

“You’ve Got to Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative”

BY PAT McLAUGHLIN

Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. Remember that Johnny Mercer song? I have this memory of it being sung by an animated bear on TV. Maybe it was the bear’s limited credibility that had me responding with a hearty, “Says who?”

Why eliminate the negative when it provided certain benefits—not the least of which is I can be a darned amusing depressed person. And I had high-power backing. At the August 2000 American Psychological Association (APA) meeting there was a panel called “The (Overlooked) Virtues of Negativity.”

“Being (constantly) upbeat can lead to a tendency to think in a quick fix kind of way,” says Julie Norem, a social psychologist at Wellesley College. Psychologist Barbara Held of Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine laments what she calls the “tyranny of the positive attitude.” This camp points out that optimism run amok can lead to sloppy work and bad decision-making.

That panel could be viewed as

backlash to a “Positive Psychology” movement that coalesced around University of Pennsylvania psychology professor Martin E.P. Seligman, who was elected president of the American Psychology Association in 1996.

That positive movement maintains that psychology has traditionally focused on disease and how to ameliorate it. Positive psychology aims to look at what works through scientific research. By examining the mechanisms of what works psychologically, they hope to shed light on what doesn’t for those who are ill *and* to find ways to make things better for those who are not psychologically sick, but wouldn’t mind a little tune-up.

These scientists (in contrast to so many in the scientific community who seem to spend an inordinate amount of time telling us what *not* to eat, wear, or do) are looking into topics such as resiliency, hope, forgiveness, and gratitude. I find that heartening.

Positive psychology was what I was after, though I didn’t know the name for it when I started. From conversations with fellow writers and reading Ninclink posts, I suspect I’ve

got lots of company. And what I’ve learned is that negativity and pessimism could be robbing us of writing time and possibly of good health, as well as diminishing our writing by narrowing our thoughts.

Last summer, long before I’d heard of positive psychology, I was facing a deadline when I received a review on a previous book with a phrase along the lines of “although the story loses some steam ...” That same day, I had a piece of good news. You guessed it—I focused on that solitary phrase in the review to the exclusion of everything else, and hearing that phrase drumming through my head cost me an entire day of writing at a time I couldn’t afford it.

After crying on some dear friends’ shoulders, I looked at the review again the next day and realized that *everything* else in the review before and after that phrase was glowing. Yet I’d managed to not see that, instead zooming in on the negative. I’d been aware of this tendency before, but I’d figured it was part of the standard equipment in my writing personality (in most areas of my life I am not like

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

We've had a great deal of discussion on the Ninlink about volunteerism and the board and what Ninc can do for its membership and vice versa.

I'd like to bring all our members up to date on the business of the day. As I write this, our last board meeting was in March, and our next won't be until April 23, so when this appears in May, we'll already have made decisions I can't predict right now.

Our most recent discussion online was in reference to the publisher audits Ninc performed several years ago. At the time, we were extremely excited by the prospect of drawing names from a hat and auditing a member's book to see what we could uncover. As time went on, the bloom wore off that initial excitement.

First, we had the problem of publisher audit clauses which effectively disqualified nearly all the members who threw their names in the hat. The reasons were many and varied and discussed in our newsletter at the time, but the auditors had the legal expertise to know which books they could audit and which they couldn't. (Start reading your contract audit clauses, folks! You may be shocked.)

Next came the reality of the actual audit. Since these were strictly confidential to protect the member whose book was audited, and we published all the information we're legally able to on the publishers at the time, I can't go into additional details here. Suffice it to say, by the time the auditors were allowed access to the books, they were squeaky clean. We spent a fortune on time and travel, and the auditors admitted they could find nothing.

Because of the publicity surrounding this type of audit, publishers cannot afford to have our audit turn out any other way. Private audits that have turned up discrepancies often result in gag orders before the author receives his/her money. We've had discussions with professionals in the field, and they agree that if a publisher wanted to cover up their tracks, they could. Think Enron. There isn't enough money in all our pockets to pay the expenses that would accumulate to work through the megalopolies out there today if they chose to stonewall.

That isn't to say that individuals can't audit their publishers (read that contract again!), but it does say that Ninc paying for the audit could cause difficulties. The board has the issue on the April agenda for discussion to see if any new insights strike us as worth pursuing.

I've run out of space to discuss all the other issues before us (and Laura Baker's report on the conference is a major example of some of the things we're doing), which doesn't leave me time to discuss volunteerism. Again. Many of the projects we'd like to see accomplished require research and expertise beyond that of the board. We can make decisions once presented with facts and figures, but it's extremely difficult for us to summon those facts and figures and still carry out all our other duties. Someone has to oversee our website, sit in on the lengthy monthly discussions with the Authors Coalition board, sort out dues renewals, membership applications, balance our checkbooks, edit the newsletter, answer member and non-member queries—the list is endless.

So I appeal to our members, if there is a topic or issue that really ticks your bomb, let us know. But please, be in a position to help us find volunteers to form a committee, research the facts, and get back to us. As much as we'd like to solve world peace, or at least publisher ingratitude, we can't do it by ourselves. It takes a village, remember?

— Pat Rice

How You Can Become a Ninc Angel

Janelle Burnham Schneider has graciously agreed to be our Volunteer Czar. Or maybe that should be Czarina. Anyone who would like his/her name added to our Ninc Angels list, please e-mail her at MJSchneider@primus.net. If you have particular talents outside the writing world (accounting, sales, whatever) that you think might be beneficial to the organization or its members, please let her know. Sometimes we simply need another person to help out on a committee, so you don't need to have special training to be valuable to Ninc. If you do have a particular interest—advocacy, conference, liaison with bookstores, etc.etc.—express that, too, please. With Janelle's help, we're looking forward to building a really useful database.

— PR

INTRODUCING.....

The following authors have applied for membership in inc and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc:

New Applicants

Lisette Belisle, Ballston Lake, NY
Karen Drogin (*Carly Phillips*), Purchase, NY
Randi Dufresne (*Elizabeth Ashtree*), Elkridge, MD
Katherine Grill (*Katherine Greyle*), Champaign, IL
Gwen Kirkwood (*Lynn Granger*), Dumfries, Scotland
Mary Lesak, Fenelon Falls, Ontario, Canada
Jane Malcolm, Heber, AZ
Isolde Martyn, Turramurra, NSW, Australia
Pat Nagle (*P.G. Nagle*), Albuquerque, NM
Hope Tarr, Fredericksburg, VA

New Members

Pamela Burford, Baldwin, NY
Melanie Jackson, Sonora, CA
Victoria Strauss, Amherst, MA
Linda Style, Mesa, AZ
Tracy Summer, Woodside, NY

**Ninc has room to grow...recommend
membership to your colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online
at www.ninc.com.**

Bits'n'Pieces

NOW PLAYING @ wga.org Week of April 1, 2002 Vol. V, Issue 6—The official e-newsletter of The Writers Guild of America, West at <http://www.wga.org>

SCRIPT REGISTRATION: Now You Can Do It Online! The WGAW Intellectual Property Registry has been aiding in the creation of legal evidence since 1927. The Registry has always been a vital instrument of the Guild's service to writers.

In keeping with the times, the Intellectual Property Registry has expanded its services online.

The Writers Guild's Registration Service (or Intellectual Property Registry) registers more than 40,000 pieces of literary material each year and is available to members and non-members alike. Writers are invited

to submit material to be archived by the Writers Guild to document their work. Materials may be submitted for registration in person, by mail, or online.

Contact the Intellectual Property Registry at (323) 782-4500 or click **SCRIPT REGISTRATION** on the wga.org homepage for complete details.

AS OPRAH DUMPS HER BOOKCLUB everyone else is getting onto the book club bandwagon—or so it appears. *USA TODAY* announced it's launching a book club, complete with online chats, message boards, newspaper coverage and more. By the time you read this, the "Today Show" will have its book club launched, as well. According to *PW* Newsline, the program already not only has "the best reputation among book publicists (after Oprah, of course)," but its success rate is a lot higher because it covers a lot more books. Will either of these succeed now that Oprah's out of the game? Hmmm.

Filed by Terey daly Ramin

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this), and figured it ensured that I remained humble.

But this instance was different. First, I was embarrassed to admit to the friends with the damp shoulders that I'd jumped to the most negative conclusion possible. Second, I'd lost that entire day of writing—and it wasn't the first time this had happened. I'd had it. I was not going to let that habit interfere with my writing if I could help it. I wanted to know why we (not all writers, but a fairly high percentage from my unscientific sampling) do this and—more important—how to stop.

First I brainstormed for reasons why we, as writers, might be inclined to open the door and let stuff such as a negative review or even a solitary negative phrase right into our heads, our hearts, our souls. I came up with a few theories, which I would be happy to share with that APA "The (Overlooked) Virtues of Negativity" panel:

▼ We don't want other people to think we have big heads

▼ We don't want to be blindsided by criticism so we make sure we know what all the potential slams are, and thus hope to be armored against them. (Doesn't work, but we hope.)

▼ It's a survival mechanism carried over from when doing something right was fine, but learning from your mistakes kept you alive another day. (Therefore evolution favored those who obsessed about their mistakes, and we're the descendents of all those fretters.)

▼ It's an analytical mechanism that—if not taken to an extreme (Hah!)—can help us improve our work. (My mind accepts this one, my hand reaches for chocolate.)

▼ It's a carryover from the last times we read our manuscript that's

being criticized. The last—what?—three, four times we read it before it was published we were on the hunt for bad stuff because we were editing it, reading line/edits, reading galleys. So we've last viewed it with a mean critical eye, not looking for or noticing the good. Certainly not reading it as a reader. So if we hear something critical, it fits right in with our attitude toward the book, while the good stuff doesn't. This fits with scientific studies showing that people accept information that backs their opinion and reject information that doesn't.

All this could be true, and for some folks, knowing these are the reasons that trigger the "accentuate the negative" switch in our heads might stop the habit in its tracks. For those of you like me whose habits are made of sterner stuff, the journey continues.

Next, I read "positive energy" self-help books. This was not a good fit for me. I'm a fairly hard-headed skeptical type, so sending signals out to the universe that it answers in kind, while interesting, didn't sway me. (Programs that say "If you really believe in it, it will work" raise my skepticism, because they have a built-in excuse that it's never the program it's always the operator. It didn't work? It's your fault for not believing.)

One interesting connection did result from this phase, however. What some call the Law of Attraction clicked in my head as coinciding with scientific research showing that people absorb information that confirms their beliefs and discard information that refutes their beliefs. We all know this at work in bigotry: seeing what confirms the bias, dismissing what doesn't. And that's basically what we're being to ourselves—bigots against optimism and hopefulness.

It was my first step up a mountain, which helped in two ways:

▼ Consciousness. If I shrug off a good thing or wrap my arms around a bad thing I now recognize (eventually) that my reaction is because it's confirming beliefs I hold or fears I harbor.

▼ A route to follow. Scientific research might be the jackhammer that could get through my hard head and break up that realm of negativity.

Then my sister-in-law sent me an excerpt from material aimed at business people that referred to brain research showing that the biological/chemical connections of a thought become faster and easier to make with repeated use. Scientists say the repetition stimulates dendritic growth in the brain. I say we're basically creating an express lane for those frequently-thought thoughts. Negative or positive, we're carving a rut in our brain that similar thoughts will roll through in nothing flat. New thoughts have to slog along laboriously building new connections.

Ah-ha! Now this was making sense to me. And maybe it explains the anecdotal success of people who swear by affirmations—they're getting their thoughts in a positive fast-track.

That excerpt had another section that addressed research done by Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin on the neurophysiology of positive and negative emotions. With many apologies to Davidson, the gist is that different areas of our brain hold the positive stuff (that's the technical term—honest) and the negative stuff. You can stimulate one side or the other and get strong responses, as you might guess. But that's not all. When one side is anesthetized, the other side responds as if it had been stimulated. In other words, if the positive side is suppressed, even without stimulating the negative side, negative reactions such

as crying, shouting, and acting out will occur.

So even if all something negative in our lives does is mildly suppress the positive side, that's going to bring out some of the negative.

That was another light bulb moment for me. It explained sinking into negative reactions even when there aren't big, horrible "bad things"—being nibbled by ducks suppresses the positive side enough to let the negative emotions pop up (and if that happens frequently, you start building that negative-thought express lane.) It also gave me a really good reason to eat chocolate, because it stimulates the positive side, bringing it back up to even from being suppressed, and that quiets down the negative side. (Sorry, I didn't find any research that confirms this, but it's such a good theory, it's got to be true.)

But I wanted to know more, and I still needed bigger weapons to throw against the negativity.

A writing friend suggested the book *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your life* by Martin E.P. Seligman—yes, that's Dr. Positive Psychology himself, though I didn't know that when I read the book.

Much of the book is devoted to recapping a series of studies that Seligman and colleagues have done since the mid-60s. Those studies first focused on what he calls "learned helplessness"—the sense that nothing you can do will have any effect, so you don't bother to try. Giving up.

They discovered some subjects, once trained to feel helpless (their efforts have no effect), do not try to help themselves even when their efforts would have an effect—they don't even check if their efforts could help. Yet others, exposed to the same circumstances, never give up.

So what was the difference between these two kinds of people?

Seligman's answer, based on further studies, is that explanatory style is the difference: what you say to yourself when things are going bad.

He breaks explanatory style into three elements—permanence, perva-

siveness and personalization—each with a spectrum between an optimistic response and a pessimistic response.

Permanence—is what went wrong temporary or enduring?

Pervasiveness—is what went wrong limited to one specific element or across the board?

Personalization—is what went wrong solely your fault or are its causes outside of you?

Say a high school student fails a test. How does he respond?

I will never amount to anything hits the three Ps from a pessimistic style. *Never* is permanent, *anything* is pervasive and *I*, of course, is personal.

The teacher put questions on that test we hadn't covered yet hits the three Ps from an optimistic style. *Hadn't covered/yet* are temporary. *That test* is specific to one event. *The teacher* puts the onus outside the student. (I was grumbling about personal responsibility as I read this, then turned the page and there was a section headed "Caveat About Responsibility." In short, Seligman says he does not recommend a wholesale blaming of external elements, but awareness of a habit of taking on responsibility when it is not yours is advised.)

Seligman demonstrates links among the pessimistic explanatory style and helplessness and depression—and the optimistic explanatory style with persistence and often with success.

If you line up your explanatory style with optimism, will all be sweetness and light? Probably not if the raw material you're working with is not optimistic. Psychologists suggest people have a set range for optimism that can be maximized, but not necessarily made over.

But adjusting your explanatory style likely will produce a better balance. Runaway optimism might not be the best mode, either. (Seligman has noted in interviews that there are some professions where optimists might not be the best choice. Pilots, for instance. "Turn back? Heck, no. I can get this plane over that mountain range with one engine and no fuel—

piece of cake." *Not* the person you want in the cockpit.)

Moreover, Max More, yet another Ph.D. (this one not teaching or researching at a university), weighing on this, proposes that optimists can be divided into two groups: passive and dynamic. Passive says everything will be okay, and sits back and waits for that to come true. Dynamic says I can fix this, and sets to work doing that. Explanatory style is not enough on its own—you have to act, too.

But what if your explanatory style is just fine or negativity doesn't stop your writing in its tracks for a day or longer—what is in all this positive psychology for you?

In a talk describing a study underway on the benefits of "positive affect" Ed Diener, one of the studiers, said that people in a positive mood do better in creativity measures. Further, in referring to "eminent creative people," 60 percent of their creativity seems to occur while in a positive mood, and 8 percent in a negative mood.

Now, some of us skeptical types might be wondering if the good mood is a result of having a good creative session, rather than the cause, but the Ph.D.s have some thoughts on that, too.

Barbara Fredrickson of the University of Michigan has an answer for that in her research, and especially in her 2000 article "Cultivating Positive Emotions to Optimize Health and Well-Being." (Trust me—that's a sexy title in the world of the APA.)

Fredrickson writes that negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, etc.) narrow our thoughts in order to prepare us for specific actions, such as the old fight-or-flight. As Diener points out, unpleasant emotions can signal something is wrong and push you to make changes. It's useful for life-threatening situations, where you want all your resources—mental and physical—zeroed in on the action that's going to get you out of that fix. The zeroing-in effect of those negative emotions, however, means they are not willing to share your

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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ resources with other thoughts or actions—the sort of thoughts and actions that you need for writing fiction, like imagination.

So, how do you shake those negative emotions that creep in when you read, oh, say a negative phrase in a review?

Experiments have shown that positive emotions (for example contentment, interest, joy) can *undo* the cardiovascular effects of negative reactions (fear and sadness.) Fredrickson and colleagues measured the cardiovascular effects of telling subjects they had to give a speech to induce “negative emotional arousal.” Then, after saying “just kidding” about the speech to remove the negative emotional arousal, they divided them into groups and showed some negative films (scary, sad), some positive films, and some neutral films. The group shown the positive films had the fastest cardiovascular recovery.

Fredrickson then says, “Beyond speeding physiological recovery, the hypothesized undoing effect implies that positive emotions should counteract any aspect of negative emotions.” *Any aspect?* Like narrowed thinking? Like frozen creativity?

Alas, experiments to confirm that implication have not yet been done—or at least not yet reported, this area of research is ongoing—although Fredrickson notes that “indirect supportive evidence can be drawn from a collection of correlational studies. Individuals who express or report higher levels of positive emotion show more constructive and flexible coping, more abstract and long-term thinking, and greater emotional distance following stressful negative events.” (For those wanting to dig deeper, she cites Keltner & Bonanno, 1997; Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998; Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993; Stein, Folkman, Trabasso, & Richards, 1997).

[For a different take read Kevin Rathunde of the University of Utah, who wrote an article called “Broadening and Narrowing in the Creative Process: A Commentary on Fredrickson’s ‘Broaden-and-Build’ Model.” He called for a more complex model than “negative” emotions on one side and “positive” emotions on the other. He also held that creativity requires the narrowing thinking (focused, analytical) as well as broadening thinking. “A large and growing amount of research suggests that the right hemisphere operates in a primary process manner, whereas the left hemisphere operates in a sequential and analytic way,” he writes. “Creativity requires both kinds of processing; therefore, it is related to flexible communication across the hemispheres and the ability to integrate these different ways of processing information (Bogen, 1969; Martindale, 1999).”]

I’m not arguing with Rathunde, but I feel that I have the negative side down—forgive the pun—pat.

So pending the positive psychologists running some studies on Ninc members, what’s in Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build model of positive emotions for us as writers?

I’ll let her words answer that: “Cultivated positive emotions not only counteract negative emotions, but also broaden individuals’ habitual modes of thinking and build their personal resources for coping.”

Broadening habitual ways of thinking (sounds a lot like creativity, doesn’t it?) and becoming better at coping (sure seems like a handy tool in the world of publishing). I like it.

Building on the work of her fellow psychologists, Fredrickson argues that while negative actions narrow thoughts in order to facilitate an act, positive emotions, with their broadening effect provide the platform for building new skills. For

example, she says that interest sparks us to explore, which builds our store of knowledge. And contentment “involves full awareness of, and openness to momentary experiences; it carries the urge to savor and integrate those experiences, which in turn creates a new sense of self and a new world view.” Good stuff for a writer.

And what is built by a positive emotion endures long past the instance of experiencing the emotion.

Fredrickson is not alone. Alice Isen of Cornell University is researching the effects of positive emotions and indicates that positive effect appears to make people more flexible and more successful at tasks requiring creativity and flexible thought.

Think of negative emotions as the sugar fueling the short-term gratification of action, while positive emotions are the protein creating the muscle of long-term gratification of expanded abilities.

Over the past eight months I’ve read a lot, and practiced a lot, and I have become more positive. Do I qualify as little Mary Sunshine? Uh, no. A healthy dose of skepticism is beneficial in my opinion. But I have become more of what Seligman refers to as a situational optimist—even in situations where I would have previously been a knee-jerk pessimist.

I’m trying to tame my negative emotions sweet tooth so that Fredrickson’s expectation will take hold: “Positive emotions, the broaden-and-build model holds, open people’s mindsets, enabling creative and flexible thinking.”

The only downside is that I had some really good lines about being blue that are now going to waste. Or maybe I could have this pessimistic character who is a really amusing depressed person...

How’s that for flexible thinking?

NINK

Online.....by Lorraine Heath

Changing your e-mail address can often be a hassle—especially when it comes to your listserve subscriptions. But for those subscribed to Ninlink, Brenda Hiatt has written instructions that can ease your way into changing your e-mail address for your Ninlink subscription (and any other yahoo lists to which you subscribe):

1. Go to www.yahogroups.com.
2. Click on “my groups.” (I don’t know if you’re subbed to any groups besides Ninlink or not, but if so, this will let you change your address for all groups.)
3. Click on “my preferences” (at the top of the page) where you can edit your e-mail address.
4. Don’t forget to “save changes.”
5. Go back to the “my groups” page
6. Click “edit delivery options” to make sure the new address shows up for the groups that you’re subscribed to (if not, change it and again, save changes).

Brenda says, “That should do it, although some people have reported having to go through that process two or three times before it ‘takes.’”

If you have any problems changing your e-mail address, e-mail Brenda, BrendaHB@aol.com. While it may be tempting to unsubscribe using your old address, then re-subscribe using your new address, remember that you’ll delay receiving mail from Ninlink because the list moderators must approve all subscriptions. So follow the steps above for ease in switching your subscription to a new e-mail address.

While an abundance of free information is still available on the Internet, it seems that I’m discovering more sites are charging fees for information or e-zines. While I may report them in this column, I’m not endorsing any sites or e-zines that require payments. As always, you should determine whether or not what is offered is worth your money.

PROMOTION

Bill Stoller’s Publicity Insider, <http://www.PublicityInsider.com>, offers tips for publicizing yourself. The useful site gives you the format for press releases and pitch letters. More importantly, he provides examples of bad and good press releases and pitch letters. A subscription to his e-zine, *Free Publicity*, is \$97 a year for charter members. Once the issues actually begin distribution, it will cost more for those who are not charter members. You can view a sample online.

Romance Divas, <http://www.ROMANCEDIVAS.com>, is a new site dedicated to romance. Although, it launched on December 16, 2001, Kali, the website owner, recently told me, “My site was unfortunately put on hold while I was deployed out of state for 89 days.” She has plans to begin updating the site soon.

RESEARCH

The Costume Gallery’s Research Library, <http://www.costumegallery.com/research.htm>, is absolutely wonderful. It has various issues of the *Lady’s Home Journal* from 1893, 1894, and 1895, *McCall’s* from 1908, and other periodicals. On the “Portfolio of Costumes” shelf, it has a book labeled *Color Names*. This page provides you with documented colors used in period dress. They also have information on clothing from various time periods. All of this information is available to the public at no charge. For a fee, they will research your specific clothing needs for your characters.

The Realms of Research, A Society Dedicated to Research, <http://www.realmsfresearch.com/>, is a new site. “A Day in History” page allows you to pick any day of the year and it lists historic events which took place on that day. On January 3, 1888, the first drinking straw was patented. It’s really a fun and interesting page. They do have a newsletter, *Gems of Research*, in which you’ll “find articles on the American West, the American Indians, the Victorian Era, the Middle Ages, and the Regency and Tudor Periods.” The subscription costs \$29 for 36 issues (6 issues are sent every 2 months).

ResearchBuzz, <http://www.researchbuzz.com>, is “designed to cover the world of Internet research. To that end this site provides almost daily updates on search engines, new data managing software, browser technology, large compendiums of information, Web directories—whatever. If in doubt, the final question is, ‘Would a reference librarian find it useful?’ If the answer’s yes, in it goes!” The site offers a free weekly e-zine. The archives are available. The newsletter addresses new sites and additions to sites, some of which could prove useful depending on what you are writing. They also have the *ResearchBuzz Extra*. A year’s subscription is \$20. You can view a sample issue online.

Scots Online, <http://www.scots-online.org/>, is dedicated to the language of Lowland Scotland. English translations are provided which I found extremely helpful. ▶ ▶ ▶

ONLINE.....

▶▶▶ If you're looking for quotes, visit *Quote Land*, <http://www.quoteland.com>. I enjoyed the random quotes. They have a feature that allows you to search for the source of a particular quote—which could prove useful.

Hereditary Titles, <http://www.hereditarytitles.com>, is “dedicated to the hereditary titles of the British Empire.” It has a database that allows you to type in a name in order to discover if it's currently or has ever been associated with a title. It's a very useful tool if you want to determine if the names you are using in your novel are truly fictitious. It also provides an explanation of hereditary titles and the peerage.

The Brain Bank, <http://www.cftech.com/BrainBank/>, is another useful site. Under “Other Resources,” you'll find a link to *Spoken and Written Forms of Address for U.S. Government Officials, Military Personnel, Foreign Officials, Nobility, and Religious Officials*, <http://www.cftech.com/BrainBank/OTHERREFERENCE/FORMSOFACTRESS/SpkWritFrmsAddr.html>. The comprehensive chart lists the person, how you would address a letter to that person, how you would greet the person in a letter, how you would greet that person when speaking to him, and how you would refer to that person in a formal introduction. The list begins with the President of the United States and goes through several other titles and positions.

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Each month, subscribers to Ninclink share various articles on the Internet. Some of the articles generate a lot of discussion and debate. For those who don't subscribe to Ninclink, I've listed this month's offerings below:

Control and Creativity, by Lawrence Lessig — <http://spectator.org/AmericanSpectatorArticles/Lessig/Control.htm>

The Standard Book Contract: An Antitrust Lawsuit Waiting to Happen, by Thomas Hauser — <http://www.mediachannel.org/views/oped/bookcontract.shtml>

The Outsider, by Dorman Shindler — <http://www.salon.com/books/int/2002/02/27/simmons/index.html>

Confessions of a Slush Pile Reader, by Patricia Chui — <http://salon.com/books/feature/2002/02/25/slush/index.html>

Fabio Gets His Walking Papers, by Katherine Marsh — <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0201.marsh.html>

FOR FUN

If you like to send unusual e-cards to people, check out *Jacque Lawson*, <http://www.jacquelawson.com>.

Jacque creates short animated films that you can send as greetings cards. You have the option of including the card in your e-mail or providing a URL where the recipient can view it online. Jacque does have a yearly membership fee. For those in the U. S., the membership is \$7.00 a year or \$11.00 for two years. You then have unlimited access to her unique cards and can send as many as you want to.

If you discover sites that you think would interest Novelists, Inc. members, I'd appreciate it if you'd e-mail them to me. I'm always looking for interesting and useful sites to include in the column. E-mail me at lorraine-heath@attbi.com.

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Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@attbi.com

Bits'n'Pieces

IN AN ADJOINING PIECE OF... WHATEVER...

A woman by the name of Pat Holt, described by someone else (Hey, far be it from me to get NINK into trouble in my first pass at tidbits. <vbg>) as “the slightly shrill lover of all things independent” is urging readers (yes, that would be readers-of-books) to join with West Coast long-distance provider Working-Assets to petition Oprah to restart The Club, as in book club. A message on the company's Actforchange.com reads, “Because Oprah Winfrey has become a powerful and positive influence on the public and the industry alike, it would be a grave disservice to us all to see her book club come to an untimely end.” There's more, but you can go there and read it for yourself. My strange sense of humor had me, well, rolling. I'm sure it's not really that funny. — TdR

OUTSIDE THE BIG APPLE

BY VELLA MUNN

The week beginning April 22 was “Open an E-Book Week.” What’s that yawn? This is BIG news—well, kinda big.

When I started thinking about this month’s column, I drove myself a little bit nuts (I already have a head start) trying to figure how to give a cram course in what e-books are all about, then decided, “Let Nincers do their own research if they don’t already know.” I’ll hit other areas of this phenom in upcoming issues so don’t feel as if you’ve lost your only chance to get me to do the work. Instead, after my usual false starts, I decided to focus on the current state of the e-publishing industry.

Back to “Open an E-book.” The mover and shaker behind the designation is the Open E-book Forum, an international association of publishers and digital publishing vendors. Their new executive director, Nicholas Bogaty, was former director of the now-folded online rights marketplace Rightsworld.com. OverDrive’s Steve Potash is president. OEBF has launched a web page at www.openanebook.com as their way of getting the word out.

That word (or words) will include providing FAQs for libraries, consumers, disabled readers, youth groups, and teachers. It’ll also serve as a virtual trade show for e-books and OEBF expects to offer an e-book bestseller list and will include a variety of downloadable content, some free, some for a fee, some unprotected content and some with digital rights management [DRM]. That ‘content’ will include full-length books, short fiction, manuals and business documents.

Okay, so maybe finding a place to download a business document isn’t the most important thing you’re going to put in your memory bank this week. There’s more—a hell of a lot more—to this ebook business as I recently learned when I trudged up to snowy/rainy/windy Tacoma Washington for the third annual EPICon. What’s that you say? EPIC (www.epicauthors.org) stands for The Electronically Published Internet Connection, a 300-member strong organization of writers and small publishers dedicated to getting the word out about this brave new world.

While there I gleaned mucho info about everything from the latest and brightest from Microsoft Reader, to what the think-tankers at Seattle Books are up to, to the underground success of erotic efiction, to ebooks in libraries, to selling sub-rights, to niche-marketing, etc., etc. I also learned that the restaurant attached to the motel is a rip-off

and small town gals have no business trying to drive around Seattle but that’s another story.

Hmm. Where to go from here? One thing that struck me about my introduction to EPIC, especially the crowded E-Xpo and E-Xtravaganza, is that there’s room for the Mama and Papa publishers in this brave new world.

Example: six years ago Dave Howell and Ted Treanor of Seattle Books began the dot com *Mind’s Eye Fiction* and *Alexandria Digital Literature*. *Mind’s Eye* focused on science fiction, fantasy, and horror while *Alexandria* lived up to its name by offering literature in the public domain. Encouraged by the fact that their dot com was still in business after many around them had crashed and burned, Dave and Ted put their considerable gray matter together and determined that a common denominator was needed for the at least 17 different E publishing formats such as PDF and HTML, etc., etc.

Their resulting brainchild is their Rosetta Machine which creates one master ebook file for “authentic, customized, high-quality conversion to all major ebook file formats.” Using Rosetta, a novel can be converted from any format to another in one minute.

Epublish Engine launched for publishers in April, and they’re working toward offering POD (Print On Demand) which will include cover treatments and distribution through a variety of sources, including overseas.

Another example: although Hard Shell Word Factory (www.hardshell.com) president Mary Wolfe wasn’t there, her epubishing company was well-represented via its comprehensive display. Epublishers come and go, but Hard Shell is doing a lot of things right, including treating its writers as intelligent human beings, encouraging and disseminating promotional information, and supporting an active yahooogroup. Mary, whose business survived a horrific accident last year which killed one of her sisters, badly injured another, and put her young niece in a coma for several months (both sisters were employees of Hard Shell) is the winner of the eBook eXcellence Award. She also maintains an extensive epubishing information site at <http://www.coredcs.com/~mermaid/epub.html> which makes a great introduction to the ebook universe.

Then there was Clifford Guren of Microsoft who—sorry boys and girls, that and *PW*’s most current take on epubishing is for next month. Suffice to say for us writers, the money ain’t there yet. However, stay tuned....

NINK

Tricks of the Trade

The Sag at the Middle

BY RONN KAISER

Creative writing, it seems to me, is a bit like life—sometimes it goes well, sometimes it does not. When writers bemoan the tough times, their struggles with their WIP in particular, why is it the difficulty so often centers on the middle of the book? To be sure, it's a common problem. It even has special names like "mid-book sag" and "muddle in the middle." The phenomenon is so pervasive that it almost makes you wonder if it's something endemic to the creative process in the same way that "mid-life crisis" is seemingly a natural (inevitable?) consequence of aging.

Before looking at what Ninc'ers had to say about this, let me pose a framework for analyzing the input I received.

Here's my theory. A novel is like a life. It's born. It lives. It dies. (Or, for those of you not into tragedies: it reaches its golden years in dramatic fashion.) Mid-book problems, like mid-life, have to do with the difficulty of living. Beginnings and endings are pretty straightforward. We all know what they are about, though their qualities vary. There are difficult births and difficult deaths, true, but the process and purpose at each of those stages is fairly clear and understandable. Not so with mid-life. About the most definitive we can be is that it bridges the two other stages of life.

Perhaps the end of a thing is ultimately defining, but the beginning sets the stage and the middle is where much of the hard work was done. The middle is where a life and a story do what they were created to do. The middle takes what was given at the beginning and makes the end possible. In a very real way, the middle is the story (in art as in life).

Okay, with that in mind, let's have a look at what Ninc'ers perceive to be the cause of mid-book sag and their solutions to the problem. Generally, the responses fall into two groups: those who see it as a structural issue (plot) and those who see it as a psychological issue (writer). First the plotters.

Tina Wainscott believes that the sense of the story dragging is caused by getting off track. Tina goes back and rereads her synopsis. In her current WIP she discovered things "changed or cropped up that need addressing." She says, "I realized I'd overlooked something, and with this process, figured out how dealing with it now is moving my plot forward again (and providing some great scenes!)."

For Sherry-Anne Jacobs, problems creep up in the middle because, as she says, "I'm not yet totally secure in my story/characters because things always change from the pre-

liminary plot, especially the last half of the story." Sherry-Anne has three ways to deal with the problem: 1) she introduces a major new element in the middle third of each book; 2) she re-reads and polishes when things start to flag; and 3) she uses sleepless nights to worry her way through plot slow-downs or wrong turns.

Merline Lovelace attributes muddle in the middle to not having spent enough time plotting. She says, "Instead of saving the big battle scene or explosion of the power plant for the dramatic conclusion, I move it to the middle of the book. (As Maass might say, I up the stakes.) That forces me to come up with more drama/action for the rest of the book."

Speaking of Donald Maass, (*Writing the Breakout Novel*), the following quote might help those who see Mid-book sag as a plot-related issue: "[Plot] must be reinforced. In terms of fiction technique, we would say that conflict must undergo complication. It must twist, turn, deepen, and grow. Without that constant development, a novel, like a news event, will eventually lose its grip."

Now let's hear from (and have some fun with) those who see the problem more in psychological terms, i.e. a writer-centered issue.

The first sub-group might be called the Mommy-are-we-there-yet folks. Linda Bartell describes it this way: "...the initial excitement over the beginning of a story—introduction of characters, newly developing obstacles or problems, possibly addition of subplots, etc. starts to dwindle right about (or just before) the middle of the book. And it's too early for the crescendo/climax/denouement/wrapping it all up/ that delivers such enjoyment and satisfaction in the last third of the book." What to do? Linda says, "I've found that merely realizing I'm at that point—that I've just got to get over that hump before I begin the great 'snowball rolling down the hill'—is usually inspiration enough."

Annette Mahon is a self-described "plunger" type of writer who begins with a good idea and knows how her book will end, but struggles in the middle. Her first drafts are extremely short, so short she regards them as outlines. The solution is to "go back and rewrite, and rewrite." Annette has decided that maybe she can psyche herself up for the task by getting out of the house with her AlphaSmart and writing in a different environment.

Then there's the "I'd rather be..." subgroup. Problems with attention span is an example of this syndrome plaguing this group.

Sylvie Kurtz notes that a frequent cause of that difficulty of getting over that hump is being distracted by "another story that's starting to surface and sounds so much more exciting because it's new and has so many things left

to be discovered.” Sylvie’s solution is to make some notes on the new story, call a friend who’s helpful in regaining that “spark,” or taking a few days off.

Jaye W. Manus attributes mid-book problems to “sheer boredom” and, more ominously, a “crisis of faith.” The solution to boredom is a “mini-vacation” in either the form of a full break or by working on other projects. Jaye deals with the crisis of faith problem by trying to head it off at the pass. “Being as I have both the attention span and work ethic of a housecat,” says Jaye, “I’ve learned to divvy up my books into manageable sections...of 75 to 100 pages.” Each section revised and polished so that it’s a “finished” product, thus circumventing the “middle muddle.”

Cynthia Pratt feels the sagging middle is due to the fact that the natural focus is on the beginning and the end, “but as in life the bits in the middle are sort of housekeeping,” which “do not seem to have as many high points as the thrilling beginning or end.” Cynthia feels the solution is to plan “lots of incidents or ‘high points’ while ‘enthusiasm for the project and creativity are at their peak.’” These are used when the mid-book sag strikes. “Impact moments” may involve “revelation or spiritual growth” as well as “explosions or dead bodies.”

Here’s the way Barbara Keiler describes the problem “... the beginning of the book is where you’re setting things up, the end is where you’re tying things up, and the middle is where you have to manipulate the set-up to the tie-up point.” Says B.K., “It’s just not as creative or exciting to write as the beginning and the end.” Her solution? “I write very, very, very long beginnings. Then I write long-ish ends. I try to make the middle as brief as possible.”

Editorial comment: Perhaps it’s no accident that the greatest need for psychotherapy comes at middle age, when the meaning of it all is most vague. Even so, I think it’s safe to say that when it comes to the art of the novel, there is no right or wrong way of doing things. Whether your solution to mid-book sag is intricate plotting, positive self-talk, mind games, or self-hypnosis, the only thing that matters is whether what you do works.

Robert McKee (*Story*) sums it up well. He terms what happens between the inciting incident and the crisis/climax as “progressive complications.” He says, “To complicate progressively means to generate more and more conflict as they face greater and greater forces of antagonism, creating a succession of events that passes points of no return.”

Ninc’er Laura Resnick expressed the concept very nicely. Says Laura, “If two people are holding the two ends of a thread and pulling, it’ll have tension, consistently, throughout every inch. As soon as the person on one end or the other loosens her hold, though, the middle sags. Similarly, I think of the middle of the book—however short or long the novel—as the tension-filled direct route between the beginning and the ending. As I see it, if I don’t have a solid grip on the beginning and the ending of the book, and maintain a constant tension between them, then the middle sags. So any event, development, obstacle, or plot reversal

in the middle should increase the story’s driving urgency, its compulsion, to get to that ending specifically from that beginning; if it doesn’t, then it usually makes the middle sag and drag.”

What conclusions may we draw from all this? Perhaps this:

For those who are plot-oriented, the middle is where you must apply your skill and do your thing. This the point where you really tell your story and prove your stuff.

For those who are sensitive to the psychology of the problem, think of the middle as the true writing challenge. Find the excitement in walking that tightrope bridge from your beginning to your end. It’s not just the destination that matters, after all. It’s also the journey.

Correction: Debra Salonen’s contribution to the April column was erroneously attributed to Deb Shore.

Topic for July: As professional writers, our art is also our career. Here’s a potpourri question. What to you is the greatest challenge of earning a living through creative endeavor, and how do you handle the inevitable conflict between the “business” side of your work and the requirements of creative expression? How do money issues and your muse get along?

Please submit your July tips and topic suggestions for August in the medium of your choice, by May 25 as follows:

E-mail: ronn.kaiser@prodigy.net

Fax: (916) 681-7155

Snail mail: 8133 Ibanez Court, Sacramento, CA 95829

Bits'n'Pieces

On Regis & Kelly, the discussion of Oprah’s book club going down the tubes brought on a discussion that Kelly should have her own book club. So she went on about how she wanted “trashy” romance novels with Fabio clutching a woman with a heaving bosom on the cover. Wanted sleazy books, the sleazier the better. To contact the show regarding this possible book club, this came from an ABC spokesperson:

Live with Regis and Kelly
7 Lincoln Square, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10023
Executive Producer, Michael Gelman

— TdR

Freedom to Write



Sunday thru
Tuesday
Sept. 22-24, 2002

New York
Marriott Marquis
Times Square,
New York City

The March 18 issue of *Publishers Weekly* devotes 22 pages to the bestsellers of 2001: hardcover, mass market, children's, the usual suspects, and the surprise hits. The latter are the most interesting. What helped those books break out? The articles talk about "early buzz," and a "formula for success," and publishers who "have their heart in this one." Not exactly hard facts about breaking out a book. And the more I read, the more I began to think that the answer to success is kept on top of Mountain Impossible, surrounded by the River of Fire, and guarded by the Forces of Unlimited Power.

Otherwise known as the marketing departments, the publicity departments, and the distributors.

The publishing *business* is inherently one of *risk*. But which is the operative word: business or risk? Book sales have been somewhat flat over the past few years (down a bit in fiction, up in nonfiction). In this kind of climate, how does a house build an author? What factors go into choosing that author? What is the marketing department's impact on selling: where we sell, how we sell, even *if* we sell? How does the publicity department gauge the progress of a writer? And what do distributors look for in ordering and is it possible for an author to get past bad sales numbers?

"I'm a stranger to you. You have no idea what I am capable of." Lt. Chris Sabian, *The Negotiator*, 1998.

For two hours at the Novelists, Inc. conference, you can learn what these people are capable of:

- Barb Burg, Senior Vice President, Dir. of Publicity and Public Relations, Random House
- Tania Charzewski, Public Relations Manager, Harlequin
- Bill Golliher, Director Corporate Book Sales and Marketing, Anderson News
- Betsy Hulsebosch, Director of Marketing, Random House
- Patsy Jones, Vice President Merchandising, American Wholesale Book
- Doug Mendini, Director of National Accounts, Kensington
- Joan Schulhafer, Director of Publicity and Public Relations, Kensington

NEW YORK...MEET HOLLYWOOD

Chili Palmer: **"I got an idea for a movie."**

Harry Zimm: **"Doesn't everybody?"**

Get Shorty, 1995

What are your preconceptions about selling to Hollywood? That it's dumb luck? That the book has to be a NYT bestseller? That you have to know someone to get your screenplay read? Let's face it, even Chili had trouble and he had guns.

But then Chili didn't have Novelists, Inc.

Insider's information is what the upcoming conference is all about. So, folks, coming to New York City in September:

- Kathie Fong Yoneda, Paramount Pictures Television, specialist in story analysis, development, marketing and evaluation of scripts, plays, novels, treatments and pitches for film and television, and
- Karen Moy, Columbia Pictures, Vice president, Creative Affairs.

Both of these studio professionals have more than twenty years experience in the business and resumes too long for this column. What they know about selling to Hollywood and network and cable television is more than could be covered in a day, let alone a panel...which is why they have offered something special for the conference.

The Business of Wooing Hollywood

"Wait a minute," you say, "that's my agent's job." Okay, but who best knows the dramatic points of your story? Who is better equipped to convey the unique characters and their compelling story? Who is the one who had the movie in her head to begin with? And one last question: Why not give your agent every tool possible for success?

Ms. Yoneda will lead a two-hour session on what an author can do to enhance her/his chances in Hollywood. For the first hour, she will discuss proven techniques to help you and your agent sell your book or screenplay to Tinseltown; how to get your story distilled to a selling document you can provide your agent; pointers to help even the most tongue-tied writers when they need to "pitch" their creations. For the second hour, a limited

number of attendees will be given the rare opportunity to practice what they have learned by giving a five-minute pitch of their book or screenplay. In turn, both Ms. Yoneda and Ms. Moy will give candid and professional appraisals of each project.

"I'm the guy telling you like it is."

Chili Palmer, *Get Shorty*

Actually, it will be a gal telling you like it is. In addition to the two-hour session, Ms. Yoneda will meet privately with a limited number of people. Six of you will get ten minutes each with her. Normally, these sessions come at a cost, but Ms. Yoneda has generously offered them at no charge.

In addition to her twenty years of experience in story analysis and development, Ms. Yoneda is on the Board of Directors of the American Screenwriters Association and is the author of *The Script Selling Game: A Hollywood Insider's Look at Getting Your Script Sold and Produced*. As a consultant, her clientele includes several award-winning writers and producers.

How do you get your ten minutes alone with Ms. Yoneda? Simple. Register for the conference, then send me an e-mail or letter (information below) expressing your

interest in this one-on-one session. The deadline to let me know is August 1, at which point all the names go into a hat, six are drawn, and I will send out confirmations.

"I said I'd think about it. In this town, what does that mean?" Harry Zimm, *Get Shorty*

It means everything for this conference. Registration for both the conference and the hotel are open and people are signing up. Don't put off until too late what you *know* you want to do. We have lined up a great slate of panelists, many of the powerhouses in publishing. Check out the website for the latest listing of confirmed panelists, and ask yourself if you really want to sit back, think about it, and risk missing out on this conference?

"I'm not going to say any more than I have to, if that." Chili Palmer, *Get Shorty*

Chili was a tough guy, but not me. I'll tell you anything you want to know about the conference: lbaker10@aol.com; (505) 298-2021; Fax (505) 298-3434; PO Box 23203, Albuquerque, NM 87192



Sticky Notes from the Edge

BY CHERYL ANNE PORTER

Remember back in March when I warned against the harmful, normalizing effects of therapy? Well, the confessions are rolling in. This one from Alexis Harrington:

A few months ago, I went through a difficult time that left me irritable, stressed, and gloomy. My physician prescribed Prozac®, but I considered it with some skepticism. How could a pill make everything better? But I took the medication. Free samples are hard to turn down.

Within a few weeks, I perked right up. No more of those pesky highs and lows. No more cranky outbursts that sent pets and family running. The cat threw up in my new shoes? Well, that little dickens. My mother is grating like sandpaper on a sunburn? Just tune her out, that little dickens. Life's great! Let's go to dinner, let's go to the movies.

Guess what? I couldn't write. I went from feeling nothing was important to feeling nothing was critical. I just wanted to play and work on my miniature dollhouse. Deadline? Oh, fiddle-dee-dee. I found myself staring at my monitor, trying to generate impassioned, emotional reactions for my heroine and her dire circumstances, and thinking, "What this woman really needs is a prescription."

I've since talked to other writers who have taken their turns with one of the Big Three antidepressants: Prozac®, Zoloft®, and Paxil®. They all had similar experiences. One told me that she was lifted from the inky depths of mid-

divorce doldrums to the golden heights of shopping, going to lunch, and actually enjoying exercise. A prolific author of nearly one hundred books, she suddenly found that writing was not on her to-do list.

Antidepressants shave off those ups and downs as neatly as a carpenter's plane. They work miracles for people who are mired in despair and hopelessness. Plainly, those miracles aren't bad at all. Unless you're a writer. In order to write about a character's heart songs and heartaches, we have to be able to feel them ourselves.

Who would have ever dreamed that a person could be *too* happy? I should have known better. I've always recognized that to write, a certain amount of misery is required. Recently, Teresa Medeiros made a salient observation on Ninlink: "Being insane and being a writer will always go hand-in-hand . . . it's normal to wake up in the morning feeling like a small mouse that has been corralled into a corner and repeatedly poked with a sharp stick. This *is* the writing life and I embrace it! The self-absorption, the depression, the absurdities, the giddy highs, the crushing lows . . . suffering for our art is part of the job description."

And as one of my doctor's other patients noted: "Some suffering is necessary."

Thanks, Alexis. You never said, but I'm assuming you're off the happy pill now, right? We want you back on the manic/depressive, creative-mess seesaw with the rest of us! Hey, nobody gets out alive.

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

BANG! BANG! Is the Western dead?

This month three knowledgeable professionals—Dan Slater, Ann LaFarge, and Larry Martin—pull up a chair and sit a spell with *NINK*, to discuss the past, present, and future of the Western novel. What they have to say is definitely worth a listen, so c'mon, prop up your boots and let's get crackin'!

Dan Slater is one busy hombre. Previously at S&S / Pocket Books, he's spent the last four years at New American Library, part of Penguin Putnam Inc. As a Senior Editor, he's in charge of the Western line, acquires and edits commercial fiction and nonfiction, and oversees movie tie-ins for both NAL and Berkley.

What is readily apparent is that much work and little play does not make Dan a dull boy.

NINK: *So tell us, Dan, how old were you when you read your first Western?*

Dan Slater: I was very young. I was a voracious reader, the kind of kid who'd get in trouble when my parents would catch me reading under the covers after midnight. I loved reading Westerns, loved playing cowboys and Indians like any other kid. And growing up, a lot of the books I was reading came from NAL and Dutton's Diamond D imprint. Back in the '50s the Diamond D line was the premier line of Western hardcovers.

NINK: *Is there any particular book that stands out in your memory?*

DS: Jim O'Mara wrote a book called *Wall of Guns*. It had all the traditional elements of a good Western. The mysterious drifter roams into town, he's caught between two factions, but in the end he comes out on top with the help of, well (chuckles), his gun. Anyway, years later as I'm working at NAL, I discover that we still had the title on our backlist. I decided to reissue *Wall of Guns* as a

"new classic" with a similar pulp-style cover as the original, and it was as if everything seemed to have come around again. I went home and put the new paperback on my bookshelf right beside the original I'd read with such pleasure as a boy. That was pretty special.

NINK: *Indeed. And it sounds as if NAL has been as true to the genre as you've been over the years.*

DS: NAL has been expanding the western line over the past five years. Yearly, we have almost 20 single titles on the list, plus a Western novella series, *The Trailsman*, and with 12 to 14 of those being published, we have upwards of 35 Westerns coming out each year. We've been successful in getting the books out and in expanding authors.

NINK: *Example?*

DS: Ralph Compton has appeared on the *USA Today* List and we've been publishing him for years. Ralph Cotton—it's easy to get those two names mixed up—has also been a *USA Today* bestseller and is doing very well. We focus primarily on traditional Westerns, and we look for original new voices in Western literature as well as older, respected voices such as John Jakes and Richard Wheeler, whose NAL book *Drum's Ring* recently won a Spur Award. We also do more sweeping historical epics, primarily based on real people and events. David Marion Wilkinson is coming out with a wonderful piece of fiction based on fact—call it "faction," if you will—about Major Ridge and the Cherokee nation, entitled *Oblivion's Altar*. It will be a trade paperback release this November, so we're expanding into other formats, besides the conventional mass market paperback.

NINK: *With the Western program at NAL being so active, are you on the lookout for new authors?*

DS: Our program is indeed very

active and it's growing larger all the time. We try to stay aggressive and expand the audience. And yes, I'm always looking for a compelling story, authors we can grow, the best and the brightest voices for the genre. That's why I go to conferences, looking for fresh talent.

NINK: *Can you give us some specifics for submitting to you?*

DS: While we're actively soliciting proposals for our line, our company policy is not to accept unsolicited material. We're looking for more traditional Westerns while slowly expanding into other areas like broad, expansive sagas and possibly nonfiction in the future. We really look to the authors to see which direction they are writing, new places they might take the genre.

NINK: *And how do Westerns compare with other genres, submission-wise?*

DS: The consensus tends to be that if you're going to start writing, be as commercial as possible, so Westerns aren't the first that come to mind. But thanks to community groups of writers and authors conferences, good work continues to come in.

NINK: *Word count?*

DS: Our novella word length is 60 to 70k, full-length 100k words. Westerns are often conducive to a shorter format, but the point is to give readers a real book to read. If a really compelling story comes across my desk, it won't get sacrificed for page length.

NINK: *Readers. What can you tell us about this particular audience?*

DS: The thing about Westerns is...this is an audience that has been small compared to category mystery or romance, but it's a very devoted audience that loves revisiting the Old West and its history. The history of the West is really the history of America. Our readership is diverse. They come from all walks of life.

NINK: *But what about the young people?*

DS: Young people still do read Westerns, and we also sell a lot of them to the libraries. But things are different from when I was young, and that does present a challenge. And not only for the Western genre. We're up against the entertainment industry and as booksellers, we have to compete with TV, music, movies, video games, the Internet. Can we reach the young adult audience? Definitely. But across the board, it's just more difficult these days to compete with more prevalent and accessible forms of entertainment.

NINK: *What about sci-fi?*

DS: The sci-fi genre is actually very similar thematically to the Western. It's still frontier fiction—facing the unknown and whatever dangers lie in wait. That's a Western at its heart, to push into an unknown frontier, to explore areas that haven't been explored before. To have the courage and fortitude of character to stand up against all odds, and to have faith that you will persevere and overcome. At its core, that's what it means to be an American. The values that come out of these Westerns are the values of America.

NINK: *You sound pretty patriotic.*

DS: I'm actually Canadian. But I've always been a reader and I love these books. I'm grateful to be involved in an industry where I can encourage others to read, and bring these stories to the public.

NINK: *What do you think the future holds for the Western genre?*

DS: The Western has survived, and thrived, since the dime store novels in the days of the Old West. As long as people are interested in the roots of America, there will always be interest in the Western novel. It is the same as reading history, and one of the only pure types of Americana writing.

Taking her turn next around the campfire is Ann LaFarge. Ann is what you might call a Clint Eastwood of the publishing industry. She does it all! Writes, edits, produces, directs—and she's quite a character, too. Ann is Executive Editor at Kensing-

ton Publishing, where she's worked since 1988. She is the author of five published books and writes a weekly book column called "Constant Reader" for a chain of eight newspapers.

She got her start as a feature editor on "The Garry Moore Show" after graduating from Radcliffe College. But perhaps one of the most amazing things about Ann is that three of her four children ended up with publishing careers themselves.

NINK: *How do you explain having so many of your kids go into publishing?*

Ann LaFarge: What choice did they have? They were taught early on, never to interrupt anyone who was reading. And, of course, their father and I always had a book in our hands. Reading, in our family, was very important. All kinds of reading.

NINK: *I hate to admit it, but I haven't read many Westerns.*

ALaF: You should! As an editor, a teacher, a parent, and book reviewer, I firmly believe you should never allow yourself to get in a rut as a reader. The problem I see again and again is how readers decide, "Oh, I only read this or that," and that's *not* how to be a reader. Learning how to read is a lifetime proposition. There is something wonderful about every kind of book. Even those with sad endings. What's wrong with having a negative emotion?

NINK: *Maybe some people have unhappy lives and read to escape that negativity?*

ALaF: I've heard that before and I don't buy it. It's terrible to read, and write, in a very boxed-in way. It's so important that we open ourselves up to all different kinds of reading experiences and not demean certain types of literature just because it's "literary." There's a reverse snobbishness I've seen in genre fiction that disturbs me. For example, I read an article that really put down Jonathan Franzen. I had just finished reading that book (*The Corrections*) and was in a state of extreme love, so it hurt to see him dissed. I have a great passion for books and want others to broaden their tastes, try as many different reading experiences as possible. It will

never happen, but I've always said it would be great if every book had nothing but a title and author and came wrapped in brown paper. Then people wouldn't be so prone to judge a book by its cover—rather the content inside.

NINK: *And Westerns should be added to that mix.*

ALaF: Absolutely. Westerns are the heart and soul of America. The good guys are really good and pure, the values are American values, and in this point of our history we care about reading these themes. Readers are going for the World War Two books for the same reason. Fiction and non-fiction based on American history is very big now. Look at that bio of John Adams.

NINK: *What about the foreign market, are people overseas interested in our history?*

ALaF: Actually, our sub-rights person, Meryl Earl, overheard me talking about Westerns just now and came rushing into my office. She says that when she was at the London book fair, everyone was asking for Westerns, and for large print as well. So she believes, as many of us do, that there's a Renaissance afoot for Western books.

NINK: *Then the numbers are good.*

ALaF: There is a revival. People are buying more. And the readers of this genre are very devoted. True, a lot of the original audience for Westerns has died off and we don't have all the Western movies leading people there that we used to. But as a genre it's very healthy and interest is gaining.

NINK: *How long have you been editing Westerns?*

ALaF: Years ago, when I worked at Dutton, they had an arrangement with Bantam where we would edit the books and do a small hardcover run, while they would come out with the big paperbacks. One of my first authors was Louis L'Amour.

NINK: *Wow! Louis L'Amour himself! What was he like?*

ALaF: He was very much a patriot, a family man who loved his wife and kids, and he wore a great big Stetson. As for editing his work, my first impression was that

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The Buzz in the Biz.....

▶ ▶ ▶ his women characters were so...colorless. When I mentioned it to him, his response was, "Women?" Like, what women? But he went back and worked on that and became a lot more skilled at fleshing out his female characters. No one has ever surpassed Louis L'Amour in the genre.

NINK: *Has anyone ever come close?*

ALaF: I have to say that Bill Johnstone comes close. I've edited him for years. He's written over 100 books for Kensington and has five series going right now. He has a lot of humor in his books and does well with the women characters. In fact, I asked him for a quote or something for this interview and this is what he sent: "...50% of my Western readers are women. They like those 'real man' heroes who do indeed have a softer side. It takes a woman, though, to find it! I am proud to be part of the resurgence of the Western novel."

NINK: *While we're on the subject of Western authors, is there a "type" of writer who gravitates to the genre?*

ALaF: Western writers are patriots, lovers of the land and their books reflect that. Larry Martin is a good example. As he says, "It's time the new generation discovered the Western, a genre rooted with all the values that made this country great." Values are key to this genre, and to the writers who serve it.

NINK: *What sort of metamorphosis, if any, have you seen in the last ten years?*

ALaF: The only thing significant I've seen is the demise of the "adult Western." You know, those male porno books that used to sell big at places like truck stops? Being lucrative, nearly every publisher had a line of those—including us—but almost everyone has dropped them.

NINK: *Any final words on the Western genre?*

ALaF: It's alive and well. Westerns speak to our roots, our values, and what it means to be an American.

And for final words in general, this ex-English teacher thinks she'd

better practice what she preaches, as far as being a wide-ranging reader is concerned. I've never read science fiction/fantasy: that will be my next project. So thanks for giving me a gentle nudge in the right direction

Now for those of you who haven't had the pleasure of meeting Ninc member Larry Martin, let me tell you a tad about this cowboy.

Larry hit the trail of Western fiction about twenty years ago and has many fine novels under his silver-buckled belt. Larry lives something of the life he writes about on a 25-acre Montana spread where his closest neighbors are a profusion of wildlife and unadulterated nature. Larry regularly shoots at it all—with his camera, that is. A professional photographer, he has quite a gallery of the images he's captured: bears, wolves, rams, coyotes, rodeos, unbelievable sunsets...

Larry and his lovely wife, Kat, designed a log home that blends every amenity with a meat-and-potatoes real sensibility (think Little House on the Prairie meets *Architectural Digest*). When he's not in his office writing Westerns (or thrillers) for Kensington—look for *Blood Mountain* and *Stranahan*, out next year—Larry can be found elk hunting, horseback riding, or tending his land.

NINK: *How did you get started writing Westerns, Larry?*

Larry Martin: The first book I wrote was a historical tome. When I couldn't sell it, I decided to write what I most enjoyed reading—Westerns. I knew the language, I'd been an outdoorsman all my life, and it just came natural to me.

NINK: *But you have had a tome published—by Bantam. Rush to Destiny, I believe.*

LM: That was some heavy history and it required the space to do it justice. Most of my books are historically based but usually range in the 75 to 85k word range.

NINK: *How are sales these days?*

LM: Truthfully, they're not what they were, say, five or ten years ago. But word has it that there's been a renewed interest in the genre since 9-11. Westerns uphold good, moral American values. That's what plays to this audience—which could be broader if we reached the right people. Like horse lovers, who tend to have Western interests. Care to guess what area in the US has the most horses?

NINK: *Um...maybe Texas somewhere?*

LM: Nope. L.A. But this potential audience isn't necessarily exposed to that many Western novels. Not when the typical Barnes and Noble superstore only carries from eight to 15 feet of shelf space for Westerns, and half of that is Louis L'Amour—who did great geography and was a great storyteller, by the way.

NINK: *Any other potential audience you might be missing out on?*

LM: Young people. I think we missed our opportunity twenty years ago to get young readers started on the genre. Instead they went to Star Trek, and now we have to compete with the computer, too. Somehow we need to pull in a new audience because so much of the existing one is dying off.

NINK: *Then a lot of your readers are elderly?*

LM: Some of my best signings are at military bases and they're full of retirees. I get plenty of little old ladies who won't buy a book until I answer two questions.

NINK: *What are they?*

LM: The first thing that little old lady will ask me is, "Does this book have any swear words in it?" To which I'll answer, "No ma'am. Except there might be one 'some-bitch' that slipped in there." Then she'll want to know, "Is there any sex in this book?" And that's when I say, "No ma'am. You won't see anything in those pages beyond his boots hitting the floor."

NINK: *Sounds like a clean read to me.*

LM: They are clean books. Well, except for those sexually explicit sub-genre Westerns, like the Longarm series, that are about as graphic as you can get.

NINK: *Ohmygosh. I saw one of those years ago. It was XXX-rated trash! Ugh.*

LM: You can say that again. They don't print nearly as many as they used to, but I think those awful books did more to harm the Western genre than anything else could have. Really fine Western fiction is based on good history that's accurately portrayed instead of relying on stereotypes that aren't necessarily accurate.

NINK: *Example?*

LM: For example, it wasn't like you see in the movies, with 20 white guys on a cattle drive. Ten Mexicans, a white foreman, and a Chinese cook, however, would be historically accurate. That's something Larry McMurtry did admirably well when he wrote *Lonesome Dove*. He told his story with a variety of characters, including a black cowboy, which was more the way it really was.

NINK: *Let's go back to your concern about expanding the Western audience. Any ideas on how that could be done?*

LM: I think there are definitely areas the genre could expand into, par-

ticularly the young adult market and the inspirational market. I've actually had a couple of ministers ask me if I had considered writing something with a religious theme because my books tend to be inspiring and uphold good values. While I'm not personally of a bent to preach, I do think the inspirational market would make an easy fit for a lot of Westerns, and that's something another writer might do well to tap into.

NINK: *So if the Western could expand in cross-genre directions, what about humor?*

LM: I do get some pretty funny jokes that come across my desk. In fact, I got one today that I'd be willing to share if I weren't worried about offending the prim and proper sort.

NINK: *In that case, all you prim and proper sorts out there, turn the page, close your eyes, consider this article finished. Whatever, just don't you dare raise a ruckus for peeking. Okay, Larry, lay it on the rest of us.*

LM: Yes, ma'am. Pleased to oblige and here goes:

Three cowboys were sitting around the campfire one evening during the cattle drive. One was from Kansas; another from Wyoming; and the third from Texas. As often hap-

pens among rough, tough men living rugged, hard lives, tall tales of bravado and manliness were exchanged.

The cowboy from Kansas said, "I'm the meanest, hardest hombre this side of the Pecos River. On the last roundup, a big Brahma bull got loose and gored six cowboys before I jumped on that big fella, wrestled him to the ground and hog-tied him all by my lonesome."

The cowpoke from Wyoming gave a snort of disgust, spit out his wad of tobacco and claimed, "Why that's nothing, just last fall I was guiding a wagon train through Indian territory when a nest of rattlesnakes spooked my horse and I was thrown right smack dab in the middle of them. I had to grab 'em all before I was bit. With both hands full of snake, the only way to kill them was to bite their heads off. Now tell me that ain't the manliest thing you've ever heard."

The Texan remained quiet, slowly stirring the coals with his penis.

Olivia Rupprecht plays a mean hand of video poker, loves old Bonanza re-runs, and even rode a horse once. She's very much obliged to the partners who were lassoed into doing these interviews.

Have Rope Will Travel!

Bits'n'Pieces

I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THIS

ONE, BUT according to a bit in PW Newsline authors now have another reason to be upset at Amazon (so what else is new?) I'm going to quote this because there's really no other way to do it—or say it. The irony is...well, priceless to say the least. "Authors whose links result in a used sale don't only miss out on royalties; they're deprived even of single-digit affiliate commissions." Daniel Gray, author of *The Complete Guide to Associate and Affiliate Programs for the Net*, is quoted as saying "Amazon is selling used books where the referring associate websites are not paid a single penny for the referral. Amazon profits from the traffic and the associate gets nothing in return."

Personally, I'd suggest changing those links to Booksense.com, Books-a-million.com, or Barnesandnoble.com just as quickly as is humanly possible.

AND IN RELATED NEWS: According to pieces in Publishers Weekly Daily (e-mail) and in *USA Today*, the Authors Guild has e-mailed its membership urging them to de-link their sites from Amazon at once. The Guild is most upset about an Amazon link that tells its customers how much money they can make by selling used items (not just books) through its site. (Hmm. Although I have the utmost respect for the AG, it seems to me that Ninc has already been here and done this, including pointing out to Amazon that by linking to Amazon authors are undermining their own new book sales by inadvertently promoting the sales of used books for which they receive no royalties. But Jasmine didn't hire me to write editorial commentary, so I won't.) Oh, and the AG recommends its members link to Booksense.com & Barnesandnoble.com.

- TdR



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Kingdom of the Sots”

Once upon a time, there was a writer who worked hard, endured rejection, honed her craft, and kept submitting manuscripts. And one day, finally, she sold her first book! Believing that the worst times were now behind her, she experienced the usual thrill of excitement the day she received advance copies of her first published novel from Kensington. Her excitement turned to horror, however, when, upon perusing the book, she discovered that ten thousand words had been haphazardly cut from the story sometime after she had proofread the galleys.

“When I called my editor, deliriously angry,” the writer informs me, “she told me that this imprint [Precious Gems] had changed its standard word-count shortly before my book was printed.” So the editor simply cut huge portions of the book without notifying the writer, let alone giving her the chance to do it herself so that the novel might retain some coherence.

I was stunned when the writer told me about this. Okay, yes, awful things have happened to me in this business. Often, in fact. My first publisher dumped me, and two other publishers folded out from under me. On another occasion, an imprint was cancelled and my editor was laid off; no one at that house ever answered my calls again. My first agent dumped me after five months, and my parting from my second agent was stomach-churningly acrimonious. My first editor in this business quit without warning me. My second editor took a dislike to me and wouldn’t read my work or return my calls. Harlequin failed not once, not twice, but three times to send the signing check for my fourth contract with them. An editor at another house once simply forgot (for two months) to file the paperwork so I could get paid for an accepted MS. I once got a book cover that was so bad that my editor wouldn’t show it to me until I was safely 800 miles away from her. And so on.

But I had never before even heard of something like opening your book to discover that your editor had cut 10,000 words without telling you. I had no comfort, no words of wisdom to offer to this writer who had worked so hard only to endure such an awful experience upon publication of her first novel. And it turns out, this isn’t

even the worst thing that can happen to an innocent writer in the cruel and chaotic world of publishing.

In fact, one need look no further than the above-mentioned Precious Gems imprint at Kensington for an even worse anecdote, a publishing nightmare so amazing that I initially believed it was just an urban legend. (Nope. It’s real.)

The book is *Just This Once*, written by Trish Jensen under the pseudonym Trish Graves. An important secondary character in the manuscript was a fourteen-year-old boy whom the hero steers away from street gangs and toward organized sports. You can perhaps imagine the author’s surprise upon getting her galleys and discovering that her editor had changed the boy into a raccoon.

I am not making this up.

The editor had never warned or consulted Jensen, who says, “I screamed to high heaven, my agent screamed to high heaven. We wanted the book pulled. Kensington said it was too late. They couldn’t pull it, and it was too late to turn it back into what it had been.” When Jensen asked why on earth the editor had done this, the answer was (wait for it!) that the hero’s mentoring the teenage boy could be misconstrued as having “pedophilia undertones.” So she turned the kid into a raccoon.

I think we probably all echo the author’s sentiments about this: “Huh?”

Not surprisingly, Jensen says, “I was heartsick for a long time. To this day I can’t look at that book.”

Kensington was able to get away with this travesty (as well as the previously-mentioned abomination of cutting 10,000 words from a book without consulting the author) because Precious Gems contracts typically included a clause which gave them the right to do so. (Picture, if you will, the director taking the actor’s place in certain scenes of the movie, and you have a grasp of the sheer incoherence which such a contractual clause promotes in a novel.) Jensen ensured that she got that clause changed in her subsequent contracts, and she warned her fellow Precious Gems authors about the risks of this clause, too. Her courage in standing up to be counted helped improve the situation at Precious Gems for writers thereafter, so at

least some good came out of it—but too late for *Just This Once*, of course. Jensen, who's a lot more philosophical about the whole experience than I would be, jokes, "Now I'm known as 'the raccoon author.'" Ah, the things our mothers never warned us could happen if we grew up to be writers. The strange disasters, bizarre gaffs, infuriating screw-ups, and wacky mistakes which are out of the writer's control...

"One of my books had my cover and my title page—but everything else in it was someone else's book," says Ninc member Annette Mahon. Incidents like this are not as rare as you might think. Another Ninc member reports that her name and title were once switched with a *New York Times*-bestselling writer's book on a portion of the print run. Sadly, the mistake did not result in a deluge of income for the writer, who says it was her worst selling book ever. And one of Judy Gill's books for Loveswept was released with another writer's cover.

Unlucky twice, Judy Gill also reports that one of her books was released with three chapters printed upside down. Sherry-Anne Jacobs had a novel published wherein three chapters had such serious formatting errors that they're genuinely difficult to read. Another writer reports that the printer received the wrong computer file for one of her novels, and the book was published with dozens of typos on every page. A Ninc romance writer says that in about two thousand copies of one of her recent novels, nearly fifty pages in the middle of the book are actually from a horror novel by another writer. About a hundred copies of a novel by Becky Barker also wound up with another novel inserted into it by mistake. Patricia Matthews says that halfway through the first book she ever sold, an sf/f novel called *The Other People*, the published version suddenly shoved the confused reader into the Old West, with cowboys, cattle, and shooting. By coincidence, a friend of hers who'd sold a Western to the same publisher was stunned to find "werewolves, vampires, and other assorted odd people stuck into the middle of his story about the Old West" when his novel was released. The printer had somehow mixed up their manuscripts. Happily, the publisher decided to reissue the books correctly rather than just forget the whole thing.

One of the most entertaining examples of such a publishing gaff was offered by editor Denise Little, who cites an incident where material from Penthouse Magazine accidentally wound up being bound into some Disney books. (Well, I think it's entertaining. I suppose the parents who had to answer awkward questions from their children were somewhat less amused.) Denise Little also relates that when she was a bookstore manager in Texas years ago, her store sold four thousand copies of James Michener's *Texas* before discovering that sixty-four pages were missing from the middle of each copy. (Strangely, only four customers returned the book.) Madeline Baker had a novel released wherein all the pages were indeed hers... but they were out of order in some copies.

Of course, as we all know, not all mistakes are on the

inside of the book. The heroine on one of Christina Dodd's romance novels had three arms. Another writer once showed me a novel wherein the hero had a thigh the length of Kansas. A source who requested anonymity told me about an angry art director who put a phallus in the background of a romance cover. When a Kensington novel with an elaborately embossed and flocked cover was unpacked in bookstores, the flocking had worn off and the cover model's breasts looked naked.

Suzanne Simmons' name was left off the cover of her first romance novel: "Just a blank space where my name should have been. Once I got over the disappointment, I had to laugh. It's turned out to be excellent training for the bizarre and sometimes inexplicable world of publishing."

And don't you just hate it when they get your name wrong? Jo Ann Ferguson's real name was once put on the cover of a novel which was supposed to be published under a pseudonym. When Steven Womack pointed out to the producer of an ABC-TV movie he wrote, *Volcano: Fire On the Mountain*, that they'd left the "n" off his name in the credits, the producer insisted it didn't matter. Womack replied, "Good thing you guys didn't produce *The Godfather*. It would have starred Marlo Brando."

Still on the subject of names, romance novelist Cheryl Anne Porter once showed up at a signing to find the store had mistakenly ordered *Gross Grub*, a nonfiction book by children's author Cheryl Porter. (And let's not even get started on the subject of what goes wrong at signings, or we'll be here all day.)

Lucky (if not necessarily giddy with joy) is the writer who discovers gaffs while there's still time to fix them. Jo Ann Ferguson discovered a chapter missing from one of her novels when she proofed the galleys. When she called the production department to notify them of the problem, the reply was, "Oh, I suppose something important happened in that chapter, so I guess we should put it back in." Linda Lea Castle once proofed a set of galleys which, for some reason, had fifty or so colons on every page. "It was a mess," she says. "I had to circle each one and, as per Harlequin's policy, write the page, line, and word on an alteration sheet. I spent a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from early morning until late at night doing it in order to meet their deadline, and I ended up with a bloodclot behind my knee for my efforts."

Phoebe Conn once discovered, upon calling her editor to ask when she could expect to receive the copy-edited MS, that the book had disappeared in production. The editor claimed that a temp employee had thrown it out. Conn sent them a new copy of the MS, "but I've always wondered when they would have discovered the book had 'disappeared,' had I not called to request it."

That's a reflection which brings us to the subject of bureaucratic screw-ups. Those of you who know the fear and loathing with which I regard the Internal Revenue Service will appreciate how chilled I was by Pat Rice's experience. It's a long, demoralizing tale in- ▶ ▶ ▶



THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ involving checks sent to the wrong address, followed by checks sent to the right address in the wrong amount, followed—at length, and after much hair-tearing—by the right checks in the right amount finally being sent to the right address. Then one day... the IRS sent Rice a letter billing her for a fortune in taxes for monies she had never earned or received, because—you can see it coming, can't you?—the same publisher had issued inaccurate forms to the IRS.

In fairness to publishers (since even I can be fair on occasion), some of the worst publishing disasters were not their fault. Editor Denise Little points out that book sales plunged during the Gulf War, and again after the massive terrorist attacks of September 11. In instances like this, she advises charting your releases against a calendar so that you can always demonstrate, in future negotiations, that there were excellent reasons, having nothing whatsoever to do with your overall career, for that particular dive in sales.

Finally, even the best of intentions can go awry in publishing, since human error is, well, only human. When Maggie Davis wrote a novel set in seventh century Scotland, the publisher decided to invest money in beautiful hand-drawn maps for the endpapers. The artist's map, Davis says, showed the ancient capital of the Celts, Dalriada, and even portrayed a stylized Viking ship bouncing around in the sea off the coast. But, Davis adds, "The artist must have stayed up late while doing the lettering." Lack of sleep and eyestrain might have caused him to make that little mistake, when he titled his beautifully rendered map of Scotland, "Kingdom of the Sots."

The Comely Curmudgeon would like to extend her thanks to all contributors, and she apologizes to anyone whose anecdotes she didn't have space to include. The subject of publishing gaffs, alas, provided her with an embarrassment of riches.

Bits'n'Pieces

OKAY, THIS ONE IS JUST...Well, you decide. *Satisfaction: The Art of the Female Orgasm* claims to tell readers how to maneuver the, um, contours of the female body. But this is not the book's real trick. Uh unh, no. The real trick is in the book's success, which may soon have the publishers needing a guide to chart a course through some interesting terrain of their own. The bestselling title, from *Sex and the City* co-star Kim Cattrall, came out of an unlikely arrangement between Warner and Barnes & Noble, who collaborated on editorial and design, but not on costs across the board. No, each paid for their own copies and sold them separately. The collaboration seems to have worked remarkably well so far though naysayers think there's always a "but" in the ointment. This one seems to be that a lot of booksellers want to be publishers, but only a bookseller the size of B&N can pull it off at this time.

- TdR

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