensic behavioral science services firm. The segment might have been more aptly titled "Inside a Violent Criminal Mind." With years of experience, extensive training and instincts that won't quit, Baker has obviously become an expert at profiling violent criminals.

"Leave me at the death scene for 24 hours and there's no crime I can't figure out," Baker said.

Baker himself proved an interesting study. He is able to blend in anywhere—so much so that his son once commented that his dad could meet a common laborer and within five minutes act as if he'd grown up with the guy. Understanding the laborer has helped in his work, he says, because most violent crimes come from that level of society.

Baker's most recent assignment was at the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, a facility located at the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA. Here he honed his skills in Criminal Investigative Analysis, commonly referred to as Criminal

Personality Profiling. The center is both a collection of case studies *and* a base camp for sophisticated research.

Crimes that can be profiled include homicides, rapes, threat analysis, serial arsons, serial bombings, child molestation, ritualistic crimes, and equivocal death analysis. Materials required for this are any pertinent maps, 8x10 color photos, descriptions of the crime scene and adjoining neighborhood, and victimology, or an understanding of the victim and how the victim reacted when the crime occurred.

Although the profiler requires autopsy and police reports, no suspect information is part of the process. In fact, if suspects have been developed the profile's effectiveness is reduced, Baker said. Profiles can also be weakened if the crime occurred a long time ago, or if only a skeleton is left. High-risk victims such as prostitutes also make profiling difficult, as do bodies found a significant distance from the crime scene.

The firm Baker is associated with requires that the offender be unknown before it will accept a profiling case. The firm also requires that the crime be violent or potentially violent, that all other leads have been pursued, and that no other profiles have been requested. When hired—either by law enforcement or civilians—the firm gives an opinion only and clients can take the results and lock them away if they wish. If Baker identifies someone as being at risk, however, he insists the client warn the potential victim. If they refuse, he will do it himself.

The profiler uses the following questions as part of the criminal

investigative analysis process: What happened? How did it happen? Why did it happen? Who (what kind of person) would have done it?

Once a potential suspect is identified through the profiling procedure, Baker finds that timing the suspect's interview is critical. Most people have a strong and weak part of the day or night, he says, and the interviewer should choose a vulnerable time to "crack on" the suspect. Even more dramatic results can be obtained by interviewing the suspect on the anniversary of the crime, at the exact time it took place. He once solved a years-old murder that way.

Using graphic slides that caused some to turn their heads and at least one person to leave the room, Baker illustrated the sort of crimes that lend themselves to profiling. (Your intrepid reporter expects to be awarded a Purple Heart for valor. She stayed. And looked.)

An organized crime denotes an organized criminal, said Baker. A disorganized crime can be the work of someone who is disorganized, young, or mentally ill.

A combination of organized and disorganized might mean the criminal became sloppy or was under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. It can also mean two offenders, often a sharp guy and a dummy, Baker said.

A case of strangulation—yes, there were slides—indicates there was no weapon, that it's a personal crime, and the police might have investigated the person who committed the crime. Baker emphasized that a criminal has to really work to strangle someone.

Severe brutality, Baker said, demonstrates anger, power, and the desire to manipulate, control, and degrade the victim. Battering of the face usually means the criminal knew the victim well and the face was



NINK NOTES

battered to shut the person up. Most killers don't beat their victims, he said.

Baker also distinguished between a criminal's *modus operandi* (a manner of working that will change as the investigation progresses) and a criminal's ritual (actions that fulfill a personal need and will not change). Violent criminals often take trophies (insignificant objects that signify a conquest and will probably be given away) and souvenirs (objects they will keep for themselves, which they may use to masturbate and relive the adrenaline rush of the crime). Such objects should be listed in a search warrant, Baker said.

Baker listed common sense as the first requirement of a good profiler. He also included intuition, open-mindedness, and the ability to isolate feelings and emotions about the crime, the victim, and the offender. When Baker interviews offenders, he treats them with respect, no matter how horrible the crime. He's there to learn, not to judge.

He also said a good profiler must be capable of analytical reasoning, have experience in major case investigations and a background in basic behavioral science concepts. He warned that some profiling "experts" might not have sufficient training, i.e. might not have graduated from the FBI Academy.

Baker's firm, The Academy Group, is based in Manassas, VA. He can be reached at 703-330-0697. **VL**

Coming next month:

Delta Concept's Virginia
McLaughlin's suggestions for
Win/Win/Win Negotiating.

Writer Beks for Mercy

I have a book due April 15th, but as Membership Retention Chair, I am doomed to spend much of my work time in February calling and e-mailing those of you who have not yet sent in your dues. Please spare me from having to make those calls by sending in your dues now, if you have not already done so. Remember that we have a benevolency fund you may tap into if this is a lean year for you. The fund may be used once every five years. If you've lost your dues form (inserted in the December issue of *NINK*), you can download one at www.ninc.com. Then just pop your check in the mail to Novelists, Inc., P.O. Box 1166, Mission KS 66222-4524

Thank you!

— ***Diane Chamberlain,***
Membership Retention Chair

We Pay for Articles!

No, you won't be able to retire on the honorariums, but *NINK* pays its writers for articles and columns. We're always looking for exciting lead and second lead articles, opinions and editorials (no we don't pay for letters to the editor...<g>), and columns ranging from "Dispatches From the Front" to "Oh My Aching..." and "Taking the Pulse of..." to "Curmudgeon's Corner."

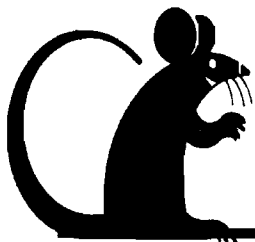
If you've got ideas or want to write a piece but can't think of what to write, you can contact me directly at the phone or e-mail listed inside the front cover, or fax them to me at 810/821-7070.

You can also send any "Breaking News" items directly to me. And thanks!

— ***Terey daly Ramin***

Open Book

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.



ONLINE...

>>>>>Have you received e-mail

>>>>>that looked something like this?

>>>>>The little arrows to the left mean that someone

>>>>>highlighted the information and hit reply.

>>>>>In this case, five people highlighted and hit reply

>>>>>before the letter was sent to you.

The E-mail Golden Rule: Send e-mail to others as you would like it sent to you.

E-mail that has been sent to several people in sequence is difficult to read because after a while, you have so many ">" marks that the margins get thrown off and you end up with gaps in the material. When I receive a letter like the above and the information is something I want to share with someone, I copy the information into a word processing document and do a quick find and replace to get rid of all the ">" marks and then I copy it back into the letter.

If the information is important enough to send, I want the receiver to have a clean read.

I try to avoid forwarding mail. When someone forwards me e-mail that has been forwarded several times before, the copy I receive has all the previous "To" data as well as all the header data, and I have to scroll down to discover what information the sender wanted to share with me.

Do your friends and associates a favor. If someone forwards something to you and you feel the information is worth passing on, copy and paste it into an e-mail. (Thank you, Terey, for always being this considerate.) Don't forward it.

Forwarding mail should only occur when it's important that the person to whom you are forwarding it needs to know who originated the piece of e-mail. In these situations, I still use a copy and paste, picking up the "From" information. This practice saves the person to whom I'm sending the information from having to wade through headers. Header information bothers me. One per e-mail is enough.

Oh, yes, and let's not forget chain letters. When I was ten years old, I received a lot of chain letters via snail mail. Send a postcard to the first person on the list and a copy of this letter to six other people and at the end of the month, you'll receive a hundred postcards from around the world. I fell for it every time. Dutifully sent off my postcard, sent the chain letter, and waited . . . Never did get a postcard from anyone. Many years later, I'm still getting the chain letters only they come via e-mail now and promise good luck, fortune, or happiness if I'll only

forward them on to ten other people. I hit the delete key.

Now I'll stumble off my soapbox and share with you some interesting sites that others shared with me this month.

GENRE-SPECIFIC SITES

Patricia Bray recommends "a great Web site called Science Fiction Romance that's geared to writers of paranormals, time-travels, and other science fiction romances." You can find it at members.aol.com/sfreditor.

For those of you who incorporate Southern themes or whose settings take place in the South, Southern Scribe at www.southernscribe.com/ is a clearinghouse of information for writers. It offers regional book news, contests, resources on the Net, and the Southern_Writers List. This month, Southern Scribe will begin an e-zine that will include interviews and book reviews for those writing Southern history, literary fiction, creative nonfiction, and romance, mystery, horror, and fantasy in Southern settings.

If you are writing for children or considering it, you might want to pop out to Write4Kids The Children's Writers Supersite at Add@write4kids.com where you'll find updates about writing and illustrating children's books.

Terey reports that The Writers Guild of America, West provides "an absolutely stellar font of information and has links to an amazing number of research sites" at www.wga.org. At the site you can also subscribe to a monthly newsletter.

The RWA Mystery-Suspense (also known as the Kiss of Death) Chapter Web site is a wonderful place for mystery/romance-minded writers. You can find it at www.win.net/romance/MySus/welcome.html. Although you have to be an RWA member to join, you don't have to be a member to take advantage of the links they provide to specialty sites geared toward forensics, pathology, and weapons.

CHARACTERIZATION

Barbara Samuel shares with us "Interracial Voice—a solid Web site with lots in interest in the angle of being biracial. Tends to be high in tone, and they have a strong interest in the practice of dividing Americans by racial designations." The site is located at www.webcom.com/~intvoice/welcome.html.

Barbara also recommends another site that is broader in spectrum, but a great resource and very interesting—Mosaic Web at www.mosaicweb.com/interrac.htm. Categories are broken down into all kinds of topics and subtopics.

How often as you are writing do you discover that your character is Portuguese, French, German, or Spanish—and he wants to toss out a word in his native language? A language you didn't take in school. For help, go to Systan Translation at www.systransoft.com. This site comes to us courtesy of Susan Wiggs.

If your characters need more than an occasional foreign word, Jo Beverly suggests Le Mot—the group of native speakers of languages other than English, who are happy to help writers. They are now on onelist. You can subscribe to lemot-subscribe@onelist.com and ask for help or visit www.onelist.com/subscribe/lemot.

Then imagine your hero doesn't want to cooperate at all. In addition to using foreign words, he's just revealed that he's a physicist (and you only took non-science major classes) plus he's embroiled in a legal issue and has a rare disease which you've only heard mentioned in passing at a family reunion ten years ago. Connie Bennet comes to the rescue with All Experts at www.allexperts.com. "It's a great site. You find the category of information you're looking for, select one of the volunteer "experts" and e-mail him or her with your questions. You're supposed to get an answer back within three days."

THE BUSINESS

If your subscription to *Publishers Weekly* has lapsed, you can still read select articles by visiting the *Publishers Weekly* Web site at www.publishersweekly.com.

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Web page at www.sfwaweb.org/Beware/ has information covering vanity presses, book doctors, etc. under WRITER BEWARE. It was recently mentioned in *Publishers Weekly*.

Carla Neggers shared with us Elaine Gignilliat's site at www.romancebookcoverart.com/. And why might you be interested in her site? Because Elaine has done the cover art for over 350 romances and is now making available prints suitable for framing. Her index lists authors' names—including Carla's. Carla says, "Elaine did my Loveswept launch book cover—it remains one of my favorites."

If you are interested in e-publishing, you might want to subscribe to eBook Connections E-Pub Market Update, which contains current e-publishing industry market information for writers. It is an announcement only newsletter—no chatter. Go to www.onelist.com/subscribe/ebcmktupdate.

Judith Bowen encourages "Anyone with an interest in self-publishing or small presses, to check out the elgrande.com site. They are in beta testing and plan to go big time in March."

George Elliot said, "We are all novices in a craft in which no one ever becomes a master." If you feel a need to review the basic skills of writing, visit Basic Prose Style and Mechanics at www.rpi.edu/dept/llc/writecenter/web/text/proseman.html. Twelve principles of writing are discussed.

If you are not subscribed to NINCLINK and wish to be, send an e-mail:

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

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If you have any technical problems with

the listserve, contact Patricia de la Fuente (patricia@hiline.net) as she handles the technical aspects.

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

— Lorraine Heath (LorraineHe@aol.com)

VANCOUVER 2000: Meet the Conference Chair

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Zita Christian is the author of three historical romances published by HarperMonogram, all set in the American West.

When she is not writing, Zita works as the assistant to the executive director of the Bushnell, Connecticut's largest performing arts center. In that capacity, she interacts with high-level donors and government officials, arranges domestic and international travel, works closely with the board of directors, and coordinates approximately a hundred formal meetings a year. (She also gets to read scripts of new musicals, listen to accompanying CDs, and see lots of shows for free!)

For the last few years, Zita has taught a six-part course on the basics of writing commercial fiction at the annual conference of the International Women's Writing Guild and at the Hartford College for Women. She has given writing workshops at conferences in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia, and has lectured to writers' groups, libraries, civic organizations, as well as middle grade and high school students. A certified handwriting analyst, Zita also teaches a basic handwriting analysis course and has lectured on that subject as well.

In addition to writing and teaching, Zita hosts a weekly television show on local cable access in central Connecticut. The show, "Zita Christian's Author Chat," features interviews and panel discussions with writers of fiction and nonfiction, published and unpublished, as well as booksellers, reviewers, librarians, readers, and specialists in the creative process.

(Ed's note: Please contact Zita directly with any thoughts or suggestions you may have for conference workshops—or to volunteer! We're always looking for a few good...writers...;->)





The Fast Track

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	Nov 4	Nov 11	Nov 18	Nov 25
Catherine Anderson	<i>Baby Love</i> , Avon	82	145		
Jo Beverly	<i>An Arranged Marriage</i> , Zebra	193	144	121	144
Jo Beverly, Deborah Simmons, et al*	<i>The Brides of Christmas</i> , Harlequin		178	115	
Sandra Brown	<i>Tiger Prince</i> , Mira	47	76		
Sandra Brown	<i>Tidings of Great Joy</i> , Bantam		28n	32	37
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Countess</i> , Signet	148			
Jude Deveraux	<i>High Tide</i> , Pocket	75n	88	140	
Dorothy Garlock	<i>With Heart</i> , Warner Vision	113			
Julie Garwood	<i>Ransom</i> , Pocket	10	10	23	28
Nora Hess	<i>Raven</i> , Leisure	100	127		
Linda Howard, Joan Hohl, et al *	<i>Delivered by Christmas</i> , Silhouette		67n	62	85
Linda Howard	<i>Come Lie with Me</i> , Mira		72n	72	
Susan Johnson	<i>To Please a Lady</i> , Bantam	138			
Stephanie Laurens	<i>A Rogue's Proposal</i> , Avon	79	128		
Cait London	<i>Sleepless in Montana</i> , Avon			195	147
J.D. Robb	<i>Loyalty in Death</i> , Berkley	56	91		
Nora Roberts	<i>The Reef</i> , Jove	36	63	144	
Nora Roberts	<i>The Donovan Legacy</i> , Silhouette	46	49	68	96
Nora Roberts	<i>Enchanted</i> , Silhouette	70	99	135	
Nora Roberts	<i>Jewels of the Sun</i> , Jove			261	3
Deborah Smith	<i>When Venus Fell</i> , Bantam	132			

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

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