

When, Where, and With What?

BY BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS

from *Word Work: Surviving and Thriving as a Writer*
to be published May 2002 by Invisible Cities Press

As a beginning writer, I suspected that more experienced writers knew about some almost-magical combinations of place, time, and tools that could help my writing go more smoothly. After a visiting writer had read in the university auditorium, I'd be the student who stood during the Q&A to ask, "Do you write at the kitchen table? Do you keep regular writing hours? Do you write your first drafts by hand? On what kind of paper? With what color of ink?" And the visiting writer might patiently answer all of these questions, but would more often answer only part of them and then say something about how the particulars of writing practice did not matter as much as finding some way, any way at all, to get words onto the page.

Now, of course, I am a more experienced writer. I no longer rise to ask questions from the audience. No,

now I get myself invited to the reception after the reading, because in that setting it's much easier to corner the writer and interrogate her until she gives a more complete and satisfactory account of where she writes, and when, and with what tools. At this stage in my career, I don't just *suspect* that place, time, and tools combine to make the writing go more smoothly. I know it.

Well, all right. I don't really corner honored guests at their receptions. But I'm tempted. I *do* eagerly scan interviews with writers to see if they'll talk about the details of how they get their writing done. I'm delighted when I learn, for example, that South African playwright Athol Fugard likes to grind his own ink. For each new play that he writes, Fugard selects a new pen, which he then retires once the play is finished.

I won't necessarily adopt many of the writing practices I run across, but I do learn something from most of them. Fugard's ink grinding may be a sort of ritual, like pencil sharpening, that helps to put him in the frame of mind that he needs for writing. While I don't know what Fugard gets out of having one pen dedicated to its play,

such a practice appeals to me in at least three ways. I could imagine that the play was already known to the pen, and that all I needed was patience to let the pen write it out. A pen so special that it could only be used for one task would remind me of the grand nature of that task. And the urge to retire the pen would give me a concrete event to work toward, since it might be a long time after I finished the play before it was performed and "finished" in the eyes of the world.

Does Fugard keep his retired pens or give them away as gifts? Which practice would appeal to me if I were to retire *my* tools? What tools do I use that I could dedicate to just one project? The notion of retiring some object after a work is finished appeals to me, and I might find it motivating and fun to find an analogous way to mark the completion of stories or chapters or books.

The right combination of place, time, and tools will do three things for a writer. First, it will keep him writing enough (rather than researching or thinking about writing or day-dreaming) so that a reasonable quantity of work gets finished. Second, it

Continued on page 3 ▶ ▶ ▶

Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne†	Evan Maxwell
Janice Young Brooks†	William Bernhardt
Jasmine Cresswell†	Victoria Thompson
Maggie Osborne†	Steven Wornack
Marianne Shock†	Julie Kistler
Linda Barlow	Carla Neggers
Georgia Bockoven † Founder	Barbara Keiler

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

2002 Board of Directors

PRESIDENT: Pat Rice
4100 Kingswood Road
Charlotte, NC 28226
Ph: (704) 341-7478
Fax: (704) 341-6195
Price100@aol.com

PRESIDENT-ELECT: Anne Holmberg
410 W. Central Ave #C
Belgrade, MT 59714
Ph: (406) 388-7534
Fax: (406) 388-7534
anneholmberg@juno.com

SECRETARY: Kathy Chwedyk
1215 Fairmont Court
Algonquin, IL 60102-1946
Ph: (847) 658-0732
KChwed@aol.com

TREASURER: Linda Kay West
204 Chaucer Lane
Mandeville, LA 70448
Ph: (985) 674-9298
Fax: (985) 674-0109
l.k.west@worldnet.att.net

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Jasmine Cresswell
465 Walls Way
Osprey, FL 34229-9068
Ph: (941) 966-6485
Fax: (941) 966-4929
jasmine444@aol.com

ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:
Georgia Bockoven
3324 Zircon Dr.
Rocklin, CA 95677-4725
Ph: (916) 624-7333
Fax: (916) 630-1145
gbockoven@jps.net

CENTRAL COORDINATOR: David L. Brooks
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 1166
Mission, KS 66222-0166
Fax: (913) 262-6435
E-mail: ninc@kc.rr.com

Website: <http://www.ninc.com>

Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

Copyright ©2002 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.

THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

Ah, dictator at last! (cue evil laughter) Curmudgeonly Laura, beware, for I can not only out-curmudgeon your curmudgeon, but carry a bludgeon with which to beat it. Or so they told me when they offered me the crown and sceptre of the Ninc presidency. Is that evil laughter I hear?

If anyone expects me to be wise and insightful, the yolk's on you. I like to argue. I like stirring up trouble. And I get bored easily, so I do these things on a regular basis. I'm also lazy and have no intention of doing everything myself, so when I point a finger at someone, that someone had better jump to it or it won't get done. I try to be nice and smile sweetly when I call on volunteers, but impatience will win out if I have to pull teeth. Ever had teeth pulled by an impatient dictator? Ninc is a small organization with no budget for paid staff, so our members have to pull their weight. If you enjoy the privileges we offer, then stand up and volunteer when opportunities beckon.

And in all sincerity, folks, working with this organization truly is an opportunity. I started out in Ninc as treasurer for some of the earliest boards when I was the only CPA in the group. I had the opportunity to work with some of the smartest, most farsighted people it's been a pleasure to know. Over the years, their vision has proved fruitful. Through their efforts, this organization has grown into a force to be recognized, as well as a welcoming hearth for the exchange of information, and we've done it without the agonizing growing pains other groups have undergone.

I count the people I worked with during those years and in this past year as president-elect as instrumental in helping me grow as a person and as a writer. I've made friendships and connections stronger than those I made in college. This is what networking is about, and this is why every member should be eager to step in and help out when offered the chance.

And if you're new or have never participated before and would like to be offered these opportunities, let the board know. Let the nominating committee know. Open your mouths or your e-mail and say "Here I am, how can I help?" Ninc is not a closed clique of good friends. We're an open clique of volunteers. Anyone can join in the fun, but you've got to step forward to be recognized.

If you don't want to be an officer or chair a committee, ask our conference chair, Laura Baker, if you can help with the New York City conference. Even if you don't plan to attend, there's plenty of behind the scenes work that can put you "in the know" and bring you into contact with other members. Or e-mail Jasmine Cresswell, a saint who has worked on Ninc boards before and enjoyed it so much that she actually agreed to edit our newsletter this year just so she could work with us again. Tell her of an article you'd like to write or information you'd like to see in our newsletter. The newsletter belongs to all of us, but only those who add their two cents get their money's worth.

I won't guarantee you'll always get the committee or the position you'd like to have, but I will guarantee I'll remember your name and keep you in mind for anything else that opens up. We're a laid-back group. We play together well. And you can make connections that will last a lifetime.

Who else can offer that much in this business?

— **Patricia Rice**

WHAT, WHERE, AND

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Continued from page 1

will help him to feel good about writing, encouraging him to keep at it. Third, since we all know that it's easier to enter and record the fictive dream on some days than others, it will help him have more good days than bad ones. That is, a good writing practice will help the writer to dream the dream that is his fiction and record it.

The details of my writing practice tend to be fluid, changing little from day to day, but varying considerably from year to year. Here are some thoughts on what I do now, and why.

Where

Most days, I do my writing in one of two places: reclining on the couch, or sitting at my desk. If I'm on the couch, there's a very good chance that I have a cat in my lap. She'll complain if I don't stay settled, so she helps to enforce the discipline of staying put and working instead of getting up to see if the mail has come. I don't have any comparable method for staying at my desk, since the chair I use has me kneeling as much as sitting. Hence, no lap for the cat. But the wall beyond my computer monitor is covered with little signs, such as the reminder from Isak Dinesen to write every day "without hope and without despair."

Both settings are comfortable. My back is well supported when I'm lying on the couch, and the half-kneeling chair at my desk encourages a posture that I can maintain comfortably for a long time. My office has big windows, so I have plenty of natural light in the summer. For western Oregon's gray winters, I have brilliant halogen and fluorescent lights for both the couch and the desk. From either place, I can look out at trees in the middle distance and give my eyes a break from focusing on a page or a screen that's only a foot or two away.

All of these comforts are important. They make it possible for me to

stay on-task for a long time and get some words down on the page, but comfort does more than increase my endurance. Being comfortable helps me to forget that I am writing at all, and I can lose myself in my story. Conversely, if my back aches or if eye-strain gives me a headache, my discomfort will constantly remind me that I'm not really in another place and time with my imaginary people.

Working on the couch gives me an additional benefit. It makes me feel cozily decadent, like I'm getting away with something. That's fun.

It's partly for the pleasures of decadence that I sometimes leave home to work in other places. *Look at me! I'm sitting under a tree in the park! This is my job, writing in this notebook and occasionally watching squirrels!* But working away from home can also be a way to jog myself out of a rut when I feel stuck on a story or chapter. When I'm pacing back and forth on the footbridge over the Willamette River, notebook in hand, muttering, I'm writing. Sometimes my pacing takes me over the river to a shopping mall's food court, a hotel lobby, or a bookstore with comfy chairs. I've written in all these places. (I've also ended up killing an hour or two browsing in the bookstore—some destinations are hazardous.)

I've written in cafés, libraries, bus stations, and museums. There are times when it feels necessary to have other people around, when silence or music or white noise just aren't the right background sound for the kind of work I'm doing. And it's not just writers who sometimes want the murmur of human voices for background. Accountants in a new, super-quiet office building at the British Broadcasting Corporation found the silence so stressful that management decided to install a special "mutter" machine that would provide simulated background conversation and occasional light laughter. We are social animals.

Sometimes we're starved for the sounds of our kind, even when we are concentrating and don't want any actual social interaction.

When

I get up at 6:00 a.m., and from then until 3:00 is my writing time. That doesn't mean that I'm actually on the couch or at my desk for the entire nine hours. Generally, I lie on the couch under the intense light for ten minutes or longer before my reptile brain stirs. I review my to-do list for the day, and then I write for fifteen minutes. Sometimes those first fifteen minutes are journal writing, dream recording, or just desultory mad scribbling that might include lots of cheer-leading or whining. I might write about the day's main writing project, circling it, sniffing it, and maybe growling at it. Sometimes I use the fifteen minutes to write three off-the-cuff five-minute stories. Only rarely do I actually begin to draft something in these first fifteen minutes, but these first scribbled pages serve as a sort of inoculation. I have already written, so whatever I write later won't represent the first writing of the day. I already have some momentum.

After that, the next few hours are devoted pretty much to either writing or doing nothing. I eat breakfast, take a shower, meditate, dress, etc. Some mornings I may drive my wife to work—a round trip that takes me half an hour. But except for those occasional bad days where I'm sloppy and undisciplined and don't get anything done, that's about the limit of what I do that isn't writing. I don't check my e-mail, read, or listen to the radio. I'm free to stare at the wall all I want.

In short, I either start writing because I want to write, or else I bore myself into writing. I give myself "half an hour" for lunch (which is more often an hour altogether), when I get a little respite from the ban on reading. That's when I open the mail and read the newspaper. After that, I'm back to writing or doing nothing.

I rise early and write early because I'm at my most creative ▶ ▶ ▶

WHAT, WHERE, AND

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ early in the day. Early, but not too early. Many writers I've met get up very early (Katherine Stone gets up at 2:00 a.m. to start her writing day) or stay up late so they can write in the pre-dawn quiet, but six is as early as I want to rise because I'm seldom fully alert when it's dark out. If I got up at five, I'd just be in a waking haze for an hour longer. Writing early also makes it easier to not do some of the things that are less important than writing. Often, there isn't time left for them at the end of the day. Better that unimportant things get neglected, rather than the writing.

Of course, I'd rather not neglect anything at all. I'd like to find a way to follow every one of my dreams, but I've gradually become more realistic. Long ago, I secretly envied a friend of mine whose chronic pain kept him from sleeping more than a few hours a night. He spent part of every night writing at a 24-hour café, then slept his three or four hours at home before getting up at seven for a full day of teaching and study. I used to think that by force of will, I could live like that, too. Think of all the writing I could do with those extra hours, and I'd still have time for everything else! I tried to wean myself of "excess" sleep.

Writing during the wee hours may have been a good way for my friend to deal creatively with his persistent inability to sleep, but trying to get by on five, six or even seven hours a night didn't work for me. I don't think or write well on less than eight hours of sleep. The fictive dream I'm trying to dream onto the page requires mental alertness. Going to bed at ten is as important to my writing day as getting up at six.

With What

For writing on the couch, I use either pen and paper or my palm-top computer. Pen and paper are for making notes, outlining, or writing around the edges of a project with finger ex-

ercises about character or back story. Most of these notes go into a Mead notebook. Each large project gets its own notebook, so ideas for short-short stories go into the notebook for a short-short collection. My stack of notebooks for novels that I haven't written serves as a reminder that I have to stop generating new ideas and write one of these, and then another, if I ever hope to get anywhere as a novelist.

Right before I draft something, I usually jot down an outline and various working notes on an oversized pad of newsprint. For both fiction and nonfiction, I use "cluster" outlining, drawing connecting lines between related ideas. I need the space of oversized sheets to get all the related elements onto one page.

I'm not unnecessarily picky about what pens I use. In a pinch, anything that makes a line will do. However, if I have a choice, I like to work with a variety of colors only because it's fun. Lately, I've been writing with metallic gel roller pens and a two-color roller that lays down an alternately purple or blue line. And although this isn't a very landfill-conscious attitude, I like the gel pens because they put down more ink with every stroke than a regular ball point does. A ball point seems to last forever, but I use the gel pens up in a matter of weeks. It's silly, but seeing the dwindling supply of ink makes me feel that I must be making progress.

Gel pens also have a very light touch. Since I once bruised my thumb badly by writing for eight hours straight with a ball-point, I appreciate a pen that I don't have grip so tightly or press so hard. After that bruise, I couldn't hold a pen for a week—a reminder that driving yourself mercilessly now can mean less productivity later.

The palmtop computer's keyboard is so small that I can't touch type. I have to hunt and peck with my

thumbs. But I can do this on the couch, on my back. As I draft the opening paragraphs of something, I compose so slowly that the limitations of the tiny keyboard don't really slow me down much.

The palmtop is so small that I can and do bring it almost anywhere. I can write while the dentist keeps me waiting.

Once I've got my opening paragraphs, I'm ready to work much faster. That's when I move to the desktop computer. I use a split keyboard, which reduces the strain on my wrists. Although the finished work will be printed in manuscript format, I compose single-spaced pages in a Times Roman font. I like to see as much of the text at a time as possible.

Colored pens make the writing process more fun, the palmtop adds to my productivity by letting me draft downloadable text anywhere. In both of these cases, I'm pretty conscious of my tools as I use them. For dreaming the fictive dream scene by scene and writing it down, my desktop PC is my most helpful tool because I can use it unconsciously. I touch-type so automatically at that keyboard that I can give all my attention to the story, hardly aware of how I'm writing it down.

That's what works for me. You now know about my own place, time, and tools for writing, in some detail. My point, however, is not that you should do as I do. My point is that we all develop our distinctive work habits in much the same way that we each develop a distinctive prose style.

We learn style by imitation. At least, that's how it worked for me. As a beginner, I copied my favorite writers. In my earliest, mostly unpublished stories, an astute reader could point to the adjectives that I borrowed from Ray Bradbury, the puns I took from Nabokov, the long sentences I wrote to parallel Faulkner's. As I read more widely and borrowed moves from a greater range of sources, my copycat repertoire grew broad enough that I could pick and choose my effects deliberately. The way that I combined

and modified those effect became my own unique style. When I read, I read partly for pleasure and partly as literary espionage, on the lookout for effects that I can steal.

I assembled and continue to modify my writing practice in the same way. Here then, as an aid to doing the same, is an assortment of other writers' notions of When, Where, and with What.

When

Most writers are regular. Many rise early, as Hemingway did, and write into the afternoon, but most of my writing friends seem to rise late and write either in the late morning and afternoon, or late into the night when the rest of the world sleeps. Timing is often a matter of finding those hours when the house and neighborhood are quiet. When Anne Tyler's children were at school, she wrote until they returned. Such a practice, born of necessity, may continue after the children are grown. James Baldwin wrote nights because his house was quiet then, but even after his children had grown, he continued the practice because he could count on solitude. The phone doesn't ring at 2:00 a.m.

However, being regular doesn't necessarily mean having the same habit every day, or even in every season. My friend Bill Sullivan writes both fiction and nonfiction, but it's the nonfiction that shapes his writing time. Bill makes his living from writing guidebooks for Oregon hiking trails. In the sunny third of the year, he hikes and takes notes. When the rains return, he spends his days at the keyboard.

When Erskine Caldwell lived in Maine, he wrote on even summer days and worked outside on odd ones. During the winter, he switched to shoveling snow or sleeping during the day and wrote at night, every night.

At times when my schedule was too irregular for me to keep to the same writing hours every week, I would make appointments with myself and write them into the calendar so that I could get an hour of writing in

on Monday morning, half an hour during my lunch break on Tuesday, and so on. I hated this, and I didn't always keep my appointments, but it was a way to squeeze some writing time into weeks where I wouldn't have written at all otherwise.

Joseph Heller squeezed writing time out of his workdays as a copywriter. He composed at least parts of *Catch 22* in the office, scribbling away at pages in his desk drawer. If someone entered his work area, he'd close the drawer so they wouldn't know he wasn't creating ad copy every minute.

When you write is also a question of duration. For how long should you keep at it?

Western writer Matt Braun's attitude about hours is typical for many commercial writers. "There is a belief," he writes, "perpetuated through the generations, that a writer can be creative for only *four hours* a day. All but holy writ, the belief has gained widespread acceptance within the literary community. Of course, what it actually represents is the world's best excuse not to work a full day." And it is true that many writers put in forty or fifty hours a week at the desk.

But writing less than one can physically manage may be less a sign of laziness than self-knowledge. Some writers, compelled by financial necessity to write more than they would prefer to, burn out. Others really do have a physical limit. Edward Albee would always get a headache after three or four hours.

Among the four-hour writers were Henry Miller, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann, Anne Bernays, and Tolstoy. Anthony Trollope accomplished his staggering output of seven manuscript pages a day during the two or three hours before he went to work.

How long you can bear to write can be a function of what you're writing. John Irving, when he begins a novel, can put in only two or three hours a day. In the middle of the book, he can write for as long as twelve hours, but he slows down again to two or three hours a day when he approaches the final chapters.

Not every writer measures his workday in hours. John Updike writes three pages a day. I believe Fred Pohl manages four.

Some writers are marathoners. Georges Simenon used to get a check-up from his doctor before he wrote a novel, to make sure he was up to it. Then he would write feverishly, living, as he said, "just like a monk." After five or six days like this, he'd be tired of the novel, but he'd press on to finish the damn thing by the tenth or eleventh day, staggering out of his seclusion with a manuscript. William Faulkner wrote *As I Lay Dying* in six frenetic weeks while he was also working as a day laborer, shoveling coal. Quite a few commercial fiction writers do tie-in novels this way, pumping out four hundred pages against an impossible deadline.

On a smaller but still demanding scale, Katherine Anne Porter wrote each of her short stories in one sitting.

There are even writers who were quite successful writing only when they felt like it. Henry Miller would sit down at the typewriter first thing after breakfast, but if he found the words weren't coming, he'd quit. Edmund White agreed. "If you're not writing well, why continue it? I just don't think this grinding away is useful." Jerzy Kosinski also wrote only when he felt like it, but he also said, "I feel like it most of the time." The extreme case of someone who felt like writing most of the time was Isaac endured or accomplished some difficult task—such as watching television, going out socially, or sleeping—I always look forward to rewarding myself with the small pleasure of getting back to my typewriter and writing something." As he also said, "Thinking is the activity I love best, and writing to me is simply thinking through my fingers."

Where

Sometimes, where you write is a matter of taking what you can get. When Raymond Carver's household was too noisy for concentration, he'd take his notebook out to

► ► ►

WHAT, WHERE

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

the parked car to write. Many a kitchen table has a second career as a writing desk. Commuting writers have penned novels on trains, ferries, and buses.

My friends mostly have home offices. Only one of them, Michael Armstrong, has his office in a separate building, a cabin that he built a few feet from his home. He built his office as a separate building, rather than as an addition to his existing cabin, to “create a psychological distance between life and work” and to enforce the notion that his writing was a job. “Walking out the door, into the weather, down a short path and out to another building creates a transition: ‘Going to the office’ becomes a literal act that fosters a working state.”

Annie Dillard also writes in a separate building, a shed in her back yard. But Dillard and Armstrong couldn’t be more different in how comfortable they think a writing space should be. Armstrong wanted good natural light and an inspiring view. Dillard’s shed gets little sunlight. Her desk faces a blank wall so that she can’t see out of either small window. “Appealing workplaces are to be avoided,” Dillard wrote in *The Writing Life*. “One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark.”

Indeed, View vs. No View is a chief debate in the question of where writers should write. “A writer should never install himself before a panorama,” said Blaise Cendrars. “Like Saint Jerome, a writer should work in his cell.” A view can, after all, be a distraction. William Maxwell’s window overlooked nothing but a tin roof. “It was perfect,” he said. “The roof was so boring it instantly drove me back to the typewriter.”

Norman Mailer, on the other hand, wants “a long view” overlooking “the sea, or ships, or anything which has a vista to it.”

In Toni Morrison’s case, it’s

apparently not the particulars of the writing space that matters, but their separation from her home. She rents a hotel room to write in.

Most writers write in a chair, and not a few think that my habit of writing on the couch is strange. But I’m in good company. Truman Capote wrote lying down, as did Paul Bowles. John Nichols reportedly writes while both horizontal and wet, in the bathtub. Agatha Christie didn’t draft her fiction in the tub, but she liked to plot there.

Someone once told Virginia Woolf that, as a writer, she had an easier discipline than her sister, who painted. Her sister, after all, had to stand to make her art. Thereafter, Woolf wrote standing up. Hemingway started his writing day on his feet, too, writing in that position until he developed some momentum. Only then would he move to a chair.

With What

John Barth and Anne Tyler write with fountain pens. Tyler feels that the muscular action of moving the pen helps her to recover her imaginative state, to move swiftly back into dreaming the fictive dream. Barth sees the continuous line of ink as helping him to hold the fiction together. “Good old script, which connects this letter to that, and this line to that—well, that’s how good plots work, right? When this loops around and connects to that...”

Steinbeck’s pencil worked for him something like Tyler’s pen. He had to have round pencils. Hexagonal ones were painful to hold for six hours. With the correct pencil in his hand, though, his whole body must have been primed to write. “I really am a conditioned animal,” he said, “with a conditioned hand.” Some writers vary their conditioning according to what stage their work is in. John Updike writes early drafts by hand, then types them, and finally his secretary enters the corrected pages onto a word processor.

Robert Frost said he always wrote on a writing board, never at a desk or table.

Isak Dinesen dictated some of her early drafts. Earl Stanley Gardner dictated his Perry Mason novels and other mystery fiction. One obstacle to trying dictation is that writing is usually done privately, but dictation is a sort of public performance of the first draft, even if the audience is only one person.

Eugène Ionesco didn’t want his early drafts to be subject to even unspoken criticism. When his hands shook too much for him to write and he had to hire a secretary, he found one who wasn’t particularly sensitive to literature so that she could take dictation without having an opinion about whether something was good or bad. Now voice recognition programs make it possible to dictate a first draft to a computer. Science fiction writer Wil McCarthy is beginning to experiment with writing fiction this way.

It’s not just the tools themselves that matter, but how you use them. I began writing before the era of personal computers. I know that having to re-type a complete draft just do fix some problems in the middle sometimes made me fix problems in the beginning that I’d wanted to overlook. I mean, if you’ve got to retype the whole thing anyway...

Fred Pohl knows about this advantage that the typewriter had over computers, and he duplicates the effect by printing out his first drafts and then erasing the file. He forces himself to type the second draft in from beginning to end.

Ultimately, it is true that what matters most is *that* you write, not the particulars of where, when, or how. But by being open to the methods of others, you can sometimes discover new tricks that make it easier to project those moving pictures in your head, write down the words to describe them, and feel like doing it again later.

Bruce Holland Rogers is a frequent speaker at writers’ conferences. This article is an excerpt from his forthcoming book, Word Work: Surviving and Thriving as a Writer, Spring 2002, Invisible Cities Press.



Liberty, Equity, Futurity Philly Redux

When Your World Caves In

As we saw on September 11, anyone's world can cave in within split seconds. Only days before, at the national conference, a group of NINC members discussed how to deal with such cave-ins, personal ones as well as those directly related to the writing business.

Good things as well as bad can trigger a cave-in. Family obligations and outside work responsibilities can suck us into a maelstrom, slow our learning curves and levels of excitement.

None of us has unlimited mental or emotional resources. For whatever reason, inspiration deserts us, editorial changes perplex us when they cause abrupt about-faces in the publisher's vision for a line, or for the house as a whole. Agents come and go. Our fellow authors forge ahead while we spin our wheels. More important than any of these external factors, however, is how we let them affect us.

How to avoid being crushed by external pressures? Decompress, by getting out a piece of work that somebody can say yes to. For some, this means starting small, proving to one's self that one can still write. For others, nonstop proposing and submitting is the solution. Wipe out reflective pools of time in which one tends to brood over every stumbling block. This is an excellent first step toward recovery, but it's not an easy piece of advice to follow. Book-In-a-Week exercises can help bring the focus back on writing, as opposed to the problems of publishing.

Unfortunately, in the publishing business much is out of the author's control—but we can and must look to our strengths. Those strengths are ideas and characters, crafted in our

own voices into stories that can dig us out of the rubble and jump-start our careers again.

Reported by Ann Josephson

Legal Issues in Publishing

Elaine English, of Graybill & English, LLC Law Offices, has 16 years experience as a literary attorney, and more recent experience as a literary agent. Elaine made herself available to answer legal questions posed by our members. The first topic she addressed was the difference between a literary attorney and a (non-attorney) literary agent, pointing out that not all agents may be fully versed in contract law, though they may be very savvy on editorial and marketing concerns.

One author asked about the legal ramifications of auctioning off a character name (having a character named after the winner) for a charity event. Elaine strongly recommended obtaining a release giving the author the right to use the name and to create whatever type of character she wanted, to insure herself against potential invasion of privacy or false light lawsuits. In such a case, it's important to be clear that the author has ownership rights to the character in question in the event there are spinoff books or later trademark issues.

Signing a *release and transfer of all rights* should ideally be a condition for bidding in such an auction or entering any contest with a similar prize. When it comes to creating character names from scratch, we were advised that we're better off using common than uncommon names. If fewer than five people in the U.S. have a particular name, using it could open an author to possible problems down the road, should one of those people decide to sue.

Another author asked about using trademarked products in books. For trademark infringement, we were told the name would have to be on an actual product, not just used in a book. However, using a trademark in a generic fashion (Kleenex without the capital K) can open an author to a lawsuit for dilution of trademark—and some companies do pursue this. In a related question, an author asked about using real places that are trademarked. Elaine said that such use should be fine as long as the author doesn't duplicate the trademarked place and set it elsewhere, using the same name.

On the question of quoting from song lyrics, we were assured that ASCAP and BMI are very aggressive in demanding payment for such quoting, though Elaine was unsure those organizations would have legal standing should such a case actually go to court. Still, it would be expensive for an author to find out.

This led to a discussion of fair use, which is much more complicated than most of us realized, involving a balance of such factors as percent of the whole used and how such use will affect the sale of the original work. The notion that a set number of words are always allowed is, alas, a myth.

Finally, we discussed at some length the importance of copyright registration, in light of the discovery that some publishers (notably Harlequin and Silhouette) are no longer registering their authors' works. Elaine recommended checking contract language to see whether a publisher *will* or *may* register, then to directly ask whether the publisher *is* registering. Without registration, an author may not collect statutory

▶ ▶ ▶



Liberty, Equity, Futurity Philly Redux

►►► damages or attorney fees if her work is infringed (stolen), meaning that if an author is unlikely to recover more than about \$15,000 in *actual* damages (unlikely), a lawsuit would not be cost effective. A question arose about registration requirements for books published in other countries with better protection for authors, and Elaine promised to look into the specifics for us. All in all, a very enlightening session!

Reported by Brenda Hiatt Barber

Become Irrisistibly Attractive with Personal Coach Susan E. Race

"Let the universe know what you want. Let people know who you are, what you're about, and how they can find you."

"To have something different, you have to do something different."

"First believe that you deserve it,

that it can happen, and that you can have it."

The benefits of this session came from self-insights from doing the individual exercises, plus sharing those insights with the others attending. Reporting the specifics of personal insights wouldn't be fair to the participants—in other words you had to be there.

But these are the general steps Race led the attendees through to

Copyright Protections, Issues Explained by AAP Attorney

This important Conference session with Allan Robert Adler, Vice President Legal and Governmental Affairs for the Association of American Publishers (AAP) is reported by Ann Josephson, with input from past president, Barbara Keiler.

Mr. Adler stressed the importance of authors and publishers seeking common interests instead of divergent ones at a time when copyright protections are under serious attack.

The AAP is a trade association that speaks on behalf of publishers of trade, commercial, and scholastic books and journals in the United States. Although these are very different businesses, AAP focuses on the common interests of all and counts every major commercial publisher, as well as many university presses, scientific, and scholarly journals among its more than 7,000 members.

A major part of the AAP mission is to represent its members' interests as they pertain to government affairs. The AAP concentrates on five main issues of concern to publishers: copyright; freedom to publish/freedom of expression; coping with the advent of

technical changes; education and literacy; and postal rates.

Unfortunately, the motion picture and music industries have tainted the idea of copyright in the minds of many lawmakers. These days, when lawmakers think about copyright, they visualize laws that protect the multi-million-dollar profits of Hollywood empires. Socially conservative lawmakers view these Hollywood empires as purveyors of sex and violence to the American people—purveyors who earn millions of dollars thanks to stringent copyright protection. Lawmakers tend neither to remember nor to care about the protections copyright law affords to book publishing and struggling authors trying to make a living. Additionally, their view of publishing as part of a big, profitable entertainment industry leaves no room for consideration of copyright protections as important in preserving our national cultural legacy.

As a consequence of this "Hollywood" vision of copyright law, the inclination of most lawmakers is currently set hard against any and all expansion of the law. Far from being able to lobby for extension of copyright protection, the AAP finds itself fighting the legislators' belief that the protection is already too generous for the public good. And in this, although for different reasons, public opinion is aligned with that of the lawmakers. Most people want the freedom to access and use copyrighted material without having any restrictions imposed on them. Free is almost always considered good. Lawmakers naturally try to please their constituents.

achieve the goals above.

Clarify your vision (what you see as possible in the world) and your mission (your purpose in life, in other words, how you achieve your vision).

Assess your true values.

Simplify your life by eliminating old habits that no longer serve you.

Banish "tolerations"—These things signal unmet needs for you.

Define and reinforce your boundaries (how you expect and allow others to treat you).

Assert yourself by living up to a bill of human choices (choices you make rather than rights that are given to you).

Fall in love with you (self-acceptance and extreme self-care).

Whatever you need, give yourself the permission and time to fill that need.

These steps sparked conversations and insights for many of the attendees. Some indicated they'd pursued similar material in the past, but as one said, "It's good to remind ourselves, to bring the lessons back to the surface of our minds."

Reported by Pat McLaughlin

Tai Chi

Jeanne Savery Casstevens treated attendees to an explanation of Tai Chi, a low-impact exercise born in Taoist philosophy and said to prolong life and cure human ills. A demonstration of one of the Tai Chi forms

by Dr. Silverman followed before he and Jeanne led the group in some simple exercises.

Tai Chi has been used in present form in the 20th century. A meditation art, Tai Chi unifies body, mind, and spirit. It allows its practitioners to escape the survivor style of life, though Tai Chi, performed at a faster tempo, can be used as a martial art.

Tai chi is sometimes called moving meditation or river boxing, and each form consists of consciously continuous movement of the body while the mind floats. The user must practice until the form becomes natural before reaping maximum benefits. Connectedness happens ▶ ▶ ▶

Authors and publishers form a very small constituency when set against the millions demanding free use of new technology.

Popular ideology presents the Internet as the true "new world" where old values don't or shouldn't apply. Copyright is often seen as an inconvenient relic of the past. "Fair-use" advocates see copyright protection as a way of restricting the free exchange of ideas, and demands for expansion of "fair-use" is enjoying a growing popularity, thanks to Napster and other such technological breakthroughs. There is opposition by Internet proponents to the whole idea of compensation for intellectual property.

Adler sees some changes brought about by digitization and the Internet as being good, if for no other reason than that it expands markets and opportunities for writers. The risk, he says, is that digitized books are easier to copy, and each succeeding digital copy becomes a new master. Loss of control over the number of copies available is inevitable. In addition, the globalization of access to information, combined with free trade agreements, makes copyright harder to protect.

International piracy of printed works is especially difficult to control, prevent, and prosecute, both from the point of view of discovery (how do you ever find out that a hundred Croatians have downloaded your novel from a pirate site located in Russia?) and because different nations have different copyright laws.


To compound the complexity of the issue, the US

Government publishes a great deal of material on the Internet. What happens when something that the Government puts up on one of its websites is subject to proprietary interests? The national digital library, for example, is not limited specifically to material in the public domain.

In view of the all the foregoing, the AAP's current goal has to be to put copyright on a firm footing, bearing in mind the hazards and temptations of so much new technology. The AAP doesn't support copyright term extensions, in part because the legislative climate simply doesn't allow for such extensions at this time, and in part because some of its members are big in secondary markets.

The AAP is active in supporting copyright law whenever and wherever it's threatened. Much of this involves filing *amicus* briefs. The United States urgently needs adequate laws to prohibit technologies that circumvent protection of copyrighted material. As indicated above, the AAP is also fighting to prevent over-liberal interpretations of the Fair Use Doctrine, while allowing scholars to extract the quotations they need from copyrighted materials.

The interest of authors and publishers is aligned on these issues, so we should work together.

Copyright initially belongs to author and we contractually grant the use of it to publishers for a limited period of time. Mr. Adler's efforts to preserve copyright protections for publishers actually benefit authors as well. 



Liberty, Equity, Futurity Philly Redux

▶ ▶ ▶ best with practice in a group.

A study in the unity of opposites, Tai Chi is stillness within activity, stillness of mind within motion of body, and tension within relaxation. Benefits, over the long term, include reduction of blood pressure, stress, and cholesterol levels along with increases in bone density and immune function. Practicing the forms reduces tension and gives the participant a sense of wholeness.

— AJ

Web Promotions Panel

Linda West served as moderator for the two speakers: Cissy Hartley of Writerspace and Malle Valik of eHarlequin.com.

The first question posed was how to attract visitors to a website. Cissy Hartley suggested the best way to attract visitors is to become an online community for readers.

Malle Valik explained that one of her primary efforts at eHarlequin.com is to bring new readers to the books. She considers authors the lifeblood of eHarlequin and there are many opportunities for promoting Harlequin authors: 375 author areas (bio, interview, writing diary, etc.); a listing of current books (both promotion and splash pages); a newsletter with nine separate choices; and Malle's personal favorite—the 10,000 word e-series that are connected to upcoming print books by Harlequin.

Both Hartley and Valik believe that experimentation is the key to web success.

eHarlequin has tried reading groups, but found they did not work for them. Community discussion groups on subjects such as characters have been popular—even with authors themselves. Recently, an author responded to a discussion on her

e-serial's character by adding a little more explanation for his motivation in her next installment of the e-serial. Both Hartley and Valik agreed that the immediate feedback of what draws visitors and what does not is an advantage of the web business.

Malle Valik's top advice is that a personal site is a valuable tool, so get a professional to do it right. She also advocates fully participating in your publisher's web promotional efforts by returning bio statements and anything else requested as soon as possible.

Cissy Hartley mentioned domain names again, advising that in any search, what is present in the domain name is sure to come up near the top of the list. One potential tool is to park more than one domain name (yourwritersname.com, pseudonym.com, or .org, .net) to one website. That way any of the domain names typed into the address bar of a browser will go directly to the website. When asked the cost of Writerspace services, Hartley gave a hosting range from \$40-\$150 per month, the amount varying according to the amount of promotion desired. Design services range from \$1,000 to \$2,500. Asked if a writer were to design her own site and then host it at Writerspace, would the writer then be offered less services, Hartley said no. She also pointed out that Writerspace grows by about 1,200 members per month.

There are two important questions for an author to ask before creating a website, Hartley suggested. First, "What do you *want* your site to do for you?" Second, "What do you *expect* your site to do for you?" Knowing the answers to these questions can help decide what elements and information to include on your page.

Hartley explained that there are two types of visitors: fans and casual

browsers. Fans can be expected to return to a page more often, while casual browsers need something new and intriguing to keep them interested enough to return once they've happened upon the page.

One simple tool to bring fans to your page is to register your domain name as yourwritingname.com. Persuading casual browsers to become repeat visitors requires more innovative means to keep readers hanging out at the site:

- contests (which drive site visits and build up a mailing list)
- author chats
- easy and quick navigation throughout site
- prominent display of what is currently available in bookstores
- up-to-date general information
- a short bio/background piece
- whole site reflects the tone of author and her books
- professional polish (some elements scream amateur web design)

Hartley's Writerspace provides a range of services for clients, from web hosting to a full hosting, design and promotion package. One promotional opportunity they offer their writers are banner ads on the Writerspace site. They also provide group and individual chats, bulletin boards, a reader's calendar, and a listing of author signings. One of the reasons that Writerspace has been so successful is that it provides one site for a reader to come to find many authors. Clustering a website by making a unified site leading to individual sites with other authors (Regency authors, or Avon Ladies, for example) can be useful for increasing visitors to a site.

When asked what writers who are creating their own pages should do to increase traffic at the site, Hartley sug-

gested checking out reader sites and requesting that your site be linked on them. Writerspace has a link section for all authors, not just the ones who use their service. Many other reader sites do as well. Valik emphasized asking publishers what they're doing, and on personal sites to update frequently so visitors do not get bored. Hartley also warned that visitors use many different browsers and a page created on one can look very different on another, so checking a page in different formats is highly recommended. She suggests staying behind the curve a little in order to allow visitors using older versions of browsers to view your site without frustration. Counters are often considered amateurish, as are patterned backgrounds, or freebie backgrounds and graphics, or graphics which have a "halo" (a fuzzy border around the edges).

The moderator asked the panelists if they thought too much time on a reader's site might not reduce time spent reading. Malle Valik replied that romance readers are insatiable, but to keep in mind that many visitors surf the Web at work, so remember to keep pages short, rapid loading, and free of sound and music. About whether or not an author should participate in a discussion of her work by a reader's group, or attempt to put out a flame-war associated with her name, Valik suggested remembering Internet etiquette at all times by following these sometimes unspoken rules: be a presence but not a pest; avoid explaining or defending your own work; don't post too much. eHarlequin reads posts before they are allowed on the site.

When asked about statistics kept on regional breakdowns, Hartley said that none was done at Writerspace at this time, but could be done in future. Also does not have stats on historical, contemporary breakdown, although she guesses it is the same as that for readers in general. Valik reported that eHarlequin does find the younger readers are more interested in paranormal elements. Hartley believes

there is a much higher percentage interested in science fiction among the online community than among readers in general.

A question arose about proper etiquette for e-newsletters—does writing a letter to an author give tacit permission for being added to an e-mail list? Hartley felt it was fine to add, but always give a reason they've been added and an option to be removed from the list if so desired. She does caution against harvesting e-mail addresses (taking e-mail addresses from wherever you find them) and suggests adding a checkbox to allow visitors to choose to receive e-mail newsletters. Two things never to do are:

- buy a mailing list;
- pull e-mail addresses of people who have never visited your site (this is called SPAM and makes enemies).

An audience member asked if a witty writer does better in a chat room than a more staid, "mundane" writer? Hartley answered that at Writerspace they are used to holding chats, so the interaction doesn't usually get painful for the author. The staff can feed questions, if necessary. In addition, they have found that most reader questions are easy, not challenging. No cleverness required. Valik replied that eHarlequin does not do chats, only bulletin boards and questions which author has time to answer at leisure.

One final piece of advice came from Kasey Michaels in the audience: "Don't say anything [in cyberspace] that you don't want repeated."

Reported by Kelly McClymer

Physical Pain in the Workplace

Moderated by nurse Gail Oust, this session addressed problems such as carpal tunnel, migraines, rheumatoid arthritis, and back pain. The session was small, but attendees were anxious to exchange information on disabilities that interfere with our writing.

We began with a discussion of Dragon, as this can be helpful for

such diverse problems as rheumatoid arthritis and broken wrists. Dragon promises 95% accuracy, however the user must accept that this includes many mistakes; everything is correctly spelled, but still wrong.

A Ninc member using Dragon claimed that finished pages are sometimes unrecognizable when reread. She found it very difficult and very slow. One member has done one whole book with it. She said it takes longer to write a book, and that it affected her writing style. She found that the Dragon book used less description than usual, and more dialogue.

There is a humorous side to Dragon use. While writing, you must say punctuation words, such as "comma," "open quote," etc. Someone mentioned continuing this when speaking to family members or phone callers.

Migraines are a problem for many writers. It is very difficult to work with a serious headache. A Ninc member with chronic daily headaches recounted her problem with depression because of never feeling well; it is almost impossible to work in this condition. Antidepressants like Zoloft and Prozac were recommended by participants to bring back the ability to work well.

Knee problems, arthritis, lower back pain, and sciatica are all handled with a mix of solutions including exercise, special furniture, and herbal products. Meditation was also recommended. Glucosamine chondroitin has been highly successful in treating arthritis; it is sometimes possible to obtain the same results using glucosamine alone.

When we feel bad, our work just doesn't turn out well. Preventative measures are welcome, as doctor's appointments, medical tests, and physical therapy, all cut into our valuable writing time.

Reported by Annette Mahon

Online.....by Lorraine Heath

It seems each month on Ninlink, someone asks for a list of places where he or she can send ARC's for review. I thought I'd begin the year by compiling a list of the sites that have appeared in the Online column since 1999 and sites that I've recently discovered. I've verified all the URLs, but you'll need to visit the site for submission requirements and instructions.

For additional online review sites, visit **Jaclyn Reding's Useful Links for Romance Writers and Readers**, <http://www.jaclynreding.com/links/>.

Deb Stover also provides a very extensive list of review sites, <http://www.debstover.com/links.htm>.

Of special interest is the **Reviewers' International Organization**, <http://www.rio-reviewers.com/members.html>. It currently lists 17 reviewers and the publications or sites for which they review. Contact information is provided

so you can query the reviewer whom you wish to review your books. I recommend that you verify the sites that are listed since a few of the sites no longer exist, and as we all know, the Internet is constantly changing.

RESEARCH

Jean Ross Ewing shared a useful site—hers. At www.jeanrossewing.com/horse.html, she has listed valuable “horse facts (the handouts from an RWA workshop I gave in 1998). Especially useful to anyone needing to understand coat colors, or work out how far or fast their characters can ride in a given length of time.” Thanks, Jean. I've definitely bookmarked it.

The Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies, <http://orb.rhodes.edu>, is written and maintained by medieval scholars. At least two peer reviewers judge all arti-

AT a Glance: Sites that Post Reviews

Website	URL	Genres
A Romance Review	http://www.aromancereview.com/	Romance
Affaire de Coeur	http://www.affairedecoeur.com	All genres
All About Romance	http://www.likesbooks.com	Romance
Belles & Beaux of Romance	http://www.geocities.com/bellesandbeaux	Romance
Best Reviews	http://www.thebestreviews.com	All genres
Black Raven Press	http://www.blackravenpress.com/	Mystery
Book Browser	http://www.bookbrowser.com	All genres
BookPage	http://www.bookpage.com	All genres
Book Review	http://www.bookbrowser.com	All genres, including children and young adult
Books n Bytes	http://www.booksnbytes.com	Mystery, sf/fantasy and juvenile
Bookbug on the Web	http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/8078/home.html	Romance
Crazy for Words	http://redapril.tripod.com/crazyforwords.html	Romance (the site encourages readers to purchase new books rather than used)
Crescent Blues	http://www.crescentblues.com/4_1issue/homepage.shtml	All genres
Escape to Romance Reviews	http://www.escapetoromance.com/reviews/	Romance
Gothic Journal	http://www.GothicJournal.com	Romantic suspense, romantic mystery, and gothic, supernatural, and woman-in-jeopardy romance novels
Ivy Quill	Http://www.ivyquill.com/	All genres
Literary Times	Http://www.tlt.com	All genres
Love Romances	Http://www.loveromances.com	Romance
My Shelf	Http://www.myshelf.com	All genres, including children and young adult

cles. "Authors are held to high standards of accuracy, currency, and relevance to the field of medieval studies." It is a site worth visiting if you're writing a story with a medieval setting. It also provides links to other medieval-related sites.

The Regency Library, <http://www.regencylibrary.com>, is another useful site. Most information is provided through a subscription listserve, but a few articles are available at no charge. **Moonstone Research and Publications**, <http://www.moonstonerp.com>, provides the research materials for the Regency Library. Moonstone Research is also worth browsing for its offerings.

A **Regency Repository**, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7517/index.html>, also provides interesting information about fashions, literature, cities, art, houses, and other aspects pertinent to the Regency era.

OF INTEREST

The Naked Novelist, <http://www.nakednovelist.com>, has been mentioned in *Publisher's Lunch* and *USA*

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	BrendaHB@aol.com
Patricia de la Fuente	Patricia@hiline.net
Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@home.com

Today, <http://www.usatoday.comusatonline/20011009/3520772s.htm>. At first, I thought "naked" was a euphemism since Carol Muskoron shares her writing struggles each day. But apparently Carol Muskoron writes in the buff, and video is provided. I didn't see any ▶ ▶ ▶

AT a Glance: Sites that Post Reviews

Website	URL	Genres
Reader to Reader	http://www.readertoreader.com	All genres
Road to Romance	http://www.roadtoromance.dhs.org/	All genres
Romance and Friends	http://www.romanceandfriends.com	Romance
Romance Central	http://www.romance-central.com	Romance
Romance Fiction@about.com	http://www.romncefiction.about.com/mbbody.htm	Romance
Romance in Color	http://www.romanceincolor.com	African-American romance
Romance Reader	http://www.theromancereader.com	Romance
Romance Reader on the Run	http://www.home.swbell.net/monica01/index.html	Romance
Romance Readers Connection	http://www.theromancereadersconnection.com	Romance
Romance Reviews Today	http://www.romrevtoday.com	Romance, mystery, suspense, science fiction, horror and most general fiction
Romancing the Web	http://www.romanceweb.com	Romance
Romantic Times	http://www.romantictimes.com	Mystery and romance
Sci-Fi Romance	http://www.sfronline.com	Romance, science fiction
Scribes World Reviews	http://www.scribesworld.com	All genres, including children and young adult
Sim~Gen Inc.	http://www.simegen.com/	All genres, including children and young adult
Siren Books Online Bookstore	http://www.sirenbooks.com	Romance
Write Lifestyle	http://www.geocities.com/theritellifestyle/	All genres
Under the Covers	http://www.silcom.com/~manatee/utc.html	All genres
Writers Write	http://www.writerswrite.com	All genres—reviews featured in <i>The Internet Writing Journal</i> ®, monthly online magazine

Online.....by Lorraine Heath

▶ ▶ ▶

links for the video, but I may not have looked closely enough. I wasn't really terribly interested in seeing a naked novelist work; I was simply intrigued enough to pop out to the site. Carol has yet to sell her writing, but her site has received over 308,000 hits.

you can learn more about Ninclink, subscribe, or set your preferences (digest, individual posts, etc.).

If you discover sites that you think would interest Novelists, Inc. members, please e-mail me at lorraine-heath@home.com

NOVELISTS, INC. LISTSERVE

At www.yahogroups.com/group/NINCLINK,

The Buzz in the Biz.....by Olivia Rupprecht

iPublish No More

On December 4, Larry Kirshbaum announced the discontinuation of iPublish and the consequent layoff of nearly all 29 employees. After sustaining \$13 million in losses on the venture, Mr. Kirshbaum's pioneer spirit gave way to the reality of a failed vision.

"At some point reality sets in and one has to be realistic about how much of an uphill climb this is going to be," he told *The New York Times*. "I have been wrong so far—I have been overoptimistic from the beginning, so at a certain point you have to question whether your logic is sound."

Mr. Kirshbaum praised Claire Zion "for her energy and vision." Hopefully her future endeavors will meet with better success since she has made herself accessible to our membership at many conferences and has always been glad to grant an interview.

Seeking a statement from Ms. Zion regarding this development, a call was made to her iPublish office. She has been in touch and hopes to have interesting news to report to Ninc members before the deadline for next month's newsletter.

He's Gone and She's Ba-ack

While Mr. Brian Hickey, CEO of Harlequin Enterprises, decided to take an early retirement, Phyllis Grann made her next move from Putnam to...oh, just skip the next paragraph if you can't bear the suspense.

First up is the scoop on Mr. Hickey. Actually, there's not much of a scoop to be had gossip-wise or otherwise, just an announcement by Torstar on November 19 that Ms. Donna Hayes, a 16-year Harlequin veteran, would be assuming Mr. Hickey's duties on December 30. On the surface, at least, it's an amicable passing of the torch with praise

for Ms. Hayes generously doled out by Mr. Hickey. "Donna loves the product, respects the consumer, and deeply appreciates the contributions of all of us at Harlequin," he said. "These are the instincts that will continue to make Donna a great leader for our company."

Moving on, we learned last month that Phyllis Grann was headed for parts pseudo-unknown-and possibly taking some big authors with her. Surprise, surprise, she did end up at Random House, in a "corporate advisory position that will maximize her wide range of creative and business relationships." Peter Olson, vice chairman of Random House, was also reported as saying, "The rare times someone as gifted as Phyllis becomes available you seize the opportunity to work with her. She and I have created a role for her here that is as unique as she is...Phyllis would be an invaluable addition to our company at any time, but never more so than now as we must apply even greater ingenuity to overcome the ongoing book marketplace downturn."

And how does the rumor mill churn when it comes to The Biggies jumping ship with her? If the *New York Post* tells it like it is, then Tom Clancy is staying on board with Putnam for the time being. It seems that a little green waved his way (seven figures) persuaded him to drop the key person clause from his most recent two-book contract.

Now that sounds like a lot of money, but compared to J.K. Rowling, Clancy and King are candidates for a soup kitchen line (sniff, sniff, oh poor them).

Readers, The Next Generation

Reading's, like, you know, totally kewl. That's what pre-teens, teens, and twenty-somethings are saying, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. No doubt Ms. Rowling has something to do with this youthful surge to the page, but appar-

ently much of the upcoming generation is transcending sheer entertainment value in their books of choice. Research data from Ipsos-NPD and Leisure Trends indicates that bookstore sales to young buyers have increased anywhere between 25-75 percent over the past three years. Leisure Trends also reports that more than 25 percent of those under 25 say that reading ranks as their favorite pastime.

This trend—if not a cultural shift—has been a boon to young adult writers, according to agent Andrea Brown. Thanks to the “Potter effect,” advances are up across the board with the previous average of \$4,000-\$10,000 escalating to \$12,000-\$15,000. However, S&S children’s publisher Brenda Bowen is quick to say, “Harry Potter is an absolute mind blower, and I think even people in Hollywood think you can’t replicate it so easily.”

The *Chicago Tribune* put another spin on the young adult audience and the sort of books they enjoy reading. The incorporation of multi-ethnic characters is increasingly popular, according to Philip Lee, co-founder and publisher of Lee & Low Books, which specializes in multicultural themes. “It is self-evident,” he says, “that the need is there because the country is getting more diverse.” He went on to express dismay, however, that the “same people (are) published over and over again; there’re not enough new people.”

Through January 11, The Children’s Museum of Manhattan is showcasing the work of author and illustrator Ed Young, who is Asian-American. Then from Jan 19-February the museum will display the work of Jerry Pinkney and son Brian, both African-American illustrators. Associate director for the museum, Dana Diprima, explains, “Forty percent of the family audience are people of color... It’s very important to the museum to mirror the audience of the world. We don’t want to paint one picture or another of the public. We really want to paint the diversity that they’ll find in the world.”

Or, as Deborah Norville, a Golden Books author, puts it: “Kids don’t see differences, we adults make kids see differences.”

Semantics to Squirm By

I did not plan to cover this story from *The New York Times*. Why? Because it made me *squirm*. But then I decided that the squirm factor was the very reason Harvard Law School professor, Randall Kennedy, was going to make *Breaking News* with his newest offering entitled, um, er-No, I can’t even write it, so fill in the blanks-N____R: *The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. (Note: There are two Gs in the middle and two vowels, I and E, on either side for those who might assume the title begins with “NEVER.”)

That’s right, the N-word adorns this African-American scholar’s book, and it is that very word he investigates and dissects with academic precision and impish glee. It is much to Mr. Kennedy’s amusement that many of the mostly white staff at Pantheon Books refuse to even call the book by its

name. The controversial title has generated plenty of publicity even before its January release, but not all of Mr. Kennedy’s intellectual peers are pleased by the source of it. African-American professor of English at Duke University, Houston Baker, Jr., says, “I see no reason whatsoever to do this, except to make money. It is a crude marketing technique unworthy of someone with the kind of penetrating intelligence that Professor Kennedy has.”

With such censor abounding, Mr. Kennedy shrugs it off by saying, “I write a book to be read.” He goes on to explain that his intent is to help exorcise the word’s power as America’s “paradigmatic ethnic slur” by taking it public. And where did such an idea come from? Kennedy says that he typed the word into a database of court cases and turned up over 4,000 entries.

Legally, there are severe penalties for the word’s use. Some courts have ruled it constitutes the provocation of violence, like that of a physical attack. Other courts have ruled that using the word as an insult can disqualify a judge or prosecutor from his/her job. Even lawyers have argued that if a juror should utter said word within earshot of fellow jurors, their deliberations can be invalidated.

Mr. Kennedy goes far beyond the court in citing examples of the word’s volatile nature. In 1993 a white basketball coach at Central Michigan University asked his black players about their use of the N-word to each other, which they said denoted toughness and tenacity in the game. The coach asked permission to use their slang, to which they gave their assent. Upon his adoption of the word, however, it took less than a month for the coach to receive administrative censure, be sent to a sensitivity training class, have two campus protests staged, and lose his job.

John McWhorter, an African-American linguist and author, had this to say after seeing an advance copy: “Pretty soon we are going to have a book called *NIGGER* that is going to be sitting in front of every bookstore in the United States, and that will be one more step toward taking the power of the word away.”

There. I made myself spell the word exactly as it was quoted. Not that it makes me feel like a better reporter, but confronting it head-on would no doubt please the author. Perhaps Mr. Kennedy does have a valid point, and it is his book to title as he so wishes...

But personally I would be more comfortable with a front cover emblazoned with the F-word.

Borders Hits the Big 3-0

Who would’ve thunk it? That an 800-square-foot used bookstore on the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor would evolve into an international giant with 350-plus stores and 17,000 global employees. Originated by brothers Tom and Louis Borders, Louis paved the way for inventory management in the industry by designing a computerized inventory control system to streamline the flow of books.

Just before Borders’ big birthday celebra-

► ► ►

The Buzz in the Biz.....

▶ ▶ ▶ tion could commence, their marquee at the World Trade Center was consigned to a tragic part of history. Borders' president Tami Heim remains grateful.

"This has been a chance, really, for all of us to count our blessings," she said. "We were very fortunate that all of our World Trade Center employees were safe and accounted for, and we've been gratified at the heartwarming response we've received from so many of our customers in a difficult time. It's really been overwhelming and humbling for us. We've always believed that we do more than just sell books and music, but it's nice to be reminded of the important role our stores play in their communities. We really think we can make a difference, and our relationship with our customers is so important to us, now more than ever."

In somewhat related news, Howard Lutnick, head of Cantor Fitzgerald, is working on a book represented by agent Ellen Levine. Lutnick plans to donate all proceeds to the Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund for the hundreds of families who lost loved ones in his employ at the WTC.

This and That

In no particular order, some industry tidbits to chew on:

- Avalon Publishing Group is acquiring feminist publisher Seal Press.
- Eileen Smith has joined Scribner as a senior editor.
- Betsy Mitchell, previously editor-in-chief of Warner Books' Aspect line—their SF&F imprint—assumes the duties of EIC at Del Rey Books on January 2 and will be acquiring original titles for hardcover, plus reprints for mass market paperback lists.

- Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and other memorable works such as *Sometimes A Great Notion* died two weeks after surgery for liver cancer in November. A bon vivant with a penchant for the outrageous, Kesey lived on the edge, wrote on the edge, and packed a lot of living into his 66 years.

Another "brilliant nonconformist," as his obituary read, was William Javanovich. Starting as a college textbook salesman, he became head of Harcourt Brace Javanovich for 36 years. Javanovich was 81.

- The ABA's newsletter, *Bookselling This Week*, is giving up paper printing to become a free e-mail newsletter as of January 7. It will be sent on Thursdays, updated through the week, and appear on the ABA's website. All industry professionals are encouraged to sign up (remember, it's free!) at <http://www.BookWeb.org/products/5205>.

- Also this January, 36 newspapers that currently don't have a book section will have a monthly insert on books. Advanced Marketing Services is launching the publication that will reach around 1.8 million readers. Their eight-page supplement will include news, reviews, interviews, and a page dedicated to children's books.

- The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that some recent editions of Barbara Pym's 1952 novel *Excellent Women*, was accidentally bound with another book's excerpt in the middle. That book is Christian McLaughlin's 1998 offering, *Sex Toys of the Gods*, which is about a flamboyantly gay Ohioan in Hollywood.

Olivia Rupprecht asked Santa for some new bylines but got a new editor instead. She extends a warm welcome to Jasmine Cresswell and a fond farewell to Pam Browning.

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 Member

Brenda Jernigan, Lillington, NC

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

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

New Year's Resolution:

Renew your own membership now... and strengthen the power of writers by growing Ninc among all novelists.



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Diary of a Mad Epicist”

I dream one night that a concomm (sf/f convention committee) convinces me to drive a truck, loaded with supplies for the con, from its storage warehouse in one city to the con site in another city. The vehicle is roughly the size of a small U-Haul truck, the kind recommended for hauling the household goods of a studio apartment. I'm a little nervous, since I usually drive a compact car. However, I have driven a truck this size before; so I agree to haul the load.

Once I find myself on the road, though, things start to go haywire. I thought there'd be a navigator or co-driver; but, no, I am completely alone for the whole ride. I thought I would drive the truck about 100 miles; but, no, the distance keeps increasing—300 miles, 500 miles, 800, 950, 1,200.... No end in sight. My destination keeps stretching into the distance, always farther and farther away.

Darkness falls, and dawn never comes. The night seems eternal. I'm worried. I've never driven a vehicle this size in the dark before. And speaking of size.... The truck is getting bigger. Much, *much* BIGGER. It grows to the size of a four-bedroom household moving van by the time I reach the state line. Before long, it's a massive 18-wheeler. The cab alone is bigger than my first apartment, and the load has become so huge that, looking in my side mirrors, I can't tell where the rear of the truck ends. Such a big load is incredibly unwieldy, appallingly hard to steer or maneuver. It also picks up speed with alarming ease.

I now realize it's not only pitch dark outside, but also snowing. Visibility is poor, the road is slick, and traction is unpredictable. I need to slow down...but the brakes are sluggish, and the sheer momentum of this vast, dense leviathan ensures that I keep plunging ahead into the night.

Now something's wrong with the windshield—an awning or something falls across it, obscuring my view of the dark, icy road. I can only see out of a small portion of the windshield, just a horizontal sliver of visibility right above the dashboard.

What little I can see of the outside world horrifies me: I seem to be on a city street now, instead of the interstate.

Next thing I know, I'm side-swiping hundreds of parallel-parked cars, like Sandra Bullock on that self-destruct bus in *Speed*. My massive 18-wheeler careens wildly around

the road as I try—without any success—to keep it from destroying vehicles, taking out parking meters, and knocking down lamp posts.

Coming up to a gas station, I decide that this would be a good place to stop. Along with everything else, I'm running out of fuel.

I attempt to pull up to the gas pumps. Instead, I plough into them, taking them all out, too. Some of them fly dramatically into the air, followed by geysers of gasoline. Happily, this slows down the truck enough that I am finally able to stop it. Shaking and sweating with terror, I climb out of the cab and go sit on a street curb, where I stare wearily at the wreckage this endeavor has wrought. All around me is chaos, confusion, catastrophe.

I look at the truck. It's even *bigger* now. (Is there such a thing as a 26-wheeler?) I realize it's just too big, too massive, too hard to control, and the distance is far too great. I can't get this load to the con. I know the concomm needs the goods I'm hauling, and I swore I'd deliver; but I can't get back in the cab of that truck. I just *can't*.

Now someone from the concomm happens along. He surveys the wreckage of the gas station, the neighborhood, and my own shattered self. Then he hands me a cup of coffee.

“Come on, Resnick,” he says. “It has to be done, and there's no one but you to finish the job. Get back in the damn truck and deliver the goods already.”

I sigh in resignation, get back in the truck, and turn on the engine. I check the side mirrors, looking behind me; I see nothing but the load I'm hauling, extending so high and wide and far back that nothing else in the whole world is visible. I look ahead, at the dark, icy, endless road before me...and I pull the truck out of the ruined gas station. Because I have to deliver the goods. Because it's my job. Because there's no one else who can finish this journey for me....

And I wake up in a cold sweat, heart pounding with terror and dread.

Gosh, guess it's time to start another day's work.

Welcome to my world. The daily life of an epic fantasy novelist.

I sit staring blankly at the cursor on the computer screen. I look at the current page number of my ▶ ▶ ▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ very-late and still-unfinished novel. Reading the number there, I am transported back to Palermo, Sicily, 1987...

I was 24 years old and teaching English (language, not literature) at the University of Palermo. I wasn't really qualified, but native speakers of English weren't exactly clamoring to go to that land so tormented by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, poverty, and violence in the '80s. It was a beautiful, irrational, generous country which grabbed hold of my imagination and never let go. I would eventually set two romance novels and some short stories there, and I would someday write several epic fantasy novels initially inspired by Sicily's history, legends, and culture.

In 1987, though, I was just a young failed actress who had landed a bizarre but fairly cushy job there. The contract I was offered stated that the Ministry of Education couldn't require me to work more than 12 hours per week. So, despite an active social life (Italians being very sociable people), I had a lot of time on my hands. My salary met my daily needs, but I had a bank overdraft in London (the city where I had abandoned my acting aspirations after three years) which I had to pay off. I needed to earn a chunk of money which was small by most standards, but larger than anything I could scrape out of my salary.

So I read Kathryn Falk's *How to Write a Romance and Get It Published*. I grew up in a writer's house, so I knew the odds. Nonetheless, this felt like something I might be able to do, and I had everything I needed to try: pens, notebooks, blank paper, a manual typewriter, and plenty of free time. I always swore I would never write—what insane work, what a miserable lifestyle!—so I approached my project quietly, privately, telling hardly anyone what I was doing. It seemed to me that if I wanted to sell one book to pay off my overdraft, then I should probably start by writing at least three. If none of them sold, I'd try to figure out my mistakes before writing three more.

I chose to target Silhouette Desire. Not because I read Desires; I wasn't a even romance reader. (I liked adventure novels, especially spy novels.) I chose Desires because they were short. I seriously wondered if I could possibly write as many as 55,000 words. My God, that was a lot of words! At least 200 pages! I paced myself, planning 10 chapters of about 20 pages each. I was astonished each time I completed a chapter, and happily flabbergasted when I reached the end of the book.

Wow! Look at me! 217 whole pages completed!

A year later, I sold my first book to Desire and

entered into a relationship with Silhouette which lasted for several years. I didn't attempt a Special Edition until my fifth sale, because its length, roughly 300 pages, was so daunting to me...

Years later, I again look at the current page number of my work in progress: 1,416.

This book, an epic fantasy novel, is already longer than my first six books put together—and it's still not done.

There is reputedly a higher rate of manic-depressive illness among poets than among novelists, and a higher rate of such disorders among novelists than among mundanes. No one has ever studied the rate of mental illness among epic writers as compared to other novelists, but I'll bet the numbers go through the roof.

Mwba-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! <Sob!>

I wasn't suited to category romance, but I liked writing short books. Hell, I like *reading* short books. The biggest irony of my career may be that you have to tie me to a chair at gunpoint to make me read a book as long as the ones I currently write.

After I wrote my first single title romance, I realized that 100,000 words was not such a difficult length, after all, despite my initial fears. I could certainly write that length regularly without struggling. Cool!

Then <*sinister music*> I pitched a fantasy proposal to my agent. He liked it but explained the market situation in fantasy, which was that epic fiction was hot and commercial, and almost everything else was in a career-withering slump. If I could find a way to turn my initial two-book idea into one big epic story, we could really do something with that.

I explained about only reading short books. I explained about preferring to write short books. I'd recently seen a family photo of NYT bestseller Tad Williams' adult cat, sitting upright, completely dwarfed by Tad's epic fantasy MS sitting next to it. I explained emphatically to my agent that I would not do that. I would *never* do that. It was out of the question. No way.

Now I continue to stare at the blinking cursor on page 1,416 of my current book.

From where we start out, how do we ever reach where we wind up?

James Clavell, epic in a fashion that awes even epicists, once said that the only way he could write books

like *Shogun* and *Noble House* was by always believing, at the start of a novel, that this time things would be different. This time, that wouldn't happen to him.

How did a manuscript the size of a small horse simply "happen" to someone, I wondered?

Now I know. Like the road to hell, you make the journey moment by moment, unable to see through the dark and the snow... until you one day realize that your truck is bigger than Cleveland and it's too late to turn back.

At page 100 of this book, I had not yet introduced all of my plotlines. At page 300, I had not yet introduced all of my ten viewpoint characters.

I had a *crise des nerfs* around page 500. I recalled that when my editor read my last book, which was 978 pages when I turned it in, his revision letter ensured that I added about 30 pages to the final version. Now, at page 500, I could already tell that I would have a nervous breakdown if I heard those words again: "It could be even longer."

At page 800, I started to get morose. Around page 950, I fell into a deep depression, living only on Oreo cookies and refusing to answer the phone. I realized I had made a disastrous miscalculation. Being relatively new to epic fiction, I began this book (a sequel) fearing that I didn't have enough conflict to carry another 250,000-word story; so I developed lots of new conflicts to accompany the ones left over from the prequel, thus ensuring this book wouldn't be a heavily-padded bore.

Works in theory.

In practice, I now perceived that the story had become so complicated that there was no possible way I could wrap it up in a mere 250,000 words. It was also too late to remove a few plotlines and keep the book "short." I'd created a fabric of multiple storylines which all gradually weave together towards a series of interrelated climaxes. Pull out one thread, and the whole tapestry would unravel.

I'd originally thought this was good structure. Now I saw that it had put me in the cab of a 26-wheeler leviathan careening down a dark, icy road with no way out, and no one else to complete the journey for me.

Around page 1,200, I realized that I couldn't finish this book around page 1,200. (*Nothing* slips by me!) Realizing that I was already over my contracted story-length, I confessed to my agent, who confessed to my editor. My editor is actually a pretty kind man, and he phrased his reply in gentle and encouraging terms, but the essential message was: Epic fiction is BIG, Resnick, so suck it up and tough it out.

I proceeded to page 1,201. To page 1,416. To page 1,779, where I finally, weeping with relief, wrote the words "The End."

Because it's my job. Because I swore I'd deliver the goods. Because no one else can make this journey for me.


The long-dark-haul of epic fantasy is the private little hell in which I am destined to burn. Your private hell may be different; and I don't want to burn there any more than you want to burn in mine. *Vive la différence!* As Andre Maurois said, "In literature, as in love, we are astonished at what is chosen by others." Whether I chose this load or it somehow chose me, I'm still at the wheel and going straight on 'til dawn.

That book, all 1,779 pages of it, is my message from hell (where a beachside cabana is cheaper than you'd think), delivered in a bottle the size of a mack truck, written on a stack of paper that makes whole forests fear my name: In the end, a writer's work must always be its own reward, because that's all you can count on when you're careening down that dark icy highway, all alone for the long haul—be it 217 pages or 1,779. This is the gospel according to a mad epicist.

If I can celebrate my descent into my own private little hell by roasting marshmallows in its raging fires, if I can keep faith with the vision I repeatedly lose and rediscover and refine between the words "Chapter One" and "The End," if I can follow my fate through the snowy night and refuse to turn back when the going gets rough....

Then I am in the driver's seat, regardless of how many gas pumps and street lights I wipe out in the process. Then no one and nothing can keep my truck off the road. Then I am always, somehow, headed towards my destination.

Even if it's not on the map. Even if no one is there to welcome me when I arrive. Even if I'm less than wholly sane when I *finally* finish my journey and at last come to rest.

(Until, that is, I get the revision letter. Your mileage may vary. Mine sure as hell seems to.) 

National Writers Union Health Plan

Nine 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.**

From your new editor:

Over the past few years, Ninclink has become a vibrant and interesting forum for almost two-thirds of Ninc members. Hot-off-the-press information gets shared on the Link, along with conversations about our writing lives, and insights into the bewildering rituals of the publishing industry.

The success of Ninclink leaves me wondering exactly what we expect from our newsletter now that it's no longer our primary medium for communicating with each other. I assume most of you want *NINK* to provide information and education rather than entertainment. Am I right?

If I am, what exactly constitutes information and education for you? Do you want how-to articles? Interviews with editors? Nitty gritty stuff about contract clauses? If you could design a new monthly column entirely for you, what would it be about?

E-mail me (jasmine444@aol.com) with your opinions, wants, and even your gripes. Otherwise be prepared to read a newsletter each month that reflects what I think you ought to be interested in reading, as opposed to what you really want.

— **Jasmine Cresswell**

Fast Track.....Compiled by Vella Munn

Fast Track is a monthly report listing Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today Top 150 bestseller list. Internet surfers can find the complete list at: <http://www.usatoday.com>

NINK's new Fast Track reporter is Vella Munn. If you would like to alert her to your upcoming releases, please contact her at vmunn@attglobal.net

USA TODAY BESTSELLER LIST November, 2001

Sandra Brown, *Riley in the Morning*,
Bantam
Betina Krahn, *The Husband Test*, Bantam
Jayne Ann Krentz, *The Wedding Night*,
Mira

Jayne Ann Krentz, *Lost and Found*, Jove
Connie Mason, *The Dragon Lord*, Leisure
Nora Roberts, *Heaven and Earth*, Jove

[Yes, Harry Potter did rule the lists.....]

NINK, a publication of Novelists, Inc.

An Organization for Writers of Popular Fiction

P.O. Box 1166

Mission KS 66222-0166

Publishing Services by Huseby Agency, Ltd.

FIRST CLASS MAIL U.S. POSTAGE PAID FARGO ND PERMIT #281
--