

Novelists' INK

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

Goals & Golden Eggs

BY BARBARA KEILER

I have novelist friends who plan their careers. They know from day to day exactly what they're doing: what they'll be writing in February, what promotional material they'll be mailing in June, what they'll be discussing with their agents in August, what requests they'll be making of their publishers' marketing departments in November. They have five-year plans that make Stalin look like an amateur.

I have other friends who plan their careers in more mystical ways. They write their goals on pieces of paper and tack them to the walls above their desks. They meditate on their goals. They visualize them. They post them on computer bulletin boards: "This year I am going to sell three books," or "This year I am going to change publishers, change agents and hit the *USA Today* list." Expressing their goals publicly makes those goals

more concrete somehow, more irrefutable.

I envy these friends. They convey such confidence, such a spirit of mastery. They have a centeredness to them, a focus and a purpose. They know what's going on; they know where they're going. They are in command of their own professional lives, piloting their own careers.

I can't do what they do. I wish I could, but I can't.

Mind you, I've tried. I recall a speech I heard a famous author give many years ago, when I was still a rookie, in which this author described her ascent to the *New York Times* bestsellers list. She said she had decided that making the *Times* list was her primary professional goal, so she imagined it. She closed her eyes and pictured her name on the list. Every day when she sat down to write, she reminded herself that the *Times* list was where she was heading, what she was aiming for. And, lo and behold, within a few

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2001: A Nominating Odyssey

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2001, A Nominating Odyssey? Yes, that's right—it's time for the Nominating Committee to get started. We'll be looking for candidates for president-elect, treasurer and secretary to serve on the 2001 Novelists Inc. Board of Directors, as well as a slate of nominees for next year's Nominating Committee.

If you think you might be interested in one of these jobs, or if you'd like to suggest the name of a fellow member you think would make

a dynamite officer or member of the Nominating Committee, you may contact any member of the current Nominating Committee.

They are: Julie Kistler (julie@juliekistler.com), Julie Tetel Andresen (jtetel@acpub.duke.edu), Brenda Hiatt Barber (BrendaHB@aol.com), Kathy Lynn Emerson (emerson@megalink.net), Amanda Scott/Lynne Drennan (AmandaScott@worldnet.att.com) or Barbara Samuel/Ruth Wind (samuel@rmi.net).

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.....THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE

Over the past few months, NINC members have discussed plagiarism and how it's handled in our organization. What is NINC's stance? What do we do about proven plagiarism? What do we do if a member is caught up as a victim in a copyright infringement case?

From its inception in 1989, Novelists, Inc., has been staunchly opposed to plagiarism. NINC's condemnation of plagiarism is woven into the fabric of the organization, and has been from the beginning. For more information on precisely how this matter is handled in NINC's bylaws, refer to Article II: Members, Section 3; and Article XII: Removal of Membership.

NINC and the victims of plagiarism

I hate to use the word "victim," but unfortunately, that's the reality. NINC has no formal policy for dealing with members whose work has been plagiarized, nor, in my opinion, should we develop one. These matters must be handled on a case by case basis, because each case, each person, is different.

But let me make some general comments. First, we can't act on what we don't know. If a NINC member who becomes a victim of plagiarism chooses not to go public, that is their right. Even if we are privately aware of the facts and the offended party still doesn't wish to go public, we must respect his or her decision and remain silent. Once the facts become public knowledge, the choice of what, if anything, we do must be decided on a case by case basis. We don't want to inadvertently add to the rumor mill or the emotional distress of the victim, or do anything that might undermine his or her legal position. The intent of any silence on NINC's part is not to leave a victim twisting in the wind—the intent is to not make things worse, and above all, to respect his or her wishes.

Finally, NINC can't get involved in an ongoing legal case, whether it's a lawsuit over plagiarism or a contract dispute. We are prohibited, by law, from serving as an agent for any individual. We can report the facts and comment on those facts. But individual legal cases of plagiarism must be left to the parties directly involved. [NOTE: To my knowledge, no victim of plagiarism has ever asked NINC to get involved in their legal case.]

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NINC and the issue of plagiarism

The events of the past two-and-a-half years have been an education for many of us on the issue of plagiarism itself, on the hard realities of what happens when someone is caught passing off another

writer's work as their own. The Board has been looking into how we can address this issue since January. Let me tell you what we're doing.

- ▼ We will publish a piece on plagiarism from a legal point of view in an upcoming *NINK*.
- ▼ We will put up our membership application and revocation policies specifically dealing with professional misconduct on the website. It's not sexy, I know, but it's critical information.
- ▼ We will put up links to good sources on copyright law to better educate our members and the public who visit our website.
- ▼ We will produce an FAQ that addresses such commonly asked questions as, "What's the difference between plagiarism and copyright infringement?" This FAQ will be put up on the website, printed in *NINK* and available to members for copying.
- ▼ We will archive past and future *NINK* articles on this issue on the website.
- ▼ We will continue to welcome articles, columns and letters dealing with this issue (published, as

always, at the discretion of *NINK*'s editor).

But let me also tell you what we won't be doing. We won't be interfering with anyone's legal right to publish. Plagiarists sometimes manage to publish again. If they can get someone to take the risk and buy their work, we can, as individuals, decide not to buy their books. As an organization—we can't get into the territory of black lists and boycotts and interfering with someone's right to make a living.

Finally, a personal note. I believe this has been a healthy if painful airing of a difficult issue. I want to thank Nora Roberts for putting into words, as only she can, what it's been like for her since she learned that Janet Dailey had plagiarized her. I was talking to someone in New York who'd read Nora's letter, and she said she'd had no idea how miserable an experience this has been and appreciated Nora's heartfelt expression. The truth is, whether as an individual or an organization, we can't right the wrong committed against a friend, a colleague. Would that we could.

— **Carla Neggers**

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.

THANKS TO THE PREZ

I wanted to write and say thank you to Carla for saying such nice things about the Internet Committee in her April President's Column and also point out that Patricia de la Fuente and Brenda Hiatt Barber, the Gatekeeper and Moderator of the NincLink, deserve all

the praise and then some! There are also a few people on the other side of the Internet Committee—the ones who've contributed to the Novelists Inc. website (www.ninc.com)—who could use kudos as well. There's Neff Rotter, who does the Next Page of new book listings, Marilyn Pappano, who keeps the best-seller list, Marsha Bauer, who worked really hard to reorganize the whole website and also get the Members Only area up and running... And our webmaster, Craig (webmaster@ninc.com) who you need to contact for pretty much everything else, especially if you're having trouble getting into the Members Only area! If I forgot anyone, I didn't mean to! We're trying to keep both halves of Ninc's Internet presence—NincLink and its sister, www.ninc.com—as useful as possible, and there are a lot of people working on it. And if anyone else out there wants to help, give me a yell!

— **Julie Kistler**

Internet Committee ▶ ▶ ▶

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



HURRAH FOR VANCOUVER

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Add my name to the list of members who think that Vancouver is a great site for a Ninc Conference. A recent trip to a Whistler, a Canadian ski resort, took me through the city and surrounding area. Vancouver is a perfect snapshot of all that is wonderful about the Northwest and nearby Alaska. The surrounding landscape is dotted with islands and waterways as far as the eye can see. Even on a gray day the scenery is riveting as fog and clouds meld with the water and land. On a sunny day the vistas are endless and the blue sky and perpetually green landscape are unreal in their sharp edged clarity.

On a more practical level, the favorable Canadian exchange rate allows you to spend more money than your bank account will actually feel. It's as though you are buying everything at 35% off!

It's a must-see for all NINC members outside the Northern Hemisphere and those east of the Rockies and South of Mt. Shasta. Members from the Northwest will feel right at home.

— **Mary Blayney**

From: Laura Resnick <LARESニック@AOL.COM>

Subject: Good cause!

Valerie Taylor (new NINC member) and I had lunch at a new Ethiopian restaurant which has opened here in Cincinnati. The waitress heard us talking, and, as it turns out, is an avid romance reader. She says she reads at least two books a week, then when she's got a big pile of already-read ones, she packs most of them up and ships them home to Ethiopia for people there, where current popular fiction is very hard to get.

Since we really liked the food <g>, we offered to bring her books, and she was thrilled with the offer. Now we could just bring her *our* books, of course, but I thought I'd throw in a request here for anyone who'd like to contribute—since whatever you send will (after she reads it) eventually go to a country where people who can't get your books would love to have a chance to read them. If you'd like to give a book (or several), please send them to me at:

Laura Resnick
P.O. Box 8024
Cincinnati OH 45208

She said that she reads absolutely everything in romance, but particularly enjoys books set in the 14th-16th century, and also books about American Indians. (And I'll bet everyone who reads the books would be tickled if you autographed them.)

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is morally wrong.

Plagiarism is ethically wrong.

Plagiarism is legally wrong.

Can you get more wrong than that?

— **Jeanne Savery Casstevens**

PLAGIARISM REDUX

I'm writing because Nora Robert's letter in the March 2000 issue kicked me in the butt. I remember clearly when Dailey's plagiarism was finally exposed. I was on tour that August, and I heard a reader at an autographing say something like: "I heard Janet Dailey plagiarized Nora Roberts, or maybe, Nora Roberts plagiarized Janet Dailey."

I went on the war path. Everywhere I spoke I brought it up if readers didn't, which they usually did. I repeatedly held up her book *Notorious* and said Don't Buy This; Don't Buy Anything by Janet Dailey. I cannot tell you how many times people thought it was Nora Roberts who had done the plagiarizing. Nora got the bum rap too many times.

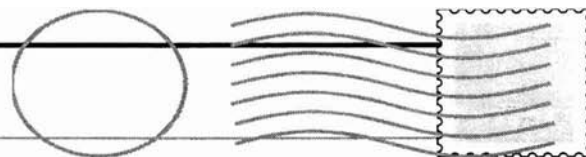
Listen up here: Somebody takes our words, the person is breaking the law. It can't get any simpler than that.

Janet Dailey's plagiarism of Nora Roberts was right out there for everyone to see. But guess what? No one appeared particularly bothered about it, except the media who had a ball mocking the genre in a brand new fresh way.

Then I experienced a big epiphany. The publishing house, HarperCollins, DIDN'T CARE. Not only was Janet Dailey's book, *Notorious*, NOT withdrawn, apologies issued, and Janet Dailey's contract canceled. Nope, HarperCollins didn't appear to do any grappling with ethics vs. greed at all. They just kept joyfully printing. How about the bookstores? Did Barnes & Noble say anything? Waldens? Actually, the bookstores had special tables set up with both Nora's *Sweet Revenge* and Janet Dailey's *Notorious* side-by-side. I saw several of them with my own eyes. Greed won out everywhere.

What I didn't realize until I read Nora's

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



letter was that neither of my own primary organizations—NINC nor Romance Writers of America—came out officially, IN WRITING, and blasted Janet Dailey in the chops over this crime. I would really appreciate an answer from both organizations as to why not. After all, it's not like there was this vague floating "suspicion" that a foul deed was done. No, *Notorious* was standing over the body of *Sweet Revenge*, the murder weapon computer in one hand and a confession in the other. Afraid of libel? Why? The crime is there for all to see.

So why didn't NINC and RWA come out swinging, condemning this as unethical, immoral, criminal, despicable, beyond unprofessional, and Janet Dailey should pay for her crimes?

I heard that Nora's lawyer said he had never before come up against a "serial plagiarist." You see, Janet had been making a long-time habit of this. She had gotten away with many murders. Why did Janet Dailey do this? Don't you think it's ironic that Janet not only plagiarized, but she was stupid enough to plagiarize a bestselling author? Did she feel safe because Nora is so prolific? Why didn't she plagiarize her own earlier books? Why pick someone with such an utterly different style? I'd sure like to hear the answer and not some ridiculous justification about a hitherto unrecognized psychological problem, but the bottom line answer: "I, Janet Dailey, plagiarized Nora Roberts because. . ."

Didn't RWA or NINC write scathing editorials because poor Janet would just suffer more, and after all, she really wasn't responsible?

Janet Dailey did the plagiarism. The computer is still smoking. NINC and RWA—it's a bit late, but how about doing it now? [Ed's note: see April 2000's *Comely Curmudgeon*.]

I wish to officially apologize to Nora for not asking these nitty gritty questions while all this was happening, for not making tsunami waves since I had seen firsthand what was going on out there.

— Catherine Coulter

PAST PRESIDENT RESPONDS TO THE ISSUE

Since I was the president of NINC in 1997 when the story of Janet Dailey's plagiarism of Nora Roberts

broke, I feel compelled to address the question of why NINC did not take a public stand on this issue. First of all, let me say that the members of the 1997 board were personally outraged to learn what had happened and were anxious to support Nora Roberts in any way we could. Members on Ninlink were demanding action and making suggestions that were either impractical or impossible, so the board gave careful consideration to what action we *could* most effectively take.

Our first step was to address member concerns over the situation in the President's Column. Remember that the story broke in the summer of 1997, reaching a fever pitch at the Romance Writers of America conference in July. In my August 1997 President's Column (written in early July, the earliest we could possibly have made any sort of response at all since this was when the facts first became public knowledge), I described the situation. I did not use names because Dailey had not yet acknowledged her guilt, and to name her in print would have invited a libel suit against NINC. I pointed out that the victim of the alleged plagiarism had not yet requested any official action from NINC, and when she did, we would respond in an appropriate manner.

In my column, I also addressed the suggestion, raised by several members, of developing a code of ethics that would specifically condemn plagiarism. I noted that plagiarism is not only unethical but also happens to be illegal. "If a law doesn't prevent an author from stealing another's work," I wrote, "a Code of Ethics probably wouldn't either." The board also felt it was unnecessary for NINC to officially go on record as opposing something that is already against the law. Personally, I think that to do so would just make us look silly—scoffers could ask what *other* illegal things NINC opposes, for example.

In addition to mentioning the plagiarism case in the August 1997 President's Column, the board also contacted Ms. Roberts through an intermediary and asked what she would like NINC to do for her. She replied that she did not want us to take any action at that time. She did allow the intermediary to provide information on the case to Evan Maxwell, who addressed the situation in his September 1997 East of the Hudson Column. After that column appeared, Ms. Roberts asked us not to mention the case in *NINK* again, and we honored her request.

Those of our members who are fortunate





BREAKING NEWS

BY PAMELA BROWNING

Noble Guy: Can't We Give Him An Award Or Something?

Barnes & Noble chairman Len Riggio said he would much rather see publishers invest in their operating systems and pay higher royalties to authors (yes!) than spend money on acquisitions. At the Association of American Publishers' annual convention, Riggio speculated that price reductions would increase book sales. He believes that price increases "have destroyed the mass-market paperback business," and he'd like to see mass-market paperbacks priced at a level that would attract a mass audience. Hardcover prices, he said, also need to come down, with Riggio suggesting \$19.95 for most hardcovers, \$24.95 for top authors. Riggio wants to establish pilot programs with publishers in an effort to eliminate returns.

Say What?

The film *American Beauty* won four Oscars this year: Best Picture, Screenplay, Director and Actor. The screenplay, by Alan Ball, was his first effort, and you can buy the final script (*American Beauty: The Shooting Script*) from Newmarket Press for \$16.95. It features notes from Ball and director Sam Mendes discussing a very different ending. The big whoop? Ball's inspiration for the tale was Joey Buttafuoco.

Say Who?

Check out www.nytimes.com/library/books/032700kingsolver-

LETTERS

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enough not to have been involved in any legal proceedings may be unaware of how sensitive these matters can be. A wrong step by a concerned but uninvolved third party, no matter how well-meaning, can ruin negotiations and possibly even be used against the very person it was intended to help. It can also draw the third party into the legal action. For example, one request members were making at the time was that NINC take a stand by asking people not to buy books by Janet Dailey and even to boycott the publisher of her books. To do so, however, would have been extremely dangerous for NINC. Dailey could have sued us for conspiring to deprive her of the means of making a living and the publisher could have sued us for restraint of trade. No liability insurance company would cover expenses for such a suit because we would have been clearly in the wrong, and we would have lost the suit for the same reason. Such a lawsuit would have bankrupted NINC.

As difficult as it may be to believe, however, some members have actually accused the board of being cowardly for not taking such actions. Quite the contrary, it takes courage to do what is best for an organization when your hearts (not to mention a lot of the members) are demanding that you join the fight for justice. While an individual might decide to risk himself and everything he owns just to make a statement, the board is responsible for protecting the entire organization. To endanger the future of NINC to take a stand the victim specifically asked us not to take would have been irresponsible in the extreme.

As much as I might personally like to see plagiarists pilloried, this is not the current penalty for plagiarism in the United States. If found guilty, they pay a settlement and walk away, which is what Dailey did. This isn't fiction, folks, where the bad guy gets punished and the good guy lives happily ever after, either. If the bad guy happens to be an author whose books the general public will still buy in large quantities, some publisher somewhere will continue to publish those books, no matter how outrageous or despicable that might seem to the rest of us. That's life, and life often isn't fair.

I'd also like to point out that in 1997, only one letter to the editor mentioned the Dailey plagiarism, and this letter took Evan Maxwell to task for kicking Janet Dailey when she was down! Not one member wrote in support of Nora Roberts. Perhaps some of us wish we had done so, at least privately, now that we understand how abandoned she felt by her peers. We can, however, still let her know that we share her outrage and understand her sense of violation and are sorry we didn't tell her sooner. We can also offer understanding and support to others who suffer the same violation in the future.

One thing I hope NINC will never do, however, is to behave irresponsibly toward either a victim of plagiarism or toward the organization itself in a misguided effort to do the right thing.

— **Victoria Thompson,**
past president of NINC

GOLDEN EGGS

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years she had made the list.

Wow! I thought at the time. Is that all I have to do to make the *Times* list? Close my eyes and imagine it?

Well, I'm here to tell you that, for me, it's going to take a whole lot more than closing my eyes and imagining it. I spent an awful lot of time in those early years with my eyes closed, and I haven't made the *Times* list yet. I spent time mapping out various five-year plans—although none of them lasted five years, because I invariably missed my first-year goal and abandoned the plan for a new one. I nursed my hopes, fretted over my failures, dreamed big dreams and suffered when those dreams didn't come true—which, as a rule, they didn't.

Ultimately, I concluded that the reason I wasn't reaching my goals was luck. Despite all the planning I did, all the visualizing, all the public proclamations about what I wanted to be writing in five years—and all the hard work, too—some element beyond my control seemed to be playing an essential role in whether or not I reached my goals. That element was luck.

I can control what verb I place in a sentence, and how many hours a day I spend at my computer. I can control, to some extent, my dealings with editors. Barring disaster, I can control how many books I will write in a year. But I can't control how many books I will *sell* in a year. All I can do is write the best books my talent allows. The rest is controlled by luck.

There is no getting around the fact that luck meddles in our careers. How else to explain some of the truly awful books that earn scads of money—or, far worse, the many brilliant, beautiful books that vanish into some publishing black hole, never to be seen again?

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When you hand your professional fate over to luck, you can relax about those beyond-your-control goals. If you forget about making the *Times* list—because ultimately, making it is a matter of luck—you don't have to suffer disappointment about not making it. You can simply concentrate on the things you do have control over: verb choice, hours at the computer, whatever. It makes for a more even-keeled, less histrionic life.

I adhered to that idea for a while, that because luck was beyond my control I



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ writing.html for an article by lit'ry author Barbara Kingsolver (*The Bean Trees*, *The Poisonwood Bible*) on the difficulty of writing good sex. It's part of a series in which writers explore literary themes. She asks about sex scenes, "Why should literary authors shy away from something so important?" We've wondered too, Barbara. Welcome.

Mighty Phat

Fatbrain, online clearinghouse for unpublished authors, recently launched a consumer site called Mightywords.com. Its goal is to offer all kinds of e-Matter in the 10–100 page range, from the well-known and unknown alike.

Two of the known are Pete Hamill and Jonathan Kellerman. But don't go there if you use a Macintosh—you can't download. PDF format on Windows 95/98NT 4.0 and 2000 only.

Real Horror

Steve Riggio, vice-chairman of Barnes&Noble.com, crowed that "the e-book format has arrived" when Stephen King's novella, *Riding the Bullet*, was published exclusively on the 'Net on March 14. Seemed like he was right; demand for the \$2.50 e-thing swamped Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble.com. Then, horror of horrors, hackers figured out the encryption technology and downloaded the story for free. Len Kawell, President of Glassbooks Inc., an e-distributor, said the book was released using a 40-bit encryption key, the safest available at the time. "The reality is there's no such thing as an invincible copy protection system," Kawell said.



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ **Bertelsmann vs. Amazon**

German media group Bertelsmann recently sold stakes in two online joint ventures to its partner AOL, increasing Bertelsmann equity capital to approximately 15 million marks. CEO Thomas Middelhoff's expansion plans include book publishing in the Spanish-speaking world and in France, Italy and Asia, and he sees opportunities in newspapers in the United States as well. He says Bertelsmann seeks to catch up with Amazon.com in e-commerce within five years. Not so fast, Tom! The *Wall Street Journal* speculates that Amazon is gearing up for an acquisition of its own. Amazon's looking to raise the amount of new stock it can create without shareholder approval by about 3.5 billion shares, more than twice its present allowance.

Musical Chairs

Janet Tanke has left Silhouette. Rachel Sharpin of Mills & Boon has joined Silhouette. Contrary to a number of rumors that have waltzed down the pike lately, Claire Zion is still at Time-Warner and will make a major announcement about her assignment in May.

Forget Writing, Sell Old Magazines

Romantic Times reports that RT#138, September '95, recently sold for \$102.50 on e-bay, an Internet auction site.

Doing It All

Chicago distributor LPC

▶ ▶ shouldn't bother thinking about it. But in time I came to realize that, regardless of luck's being beyond my control, I didn't have to let it render me impotent.

Sometimes when a bird flies over us, what it drops onto our heads isn't fecal matter; it's a golden egg. We don't have to be powerless when it comes to figuring out what to do when good luck befalls us, how to get it to work for us. While luck, good or bad, can't be controlled, it can be used. The word for this is serendipity: making the most of unexpected good luck.

In one of the workshops at the 1999 Novelists Inc. conference in Savannah, I described my own experience with serendipity. Apparently, what I said generated enough interest that *NINK's* editor has asked me to share the story here. (Of course, if you'd attended the conference, you would have heard the story there. That's why it's so important to attend Novelists Inc. conferences: because at our conferences we writers share these enlightening experiences freshly and, yes, serendipitously, sparking insights that will inspire us long after the conference is over. So attend the Vancouver conference! End of advertisement.)

Here is my story: I am a series romance writer. I'm good at what I do, and successful at it. I've sold more than seventy series romances, and I hope to continue selling them.

But I also want to write longer books. I want to expand my readership. I want to grow as a writer.

Several times, I wrote proposals for longer books: a

women's-friendship story. A family saga about bootleggers. A romantic melodrama set in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. An urban comedy. I put together one of these projects every two or three years—that was all I could squeeze in around my paying contracts. Some of my single-title proposals received rave rejections; others received form rejections. Not one of them sold.

I knew I was a good writer. After all, I've sold all those series romances, and my books satisfy an awful lot of readers. So I attributed the dismal results of my forays into single-title publishing to bad luck.

In the fall of 1998, the bird soaring over my head beamed me with a golden egg: I was invited to be the luncheon speaker at the Romance Writers of America national conference the following summer. I have no idea why RWA chose me for this honor, other than that I've been kicking around in the business for a long time and I'm reasonably smart and nice. I hadn't campaigned for the invitation, hadn't sought it, hadn't visualized it or listed it as a goal or included it in a five-year plan. I had never even considered it as a possibility. Being offered this opportunity was pure good luck.

It happened that I had a new single-title idea I was toying with. I thought, why not take advantage of the good luck that has just befallen me? Why not take this golden egg, polish it to a high sheen and maximize its worth?

At the time of the invitation, the single-title idea was literally no more than a computer document file consisting of a single sentence. I didn't have time to develop it, because I was under contract for

four Harlequin Superromances and a novella, with back-to-back deadlines.

But how often does a golden egg fall from a bird and land on my head?

In July of 1999, I was going to be spotlighted at a large national conference. Editors who had never heard of me were suddenly going to hear of me. People who attended my speech were going to think, "Barbara Keiler must be hot stuff—why else would RWA showcase her like this?" I knew the spotlight wouldn't last. I had five days—the duration of the conference—to stand in that spotlight, to harness its glow.

So I decided to write the single-title book. While I wrote the contracted Superromances and the novella, I also worked on the single-title project. I squeezed in a page here, a few paragraphs there. I worked late at night, on weekends, at my sons' baseball games, before and after their music recitals. I knew I'd have a better chance of selling the book if I wrote the whole thing, and that was what I was aiming for.

I couldn't do it (another goal I failed to reach, alas). By the end of June, I had only about 30,000 words written. The conference was a month away; I was running out of time.

I revised what I had, composed a ten-page synopsis, sent it to my agent and said, "Get this on six

editors' desks before the RWA conference."

Then I wrote a damned good luncheon speech.

At the end of July, I went to the conference and gave my speech. People—including editors—came up to me afterward and said, "What a wonderful speech!" And I said to those editors, "I'm so glad you liked it. You've got a manuscript of mine sitting on your desk right now."

Barely two weeks after the conference, I received my first offer on the book. In the next couple of weeks, other editors signaled their interest. By early September, my agent completed negotiations on a three-book contract with Mira.

This didn't happen because I'd written a wonderful proposal. I'd written wonderful proposals before, quite a few times, and they'd all been rejected. In my case, at least, good manuscripts alone are rarely enough.

Nor did it happen because I visualized the sale, or dreamed it, or drew up a plan five years ago predicting that in September of 1999 I was going to

sign a three-book deal with a reputable single-title publisher.

Nor did it happen because I was invited to give a high-profile speech at a large conference, although it probably wouldn't have happened at all without that

**Sometimes
when a bird
flies over us,
what it drops
onto our heads
isn't fecal
matter...it's a
golden egg...
While luck,
good or bad,
can't be
controlled, it
can be used.
The word for
this is
serendipity:
making the
most of
unexpected
good luck**

Continued on page 12 ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ announced its own imprint, Olmstead Press, which will release up to 40 titles a year with the help of e-Reads, Richard Curtis's electronic imprint for out-of-print titles. LPC will handle traditional and on-demand publishing while Curtis will release e-versions only.

Nightmare of Genie

Defunct Internet server Genie may still be billing certain customer credit cards. If it's happened to you, here's help. Send a blank e-mail to GenieBill-subscribe@onelist.com or visit the website at <http://www.onelist.com/subscribe/GenieBill>

Can't Wait

"The Book Trade in 2010" was the focus of a recent seminar in London. Organizer Hugh Look said he believes that power in the publishing business will shift to authors, who will have their own imprints and studios in which apprentices and proteges will help create material. Some authors will publish themselves quite successfully. DK Online's Alan Buckingham added that authors "will become participants in hosting and running communities. They will not simply sign a contract and eventually deliver a manuscript." Royalties will reach as much as 80%, and authors will share in advertising and sponsorships. Advances, however, will decline. More good news: statements and payments from publishers will become more accurate and up-to-date.

At Random

Random House ▶ ▶



VANCOUVER CALLS:

The Market, the Media, the Muse

Part 1: The Market—Morphing before our Eyes

The other day, I went to my office, or what my friends call Zita's Zen Den, to contemplate the portion of this year's conference devoted to the market. Much as I love workshops devoted to creativity, when it comes to the business of writing, I want to know about the publishing market. I assume you do too. While information about the market's past and present is readily available from numerous sources, I want the conference to offer a glimpse of the market's future. So, I plugged in my birdbath fountain, turned on a CD of Anugama's "Shamanic Dream," and entered into some serious conversation with my modern goddess of communication. She has been spending a lot of time at the *Publishers Weekly* website. Two subjects demanded my attention: electronic publishing and selling books online.

The wedding of technology and publishing has given birth to electronic publishing. Regardless of how e-published books are viewed for membership in NINC, many of the issues related to e-publishing affect all writers. How will the ability to print on demand affect an author's print run, or backlist? Does e-publishing change the way an agent negotiates an author's rights, the way a publisher views rights in general? Could e-publishing affect the way a book is marketed? The number of returns? The amount of money a publisher holds in escrow? How likely is it that the fledgling e-publishing market will become the market for mainstream books, stocked by major publishing houses, bought by your average booklover who will soon carry a reading device as readily as a cell phone?

Twenty years from now, when we look back at this new frontier of publishing, will we view ourselves as among the pioneers who helped establish standards for this new way of storytelling? Will cataracts formed from fighting progress cloud our vision? Or will we sit comfortably, smugly, amidst our own pile of paperback to-be-reads recalling the fad once known as e-pubbing? When you come to Vancouver, you'll have a chance to hear what industry leaders are saying on the subject. You'll have a chance to express your own opinions too.

Twenty years from now will we still go to our local bookstore to browse the shelves and buy the titles we want? Or will we browse and buy with a click of a mouse? Online sales have revolutionized the market. Not only are new titles

readily available, but obscure titles are now easier than ever to obtain. The online giant amazon.com maintains a mind-boggling database of 3.2 million titles. In-house experts can effectively hand-sell over the Internet. The company also offers readers the opportunity to post comments and reviews of books.

But the picture is far from defined. What happens when the write-in book review is negative? Can an author influence sales by encouraging positive reader comments? Add e-publishing to the mix of online selling and we're seeing new "families" formed. Barnesandnoble.com and Microsoft have formed what some call a "publishing pact." Time-Warner and AOL have become buddies. If e-publishing and online selling are truly creating a new frontier, are we in for a land rush? Or is the field limited to bestsellers? Is the frontier a haven for the self-published opus? A vanity press in disguise? A recent article in *PW* talked about chainstore buyers wanting publishers to discuss marketing plans for their latest releases. How will the rapidly multiplying "dot.com" sites factor into such marketing plans?

E-publishing and online selling are subjects for two of the major forums at this year's conference. If you're tempted to think that neither subject applies to you, your writing, or your career, let me share a bit of advice given to me eons ago by a good friend and very wise woman: Destiny is a wide road.

Twenty years from now, I may not have had a manuscript electronically published. Even the most dedicated search engines may fail to find my backlist. But wherever I am on the writing path, I will not have gotten there with my eyes closed. The message from the Zen Den is clear: When Vancouver calls, listen. My mailbox is full of RSVP cards from editors and agents. Clearly, they're listening too.

To the right, you'll find the conference registration form. Close your eyes and imagine listening to the radio while Wolfman Jack urges you, in his raspy, scratchy voice, "Send before midnight so you don't forget." Or think of my wise woman friend whose voice resonates with the ancestors, whose laugh rests upon an ever-present sigh, whose counsel is always clear: "Destiny is a wide road."

— **Zita Christian**

REGISTRATION FORM

NINC • VANCOUVER 2000 • OCTOBER 26-29 • WATERFRONT CENTRE HOTEL

NAME: _____
(Please print clearly)

NAME to appear on namebadge (if different from above) _____

PSEUDONYM(S) to appear on namebadge (limit 2): _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____ FAX: _____ E-MAIL: _____

EDITORS AND AGENTS ONLY:

TITLE: _____

COMPANY: _____

TO HELP US STREAMLINE REGISTRATION AT THE HOTEL:

Arrival date and time: _____ Departure date and time: _____

Special dietary and/or physical requirements: _____

REQUIRED REGISTRATION FEE

FOR NINC MEMBERS:

\$250, on or before July 1

\$275, after July 1

(Includes all conference meals and group functions)

AMOUNT PAID

\$ _____

\$ _____

FOR EDITORS AND AGENTS:

\$75

(Includes continental breakfast on Friday, Saturday and Sunday; Thursday dessert party, Friday cocktail party, Saturday President's reception and most group functions.)

\$ _____

OPTIONAL MEAL PLANS

FOR EDITORS AND AGENTS:

\$95

(Includes Thursday light supper, Friday luncheon with keynote speaker and Saturday banquet with special guest speaker.)

\$ _____

SPOUSE/GUEST MEALS:

\$160

(Includes all conference meals)

\$ _____

Name of spouse/guest for namebadge: _____

TOTAL: \$ _____

TO PAY BY CHECK: Make check payable to NOVELISTS, INC. and mail with this form to:
David Brooks • Central Coordinator • NINC Conference • PO Box 1166 • Mission KS 66222-0166

TO CHARGE: Visa and MasterCard only, Card No: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Name on card: _____ Signature: _____

Mail completed form to David Brooks • (address above) • or fax to him at 913-262-2632.

See www.ninc.com for conference details. Remember, registration is not confirmed until payment is made.
Thank you. We look forward to seeing you in Vancouver.

CLIP OR COPY THIS FORM - REGISTER TODAY!



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ recently became the first house in its class to own a large chunk of an electronic publisher when its Random House Ventures took a 49% stake in on-demand and epress Xlibris for an undisclosed price.

How About You?

The Internet Movie Database polled 1672 movie fans to ask, "If you were a novelist, would you want your book made into a movie?" Only 19.2% chose "Absolutely—it brings the story to a wider audience." "No way—movies never get it right," said 6.3%. That left 74.5%, who took the middle ground, answering, "Only if I could work closely with the director."

Forget Writing, Do a Game Show

Author Brad Herzog, contestant on "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?," watched his *States of Mind* catapult from the low 120,000s to #7 on Amazon.com after host Regis Philbin recommended the book. Herzog won \$64,000.

What About the Author?

Questia, a Houston startup with more than \$45 million in venture capital, will make the content of 250,000 educational books available online and then sell subscriptions to students for full-text access. It's also paying publishers by the page-view. VP Linda Cunningham says, "Instead of the copy machine getting 25 cents every time someone

Continued on page 14 ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

GOLDEN EGGS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 9*

speech.

The speech was the good luck part. But the sale happened because I grabbed hold of that good luck and rode it for all it was worth.

When you see a bird flying toward you, you'd probably be wise to open an umbrella. Most of the time, what the bird drops on you isn't gold. But if you're lucky, if a precious golden egg tumbles out of the sky and lands in your lap, celebrate serendipity. Make the most of it.

If an editor says she's heard good things about you, offer to submit to her. If a movie producer mentions he's tired of the same old stories, tell him a new story—one of yours. If you win a writing prize,

make sure everyone in the world knows about it. If a publicist mentions that she's desperately looking for an author willing and able to handle radio interviews, tell the publicist you excel at radio interviews—and then make sure you master radio interview techniques. If you overhear your editor discussing a special project, nominate yourself for the project. Luck placed you within eavesdropping range of your editor. Don't waste the opportunity.

There are plenty of birds soaring in the sky, and who knows? One of them might be about to lay a golden egg. Keep your eyes open and your hands cupped to catch whatever good luck falls on you.

You might reach a goal you'd never even dared to dream.

.....DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

Retaliation is Chicken Soup for a Writer's Soul

BY PHYLIS WARADY

Only once did a rejection move me to retaliate. It came from a small, obscure magazine that shall be nameless. It stated: "I've never heard of these publications. Don't bother to list your credits unless on a par with the *Saturday Evening Post*."

Here's my response: "To be candid, I've never heard of your publication either. Nor would I have taken the time to write a cover letter listing my credits had your listing in *Writer's Market* not requested same. In any case, do you honestly think if I had credits the caliber of the *Saturday Evening Post*, I'd have bothered to

submit my work to your obscure publication?"

(After years of enduring sneering rejections, in the above instance I did retaliate with a rejection of my rejection. While it felt great to vent my spleen, I thought my return letter the end of it. But this year I went online and entered a contest sponsored by <vanderbiltbooks.com>. "In no more than two paragraphs, tell us the most unusual, outlandish, funny or frustrating experience you've had dealing with an agent, editor, publicist or publisher.")

(My entry won third place and \$100.)

WRITER'S BLOCKS: *a Solicited, Unsolicited Testimonial*

Software Review:

By Gail Oust

Beware my fellow writers. Terey Ramin, our intrepid newsletter editor, can be relentless in her quest for articles. The shark in *Jaws* comes to mind. She has no qualms whatsoever about attacking a dear friend when she's the most vulnerable.

I remember it all as though it were yesterday. There we were, sipping double mocha cappuccino and chatting with a romance Readers Group in Border's. Talk turned to writing methods and outlines. Lost in a comfortable funk after reaching a deadline with fifteen minutes to spare, I innocently mentioned I use a software program called Writer's Blocks. Like lightning, Terey struck. Before I could mount an adequate defense, I had agreed to reveal how I got hooked on Writer's Blocks.

A discussion on NINCLINK first enlightened me to the fact that there were actually software programs designed to oil the creative progress whenever it got stuck. What a revelation! What a discovery! God bless NINCLINK. If memory serves, several types of software were mentioned, but Writer's Blocks seemed the one best suited to meet my needs. After visiting their website, I was hooked. Among other claims, it promised to simplify my life. How could I resist?

What is Writer's Blocks? First and foremost, Writer's Blocks *isn't* designed to help those with writer's block like some others. It also isn't designed to help create, but rather to organize and develop structure. Comparable to electronic index

cards, WBs is a Windows program created to hold text. Text can then be arranged into columns that are ordered from left to right. Blocks are added within a column from top to bottom. Columns may represent chapters, acts, segments or any other grouping you chose. My personal preference is to use the columns to represent the chapters and the blocks the individual scenes within the chapters. Though as many as 100 columns are available, you may use the Column Default to select the number of columns which works best for your current project. Blocks can be easily edited, and rearranged by using a drag and drop method.

My favorite feature is the ability to color code the individual blocks. For example, I can 'color' all love scenes pink, scenes with the villain blue, or the timeline green. By scrolling through the columns, I have a visual display of the book's pacing. I can electronically shuffle and reshuffle scenes and their sequence to optimal advantage. Even any blank spaces serve a purpose by showing me where the plot needs to be expanded, or what chapters need to be more fully developed.

I seem to find the program most useful when I'm approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of the way through the book. Since I know the start and end points, I then fill in other scenes I am sure about. It readily becomes apparent whether or not I have enough material. WBs allows me to easily elaborate, discard and rearrange plot points until I am satisfied I have a smooth,

coherent piece.

Other useful features include AutoNumber, which automatically renumbers the blocks to reflect their current order. Linking allows the writer to show the relationship between two blocks (scenes) by a line visibly connecting them together. The bookmark feature allows me to target specific blocks or locations within the document. WBs makes it possible to print the entire document as blocks, in outline form, or on index cards. Numerous other options are offered which customize individual writing styles. In addition to books, WBs would also be a useful for screenplays, speeches, or research papers.

Has WBs justified its claim to simplify my life? To some extent, yes. Quite honestly, my life would be far simpler if I could give up my day job. Since my quality writing time falls on the weekends, I don't have time for plot detours. The first order of business on my writing day is to review my wip on WBs. It serves as a jump-start. WBs literally shows me where I've been and where I'm going. It keeps me on track, focused and organized. I'm a visual sort of person and a color-coded road map gives me the sense of direction I need. Another plus: Electronic index cards never get buried on a messy desk.

While Writer's Blocks isn't for everyone, a free trial may determine whether or not it works for you. Writer's Blocks 2.0 is available from Ashley Software for \$99. For more information or to download a free trial, I suggest you visit their website: www.writersblocks.com



BREAKING NEWS

► ► ► uses a book, the publisher gets it."

Again, What About Authors?

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that since 1996, the EU has pressured Great Britain to adopt the resale-rights law known as *droit de suite* (translation: you could afford more chocolates). It adds a charge of between 0.25% and 4% to works of art that fetch more than \$4,000 the second time they are sold and at all sales thereafter. The money, less a 20% agent's fee, goes to the artists or heirs for 70 years after the artist's death.

Forget Writing, Try Acting?

Frustrated actor Salman Rushdie, whose book *The Satanic Verses* resulted in an Iranian-imposed \$2.4 million reward for his assassination, says that now that the fatwa has been lifted he plans to move to New York, where he has connections in the film business. *New York Post* columnist Neal Travis notes that film companies might find it difficult to get insurance on projects in which Rushdie is involved, since some fundamentalists have launched a fundraising campaign in which Iranians have been asked to sell their kidneys in order to raise a new bounty on Rushdie's head.

— **Pamela Browning**

Pamela Browning, editor of the quarterly US-China Review, has written books for Harlequin, Silhouette, Mills & Boon and Berkeley. In her spare time she lurks on Ninklink, which is how she ended up writing this column. (Don't ask.) E-mail weird or noteworthy tidbits to her at write2pam@aol.com

Ed's Note: Since M&Ms are among the munchies of choice for writers, I thought you'd all get a kick out of this excerpt from a letter to my son Nathan from a friend who's studying in Toronto. Printed by permission.

So you may all be wondering what we study here in Canada. Well, this is a pretty representative example straight from my Biology lab manual written by my professor (we're studying genetics).

Whenever I get a package of plain M&Ms, I make it my duty to continue the strength and robustness of the candy as a species. To this end, I hold M&M duels.

Taking two candies between my thumb and forefinger, I apply pressure, squeezing them together until one of them cracks and splinters. That is the "loser" and I eat the inferior one immediately. The winner gets to go another round.

I have found that, in general, brown and red M&Ms are tougher, and the newer blue ones are genetically inferior. I have hypothesized that the blue M&Ms as a race cannot survive

long in the intense theatre of competition that is the modern candy and snack food world.

Occasionally I will get a mutation, a candy that is misshapen, or pointier, or flatter than the rest. Almost invariably this proves to be a weakness, but on very rare occasions it gives the candy extra strength.

In this way, the species continues to adapt to its environment.

When I reach the end of the pack, I am left with one M&M, the strongest of the herd. Since it would make no sense to eat this one as well, I pack it neatly in an envelope and sent it to M&M Mars Inc., along with a 3x5 card reading "Please use this M&M for breeding purposes."

This week they wrote back to thank me, and sent me a coupon for a free half-pound bag of plain M&Ms. I consider this "grant money." I have set aside the weekend for a grand tournament. From a field of hundreds, we will discover the True Champion. There can be only one.

Time-Out: M&Ms

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

Roby James, Tarzana CA
Randye Lordon, Amagansett NY
Evelyn Coleman, Atlanta GA
Susal Wittig Albert, (Robin Paige)
Bertram TX

New Members

Karen Sandler, Cameron Park CA
Jan Scarbrough, Louisville KY

We've room for more!

Remember, recruiting is a community effort you can share.

I've been a government employee for going on twenty-four years and one thing government employees excel at is finding shortcuts. Many of those shortcuts involve discovering ways to minimize keystrokes. As a writer, I also look for shortcuts in an effort to meet my deadlines without compromising my writing. One shortcut that I often utilize is the auto-correct feature imbedded in my word processing program. It comes with a set of commonly misspelled words that it automatically corrects as I type. It also allows me to add my own words. I add long words or oddly spelled words that I frequently type—most commonly my characters' name. My heroine Jessye spelled her name a little differently and my fingers kept fumbling over her name. So I added "Jess" to my auto-correct as the item to be replaced and "Jessye" as the word to replace it with. So whenever I typed "Jess" and spaced or put a punctuation mark, my word processor automatically wrote "Jessye" for me. I have a secondary character in my WIP—Alejandro—whose name automatically appears after I type "Alej." I also have "mss" which changes to manuscript and a variety of other writing related words that I'm simply too lazy to type. I have found auto-correct to be invaluable in my WIP since it is peppered with Hispanic words. Using the character map to acquire letters with accent marks and tilde's, I can type a Hispanic word and insert the foreign characters—characters not normally found in the English language. Once I've typed the Hispanic word, I add it to my auto-correct feature without the foreign characters as the "to be replaced portion" and then indicate that it is to be replaced with the Hispanic word: Si becomes Sí; senorita automatically changes to señorita, etc. This method has saved me a lot of time and frustration—so I wanted to pass it on to those of you with an auto-correct feature.

Speaking of word processing programs, many authors have found that Courier is too light for manuscript use.

Terey reported that she learned that "dark courier and other HP fonts can be picked up for free" at www.fontsmart.com/fonts.htm. She explained that "some of the writers on sff.net swear by it. And a couple even said it could be tweaked to work with other than HP printers."

RESEARCH

Does your story have a character who works at a nuclear power plant? Or perhaps one who suspects the management of the nuclear power plant of foul play? And you're considering Colorado for the setting? Check out The Quick Virtual Nuclear Power Plant Tour at www.cannon.net/~gonyeau/nuclear/tour-a.htm where your questions about reactors and their locations (none are in Colorado) can be answered as you tour a virtual facility in a relatively safe environment.

Rumor has it that there are over a billion web pages—a lot to research. I discovered a really neat site that does the searching for you and then simply displays the sites one at a time—as though you were turning pages. At eTour found at www.etour.com, I selected "history" as my interest. It first showed me a Lewis and Clark website, followed by a Civil War website, Theodore Roosevelt, and shipwrecks. I couldn't determine a way to narrow the search or receive a more specific search, but it was still interesting to just flip through sites and see what would come up next. The advantage to the site is that it can offer you sites that you might not find via a search engine.

Trying to determine the origin of a word or whether your character is using it properly? Visit The Word Detective at www.word-detective.com to discover the details of a word's history. You e-mail your request and its history may appear in a later column. The columns first appear in newspapers, then are posted at

the website. You can register to receive e-mail notification each time a column is added to the website. It's a fun site to browse.

The Hollywood Thirties at www.geocities.com/hollywood/lot/4344 received the Britannica Internet Guide Award. The host, Gary Jackson, collects movies from the 1920s through the 1940s. He focuses on the movies, history, trends, actors, and actresses of that glamorous Hollywood era. These time periods seem to be more acceptable as settings since we've moved into another century so the site might be useful to you at some point.

PROMOTION

Unfortunately, this promotional opportunity only applies to those with access to America Online. The Writers Group meets every Tuesday at 10 PM ET in the Women's Channel: Living Chat Room. The group is looking for writers to serve as guests for a variety of workshop topics. If interested, contact HOSTWLVRoz@aol.com.

Attention Mystery Writers: Denise Dietz Wiley shared a wonderful promotional site with us. Murder on the Internet Express at members.xoom.com/murderxpress/ greets you with dripping blood. "It doesn't cost anything to be listed there" and they will provide a link to your site without asking for a reciprocal link although Denise plans to reciprocate. They also list booksignings.

FaveMail at www.favemail.com allows you to add banners to your emails at no cost. They advertise that it's a fun and exciting way to add graphics to your e-mail. You can use pre-existing banners or create your own—a possible way to promote that next book. They are currently in the process of adapting the software so it can be integrated into AOLers e-mail service. But if you're on another service, you may already be able to use the banners.

Last month, I mentioned a website that allows you to add free bulletin board service to your ▶▶▶▶

Online.....

►►►► website. This month, I discovered another one. Coolboard at www.coolboard.com offers a user-friendly format that is easy to master.

MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

Blue Murder is an online e-zine found at www.bluemurder.com. The issue I looked at had a couple of articles and interviews with former police officers, conference announcements, and a contest.

FREE E-MAIL WITH A WHALE OF AN ADVANTAGE

One problem with many free e-mail services is that they either don't allow attachments or they limit the size of the attachment. WhaleMail at www.whalemail.com is a free service that accepts attachments up to 50MB.

WEARY OF SOLITAIRE?

When a secretary in my husband's office learned that I was a writer, she bemoaned the fact that she didn't have a stress-free job like I did. Needless to

say, I could only stare at her perception of a writer's easy life. Stress builds up and we all have different ways of relaxing. I know several writers turn to the solitaire program that came with their PC's. But remember when you were a kid, and a package would arrive with an object wrapped in bubblewrap? Remember how you'd lay it on the floor and tap dance over it and feel the exhilaration of . . . I don't know. Destroying plastic?

Well, now you can experience the thrill again in cyberspace. At www.urban75.com/Mag/bubble.html, you will find a perpetual piece of bubblewrap on the screen and all you need do is run your mouse over it. Pop! Pop! Pop! And the best part of all is that the bubbles return so you can engage in this mindless activity

for minutes on end — or if you have a deadline looming — hours on end.

If you're not into mindless relaxation but prefer challenge, check out Free Puzzles at www.freepuzzles.com where you can sharpen your mind and, according to information on the site, increase your IQ. The site currently offers more than 200 puzzles in 6 categories: Math, Logic, Geometry, Moves, Weight/Volume and Misc. Each puzzle provides an image, a hint, and a solution.

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

— Lorraine Heath
(LorraineHe@aol.com)

JOINING THE LINK

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

To: LISTSERV@PEACH.EASE.LSOFT.COM

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

Body: SUBSCRIBE NINCLINK Your-First-Name Your-Last-Name

If you have any technical problems with the listserve, contact Patricia de la Fuente (patricia@hiline.net) as she handles the technical aspects.

MEMBER News.....

From Julie Beard: "My new 'how to' book is now out: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Your Romance Published*. It's being well received (B&N.com romance editor and horror novelist Doug Clegg says it's one of the best 'how to' books on popular fiction he's ever read.) I thought published authors would like to know the book is out. It might be handy for them to recommend when they're cornered at book signings by aspiring authors." [Ed's note: I picked up a copy of Julie's book and can tell you, I normally HATE the Idiot's series, but this book really is a wonderful-to-recommend read-it-and-follow-the-advice book for both would-be writers and inexperienced authors alike. Tdr]

From Janet Evanovich (who's rather excited about this as you'll be able to tell...<vbg>) "The first ARC of *Hot Six* has shown up on E-bay and been auctioned off. It went for \$462.78. It was bought by a group of seven people. The group hails from California, Canada, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. They are going to have a telephone conference and read the prologue together, and then the ARC will be FedExed around the group. They are also going to be meeting in Baltimore next week (I have no idea why) and they are going to take a group picture for us to put in the *Plum News*. We're sending them all signed plates and keytags to go along with the ARC. The second

runners-up for the ARC were a group of three women who are all met and became good friends on the site. We are sending them keytags and bookplates too, even though they don't have an ARC yet. They are all going to purchase the hardcover when it comes out. All seven have promised to keep the 'secret' of the prologue."

From Neff Rotter to all those family and friends who may be interested: "As some of you know, I've become a publisher as well as a writer. And more recently I've developed an absolute passion for ebooks. So my company, Belgrave House, has

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THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Going Postal”

(The music swells...)

“Please, wait a minute Mr. Postman—
And take your Thorazine!
Whoa-oa-oa-oa,
Wherever that letter’s from,
Don’t forget your lithium!”

...Okay, so there’s a really good reason that I’m a novelist instead of a songwriter.

There is *no* good reason, however, that I—a law-abiding taxpayer in the United States of America at the dawn of the third millennium of the Common Era (and please, let’s not get technical about which year marks the start of the millennium, since it has taken me three months to learn to write ‘00 on all my checks—and while we’re on the subject, would someone please tell national television reporters that it’s “millennia,” not “millenniums”).... Where was I?

Oh, yes... Why is it that an ordinary citizen like me, in the burgeoning Information Age, in the wealthiest society on the third rock from the sun, can’t get her mail? Why is it that what goes into a mailbox somewhere out *there* never comes out of the mail sack *here*—or if it does, it is virtually unrecognizable by the time it arrives? (I have received packages with *tire tracks* on them, I tell you!) How is it possible for a letter, check or package to take longer to travel between New York and Cincinnati than it takes NASA to find probes lost on Mars? (No, this isn’t a dig at publishers. For the purposes of this diatribe, I’m restricting my attention to the indignities and abductions endured by items which publishers have actually sent in a timely fashion.)

This strange ripple in time, this black hole of letters and packages, is certainly not a mystery unique to long-distance postal service, either. My rent checks, which travel about six miles from here to their destination, have disappeared three times in the mail during the past fourteen months.

Mary Jo Putney attributes this sort of thing to Mercury being in retrograde. (Don’t ask me what that means.) The guy handing out leaflets in Fountain Square says it’s because I haven’t joined the Church of the One True Way, and so his merciful and loving god hates my guts. Pat Sims, a former Worldcon Fan Guest of Honor, is a social worker in her mundane life (“mundane” is sf/f fandom’s adjective for all areas of life which are not fannish), and she happens to get postal workers as clients from time to time. She insists that they’re under terrible stress and that the general public is hideously rude to them, which accounts for their eventually “going postal,” to use the popular term inspired by this

division of our federal civil service. (So if you’re one of the people being hideously rude to postal workers, please stop—stop now! I want my mail!)

The painfully shy serial killer downstairs wouldn’t discuss this mystery of the universe with me before he moved to New Jersey; but at the house down the street, where the shutters are always pulled down and stray cats reproduce beneath the porch faster than media tie-in books multiply on bookstands, the inhabitants explained to me that my postal problems are part of a carefully orchestrated government plot to eliminate all my civil rights and personal liberties—starting, it would seem, with my right to be paid and to proofread my galleys.

As always, however, Grandpa Resnick’s take on my problems is probably the most helpful one: “Kid, most people are idiots and the world is a really weird place. Have a margarita.”

As if the normal Russian roulette of federal mail service weren’t nerve-wracking enough for someone whose work and money all comes entirely through the post, I seem to live in a particularly sanity-challenged postal district.

One day not so long ago, I made the mistake of requesting my mail be held while I was out of town for a week. When I returned, the post office didn’t resume delivery of my mail as I had requested in the standard your-name-here form. This didn’t worry me right away, actually. My mailman recognizes all sorts of holidays, which aren’t on anyone else’s calendar, and we typically just don’t get our mail in this building on at least one ordinary working day every month.

However, after three days had passed with no mail delivery, I decided something was wrong—wrong beyond the normal wrong, a faint and fuzzy distinction. So I phoned my postal station and explained the problem.

“Your mail carrier is just thinking of you, miss,” the postal worker in charge advised me. “He’s just looking after your best interests.”

“How is he doing that?”

“Don’t you realize what could happen if he delivered your mail?”

“Um... I... Um...”

“You could be raped or killed!” he cried passionately.

“Excuse me?”

“Terrible things happen to women all of the time, don’t you know that? Women are raped and murdered, beaten and abused and killed! You could be killed right in your bed one night! Did you ever think about *that*?”

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ “I try really hard not to. But if we could return to the subject of my mail—”

“And if he started delivering your mail, that’s what could happen to you!”

I tried to assimilate this new information which, I confess, had never before occurred to me. “Let me get this straight. I could be raped and killed as a direct result of the postal carrier delivering my mail?”

“That’s right! So now maybe you can understand why he’s not delivering it.”

(I am not making this up.)

I made the mistake of trying to learn how delivery of my mail could lead directly to my death and dismemberment. As near as I could understand it, if the postal service delivered my mail, then it would be obvious to any rapist or murderer that I not only lived here, but was also currently in town, in residence, ripe for assault and assassination. The End. No sequels. R.I.P.

“But you’ve been delivering my mail all this time,” I protested, “and no one has killed me in my bed yet!”

“And we don’t want to see that happen,” he replied, sticking to his guns.

In any event, further attempts to unravel this chain of reasoning only led me down the murky path of schizophrenia, so I soon gave up and tried another tactic.

“Look, I appreciate your concerns, I appreciate this care for my continued well-being. But I really, really *need* my mail.”

“We just don’t want to see you dead, lady, you know what I mean?”

“And because I really need my mail,” I continued doggedly, “I’m willing to take the risks associated with having it delivered.”

“Well, maybe *you* are, but you know, your carrier, he doesn’t want to be responsible for what could happen to you. I mean.... He’s got to *live* with that, you know?”

“I really don’t think he has any choice about this,” I persisted. “When I filled out that ‘temporary stop’ form, I specifically wrote that he was to resume delivery three days ago. I’m pretty sure that means he has to, no matter how he feels about it.”

Now *he* changed tactics: “Oh, yeah, right, and how do we even know you’re really Laura Resnick?”

Stumped, I could only reply, “I *am* Laura Resnick.” However, after five more minutes on the phone with this guy, I could probably be convinced that I wasn’t.

“Maybe you are. I’m not saying you’re not. But we have no way of knowing you are.”

“I’m using her phone and calling you from her apartment.” Bad sign, referring to oneself in the third person.

“Maybe the real Laura Resnick’s in Hawaii,” he suggested.

“The real Laura Resnick’s never been to Hawaii!”

“Then maybe *you* killed her! Maybe that’s how you got into her apartment!”

(I’m really not making this up. I’m not even exaggerating.)

Fearing that I could wind up being arrested for my own murder if I talked to this guy much longer, I ended the conversation and hung up. Two days later, I left a note in my mailbox begging the postman to start delivering my mail again, and making vague threats about what I’d do if he didn’t. Mercifully, the mail began its casual and occasional arrival two days after that, though a check from my agent never turned up and eventually had to be reissued.

Then there’s the whole subject of mail, which comes here, which shouldn’t. No matter how many times I write “Not At This Address and Never Was” or “Wrong Street, Wrong City” or “Died At Antietam” or “Forward To Devil’s Island” or just plain “Return To Sender” on pieces of mail which don’t belong here... The exact same pieces of mail always reappear in my mailbox within 72 hours. I have thrown away enough mysterious mail to barricade a six-lane highway, not knowing what else to do with it. I often wonder if my missing contracts, checks and galleys have come to a similar end at someone else’s hands.

Speaking of galleys, that reminds me... If federal postal workers claim the excuse of being understaffed and overworked, or of having been unwitting test subjects in some sort of mental experiment straight out of the “X-Files”... What excuses do they have at UPS and Federal Express? If I had a dollar for every time UPS claimed to have delivered an item to me which, in fact, they never did—well, I wouldn’t have to write for a living anymore. I never had much faith in Federal Express after an entire year’s worth of original artwork by two sf/f artists (Don Maitz and Janny Wurts) disappeared from one of FedEx’s trucks on the eve of the World Fantasy Convention art show—never to be seen again, last I heard. And my own experiences suggest, sadly, that FedEx employs people who weren’t competent enough to work for the post office.

The key difference between UPS and Federal Express, I have found, is that UPS sometimes realizes they haven’t delivered the package—or discovers they’ve delivered it to the wrong place—and winds up bringing here it the end. Federal Express, however, is more stubborn. Once they say they’ve delivered it, nothing on earth can make them change their story. You’re on your own after that. One time, a set of my galleys turned up in a water-logged box under the stairs three weeks after Federal Express hotly insisted they had delivered it to me. (And, no, the galleys hadn’t been there the whole time. They just appeared, as if dropped from the sky, that day.)

All things considered, my editor says he’s tempted to

simply send his assistant all the way to Cincinnati as a courier next time he's got something important for me.

So, despite my railing against the U.S. Postal Service, I can't say that I really think privatization is the answer. And just as mail non-delivery is a problem, which I don't believe is unique to my neighborhood, it's evidently also not a curse unique to our era. I was recently reading a *Wizard of Id* cartoon published more than thirty years ago in which the Wizard's wife has to pay a merchant within thirty days; she gets warned not to *mail* the check, as that would be cutting things too close.

So the next time your agent or editor says, "The check is in the mail," I wouldn't advise taking comfort. Someone in Guam is more likely to get it than you are.

Meanwhile, anyone who wants to write me nasty letters about this column, please be sure to send them to me via the United States Postal Service, UPS or Federal Express.

— **Laura Resnick**

Laura Resnick aka Laura Leone is an award-winning writer in both sff and romance. The author of fifteen novels, two novellas and nearly forty short stories, she has also written one non-fiction book about her eight-month journey across Africa, as well as a few travel articles. In addition to writing this column, she has contributed numerous pieces to NINK, has served on several NINC committees, and was the chairman of the 1997 NINC conference in New York City. You can find her on the Web at www.sff.net/people/laresnick.

MEMBER News.....

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 16

published three ebooks, the most recent one being *And One to Grow On*, a novel I wrote with David Pepper, a family practice doctor. That book got picked as an "Undiscovered Gem" for the ebooknet.com site and is featured on their opening page! Their picks are supposed to have ebook "best-seller potential," a sound I like.

Australian member Sherry-Anne Jacobs reports, "My book *Our Lizzie* has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Romantic Book of the Year (Australian Romance Writers) and I'm thrilled to pieces about that. [also] I gained a prestigious Writer in Residence position offered by the City of Hobart in the island state of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Writers' Centre to celebrate the new millenium. I'm thrilled to pieces about that. They pay my fare, plus a stipend, plus providing accommodation and they pay me extra to give a couple of workshops on writing. It's a delightful package. I even get invited to speak at the Tasmanian Writers' Festival—little old moi at a gathering of literati! That'll be fun!"

And speaking of Tasmania...in a totally delightful first for Novelists, Inc., NINK and particularly *Nincklink* comes

this announcement from **American member Denise Dietz Wiley and Tasmanian Aussie member Gordon Aalborg**: "Exactly three years ago, NinckLinkers were talking about pesky interruptions. At the very same time, my husband said he was leaving me. I blurted it out on the list, starting with the words: 'Speaking of interruptions...' I hit the send key and immediately thought: 'Oh no!' But I'm glad I didn't edit my post, or even stop to think, because the support, encouragement and empathy from list members helped me over a major bump in the road. One of the (private) e-mails I received was from a male NINC author, calling my mate a 'bloody fool.' I responded with a thank-you, and we became friends. We drifted, lost touch, then found each other again..."

"This might be a first for NINC, maybe not, but the last love of my life, Gordon Aalborg, has asked me to marry him. I said yes. We considered keeping it a secret for a while, but our recently revised bios have announced our engagement. Besides, why keep secrets from the very group that brought us together? If you're thinking, 'this would make a great book'...you're right. Gordon (published with more than 20 novels) is writing our story, a BCN romance

called: POETRY IN e-MOTION."

Gordon responded to Deni's announcement of their betrothal with a romantic poem, which he sent to the link, calling it "Gordon's answer to being led down the garden path by a devious, cunning female, not that he's actually complaining, mind. She's drop-dead-gorgeous, both inside and out, crafty and cunning, a brilliant editor and much, much more. How could I 'not' love her? Which is my final word on the subject until she arrives in October and I actually do meet' her. Be still my heart." This romance has taken place entirely through e-mail, lending new heights to the movie scenario of *You've Got Mail*. NINK's congratulations and felicitations go out to the happy couple!



"We have always understood culturally at some level the power of the word...If you articulate something that is within the community's reach but not yet actuated, the articulation of the goal can move the community toward that actuation. And the same is true of yourself. It's not a question of getting the opportunities, it's a question of noticing that opportunities are there."

— **Henriette Klauser**

Write It Down, Make It Happen

.....THE FAST TRACK...

Compiled by MARILYN PAPPANO

NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the *USA Today* top 150 bestseller list. (A letter "n" after the position indicates that the title is new on the list that week.) Members should send Marilyn Pappano a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Marilyn's phone 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>.

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

NINC Member	Book Title/Publisher	Mar 2	Mar 9	Mar 16	Mar 23	Mar 30
Sandra Brown	<i>Bittersweet Rain</i> , Warner	41	103			
Sandra Brown	<i>Send No Flowers</i> , Bantam		27n	33	46	57
Catherine Coulter	<i>False Pretenses</i> , Signet		96n	13	10	11
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>Tough Cookie</i> , Bantam		82n	82	96	90
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>Prime Cut</i> , Bantam		35n	37	41	46
Christina Dodd	<i>Rules of Surrender</i> , Avon			34n	25	48
Carolyn Hart	<i>Death on the River Walk</i> , Avon Twilight	148				
Norah Hess	<i>Snow Fire</i> , Leisure				55n	64
Linda Howard	<i>MacKenzie's Mountain</i> , Mira		90n	58	101	120
Joan Johnston	<i>The Cowboy</i> , Island	32	47	111	120	145
Jayne Ann Krentz	<i>Call It Destiny</i> , Mira	110				
Jill Marie Landis	<i>The Orchid Hunter</i> , Jove	201	66	134		
Debbie Macomber	<i>Mail-Order Marriages</i> , Harlequin		179	21	24	44
Cathy Maxwell	<i>A Scandalous Marriage</i> , Avon	64	125			
Kasey Michaels	<i>Can't Take My Eyes Off of You</i> , Zebra		58n	69	94	121
Linda Lael Miller	<i>One Wish</i> , Pocket Star	46	76			
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	<i>First Lady</i> , Avon	16	21	48	76	92
Amanda Quick	<i>I Thee Wed</i> , Bantam	47	94			
J.D. Robb	<i>Witness in Death</i> , Berkley		108n	15	19	22
Nora Roberts	<i>Jewels of the Sun</i> , Jove	61	70	95	93	84
Nora Robert	<i>Carolina Moon</i> , Putnam			3n	13	18
Bertrice Small	<i>Bedazzled</i> , Zebra		148n	148		
Erica Spindler	<i>All Fall Down</i> , Mira			147n		

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