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## Dispatches from the Front:

### ***Pardon My Aztec***

**BY RON MONTANA**

My mother doesn't like four-letter words. That, in and of itself, is not a surprising revelation. Most moms are not purveyors of profanity. But, since I am a writer, this prudish attitude on the part of my maternal parent has, in the past, presented particular hazards. Witness the conversation that occurred when my first novel was published:

"Well, what did you think of your son's opus magnum, Ma?" I asked cautiously, not happy with the wrinkle on her brow, that warning sign that always signaled trouble.

"It has a nice cover."

Now, with the state of cover art being what it was then, especially for first books, I should have taken that as a compliment. But I had this creeping feeling

*Cont. on p. 14* ▶ ▶ ▶

## ***Confessions of a Trade Show Junkie***

# ***TO THE TRADE SHOW WE GO***

**BY VELLA MUNN**

All right already, I confess! I've become a trade show junkie. Not just any trade show but when the bottom line is books—

Do I have your attention? I thought so.

Okay, here's the deal. The American Booksellers Association (ABA) has at least thirteen regional associations, and those in the Great Lakes, Mid-South, Mountains & Plains, New Atlantic, Upper Midwest, Pacific Northwest, Southeast, New England, and Northern California areas have shows at least once a year with southern California possibly climbing on-board soon. For specifics go to [www.bookweb.org](http://www.bookweb.org).

I've only been to the Pacific Northwest show (PNBA) which is in my neck of the woods, but I can't say enough about my experiences and the professional benefits. For a small-town hick, the chance to go to Seattle or Portland and overdose on everything involved with the writing game is irresistible.

In the spring of 2000, I had a new hardcover coming out, and when my

publisher mentioned they were considering sending me to PNBA in Tacoma, I ran with that. In exchange for an hour of signing a case of my books and handing them gratis to booksellers, Forge flew me to Washington, put me up in a hotel for three nights, and provided me with tickets to two breakfast programs. Soon after returning home, I learned that the book in question had been nominated as the PNBA book of the year, an extra added benefit.

But even more than that, I got to talk, really talk to regional book buyers both from independent stores and the chains. These people love books, know books, and respect the effort writing them takes. To be told again and again that they've either read my work and would like to invite me to a signing or have loyal readers waiting for my next release—heady stuff indeed!

The show I just returned from was more personally low-key because I was there simply to populate a Women Writing The West information booth. Just the same, in exchange for a ten-hour round trip drive and sponging off a friend who had a place for me to

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## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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# THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

BY PAT RICE

No, it's not 2002 and you haven't lost a whole year. I'm standing in for Barbara this month because even president-elects have to do something besides take out the trash, and I've been working with the Membership Committee and know more than Barbara on our current imperative subject.

Kathy Lynn Emerson, our membership chairperson, has the enormous job of increasing our membership base. This has always been an important position because Novelists, Inc. is intended as a networking organization among popular fiction writers, and obviously, the more writers who join, the more networking possibilities we create. Our membership chairperson traditionally seeks out writers in all areas of popular fiction, and we hope our members spread the word as well.

In our current market, the crossover between genres has become so significant that we need to stay abreast on all aspects of fiction writing, and not just that of our own genre. Many of the people who started with us as romance writers have crossed over to suspense and mystery and fantasy, and vice versa, and we would like to think that some small part of that was due to the networking possibilities in Ninc.

The main reason I'm addressing the membership in this column is not just to encourage networking. Many of you may not realize that we receive significant funding from the Authors' Coalition, a non-profit organization that divides European photocopying fees among various writing organizations. These funds give us the financial base to pay for our newsletter articles and to finance our conference at a loss when we wish to hold it in places like New York City, where the cost for a small organization is far beyond a fair conference price for our members. Without the Authors' Coalition fees, we would have to double our dues and struggle to maintain our services.

To belong to the Authors' Coalition, an organization must maintain more than 500 members.

We have been fortunate in keeping over that number for most of our existence. We have a solid membership base, although many of us come and go with the winds of economics and publishing. But the membership numbers really are too close to that 500 figure for comfort. If we could continue growing, year after year, we could ensure our place in the Coalition and build a safety buffer should the 500 number ever change, as well as enhancing the all-important networking for which we exist.

Toward that goal, Kathy and I have been working on a new Novelists, Inc. brochure and a letter of invitation for any author who may qualify for membership. These letters and brochures will go out to all the people suggested by our members when they renewed their dues this year. If every member of this organization could give us the names and addresses of at least

**Just to get the ball rolling, we're enclosing a copy of our membership brochure in this issue.**

**Share it with a writer friend or colleague you know who will benefit from membership in Ninc.**

two authors they would like to see invited, we could make a giant step toward not only survival, but a whole party of wonderful new connections.

Entirely too few people know what Novelists, Inc. really is or what it can do for them. Others have heard of us but believe we can only be joined by invitation. With a mass mailing of brochures, we can clear up all questions and end any speculation, while ensuring the longevity of our organization.

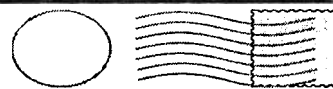
To encourage participation, the board will enter the names of all members providing three or more eligible prospects into a drawing, and the prize for the name drawn will be free dues for 2002. To jog your memories, our qualifications for membership are two published novels from bona fide professional publishers, one of which must have been published within the last five years. It's simple, it's easy, go for it!

And we can all party in Philadelphia together! **NINK**

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## LETTERS TO NINK

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*Letters to NINK 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 or e-mail. See masthead for addresses.*

### Swift Response

I was contacted recently by Harlequin/Silhouette vice-president Isabel Swift to acknowledge the position statement the Ninc board sent her on the subject of author pseudonyms. (The statement appears in the April *NINK* and is on our website, for those of you who might have missed it when I posted it on the link a couple of weeks ago.) She had taken a vacation day and was in the process of packing cartons for a move but wanted to let me know she'd received our statement and was very sympathetic to our position.

She said we raised valid points, and as the person representing the authors' interests while the company reviews its boilerplate, she will be advocating a "more relaxed" position on pseudonyms. She described the issue as a "big ticket item on her agenda."

This was an informal conversation, and once she and her husband are settled in their new house and her life calms down a little, she said she would call again so we could discuss the matter more formally.

I can't go into detail about our off-the-record schmoozing, but I was frankly surprised and greatly heartened at how supportive she was to our position. She explained some of the corporate thinking on pseudonyms (which, again, I will report once we've had a more formal discussion) and the hurdles are huge. But she's on our side, and she expressed appreciation for Ninc's having presented

the authors' position cogently and lucidly.

I'll keep you posted on further developments.

— **Barbara Keiler, President**

### Open Invitation to All Ninc Members:

A few weeks ago I approached the Board of Directors with an idea that came to me during a recent Ninlink discussion on how we can not only maintain our membership but gain new members who might not be aware that we exist as a group—or be aware of the value of belonging.

My suggestion was that we compile a compendium of articles from past *NINKs* and make it available to all writers everywhere. Now, with the blessing of the Board, I'm asking for help with this venture. It will be a book project containing articles from past newsletters. If you recollect any articles that were of particular interest to you, or that offered you much-needed insight in one aspect or another of this crazy business we all share, articles that might fit into one of the following categories (or even into some we haven't thought of yet), would you be good enough to let me know? If need be, I'll borrow print copies from those who have them and scan them, providing I have the permission of the original authors. We'll be looking into the vagaries of copyright on the articles, seeking out an agent for the project, and then, eventually, a publisher. We have a lot of work ahead of us and a long way to go, but I'm confident we will succeed.

Categories so far suggested:

**Genres** (what benefits are there for writers of sf/f, fantasy, horror, Western, historical fiction, adventure, thrillers, mystery, romance, suspense writers etc. in Ninc?)

**The Business of Writing**

Cont. on p. 5 ▶ ▶ ▶

# What Makes a Bestseller?

BY SHERRY-ANNE JACOBS

OK, I can't blame anyone else for forcing me to produce this article, which has not been easy to research or write. I volunteered. And this is why. I always read with envy (yes, I admit it!) the list in the *NINK* column, Fast Track, that gives fellow Ninc members' bestsellers as reported by *USA Today*. I want to be listed in Fast Track, too. But I'm not usually published in the USA, so I can't be under current rules.

When my book, *Our Lizzie*, hit the *UK Times* bestseller charts in February 2000, it got a separate mention elsewhere in *NINK*—as if my achievement was different and inferior. I felt like a second-class citizen.

And before I go any further, I also wish to make it plain that I'm not trying to detract from the wonderful achievements of those who are on the *USA Today* list. No way! You folks go get 'em!

## Ninc's Role

I believe that if we in Novelists, Inc. are to consider ourselves an international organisation and push for world-wide membership, we need to make some changes in this reporting of bestsellers. I don't know exactly what, but I hope this article will start the discussion rolling. I will freely admit that I'm providing only a sketchmap of some of the things we need to consider, because bestseller reporting is a huge minefield and I don't pretend to understand all the ramifications.

I see four main English-speaking markets of relevance to Ninc: the US, the UK, Canada, and my own Australia. I don't truly understand how Canadian and American sales relate to one another, because when rights to my books are sold, Canadian rights are often included in both the North American market and in the UK/Commonwealth markets under a "non-exclusive" option. But we have enough Canadian writers in Ninc to set me right on that, I'm sure!

## What Is A Bestseller?

What makes a bestseller, anyway? In the UK's annual writers' bible, the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*, they always make a distinction between bestsellers and fastsellers, and they have a useful article on that in the Year 2000 edition. In addition, they always give the list of Top 100 Paperback

Fastsellers for the previous year. It seems to me that fast-sellers is the more accurate term. Only those books which sell quickly reach the so-called bestseller lists. Other books may have comparable total sales, but don't rate a mention.

The sales director of a large publishing house told me that in Australia, if you include the time element, "To get on the bestseller lists you would have to sell around 7,000 units over a period of about four to six weeks." However, the Australian Publishers' Association also conducts an annual survey of the whole year's "bestsellers" and for 1999, it listed 158 titles, going from 280,000 down to 5,000 sales.

*Colour me confused! And there's more confusion to follow.*

## The Numbers Game

Few, if any, countries can compete with the USA on actual numbers of books sold, so we can't judge bestsellers on sheer numbers. The US has a population of approximately 268 million, the UK 60m, Canada 30m, and Australia 19m. Here in Australia, we rate well on number of books bought per head of population, but that's not going to make much difference to total sales, comparatively speaking.

Just to take one specific example to show how useless comparisons of actual sales numbers would be: I know a UK author with sales of around 40,000 books who is considered to be doing really well, even if those books don't sell fast enough to hit any charts. I know a US author who was dumped by her publisher because one book "only" sold just over 50,000 copies.

In Australia sales numbers are even smaller than the UK. Any book selling 5,000 copies is doing nicely, though Bryce Courtenay, one of our top fastselling authors, sells 200,000 to 300,000 copies each time. But he doesn't sell well overseas, just as the English author Dennis Wheatley didn't. So top-, best- or fastselling books from one country don't necessarily translate to another country.

*(Members from the US, UK and Canada may like to do follow-up articles and tell us what sales numbers it takes to hit the charts there and how quickly this needs to happen. It'd make me jealous again, no doubt, but I'd be interested to know.)*

## Validity

There are various methods for tracking bestsellers. I'm not going to get into the specifics of whether these systems are valid, reliable, fair, etc. Who am I to judge? There are

anomalies in every reporting system. For example, another sales director from a large publisher told me that there is one system in Australia where if you come out in hardcover first you can't appear on the lists in paperback. The UK has Booktrack, which tracks actual sales, but sales for which parts of the country? That can vary.

*I'm offering more questions than answers in this article. But these questions need to be asked at some stage if we're to be truly international in Ninc.*

## Comparisons: A Suggestion

How, then, should we make comparisons? Well, I don't think we can compare one "bestseller" directly with a "bestseller" in another country purely on numbers.

The only way I can think of is to find out which lists/systems are considered "reputable" in each country and go by that. Even living in a small country town in Australia, I

know that the *UK Times* newspaper is pretty dependable and so is the *Telegraph*. Do we have UK members who'd confirm that? If so, that gives us a start. What's a "good" list in Canada?

For Australia, we have *The Australian* newspaper, a national with a good reputation, though with Booktrack coming things may change. We can monitor that. Any Aussie members like to add to that?

## The Bottom Line

The bottom line is: In Novelists, Inc. we're currently treating our non-American members like second-class citizens when reporting bestselling achievements, while at the same time making a push to get more members internationally. I don't feel this is right.

Let's see how we can change things for the better. It'll take time, but I feel it's worth doing. **NINK**

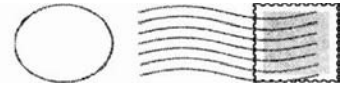
# NINC NEEDS YOU!

It's already time for the 2001 Novelists Inc. Nominating Committee to get to work. So if you're interested in volunteering for the 2002 Board or Nominating Committee (the people who will find officers and committee members for 2003), or if you'd like to make a suggestion or recommendation of someone you think would do a faboo job, please pick up a pen or fire up your e-mail, and let a member of this year's Nominating Committee know.

They are:

Carole Nelson Douglas (cdouglas@catwriter.com), Lawrence Watt Evans (lawrence@clark.net), Barbara McMahon (BMcMahon@cdepot.net), Pamela Morsi (PamMorsi@aol.com), and Mary Jo Putney (Mehetabel@aol.com). If you'd like to be a part of Ninc's future and help decide who we are and what we can become, join in!

## LETTERS



### Open Invitation, cont. from page 3

(will include taxes, accounting, etc.)

**Agents** (to have or not to have, advice from, warnings about)

**The Publishing Industry** (how is the state of flux therein affecting us as writers?)

I know there have been multiple articles addressing each of these topics, and more. What we need to do is find them and discover if we can use them.

My vision of this book is that we can market it as a "things every writer needs to know" kind of manual, which will increase our visibility in the different writing communities. There will be no how-to material aimed at the unpublished, though likely many of the articles will be as helpful to them as to the multipublished. As I recall it, from the very beginning, we had many great articles that focused on a wide variety of problems for all people in the writing life, items that would be of value to professionals in every genre. The ultimate aim is to attract members from all fiction fields to Novelists, Inc. I believe we can do this by illustrating the expertise, experience, and brilliance of our membership, not to mention the diversity of knowledge.

Please let me know if you can help.

— **Judy Gill** (j\_gill@sunshine.net)

# TRADE SHOW JUNKIE

► ► ► ► *Continued from page 1*

crash, I received a free pass to the exhibits hall and the opportunity to pick up several hot-off-the-presses books. But that wasn't all. I learned! Boy, did I learn.

## What's There

The event covered three days with the first devoted to workshops targeted for writers, booksellers, and/or publishers. I attended a sampling based on purely selfish reasons—I either knew the presenters or the subjects intrigued me.

I skipped “Writing Down the Funny Bone,” “Children’s Writers Critique Groups,” “Booksellers’ Sharing Strategies,” “How To Make Your Store More Profitable,” “Financial Forms for Fun and Profit,” “Eye-Catching Marketing Techniques for Publishers,” and “Reps Picks of the Lists.” I’ve attended the picks’ session before and recommend it for insight, not just on what books garner the most attention and why, but to get a feel for different reps’ delivery, presentation, and style. Forget any fantasies you may have about leisurely, in-depth discussions of each book’s merits. Instead, think land speed record and repeated use of the word product.

What drew me in were sessions on promotion, both the grassroots kind and how to work the media, the changing role of the sales rep, and the current status of BookSense, the ABA’s response to Amazon. For the heck of it, I sat in on a session aimed at authors or publishers attending for the first time and picked up a number of sound bites from Cynthia Frank, owner of Cypress House out of Fort Bragg, California (<http://www.cypresshouse.com>).

This savvy marketer recommends looking at the trade show as if you’re going to a mammoth supermarket. “Plan to hit every aisle, in order, and to make more than one pass through the hall. Don’t hide your badge. Put your business cards behind your name tag and write a note on every card you’re given.” Other tidbits I picked up from her were:

- Ingram’s is beloved by booksellers, Anderson’s isn’t.
- Most bookstores want to deal with a distributor.
- There’s a core difference between distributors and wholesalers.
- If you go to a show, let your publisher know in advance.
- Four major distributors went under in the past two years and took some small publishers with them.
- Wholesalers don’t have sales reps.
- Ingram’s stocking phone number (1-615-213-6803) will

give you sales figures.

- Check your book listings at all online bookstores to see if they have the information right.
- Look at every booth at the show with an eye to how that company might help you get the word out on your books or help you increase sales.
- Wear comfortable shoes and bring water. (I couldn’t agree more.)

## People, Publishers, and Panels

Jennifer McCord, publishing consultant and past president of the Pacific Northwest Writers Association, moderated “The Changing Role Of The Sales Rep.” Her panelists were Christopher Kerr of Parson Weems’ Publisher Services, which represents publishers in the Mid-Atlantic and New England; Jim Harris, Northwest Regional Manager of Graphic Arts Center Publishing; Marlene Howard at Media Weavers; and Kathi Kirby from Portland’s Powells Bookstore.

Chris, who has been representing books forever and now has his own firm working with small publishers, which means he gets hired and fired a lot, said that in the past, 75 percent of his list was backlist but that has dropped to less than 25 percent. Waldenbooks is down 50 percent in number of stores, for a variety of reasons. The core problem with getting books into the hands of readers, in his opinion, is that publishers don’t understand how people buy books.

In addition, the stores themselves are understaffed and the staff underpaid. He’s seeing a lot of bookstores losing leases. On the plus side, specialists are surviving, in part because they do a lot of outreach. He has to know what’s going on in every store he visits and does lots of follow-up because the window of opportunity for any given release is so narrow. He maintains that each arm of the publishing business needs to know what the other is doing—partnering. He suggests writers inform reps of where you and your relatives live, where you went to school and the careers you’ve had, the book’s setting, etc., as ways of increasing regional interest.

Jim started out as a rep with Random but now is on commission working with 30 publishers. All of his business is with the independents, and he believes his job is to help the bookstore, not the publisher. Because inventory is usually computerized, he can spend his time talking about books instead of counting stock. He hopes the rep will never be replaced by CD-Roms because that kind of listing

doesn't answer questions or give details that can make a bookseller sit up and take notice. He'd like to see all books displayed face out. (Yes!) He believes in trade paperback because hardcovers have become too expensive. He recommends writers get to know their publisher's sales reps and keep them informed of promotional efforts so they're not at cross purposes with what the publisher is doing.

Marlene bought the quarterly newsletter, *Writers NW*, and calls the review-and-events newspaper-style publication a labor of love. Regional in nature, it gives area writers exposure they can't get elsewhere and discusses such issues as intellectual freedom and challenges in public libraries. Afterward, I reintroduced myself to Marlene and received permission to send my upcoming release to them for review. Not bad for a one-minute conversation!

Kathi of Powells also mentioned "partnering," adding that she appreciates reps who keep her informed and are knowledgeable about individual stores. Her caution for writers: there's a fine balance between having a good relationship with a bookseller and being too pushy.

After hearing from those "in-the-trenches" people, I was a bit disappointed with the workshop on "Grassroots Book Marketing" because much of what June Cotner ([www.junecotner.com](http://www.junecotner.com)) said better suited nonfiction books. According to her, 50 percent of a writer's job is promotion, and she sees her publishers as primarily printers. To give weight to her words, she pointed out that each year, the major publishers bring out 55,000 new books. Adding in the small presses, that comes to 100,000 per year—the majority of them lucky to get six weeks on the shelves. In marketing language, a potential customer needs eight impressions before he/she remembers a product.

June, who'd attended and recommends the Maui Writers Conference, quoted agent Michael Larson as saying there are two keys to a book's suc-

cess—Title and Promotion. One thing a writer can do to help the publisher publicity department is supply them with information such as a book's location and major premise. It doesn't hurt to let the publisher know what schools a writer attended, where he/she lives or lived, where relatives are located, past and present jobs and careers, but the writer herself is missing a bet by not running with that information.

For example, send a bio to alumni or business newsletters, see if a college bookstore (either where you attended or where the book is set) will carry your work, and send press releases to all relevant newspapers. If appropriate, when a news story captures public attention, if you've written something addressing that issue, you should contact the media. She also advocates contacting organizations whose interests and/or concerns dovetail with the book's subject. A website is, in her opinion, a must for writers, and the site should contain both reviews and excerpts. A writer should contact possible outlets other than bookstores since half of sales take place outside them.

### And More Miscellany

A few other notes: Oprah gets 10,000 books a year; postcards are better than an envelope, which has to be opened; black and white might be as effective as color; relationships with bookstores **MUST** be cultivated; if possible, get important endorsements outside the writing community; try for co-op marketing money from your publisher; take a look at Kremer's *1001 Ways To Market Your Book* (ISBN 0912411481); join Toastmasters International to increase public speaking skills; think marketing the moment the book is sold.

Next up was a workshop on "The Publicity Ballgame: how to pitch effectively to broadcast and print media." By the time Diane Jordan, creator, producer, and host of "The Book Page" and "Between the Lines" on KXXL and the AP Radio ▶ ▶ ▶



## BREAKING NEWS

**COMPILED BY  
PAMELA BROWNING**

### Kick Internet Piracy, Yeah

Author Harlan Ellison has gone to court over a copyright issue involving unauthorized posting of the full text of many of his works on the Internet, primarily through the Usenet's alt.binaries.e-book.

He and his attorney, M. Christine Valada, sued AOL and Usenet newsgroup services provider RemarQ Communities, now owned by Critical Path, in California Federal District Court. AOL is cited for "vicarious infringement—for the development of the Gnutella file transfer protocol by its Nullsoft division."

"At issue are matters such as whether AOL or RemarQ/Critical Path fulfilled their duties under the DMCA for the limitations of liability, whether the defendants had prior knowledge of the infringing activities or ignored 'red flags,' whether the defendants are direct, contributory or vicarious infringers of the copyrights, and whether their activities—or the activities they have failed to stop—also constitute unfair competition with Harlan.

"Interpretation of the DMCA is still an overriding issue here, and it is our position that AOL is arguing an impermissible extension of the law, which, if ultimately accepted by the Court, will make it impossible for anyone ever to prevail against an online service provider in copyright infringement litigation. We are also deeply disturbed by the

▶ ▶ ▶





## BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ RemarQ/Critical Path position that the wholesale copying of copyrighted works of fiction is 'fair use.' Or that it was necessary to copy all of the material to fulfill the public good of keeping the Internet operating. This is truly a death-of-copyright argument."

Ellison claims to have invested over \$40,000 in this battle and has appealed to fellow writers for support in the continuing litigation.

"To make absolutely dead certain that no one can even remotely suggest that contributions went anywhere but to fight this infringement of writers' rights, we are setting up a new post office box address, specially and only for receipt of contributions to what we are now calling Kick Internet Piracy. And all checks must be made payable directly to our attorney, M. Christine Valada, to help cover costs and legal fees."

If you wish to contribute to Ellison's cause, here's the address:

Kick Internet Piracy  
Post Office Box 55935  
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413.

Checks to be made payable to:  
Law Office of M. Christine Valada.

### eBay's Gotta Get Into The Act

eBay, the online auction, recently paid \$37 million to buy an e-company that sells videos, books, and CDs. This move positions eBay strongly for fixed-price selling.

An eBay book buyer can search for a popular title, and when he locates it, he is offered a selection of copies at a range of prices from a variety of sellers/vendors who are also customers of the site.

After the buyer reads the book, he can sell it on the site as a used book by typing in the UPC code for the product, briefly ▶ ▶ ▶

# TRADE SHOW JUNKIE

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Network finished, I wanted to hug her because this reader of five books a week looks for the PASSION in books, a love of writing that leaps off the page. She prefers being contacted by phone or e-mail about current books written from the soul. Most of her radio interviews are conducted in-studio and she usually reads the book right before the interview; she suggests the writer do the same. Because she works on a short lead time, she prefers to receive the published book, not the galley.

In what to me was a sharp contrast, Randall Yip, executive producer of KPTV 12's "Good Day, Oregon" emphasized his program's viewer demographics, which are young and hip. They produce a "fun" program and seek out guests who are relaxed and comfortable and who can establish a solid rapport with the producer. Some 25 percent of guests are book authors but rarely do they highlight fiction. "You're in the driver's seat," he said, referring to the program's insatiable need for material. "But the highway is very crowded."

Margie Boule, who writes a regular column for *The Oregonian*, also stressed the never-ending need for material, the deadline monster. Because she looks for the individual story that makes a bigger point, when she turns to books, she usually selects nonfiction. I found it sobering that she receives 200 e- and voice mails a day and insists that those who contact her know who their target market is. If someone sends her a press kit, she suggests following up with an e-mail—but don't deluge her with material.

Sharon H. Castlen of Integrated Book Marketing (1 (631) 979-5990 or [bookmarketer@compuserve.com](mailto:bookmarketer@compuserve.com)) addressed how to generate increased

sales and more media interviews after the interview/review. Not only is it essential to notify distributors and wholesalers in advance so they'll have books on hand, key bookstores should be brought onboard ahead of time. Parlay that into signings, and take copies of reviews to signings. Update press kits, and see if your publisher's trade show booths will use material reflecting your 15 minutes of fame.

In wrapping up the presentation, Joanne McCall, who has her own public relations firm and is a Portland radio host, suggested including in a press kit a list of ten ideas or ways for the media to make use of you and your material. "Think like a producer," she said. "Target the audience." She also stressed asking yourself if you can handle TV, develop a 30-second pitch, know how each media person wants to be approached, and follow up in the correct way.

The last workshop I attended is worthy of its own article. If you haven't heard of [www.BookSense.com](http://www.BookSense.com), check it out, now! In a nutshell, BookSense is the independent booksellers' response/reaction to Amazon. Although still in the beta testing phase, the initial 400 booksellers who signed up to test it has grown to over 1100. In addition, some 30 publishers have come onboard, and when CNN and Yahoo featured it, they had 300,000 hits in a single day.

In brief, a bookstore can tie in to BookSense, which allows them to design their own website from seven templates but unlimited in individuality. Distribution is through Baker and Taylor, but books are "sent" from member stores. The store sites list e-book bestsellers, heavily promote the BookSense 76 books which are store-nominated, have access to online





## BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ describing the condition, and listing any desired price.

An eBay spokesperson claims a 50 percent monthly growth in dollars exchanged at their auction sites, which are now available in several countries. She reports that 75,000 entrepreneurs make a full-time living listing items for sale on eBay and that most have hired small staffs; many sellers do business to the tune of \$1 million or more a year. She said that most of their auction sales were antiques, coins, and books. Repeat: BOOKS, as in used.

### Don't Sleep With Amazon

Jeff Bezos, CEO and founder of Amazon.com, appeared on the BBC's *Money Program* recently and advised small investors not to buy Web stocks, according to the BBC. Bezos was quoted as saying Amazon was "not a stock you can sleep well with at night." He added, "We think over time we'll build a very valuable company. But for the short-term investor, or for a small investor, I would not invest in Internet stocks."

*PW Daily* noted waggishly that Bezos missed an opportunity to drum up extra business by failing to recommend a suitable investment guidebook, always available online from Amazon.com.

Amazon posted a gross profit in its U.S. books/movie/video division of more than 30 percent for the first quarter of this year. They said, however, that sales in the group had only a "very slight" increase. For the entire company, Amazon expects a 21 percent increase over sales in last year's first quarter.

▶ ▶ ▶

help, can or can't discount as they choose, are able to update as frequently as desired, etc.

Starting early next year, the service will cost bookstores a \$350 setup fee plus \$100 a month, and more and more bookstores are finding this cheaper than designing their own site. Plus, they become part of a growing support network, have access to Baker & Taylor's database, and will benefit from planned national branding efforts. Am I excited about the possibilities for writers? Oh, yes!!! [Editor's note: Watch for Vella's article on BookSense in a future NINK.]

Although twelve writers autographed and gave away their books during the afternoon (more than 80 autographings by the end of the show), I didn't make it to their tables. Trade show attendees are given different colored badges, and mine identified me as an exhibitor. I felt a tad conspicuous taking books better served in the hands of those who deal directly with the book-buying public. I also missed the evening's reading/autographing held at nearby Powells, where six "newer" authors, "chosen for their potential as excellent 'hand selling' opportunities" were spotlighted.

### Days Two and Three

This was kid-in-the-candy-store time. Although I spent much of my time at the Women Writing The West booth, I also cruised. There were over 400 exhibitors and more than 100 booths. A number of exhibitors were represented by a single distributor, and for all of them, the bottom line was grabbing the attention and purchasing dollar of booksellers. Because it's impossible to make a blanket statement about what was presented, I'm resorting to a listing of sorts. Not only were

the big boys such as Farrar, Straus & Giroux, HarperCollins, Houghton Mifflin, Random, and Time Warner in evidence, but so were university presses from California, Oregon, Washington, Syracuse, Temple, Teacher's College, Penn State, Ohio, Oxford, and Georgetown.

Holtzbrinck, which reps St. Martin, Tor, Picador, Edmund, Minotaur, Golden Guides, Audio Renaissance, Bloomsbury, Palgrave, Rodale, World Almanac, and Wizards of the Coast, had a large presence, as did Nancy Suib & Associates, which represents the likes of the University of Nevada, Williamson, Zagat Survey, Paul & Company, Jewish Lights, LPC Group, Mondo, Orbic, Child's Play, Dawn, Free Spirit, Adams Media, and Bristol.

Baker & Taylor showcased calendars, and the complete works of Mary Baker Eddy were available, as were offerings from such diverse sources as Collectors Press, ABC Arts Books Canada, Adventure Imports, Ancient City Press, Antique Collectors' Club, Arizona Highways, Australian Fishing Network, Beautiful America Publishing Company, Bilingual, Blushing Rose, Book Travelers West, Bored Feet Press (what?), Catholic Universities Of America Press, Central European University Press, Collector Books, Crane Creek Graphics, Creative Homeowner, Empty Bowl Press (hmmm), Facts On File, Fun Specs Inc., Golden Gate National Park, Grief Watch, Human Kinetics, Independent Mystery Publishers, Kingfisher Larousse, Lectorum Spanish Titles, Map Art/Marco Polo NA, Map Link, Microsoft, Mindcastle Books, Music Sales, Naval Institute Press, Norseman Ventures, Northwest Artworks, Oregon Book Tours, Peppermint Press, Poisoned Pen Press (fun folks), Red Apple, ScaleDown/Pine Forest Publishers, School ▶ ▶ ▶



## BREAKING NEWS

### ► ► ► Palm Readers

Palm Inc., maker of the most popular personal digital assistants (PDAs), is revamping its product line to increase the speed and utility of the devices. The company claims a 60 percent share of the handheld market but plans to grab even more of it by adding features that appeal to the young, mobile businesspeople who made the PDA popular.

The new 500 series Palm will include the Peanut Reader e-book software, currently only available by free download from Peanutpress.com. Peanutpress offers a full list of books, ranging from business, sf/f, and fiction to the everyday public-domain classics. Peanut currently sells about 500 e-books a day, at prices ranging from \$1 to \$35, averaging about \$7.

That's not peanuts, folks.

### Revolving Doors

Suzanne Gluck has left ICM and, effective April 4, can be found at the William Morris Agency, New York, where she joins Jennifer Rudolph Walsh as co-head of the literary division.

### Something You Don't Want To Know

Returns. Not as in "May you have many happy." Returns as in—your books.

Maybe I should stop right here, but I feel compelled to let you know that Publishers Marketing Association has released a 41-page report on book returns and their impact on small presses.

According to the report, returns total \$7.1 billion annually for the book business as a whole, and small publishers account for \$1.95 billion. "Returns are the bane of the publishing industry," ► ► ►

# TRADE SHOW JUNKIE

► ► ► ► Zone, Self-Counsel Press, Simple Minds, Subterranean, Ten Speed, Weatherhill, Wilderness Press, Yosemite Association, and Writers Digest. Whew!

Because I'd promised a small publisher that I'd try to look at the show through his eyes, I talked to people representing coalitions of small press distributors and printers, but I won't say much about that except that I learned publishers have their own support and marketing associations.

I met the owner of a vanity press who spoke for ten minutes without mentioning the "V" word, kept a straight face around a woman who called herself a writer's mentor before stating her price structure, tried not to yawn as an elderly woman detailed her efforts to find a publisher for her life story, shared the determination of a young mother with an intriguing self-published picture book and not enough time to market it, talked to rank newcomers with a hot-off-the-press self-published non-fiction book and no idea where to go from here, made what might be a great contact with the woman responsible for Portland library events, picked up a double armful of catalogs, soothed the frazzled nerves of my publisher's associate publicist, made what I hope will be a good connection with a publisher for a critique partner, picked the brain of a small mystery books publisher, exchanged cards with a number of booksellers, made new contacts and renewed old ones, learned how to reach a real person at Powells, picked up a copy of the ABA's latest *Bookselling This Week* newsletter, got a signed children's book for my grandson, another on a 1909 bicycle journey from California

to Alaska for my mother, conned a distributor into giving me a book for my sports-fanatic son, snagged a sample of rum cake, ate a lousy hot dog, had my books praised (and praised other writers' books), shared war stories, dodged a long-haired man advocating the overthrow of the establishment education system, sat near an exhausted rep who only wanted to go home, learned—not through personal experience—that the consequence for taking a book from the exhibit floor without permission is expulsion, had a three-hour working/gossiping lunch with my agent, talked to members of Sisters In Crime, got a lead on what has proven to be exactly the research book I need, etc, etc.

I came home brain-dead with an upset stomach and powerful impressions of how large, complex, and competitive the business of books is. Sitting at my computer today, I still feel overwhelmed by what happens once we, the initial producers of the product, pull the last page out of the printer and drop it in the mail. I'll probably never feel I have a firm grasp of the whole process, but the trade show served as a giant step in that direction.

Will I do it again? You bet! **NINK**

*Vella Munn began her writing life as a young child, illustrating comic books with the Lone Ranger's horse as the protagonist. Taking that "success" as her cue, she graduated to confessions, non-fiction articles, and finally, gulp, books. With somewhere in excess of 40 to her credit, she now awaits June when Cheyenne Summer will be a Forge hardcover release and Soul of the Sacred Earth comes out in paperback.*

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## INTRODUCING.....

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*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

Linda L Crockett (*Linda Lea Castle, Linda Castle*), Farmington, NM

Meg O'Brien, Arlington, WA

Shirley Rogerson (*Shirley Rogers*), Virginia Beach, VA

S. K. McClafferty (*Selina Macpherson*), Kittanning, PA

### New Members

Cheryl Wolverton, Zachary, LA

**Ninc has room to grow...  
recommend membership  
to your colleagues.**

**Prospective members  
can apply online at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).**

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## ◆ In Memorium ◆

### Celeste N. DeBlasis

Author Celeste N. DeBlasis, 54, died April 13 in her home on the Kemper Campbell Ranch in Victorville, California. She is survived by her mother, Jean DeBlasis. In addition to Novelists, Inc., Ms. DeBlasis was a member of the Writer's Guild, the California State Library Association, the California Historical Society, and the World Wildlife Fund.

Her historical novels include *The Night Child*, *Suffer a Sea Change*, *The Proud Breed*, *The Tiger's Woman* and her popular trilogy, *Wild Swan*, *Swan's Chance*, and *A Season of Swans*. Her last book, *Graveyard Peaches* in 1991, was a personal memoir recalling her life on the ranch. She was an avid and enthusiastic researcher, combing the nation and the world for the information that would enrich her works with historical depth and realism. Several of her books are included in scholarly historical library collections.

Ms. DeBlasis was an avid birder, traveler, gardener, and reader. She walked on the ranch and in the Mojave Narrows Park nearly every morning of her life and chronicled the activities of hundreds of bird species.



## BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ said PMA executive director Jan Nathan. (Tell us about it. Or better yet, don't.)

Returns for publishers of all sizes have risen since the beginning of the year. Major factors are the worst Christmas season in five years and several major bankruptcies—think Crown Books, Wallace's Bookstores, and Bibelot.

The report recommends net pricing, more effective mark-downs, and more special sales as well as—and you might not like this either—expanding e-book and print-on-demand.

The PMA report on returns is available online at [www.pma-online.org](http://www.pma-online.org) and is downloadable for a fee of \$25 for non-members. No returns on this one, probably.

### Summer TV-Writer Seminar

Larry Brody, *Screentalk* magazine columnist (<http://www.screentalk.org/ezine.htm>) and veteran TV writer-producer, will lecture, answer questions, and roll tape at a seminar on July 21 and 22.

It's billed as the The TV Writer.Com Summer Intensive Seminar, and some of the pros expected to assist are Rob Gregory-Browne, Nicholl Fellowship Winner; Cal Clements, Producer, *Walker, Texas Ranger*; Gerry Conway, Executive Producer, *The Huntress*; Sean Davis, Agent, Shapiro-Lichtman Agency; D.C. Fontana, Story Editor, *Star Trek* and *The Next Generation*; Michael Steven Gregory, writer of just about everything; as well as other luminaries too numerous to mention.

Topics will include Idea Development, *Cont. on p. 15* ▶ ▶

Our esteemed editor Pamela Browning sent me an article about resources on the Internet where writers can find freelance work. I checked out several of the sites. The most useful site for writers was the Freelance Writers Job Page, <http://freelancewrite.about/careers/free-lancewrite/bljobpage.htm>. It lists all types of writing assignments and the contact information. I found listings seeking writers for a variety of magazine articles, computer games, and technical reports.

The other sites were a bit cumbersome since they are geared toward all types of employment. They required more time to uncover listings specifically related to writers. The listings I checked out were not geared toward "freelancing," but I could have overlooked the freelance listings or they might show at other times or in areas I didn't search. At these sites, you can usually subscribe to a newsletter, but the ones I received were not useful. FlipDog's newsletter told me that Universal Studios in Orlando was looking for a boat captain. At some sites, you can enter your job criteria and receive e-mail notifying you about jobs that meet your criteria. At some sites, you submit a résumé that is either sent by e-mail to employers or kept at the site so potential employers can browse it.

I did not set up a search for myself or submit my résumé so I don't know how effective that approach is, but for those who are interested, here are some sites that may offer freelance employment opportunities:

**CareerMagic @** <http://www.careermagic.com>  
**FlipDog @** <http://www.flipdog.com/home/html>  
**Headhunter @** <http://www.Headhunter.Net>  
**Hotjobs @** <http://www.hotjobs.com>  
**Monster @** <http://Monster.com>  
**Net-Temps @** <http://www.net-temps.com>

## Industry News

From Tess Gerritsen: "Thought I'd tell you all about a really great website about the book industry and the latest publishing gossip. You can also announce your book deals there. It's <http://www.publisherslunch.com>. You can subscribe to their daily e-mail newsletter, or just drop in to check the site from time to time." Note: The site does have a little quirk. When you type in the URL, it will pop you to [www.caderbooks.com](http://www.caderbooks.com). At the top of that page, you will see a notation for Publisher's Lunch. When you click that, you get the Publisher's Lunch URL again.

Cynthia Sterling has a marketing e-newsletter. "Every week (or thereabouts) I post whatever marketing news I've dredged up from various newsletters, online sources, and talking to my agent and editors. I've been doing it about nine months now and have a pretty good archives available,

which members are free to look through at any time. It's mostly romance centered, though I do cover other genre markets when I hear about them, and I include information on short story markets when I can get it (and if the market pays.)" To subscribe, send a blank e-mail to [cynthiasterling-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:cynthiasterling-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

## Business

UPS, FedEx, and Airborne packages can be tracked at Pack Track, <http://www.packtrack.com/>.

## Printing Technology

From Joyce Ware: "Those of you looking for a free source for a darker Courier font than is provided on most PCs might want to try the following site: <http://www.neosoft.com/~bmiller/courier.htm> or [bmiller@neosoft.com](mailto:bmiller@neosoft.com).

"If you use a Mac, try: <http://world.std.com/~wij/courier/about-courier-web.html> or William I. Johnson at: [wij@world.std.com](mailto:wij@world.std.com)."

## Research

A wonderful website that offers topics on history, culture, social science, math...well, just name it, and you can probably find some information at Study Web, <http://www.studyweb.com/>.

Since 1993 George Emery, a librarian at Canisius College, has been collecting timelines on the Internet. His terrific collection can be found at Alterna Time, <http://www.canisius.edu/~emeryg/time.html>. Be prepared to spend some time browsing. I was fascinated by the time lines for the Titanic, King Arthur, and the Victorian era.

## Attention: Signet/NAL Authors

Jaclyn Reding invited Signet/NAL authors who are interested in talking with other authors from this publisher to subscribe to the listserve. You can send a blank e-mail to [SignetNAL-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SignetNAL-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) or visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SignetNAL> and follow the prompts to enter your information.

## Be Careful Out There

From Judith Bowen: "Yes, I'm paranoid...if you are too and want to see what the Internet 'sees' through your connection, check out this site: <https://grc.com/x/ne.dll?bh0bkyd2>. It will tell you whether the Internet 'sees' your computer. If you can be seen, you're more vulnerable to

hacking and your computer could be made a drone.”

From Shirley Hailstock: “I received a message yesterday from a weird looking AOL address. It seems harmless. It was from a “supposed” student and was asking for information from an author. Yet there were only two questions. One on “what” not “who” influenced you to write, and the second on when my birthday is. I immediately thought this could be a scam. Many people use their birth dates as passwords on the Internet or for bank cards, etc. I am not one of them since I have no bank card and I don’t use it on the Internet either. What could they want with my birthday?

“The message says nothing about the nature of the project. In my reply I answered neither question, but requested the name of your school, the phone number of the school, the class which this project is being done for, the teacher’s name of that class, and the project title. I will verify it by calling the school and asking for that teacher. If I get no reply, I don’t reply either.

“I’m sorry about being paranoid, but I’m getting more and more requests for these school projects. And each one is less and less about writing and more about what personal information they can obtain. I only put this information here because I think the harmless-looking e-mails are immediately answered and sent off without thinking. But, they could be traps.”

From Patricia Rosemoor: “You can honestly decrease porno spam as I do by opening the headers and forwarding it to **abuse@\_\_\_\_\_** —fill in the blank with the information you find in the header. Sometimes I send it to several (as many as three) sources, including Yahoo (not lately, so it’s not the changeover) and probably the people who sent it to me if they have a separate domain. I used to get lots and lots of porn spam, but no more. And msn is particularly vigilant about getting rid of ‘clients’ who spam. They let you know.”

### 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. The benefit package includes:

- Traditional Dental Coverage
- Doctor Visits/Lab Work/X rays/Vision Coverage
- Fitness Reimbursement/Wellness Care/Maternity
- Infertility Programs

**Call 1 (800) 258-3669  
for further information.**

### Controlling Your Listserve Preferences through E-Mail

Subscribe	NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Unsubscribe	NINCLINK-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com
Switch to Digest	NINCLINK-digest@yahoogroups.com
Switch to Individual Mail	NINCLINK-normal@yahoogroups.com
No-Mail	NINCLINK-nomail@yahoogroups.com
<b>Moderators: If You Have Questions, E-Mail:</b>	
Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrendaHB@aol.com
Patricia de la Fuente	Patricia@hiline.net
Lorraine Heath	LorraineHe@aol.com

### Sites For The Frugal

If you’re on a tight budget or trying to save money for the Ninc conference, you might want to check out these sites:

[www.frugalhomemaker.com](http://www.frugalhomemaker.com)  
[www.SavingSecrets.com](http://www.SavingSecrets.com)  
[www.miserlymoms.com](http://www.miserlymoms.com)  
[www.stretcher.com](http://www.stretcher.com)  
[www.cheapsk8.com](http://www.cheapsk8.com)

They offer innovative tips on frugal living.

### Ninclink Subscribing and Making Changes

At [www.yahoogroups.com/group/NINCLINK](http://www.yahoogroups.com/group/NINCLINK), you can learn more about Ninclink, subscribe, or set your preferences (digest, individual posts, etc.). See reference chart, above.

If you discover sites that you think would be of interest to Novelists, Inc. members, please e-mail me, Lorraine Heath ([LorraineHe@aol.com](mailto:LorraineHe@aol.com)). **NINK**

## Who Said It?

*“No one else knows my lack of ability the way I do...my work is no good...I’m desperately upset about it...It isn’t the great book I had hoped it would be. It’s just a run-of-the-mill book. And the awful thing is that it is absolutely the best I can do.”*

- (a) Edna Ferber about *O Pioneers*
- (b) John Steinbeck about *The Grapes of Wrath*
- (c) Snoopy about *One Stormy Night*

Ans: page 18



# Pardon My Aztec

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 5

that the gray-haired lady wearing the perennial apron was not being entirely honest with me.

"The book, Ma, how'd you like the book?"

"I didn't read it."

"Jeepers crow, Ma,"—(we said that a lot around my house for reasons that will become evident later)—"did you break your glasses or something?"

She gave me that down-the-nose piercing-gaze look that I had come to know so well in my youth when I had broken one of the rules of etiquette, like eating lasagna with my fingers, and said, "It had one of those words in it."

Now, the French have a saying, *toujours la dace*. I think it means "don't let your mother get the best of you," so I charged forward boldly like I had in the old days with the lasagna. First, you pretend you never saw a fork before; then you look surprised when it turns up beside your plate.

"Where?" I asked indignantly.

"Where? In the book, how should I know where? You think I marked it?"

Running to one of the various racks around the living room (when the book came out, she bought out two bookstores and had my dad build racks), I grabbed a copy and shook it in her face. "I defy you to show me what you're talking about," I said, although I was pretty sure I was about to be clobbered.

She took the book and opened it to a dog-eared page. I had selected the book at random and was somewhat surprised until I glanced at the others and saw they were *all* dog-eared.

"How should I know where it was?" she said. "Try page four, paragraph six, line three."

Well, she was right. It was there, bigger than life and underlined with a yellow marker. I quickly searched my mental repertoire for another French phrase, something Napoleon might have used on his way to Elba.

"Oh, that." I laughed without too much conviction. "That's in dialogue."

"I don't care if it's in Aztec." She cast a suspicious glance at my tiny quiet wife of the time who was sitting at the other end of the dinner table and said, "You didn't learn words like that in my house."

I got to hand it to my wife; she just smiled and ate another cannoli. She told me later that she needed something in her mouth to keep her from replying. I had always wondered why she dieted for a week after visiting my mother.

"You don't understand, Ma. I didn't say that."

"So it's a typo? Maybe the editor is a pervert who runs around putting dirty words in all the books, huh? Or maybe it's a factory defect and they'll recall all your books." At that point hope gleamed in her eyes. My wife ate a piece of lemon meringue pie with two scoops of ice cream.

"No, no, no. You see, the character said that. Not me. I defy you to find any tiny bit of profanity in any descriptive blocks, the title, or the dedication—which by the way, was to you."

"That was nice. 'To my mother who was responsible.' Ha! Now the world thinks I tutored you daily on how to swear!" My mother glared, my wife reached slackly for the

cookie plate, and I squirmed.

"Look at it this way. If I were a newspaper reporter and I was interviewing a rapist-murderer—" my mother cringed and my wife smiled around an Oreo—"and the accused described to me in gory detail how he accomplished his horrible acts and I wrote them down, would I be guilty of the same crime?" I gave her my broad Clarence Darrow grin and lifted my glass of wine to my lips in my "your witness" pose.

"You are encouraging the youth of this country to use foul language, you with two children of your own. You ought to be ashamed."

I waved the book in her face and pointed to the dialogue block. "But that's a Harlem hooker talking, Ma. That's how they talk."

"On page 163, paragraph six... ah," she searched her memory, "yes, line five, you have our President saying that word. He would never say that word to the country."

My wife flashed me that "let's see you get out of this one" look and reached for the candy dish.

"No, he'd rather *do* that word to the country!"

Mom looked at me calmly and said, "When they come and arrest you for pornography and treason, don't ask me to bake you a cake with a thesaurus in it. Then it'll be too late to change your ways."

Well, it's several years later, and times haven't changed a whole heck of a lot. No matter how hard I try, one of those gosh darn words crops up occasionally in my books. And, in case you run into a matronly lady in a bookstore hand-editing books with a black magic marker, it's probably Mom. **NINK**



## BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 11

Story Structure, Plotting Tricks, Script Format, Storytelling Techniques, Storytelling Shortcuts, How to Get a Staff Job & Be a Show-runner, and so on.

The seminar will be held at Cloud Creek Ranch in Westlake Village, CA, with special discount hotel rooms available nearby. (Or—and I'm not making this up—camp on the grounds, porta-potties provided.)

The cost is \$350 for both days, with a \$50 discount for students and seniors (60 or over). More info is available from Brody Productions, Cloud Creek Ranch, 422 West Carlisle Road, Westlake Village, CA 9136. Or take a look at the website at <http://www.tvwriter.com>

### Suit Settlement

At presstime, *PW Daily* announced that the American Booksellers Association, its 26 independent bookstore co-plaintiffs, and defendants Barnes & Noble and Borders have reached a settlement in the lawsuit charging federal antitrust activity and violation of a California state statute prohibiting unfair trade practices.

According to the ABA's allegations, the chain bookstores were involved in illegal deals from publishers that included the following: special discriminatory prices; extra advertising allowances that subsidized discounting; extra payment for the display of agreed-upon titles in prominent store locations; extra credit terms that included anything from lengthened allowances for time of payment to simple write-offs of debt; and a variety of other profit-enhancing terms that were illegally solicited by the chains—unknown and unavailable to other customers.

B&N and Borders will pay \$4.7 million to settle the three-year-old lawsuit. **NINK**

*Thanks to everyone who contributed to this month's column. Please zap news and sundry items to me at [write2pam@aol.com](mailto:write2pam@aol.com).*

## MEMBER NEWS...Compiled by Kathy Chwedyk

### Bujold in Finals for Nebula Award

Lois McMaster Bujold is pleased to report that her novel *A Civil Campaign* (Baen Books, 1999) is one of the final nominees for this year's Nebula Award for best science fiction or fantasy. The categories include novel, novella, novelette, short story, and screenplay.

The Nebulas are voted by the writer-members of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA).

More information about the Nebulas and Nebula Weekend, including a complete listing of all the nominees, is available on the SFWA website at [www.sfwaweb.org/](http://www.sfwaweb.org/).

Bujold's next novel, *The Curse of Chalion*, a fantasy unrelated to any of her prior works, will be out from Eos/HarperCollins in August, 2001. Sample chapters are being posted, one every three weeks till publication, on Eos's website at [www.eosbooks.org](http://www.eosbooks.org).

### Link, Heggan, McGoldricks Win HOLT Medallions

Gail Link, Christiane Heggan, and Jim and Nikoo McGoldrick were awarded HOLT Medallions by the Virginia Romance Writers RWA Chapter.

Link won best long contemporary for *Sullivan's Child*, a Silhouette Special Edition.

Heggan won best mainstream for *Enemy Within*, which was published by Mira Books.

The McGoldricks, who write as May McGoldrick, won best short historical for *The Dreamer*, which was published by Onyx Books.

### McLaughlin wins Veritas Award

The Romance Writers of America (RWA) has awarded Pat McLaughlin its Veritas Award for a journalistic endeavor that accurately conveys the romance publishing industry. The award is for an article that ran in the *Washington Post's* Outlook section in July, 2000. Novelists, Inc. members generously shared their experiences with Pat for the article.

Kathleen Gilles Seidel, Carolyn Males, Anna/Sherry-Anne Jacobs, Mary Kennedy, Jane Malcolm, Cheryl Zach, Laura Resnick, and Laurie Miller/Grant were quoted in the final article. Georgia Bockoven, Dawn Reno, Judy McAnerin, Ruth Glick, Jan Hudson, Pam Toth, Shirley Parenteau, Sally Hawkes, and Joan Reeves provided material that helped shape the article—material that McLaughlin would have loved to use, she said, if the editor would have just let her fill the entire section that week. McLaughlin said the award goes to all these wonderful writers. And to Nancy Szokan, the Outlook editor who backed the article from the start.

In addition, McLaughlin, writing as Patricia McLinn, had two books final in the Virginia Romance Writers' HOLT Medallion competition, *At The Heart's Command* and *Hidden In A Heartbeat*, both in the long contemporary category. The books are Silhouette Special Editions.

The next Patricia McLinn book out—*Almost a Bride in June*—will start a new Special Edition miniseries for her called "Wyoming Wildflowers," followed by *Match Made In Wyoming* in July and

Cont. on p. 20 ▶ ▶ ▶



**Laura Resnick is**

# **THE COMELY CURMUDGEON**

## **“Read It and Weep” (Reader Mail: Part One)**

“Do you take good care of yourself?” a reader asks me one day in a letter. She explains that reading my writing is like having a conversation with a very close friend, where all she needs to do is listen a lot and occasionally nod her head in agreement. She goes on to ask, “Do you look both ways before you cross the street and drink lots of water and get regular check-ups? I sure would be disappointed if something happened to you before you finished writing down everything that you have to say.”

At a moment like that, I think, wow, despite the rejection letters, the snide reviews, the publishers lost, the public disappointments, the private fears, the dismissive comments, and the jeers, I’m doing something worthwhile here. I have every reason to persist and persevere. Someone out there who has never met me, and perhaps never will, has written to urge me to stay alive and keep writing, because my work matters to her.

Many of my readers are actually apologetic about writing to me, saying they’re sure I get pestered by too much fan mail (yeah, right) and don’t need yet another reader bothering me (HAH!), but they were so absorbed by something I wrote that they nonetheless felt they had to contact me. Several have even apologized for being so “disrespectful” as to ask when the next book is coming out, because they just can’t wait. Some have written to ask me, always very politely, to further build on certain characters or certain aspects of previous work. And even those readers who don’t feel they must apologize for “disturbing” me with their approbation nonetheless clearly have no idea just how much their positive comments mean to me.

As I said to someone recently, I sit by myself in my office day after day, completely alone with a project requiring months upon months of sustained effort, drive, commitment, and vision. And when it’s finally done, I turn it in and <drum roll>... I get a revision letter. Not applause, not ovations, not the roar of the crowd. No, I get told about all the ways in which the work is inadequate and in need of improvement. (Okay, to be fair, most of my editors have also made sure to tell me what they like about the work while telling me how it needs to be fixed. But you—you of all people!—know what I mean.)

By the time the work goes out into the world, I’ve already grown used to the consistently anti-climactic events

which have greeted it ever since its birth: editing, copy editing, production, packaging, shipping, etc. Then come the reviews. It doesn’t matter how many reviewers praise the work, because (a) I write for readers, not for reviewers, and (b) I have certain ingrained prejudices about reviewers which prohibit me from getting all misty-eyed and pride-filled even if they like a book. Besides, no matter how many good reviews a book gets (if any), you can always count on someone feeling honor-bound to trash it thoroughly in print for all the world to see (Hi, Kirkus!), or perhaps even pointedly ignore it as beneath them. There are, for example, authors whose books repeatedly make the NYT list and yet whom the NYT *Book Review* considers unworthy of its notice. My first sf/f novel was reviewed in any number of mainstream presses, but completely ignored by the most prominent review journal of my own genre (Hi, *Locus*!).

### **Why Bother?**

So one day you’re thinking, why do I bother? What was I thinking? Why didn’t I become a civil rights lawyer or a casino manager or a lion tamer instead of a writer? And just as you’re ordering grad school catalogs, or packing your bag and preparing to run away and join the circus... You get a letter like this:

“I am nineteen years old and really never liked reading. But for some reason I bought your book *In Legend Born* and I was totally engulfed in it. I would find myself reading for hours on end. And that’s real rare in me. It takes a special kind of book to do that. I think I have only enjoyed two maybe three books in my life, but yours blew them all away... You made [me an] avid reader and [now I] am eagerly awaiting your next book.”

And suddenly, even lion taming doesn’t seem as appealing as sitting down to write your next book, your next chapter, your next page, your next word. Because suddenly you’re reminded that people are reading what you write, people care, people want more—and part of what made you a writer, and a pro, is the drive to tell your tales to others, to keep them absorbed, to keep them coming back for more.

Reading that I turned a non-reader into an avid reader was one of the most rewarding moments of my career. Among my favorite comments, in general, come from people

who write to tell me that I kept them up too late at night, I made them late for work, I made them miss appointments. Okay, so I'm not a nice person, I enjoy spoiling my readers' lives. But when other writers sit around arguing about whether they want to entertain or educate, amuse or teach, tell a story or impart a lesson, my own goal is always much simpler: I seek to absorb.

I thought the ideal compliment was something once related to me about another writer's book: My friend Julie had recently given birth to her much-wanted first baby. A week or two after the child was born, Julie was lying in bed one night reading Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander*. She heard a baby cry and thought, "There's a baby in my house?" A moment later, she came out of the story enough to recall that it was her baby, and the center of her life at that time.

Now that's an absorbing reading experience! As a writer, I strive to achieve that level of absorption in the reader, to make the setting and its characters seem that real, the conflict that important. To make the reader care so much that, while the book is open, the story seems more real to her than reality. I strive for that as a writer, because that's what I long for as a reader. Those are the books I remember, whether humorous or dramatic, whether light or dark, whether "important" or "fluff."

I love to hear that someone who hasn't gotten absorbed in a book for years couldn't put down *A Blonde In Africa* (even if he decided, upon reading it, that nothing on earth could get him to go to Africa), or that an actor who was paid to read *In Legend Born* for an audio books company found it so absorbing that he kept forgetting to concentrate on his performance skills while reading it.

## What We Can Impart

Each writer strives to achieve whatever she most wants to impart to the reader's experience, and the reader mail we get is perhaps the primary means whereby we find out if we have succeeded. Reader mail is also how we learn that we have contributed to someone's reading experience—and perhaps even his or her life—in ways we didn't expect, as well as in the ways we tried to do so.

Ninc member Sandra Hill, who writes humor, says she often receives mail from readers who thank her for making their lives a little brighter during dark times. One particularly moving letter which she shared with me, when asked, was from the wife of a severely ill diabetic who had recently received an organ transplant which saved his life. In addition to dealing with the obvious stress of this, the reader was additionally dealing with the guilt of knowing the organs came from a teenager. "I could not accept," the reader wrote, "the fact that someone's child had to die in order for my husband to live. The thought haunted me morning, noon, and night, till I thought I would go mad with grief." She goes on to tell Hill, "Then I opened your book." And the joy and laughter she found there helped her recover from the grief and guilt. "You gave me back my perspective," she says to Hill, and

goes on to talk about how much laughter has been an essential part of her and her husband's lives in dealing with his illness and with the fears and consequences of it. "Thank you," the reader concludes.

Another reader says she is a longtime fan of Hill's, as was the sister she recently buried. "Thanks for bringing to both our lives some humor," the reader writes, "and [for] the help it gave us as [my sister] battled her cancer. Hopefully she can read in heaven!" Since I remember some of my younger cousins drawing bright pictures and laying them in my grandmother's casket at her wake to try to relieve the grim atmosphere, I was particularly moved when this reader told Hill how she had placed the cover of her sister's favorite Hill novel in her sister's casket at the wake.

Of course, authors who write books about difficult issues often get strong reader response. Mary Jo Putney, for example, says that her most memorable reader mail has usually come as a result of writing about characters with serious problems—such as alcoholism or epilepsy—in stories which seem to touch chords in people who aren't used to seeing these issues addressed in popular fiction. Such readers often tell the writer about their own personal situations, glad for the opportunity to share with someone who, as they have already seen, truly understands the problem.

However, it is the reader, not the writer, who decides what a novel means to her. Susan Wiggs received this letter from a reader of *The Charm School*: "You changed my life, and my whole perspective on the world. I would not be the person I am today without you. You have a tremendous gift. You can take people away from their lives, and whether they enjoy their own lives or not, you bring them into another person's world. You can make people love your characters, and hate them. You can bring people joy, or make them cry. You can make a person's life better, simply by writing with your born skill for writing. I'm living proof of that. Thank you."

The above letter came from a passionate young adolescent who felt that Wiggs' writing helped her cope when the members of her clique dumped her. She feels that as a result of Susan's work, she found a way to respect herself more, live life on her own terms, and make new friends more worthy of her friendship. Okay, if we weighed human experience on an objective scale, we'd probably have to say that losing a loved one to cancer or knowing that your spouse's life was saved by the death of a youngster are probably bigger, darker, harder experiences than being rejected by your junior high school clique. However, human emotion can never be assigned accurate objective weight.

If you think back to your adolescence, you may well remember how overwhelming the pain of peer rejection was, and how helpless you felt in such circumstances. And this teenager articulately expressed to Wiggs just how much *The Charm School* contributed to her personal maturity as she confronted a typical example of the growing pains we must all face and triumph over in order to eventually become functioning adults.

▶ ▶ ▶



## THE COMELY CURMUDGEON



### The Other Kind of Mail

However, despite how moving or influential some of our reader mail is, we've all also received... The Other Kind of mail.

Perhaps a reader insults you when intending to compliment you: "Dear Brilliant Writer, You and [insert the name here of the author whose writing you most loathe] are my two favorite writers in the whole world, and your recent brilliant novel is right up there alongside [insert the name of the most offensive and semi-literate novel you've ever read] as the best I've ever read." You may be a more tolerant and openminded person than I am, with far more perspective than I have; but when I get a comment like that, I usually think, "Oh, my god, I've got to quit writing for the good of mankind!"

Or perhaps you've gotten genuine hate mail from readers. Author Lynn Flewelling received a lengthy letter telling her she was threatening the fabric of American life with her books. (It might have upset her more, of course, had the letter's author not been a prison inmate.) Flewelling also hears from homophobic

fundamentalists from time to time—who are usually astonished to discover that she's a churchgoer, a background which they apparently don't associate with tolerance and compassion. Nora Roberts once got reamed for killing a cat in *Montana Sky*. "No mention was made," Roberts says, "of the human beings who'd been scalped, sliced, and disemboweled. But I'd killed a cat. I was a terrible person, and she was never, never reading me again." Whereupon we may postulate that some readers, yes, get a little too absorbed in a work of fiction.

Anyhow, while we may need the Good reader mail to keep us going when the tunnel, far from having a light at the end of it, is actually caving in on us and releasing toxic gas fumes while trapping us beneath rubble, we must always keep reader mail in perspective... because there is also the Bad reader mail, not to mention the Deeply Weird. A writer who took her mail too seriously would probably be checked into a padded cell by well-meaning relatives within a year of becoming published. Next month, this column will share some of the priceless examples provided by Nink members: reader letters which prove that it does indeed take all kinds to make a world. **NINK**

### Who Said It? (Quoted on page 13)

The correct answer is (b), John Steinbeck about *The Grapes of Wrath*.  
And the author of *O Pioneers* is Willa Cather, not Edna Ferber.



## In Philly...

Meet these industry  
honchos...and your  
colleagues and  
friends....

Editors, agents, and  
publishing professionals  
already planning to  
attend are:

Cecilia Oh, New American Library; Damaris Rowland, the Damaris Rowland Agency; Claudia Cross, Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc.; Steven Zacharius, Kensington/Zebra; Sarah Gallick; Christine Zika, Berkley; Malle Vallik, Harlequin Web; Jennifer McCord, Northwest Bookfest; our own NINK publisher Sandy Huseby; and stand-up comic Brian Kiley from the Conan O'Brien show.

### New This Month:

Susan Race, coach, Personal Growth Systems & author of the book *Succeeding in the Workplace*;  
Jenny Bent, Harvey Klinger, Inc.; Steve Axelrod, The Axelrod Agency;  
Ann LaFarge, Kensington/Zebra;  
Audrey LaFehr, executive editor, Dutton/Signet;  
Hilary Ross with Dutton/Signet



# Liberty, Futurity



# Equity, in Philly

**September 6-9, 2001  
(the weekend after  
Labor Day)**

**Adam's Mark Hotel  
Philadelphia, PA  
City Ave. & Monument Rd.**

## ***On the "Mark"...Why you need this conference this year...***

First off this month, check out the new conference sidebar that will keep you updated on just which editors, agents, and publishing professionals are planning to attend.

Second off this month, for any of you planning to drive to the Adam's Mark, the hotel's street address is 4000 Monument Road, Philadelphia. Relatively accurate turn-by-turn directions can be gotten off the Internet through mapquest.com—though I personally tend to trust my AAA (auto club) Internet maps for even better accuracy. <vbg>

Third off, it's Monday Moaning, and I've just been reading the Ninclink and realizing that we—all of us—seem to be in dire need of *this* conference *this* year.

Liberty, Equity & Futurity in Philly not only has a nice ring to it, but seems to me more and more appropriate to our situations as writers of popular fiction for the 21st century. Two recent Ninclink discussions in particular prompt these observations: one was a discussion on being categorized or pigeonholed not only by a publisher or publishers but by one's readership, and the other is the age-old discussion on what stress does to a writer's creativity. And we're not really talking simple burn-out here, but real-life, down and dirty, get-in-the-way-of-everything, all-capital-letters STRESS.

My life is a piece of cake compared to many of the writers who make use of Ninclink to dish, get advice or empathy, share problems and stresses, etc. It hasn't always been. But that's not the point. The point is that despite the lack of *real* stress in my life, I'm still not writing much at the moment. No, I'm not burned out or suffering from writer's block, I simply have a life.

Part of that life is a brilliant seventeen-year-old daughter who's graduating high school in a month near the top of her class and who's having trouble deciding where she wants to go to college. She's stressing over whether or not she wants to attend the prom, what she should wear and how much more scholarship money she can find for herself in order to lighten her parents' "overloaded financial burden." And she's willing to do

the work to find the scholarships, but she's definitely not willing to stress alone; mom must stress with her because mom's the one who has to take care of much of the paperwork.

Another part of my life is putting together the 2001 Ninc conference, answering questions, fielding suggestions, and overseeing the project generally. Do I ask for help when I need it? Heck, yeah! I'm one of the best darned delegators you'll ever meet. Does it get in the way of my writing time anyway? Eh. Some. But it's not really the physical *time* I devote to the conference itself, or to my daughter's future—or my son's, for that matter (and trust me, that's a whole 'nother ball of silly putty <g>). It's the creative energy I put into these ventures. I'm not being paid for any of them, but they satisfy the creative urges of the writer within me—and I don't like it, not one bit. Why? Because I can't live in the fictional world while I'm living in the real one—lovely as it may be at the moment—that's why.

The adage that a "writer writes" is pure bull. A writer does a wide variety of things besides "apply ass to chair and fingers to keyboard." A writer lives and breathes and collects grist for the mill and cogitates. A writer backburners 90 percent of the ideas and projects s/he has in mind at any given time to concentrate on getting through one or two. And sometimes these "one or two" things have nothing to do with writing anything, let alone popular fiction, or getting paid for it. And that's why we need our annual conference, and this one in particular. We need it to blow off steam, to renew ourselves, to remember that we're not alone, and to collect grist for the mill. And this year we also need it to learn to grow beyond who and what we are at any given moment. We need to free ourselves to the possibilities (Personal Growth Systems coach Susan Race will help us there!), and to allow ourselves to get to the fullness of a new and equitable future. In short, we need each other. In Philly.

See you there. **NINK**

*(Next month: brochures, bios, see & do Philadelphia.)*

## MEMBER NEWS.....

▶ ▶ ▶ Cont. from p. 11

*My Heart Remembers* in December.

### Nine Members Nominated for Lifetime Achievement

Barbara Keiler, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Maggie Osborne, and Robin

Lee Hatcher have been nominated for the Lifetime Achievement Award by RWA.

### Susan King is RITA Finalist

Susan King's novel, *The Stone Maiden* (Signet, 2000) is a RITA

finalist for Long Historical. The RITA is awarded by Romance Writers of America.

Please send news for this column to Kathy Chwedyk at [KChwed@aol.com](mailto:KChwed@aol.com) or 1215 Fairmont Court, Algonquin, IL 60102.

## Fast Track.....Compiled by Marilyn Pappano

*The Fast Track* is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today top 150 bestseller list. Members should send Marilyn Pappano a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Marilyn's phone number is (918) 227-1608, fax (918) 227-1601, or online: [pappano@ionet.net](mailto:pappano@ionet.net). Internet surfers can find the list at: <http://www.usatoday.com>

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

### USA Today Bestseller list—March 2001

Patti Berg, *Born to be Wild*, Avon  
Stella Cameron, *7B*, Mira  
Catherine Coulter, *The Scottish Bride*, Jove  
Catherine Coulter, *Warrior's Song*, Signet  
Christina Dodd, *Rules of Attraction*, Avon  
Dorothy Garlock, *More than Memory*, Warner  
Kristin Hannah, *Angel Falls*, Ballantine  
Lorraine Heath, *Never Marry a Cowboy*, Avon  
Norah Hess, *Flint*, Dorchester  
Sandra Hill, *The Blue Viking*, Leisure

Susan Johnson, *Tempting*, Brava  
Joan Johnston, *The Texan*, Island  
Jayne Ann Krentz, *True Colors*, Mira  
Stephanie Laurens, *All about Love*, Avon  
Kat Martin, *The Secret*, Zebra  
Connie Mason, *A Breath of Scandal*, Avon  
Cathy Maxwell, *The Marriage Contract*, Avon  
Anne McCaffrey, *Pegasus in Space*, Del Rey  
Carla Neggers, *The Carriage House*, Mira  
Susan Elizabeth Phillips, *This Heart of Mine*, William Morrow  
Amanda Quick, *Wicked Widow*, Bantam  
J.D. Robb, *Betrayal in Death*, Berkley  
Nora Roberts, *The Stanislawski Sisters: Natasha and Rachel*, Silhouette  
Nora Roberts, *Considering Kate*, Silhouette  
Nora Roberts, *Heart of the Sea*, Jove  
Nora Roberts, *The Villa*, Putnam  
Erica Spindler, *Bone Cold*, Mira  
Mariah Stewart, *Voices Carry*, Pocket  
Joan Wolf, *Royal Bride*, Warner

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