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

ALWAYS AND FOREVER NEW YORK (IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER):

A Studio Publisher's Relationship to The City

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW
BY JULIE TETEL ANDRESEN

When I first had the idea to start my own publishing studio in 1996 and then launched it in 1997, I did not do so because the New York publishing business was not working. I did so because the New York publishing business was not working *for me*.

After ten-plus years and sixteen mass-market romance novels, I had come to realize that the industry was not set up to support my financial requirements, my vision of my writing self, or my writing future. Now, that realization did not lead me to believe either: a) that there was something wrong with New York publishing; or b) that there was something wrong with me. Oh, all right, I most likely

did think both a) and b) for a while, possibly even for a good, long while. However, the point is that I got past both blind spots and took steps to set up a publishing system that I thought would support my writing interests and goals. Now, four years later, I am happy to report that studio publishing works very well for me and that New York is very much an okay place to do business.

My satisfaction has derived from understanding the relationship of the little guy—be it the studio publisher

or the individual writer—to the “big publishing system” (most easily captured by a geographical reference to New York) and in defining my own place in that relationship.

**How Not to Cut Off
Your Nose to Spite Your Face**

In other words, I am not much in sympathy with Fred Moody’s rant “Never Again, New York: Authorship

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Our Favorite Books

BY PAMELA BROWNING

It was Laura Resnick’s column about the books she has loved that gave me the idea for this project, but I have to admit that I’d been thinking about it for a long time. Ever since I was a kid, really.

By the time I knew I was meant to be a writer around the age of eight

or so, I was reading everything from encyclopedias to cereal boxes, but I suspected that writers, real writers, were supposed to read selectively, and deeply, and with some seriousness. All the advice I found about becoming a writer said, “Read a lot.” But read *what*?

I set out to find out what writers

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

This is the column in which I'm supposed to tell you how wonderful our conference in Philadelphia was. It was, indeed, a wonderful conference. But it happened a lifetime ago, and when I think about it now, it seems like a distant star glimmering faintly in a night-dark sky. Less than 48 hours after the attendees hugged one another goodbye and checked out of the Adam's Mark Hotel, our world changed forever.

Everyone knows someone who knows someone who was there. Some of our members were there, including several who had decided to spend a few days in the New York area before returning home after the conference. Most of our editors, publishers, and agents were there. Those of you on Ninlink may have seen my post about how my agent in midtown Manhattan, Charles Schlessiger, was able to contact my parents on the Upper West Side when I couldn't get through to them on the telephone. By the time my agent reached them, they had heard from my nephew, who worked in the World Trade Center's south tower. He had made it out of the building and was among the hordes of dazed pedestrians migrating north through Manhattan, and my parents—who had no long-distance phone service then or for days after the attack—asked Charles to let me know my nephew was safe. Charles has often phoned me with good news, but the news that my nephew had survived was the best he'd ever delivered.

My nephew grabbed three things from his desk before he fled the building: his wallet, the key to his bicycle lock, and a Harry Potter book.

Books will save the world.

I can't guarantee that; I can't tell you that books alone will help our nation and its allies to root out the terrorists who conceived and carried out this heinous act. But I am a writer, and I believe in the power of books. Through books we can reach others, connect with them, console them. We can share our fears and our hopes. We can speak the truth.

Nonfiction writers—the journalists, the historians, the experts—can educate and enlighten us, can provide us with the facts we need. But writers of popular fiction speak a different kind of truth. We write stories of epic struggle in which justice prevails. We write narratives of bitter antagonists who learn to love each other. We write thrillers in which the Good Guys win, mysteries in which the crime is solved, novels in which heroes and heroines refuse to give up. They keep going, fighting against evil, searching for knowledge, risking their hearts, and clinging to their faith. Our books are more than distant stars shining from a million miles away. They are beacons. Their light cuts through the darkest night, illuminating the path that lies before us.

When I faxed some pages to my editor in Toronto a couple of days after the attack, I included a cover note in which I apologized for not having sent the pages sooner. I explained that not only had I been anguished about my nephew's safety, not only is New York City my home town, but the community I live in now, like so many surrounding Boston, had lost people on the hijacked planes. My editor e-mailed me to let me know she'd received the pages, and then she wrote, "There are no words." She meant that she had no words of comfort for me, no words that could begin to express the shock and outrage civilized people around the globe were experiencing. Yet it was an ironic statement for an editor to make to a writer: *There are no words.*

There *are* words. Slowly, gradually, they are coming back to me. Let them come back to you, too. Do what writers do: write. Tell the truths you know. Share your stories. Shed your light on this dark and grieving world.

— **Barbara Keiler**

A STUDIO PUBLISHER'S RELATIONSHIP

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

for No Fun and No Profit" that appeared in *NINK* in June 2001.

While reading the piece, I kept thinking, "Hey, Fred, lose the attitude and grow up!"

Any big system such as big publishing has the potential to magnify both mistakes and benefits. Most members of Ninc have probably had publishing experiences on a par with Fred Moody's that have left us wondering how the idiot publisher is able to open the office door in the morning and turn on the lights day after day. At the same time, a privileged number of Ninc members have also experienced the magnified benefits of the big system: megabucks, high visibility, career control, invitations to A-list publishing parties—not to mention the opportunity to work with some of the most talented agents, editors, designers, marketers, and publicists around, many of whom just happen to be in New York.

Q: What happens in small publishing?

A: The same things, only on a smaller scale.

In the midst of writing this article for *NINK*, I was confronted with a \$2,000 mistake concerning the printing of a promotional piece for a new title, *Fat Like Us* by Jean Renfro Anspaugh (forthcoming under my nonfiction imprint, Generation Books, December 2001). Several people were involved in the mistake, and I am truly mystified that one of them, in particular, is able to stay in business. We're working to straighten it out, but I already know I won't recover all \$2,000.

And, yes, I have managed to make my own share of mistakes all by myself, which I count as learning experiences as long as I don't make them twice. My most expensive mistake to date cost me \$5,000—chump change for a big-time publisher, but enough to hurt, though not to kill, a small fry. All in all, then, in small publishing, mistakes tend to get minimized.

The more interesting question is: Are the benefits of small-time publishing also proportionately smaller than those of big-time publishing? The answer is Yes and No.

Certainly, "mega" is not a word that currently collocates with "bucks"

to describe my bottom line, and as for visibility...let's just say that *People* magazine hasn't called yet to put my picture on the cover. (By the way, would that be a good thing?)

On the other hand, I have creative and career control equal to any writer on earth, I like the parties I'm invited to, and I work with talented people—writers, editors, copyeditors, book designers, graphic designers, printers—who don't, it seems to me, make more mistakes than other people in other places.

In a therapeutic way, my ability to function outside of the New York system has served to normalize my relationship with New York. Instead of seeing it as a place where the little folk get chewed up and spit out of the cogs of an uncaring and inefficient publishing machine, I have come to appreciate New York for its clout and its usefulness as a place to do business.

The pragmatist in me values a good relationship with Small Press & Vendor Relations at Barnes & Noble headquarters and understands the importance of reviews in *Publishers Weekly* and *Library Journal* whose offices are also in New

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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

Marty Ambrose, Bokeelia, FL

Geri Borcz, Pensacola, FL

Barbara Hannay, Townsville, Queensland, Aus.

Janelle Burnham Schneider, Kingston, Ontario, Can.

Elizabeth Doyle Fowler, Cedar Creek, TX

Claudia Welch (*Claudia Dain*), Raleigh, NC

Kris Neri, Granada Hills, CA

New Members

Cherry Wilkinson (*Cherry Adair*), Covington, WA

Eliza Shallcross (*Elizabeth Brodnax*), Metuchen, NJ

Barbara Schenck (*Anne McAllister*), Dubuque, IA

Malia Nahas (*Malia Martin*), Aliso Viejo, CA

Elizabeth Bevarly, Prospect, KY

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

Prospective members may apply online at www.ninc.com.

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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ York. One thousand copies of the first nonfiction book I published, *Real Birth: Women Share Their Stories*, by Robin Greene (Generation Books, 2000), were sold on the strength of a “Highly Recommended” rating from *Library Journal* alone. That’s a very nice number for a small press. Selling the second thousand took more effort.

Quite simply, it does not make sense for anyone in the publishing industry not to want to leverage an important part of the system that operates through New York.

All Right, But—

You might be thinking, “All right, but—” where the “but” might be followed by: “Can you really make it on such a small scale, given the competition that’s out there?” “Don’t you, deep down, want one of your books on a major bestseller list?” “Sure, it’s nice to know that mistakes are minimized in small publishing, but isn’t the upside, such as you’ve described it, extremely limited?” “All this thinking small is giving me a mental cramp. I’m a writer with an outsized imagination; plus I’m a North American, and I tend to think big. I’ll stick with New York publishing.”¹

NOTE: I am not advancing any aesthetic arguments here for “less is more” or “big is bad” or, alternatively, “the bigger, the better,” for that matter. I am not going to moralize that “how much money/status/fame you want in life is a personal matter” or that “a good book is its own reward, so who needs bestseller status?” Neither am I recommending studio publishing to my fellow writers. Nor am I disrecommending it.

Rather, I’m exploring the relationship of the small to the big. My pur-

pose here is to suggest ways that the individual can strengthen his or her publishing career, and I want to do that by challenging the very notions of “big” and “small” that underpin the hypothetical questions and comments I posed above and that I have been using all along. In other words, I’m advocating mental reorganization. Oh, yuk.

Yeah, and here’s the even-worse part: you have to act on your reorganized mentality and manifest it concretely in the real world. The good news is, if you’re currently anxious about your publishing lot, reorganizing your relationship to yourself and New York really can, indeed, strengthen your career for the long term.

Do you have the “claw model” of publishing in your head? You know the claw. It’s that machine at an amusement park where some kid puts in a quarter and operates the knobs to control the movement of the claw above a heap of cute stuffed animals. All the animals are thinking, “Pick me! Pick me!” The kid may be going for the pink elephant, but the claw grabs the green crocodile instead. So, now there’s the green crocodile, suspended in space, The Chosen One, on top of the bestseller list, while all the other stuffed animals are lying at the bottom, feeling unloved and pretty sure that the whole process is random. (In that publishing model, I allow that both the pink elephant and the green crocodile are equally talented and hard working; the “random” part concerns whose talent and hard work is in the right place at the right time, i.e., gets “picked up” and valued.)

If you have anything close to such a model in your head, get rid of it. It’s disempowering.

Now I’m going to repeat what every self-help book on creativity has

ever said: when you are doing what you are supposed to be doing, when you are writing what you are supposed to be writing, when you are following your own path and speaking what you know to be your own truth, you will have complete control over your destiny. It’s not about big and small. It’s about doing what you need to do. Another way of saying this is: I have recently discovered that the big system needs the individual just as much as the individual needs parts of the big system. In fact, “little” and “big” have ceased to be terribly relevant terms for me. We’re all in one big, intertwined mesh. Quite a surprise.

Morley Safer and 60 Minutes Come Calling

I mentioned that I am publishing a book, *Fat Like Us* by Jean Renfro Anspaugh. It’s a collection of dieting narratives from what Jean calls “ground zero of our nationwide diet culture,” namely Durham, NC, a.k.a. Diet Capital of the World.

When I first got the manuscript, it was rough, but I fell in love with Jean’s voice and the emotional range of the stories. I acquired the book during a time when Jean was in conversation with two high-profile New York agents who also saw the possibilities of the manuscript. Jean chose Generation Books because my vision for the manuscript matched hers. I can guarantee you that she didn’t choose Generation Books for the advance monies.

The manuscript had developed out of Jean’s master’s thesis in folklore that she wrote at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She had done her field work next door in Durham, where she collected over one hundred diet stories. Before entering grad school, she had been a patient and lost one hundred pounds on one of the four internationally known diet programs there.

I had no difficulty imagining the possibilities of a popular treatment for Jean’s stories. It could have been a doozy along the lines of *Fat Girls Have Sex and Do Drugs in Durham*. But I

¹ You might even be thinking, “Are you still a writer? It looks like you’re not.” I have, in fact, just finished the second reincarnation romance that I am publishing under my fiction imprint, *Madeira Books*. However, since my topic here is the nature of my relationship with New York, I’m focusing on the business side of my studio rather than my own writing projects.

embraced the anthropological framework hidden away in the book, the hints at the medical history of diet culture, and the spiritual journal of the dieters, all of which Jean had identified but not foregrounded. Most especially I loved the glossary. (Q: *What's a nickel?* A: *A five-hundred-pound woman.* Q: *What does "pulling the apron" mean?* A: *I'll let you read the book to find out.*)

Jean and I had many conversations about the direction in which we were taking the book. We were both clear that the treatment we were giving her work was not exactly the popular way to go, but we both wanted to do the book our way with a kind of academic integrity (for lack of a better term) to make it more than a collection of diet stories. We've produced a book that is, to my way of thinking, not only the fat community's *Canterbury Tales* but also an examination of body politics in contemporary American culture and of the complex relationship that all Americans have with food. Our idea was that *Fat Like Us* was going to have the audience it was going to have. Two thousand readers. Five thousand readers. Whatever.

Now things have changed a bit. By a wildly unpredictable set of circumstances, the producers of CBS's *60 Minutes* found out about the book and asked me for a copy of the manuscript. They fell in love with it and decided to use Jean as Morley Safer's guide to diet culture in a segment they're doing on The Diet Capital of the World. The segment will air on a Sunday between this September and December.² The producers praised the manuscript as being "rich and profound" and said that "it strikes a vein." We heard rumors that it was being passed around the CBS offices.

Needless to say, I am delighted to have this confirmation of the quality of the book, but at the same time, I

already knew that the book was good, and I was confident that it was going to do well for me, whatever that meant. Of course, I realize that it is now likely to have a bigger audience more quickly than it would have had without the exposure to the *60 Minutes* audience of 30 million viewers, so the only difference that the prospect of increased attention is making in my life these days is that I now have a new set of publishing problems to solve.

It Felt Right

Still, this CBS episode confirms for me that I was doing what I needed to be doing. I wasn't worrying about how my actions fit or did not fit into a big system. I wasn't looking over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching or caring or approving or disapproving. It didn't matter. It still doesn't matter. I just knew what I was doing and that it felt right.

And if *60 Minutes* hadn't found me? I would still be publishing a good book (although I probably wouldn't have been approached to write this article). Somewhere along the way, it occurred to me that CBS is benefitting from the effort that we have put into the *Fat Like Us* project as much as we will potentially benefit from their interest in it. I am beginning to understand that good business relationships are all about symmetry—which is why I've abandoned thinking in asymmetrical terms such as "big" and "small." They just don't do any conceptual work for me anymore.

Through this experience, then, I have come to realize that there are only chains of activity in the publishing world, and if the interests of one chain intersect with those of another chain, then fine. If not, then that's fine, too.

Sorry, Fred Moody and "Never Again, New York." You had the wrong assumptions about what New York could and would do for you. It's not there to validate you or to make your publishing life easy or to earn you a living. Now, given the concen-

tration of chains of publishing activity in New York, authors tend to orient themselves in that direction. However, the only thing those chains can do for an author is to give him a forum. How an author is subsequently treated by a publisher directly reflects the author's value to the publisher. That seems plain enough. For a good link to be forged, the two chains of activity—the author's projects and goals and the publisher's projects and goals—must be reciprocal, and the benefits to those activities must be mutual and symmetrical.

By the way, I now know why *60 Minutes* has the reputation it does for quality investigative journalism. Their producers, their camera crews, and

When you are writing what you're supposed to be writing, when you are following your own path and speaking what you know to be your own truth, you will have complete control over your destiny... It's about doing what you need to do.

their star journalists are smart, thorough, professional, and personable. Truly, it's a pleasure to do business with New York when you're working with the best.

Another New York Link

Six years ago, when I still believed that I needed a New York publisher to pay attention to me, me, me in order to advance my writing career, I probably couldn't have gotten arrested in The City. Now that I'm minding my own business (literally), who but a reporter from *The New York Observer* should call me—and on the very day I was dealing with the \$2,000 promo-piece boo-boo, no less.

It so happened that the reporter was working on an article that looped into my work as both a

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² As of August 20, the date I submitted this article to NINK, we had not yet been informed of the air date. We figure we aren't going to get more than, perhaps, a week's "heads up."



BREAKING NEWS

BY OLIVIA RUPPRECHT

A Not-So-Odd Couple

Former President Bill Clinton vacated the White House amid cheers from his detractors only to be welcomed by Publisher's Row with open arms and pocketbook—to the tune of over \$10 million for his memoirs, considerably more than the \$8 mil that Hillary bagged for her own deal with Simon & Schuster. Knopf's purchase is believed to be the largest ever paid for a nonfiction book, exceeding the \$8.5 million Pope John Paul II received in 1994 even with inflation figured in.

But presidential memoirs have a reputation for raking in more losses than profits. Sonny Mehta, president and editor-in-chief of Alfred A. Knopf, part of the Random House division of Bertelsmann, explains, "I think he is up there, one of a handful." They're banking on big sales overseas and Clinton's being one of the most fascinating personalities of the century. Says Mehta, "I'm as curious to read it as you are."

No one is totally sure what the content will be beyond a "comprehensive and candid book about Clinton's life, with particular emphasis on the White House years." Whether that candor extends to Monica Lewinsky or the Whitewater investigation remains to be seen (oh, come on Bill, dish!). As for why the memoir never made it to auction, Clinton is quoted as saying, "One of the main reasons I chose Knopf is the chance to work with Robert Gottlieb."

Gottlieb is a character in his own right. When Clinton arrived in formal suit and tie for their first editorial meeting at Knopf, Gottlieb greeted him in baggy trousers and a worn-out tee shirt. Having played a large role in the careers of Joseph Heller, ▶ ▶ ▶

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▶ ▶ ▶ romance writer and now a publisher, and the way he got my name and number was so extraordinary that there was no way I ever could have deliberately set things up to capture his interest. He conducted an intelligent phone interview, and I'm guessing that the resulting article will be, if not exactly laudatory of my work, at least responsible to it.³ Although I have no way to prove this, I believe that I will get more mileage out of this article's running in this paper with its circulation of 60,000 than I would if it ran in a publication with a similar circulation figure but with a less publishing-industry-oriented readership. Such is the power of New York!


"The New York Publishing Industry" Deconstructed

Clearly, my interpretation of "the New York publishing industry" is extremely broad and extends beyond the acquisitions and marketing departments of the big publishing houses that seem to be the focus of many authors' current frustrations. I, personally, have no reason to limit my interpretation. I'm even prepared to deconstruct it. As for the "New York" part of "the New York publishing industry" phrase, one could argue that Oprah in Chicago is the book center of the universe, that Amazon.com in Seattle has forever changed the way books are bought and sold, and that the publisher in Florida responsible for the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* phenomenon has reinvented book sales and marketing. In my own specialized world, I am currently in negotiation with a

publisher in the Midwest who specializes in pregnancy and childbirth for the rights to *Real Birth: Women Share Their Stories*. Publishers are everywhere and, as a result, publishing deals are everywhere.

Even the "publishing" part of the industry seems to be more of a pleasant fiction these days than a reality. All of us, to some degree or another, have been absorbed into the vast entertainment industry, a fact underscored by the German, British, and Australian media conglomerates who now own the global distribution systems that funnel through New York. We might as well face it. Writers have become just other type of content provider, while publishers are just another type of content aggregator.

That's it, then—the little drum beat I have been tapping out in the past few years: in the globalized world we now inhabit, brought to us by Microsoft and Viacom and the WTO, the individual has been both decidedly marginalized and immeasurably empowered. I see no reason not to understand the conditions of my marginalization and then wield my power accordingly.

New York? Take it or leave it. As long as significant publishing chains cluster there, I'll take it and happily forge the links that profit me most. 

Julie Tetel Andresen is the author of numerous historical romances with mass-market publishers and now a series of reincarnation romances under her fiction imprint, Madeira Books. The most recent is The Crimson Hour. Check out www.fatlikeus.com for information on gastric bypass surgery (i.e., "stomach stapling"), diet drugs (Xenical/Orlistat, Quick Slim, etc.), representation of fat people in movies, the super-size-it obesogenic environment we live in, and the latest statistics on fat American children, fat American adults, and the rising incidence of obesity worldwide.

³ If you're interested to read it to see if I'm right, you can run a search of articles by Ian Blecher at observer.com, checking dates after August 20. I don't know the title, but the general subject matter involves the work of the literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Favorite Books

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read because I figured there had to be a pattern, there had to be a clue in the books that had shaped them, and maybe those books would help me too. For a while I devoured autobiographies of writers because sometimes they mentioned the books they'd known and loved. I read newspaper articles about writers, and I searched *Life* magazine and *The Reader's Digest* and other publications too. I discovered roundabout ways to find out what writers read; for instance, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy in *Little Women* play-acted the characters from Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*, so I read *The Pickwick Papers* because I knew that Louisa May Alcott had admired that work enough to include its characters in her book. And so on.

Now here I am, a writer with a whole bunch of books under my belt, still a compulsive reader of encyclopedias and cereal boxes and books, books, books. But somehow I'm still fascinated by the question: What do real writers read? What books are important to them?

When I asked Ninc members to list five favorite books, I thought I would get mere lists. But no. You sent impassioned comments, pleas to be allowed to name more books, enthusiastic explanations of why you chose the books you did, and you even included addenda of books that would be on your lists if you were allowed more.

Some of you sent titles with no authors, one person sent a list of authors and mentioned her favorite books by them. Some stuck to the

rules and listed five books. Some indulged in rule-bending and included four books and a trilogy—in other words, seven books. Some listed series, such as the six-book *The Lymond Chronicles*, which thereby put them one over the five-book limit. And then there's the creative tactic of proclaiming a two-book tie for one of the places on your list!

At first I didn't intend to print anything but the five-book lists, but you proved that it's hard to put a good writer's work down, so some of your comments are included. Some are not, but it's only because of lack of space. Also, I found that I didn't have the heart to cut the explanations that you gave about lesser-known or obscure works if that little blurb would introduce your favorites to other appreciative readers.

In no particular order, then, here's what you said. Here's what you've read.

Suzanne Simmons: *Rebecca* by Daphne DuMaurier, *Dune* by Frank Herbert, *Lord of the Rings* by J.R. Tolkien (admittedly a trilogy), *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White (still a kid at heart), *The Once and Future King* by T. H. White (that Arthurian thing.)

Denise Dietz Aalborg: *Boys and Girls Together* by William Goldman, anything by Celeste DeBlasis (started with *The Proud Breed*), *The Watchers* by Dean Koontz, *Rosemary's Baby* by Ira Levin, and (tie) *Almost Paradise* by Susan Isaacs and *Katherine* by Anya Seton. There are many more authors and books that shaped my life (and career), including John Steinbeck, Ian Fleming, Stephen King, Charles DeLint, Betty Smith's *A Tree*

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BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ Michael Crichton, and Toni Morrison, to name a few, he is known for being nurturing yet heavy-handed. On a personal front, he's considered equally contradictory. From his passions for classical ballet to collecting plastic women's handbags and paintings on velvet, he's both highly refined and an eccentric bohemian at heart.

Peter Osnos, publisher of PublicAffairs and an editor who has previously worked with Clinton, believes it is Gottlieb's great appreciation for both low and high culture that uniquely suits him to editing the presidential memoirs. "Bill Clinton is a high-low person," Osnos says, "and Bob Gottlieb appreciates both."

A No-Brainer for John Wiley & Sons

Hungry Minds, Inc., publisher of the vastly popular "For Dummies" series of how-to books, handed over their assets and liabilities (BIG liabilities) to John Wiley & Sons for \$90 million in cash and a \$92.5 million assumption of debt. Considering the success of their marketing gimmick, a tongue-in-cheek insult to their readers' intelligence, one has to wonder how they dug themselves so deep into a money pit. Their woes reportedly began with stiff competition from Penguin's "Idiots" guides, coupled with declining sales of technical books. Hungry Minds also extended their debt load with many other acquisitions over the last few years, including Frommer's travel guides, the *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Betty Crocker cookbooks, Cliffs Notes study guides, and Howell's dog owners' guides.

Wiley is not part of a larger media company, being one of the last few midsize publishers in the U.S. Known for publishing scientific, technical and medical journals, along with textbooks and other professional literature, the Hungry Minds computer books are expected to make a neat fit with current offerings. In order to offset some of their own newly minted debt, it's anticipated that Wiley will sell some of the other lines just acquired; i.e., ta-ta to Webster and bow-wow to Fido—the dictionaries and dog books will probably be the first to go.

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BREAKING NEWS

Hi and (Mostly) Bye

Speaking of publishers parting with their assets, Carolyn Nichols has resigned from NAL, and Louise Burke has been replaced by Kara Welsh from Pocket. Meghan Dillon has bid adieu to Harlequin. Michaela Hamilton will join Kensington Books as editor-in-chief.

For Speed Readers Only and Other E-Book News

Well, you knew we'd have to get around to it, didn't you? E-books and the news surrounding them have become such a standard fixture in the industry, there's just no avoiding the subject. Fortunately, since our own Lorraine Heath does such a fab job with her Online column, Breaking News can stick to an assortment of juicy tidbits that *The National Enquirer* just wishes they'd gotten to first!

Picking from this neat little box of Whitman's Sampler delights, what do we have but a time-bomb program from RosettaBooks. It's cheap, you bet, going for a single George Washington a pop. That's right, folks, for \$1 a reader can purchase the right to read Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. Wow, what a deal! But wait, there's a hitch: Time being money, RosettaBooks has put a limit on the amount extended to readers. Ten hours, to be exact, and once that ten hours is up, "Poof!" the file becomes unreadable. Guess a dollar's just not what it used to be.

Ready...set...go! And they're off, Penguin UK in the lead, the first British division of a major publisher to beat its U.S. counterpart with an e-publishing program. They've announced an impressive start of 200 e-books on a variety of subjects, including Lisa Jewell's *One Hit Wonder* before its print release. What's odd is that the UK Publishers Association took to the BBC Radio, warning that children are robbing authors of e-book royalties by downloading titles onto their Palm Pilots and ▶ ▶ ▶

Favorite Books

▶ ▶ ▶ *Grows in Brooklyn*, but the above books really made me FEEL—smile, laugh, cringe, and cry.

Miriam W. Aronson (formerly Minger): *Kristin Lavransdatter* by Sigrid Undset, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Island of the Swans* by Ciji Ware, *Byzantium* by Michael Ennis, *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck.

Barbara Keiler: *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland/Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll, *A Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller.

Jean Ross Ewing: *The Lymond Chronicles* by Dorothy Dunnett, *Gormenghast Trilogy* by Mervyn Peake, *Lud-in-the-Mist* by Hope Mirrlees, *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut, *Dune* by Frank Herbert. But what about Edith Pargeter and Dorothy L. Sayers and Ursula K. LeGuin and

Linda Barlow: *The Lymond Chronicles* by Dorothy Dunnett (actually this is a six-book series. If I had to choose my favorite among them it would be the last one: *Checkmate*, the ultimate intelligent romance with the best romantic hero in all literature and the most appealing heroine after Elizabeth Bennett); *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, the perfect novel. I re-read it whenever I'm feeling low, and it cheers me right up. When it comes to plot, style, character development, humor—no one is better than Austen. Emma might technically be a finer novel, but *P&P* wins because of the appeal of Elizabeth and Darcy. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare, a Newbery Award winner for young adults published in the '60s—this is a book I'll always remember and love.

The Crystal Cave by Mary Stewart

(or, indeed, almost anything by this author). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles—hmm, the only one written by a man. Dunnett and Austen stand head and shoulders above everybody else for me; I can think of a dozen other novels I could just as easily have put in the 3-5 position, including *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Rebecca*, *The Mysts of Avalon*, *The Forsyte Saga*, *Catch-22*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Possession*, *The Golden Compass*, *Little Women*, *The Once and Future King*, *Jude the Obscure*, and anything by Mary Renault, Anya Seton or Jan Westcott.

Sherry-Anne Jacobs: Fancy having to choose only five books! There are about 20 on my top list. However, these are very significant books to me: *Kelly Park* by Jean Stubbs, *Friday's Child* by Georgette Heyer—how do you choose just one of her books? *Morning Glory* by LaVyrle Spencer, *Foreigner* by C. J. Cherryh, *Restoree* by Anne McCaffrey. And if you want another dozen great books, get back to me.....

Fran Baker: *The Magic of Believing* by Claude M. Bristol (50-year-old book that teaches readers to use their subconscious and turn thoughts into achievements ... still available in an updated edition), *The Glory and The Dream* by William Manchester (narrative history of America from 1932-1972—should be used in every American history class in this country), *Outlaw* by Warren Kiefer (simply one of the best novels I've ever read—a true American saga of love, adventure and history), *Blue Highways* by William Least Heat Moon (armchair travel extraordinaire), *Reporting World War II*, Parts 1 & 2, *The Library of America* (simple yet eloquent anthology that evokes an extraordinary period in American history).



BREAKING NEWS



showing them off to their friends on the playground. Um, okay. Sure, it's the principle of the thing, but just how many kids are going to give up the monkey bars to read something the teacher didn't even assign? Unless it's Harry Potter, that is.

Moving from the UK, on we go to Russia. Forget the Whitman's chocolates, Russian programmer Dmitry Sklyarov could probably use a stiff vodka after being indicted by a grand jury in Las Vegas on one count of conspiracy along with his Moscow-based employer, ElcomSoft, as well as four counts of trafficking technology. Sklyarov wasn't on U.S. soil when he committed the alleged crime of breaking an encryption and therefore violating the DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act). However, a subsequent trip to Vegas, where, ironically, he gave a speech on the weaknesses in e-book encryption methods, landed him in the waiting arms of the FBI.

The charges could mean up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for conspiracy as well as another \$500K in fines, plus another five years in the slammer for each count of trafficking (you do the math). The *LA Times* called the case "a surprisingly aggressive indictment against a Russian programmer, setting the stage for a significant battle over the nature of copyright law and free speech in the digital age."

For diplomatic reasons, and demonstrations on Sklyarov's behalf that has accuser Adobe Acrobat backing off, the government is trying to strike a deal while making their point that copyright infringement will not be tolerated. If negotiations move at the speed of the information highway, Dmitry will be slamming down some Stoli with his comrades by the time this goes to print.

After the hard hit Mr. Sklyarov took, MIT is trying to keep it hush-hush as to which of their programmers broke the encryption of Microsoft Reader. ▶ ▶ ▶

Anne Holmberg: I keep finding it impossible to pick any five. Then it suddenly struck me: I COULD pick the five (well, all right, six) authors whose work led me to writing romances rather than any other genre.

Jane Austen (especially *Pride and Prejudice*), Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*), Zane Grey (especially *Nevada*), Georgette Heyer (one of my favorites: *The Unknown Ajax*), Mary Stewart (beginning with *The Moonspinners*), Madeline Brent (*Tregaron's Daughter*).

Ann LaFarge: *The Last Puritan* by George Santayana, *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, *Colony* by Anne Rivers Siddons, *World's End* by T. Coraghessan Boyle, *The World According to Garp* by John Irving.

Teresa Medeiros: The books that are part of my blood and bones are *A Fine And Private Place* by Peter S. Beagle, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson, *Summer of My German Soldier* by Bette Greene, *Mystery of the Witches' Bridge* by Barbee Oliver Carleton, *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman.

Eileen Hehl: *Katherine* by Anya Seton (read at least 20 times by now), *Marjorie Morningstar* by Herman Wouk, *High Tide at Noon*, *Storm Tide and Ebbing Tide*, all the Bennett's Island books by Elisabeth Ogilvie (these have been read every year also, my whole adult life).

Jodie Larsen: *The Stand* by Stephen King, *Mrs. Mike* by the Freedmans (a childhood favorite that my daughter loved, too), *Fear Nothing*, *Seize the Night*, and *The Watchers* by Dean Koontz

Cynthia Pratt a.k.a Lynn Bailey: These days my list would include *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Persuasion* by Jane Austen, *These Old Shades* by Georgette Heyer, *A Civil Campaign* by Lois McMaster Bujold, and *Moving Pictures* by Terry Pratchett.

JoAnn Ferguson: *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, *Moonstruck Madness* by Laurie McBain, *The White Dragon* by Anne McCaffrey, *Crocodile on the Sandbank* by Elizabeth Peters, *Have Spacesuit Will Travel* by Robert Heinlein.

Carole Bellacera: The five books that shaped my life—*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, Anya Seton's *Green Darkness*, *The Moonspinners* by Mary Stewart, *Gone With The Wind* by Margaret Mitchell.

Judy Gill: *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand, *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri, *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maude Montgomery, *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress* by Robert A. Heinlein, *I, Robot* by Isaac Asimov. Actually, I'd rather say any/all of Asimov's Robot novels, because there are too many to list.

Lillian Stewart Carl: I could send you a list of a hundred, but my top favorite, gotta re-read it regularly book? *Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, which is almost the only book that blew me away in my teens that still does. Even when that niggling little internal editor points out, for example, that Mr. Tolkien had a real love for the word "cloven," the sheer lucidity of his prose keeps me coming back again and again.

Lori Handeland: *Skye O'Malley* by Bertrice Small, *Nobody's Baby But Mine* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips, *The Shadow and the Star* by Laura Kinsale, *Lord of Scoundrels* by Loretta Chase, *Guilty Pleasures* by Laurell K. Hamilton.

Jeanne Savery Casstevens: Dorothy Dunnett's *Game of Kings* because it is the best written historical I've ever seen. Scott's *Ivanhoe* because it introduced me to the concept of bowdlerism, an outrage I've never forgotten or forgiven. There are a whole bunch of series mystery writers just because I enjoy ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

The anonymous programmer says he did it for his own use, but what this brouhaha really underscores is the fallibility of digital rights management. Internet journalist Wade Roush perhaps has the clearest eyed perspective: "Until software makers and publishers can figure out how to protect their e-books without treating all readers like thieves, the summer of beach-blanket e-books may never materialize."

Such a quote is the last thing Larry Kirshbaum probably wants to hear. Mr. Kirshbaum hit the front page of *The New York Times* a year after going public with his Time/Warner brainchild, iPublish. Despite discouraging results initially, he remains optimistic. "Perhaps we were too-early adapters," he said. "We were the early birds who went out to catch the early worms and there weren't very many." Nonetheless, Kirshbaum believes they can expect sales nearing \$1 million by year's end and \$50 million a year within the next five. He admits, "There is no question that consumers have not accepted the retail price structure we set forth."

Giving bite to his words, iPublish has forged ahead by releasing three books out of a pool of 1,300 submissions along with a big push for the authors selected. They include a legal thriller/romance by Kate Donovan, a sci-fi novel by Jerry J. Davis, and a medical thriller by Fred Petrovsky. The books can be specially ordered in on-demand print, and should they sell well in that venue or digitally, Time/Warner will offer them as conventional books.

Okay, all done with this little Whitman's Sampler of e-news for the month—except for a mushy center with a thumbprint in it. Amazon creme, anyone?

Money, Money, Money

The New York Times ran an

Cont. on p. 14 ▶ ▶ ▶

Favorite Books


▶ ▶ ▶ them. There is the Narnia series because it teaches ethics painlessly. Number five? Any George Heyer because she makes me laugh, which is healthy.

Linda L. Crockett/Linda Lea Castle: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo, *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas, *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Black Stallion Series* by Walter Farley, Ian Fleming's Bond books, all of Jack London's, and all of Catherine Cookson's.

At the end of her list, Cynthia Pratt wrote, "But in truth, how can a voracious reader even begin to choose? One title occurs, but a dozen others arise to crowd it out, all

shouting 'Wait! What about me?'"

So true.

And now that I've finally found out what real writers read, now that you've reacquainted me with so many wonderful books and brought to my attention so many more worthy ones—I'm off to re-read *The Moonspinners*. 

(Pamela Browning's list includes *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Gone With The Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, and *Dominic* by Kathleen Robinson, a picaresque novel about a dwarf set in ancient Roman times. Her favorite cereal boxes were Cheerios.)

I invite you to join me on a Writer's Journey, a mission of discovery to explore and map the elusive borderlands between myth and modern storytelling. We will be guided by a simple idea: All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies. They are known collectively as The Hero's Journey. Understanding these elements and their use in modern writing is the object of our quest. Used wisely, these ancient tools of the storyteller's craft still have tremendous power to heal our people and make the world a better place.

— **Christopher Vogler**
The Writer's Journey

BY LORRAINE HEATH

I recently received a very pleasant e-mail from a lady who was compiling a list of books that features Rubenesque heroines. I didn't have any heroines in my books that fit the description she was looking for, but I did pop out to her site. I was greeted by an attractive man. The first thing I noticed was that his shirt was unbuttoned to reveal an amazing chest. The second thing I noticed was that his shirt wasn't the only piece of clothing that wasn't fastened. I did a double-take, then a triple. Yes, indeed. To say the least I was surprised by what he was exposing, and it was the last thing I expected to see on this site, following the very nice e-mail.

As authors, we are often bombarded by e-mail from people who want to help us promote our books or want to include our works on the lists they are compiling. It's very tempting with our busy schedules to respond without checking out the website or verifying that indeed this is a site where we want to be mentioned. Perhaps all promotion is good promotion. I don't know. But I do think it behooves us to click the URL they provide and take a gander at the site before we respond with the name of one of our children.

Promotion

Post Card Mania, <http://postcardmania.com>, is the newest in a list of sites that provide post cards. They also have mailing services so you can submit your database and they'll address and mail the cards for you. According to their information, you'll pay around 17 cents per card instead of the 21 cents the post office now charges. However, it appears that they do charge you 4 cents to address the cards. So do read all their services carefully so you don't get surprised by any hidden costs.

C K Marketing, <http://books.2itb.com>, is a service designed to help you market your books to booksellers. Some of its other services include sending out press releases, getting reviews, evaluating your website, and arranging speaking engagements. While the book reviews require asking for a specific quote, the other services seem to be available for \$89 each.

The Hopeful Romantic, <http://www.thehopefulromantic.com>, is a new online e-zine designed for romance readers. The cost to subscribe is \$19.95 a year, which allows you to access the private area of the site in order to read the magazine. Authors, however, can get into the "Authors Only" section by simply completing a registration form. When it asks for payment, simply cancel. You will then be sent a log-in ID and a password. There are several free services, including an events calendar that you can utilize.

Teresa Medeiros alerted us to a new review site: *Love Romances*, <http://www.loveromances.com>. She was interviewed and found the experience to be very positive.

Research

This may seem like an unlikely site, but *Insulting Stupid Movie Physics*, intuitor.com/moviephysics/index.html, is not only a fun site to visit but it explains why you shouldn't have a hero jumping through a plate glass window and what you really see when a bullet is fired. And what about those cars driving off a cliff? When would they really explode? This site provides the answers.

Jo Beverley shared two wonderful sites to help those of us who are moving our settings to England. *British Titles of Nobility*, <http://laura.chinet.com/html/titles01.html>, is extensive. Jo's own contribution, <http://www.sff.net/people/jobeverley/Title.html>, "is sort of 'titles for romance writer dummies,' no slur intended. It's incredibly informative and helpful in explaining many of the different aspects of the peerage. "It includes warnings about some of the more common errors, such as confusing Lady Mary Smith and Lady Smith, and having adopted sons inherit titles." Jo said, "If anyone can think of common errors that I haven't mentioned, please share them with me and I'll include them. Best to know ahead of time!" Thanks, Jo, for providing such an insightful article.

Who would have thought that in 1880, Minnie was a top ten girl's name? If you're struggling with character names, Mary Kennedy suggested the *Baby Center*, <http://www.babycenter.com/babynames/popnames.html>. It includes the top ten names for each decade beginning with 1880.

Another interesting site is the *Inflation Calculator*, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation>. You enter an amount and a beginning year. Then you enter an ending year. \$5.00 in 1860 was worth how much in 1870? The calculation will tell you that in 1870, \$5.00 was worth \$7.41. In 2000, that same \$5.00 was worth \$92.49. It's fun to toy with the numbers. You can also do it in reverse order. Something purchased in 2000 for \$100 would have cost \$5.81 in 1881. Of course, these are simple calculations, and other factors may need to ▶ ▶ ▶

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
Moderators:	
If You Have Questions, E-Mail:	
Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrcndaHB@aol.com
Patricia de la Fuente	Patricia@hilene.net
Lorraine Heath	Lorraine-Heath@home.com

▶ ▶ ▶ be considered for an accurate pricing—but it can provide a starting point if you want to include amounts.

This month Terey daly Ramin shared a unique search engine: *The One Woman Production*, <http://www.pacinfo.com/~shirley>. She wrote, "Great place! Thought other members might enjoy it, too." Thanks, Terey, I did enjoy browsing the site.

Very often on Ninlink, someone will be looking for a site because they remember it was mentioned either on the list or in the Online column. Terey has created a web page for herself "and a *links* page that provides links to a LOT of research and info sites for writers, many of which we've done in your Online column. It also includes a free knitting pattern link for one of my own creations." Her site is http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/t_ramin. I've also just started designing my own pages and I plan to add all the Online links to my site. But it's still under construction. So whenever a memory teases and you think someone mentioned a site, you might check out Terey's site for the link. If it's not there, then posting the question on Ninlink is bound to get you a response. Our members are incredibly informed.

Links of interest:

Irish Language Learning Site: http://www.geocities.com/thomas_ihde/irish.html

Geneology sites on the Internet: <http://www.cyndislist.com/>

History timelines: <http://history.searchbeat.com/>

History references and resources: <http://history.evansville.net/referenc.html> (and yes, referenc does not have an "e" on the end)

Odin's Castle of Dreams and Legends (Medieval History): <http://www.odinscastle.org/index.html>

Spamming

Every month it seems that the subject of SPAM comes up on Ninlink. To get involved in the fight to make Spamming illegal, check out *Spam Abuse*, <http://spam.abuse.net>. If you are really bothered with SPAM, then you might consider registering at the *Network Abuse Clearinghouse*, <http://www.abuse.net>. It is a complaint forwarding service, but it only allows registered members to complain.

Doing It Yourself

These days many of us are designing our own websites. As our skills develop, we find ourselves wanting to move beyond the simple page that only provides information. *Bravenet*, <http://www.bravenet.com/> can help you get a guestbook on your site, a message board, and chat forum.

Just for Fun

Check out *Useless Knowledge*, <http://www.uselessknowledge.com/>. As is becoming common among sites, it has a free newsletter to which you can subscribe. But browsing the site is interesting without the newsletter. And also very informative. How did a Brit get a divorce before 1857? And what about interesting U.S. town names: Deadhorse, Nothing, Two Guns, Climax, and Hell Hollow to name a few? Although it didn't list my favorite Texas town, Old Dime Box.

An addictive site that provides a bit of a break is *The Reflex Tester* at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~pyang/>. Feel free to e-mail me your best time.

OUTLOOK® Tip of the Month

If you are receiving individual posts and have no need or desire to have your mailbox filled with your replies to Ninlink, consider setting up this rule:

Apply this rule after the message arrives


Where the From line contains "your e-mail address" and

Where the Subject line contains "ninlink," Delete it.

If you subscribe to several lists, you can add those lists to the subject line in a format of "ninlink" or "heathlist" or "lorrainelist," etc. Or if you're certain you'd never want to read anything that you sent yourself, you don't have to specify a subject line.

Ninc Listserve

At www.yahogroups.com/group/NINCLINK, you can learn more about Ninlink, subscribe, or 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 at lorraine-heath@home.com. 

CALL FOR ARTICLES

NINK needs articles, and we pay. Okay, it's not a lot, but it's not bad, either. As far as subject matter and style, anything goes. We particularly need lead articles, and I'd like to see pieces about serious issues written in a hard-hitting journalistic style.

We publish Op-Ed pieces, though we don't pay for those or for Letters to the Editor. You do not have to be a member of Novelists, Inc. to write for **NINK**.

E-mail me at: write2pam@aol.com with your ideas. Or snail mail me at 7025 Quail Hill Road, Charlotte, NC 28210.

Need a jumpstart? I'll send a list of suggested topics. No phone calls, please.



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“If I Had Written It...”

Unless you’ve been living in a cave (quite possible, since you’re writers) or a foreign country (not all Ninc members are American), you probably know that a young intern named Chandra Levy disappeared from Washington, D.C., this spring, and that her disappearance became a national scandal due to her alleged affair with Gary Condit, the California Congressman for whom she worked.

As I write this, Chandra Levy has been missing for 120 days, and the pundits all say that it’s extremely unlikely she’s still alive. The more time passes, the less likely it is that even her body will turn up or that the young woman’s fate will ever be known. One can only imagine the pain and grief her family members must experience every day, not knowing what happened to Chandra, picturing horrific things, having no proof of life or death—and knowing the odds are increasingly against their *ever* having such proof.

As novelists, some of you have not only imagined but also explored in detail what people experience when their lives are ripped apart by the disappearance of a loved one. A few of you have probably also explored the additional agony experienced when the media turns such a dark event into a scandalous farce which frequently humiliates the victim, as has been the case here.

Congressman Gary Condit, whose involvement with Chandra is the plot point which turned her tragedy into tabloid material, stayed silent for more than three months while the scandal raged and the fruitless search for Chandra continued. Then, finally, Condit broke his silence in late August and gave a TV interview to Connie Chung—followed by a veritable media blitz.

After the Chung interview, media commentators condemned Condit’s behavior in the interview as stiff, legalistic, cold, shifty, and calculating. Polls indicated that the majority of Americans who’d seen the interview thought Condit had come off badly. Journalists noted that Condit seemed to have been coached by lawyers rather than PR people. Pundits declared he’d made the wrong choices, taken the wrong attitude, and failed to say the right things.

The scene where the famous figure finally comes clean in a high-profile interview didn’t work. Indeed, judging by the staggering proportion of thumbs-down reviews it received, it was a real flop.

Certainly it flopped with me. So as the rest of America discussed what would have made the scene work for them, I

found myself wondering what would have made it work for *me*. (I did this because I was way behind schedule to meet a tight deadline; so, obviously, further procrastination was the way to go.)

From a purely practical viewpoint, I thought Condit’s obvious mistake was in consulting lawyers, PR mavens, and political advisors. What Condit needed was a *novelist*.

(Time out for a word from our sponsor. I am not making political commentary here, though the subject of my comments this month happens to be a politician. In fact, I know nothing whatsoever about Condit’s political positions despite the many weeks he has been under intense media scrutiny.)

Where was I? Oh, yes...

I went straight from one deadline to another this summer, so I didn’t really follow the Levy-Condit scandal. However, it was such prominent headline news for weeks that even I, living in my cave, was aware of it and marginally acquainted with the plot outline and the character sketches. By the time I sat down to watch the Chung interview, my impression of Condit’s conduct was extremely negative. In other words, I was a reader who didn’t like the character. However, I’m also a novelist, so I understood that he *could* be a shapeshifter, a red herring, or even a deeply flawed protagonist laboring under terrible challenges.

So what would it have taken for Condit to win me over, in the Chung interview, to a more positive view of his character and his role in the story? I considered various possibilities: dewy-eyed remorse, emphatic contrition, compassion, prayers, apologies, denials, tears, anger, paranoia, cheerful idiocy... and I found that none of them satisfied me.

I realized I couldn’t think of a way to make the scene work.

Well, I’m a novelist, so I know that when a scene simply will not work, no matter what I do, that means I have to start my rewrite well before that scene actually begins. The origin of the problem lies earlier in the book, waiting for me to go back, discover it, and fix it so that the rest of the story can unfold as it should.

Work with me here.

If we rewrote this story to redeem Condit, what would he do? For me, the answer is obvious. As a writer of heroic fantasy, I see sacrifice as a crucial element of redemption. Sacrifice means giving up what we want ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶



BREAKING NEWS

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Cont. from page 10

interesting piece on Ken Follett that primarily focused on the fortune he's amassed and his philosophy of money. Having grown up in a British working-class family, he's a conservative investor with a taste for the good life. Al Zuckerman, Mr. Follett's longtime agent and chairman of Writer's House, a literary agency, says of Follett, "He doesn't skimp. He doesn't sit on his money." Follett makes some candid observations of his own about the green stuff, believing that investing in stocks is a total gamble and that Warren E. Buffett "is just lucky...He doesn't know any more than anyone else." And while he commands millions for a book, Mr. Follett likes his payments in monthly installments. "It's a comfort," he says, "It's pleasant to know how much money is coming in every month."

While some of his comments have an air of arrogance to them, this father of five grown children, most of them in the arts, has some down-to-earth views about the work ethic vs. over-indulgence. "There is something about rich kids that bothers me," he says. "The experience of working—of having to work for money—is an important growing-up experience. Knowing that somebody does not give a curse about you as an individual but just wants you to wash the damn dishes. If you do it, he will pay you, and if you don't, he won't. That is a growing-up experience."

Putting his money where his mouth is, so to speak, he explains how his daughter, an actress, emerged from drama school and was unable to land an acting job. No hand-outs from daddy dear, she "washed up in Ed's Diner, that kind of thing." Despite his lessons in character building and strong socialist leanings, Mr. Follett has no plans to leave his fortune to charity when his time is up. It will go to his children when he dies because, "I guess looking after your children in the end is more important than living in a just world."

Peter Maas Dies at 72

Peter Maas was more than a writer—he fought against corruption with the power of his pen. Author ▶ ▶ ▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ most. My consistent impression is that what Condit wants most is to preserve his stature. Consequently, I perceive his stature—his throne, so to speak—as what he must choose to sacrifice. And note that condition: *choice*. The character is merely a loser or a defeated antagonist if his stature is taken away from him against his will; redemption requires that he *choose* sacrifice.

If I were writing this story, the character in Condit's role would realize the jig was up when Chandra Levy disappeared. Initially, he'd panic. He'd spend a sleepless night in which he considers how to escape exposure and disgrace. Perhaps he'd even perceive an easy way to save himself at the girl's expense...but the part of him that exemplifies the heroic which (theoretically) exists within each of us would ultimately reject this path and, instead, courageously risk everything in order to pursue redemption. This epiphany would probably occur in a tense pivotal-moment decision and come as a surprise to his cynical political advisors—perhaps even as a surprise to himself.

As a result of this epiphany, the Condit character might well volunteer the whole truth in his very first interview with the police; if not, then he would actively seek a second interview in which he comes completely clean. He would go voluntarily to the Levy family (without his lawyer), offer his sympathy and support, and attempt to help them, their investigators, and the authorities in every way possible. When publicly questioned about his affair

with Chandra, the Condit character would accept full responsibility for his actions, as well as accept the consequences of his choices. In addition, he would speak warmly and respectfully of Chandra; he would speak of her as a person whose safety and well-being now mattered more than his career or his public image. He would genuinely make that young woman's life, rather than his throne, his first concern.

In this way, he might become a character about whom we care, a character we find humanly complex—and humanly heroic. Certainly his stature would be threatened by these acts. However, as currently written, his stature is threatened anyhow. Isn't that interesting, from a structural perspective? (This is one of the ways in which popular fiction repeatedly teaches us that it's worth being heroic, because being evil, venial, or cowardly so often works out badly in the end.)

If the Condit character achieved redemption through sacrifice, he might even regain his stature, or achieve even greater stature than he had previously enjoyed. That's one of the cool things about redemption; it's a big gamble, but there is a potential jackpot. Of course, the odds shift, depending on the author and the story. As far as I'm concerned, Sacrifice & Redemption isn't a pawn shop where you're guaranteed of getting back your valuables. If I were writing this story, the Condit character might conceivably find redemption via a major rewrite, but he also might genuinely lose his stature in the process and never regain it.

Indeed, in some stories, redemption really *requires* permanent sacrifice. If a character has a toxic relationship with power, for example, then retaining power obviously can't be part of his redemption. His redemption probably has to include his choosing a more humble station in life: the corrupt prince becomes an ascetic holy man.

So, yes, if I were writing this story and I wanted to redeem the Condit character, I'd do major revisions on the first part of the book. Maybe you're a better writer than I am, but I look at the manuscript which has been delivered to us and I freely confess, I can't redeem the Condit character as written. By the time of the Chung interview, it's too late. It doesn't matter if Condit comes off as cold, shifty, self-serving, and insincere. No amount of warmth or sincerity in that interview could make up for this character's behavior until then. He needs revisions.

Unfortunately for Gary Condit, you don't get to rewrite real life—especially not when you live it in the spotlight. A novelist could have told him back in early May what he needed to do then if he wanted readers to see him as a protagonist, a character who made them care. Too late now. However, there is still one possible technique that could change the course of the story. That's right: the plot reversal!

At this juncture, given the choices already made in the story, the only thing that can help the Condit character at all is a major plot reversal. Something far more creative and astonishing than I suspect Condit's people can manage, since they are only lawyers, PR types, and political advisors, after all, not novelists.

If I were the author of this story and had written myself into this corner, how would I get out of it?


I think I'd avoid a plot reversal wherein the victim (Chandra) is really the villain. Not only is it over-used, but it ignores the real challenge of this story: making the reader reeval-

ate the Condit character. He's the obvious source for a satisfying and surprising plot reversal, *precisely* because his characterization seems so beyond sympathetic interpretation by this point in the book. So perhaps the plot reversal would reveal that Condit character is deliberately drawing negative attention *to* himself and *away* from someone he's trying to protect. Who? The victim, who had a much darker secret than their affair, a secret which the Condit character will sacrifice himself in order to *keep* secret? Or is he protecting the real villain? Perhaps a family member or a political aide? Maybe the novel is an existential one, so the Condit character is self-sacrificing but very misguided, protecting someone who really shouldn't be protected, such as a homicidal President or corrupt political system? I suppose we could write a plot reversal wherein someone is deliberately framing Condit, but we'd probably still need a major rewrite to make the reader *care* that this character is being framed.

Unfortunately...one of the things you notice about real life after a while is that it rarely wraps up as well as fiction does. In a novel, we'd eventually learn Chandra Levy's fate; in reality, it's increasingly unlikely that we'll ever know what happened to this young woman, now missing for four months. In a novel, Gary Condit, featured so prominently in this story, would either clearly emerge as hero or villain, protagonist or antagonist, by the final chapter. This being real life, though, his role may well never achieve such clarity. (I will, however, go out on a limb and predict that he will not wind up a hero.) The truth about reality is that it's unlikely that a plot reversal will emerge to make this story satisfying and logical. Indeed, the story may never even have an ending.

When it comes to real life, the moving finger writes and, having written, moves on. If the story makes no sense, if injustice and confusion seem to rule the page, if characteriza-

tion is murky and characters' roles are unclear... that's just the way it is. No one gets to edit. No one has a red pen for reality.

And no one gets to revise. 



BREAKING NEWS

of such bestsellers as *The Valachi Papers* and *Serpico*, he revealed secrets of the Mafia and corruption in the NYPD. Other works included *Marie*, which detailed the story of a whistle-blowing Tennessee official who discovered the governor was trading clemency for cash and expected her to do the paperwork. As with his other endeavors, the research was beyond extensive, yet he maintained, "When I write nonfiction, it's like fiction. All the research, and the writing too, is a continual process of discovery for me."

His first foray into exposing the underbelly of organized crime detailed the structure and workings of the Mafia. *The Valachi Papers* was turned down by more than 20 publishers, and the house that finally bought it did so "only because of the insistence of a single editor there." The first hardcover printing sold out within days, and by the time a paperback deal was reached, 1.75 million copies of the book had sold. Although *The Valachi Papers* was turned into a movie starring Charles Bronson, Mr. Maas called it "one of the worst films ever made." Al Pacino starred in *Serpico*.

When asked about his motivation for writing, he said his work usually started "with some anger I have about something or what someone does about something that gets them hurt." Peter Maas—an author who purveyed his talent into a legacy of integrity and truth.

Olivia Rupprecht thanks the Nink colleagues who sent news her way. Please send news items to her at MRUSH11155@cs.com

MEMBER NEWS....Compiled by Kathy Chwedyk

Holt's Novella Wins National Reader's Choice

Cheryl Holt's novella, *Meg's Secret Admirer*, was chosen as the Best Novella of 2000 by the National Readers' Choice Awards. The novella was published by Zebra Books in the anthology, *Be My Valentine*, in January, 2000.

The award was presented in July at the national convention of the Romance Writers of America (RWA) held in New Orleans.

Her novel, *My Only Love*, was

nominated for the Aspen Gold Award by the Heart of Denver Romance Writers in the Best Long Historical category. Also, *Romantic Times* magazine selected the book as a Best Book 2000 and nominated it for the Reviewers' Choice Award in the Best-British Setting category. *My Only Love* was published by Zebra Books in April, 2000.

Holt's current release is *Love Lessons*, to be published by St. Martin's this month.

Hailstock Finals in Orange Rose Contest

Shirley Hailstock's novel, *More Than Gold*, which was published by BET Books in October, 2000, is a finalist in the Orange Rose Contest for Published Authors, sponsored by the Orange County Chapter of RWA. Winners will be announced at the OCC/RWA 20th Birthday Party Celebration on October 13, 2001.

Send news for this column to Kathy Chwedyk at 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. 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—August 2001

Catherine Anderson, *Phantom Waltz*, Oynx
Sandra Brown, *The Switch*, Warner Vision
Jo Beverly, *Devil's Heiress*, Signet
Catherine Coulter, *Riptide*, Jove
Catherine Coulter, *Hemlock Bay*, Putnam
Janet Evanovich, *Seven Up*, St. Martin's
Janet Evanovich, *One for the Money*, Harper
Paper
Janet Evanovich, *Hot Six*, St. Martin's
Janet Evanovich, *Two for the Dough*, Pocket
Suzanne Forster, *Angel Face*, Berkley
Patricia Gaffney, *Circle of Three*,
HarperTorch
Julie Garwood, *Heartbreaker*, Pocket
Tess Gerritsen, *The Surgeon*, Ballantine
Linda Howard, *Open Season*, Pocket
Linda Howard, *Mr. Perfect*, Pocket Star
Susan Johnson, *Seduction in Mind*, Bantam

Joan Johnston, *Frontier Woman*, Island
Katherine Kingsley, *Lilies on the Lake*, Dell
Mary Jo Putney, *The China Bride*, Ballantine
Julia Quinn, *An Offer from a Gentleman*,
Avon
Nora Roberts, *Reflections and Dreams*,
Silhouette
Nora Roberts, *Dance upon the Air*, Jove
Nora Roberts, *Carolina Moon*, Jove
Nora Roberts, *Sacred Sins*, Bantam
Nora Roberts, *Waiting for Nick*, Silhouette
J.D. Robb, Maggie Shayne, et al*, *Out of this
World*, Jove
Evelyn Rogers, *The Loner*, Dorchester
Bronwyn Williams, et al*, *Big Sky Grooms*,
Harlequin

* et al: additional authors who are not Ninc members at this time

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