

Novelists'



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

Print on Demand Publishing: Hope or Hype?

BY LILLIAN STEWART CARL

(My thanks to everyone who helped with this article, especially Nancy Cohen, Angela Hunt, Garda Parker, and Theresa Scott.)

A stranger in cyberspace.

Despite my having committed several works of science fiction, I admit to being technology-impaired. To me, computers and the Internet are versions of my trusty Saturn. I use it to take me places. If it works, I'm happy with it. I have neither the desire nor the ability to tinker beneath the hood.

Print on demand technology was just another billboard I passed while weaving my way down the information highway.

Then the July 1999 issue of the *Authors Guild Bulletin* hit my mailbox. I already knew about the Guild's Backinprint program, which sold

members' on-hand out of print books through bookseller Shakespeare and Co. Now, I read, Authors Guild had lined up a POD company to reprint the out of print books members didn't have on hand.

Funny how interesting something becomes the minute you see what's in it for you.

Print on demand is another one of those waves of the future that every so often breaks on the writer's shore. With POD, the hype goes, your deathless prose will indeed be immortal. Your text is digitized, stored in a digital library, and printed on order—in one minute. No longer will publishers have to worry about minimum orders, warehouse costs, or wasteful returns. Books will never go out of print. (The contract implications of this are, of course, another issue.)

Behind print on demand is

Lightning Source, Inc., which was started in 1997 as Lightning Print, Inc. Lightning Source converts, stores, manages, and distributes digital content, producing both POD and electronic books. Not surprisingly, Lightning Source is a subsidiary of Ingram. It has facilities in Tennessee, will be opening new facilities on the West Coast and the UK this year, and has more in the planning stage.

The POD books are produced under contract to the IBM Printing Systems Division, which uses an IBM Infoprint 400 machine for the book block and an IBM Infocolor 70 for the cover. In there somewhere is a collator, and, I imagine, a big tube of glue. (A paper jam in one of these things must be awe-inspiring.) While the concept is bridge-of-the-Enterprise stuff, the actual machinery is not. It wouldn't

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Touch vs. Technology: Print on Demand Redux

A letter from the owner of Northshire Bookstore's The Edge

(Reprinted from the Summer 2000 edition by permission)

BY ED MORROW, JR.

Did you see the recent article about the Silicon Valley CEO who found he is so wired during the day that he has unwired at home? No TV, no electricity in most of his house, no phone. He cooks, eats, and reads by long-burning beeswax candles. Turns out he's not a rarity; he's part of a growing reaction to tech overload which is nudging high-achievers toward the simplicity movement.

John Naisbitt identified this

phenomenon 18 years ago in his book **Megatrends**. His *High Tech/High Touch* concept spoke to the need for balance between the alienating, isolating, and stressing aspects of technology and the humanizing, soul healing effect of *touch*. Touch in the form of a walk in the woods, a story, a snooze in the hammock, play, a conversation, art, a smile, all those things which slake the yearnings of the soul. Naisbitt describes his concept as "embracing technology that preserves our humanness

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Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN.....

What a year it's been! A great board, a fabulous conference in Vancouver, lots of work accomplished, lots of good stuff lined up for next year...and all of you, almost 600 published writers of popular fiction with all your energy, ideas and commitment to this unique organization.

For those of you not in Vancouver—*wow*, what a conference. I'm sure you've heard by now about the beautiful hotel, the gorgeous location, the incredible food and the discussions, from the candid to the roll-in-the-aisles fun. Many, many thanks to Zita Christian, Kate Dooley, the 2000 NINC board and all the editors, agents and outside speakers who made Vancouver such a success. I hope we've all marked our calendars for next year at the Adam's Mark in Philadelphia, September 6-9. The intrepid, creative and ever-fun Terey daly Ramin is already getting started as the conference coordinator. Kate Dooley at Mountain State Travel in West Virginia is again serving as our professional meeting planner. I'm looking forward to coming to Philadelphia as a regular NINC member!

At the annual business meeting in Vancouver, we elected next year's board, with Barbara Keiler as president; Pat Rice, President Elect; Linda Kay West, Treasurer; Kathy Chwedyk, Secretary; Pamela Browning, Newsletter Editor; and Georgia Bockoven, Advisory Council Representative. We also elected the Nominating Committee for 2001: Carole Nelson Douglas, Lawrence Watt Evans, Barbara McMahon, Pamela Morsi, Mary Jo Putney. Thank you all for doing this work—I hope you'll have fun.

Let me recap what we've done this year and what we hope to finish before we turn over the reins to next year's board.

Advocacy: Kay Hooper reported that her committee researched and recommended several informative websites on the subject of plagiarism for www.NINC.com. They also gathered and forwarded a list of frequently asked question on the subject so that a literary attorney could supply detailed answers for our members (ongoing). They also conducted a poll of most frequently asked questions from both readers and aspiring writers, for the purpose of compiling official NINC FAQ sheets our members can distribute at signings, interviews, and other appearances. By year's end, they would like to draft NINC's first Position Paper, on plagiarism, with guidelines provided by the board.

Audit: Linda Kay West reviewed NINC's books and records for the calendar year 1999, including bank statements, check register, cancelled checks, invoices and bills, receipts, board minutes, and treasurer's reports.

Internet: Julie Kistler reported that her committee moved both the NINLink and www.NINC.com to different servers this year. For the NINLink, they moved from the costly L-Soft service to free Egroups.com, which not only saved money but gave members access to archived messages and more freedom to set their own list options. Brenda Hiatt Barber did all the work for that switch and did a great job! The committee moved the website to get better service and again, save money. Our webmaster, Craig Johnson, took care of that and it went seamlessly. He's also working on making it possible for NINC to take credit card information online, vs. printing out the forms available online, as is the case now. The committee added significant content to the website as well, with archived articles, the agent database, and e-mail member roster in the Members Only area...and more to come.

Outreach: Janice Young Brooks undertook a major e-mail outreach campaign to mystery writers. In keeping with our emphasis this year on

outreach, we also did a special outreach mailing to members who didn't renew this year. We've also added a couple of lines on the dues renewal forms so members can provide names and addresses of writers who might be interested in membership—the Outreach Committee will send them info on NINC. Janice has recommended we produce a new NINC brochure and will help put that together, again, we hope, before the end of the year. We've also added a monthly reminder to the newsletter that membership applications (and dues renewal info) are available online at www.ninc.com.

Special Image Project: The board has been working with NINC member Jo-Ann Power on creating a logo and new “look” for us. It's been a lot of fun, and we're almost there—look for changes in the next few weeks and through next year. We're producing stationery and a new NINC brochure for starters, but we hope to incorporate our new look in the newsletter and on the website, too. Many thanks

to Jo-Ann, who's graciously donated her time and expertise.

Conference Future: Victoria Thompson is chairing a special committee siting the conference for 2002 and 2003. After ten years, it's time to take a look at whether we want to make any changes in our conference, e.g., show up in New York more often, alternate with a more “business” focused conference and a more “retreat” focused conference—lots of ideas are on the table, so stay tuned!

Many thanks, also, to Diane Chamberlain, who served as our entire Membership Retention Committee, Barbara McMahon, who updated our agent-editor database, and everyone who worked so hard as committee members, newsletter reporters, and assistants to the editor—NINC couldn't exist without you.

And to everyone in NINC, whether this was your year to do something or not—thank you all for a stimulating, exciting year. I'm very proud of what we've accomplished, all of us, together.

— **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.

Agent Speaks Out on Agent Practices

I'm responding to this past month's composite column about agent practices and Steve Axelrod's response.

Agents do routinely crop up in author's dissatisfaction files, how can they not? Often we are the writer's most important business partner. Business partnerships are inherently dynamic and sometimes frustrating relationships. The upside is we are easy to fire and separating the assets post relationship is usually a fairly simple matter.

I do want to specifically address the continuing commission question by making a few points. Agents provide a number of professional services without payment. They often provide editorial and career guidance, negotiate contracts, review royalty statements, sell rights and generally campaign on behalf of the author. We work on commission only, so of all the services that are provided, only the sale itself earns any actual dollars. There are very few businesses that are commission only. The sales we do make can continue to provide income for years, which if we are being paid for sale, would normally fall under almost any business's

commission structure. This income derives directly from the original sale. Because we must live on commission regardless, I do personally believe the continuing commission is fair. I don't think I would take a client who wanted to limit my commission to some fixed year period.

The chief complaint here seems to be that when an agent is no longer representing that author, they should not be entitled to the continued income from these prior sales on the theory that the agent is no longer performing any services. As a practical matter, most authors who fire agents want little to do with the fired agent. Often, there is little work left to be done. If there really is important work to be done, the agent's commission should provide some incentive. After all, because author and agent share in the same pool of dollars, they are still partners in that income. It's true the agent's much smaller share may be a disincentive in many cases and that's hard to correct. In my experience, the more professional the writer and the more specific the duties, the better the response. There's a big difference between being asked to review a royalty statement and question a reserve and being ordered to “do something about that rotten publisher.”

I'd like to suggest some basic strategies to ensure greater author satisfaction in any agency relationship. First, choose wisely. Make sure the agent is committed to you and your career and has the skills you are seeking. Make sure you have a good, basic rapport with the agent. If you can't talk, things probably will go awry at some point. Make your wishes known. Though I'm good at reading moods, I cannot read minds. If you've made a mistake or you don't like where things are going, don't be reluctant to make a change.

— **Ethan Ellenberg (Member, A.A.R.)**



Women's Fiction...What Is it?

I have been pondering a subject for some time that came to a head in our discussion at the conference concerning "women's fiction." No one has quite defined what women's fiction might be, although we all agree it contains elements that go beyond the limitations of romance. It's the "limitations of romance" that causes me problems. My first instinct is to declare that romance has no limitations other than a happy ending, and the market for happy endings is limitless.

My instinct and editor demands differ, however, and I'm not speaking of just my own editors, who are two of the most capable and experienced in the industry, I've heard the same comment and complaint from many authors within the genre, and from those who have left it. Too many editors believe romance has limitations such as complete focus on the hero/heroine relationship to the exclusion of everything else—setting, secondary characters and subplots, history, etc. When we built the romance genre a few decades ago, the sky was the limit, but suddenly, we've been placed inside a box, apparently victims of our own success. Somewhere, somehow, someone has perceived the best selling romances as those that focus entirely on couple relationships, and voilà! That's what we must all write.

Possibly, we can blame this perception on the collapsing midlist and the desperate grasp of bean counters to squeeze the last bit of juice out of a decreasingly profitable market. We might quote reader expectations as a reason for our limitations, but I've always considered readers a vast permutation of variables meant for exploring, not limiting. Even within the boundaries of category romances that have been market surveyed down to the number of love scenes and children allowed, readers eagerly grab for fresh stories and voices. Yes, it's possible to lose a few readers who want the same thing milk-fed over and over, but it's also possible to win new readers eager for the new and unexpected, so I simply can't blame the readers for our problem.

I would like to see the glass ceiling of romance removed. I think any attempt to box and limit creativity is destined for disaster, but in this vast market with limitless quantities of potential readers, it's just plain pennywise and pound-foolish. I understand marketing is a problem, but it wouldn't be if publishers and booksellers developed a wider perception of romance into an umbrella category such as "relationship novels" that broadens our boundaries. Readers looking specifically for romance should easily be able to tell the difference between a hero/heroine relationship and a mother/daughter one just from the cover. Those books with sexy stories could keep the hunk covers to designate their contents. Surely booksellers and publishers don't believe women's fiction readers or male readers would avoid the whole "relationship" area because a few books have sexy covers? If that's what they think, then they really are placing

romance in a ghetto, and I'm thoroughly offended by their judgment.

Is there anyone else interested in opening a bookseller/publisher/author forum to discuss this matter? Until it's brought out in the open, editors will be forced to focus their authors on the current market, and it's stifling out here.

Name withheld by request

National Writers Union Health Plan

NINC Members are eligible to join the CSS/NWU health plan at group rates by joining NWU in a non-voting, associate status.

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- * Doctors Visits/Lab Work/X-rays
- * Vision Coverage
- * Fitness Reimbursement/Wellness Care/Maternity
- * Infertility Programs

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You can help make *NINK* even better in the New Year. *NINK* pays for articles (not letters to the editor). For more information or to propose an article, contact the editor. *NINK's* incoming editor for 2001 is Pam Browning, our intrepid "Breaking News" columnist.

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

Kayla Perrin, Hamilton, Ontario

New Members

Daphne Atkeson, Paradise Valley AZ
Lois Faye Dyer, Port Orchard WA

**NINC has room to grow...
recommend membership to your colleagues.
New members can apply
online at www.ninc.com.**

TOUCH VS. TECHNOLOGY

► ► ► Continued from page 1

and rejecting technology that intrudes upon it.” We are all addressing this issue one way or another.

The tension between electronic technology and the everyday need to fulfill intangible, but basic, human yearnings is especially palpable in the world of books today. Many of you ask how technology is affecting us. The answer would fill a book, and cutting this topic down to size is Herculean in that technology is as monstrous as Hydra—it has many heads and whenever you cut one off two grow in its place. I’ll attack just one head and trust that the re-growth won’t get ahead (not a pun, don’t smirk) of me by the time this goes to print.

Content digitization is the Hydra’s head that has the attention of the book world right now. It is shorthand for taking a book (or any written work, or music, audio, animation, or video) and translating it into computereze so that it can be zapped through wires or the airwaves and be made to reappear in many different forms any place in the world.

Today, most books are being edited and prepared for printing in a word processing program and are then sent to a printing press and turned into traditional books as we know them. Once a book has gone through the process of being computerized, called *digitization*, the *content*, as it has come to be called, is then available to be sent electronically anyplace on the globe. It is being *packaged* (that’s what happens to *content*!) in a number of alternative forms for the reader’s convenience and experience. The major forms the digital books can morph into at this point are:

1) A PC version which can be acquired on the web by borrowing it from a digital library, or buying it from a digital vendor, or downloading it from a free source, for reading on your

desktop or notebook computer.

2) A version for reading on any one of a number of different, compact (book size) *book reader* machines.

3) A version which can be printed up in book form on an on-demand basis at the point of delivery.

Reading on a PC is acceptable for short articles, but for most of us, just barely. The body positions required, and the eyestrain from computer screen viewing, are not conducive to comfortable book reading. Portable computers with new programs, which improve the crispness and contrast of text on the screen, will work to reduce these barriers, but not, in the immediate future, sufficiently to make this a widely used channel for books.

The electronic book machines, which are specifically designed for book reading convenience and comfort, are slowing gaining acceptability as the technology improves and the number of books available grows. These devices will probably see their first major advances toward the mainstream with students, who will be able to carry their 75-pounds of semester’s reading around in a four-pound package. Heavy readers and reference-source-dependent travelers may find similar advantages when traveling for fun or business.

While electronic books are likely to be attractive only to niche markets for years to come, they do have a promising future. A combination of technological enhancements and a growing population of computer-weaned adults is inevitably going to make the e-book the mainstream means of conveying the information and entertainment which we now gain from the printed book.

Does this mean the printed book is going to disappear someday? NO. The book is a great technological invention in its own right, with a high

degree of portability and usability, and the comfort of having been a cherished tool of most of the great minds we look back to for guidance. Additionally, the book format we know is a half-millennium-old art form in its own right. The art of the book is appreciated on one level for aesthetics, beyond, and sometimes even despite, the content of the text it contains. But, of course, its art is most highly developed by those designers and craftspeople who use its text as a guiding creative light, thus presenting the art of the writer in a physically rewarding, harmoniously enhanced frame.

Ironically, another of technology’s innovations has brought about a revolution in the antiquarian and collectible book markets. The Internet has given people all over the world access to desirable book stashes of collectors, hobbyists, estates, and dealers wherever, causing an explosion in out-of-print book sales.

The printed book is going to continue to be a mainstream medium for years because of its convenience and its aesthetic, and because there is an enormous population base that has grown up cherishing it. Which brings us to the third branch of digital morphing, *Print on Demand*.

Even as technology is allowing the creation and widespread duplication of a readable “book” without the need for printing, it is assuring that no book ever need disappear into *out-of-print* land in the future. Electronic databanks (warehouses) of e-books will allow the Northshire to access a book in New York or New Delhi, download (electronically transport) it to Manchester, print and bind it, and hand it to a reader, all in a matter of minutes. While these paperbound books will be respectable, professional quality tomes, well suited to ► ► ►



BREAKING NEWS

COMPILED BY PAMELA
BROWNING

Scam Alert For Vancouver Attendees

From Judy Gill:

Sorry to have to say this, but there has been a credit card scam going on at YVR (Vancouver International Airport) from early October to around mid November. If you used your credit card to pay the airport improvement tax [as you departed Vancouver], please be aware that your card might have been put through a "skimmer," a device that downloads the codes and enables the crooks (three of them, now in custody) to make duplicates of the cards. These three were employees of the firm contracted to collect the tax for the airport. Police say the trio might be responsible for as many as five or six hundred bogus cards.

There have been no reports recently of any other kind of scam involving credit cards, so no extra vigilance beyond what you normally exercise is required unless you paid that particular tax at the airport with your card. I'm sure everyone checks their credit card bills every time, but just be a little more alert for the next while if you used your card to pay that tax.

The Grinch Who's Stealing Our Christmas

Jeff Bezos, head honcho at amazon.com, predicted a strong holiday season for his company. Analysts say he needs it to meet his stated annual goal of keeping the books division profitable through the year. ▶ ▶ ▶

TOUCH VS. TECHNOLOGY

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ conveying the thoughts of the author, they will not be examples of the book as fine art.

We anticipate having *Print on Demand* capability in the store this fall as one of a very few test stores in the country. The printing technology exists in several different forms, and it is functioning today.

It is the electronic warehouse/network and its ability to be self-sustaining with the limited number of titles currently available that has yet

to be tested. Its widespread adoption is only a matter of time.

There are many different ways in which technology is affecting us, and digitization is just one. But you can be assured that we are learning how to use developing technological resources to improve the services we offer our community of book lovers, even as we remain focused on maintaining the aroma of printers ink throughout our stacks, and embracing that which affirms our humanity. ☒

FAST TRACK.....

Due to the number of NINC authors making the Fast Track list every month we're playing with a new format for the column. Et al following an author's name indicates other authors not members of NINC. Stay tuned for further developments.

USA Today Bestseller list for Oct. 2000

Catherine Anderson, *Seventh Heaven*, Avon
Sandra Brown, *The Alibi*, Warner
Sandra Brown, *The Switch*, Warner
Jayne Castle, *After Dark*, Jove
Catherine Coulter, *The Edge*, Jove
Catherine Coulter, *Beyond Eden*, Signet
Jasmine Cresswell, *The Refuge*, Mira
Shawna Delacorte, *Fortune's Secret Desire*, Harlequin
Christina Dodd, *Rules of Engagement*, Avon
Patricia Gaffney, *The Saving Graces*, HarperTorch
Tess Gerritsen, *Gravity*, Pocket
Kay Hooper, *Stealing Shadows*, Bantam
Kay Hooper, *Hiding in the Shadows*, Bantam
Susan Johnson, Thea Devine, et al, *Fascinated*, Brava/Kensington
Jayne Ann Krentz, *Soft Focus*, Jove
Kat Martin, *Perfect Sin*, St. Martin's
Kat Martin, Jo Beverley, et al, *Five Golden Rings*, Zebra
Linda Lael Miller, *Courting Susannah*, Pocket
Mary Jo Putney, *Silk and Shadows*, Signet
J. D. Robb, *Judgment in Death*, Berkley
Nora Roberts, *Night Shield*, Silhouette
Nora Roberts, *Night Tales*, Silhouette
Susan Wiggs, *The Mistress*, Mira

PRINT ON DEMAND

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attract a second glance at your neighborhood Kinko's.

Starry-eyed promoters envision the bookstore of the future, which may or may not be working with Lightning Source/Ingrams. Instead of big stacks of King's or Crichton's latest book, it stocks one browsing copy of each of thousands of books.... Heck, let's get ambitious here. It can download from the web a digital file of any book ever written! All you'd have to do is choose one (or, if you're like me, several), settle back with a latte, and pick up your new, hot off the—er—machine, books on the way out. And somewhere a deserving Authors bank account goes *ka-ching*.

This, supposedly, is what is going on under the POD hood. But does the POD vehicle actually run?

Diary of a mad writer

By the time I picked up that issue of the *Authors Guild Bulletin*, I'd sold most of the remaining copies of my OOP books through Amazon/Advantage—even though all I had left were books three and four of a fantasy series and books two and three of a romantic suspense series. I leaped at the chance to make the first books of each series available again. And since supplies of the romantic suspense novels were dwindling fast, I signed them up as well, for a total of five books.

All I needed for the Backinprint program was a reversion of rights letter, two copies of each book (one to dismember and scan, the other to compare old with new), and (this is optional) an image for the cover saved as a jpg or tiff digital file. You can only use the original cover art if you have

the rights to it. Which was no problem—I wasn't exactly enthralled with the original covers.

Yes, in order to sign up with Backinprint you have to be a member of the Authors Guild. (\$90 a year minimum, but with more bennies than just Backinprint.) The contract is about as good as you're going to get—you're handing over only the print rights, no more. It spells out author discounts and royalty rates, and can be cancelled with 90 days' notice.

At first the Guild waived the sign-up fee (\$175) if you signed up your books by December of 1999. Then June of 2000. Then August of 2000. Now, flush with success, the Guild has suspended all fees indefinitely.

For this the Authors Guild takes 10% of any sales made through its Backinprint.com web site. Not that my books have shown up on there yet—in fact, the web site almost has cobwebs on it, it hasn't been updated in so long. What the Guild's been doing is keeping the Backinprint vehicle on the road.

Not that joining Authors Guild is the only way to get free reprints. IUniverse.com itself has another free program.... Wait a minute. How did iUniverse, the vast POD empire, get into this?

The Guild originally worked out an agreement with toExcel, a small POD company in California. In the fall of 1999 toExcel was swallowed by iUniverse, leaving the Guild to either bail out or go with the flow. With over a thousand reprint applications in hand, the Guild went with the flow.

It was January 2000 before I got the go-ahead to send my box of ten books and four floppy disks to the iUniverse plant in Nebraska. On the disks were the images for the covers of the new editions, photos my ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

To that end, Amazon has begun offering used copies of the new books that they are selling on their site. Yup, that's right. When someone goes to order your book from Amazon, they're offered a used copy, which means that if a customer buys that one instead of the new one, you will not make a cent. But guess what—Amazon will. Amazon allegedly collects \$.99 per transaction in addition to 15% of the price of the used book sold.

This outrageous practice has engendered a backlash from a number of Ninc authors who have removed links from their websites to amazon.com.

Mighty Rejection

Online e-book publishing company Mighty Words has sent rejection e-mails to thousands of self-published authors who posted works on the site. They say that customer demand falls into a few main categories, including brand-name business, technical, and health, and that they have decided to focus on those areas. Booting out the self-pubs will reduce the number of titles for sale from 10,000 to 2,500.

The company will refocus its efforts on publishing "professionally edited product." However, self-pubs are invited to resubmit their work; submissions must now be made on paper and include a marketing plan.

Denny Johnson, who used MightyWords to self-publish his novel, *Oaxaca Connection*, is outta there. "I'm going to Xlibris and have the book printed in paperback. That way I can send it off and have

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BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ it listed on amazon.com."

Hey, does anybody have a used copy of this one?

Adios, Encanto En Español

As of January 1, Kensington will no longer publish bi-lingual and Spanish-only editions of Encanto. Encanto will still be published in English, which is where they feel the strength lies in the marketplace.

Plans also include making the books longer in the near future as well as other changes, including cover art and a price increase to \$4.99. Diane Stockwell, Encanto's senior editor, has left the company. Tomasita Ortiz, editor, will now oversee the Encanto line.

City Girls Revisited

Margaret Marbury has been appointed editor for the new Harlequin/Silhouette line, City Girls, which is anticipated to launch in November 2001, with two books per month in trade paperback.

"We're launching the program as women's fiction—not romance—under the Worldwide Library imprint. The program name, which we all know as City Girls, is likely to change. The word count is 80-110,000. The books are first person or third person point-of-view, with some room for innovation; i.e. linked short stories, diary entries, etc. Although most of the stories should capture urban life in North America or well-known international settings such as London and Paris, there is some room for a protagonist with a City Girl mentality in a non-urban environment," said Marbury.

She added that she's looking for talented new voices, authors who can write compelling and

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husband had taken for the romantic suspense novels and a public-domain photo for the fantasies.

Also in January 2000 I put together a guinea pig book, a collection of science fiction and fantasy short stories. If everything went well, I'd have another title available. If not, I wouldn't be throwing an un-pubbed novel down a POD drain. But which program to use?

iUniverse's Writers's Showcase is affiliated with Writer's Digest. You upload your text and it's reviewed, then either accepted or rejected. I've heard that the people who've gone this route have been very pleased with the results. But at \$300 Writer's Showcase costs \$200 more than iUniverse's Writer's Club Press. When I asked whether my \$200 would bring me anything more than "editorial review" and more free copies (WCP provides only one) iUniverse didn't answer. Since all but one of the stories in the collection had already been published in a magazine or anthology, I decided editorial review would be pointless and chose Writer's Club Press for my venture into self-publishing.

The WCP contract does ask for more than the Backinprint contract. For one thing, iUniverse offers an electronic version as well as a print version of the book. But like the Backinprint contract, this one is cancelable with 90 days' notice. And royalties of 20% on print books and 50% on e-books aren't shabby. (Backinprint royalties are 25% for the first 100 copies sold, then 30%)

I converted my old WordPerfect files to Word and tweaked the formatting to suit iUniverse's requirements. I wrote my own cover copy, an introduction, and a biography. I scanned in a photo (tiff format) my husband had taken of the

Scottish coastline. Then I uploaded the entire package to iUniverse, with a note telling the graphics people how to do the cover: add a planet rising from the ocean, for that otherworldly look.

Within a couple of days a "publishing services associate" had cyber-introduced herself. Another PSA was in charge of the Guild reprints. Between March and May these pleasant and efficient women sent me PDF files of all six covers. For various reasons, I had to send three of the Backinprint books back to the drawing board, but iUniverse made the requested changes without protest.

I also received PDF galleys of the collection. iUniverse will correct any mistakes it itself makes—my middle name had vanished, for example. You get up to 25 corrections of your own mistakes/typos for free. With the reprints, though, there are no galleys. Any mistakes that are in the original version will be in the new one, too.

All six books became available between May and July, on schedule. The titles spontaneously appeared on BarnesandNoble.com, Borders.com, and in the Ingrams lists. Amazon.com, who'd called three times asking whether the reprints were ready yet, was the last to list them. Go figure. I submitted supplemental information—reviews, synopses, etc.—to the different sites myself.

The books are trade paperbacks. All Backinprint books have the same cover format, which is tidy and straightforward if nothing special. The iUniverse graphics people did a superb job with the cover of the collection—I've gotten several compliments on it.

Since the reprints were scanned in from mass-market copies, the blocks of print seem a bit dense, but then, each page now has a nice wide margin. The collection has a larger



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and very attractive typeface. The paper in all the books is very fine acid-free cream-colored stock made from recycled paper. The binding isn't stiff but lets the pages fall open naturally. The cover of one copy of the collection was glued on a bit crooked, but the others look just fine. I've seen—heck, I've had—books published by major publishers whose physical format wasn't this appealing.

So we've got nice-looking books, produced with a great deal of authorial control, widely available to readers. Everything's perfect, right?

Yeah, right. Just remember, to err is human, but to really mess things up you need a human with a computer.

Gutenberg's revenge

The miracle of POD means that books can be produced more cheaply, doesn't it? Tell that to the reader who finds herself paying \$28.95 for a romance novel that once sold for a fraction of that price.

iUniverse sets the prices on the Backinprint books. Mine range from \$13.95 to \$19.95, with the longest book (360 pages) at \$21.95. Several Ninc members have higher prices, sometimes for shorter books. Even slender children's books can cost \$16 each. So much for hoping you'll pick up lots of new readers. You have to be a dedicated fan to pay these sorts of prices.

At least the new Backinprint reprints are better quality and not as expensive as the often well-used out of print copies listed on internet sites such as Abebooks.

When a couple of NINC members protested the prices of their books, iUniverse replied that trade paperbacks carry higher prices than mass market (duh!) and while print on demand eliminates the need for large print runs, there is a trade-off in a higher cost to print.... Oh. And what about the first

law of economics—if you want to sell more of a product, lower the price?

Author discounts are another issue. I can order any number of the collection at a 25% discount, while I get a 30% discount on the Backinprint books—but only if I order a minimum of 20 copies. That's no way to sell books.

iUniverse offers larger discounts if you list a signing with them—40% if the bookstore orders the books, 45% if you order them yourself. Payment up front, of course, none of this submitting an invoice business. Which might be bearable if the system worked.

With perfect timing, iUniverse launched into a website re-design just as my Backinprint books made their debut. The link from my own website went nowhere. After I rather emphatically pointed this out (and I wasn't the only author who did), iUniverse posted a toll-free number. If you reached a human being—an event right up there with spotting Halley's Comet—a pleasant voice would take your order and charge your credit card.

Actually getting the books, though, was another matter.

I ordered six copies of my collection on April 21. After I made numerous calls and e-mails, the books finally arrived in late June. At least I got books.

In June another NINC member ordered copies of each of her three (\$28.95) titles for a signing. The voice on the phone made her jump through hoops to define just what constituted a signing and just who was going to take delivery of the books. Then the wrong titles in the wrong quantities were shipped to the wrong address way too late for the signing. But the sizeable charge appeared on her credit card instantly, not once but three times. As of September, two of those charges are still there.

In mid-July a third NINC ▶ ▶ ▶

witty stories of living and loving in today's crazy world. "These books are about how women twenty-something and up really are. We see life in its messy detail (meddling moms, rivalries at work, unfaithful boyfriends) and its poignant highs (landing the perfect job, finding Mr. Right For Me Now or Always, or maybe just being happy)."

Driving the story is the heroine's development into a strong woman supported by close friends. The style of writing ranges from light and candidly funny to dramatic and insightful (while still upbeat). The dialogue is sharp and modern.

Published authors may query and/or submit chapters and a synopsis. Agented submissions are welcome. Submit to Margaret Marbury, Editor, City Girls, at 300 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017.

Musical Chairs

Agent Marcy Posner is now at the Linda Chester Agency and can be reached by e-mail at marcyposner@rcn.com; phone number (212) 218-3350.

Also, for those of you looking for Robert Gottlieb's new address, it's Robert Gottlieb, Trident Media Group, 488 Madison Ave., NY, NY 10019

Reading? Capital!

Tift County, Georgia, used to be known as the Turf Grass Capital of the World. That's until Spencer Elementary School teacher-librarian Terri Nalls found a reading software program called Accelerated Reader in 1996 and talked Mike Brumby, head of the Tift County ▶ ▶ ▶



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By the end of the school year the 400 students at Spencer, many from homes where neither parent could read and 92% of them low-income, had devoured 25,000 books. Brumby wondered why everyone in the county, population 35,000, couldn't become avid readers. He put up a big banner outside the town library with weekly updates on the number of books read. Rotarians challenged Kiwanians to a read-off, and people started wearing badges that said, "Hey, what book are you reading?" Recently the county met its goal: one million books.

With Accelerated Reader, you have to pass a short test before you get credit for reading a book. Dr. Seuss is worth 1/2 point, Tolstoy worth 130. You redeem points: 10 for a pencil, 150 for an Atlanta Braves Game. "It got to where you had to say (to the kids), 'No more books,'" said Lenell Lindsey, a teacher.

Last year Tift schools improved 14 points on statewide reading tests. Tift County now proclaims itself Reading Capital of the World.

Accelerated Reader is by Renaissance Learning in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. Why do I mention this? Some place you know might want to challenge Tift County to a read-off.

Random House Splits 50/50

Random House has announced that it will share net revenues from e-books 50/50 with authors. Erik Engstrom, president

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Then the iUniverse computer (the implication being that no human being is involved) started sending out phantom messages. I got several informing me that iUniverse had accepted the reprints and my credit card would be charged for hundreds of dollars for each book. Hyperventilating, I shot an e-mail off to my PSA. She assured me that these "acceptances" were indeed mistakes and that my credit card wouldn't be charged. It hasn't been. Yet.

The iUniverse website links to "myuniverse," where you can supposedly keep track of your orders and sales. Those phantom charges have been listed there for months. Some of the books that have been available for months are still cataloged as in production; others aren't listed at all. The sales and royalties sections are useless.

iUniverse Customer Service tends to wink in and out of the space-time continuum. Sometimes no one will answer phone calls or e-mails. Other times you get a polite, apologetic response and a promise to "look into it." But nothing happens. "We can't get answers let alone product," said one non-NINC author who runs a mystery writer's community on iUniverse. "It truly is mind-boggling."

So can you actually get books out of iUniverse? Yes, if you're willing to pay full price to Barnes and Noble.

When my books first appeared on the Barnes and Noble web site (before they appeared on the iUniverse site itself), they were discounted. This lasted about a week. By the time I got around to ordering myself a set of the books they were listed at full price. At

least I had a coupon. And the books all arrived on my doorstep within a week—apparently from an alternate universe (no puns intended, but gratefully accepted.)

This ongoing disaster applies to all iUniverse titles, not just the Backinprint ones. Those of us with the Guild, though, have had some recourse. Not that iUniverse had mentioned the ongoing problems. The Guild was shocked to get eight e-mails of complaint in one day. It waded in immediately, going right to the top of the iUniverse hierarchy with what the Guild itself termed "fist-shaking and foot-stamping." Boy, would I love to have been a fly on the wall that day!

So far iUniverse has offered free copies to the irate authors, along with promises of more efficient operation in the future. Promise, promises.... To this day my website links the reprints to Barnesandnoble.com, not to iUniverse.com, even though you can actually browse the books online at iUniverse.

iUniverse has simply expanded too far too fast, just like the developers here in the Dallas area that build acre after acre of new homes and then notice that there's nothing but a two-lane blacktop and a four-inch water main leading into the neighborhood.

And, to be fair, the rising popularity of POD means there's a tremendous logjam at Lightning Source. iUniverse isn't the only company having problems getting its books printed. Small presses such as Avid and Poisoned Pen, which aren't necessarily POD but which still use Lightning Source, are also having problems filling orders. Some have even had their relatively small orders pushed aside as larger orders came in. (The more things change....) Needless to say, this doesn't go over well with booksellers trying to fill customer orders.

In fact, when it comes to



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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ and COO, said, "As we try and shape the e-book industry, it's important that authors and publishers share the economic interest."

Jonathan Tasini, president of the National Writers Association, termed the new policy "a step in the right direction." PW Daily opines that this decision by Random House on the hotly debated issue is likely to set the industry standard for years to come.

Age-Old Problems

A group of TV writers has filed a \$200-million lawsuit against TV networks, studios, production companies, talent agencies, and other entertainment firms alleging that they are victims of a "systematic pattern or practice" of age discrimination.

Twenty-eight writers, who are seeking class-action status for their suit, name 50 defendants, including Viacom, NBC, Disney, Time Warner, Fox, the William Morris Agency, International Creative Management, Creative Artists Agency, and the Carsey-Werner Co. They claim that TV networks have purged writing staffs of those above age 40 in a ploy to attract younger audiences. They also charge that talent agencies have abetted the networks' discrimination by refusing to represent older writers.

The group cites statistics indicating that only five percent of shows broadcast in the 1997-98 season hired writers over 50, despite the fact that writers in that age bracket account for about one-third of the membership of the Writers Guild of America.

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booksellers, iUniverse in particular is shooting itself in the foot. It gives Ingrams only a 20% discount, with a no-return policy, making some independent booksellers not only reluctant to stock books on spec but openly hostile to POD.

Smaller POD companies, however—like Wildside Press—have a grasp of Economics 101 and are willing to offer whatever discount it takes in order to sell books.

POD companies are proliferating. Some do hardbacks. Some have ludicrous contracts. Some only accept a few books, pick up the expenses, and pay the author in royalties. Some print everything that comes in and charge accordingly—fees range from chicken feed to caviar. Some understand marketing, some don't. I wouldn't be surprised if some POD companies weren't referring their customers to unscrupulous book doctors—that's too obvious a scam to miss. While the *Writer's Digest* program with iUniverse, for example, is perfectly legitimate, when it comes to POD the bottom line is, as always, *caveat scriptor*.

As for the book package, if you don't send in your own cover image to iUniverse you've got a crapshoot. For example, the preliminary cover of a book that takes place in ancient Greece featured Caribbean pirates. Other POD companies provide cheap generic covers, or go to a great deal of trouble to get the right look. It depends.

So does all this mean that the wave of the future has turned out to be a beachfront development in West Texas?

Not at all. For one thing, while the logjam at Lightning Source is infuriating now, better to have too much demand than too little. As more Infoprints are brought on line, the jam will break up. For example, rumor has it that Borders will

introduce another POD system any time now. As Alan Rodgers of Wildside Press puts it, "Eventually there will be numerous competing systems, because there are a lot of distributors and POD cuts out every distributor except the one that does the printing."

Meanwhile, in the interest of making lemons out of lemonade, I suggest we all invest in IBM.

The attack of the POD people

One of the panel discussions at a small science fiction convention recently was "The Death of the Mid-List." The first words out of the mouths of editors Betsy Mitchell (Warner Aspect) and James Minz (Tor/Forge) were about the wonders of print on demand and e-publishing. Betsy even commented on my short story collection, which was prominently displayed in the dealer's room down the hall.

Now my first impulse was to demand, "What, have you people just given up? What do you know that I don't know? Is it every writer for him or herself now?"

Or is it, I wondered, that POD, e-publishing, and the internet are a populist revolution, an upset of the old order, and editors as intelligent as Betsy and Jim have already heard the whoosh of the guillotine?

No longer will a writer have to fight his or her way into a marketing slot on a major publisher's list. No longer will he or she have to deal with editors whose jobs depend on bean counting, not on buying quality material. No longer will books have five minutes to find an audience. Anyone can publish anything anytime....

Okay. Let's not get carried away here.

Yes, POD programs such as iUniverse's are (in theory, at ▶ ▶ ▶



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BET Holdings, which includes Black Entertainment Television (BET), and other cable networks (BET.com, BET Pictures, and BET Books), has been acquired by Viacom, a multi-billion-dollar entertainment company giant whose other holdings include CBS, MTV, VH1, UPN, Paramount, Blockbuster, and Simon & Schuster.

"Together, BET and Viacom create the ultimate strategic platform to better address the wants and needs of BET's core African-American audience," said Linda Gill Cater, vice-president and publisher of BET Books, the leading publisher of African-American romance novels under the Arabesque imprint. Cater stated that the same leadership team that currently heads BET and oversees day-to-day operations will remain the same.

Those BET folks have been busy lately. They've joined with HarperCollins to launch an online magazine specializing in African-American books and authors. The magazine, called *Amistad Bookstore*, will eventually include a retail component. The site will feature reviews, interviews, excerpts, and online chats with authors. *Amistad Bookstore* is part of BET's online portal, BET.com, which attracts an estimated one million monthly visitors.

People Magazine for Authors?

HarperCollins is working with The Book Report Network to create a series of official author websites.

TBRN will create ▶ ▶ ▶

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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ least) a great way to publish yourself. You can hit both print and e-markets, it's much less expensive than printing up stacks of books yourself, and someone else handles such details as ISBN numbers, listing with Ingrams and other distributors, and even postage and handling.

And yes, the big publishing houses and booksellers fully appreciate print on demand and other new means of production and distribution. Most of iUniverse is owned by Barnes and Noble. (Which is probably the reason they can get books out of iUniverse when no one else can.) The POD house Xlibris is partially owned by Random House. Just in the last few months companies such as Simon & Schuster, Holtzbrinck, Penguin Putnam, and Warner's iPublish have signed up with Lightning Source. But their books, no matter how produced, will have an advantage any form of self-published book will not.

Distribution and publicity.

With any form of self-publication, the snag is in letting readers know the book exists and convincing them it's worth buying. The Internet, with its newsgroups, reviews, and online bookstore, certainly helps get the word out. However, some booksellers equate POD books with vanity press books, thinking that if you've had to publish the book yourself, it must not be any good. While we all know better—I imagine most booksellers know better—getting your work to stand out in what's turning out to be a tidal wave of publications is a real problem.

Until POD presses establish a reputation for quality products—and this will happen—a writer who's already proved him or herself in the marketplace has a tremendous advantage over the beginner when it

comes to getting the books taken seriously by booksellers. I had no problem getting dealers to sell my collection at a couple of recent conventions because they already knew my name—although it did help when I showed up with the books in hand.

As yet POD works best for writers who've already published the traditional way. Having a backlist is a huge advantage. If you decide to self-publish a new book that doesn't fit the ever-tightening marketing slots, all those readers who liked your earlier books will probably take a chance on it. Likewise, if an uninitiated reader picks up that new book—any new book, self-pubbed or not—s/he will find your backlist readily available. It's a win-win situation.

I even heard someone say recently they'd ordered and received a book directly from the iUniverse web site. So maybe iUniverse is getting its act together. There's hope yet.

So what's the bottom line? Is POD a moneymaker?

It depends on your definition of money. Just after Labor Day, I received a small royalty check from iUniverse, right on schedule. They'd listed my Backinprint books at 20% instead of 25% royalty, but when I protested, they apologized and said they'd send a supplemental check. Even though the "shipping dates" column is sheer fantasy, I have no reason to argue with their other figures. And they do seem to have worked out a problem with the definition of "unit price" since the last statement.

Now this sort of small check isn't going to do much more than support future self-publishing ventures. Since it's the big guys who get the big publicity and distribution, it's the big guys who'll get the big money. Right now I view POD as a way of keeping my name in front of my readers, and

a way of accumulating some numbers to show the bean counters the next time I have to sit across the negotiating table from them.

Yes, the POD vehicle is still at the Model T stage. But it won't be long before the Lexus version comes rolling down the information superhighway. And I don't intend to be left standing on the curb. ❑

An Open Door to Non-Fiction

BY JOYCE MARLOW

The NINC e-mail list has proven to be a valuable resource during the years I've been a member, discussing any-and-every-thing about the business of writing fiction of every genre. Once I started writing non-fiction, I noticed an occasional mention about writing non-fiction books and articles, and I'm happy to report that a number of NINC members also write articles and books on a variety of subjects such as travel, biographies, cookbooks, how-to's, relationships, etc.

I've found that fiction and non-fiction writing have a lot in common, but there's also a lot that's different. In the hope of learning more about publishing non-fiction, I tried to find other non-fiction writers, but the ones I ran into weren't writing as their main focus, but as an adjunct to their life focus, whether as an educator, historian, journalist, naturalist, etc. We *writers* focus on writing, and that's where I felt a need to connect, just as I have with fiction writers. So I came back to

Lillian Stewart Carl writes novels and short stories in several genres. Her latest books are Along the Rim of Time, a collection of fantasy and science fiction stories, and Memory and Desire, a romantic mystery. For other books and stories, as well as pictures of the new covers, check her web site, www.lillianstewartcarl.com. Just don't ask her how and why it works.

my roots—NINC.

With the hope of providing such a venue, I've started an e-mail list called non-fiction@egroups.com. We're starting off with a small number of NINC members, but membership is open to multi-published authors referred by NINC members in the hope of picking up other non-fiction writers. We've already had discussions about creative non-fiction, autobiographies, and how to sell travel articles. As our numbers grow, I'm confident we'll discuss writing, marketing and publishing a myriad of non-fiction subjects, both in article and book format. Whether you're experienced in non-fiction or just looking for a new direction, I hope you'll join our new email list. The list is "closed" in that it is private, membership is restricted, and if you log on to egroups.com, the list will not show up in a "search." That also means that your personal information will not be available to anyone on egroups.com. To join the list, please e-mail me at marlow@gorge.net and I'll subscribe you—just mention whether you prefer to receive e-mails individually or in digest form. ❑

Joyce Marlow has published three romance novels, and her first hard cover non-fiction, Country Ways—Secrets for Finding and Keeping a Country Man was published by Warner Books 2/99. Simon & Schuster will publish Making Memories—A Guide for Celebrating Mothers, Daughters, and Traditions in trade paper for Mother's Day 2001.



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official author sites for at least 50 HarperCollins authors. These sites in turn will be featured as part of TBRN's AuthorsOnTheWeb.com, an author information portal site launched in November.

TBRN (www.bookreporter.com) was inaugurated as a book-interest site on America Online in 1996 and has since developed into network of consumer websites focused on information about books, authors and reading for many age groups.

Carol Fitzgerald, TBRN CEO, said that the AuthorsOnTheWeb.com portal will be "the People magazine" of authors online. Jane Friedman, CEO of HarperCollins, called the deal an "extraordinary opportunity to serve our authors and establish a dialogue with interested readers. It's a marketer's dream to have the ability to reach an audience so directly."

Napster Alliance

Napster, the online application that allows users to swap MP3 files for free, recently announced an alliance with music-and-book-publishing giant Bertelsmann to form a subscription service that will make Bertelsmann-owned recordings available through a new secure Napster service.

According to *Time*, the new service will probably charge a \$5 to \$10 monthly fee, which gives members unlimited access to high-quality music downloads. A free promotional area will offer parts of songs or full recordings good for only a few hours or days. And Napster will likely upgrade instant messaging and give better access to global directories.

In case you've been under a blanket all year, you ▶ ▶ ▶

Online.....

One of the “perks”—and I use that word loosely—to being published is that everyone wants to know what you know. While most of us might prefer the written word, we are occasionally called upon to give the spoken word: workshops, panels, presentations. Useful tips to follow when giving a presentation can be found at *Toastmasters International*, www.toastmasters.org/tips.htm. The site also provides information for joining Toastmasters.

Beginner's Central at www.northernwebs.com/bc is dedicated to teaching those unfamiliar with the Internet how to derive the most benefits from being online. Eight chapters include “Learning while you surf,” “Off-line operations & file downloading,” “Configuring Email and News Readers,” “Newsreader Operation,” “Email, the basics beyond setup,” “FTP an introduction,” “Telnet,” and “MYTHS OF THE INTERNET.” The site also provides a glossary and a partial listing of newsgroups.

WRITING

Doctor Grammar, www.drgrammar.org/, is a “free service provided by the University of Northern Iowa” which allows you to ask specific questions regarding grammar. It also has a writer's resources link and a writer's toolbox link.

PROMOTION

Earthly Charms is a new newsletter that provides tips on promotion. You can read the premiere issue at www.egroups.com/messages/EarthlyCharms. To have issues delivered to your e-mail box, send a blank message to EarthlyCharms-subscribe@egroups.com.

PROTECTION

Sally Hawkes shared *PawSense*, www.pawsense.com, with us this month. Apparently, cat owners can have a problem with cats “typing” on the keyboards and destroying data in the process. This software utility can detect a cat's presence. Once the detection occurs, it will block keyboard activity and emit a sound that is bothersome to cats. Now, if I could just find a software program that would detect and stop my dog from devouring my wooden mini-blinds.

RESEARCH

At *ehow*, www.ehow.com, you can find over 15,000 step-by-step “how to's”. A search for “How to write a book” led me to “How to write a book report” and how to

get published led me to “How to publish an obituary.” While neither was exactly what I was searching for, the information was provided in easy to understand steps and depending on your needs, the site could prove useful.

American Slangages, www.Slanguage.com, has regional slang translations. I often have to travel to Salt Lake City for

Controlling Your Listserve Preferences at a Glance

Subscribe	NINCLINK-subscribe@egroups.com
Unsubscribe	NINCLINK-unsubscribe@egroups.com
No-Mail	NINCLINK-nomail@egroups.com
Moderators:	
Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrendaHB@aol.com
Patricia de la Fuente	Patricia@hiline.net
Julie Kistler	julie@juliekistler.com

my “other” job. I had no idea what “Junior Spazz” or “Golly Fetch” meant. Now, I do. The site has added a few foreign cities. It's an interesting place to browse and might help you add authenticity to dialogue.

Ireland History in Maps, www.fortunecity.com/bally/kilkenny/2/iremmaps.htm, provides a fascinating journey that begins with the Ice Ages and currently ends at 1840.

As I grow older, I find I can often only remember part of a phrase, and this inability to remember the whole phrase nags at me. At *Great Books Online*, www.bartleby.com, I can type in a few key words and the site will search for the phrase and tell me where I can find it. It's similar to an online Bartlett's. I typed in “my outcast state” and had 32 hits, the first one being Shakespeare's sonnet—which is the one I was looking for.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, www.ATF.treas.gov, provides information on exactly what ATF entails, what agents do, as well other interesting information. The site has a “most wanted” section and a photo archive.

Ask Jeeves, www.ask.com, is a helpful site that allows you to seek information on a topic. Rather than give you the specific answer, however, it provides you with a list of sites that can help you determine the answer. When I typed in “scriptwriting,” I received a list of sites dedicated to scriptwriters.

The Harvey Girls always seem to be of interest. You can find information on the Harvey restaurants at *A Harvey House Homepage*, www.harveyhouses.net/.

The Internet Public Library, www.ipl.org, hosted by the University of Michigan School of Information provides links

to a host of sources. The newspaper section was amazing with International papers as well as access to newspapers according to the state in which they originate.

Research-It, www.itools.com/research-it/research-it.html, provides several search tools, including a search feature for Listservs. You can type in a particular subject (I typed writing) and you'll receive a list of e-mail discussion groups that feature your selected topic (I received 122 for my topic). You can then send a query to the group to get more specific information before deciding if you want to subscribe to that listserve.

And if you don't have time for all the mail generated by listservs but have an interest in a specific topic, you can visit deja.com, www.deja.com. You can type in a subject (including your name if you want to find out what people are saying about you or your books) and you will receive a list of messages that contained your key word(s). You can then access those messages.

AND FINALLY

The ultimate web surfing site is a "must" visit at www.1112.net/lastpage.html. Enjoy!

NOVELISTS' INC. LISTSERVE

If you want to know more about the Ninclink, you can go to www.egroups.com/group/NINCLINK. At the site, you can subscribe and set your preferences (digest, individual posts, etc.).

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

— **Lorraine Heath** (LorraineHe@aol.com)

Why Writers Need Math

BY BRYNNA ANNE RAMIN

(Ed's note: Okay, so this is blatant nepotism, but I ran across this essay when I was looking for a kindergarten picture for my high school senior. She wrote this for math class when she was eleven and it's just too rich and true and painfully funny to pass up. PS: she interviewed me for the essay, but this is seen through a sixth-grader's eyes.)

I am going to be a writer.

I will use math when I am figuring out how many pages I need, how many words a page, and how many words in all. For this I will basically need counting.

I will also need to use math to figure out what percent of the profits my agent and publisher should get, and how much I should get.

I also will need to figure out how to balance my budget [sic] because when your [sic] a writer you get paid royalties which you get after the book is published and has been selling for awhile. This will use mostly multiplying, division, adding or subtracting.

You will need math to understand the computer you work on, to budget your time so you have time to work but also have time for other things and you need math to see if you will need another job. ■



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ know that Napster, defendant in a copyright infringement suit filed by Recording Industry Association of America and several recording companies, has been fighting for its life in court. Despite the new alliance, Napster may not be out of the woods. RIAA director Hillary Rosen said the alliance "does not bring an end to the court case ... companies like Napster do need to get permission before they launch businesses built on other people's creative property."

Writers Make Waves

With their current guild contract due to expire on May 1, members of the East Coast and West Coast branches of the Writers Guild of America have approved a list of demands that the guild will put before film and television producers next year. The demands include substantial raises in wages and residuals and the right for writers to participate "throughout the entire production process." Interesting to note in the wake of the Florida flap over the recent U.S. presidential election, only 2600 of the Guild's 11,000 members cast ballots.

Why Can't My Publisher Hire This Kid?

Nine-year-old Laila Banjar of Somerset, England, discovered while reading *Harry Potter: Goblet of Fire* that on page 503 the text reads, "Dumbledore, come!" said Crouch angrily."

Trouble is, the character of Crouch had vanished earlier in the book. The book's British publisher, Bloomsbury, admitted the error, saying that the sentence should have described Fudge, the Minister of Magic, rather than Crouch.

Bloomsbury sent Laila a letter saying, "Please accept our apologies for this. We are very upset that the error went unnoticed until after printing."

"I think I want to become a proofreader when I grow up," Laila said.

PAMELA BROWNING, author of fiction and non-fiction, book-length and otherwise, for all age groups, thanks those who sent information for this month's column.



COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Pirates, Rapists and Thieves”

No, the title doesn't refer to publishers. It refers to an entity of pure and undiluted evil. A powerful, slaving giant that preys upon the strong as well as the weak, the bold as well as the meek. A complex organization of such devious amorality and vicious tenacity that Lucifer himself cringes when he gets mail from them....

Come now, you didn't really think I'd get through a whole year without a diatribe on the Internal Revenue Service, did you?

As you may already know (because I've never been shy about mentioning it) I regularly receive threatening letters from the IRS promising to destroy my life because I have neglected to file a particular piece of paperwork or make a particular payment, and these letters are always completely inaccurate and totally erroneous in every single instance.

Over the years, this tedious pattern has had a disastrous effect on my mind, driving me to alarming levels of crazed frustration, not to mention instilling in me a very unbecoming thirst for revenge... a thirst which (as I shall now reveal) has recently driven me to new depths of pathos.

Having overpaid my federal taxes for 1998, I instructed my accountant to tell the IRS to credit the money to 1999 rather than to send me a refund. Well, comes the end of 1999, and my accountant notes that I'm overpaid again, by the same amount. So I instruct her to ask for my overpayment back this year rather than continue in this manner indefinitely. She does so. However, the IRS doesn't issue me the refund. Instead, they mail me a one-sentence letter: "Our records indicated a credit you claimed has already been refunded."

This is the IRS's sole explanation—accompanied by a complete lack of evidence of any kind whatsoever—for not paying me my federal tax refund.

On those numerous occasions when the IRS accuses me of not having paid monies, which I have, in fact, paid, they have never once—not once!—said, "But if you *tell* us you've already paid it, we'll take your word for it and forget the whole thing." Noooooo. I have to send multiple photocopies of the cancelled checks, accompanied by letters defending myself. During more than a decade of dunning me for payments already made and paperwork already filed, the IRS has never once suggested that I could resolve the difference of opinion by simply saying, "My records indicate that the payment you're claiming has already been made."

The IRS, however, clearly expects their word to be enough.

This (as you may have guessed) makes me *insane* with vengeful rage. I am determined to persist—which isn't easy. The IRS's terse letter denying me my refund is unsigned. Not even a relevant department is named or identified, never mind an actual human being whom I can query. The return address identifies the sender only as the Internal Revenue Service. (Isn't it amusing how their letters never even have a street address? As if a really determined person with nuclear weapons couldn't find them anyhow.)

Since I assume that any query sent to so general an address as "The Internal Revenue Service, Cincinnati, Ohio" will immediately be eaten by a shredding machine, I phone the 1-800 number also listed in the letterhead. It is an automated response system which gives me a choice of five different problems, that I can, by pressing the appropriate numbers on my touch-tone phone, hear addressed by additional automated recordings. None of the problems listed relates even superficially to mine.

This makes me *bunkers*.

Next, at a friend's suggestion, I look up the IRS in the local phone book. I try several different numbers listed there until I finally reach a machine which promises that, if I wait long enough and am persistent enough and pray hard enough, an actual human being will eventually come on the line. And only twenty-five minutes later... it happens! (So who says the age of miracles is dead?)

The person with a pulse asks me to repeat the information, which I have already typed into my phone's touch-tone pad: social security number, tax year in question, whether or not I am a fugitive from the law, etc. Then she puts me on hold while she transfers me. Fifteen minutes later, a man answers the phone. He asks me for the information which I have already typed into my phone's touch-tone pad and given to the woman who put me on hold. Then *he* puts me on hold—to access my records.

When he finally comes back on the line, with all the relevant information at his fingertips, he seems obsessed with one fact: I'm single. No matter what I try to tell him about the money the IRS has refused to refund me, he seems convinced that the really salient and relevant feature of my case is that I'm single with no exemptions besides myself. *How* this is relevant is never quite clear, but it definitely absorbs him much more than the fact that I'm demanding a refund which the IRS refuses to issue.

In any event, he soon resolves my dilemma to his satisfaction. The computer records, he advises me in the tone of

voice which I imagine Yahweh used to give the Ten Commandments to Moses, indicate that the IRS issued my 1998 refund in 1999. End of query. Problem solved. All plot threads neatly tied.

Except that I am the antagonist who will not die.

I now make the mistake of addressing this difference of opinion (in the absence of anything resembling, oh, a cancelled check) by quoting from my 1998 tax returns. This immediately leads us back again to the question of my being single.

"Yes! I'm single! Just as single as I was five minutes ago, and five minutes before that! I was every bit as single in 1998 as I was in 1999! Completely! Consistently! And from the way I'm screeching like a tree hyrax right now, you're probably not even *surprised* I'm single! So can we move *on* now?"

We move on. I now quote from my 1999 tax returns, too. My quotations are meant to draw his attention to the fact that I am overpaid for 1999 (see line 65) because I asked for my overpayment from 1998 (line 67) to be forwarded as a credit in 1999 (line 58). Thus my request for a 1999 refund (line 66a).

This proves to be a useless effort, because the taxman now explains that he has no means of accessing my tax returns or of verifying my line-by-line quotations from same. All he can verify is that the IRS has already paid me the money I claim they owe me; he knows this much is true because their computer says so.

"I *know* your *%&^!#*@ computer says so!" I reply. "I've got your damn computer-generated letter saying so! But *my* records show that you owe me a refund, and you have failed to provide a cancelled check proving your claim that you've already refunded the money!"

He double-checks his facts. "No, the computer says that we've already paid you."

I beg to speak to someone who *can* access my tax records and see that I'm telling the truth. No such person exists in the IRS. I beg to be allowed to mail in photocopies of my tax returns highlighting the relevant details and accompanied by an explanatory letter. I am told that there is no IRS employee willing to receive this material from me.

As I persist relentlessly in my questioning, the IRS agent finally, reluctantly, sulkily admits that there *is* something in the IRS called the Refund Inquiry office, and their job is to look into such matters. I insist that my claim be investigated.

He puts me on hold. He returns, verifies that I'm still single ("YES, I'm still single! No one has married me while we've been on the phone!"), and then advises me that I will be notified some thirty days hence about the progress being made by the Refund Inquiry investigators.

I ask if I can speak with them. No, of course not. I might as well ask for a direct line to Deep Throat.

I ask if there's a quality control or consumer affairs division in the IRS, someone to whom I can complain about all this. He laughs gaily at this naive suggestion and hangs up.

Thirty days go by. I hear nothing. Forty days go by. Still nothing. This makes me *demented* with outrage. After more

than six weeks have passed with no word about my refund inquiry, I finally gird my loins and phone the IRS again.

After twenty minutes on hold, I get a person with a pulse. After listening to me explain my problem, his first question (of course) is whether or not I'm married. (Still single.) He puts me on hold. When we finally speak again, I learn that he can find no record that I ever requested a refund, that the IRS refused to pay it, that I protested, or that my protest has been forwarded to Refund Inquiries.

MWHA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

The taxman offers to transfer me to someone who can help, and puts me back on hold. I am subjected to the IRS's taste in music for the next half hour. (Does anyone here watch "Angel" on TV? Although I am not a classical music buff, the music that the IRS plays to me over and over and *over* seems to be the same music which a sadistic pedophilic vampire played over and over and *over* while brutally torturing Angel in one episode. Coincidence? Maybe.)

The next person who speaks with me is (eureka!) able to find evidence that the Refunds Inquiry department has actually heard of me and is searching for a cancelled check. They still haven't found it after six weeks of searching, and they have no intention of setting a deadline or finite period for this ongoing search. This makes me *nuts*. I am now given another number to phone. This one is not toll free, and I find it utterly intolerable that taxpayers must *pay* to track down their refunds.

I phone the number. I get (surprise, surprise) a recording. The recording advises me to call the number which advised me to call *this* number. I leave a thoroughly pissed-off message demanding assistance. No one ever phones me back.

Weeks go by. *Months* go by. Fueled by homicidal rage, I eventually phone what is described to me as a Problem Resolution number at the IRS. No one's there. The answering system explains that they're all on federal holiday... even though it's *not* a federal holiday (it is, in fact, three full days *after* a federal holiday).

I phone yet another IRS number I have acquired in my quest to resolve this matter. A rude, fast-talking, and hard-to-understand woman there explains that all my paperwork has been lost, all this time has been wasted, and I must start all over again. The process, which I was assured months ago would only take 30 days, has evidently gotten more complex; I am now told it will take 6-8 more weeks, if everything goes well. I ask to speak to a supervisor; I'm told that no such person exists. The rude woman explains that she's sending me a form which will commence a trace to discover why my request was "kicked out of the system." I don't care why I've been "kicked out," I just want my refund. She's particularly hard to understand because she's talking to someone else in her office at the same time that she's talking to me, and I keep responding when she (it turns out) is not speaking to me, even though it certainly *sounds* like she's speaking to me; however, she's not at all shy about telling me to shut up.

Her office, she also informs me, has no function ► ► ►



COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ other than to send me the form I must fill out. My local office will be responsible for dealing with my problem. I ask if she knows their phone number, perchance? No. Can she get it for me? No. Does she know who might have it? No. Is there anyone I can speak to at the IRS who can actually *help* me? No.

Six more weeks pass. I awake in a cold sweat one night, convinced that the IRS has again “lost” my paperwork, and that many more months will pass before anyone tells me this. So I write yet another strongly-worded letter to them. I also write to my Congressman and both of my US Senators. My Congressman, in turn, contacts something called the Taxpayers Advocate Office. I am, by now, so consumed with a violent, overwhelming, blood-boiling wrath at the IRS that the man who calls me from the Taxpayers Advocate Office clearly thinks I’m crazy as a bedbug when we speak. (He’s right.) He promises to investigate the matter on my behalf. My Senators send me paperwork that I must sign if I want them to investigate for me, too.

Meanwhile, my father informs me that the IRS, for reasons best known to themselves, have unexpectedly refunded money to my parents which they had specifically instructed the IRS *not* to refund, to instead apply to the following year’s tax burden.

A terrible thought suddenly occurs to me.

I brave the looming menace of my storage unit and plunder its murky depths in search of my financial records. I am dusty and teary-eyed by the time I find my 1999 bank records, which I packed away eight months earlier. I sit down with a pile of bank statements and deposit slips, and I begin reading.

I find it before long: Eighteen months earlier, in April of 1999, I deposited my 1998 federal tax refund.

Upon receiving the unrequested refund, I evidently assumed that I remembered incorrectly, that I had not, after all, told my accountant to have it forwarded as a credit to 1999. She, however, had indeed done so, and—not knowing that they had ignored her instructions and sent me a check—she assumed the credit was applied to 1999 and therefore asked me, in 2000, whether to have the credit forwarded to 2000 or refunded. Which was how I, having no memory of a small deposit made a year earlier, came to believe I was indeed owed a refund, and that my 1998 and 1999 tax forms made this irrefutable.

Yes, it is deeply embarrassing. Writing to my Congressman and my Senators isn’t so bad, but telling the Taxpayers Advocate Office to forget about my case is awkward, given how furious I was when we talked. As for the IRS... No, of course I don’t apologize to them. I send a letter withdraw-

ing my claim, and I say that none of this would have happened had they (a) followed the instructions on my 1998 tax forms in the first place, or (b) provided a cancelled check at any time during the (yes!) *six months* I have been regularly requesting one, by phone and in writing.

So, sure, I’m an idiot. I don’t feel bad about not remembering receiving the check—I receive a lot of checks, after all, and I don’t remember most of them, which is why I keep written records. However, I certainly feel like a fool for not examining those records before spending so many long hours in conflict with the IRS. I regret that I let my overwhelming contempt for their long-established incompetence lead me into such a huge waste of time and energy; had I considered for even one moment that (for once) *they* might not be the ones in error, I might have thought to check my bank records months ago—and I’d have saved myself a world of aggravation and wasted effort.

Above all, though, I feel more helpless than ever in the face of these pirates, rapists, and thieves. After more than six months of refusing to pay me the refund, which my CPA-signed tax returns indicate that I am owed, the IRS has yet to produce a single piece of evidence proving they don’t owe it to me. They have never set a date by which they will stop searching for evidence they can’t find for a payment they evidently cannot prove they’ve made. They have never returned a single phone call or responded to a single letter from me about this matter. They have “lost” all my paperwork, and they have “accidentally” disconnected my phone calls more than once. I have been advised every step of the way that I have no recourse whatsoever if the IRS won’t issue a refund. The Taxpayers Advocate Office told me that if someone else fraudulently cashed my refund check, *I* would be the one to suffer for it, since the IRS, instead of then issuing me a refund, would commence a lengthy investigation in which *I* would be among the suspects.

So lay back, close your eyes, and think of Uncle Sam.

Then grab some nuclear weapons and meet me out back. I’m developing a plan to track down the physical location of the IRS...

- The End -

Nink has recently received word that Laura Resnick has been locked up for her own safety—well, hers and that of thousands of IRS employees. The future of her column remains uncertain, since she is currently not being trusted with anything as dangerous as a pen.

MEMBER NEWS.....

We Always Knew She Was A Madcap

Vicki Lewis Thompson is the winner of the first-ever "Madcap Award" given by the Heart & Scroll chapter of Romance Writers of America for the best romantic comedy novel of 1999.

Thompson won for *Bringing Up Baby New Year*, published under the Harlequin Duets imprint. Second place went to Cheryl Anne Porter's *Puppy Love*, also published by Duets, and third place was awarded to Jan (Janece) Hudson for "*A Hitch in Heaven*" from Fawcett.

Famous Georgian

New York Times Bestselling author Janelle Taylor was recently listed on the Georgia State website as one of the "Famous Georgians" and, according to the extremely flattered Taylor, "the rest of the list is awesome." She was also listed on the Columbia County's website as famous resident.

"I don't know who nominated me or how I was selected for either honor," she said, "but it's exciting and humbling."

Taylor also will be the subject of a feature article for the *Athens Magazine* January 2001 issue. To her delight, the photographer took pictures in the University of Georgia Library, which has a collection of her works.

"She (the photographer) especially liked using handwritten pages of my earliest novels," Taylor said, "a sight and touch which brought back fond memories and a tear to the eye. And an idea for a sequel..."

The magazine photographer also used items from Taylor's extensive collection of Native American and western memorabilia,

which was recently on view at the Exchange Club Fair in Augusta, Georgia.

"She even took my dirty old cowgirl boots off the fireplace, the western rug off my floor, my cactus plants, and so forth," Taylor reports.

Hooper's Three-Peat!

Kay Hooper's debut on the *New York Times* Bestseller List with her Shadow series for has certainly been a memorable one. The first book, *Stealing Shadows*, a romantic suspense/thriller with paranormal elements published in September was actually Hooper's 60th book. It stayed on the NYT bestseller list for several weeks.

"I've won a few awards over the years—Walden awards, *Affaire de Coeur* Silver Pens, Georgia Romance Writers' Maggies, *Romantic Times* awards—but nothing compares to hitting the *Times* list," said Hooper, who has been Novelists, Inc's, Advocacy chair for two years.

When the second book of the series, *Hiding In The Shadows*, was released in October, it debuted at #9 its first week on the list and promptly moved up to #7!

"Needless to say, I'm thrilled," she said then. "*Hiding...* was by far the most difficult to write, and I'm especially glad that the book I sweated blood over is doing so well.

Now I'm hoping *Out of the Shadows* will do at least as well,

NINC's Vancouver Conference 2000 was a time for firsts: our first conference outside U.S. borders and our first wedding. Gordon K. Aalborg and Denise Dietz, who met on NINCLINK, exchange vows.

because of the three it's my favorite. But what does the author know, right?"

Just when Hooper thought it didn't get any better than this, she learned that her November release, *Out Of The Shadows* debuted on the *Times* list at #7—her highest debut yet.

"So I now have a *New York Times* bestselling trilogy," she said. "Wow! I'll let you know when my feet touch the floor."

Bretton "Jumpstarts" Writers

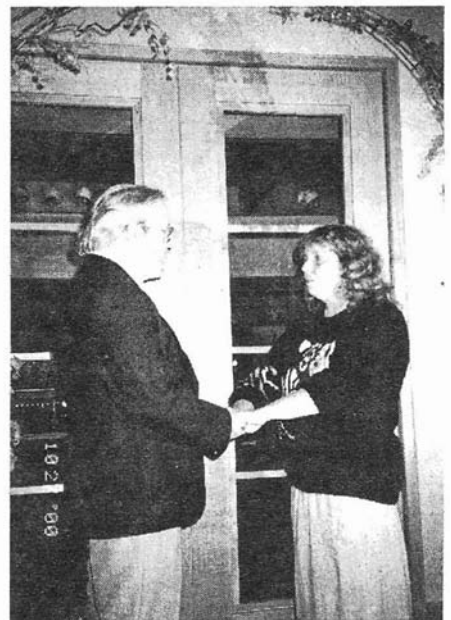
Writers wanting to jumpstart their writing days, might want to subscribe to Writers Daily Quote. Barbara Bretton sends out one quote per day—by, for, and about the writing life—to a list of almost 600 subscribers.

To view the WDQ archive of over 500 quotes, go to <http://www.barbarabretton.com/wdqarch.htm>

To join WDQ send a blank email to WritersDaily-subscribe@egroups.com

Barbara Bretton's current release is *At Last* from Berkley Books.

Please send items for this column to Kathy Chwedyk at KChwed@aol.com or 1215 Fairmont Court, Algonquin, IL 60102.





2000 NINC

Conference Reports:

Filed by Gordon Aulborg, bridegroom and special reporter to the conference

The "New" Women's Fiction:

When crime and romance aren't at the heart of the story. Friendships, relationships, small towns, coming of age, social issues... what's going on in mainstream women's fiction?

Well whatever it is, it needs a new name in lieu of any definition currently available, according to discussion during this forum hosted by Ellen Taber. Kathleen Webb put it best, I thought, in calling for "a new buzzword" that might help editors, publishers, agents and booksellers place and identify works that simply don't fit current genre classifications.

It was quickly determined that editors don't recognise layers beyond romance, despite the fact that readers have the interest and intelligence to accept a broad range of fictional tastes. And for authors, of course, there is the problem of fitting in, which could mean a change of pseudonym, a totally new start and a lot of risk in the process.

No easy definitions here, but clearly the need for more definitions and less strict pigeon-holing as authors seek new directions and try to take their readers with them in the

face of strong opposition from editors and agents alike.

Time Management for Writers:

Special Presentation by Dawn Reno, author of *The Unofficial Guide to Managing Time*.

Whose presentation left me almost wishing she could have had more time, because it was fascinating and frightening at the same time. Also efficient. Dawn not only had the answers, she seemed to have anticipated the questions and had "them" answered before they were asked.

Briefly, saving time as a writer involves a degree of planning that is not overly complicated or difficult, just time-consuming, at least for some. And even Dawn admitted, "Time saving devices don't always save time." Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that planning properly not only can save you time, but angst and energy as well, in the long run.

Dawn advised daily "to-do" lists along with a "plan" that can involve your activities on an hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly and lifetime basis. Daunting, but achievable and doubtless helpful, provided you follow her other advice, which is to seek balance and flexibility in the process.

"Compromise is not failure," she advised an audience in which almost everybody seemed in need of her advice. She suggested sharing your lists of medium and long term goals with somebody else [without advising how to select that

trustworthy individual] if for no other reason than the fact of having somebody else to remind you occasionally that you have the goals you haven't had time to think about.

Keep a tidy desk, with tools at hand and trivia someplace else. Turn off the phone when working and use caller ID. Post your list of goals where you will see it daily. And if you want to get a job done, set yourself a deadline. There was also a line about avoiding cooking, cleaning, household chores in any way possible, but I put that one in the same basket with her line about having a desk at which you stand instead of sit, so you tend to work more quickly because you're there to work, dammit, not slouch about in comfort.

Put a price on your time. Learn to say "no." And remember, because Dawn says it is true and I believed her, that time wasters do the easy stuff first, while time savers do the difficult jobs first. I will get well-and-truly stuck into this issue as soon as I find the time.

More reports from the Vancouver Conference are coming in the January 2001 issue of NINK.

Renew your NINC membership now so you don't miss a single issue—from our Conference reprise to Breaking News items important to writers.

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