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# NINK

January 2004  
Vol. 15, No. 1

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

## Dear NINK: Letters from the Editors

### In The Beginning.... Let There Be NINK

Novelists, Inc. was started more than a dozen years ago, with five writers sitting around the dining room table in Maggie Osborne's Colorado home to discuss how we would structure the perfect organization for published writers. At the time we had only a very few clear ideas about what we wanted the (nameless) organization to become, and our discussions started out more as an exercise in fantasy than anything else.

Interestingly, each one of the five founders brought different interests (it would be rude, but probably accurate, to say obsessions!) to the table. Janice Young Brooks, for example, had already moved away from writing romances and had begun her career as a mystery writer. She was determined that our new organization should welcome writers from all genres. Maggie Osborne and Marianne Shock, both with experiences as past presidents of RWA, wanted to insure that we set up an organization with clear and simple by-laws that would underpin member needs, not thwart them.

Rebecca Brandewyne had been a member of SFWA for several years and had been impressed by that organization's advocacy on behalf of its members. She always hoped that Ninc's Advocacy Committee would be equally strong, courageous, and active.

Organizationally speaking, I was the neophyte in the group, but I did have one area of previous expertise that eventually proved useful. I had been editor of the *RWR* for two years, back in the days when the editorship of that journal was an unpaid, volunteer position. The experience had been eye-opening for me. This was before the days of the Internet, so the *RWR* was in a very real sense the heart of the romance industry. I saw how important a monthly magazine could be to an organization.

With that experience in mind, the five of us agreed that we needed to develop a monthly newsletter that would become the heart and communications center of our fledgling organization. We envisioned three main purposes for the newsletter, which acquired its name at that very first meeting. (Rebecca suggested

calling the organization Novelists, Inc. and I followed up with the suggestion that the newsletter should be called *Novelists' Ink*.)

**First, we wanted NINK to act as a metaphorical meeting place for our widely scattered membership.** We hoped that the *Letters to the Editor* section would become a vibrant place for exchanging ideas, information, hopes, dreams, and gripes. The *President's Column* was originally seen as a vehicle for communicating information about the organization or asking questions of the members about directions they might want the organization to follow.

**Second, we wanted NINK to be educational, but since our members were all published, it seemed to us that educational articles should focus on the business of publishing rather than the craft of writing.** We hoped that NINK would be informative, providing up to the minute reports on editorial changes at publishing houses, marketing tips, and news from across the spectrum of genre fiction. Nowadays, the links

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## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

### Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne*	Victoria Thompson
Janice Young Brooks*	Steven Womack
Jasmine Cresswell*	Julie Kistler
Maggie Osborne*	Carla Neggars
Marianne Shock*	Barbara Keiler
Linda Barlow	Pat Rice
Georgia Bockoven	Anne Holmberg
Evan Maxwell	* Founder

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Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

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## The President's Voice

# A Knock-out Group

Before I even sold my first book, I knew I wanted to join Ninc. I'd heard about it from published friends and was eager to enter the ranks of what seemed to me to be the crème de la crème of the writing world and share in the mysteries known only to that august company.

Finally I got that first contract—yippee, one step closer—then suffered from what's termed Second Book Syndrome. Fifteen months passed between first and second sales and, okay, maybe lacking qualifications to join Ninc wasn't my major agony; I was much more concerned about being a one-book wonder, washed up before I got started. But Ninc membership was still a milestone I longed to reach; a magical universe I wanted very much to enter. Rest assured, my application was in the mail the same day I got author copies of book two.

I'm here now, and I must confess that I don't feel particularly august myself...but you all continue to amaze and impress me. This is a knockout group: experts on any topic, however arcane; warm and welcoming; flame-war free—a generous community of peers unique in our industry.

Ninc presidents have traditionally been long-time, sometimes even charter members with years of experience and wisdom in this business. Well, folks...surprise! I'm not one of them. No one was more astonished than me when Barb Keiler (yep, BK, I'm outing you up front) called me, a member for only three years at that point, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, asking me to bring fresh blood to the leadership (or was that fresh meat?) of Ninc. She cited my involvement as a liaison between Harlequin/Silhouette authors and management, my active participation on various levels of RWA, and my enthusiasm as reasons why I'd be an excellent choice.

I was flattered as the dickens. I also asked: *just how hard up are you people?*

In the end, however, though I was terrified of screwing up this opportunity for the fresh blood coming behind me, I said yes because I believe in giving back. I resolved to do my best to buckle down, work hard, and learn all I could to be a good steward of an organization that is very dear to me. My lineage in it may not be as long as that of my predecessors, but I'm a heck of a salesperson when it comes to extolling the virtues of Ninc, and my love of this organization is fierce. I'll do everything I can, during this year, to be a faithful servant of a group I admire, and I'm not too proud to ask for advice or accept it when it's offered.

I've had the great fortune to work with some terrific people already—Anne Holmberg has persevered through several time zones and the vagaries of electronics and phone lines in the rain forest to lead the 2003 Board, with whom I've enjoyed working and from whom I've learned a lot. All of us owe a debt to Anne, Ann Josephson, Karen Harbaugh, Julie Kistler, Olivia Rupprecht, and Barbara Keiler for their service despite deadlines and personal crises. Ann, as treasurer (doing yeoman's work to upgrade the accounting system), and BK, as Advisory Council rep, will be continuing on the 2004 Board with me, and we'll be joined by a really terrific cast: Vicki Lewis Thompson as president-elect, Jaclyn Reding as secretary, and Lorraine Heath as newsletter editor. I've loved working with the past Board and am very excited about the new one.

Ninc is an organization without a big paid staff, so its welfare is

completely dependent upon the volunteer efforts of its membership. Please help us when the call goes out for committee members or board positions—Ninc has an impressive history of contributions by NYT authors and newbies alike and will continue to need both old blood and new. If you're a newer member, take the leap with me and let's keep this proud tradition going. I've said it often and mean it still—if I had to choose to belong to only one of the organizations of which I'm a member, Ninc would be it.

The Santa Fe conference is coming up in March, with its emphasis on revitalization, rejuvenation, and renewing the soul of the writer. Cathy Maxwell, with assistance from Laura Baker and Barbara Samuel, has worked very hard to create a rich and varied experience that I think we'll be talking about for a long time. I look forward to seeing old friends and meeting in person many of you who've come to feel like family online.

So...from the wet-behind-the-ears new president, my thanks for your vote of confidence, my promise to do all possible to earn it, and my heartfelt wishes for a 2004 filled with love, laughter, energy, and peace.

— *Jean Brashear*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Current Trends in Technology— Exemptions of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act

The DMCA went in to effect in 1998, and the purpose of Section 1201 is to make it illegal to break through encryption or other protection that restricts access to copyright material in computerized formats. The Librarian of Congress can issue exemptions to the DMCA, and on Oct. 28, 2003 announced classes of work that are subject to the exemptions. These exemptions are in effect through Oct. 27, 2006.

The first class of work deals with filtering, while the second and third are directly related to accessing material in obsolete formats. The fourth class of work becomes more directly related to authors since it has some effect on works of fiction.

"Literary works distributed in ebook format when all existing ebook editions of the work (including digital text editions made available by authorized entities) contain access controls that prevent the enabling of the ebook's read-aloud function and that prevent the enabling of screen readers to render the text into a specialized format." <http://www.copyright.gov/1201/> The Internet address is for the Library of Congress/Copyright Office Rulemaking on Anticircumvention page.

*Compiled by Sally Hawkes*

## INTRODUCING.....

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

### **New Applicants:**

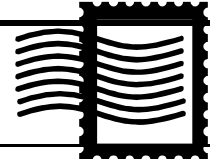
Leslie Esdaile Banks (L.A. Banks), Philadelphia PA  
Susan Crandall, Noblesville IN  
Susan Guadagno (Susan Gable), Erie PA  
Ken Hodgson, San Angelo TX  
Robin D. Owens, Denver CO

### **New Members:**

Janet Woods, Kardinya WA Australia  
Doris Rangel, Victoria TX  
Pat White (*Patricia Mae White*), Sammamish WA

**Ninc has room to grow...recommend membership to your colleagues. Prospective members may apply online at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).**

## LETTERS TO NINK.....



Even in this online age – with Ninclink – we still welcome your letters. Submit to the editor via e-mail or old-fashioned snailmail [see masthead on page 2]. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.

**Yes, we want to hear from you this year.**

### **Stay in Touch with Ninc online.**

Visit the website at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com)  
Join the never-ending e-conversation –  
for members only – by joining Ninclink.

#### **Controlling Your Listserv Preferences through E-Mail**

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Switch to Individual	NINCLINK-normal@yahoogroups.com
No-Mail	NINCLINK-nomail@yahoogroups.com

#### **Moderators: If You Have Questions,**

Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrendaHB@aol.com
Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@comcast.net

# Dear NINK: Letters from the Editors

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between different genres are fairly strong, but thirteen years ago, writers of mysteries, romances, and science fiction tended to view each other across chasms of mutual misunderstanding. I like to think that *NINK* played at least a small role in tearing down the artificial boundaries between genres.

Finally, we hoped that at least one article each month would address the creative and personal problems unique to writers: the strange process by which our creative subconscious is tickled, teased, and bludgeoned into producing plots, characters, and settings that eventually get pounded into a finished manuscript.

Probably the biggest administrative decision we made as the first couple of issues were put together was to make certain sections of the newsletter confidential. We printed these pages in blue and asked *NINK* members not to discuss the contents of the blue section with anyone outside the organization. Such a request for confidentiality sounds more than a little naive, but in fact, we always recognized that there would be a handful of people who felt compelled to broadcast the juicier tidbits that appeared in these Blue Pages. I think the idea of confidentiality survived for about three years, at which point we abandoned it as impossible to fulfill. Still, it was an intriguing experiment.

Obviously *NINK* has evolved in many interesting ways since that first issue. The Internet has made the *Letters to the Editor* section almost—but not entirely—irrelevant. However, the goal of educating, informing, and nourishing the writer's creative spirit still seems to be the major principle around which the newsletter is organized.

Jasmine Cresswell  
Editor, *NINK* 1989, 1990, 2002

Dear *NINK*,

When Olivia asked me to remember my year as *NINK* editor, I went back to my files and pulled out the *NINK* issues from 1991. It seems like only yesterday, **and the themes of the articles are still all too relevant today:** an in-depth article on a new malady, carpal tunnel syndrome; one worrying that publishers were pricing themselves out of the paperback market because a recent best-selling hardcover had come out in paperback with the astonishingly high price of \$6.95\*; and another worrying about royalties dropping because of the recession (we thought we had a *recession* back then!). We were also weighing the risk of switching genres, writing for an anthology, and using a literary attorney instead of an agent. We debated the importance of the audio book market (a lot of potential) and the ABA (none) and whether or not the marketing department was controlling the publishing house (it is!). Laura Resnick wrote about her extensive research into the reliability of bestseller lists, and Robyn Carr defined Women's Fiction and the Unput-downable Novel.

In those early years, the newsletter was confidential, available to members only, and we had no Internet on which to communicate daily. The *Letters to the Editor* column was always long and full of good stuff because it was the only place where we could blow off steam. We also had a *Devil's Advocate Column* devoted to discussing controversial issues in publishing. The following year, I replied to the *Devil's Advocate* with a letter criticizing publications that would only give a writer a good review if she bought an ad. Some member sent a copy of our "confidential" newsletter to Kathryn Falk who decided I was talking about *Romantic Times* (I'd mentioned no names!). Ms. Falk called then-

president Marianne Shock to tell her to convey to me that, as we Italians say, I was dead to *RT*. She didn't say that exactly, but the intention was clear. I'm happy to report that years later, when my first mystery came out, Ms. Falk called personally to ask if I would allow her to feature me in the first issue of their *Mystery* magazine. I let her. Hey, it's business!

Editing the newsletter is hard work. It is, I'm convinced, the most difficult of all the offices on the Ninc board, but it is also the most rewarding. Each month the editor produces a quality piece of work that will affect hundreds of professional writers and for which they will be profoundly grateful. It began as the most serious publication for writers being produced, and it remains so. As the only newsletter written by us, for us, it is the only place where we can find out what's really going on in the industry. I'm proud to have been a part of you, *NINK*, and proud of all the others who have maintained your great tradition.

Vicki Thompson  
1991 *NINK* Editor

\* My midlist mysteries currently sell for \$6.99

Dear *NINK*,

It's been a long time since I had the privilege of being your editor. I took the job because I was such an admirer and because I was in a writing slump and needed some serious reviving. **I needed the stimulation of working alongside the talented professional writers who ran the organization and contributed articles to the newsletter. The result was good for us both,** I think. I got charged up and zoomed off in a new direction, successfully, and you have proven yourself as stimulating and thought provoking as ever.

A couple of things that stick in my mind from that year, besides the fact that I don't think I ever worked so hard, is our focus on increasing membership and our controversy over the "inside pages." Membership doubled,

as I recall, and the pages that were supposed to be confidential to Ninc members only disappeared that year. I was in favor of opening up the letters to the editor section, but sometimes I miss those days, when there were twenty or more letters to print and great ongoing arguments over everything from putting bookmarks in Christmas cards to how much was too much copyediting.

You've always been a great friend to writers, *NINK*, whether in need of technical advice ranging from plotting to tax law for writers, or the emotional, from nurturing the muse to keeping personal relationships fresh and healthy. You've come a long way in the last decade and it's been such a pleasure to watch you grow. The year we spent together gave me the creative kick in the ass I needed, and I'll be forever grateful.

Robyn Carr  
*NINK* Editor, 1992

Dear *NINK*:

My year as your editor was a busy one. My immediate predecessor was Robyn Carr, who was definitely a tough act to follow, but she handed things over in wonderful shape and **gave me a great piece of advice: buy a photocopy machine. Either that, she warned, or I'd need to get used to sleeping on a cot at Kinkos!**

That was also the year when *NINK* acquired a fax machine, donated by a talented and generous Ninc member who asked to remain anonymous. (Thank you, fairy godmother. You know who you are, and I still remember you with gratitude!)

We ran a series of genre spotlight articles that year, and featured a two-part article about an amateur writer's plagiaristic use of a well-known author's signature character in a piece of published fan fiction, after the author had specifically refused to give permission for the use, and the legal battle that ensued.

My year as your editor, *NINK*, was hectic, exhilarating, and hum-

bling, and I never read an issue without being grateful that we continue to have members willing to devote their time to you, our newsletter, for the benefit and enjoyment of us all!

Judy Meyers  
*NINK* Editor, 1993

Dear *NINK*:

It's been awhile and my memory's not what it used to be, so the details of being your editor are a little blurry now. I do remember that I loved the job in spite of the headaches and the long hours it demanded. It was fun, challenging, always varied, and definitely satisfying because at the end of each month we always had something substantial to show for all our hard work. The best part was the chance to work with *NINK* publisher Sandy Huseby, and my wonderful assistant editors, Cathy Maxwell and Marj Krueger, and all the great folks who wrote the articles and columns that made you the great newsletter you are. (Working with other Ninc members is *always* the best part of volunteering with Ninc!)

I remember brainstorming ideas for articles at the start of the year and being startled at just how much ground there was to cover, and how little space and time and money there was to cover it. I'm still disappointed that we couldn't find anyone to dig up the answers to burning questions like *How to Write a Masterpiece In Ten Easy Steps*, or *Write Your Way to Fame and Fortune, Guaranteed!* On the other hand, I'm told those pieces are readily available from any number of other sources, all of which can be located through small ads at the back of certain writers' magazines, checks and money orders only, no credit cards accepted, so I don't feel like we let down the membership entirely.

What we did try to do was offer a range of articles from the personal to the professional, and every step in between. I remember there were articles on the changing genre markets, on accounting, and on managing your money to cope with erratic income

flows. There was a great series of articles on studio publishing, which was just beginning to develop at the time, and a piece on personal security for writers that I found a real eye-opener. The article on *What I Know Now That I Wish I Knew Then* generated quotes and insights that I still rely on to get me through the tough times. And that was just for starters.

Actually, I have to admit that it's the personal articles that, in the long run, have mattered the most to me. Don't get me wrong! I've got a lot of pieces on contract terms and dealing with agents and the like neatly tucked away in my files for future reference. **But the real heart and soul of Ninc as an organization is the journey shared among generous friends who willingly offer their hard-earned insights and knowledge to fellow travelers in need of them.** And you, my beloved newsletter, have been one of the very best avenues for sharing around. I could have managed without you, but it would have been a heck of a lot harder and not nearly as much fun!

So...thanks, *NINK*! And thanks to all the writers who filled you up, and the editors and assistant editors who put you together, and to Sandy, who got you out the door and into my hands each month. One thing's for sure: I'll be watching my mailbox for the next issue, and the issue after that and the issue after that. Please don't keep me waiting!

Anne Holmberg  
*NINK* Editor of Not Quite Sure Which Year...But it was a very good year indeed!

My dearest *NINK*:

We were introduced through a mutual friend. Before we met, I was told you could be demanding, frustrating, and capricious. Yet our mutual friend promised the challenge would toughen me and bring unexpected rewards. You were irresistible. So we began our 13-month affair, and a tumultuous time it was. I suppose we used each

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# Dear NINK: Letters from the Editors



other—you gobbling chunks of my time, me drawing energy from your power. **While I was with you, I was plugged in, intimately connected to people and events I've since let go.**

It's been years now, and we've both moved on, created new alliances, grown stronger. But I would not be where I am, or who I am, without the time we spent together. I like to think it's the same for you.

Wishing you the best always,  
Vicki Lewis Thompson  
NINK Editor, 1997

Dear NINK,

I believe when either Carla Neggers or Julie Kistler—the Ninc presidents with enough nerve to solicit my services as both *NINK* editor and, consequently, Ninc board member, two years running—asked me to describe what it was like to be editor for a final president's column at the end of her term I said something to the effect that, “being *NINK* editor is the most orgasmic fun you can have that doesn't involve your lover or out-and-out erotica.”

Only I'm sure I said it...more conservatively. <veg>

**Why? Because for me that's exactly what it was. Instant monthly gratification. Telling people what to do. Soliciting articles. Bullshitting. Cajoling. Saying, “Trust me, it'll be fine,”** in a laughing voice to presidents who aren't quite sure they believe it. Working with Sandy Huseby, who's one heck of a terrific gal. Dealing daily with a publishing industry that I love, top to bottom, inside and out, good, bad, ugly, and indifferent. And if being *NINK* editor was a paid position that didn't come with the complications of also being a board member, I'd be willing to do it still. But it's that “board member” business that cuts into your life.

Don't get me wrong. The board members themselves are good hard-working, intelligent people, all of whom became my friends while we were in office. But the pettiness of dealing with issues that don't pertain to the newsletter itself is wearing. Because not only does the *NINK* editor have to put out a newsletter that's germane to the industry, the Ninc members as a whole, all genres *and* that meets the separate criterion of the sitting board—and understand that *each separate board has its own criterion and agenda as to what's newsletter worthy* (and don't misunderstand: *my* boards let me do things *my way*, but not all boards do <vbg>—the editor must also vote on organizational issues that take away from her ability to keep *NINK* uppermost, and that can be...exhausting.

Does it use up writing time? Absolutely. Being on the board uses up writing time for all board members. Being *NINK* editor, therefore, can use it up doubly. But for me, the editorship didn't intrude on my writing time as much. *NINK*...was simply a love affair. One at which I look back, shine my fingernails, and say, “HA! I hired our Laura, our favorite *Comely Curmudgeon*, and titled her column. I did that. Good for me!” <vbg> Will people remember that? No. But that's not the point. They'll remember Laura, the *Comely Curmudgeon*—remember articles produced specifically during my tenure even if they don't remember the year, and that's what the love affair is about. Producing. Directing. Fulfilling a promise. Pulling out of *my* writers what I knew they had in them but they weren't sure they were capable of. And seeing them move up and on.

Yeah. That's what *NINK* was for me. And I loved it.

Terey daly Ramin  
NINK Editor 1999 & 2000

Dear NINK,

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...

## THE TOP TEN REASONS WHY I'M GLAD I WAS NINK EDITOR

10. My conference fee, travel expenses, and hotel room were paid for by Ninc that year. Wow! Who knew? What perks!

9. I was chosen for the position of *NINK* editor, and no one could have been more surprised to be asked than I was. But hey, it's nice to be wanted.

8. Working with Sandy Huseby of The Huseby Agency. She's a dedicated professional with a can-do attitude, always cheerful despite occasionally sticky crises.

7. Listening for the beep of the fax machine signaling that the latest issue was arriving for proofreading, and yanking out the freshly inked pages one by one, which is kind of like birthing a baby. Well, perhaps I exaggerate. But holding those 20 or so *NINK* pages in my hands *was* kind of like holding a new baby. *My* baby. And one that will go off into the world and maybe change someone's mind about a situation or provide a tool that will turn around his career or cure the common cold or—well, you get the idea.

6. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. When I spoke, people listened, even when I didn't have anything important to say. Some of them were editors! Yes! It's true! I'm not making this up!

5. The vision thing. The *NINK* editor crafts the newsletter according to her view of the writing profession. Or sometimes it's according to what articles she can find that month. Whatever. *NINK* is a bend-me-shape-me-anyway-you-want-me sort of thing, and a creative person can groove on it.

4. There really isn't a Number 4, so let's go directly to Number...

3. I got to pay writers for their contributions to *NINK*. This was *fun*. There's nothing like handing out money to people who deserve it.

2. It was a delight to work with other writers, columnists, editors, and so on—some of whom taught me a lot.

1. Being part of activist Ninc president Barbara Keiler's administration

and serving on a kick-ass board of directors that wasn't afraid to tackle several issues important to writers. Nothing about being NINK editor gave me any more satisfaction than this. And that's the truth.

So there you have it, *NINK*. I ended my sojourn as your editor with a certain amount of exhilaration and an equal amount of exhaustion, but no burn-out. I believe that's because I had the support of my wonderful writers, columnists, and the Ninc Board of Directors throughout. And I will always, ever after, have the utmost respect for anyone who takes on the demanding, time-consuming, but ultimately rewarding job of *NINK* editor.

Pam Browning  
*NINK* Editor, 2001

Dearest *NINK*:

It is with mixed feelings that I write this farewell letter to you. While one part of me is reaching for a hankie to sop up the tears and blow my nose, another part is tossing confetti and shouting, "I'm free! Free at last! Thank God this gig is over so I can get on with my life!" Aw, c'mon, cheer up. We've been together long enough that you know not to take it personally. And besides, you *like* all the attention a new editor is bound to lavish on you, not to **mention that little penchant you have for diversity and collecting lovers the way some people collect those dainty silver spoons or shot glasses from state-to-state.** Did I say state-to-state? Make that country-to-country, because you are International, babe, and like James Bond you're slick, you're cool, and hot, hot, hot.

Oh yeah, you're one demanding lover, who has no qualms about going to bed with a girl and lounging around on the mattress the next morning, smugly certain of picking up wherever things left off the night before. But you don't pick up after yourself, *NINK*. Like so many discarded clothes, pages, pages, and more of your pages have littered my floor (*slob*). And you never once offered to make the coffee. Not once! No wonder I often felt like your

slave—yes, your *love slave*, buster—and no wonder there were times when I wished we'd never gotten so intimately involved.

But had we not...*sigh*...ah, had we not, what a wild and crazy joy ride I would have missed. And I never would have had the honor and pure pleasure of getting to know so many of your fine friends and family members: Cheryl Anne Porter, Annette Carney, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Barbara Samuel, Terey daly Ramin, Linda Madl, Janelle Schneider, and a host of fabulous guests that always made the party worth any missed sleep. While we were sorry to see Ronn Kaiser, Laura Resnick, Vella Munn, and Lorraine Heath leave the festivities early, it was great having them for as long as they were able to stay. And thanks to you, my life is richer for the time spent with the divine Anne Holmberg whose support was unstinting, Peggy Webb who took over my column, did some great interviews and happily slapped you into shape when I wasn't around, and our publisher *par excellence*, Sandy Huseby. Each and every one of these sterling professionals worked hard for you and consistently made me look good.

Oh boy, this is starting to sound like an acceptance speech at the Academy Awards. So quick, before our allotted time is up and the audience gets restless, let's give them a peek into the secret life you lead. No, no, I'm not dishing any dirt, just coming clean about what really goes on behind the scenes.

Columnists come and columnists go (yes, *NINK*, you do have a way of wearing people out), and finding just the right replacements is a truly difficult feat. And all of those feature articles? They sure don't show up by magic—well, okay, every now and then one will appear from thin air, usually when we're desperate for a miracle because the sure thing we were counting on didn't make it. Deadlines! Details! E-mails, phone calls, board meetings, and budgets! And amidst all this we're working a month ahead of schedule, which means no sooner is

one issue out the door than the next one is getting started. You know the drill: The first week of the month all the goodies start coming in, weeks two and three are spent tying up loose ends, drumming up future articles, pestering potential contributors, getting the galleys from Sandy, hoping the Ninc president catches any glitches or errors the editor might have missed so Sandy can make corrections, zip you off to the printer, and voila! Simple as that, out you then go into the world and into the hands that eagerly await your monthly arrival...while your tireless servants take a few days off before starting all over again.

Of course, *NINK*, you're a class act and a real pro who knows writers deserve to be paid as well as possible and they need their paychecks on time. Ann Josephson sees to that, along with paying all your other bills (a cheap date, you're not), and does it all with nary a complaint. Why? *Because you're worth it.*

It's true, you're high-maintenance. You need a firm hand, balanced with equal amounts of compassion, respect, and TLC. You demand the best, but rightfully so. **For you, my dear *NINK*, are truly an amazing thing of wonder, a rhyme wrapped in a riddle, a chameleon in constant metamorphosis. You're witty and smart and funny, and you're unfailingly dependable in a profession that is often anything but.**

I am going to miss our time together, *NINK*. But I know you'll be well taken care of by Lorraine Heath. The two of you have been friends for a very long time and she'll carefully tend your pages with her own special touch. She has the discipline it takes to keep you in prime shape, and more than enough fairy dust to make you sparkle and shine.

Thanks for all the memories, *NINK*. Even if you never made the coffee, you made 2003 one of my best ever years.

With a whole latte love,  
Olivia Rupprecht  
*NINK* Editor, 2003

## Pulitzer Nominee Is One of Our Own

Carolyn Hart is soft-spoken and modest... and stunned that her novel *Letter from Home* has been nominated for a Pulitzer. After she learned of her nomination by the Oklahoma Center for the Book, she told me, *To make the short list (for the Pulitzer) would be absolutely astonishing, but to have affirmation from home is wonderful.*

Hart is the author of 35 novels, which include the popular Death on Demand series, and the only author to be nominated seven times for the coveted Agatha Award. She has won two Agatha, two Anthony, and two Macavity Awards. A native of Okalahoma City, she says her love affair with mystery began as a child reading Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and Beverly Gray.

She earned a BA in journalism from the University of Oklahoma, and then worked briefly as a reporter before returning to her first love—mystery. Her first book, *Secret of the Cellars*, was published in 1964 after she won a contest for mystery for girls 8 to 12.

**NINK: Carolyn, your biography makes your career path sound so easy. Has it been?**

**Carolyn Hart:** Oh, no. So many authors have been dropped from the mystery world over the last fifteen years, wonderful writers. I feel like I'm part of an endangered species. I've been at this so long...

At one point in my career I had written seven books in seven years, and had not sold a one. I was enormously discouraged. The romance market was very popular, so in my naiveté I decided that instead of writing about who killed John

Smith I would write about whether she gets him in the last chapter.

After I submitted a proposal, the editor told me I needed more sexual tension. I called my close friend Judith Henry Wall and asked, "Judy, what does this editor mean about sexual tension?" After a very long pause, Judy said, "Carolyn, why don't you stick to mysteries?"

I decided to try one more time and write exactly the kind of book I love to read, by golly. It was going to be my final effort. I set the mystery in a book store and had great fun writing it.

What I didn't realize was that the market was profoundly changing. In 1978, Sue Grafton, Sara Paretsky, and Marcia Muller introduced the hard boiled mystery with a female protagonist. They opened up a huge window of opportunity for writers such as myself. I sent my proposal to Bantam who had just started a paperback line for original mysteries, and my Death on Demand series was born.

That move transformed my career. I went from a mid-list failure to a mid-list writer.

**NINK: How has your writing changed over the years?**

**CH:** My writing has changed very little, from my first suspense to my 36th novel.

**NINK: What changes have you seen in the mystery genre?**

**CH:** There are mysteries that are still as wholesome and decent as they've always been, but there is a great interest in incredible violence. I find it deplorable. I don't see why there has to be such darkness. I don't know whether that's the way

the authors are seeing the world or the way the publishers think the authors should see the world.

I hope I've retired before they decide that's all they're going to buy.

**NINK: Have mysteries been influenced by chick lit?**

**CH:** In a sense, yes, but I see the market from an old-fashioned perspective. I am a mystery/crime novelist, and yet there has been a huge influx of authors who have combined aspects of mystery with a romantic motif. They are certainly successful right now, but I don't see most mystery novelists doing that kind of writing.

**NINK: Can you predict future trends in the mystery market?**

**CH:** That's so hard to do. I like to believe that the kind of mysteries I enjoy writing will continue to be a source of comfort to many readers in a very divisive and dangerous world. I don't think traditional mystery will grow because all the hoopla is reserved for more dramatic books.

My feeling is that more violent books will continue to dominate the bestseller lists...and we all know how bestsellers lists are created. But then you look and see Jan Karon and Lillian Jackson Braun making the lists, so who can tell?

**NINK: You taught at the University of Oklahoma School of Journalism from 1982 to 1985. What impact did that have on your career?**

**CH:** Teaching provided a wonderful opportunity to gain a better understanding of why I am a writer. It was the first time I had ever ana-



lyzed why I did what I did. I had always loved mysteries but never thought beyond that. During my teaching stint I realized that mysteries are a means of saying that you want the world to be a good place. Mystery readers would like to live in a world that is fair, to know that they can always find fairness and justice. That's the enduring magic.

**NINK: I'm amazed at how often legal questions come up when I'm writing and at how often I race to the phone to call my legal eagle daughter. Has your husband (a lawyer) played a role in your career?**

**CH:** He has always been so supportive. I was too stubborn to take typing in junior high school, and although I worked on school newspapers, I used the hunt and peck system. My husband typed my first book for me because I was such a bad typist. And that was back in the days when you had to use carbon paper!

He has always encouraged me. You know how vulnerable writers are, how we can lose confidence. Only after my success did he say to me, "It used to break my heart. You'd go out to your office and write a book and it wouldn't sell." And yet, during that entire bleak period he never said a discouraging word.

**NINK: I loved *Letter from Home*. How does it differ from your series books?**

**CH:** Thanks... It's not a mystery, although a crime is involved. *Letter from Home* is about the effect crime has on the lives of the people involved. The decisions people make always have consequences. Sometimes decisions made for good reasons have awful consequences.

**NINK: Your novel reminded me of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. Did you perceive the town as a character in your novel?**

**CH:** Yes, because it was all so organic. The circumstances were such that the small town was a part

of what happened to Gretchen (the female protagonist). The town was a microcosm of what our whole society was at that time (World War II).

**NINK: How did you choose your time and setting?**

**CH:** When I was growing up I took Route 66 from Oklahoma City to LA, where my grandmother lived. For some reason I was drawn back to the idea of setting the novel on old highway 66. I had written two short stories about Gretchen, but had kept thinking about writing a novel that explored her further, so the time and place had already been selected.

I was eight in the summer of 1944. The war had an enormous impact on everybody, including children.

**NINK: How were you informed of your nomination for the Pulitzer?**

**CH:** That goes back to how everything we do affects us in unexpected ways.

When I was writing the book I sent it to four novelists—three of them in Oklahoma—because I wanted to be authentic in every detail. One of them was also director for the Oklahoma Center for the Book, who subsequently nominated my novel. If I hadn't sent the book out to get critiques, she might never have seen it and the nomination might never have happened.

By the way, one of those novelists saved me from making an egregious mistake. When I first created the character called Fay, I made her a school teacher. The novelist called me to say, "Carolyn, no teacher in the forties would ever go to the Blue Light (a beer joint)." So I made her an artist.

**NINK: What impact will the Pulitzer nomination have on *Letter from Home*?**

**CH:** I don't think it will have an effect. *Letter from Home* was not published by Morrow (who publishes Hart's mysteries). They gave me permission to sell it elsewhere.

Berkeley put together a beautiful package, but I'm not a continuing author for them, so they're not going to invest a lot in this book.

I love *Letter from Home*, and I'm sad that I don't think it will have good sales because it doesn't have strong publisher support. At least the people at home love it!

**NINK: What's next for you?**

**CH:** That depends on timing. I'm a little behind in my own personal deadline. I had hoped to have the current (mystery) manuscript done. But I haven't, so I can't possibly write another big book till spring. If I get time I'll start, and then put it back for a while.

In the meantime, Morrow wants me to continue focusing on my Death on Demand series. One of them was a Christmas release, and sales went way up.

I've signed for three more in that series. All writers know the importance of marketplace and sales.

**NINK: Indeed, we do.**

**Thank you, Carolyn. We couldn't be happier that one of our own members has received such a huge affirmation to cap a long career. We have our fingers crossed that you make the Pulitzer committee's short list, and then go on to win the prize.**

**Bits 'n' Pieces**

## **New agent with a familiar name**

Bill Gollither, past corporate director of Anderson News, is now an agent and publishing consultant. Many Ninc members will remember him as a speaker at the New York conference.

**Sally Hawkes**



# Revitalizing the Writer...

## ...Coming into the Home Stretch

We're blowing into the new year on a positive note by starting to finalize retreat details.

Because of your overwhelming response, we've had to make some changes in the line-up. The big one right now is that Tuesday evening, instead of the open house at Laura Kinsale's, we will host a bit of fun at Bishop's Lodge. We have over a hundred and thirty people registered and we would have overrun Laura's digs. Certainly it was becoming too awkward and expensive to transport everyone there.

*But we have great plans in the works!* Linda Needham—writer, actress, director, her talent knows no end!—is putting together a bit of interactive mystery theater. Something tailor-made for the writer set. Linda loves to laugh, so it should be a good time. We can use some volunteers, so if you are interested in helping with this evening, please email me at [revitalize@ninc.com](mailto:revitalize@ninc.com) and I'll pass your name on to Linda.

**We end the special rate at Bishop's Lodge.** Meanwhile, room reservations at Fort Marcy, the overflow hotel, are running smoothly and *we have their special rate until \*\*\*February 1.\*\*\** There will be a shuttle between the Lodge and Fort Marcy so, hopefully, no one will be too inconvenienced. An advantage of Fort Marcy is that the rooms are actually suites. Nice!

If you still wish to attend the retreat and are traveling alone, contact Eve Gaddy ([egaddy@cox-internet.com](mailto:egaddy@cox-internet.com)) who is matching roommates for us. If you really want to stay at the Lodge, contact registrar Laura Baker ([registration@ninc.com](mailto:registration@ninc.com)) to have your name added to the cancellation list.

Don't forget we offer tours for Tuesday afternoon! Sign ups will be ending soon (see the form).

Finally, those of you who have been to Santa Fe know what a special place it is. I'm excited for those who have never experienced the mystique of the high desert. It's unique—and it will be cold! Pack warm and get ready for the synergy that comes from being in the company of writers. We are going to have a wonderful time. I promise you.

***"In times of change, learners inherit the earth while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."***

**Eric Hoffer**

### Joining Us in Santa Fe? Sign Up for Tuesday, March 9 Optional Tours Registration

Please use this separate registration form for these tours and note the deadline of **February 16**, when the registration must be **received**. Make checks payable to **Novelists Inc** and mail to: **Laura Baker, 12301 Cedar Ridge Dr. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112**. Contact Laura with any questions: [registration@ninc.com](mailto:registration@ninc.com).

Name:

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Address:

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E-mail

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Phone

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Tour:

**Bandelier National Monument** \$65

**Abiquiu Afternoon** \$65

**High Road to Chimayo** \$45

**Walking Tour of the  
Santa Fe Historic District** \$10

*Please note: We have a cancellation deadline with Cynthia, which is based on a minimum number of people registering for each tour. Your check will be returned to you if we must cancel a tour and, hopefully, you can reschedule for another.*

# Uncle Ninc Needs You ~ Yes, Really.

Due to the switch in conference timing from fall to spring, this year's annual business meeting will be a bit different. Normally, a proxy ballot is sent out to all members with the names of candidates, but at this conference, we will have no election. Our bylaws require, however, that an annual business meeting be conducted during the conference, and a quorum is necessary in order to conduct business. To be certain of a quorum (defined below in the relevant section of the Bylaws), we need you to grant your proxy vote either to the Board of Directors or to an individual member.

*Article VIII, Membership Meetings of the Bylaws, Section 4:*

*Twenty percent of the membership present in person or by*

*proxy shall constitute a quorum. If no quorum should be present, the presiding officer shall adjourn the meeting to a date and hour fixed by him/her. The meeting held upon the adjourned date shall have the same effect as if held on the date originally set. At all membership meetings decisions shall be made by majority vote, except as otherwise provided herein.*

It's important for us to have the meeting so that members have a forum to ask questions of the board, air concerns, etc. There is no vote anticipated at this time; regardless, your presence, in the form of either proxy or physical appearance, is needed for us to have a legal meeting. Please make sure your proxy arrives by **February 1, 2004.**

## Proxy A

### **Use to appoint current NINC Board of Directors as your agent.**

Proxy solicited on behalf of the Board of Directors of Novelists, Inc. for the annual business meeting of members to be held on March 7, 2004.

The undersigned hereby appoints Jean Brashear, Vicki Lewis Thompson, Jaclyn Reding, Ann Josephson, Barbara Keiler, and Lorraine Heath, each of them as his/her true and lawful agents and proxies with full power of substitution to represent the undersigned on all matters coming before the meeting at the annual business meeting of members to be held at Bishop's Lodge, Bishop's Lodge Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico on Sunday, March 7 at 6:00 p.m.

This proxy when properly executed will be voted in the manner you directed. If no direction is given with respect to any particular item, this proxy will be voted in favor of the proposals put forth by the Board of Directors.

Member please sign here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail this Ballot/Proxy to:  
Election Committee, c/o Novelists Inc., P. O. Box 1166, Mission, KS 66222-0166

**Proxy must be received by February 1, 2004.**

# ***No, We're Not Kidding... Did You Read This?***

Due to the switch in conference timing from fall to spring, this year's annual business meeting will be a bit different. Normally, a proxy ballot is sent out to all members with the names of candidates, but at this conference, we will have no election. Our bylaws require, however, that an annual business meeting be conducted during the conference, and a quorum is necessary in order to conduct business. To be certain of a quorum (defined below in the relevant section of the Bylaws), we need you to grant your proxy vote either to the Board of Directors or to an individual member.

*Article VIII, Membership Meetings of the Bylaws, Section 4:*

*Twenty percent of the membership present in person or by*

*proxy shall constitute a quorum. If no quorum should be present, the presiding officer shall adjourn the meeting to a date and hour fixed by him/her. The meeting held upon the adjourned date shall have the same effect as if held on the date originally set. At all membership meetings decisions shall be made by majority vote, except as otherwise provided herein.*

It's important for us to have the meeting so that members have a forum to ask questions of the board, air concerns, etc. There is no vote anticipated at this time; regardless, your presence, in the form of either proxy or physical appearance, is needed for us to have a legal meeting. Please make sure your proxy arrives by **February 1, 2004.**

## **Proxy B**

***Use to appoint a fellow NINC member as your agent.***

Print the member's name in the appropriate space below.

Proxy for the annual business meeting of Novelists, Inc. to be held on March 7, 2004.

The undersigned hereby appoints \_\_\_\_\_  
as his/her true and lawful agent and proxy with full power of substitution to represent the undersigned on all matters coming before the meeting at the annual business meeting of members to be held at Bishop's Lodge, Bishop's Lodge Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico on Sunday, March 7 at 6:00 p.m.

This proxy when properly executed will be voted in the manner you directed. If no direction is given with respect to any particular item, this proxy will be voted in favor of the items proposed by the Board of Directors.

Member please sign here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail this Ballot/Proxy to:  
Election Committee, c/o Novelists Inc., P. O. Box 1166, Mission, KS 66222-0166

**Proxy must be received by February 1, 2004**



## Sticky Notes from the Edge

— Cheryl Anne Porter

### The Real “Bah, Humbug”: New Year’s Resolutions

I don’t think writers should make resolutions, actually. We shouldn’t engage in any form of mental or emotional self-improvement because exactly who, and how, you are right now makes you the writer you are. Too, all personal improvement does is confuse your muse who is used to your, uh, idiosyncrasies and will become testy if she can’t find them.

Still, there are a lot of “Bah, Humbugs” out there in the publishing world worth mentioning in the form of resolutions, so I thought I’d list a few into which we can really sink our fangs and claws (Oh, please, you do too have them—they come out when you don’t win that coveted award, but the person who does win couldn’t, in your humble opinion, write her own grocery list without help from her third-grader.)

OK. Ready?

Resolution #1. I resolve not to procrastinate so much. Ha. You should know this column is due to my esteemed editor today and I’m just now writing it. It’s been a busy month, trust me.

Resolution #2. I resolve not to read any reviews or rankings (good or bad) of my work. I try to remember that the only things reviewers (except the ones who love my work, of course) can write are their blighted opinions of our work. Without us, they ain’t got nothin’ to say. Hell, even *with* us, they can’t write much worth reading, either.

Resolution #3. I resolve to clip my claws and file down my fangs before attending any conference where awards are given.

Resolution #4. Hell, I resolve not to enter any contests that give out awards. I’m tired of having my feelings hurt, y’all. It’s making me cranky. OK,

quick test: How many of you have never been a RITA finalist or winner?! Me, neither! And I’ve entered 23 books (not at once). I’m thinking I will begin an elite club for non-finalists and non-winners only. How illuminating it would be to see the stellar names in our business who could join *that* club! What could we call our snobby little selves? Any ideas?

Resolution #5. I resolve not to tell the nosey person sitting next to me on the crowded airplane what I really do for a living. Here’s what happened the last time I did.

HIM (big Texan; we’re on our way to Oklahoma—because my family is there, that’s why): So, little lady, what do you do for a living?

(Sigh; mutter) ME: Well, little guy (went right over his head), I’m a writer.

HIM: Is that so? What do you ride?

ME: Ride? The same things you do. Cars. Airplanes.

HIM (laughing uproariously): No, honey. I mean what kind of horse do you ride.

ME (Rejecting my first smart-ass response about riding llamas, figuring he bred and raced them). I’m not a rider. I’m a writer. W-R-I-T-E-R.

HIM (impressed): O-o-oh. What kind of stuff you write? Anything I would have read?

You know how it goes from there. Sigh. Happy Holidays—now that they’re over.

*The author would have you know she didn’t get every damn thing she wanted for Christmas (a Mercedes or that palace in Spain, for two examples), so she’s kind of cranky.*



## ***ADD: Not Just for Kids***

### **Dear Annette:**

I'm an organizational disaster. I lose keys, purses, and/or important slips of paper on a daily basis. I talk fast. I move fast. I'm always running late and scrambling to meet deadlines, professional or otherwise, and, well, I've been called...scattered. There are times I feel like I live inside a tornado. The other day a friend joked that I must have Attention Deficit Disorder. I laughed it off, but now I'm wondering, could I really?

*Signed: Fast-paced and Frantic*

### **Dear Frantic:**

I'm leery of doing diagnosis-by-email, but I can say that adults certainly **DO** suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder. Back in the Dark Ages, we in the mental health profession assumed children with Attention Deficit Disorder (also called ADD, or ADHD as in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or often, just "hyperactivity") grew out of it. Not so, we're finding now. It appears that symptoms of ADD may persist into adulthood for somewhere between 25% and 50% of children diagnosed with the disorder. And, as with other sorts of learning disorders, it looks like intelligent, artistic sorts have a higher incidence than the general population. (Like we really needed to know THAT).

What we've also learned is that adults with ADD/ADHD have lots of the same feelings ADD children do: they often report feeling inept, lazy, overwhelmed, and, in a word, crazy, because they seem to have so much more difficulty completing tasks and managing their everyday lives than the people around them.

### **What is ADD exactly?**

ADD or ADHD is roughly described as a cluster of

symptoms with two core features: distractibility (poor sustained attention to tasks) and impulsivity (impaired impulse control and ability to delay gratification). The third—and most obvious feature—is hyperactivity, although Attention Deficit Disorder certainly exists without a hyperactive component.

The general view from physicians and psychologists is that ADD is very likely caused by biological factors that influence neurotransmitter activity. Brain scan studies have shown that in people with ADD, the brain areas that control attention appear to be less active than normal. It appears that this lower level of activity may cause inattention and other ADD symptoms.

### **An ADD checklist:**

Now, as to whether or not you could truly have ADD...a short checklist might give you a clue. But please remember, the following is only a rough guideline. Diagnosing a true case of Attention Deficit Disorder involves a thorough process of assessment. That being said, just for kicks, see how many of the following apply to you:

- I have trouble completing projects.
- I tend to jump around from task to task.
- I was told by parents/teachers I should have tried harder in school.
- I'm frequently forgetful and have trouble remembering to do things I intended.
- I'm usually rushing around and am often late.
- I often over-commit myself.
- I often make impulsive purchases and other decisions.
- I frequently feel disorganized and overwhelmed by daily life.
- I have trouble following instructions, recipes, etc.
- I make more than my share of careless mistakes.
- My purse, car, office, household, etc. is disorganized.
- I'm easily distracted.
- In conversations, I tend to go off on tangents.
- I have to fight the urge not to interrupt others.
- I think I have more trouble than most people with detailed paperwork, like balancing my checkbook.
- I'm very restless and fidgety.

If you answered yes to a fair number of the above, you might want to find out more about Attention Deficit Disorder.

If it appears that you do seem to have more trouble than average with attention and impulsivity, there are many excellent books and websites offering tips, tricks, and techniques that can help ADD sufferers get a grip on their lives.

While diagnosing ADD does nothing to change the disorder, what I have seen an accurate diagnosis do is provide people with an explanation for their difficulties.

### **An explanation, NOT an excuse.**

My sister was diagnosed with ADD in her thirties. The

diagnosis gave her freedom from a lifetime of feeling like a scatterbrained fluff-head. She now understands why it seems so much more difficult for her to maintain order in her life. It actually *IS* more difficult. Knowing she has ADD means that those difficulties aren't personality defects. That's lifted a huge burden off her shoulders.

She now knows that her brain works a little bit differently than mine. Yes, she's always going to be more apt to lose her keys, miss that one vital step when following a recipe, and fail to plan important pieces of her vacation—like actually reserving the plane tickets. But forewarned is fore-armed. Instead of beating herself up for being an airhead, Lisa has begun focusing some of her more-than-abundant energy on anticipating and planning for her foibles.

Even those of us who aren't hyperactive could take a lesson from that.

Annette

You can "Ask Annette," in strict confidence, at one of these contacts: e-mail: [annettecarney@sbcglobal.net](mailto:annettecarney@sbcglobal.net), fax: 775-746-4560; phone: 775-323-0445.

## Learn More About...

### Books:

*Adventures in Fast Forward.* Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D.  
*ADD in the Workplace.* Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D.  
*Driven to Distraction.* John Ratey and Ned Hallowell.  
*ADHD and the Nature of Self Control.* Dr. Russel Barkley

### Websites:

Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA)  
[www.add.org](http://www.add.org)  
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)  
Focus on ADHD [www.focusonadhd.com](http://www.focusonadhd.com)  
ADHD Sanctuary [www.mhsanctuary.com](http://www.mhsanctuary.com)  
ADD help line [www.addhelpline.com](http://www.addhelpline.com)  
ADD consults [www.addconsults.com](http://www.addconsults.com)



BY LAWRENCE  
WATT-EVANS

Last spring I got an unexpected e-mail from one of my son's teachers. This wasn't in itself a surprise; Julian's high school is new and thoroughly wired, and makes good use of e-mail and other modern technology. I hadn't heard from this particular teacher before, though, and wasn't aware that Julian was doing anything out of the ordinary in that class.

So I opened it and read it with interest, and found the usual stuff about how bright Julian is, and what a pleasure it is to have him in class, and then it mentioned that he'd brought in a copy of one of my novels recently, so the teacher knew I was a fantasy writer...

Would I read his novel, and tell him what I thought?

Arrrgh!

Back when I started writing professionally, I heard that writers were asked things like, "Where do you get your ideas?" I imagined myself sitting there chatting with readers, or answering fan mail, and discussing my characters' motivation, or how I came up with a particular setting, or what I was working on next.

The reality, though, is that I hardly ever get asked anything even remotely like that; instead I get, "How do I find an agent? How did you break in? What's a first novel pay

## It Took Me Years to Write...

these days?" (This last one is a bit odd, when you think about it—after all, how should I know? It's been almost twenty-five years since I sold my first novel!)

And most of all, I hear, "Will you read my novel and tell me what you think?"

Everyone wants to be a writer.

I'm sure everyone in Ninc knows this; it's scarcely news. Marcus Tullius Cicero, dead more than two thousand years, allegedly said, "Times are bad. Children no longer obey their parents, and everyone is writing a book," so it's not exactly a recent phenomenon.

What I wonder, sometimes, is why everyone wants to write. I mean, when you look at it in practical terms, it's not exactly the most thrilling way to make a living—and that's assuming you make a living at it at all, which most writers don't. Really, why do people think being a writer is romantic?

Perhaps this isn't a stunningly original question; I suspect everyone in Ninc has a few stories about readers who assume that every writer is rich and famous. We've probably all had the occasional bitter laugh at the notion.

But even people who know that writers aren't all making Stephen King's income often seem to think that there's something inherently romantic in the job itself, and the more I think about this idea, the more baffling I find it. ▶ ▶ ▶



▶ ▶ ▶ After all, writers don't travel as part of the job; we don't generally write in exotic locations. We don't work with exciting, famous people—we don't generally work with *anyone*. The writer's normal workday largely consists of sitting alone in a room at home, staring at a computer and occasionally typing. Normal writing garb isn't high fashion; it's more likely to be an old bathrobe.

Nobody thinks secretaries or accountants are romantic when they spend their days staring at a computer; on the contrary, those are seen as the quintessential dull jobs. What makes us so different?

I suppose it's because we do something sort of mysterious that, when we do it well, can make people think in new ways and feel powerful emotions—your typical insurance agent probably never gets fan letters about how his work changed a kid's life. And of course, there's always the long-shot possibility you'll get rich and famous at it. Sure, the average writer isn't J.K. Rowling, but we're closer to being her than the average retail clerk will ever be.

And we do get to set our own hours.

Whatever the reason, writing *is* seen as romantic—but unlike being a movie star or a spy or president, it's also seen as something anyone might be able to do. And lots of people give it a try, as any slush-reading editor can attest, and most of them discover it's not as easy as it looks.

And far too many of them then decide to ask writers for advice—right?

Or is this a science fiction/fantasy thing? Does everyone in Ninc get fans and friends asking for writing advice, or is it genre-dependent?

It's certainly common in fantasy. I'm barraged with requests to just take a *quick* look at the thousand-page manuscript, you don't need to go into a lot of detail, but if you could just give me a quick opinion as to whether it's ready to submit...

Usually, of course, I just say no, I'm sorry, I don't have the time. I have my own writing to do, and I can't spare the time to look at everyone else's attempts.

I generally try not to mention that reading most unpublished novels is a fairly painful experience. Reading slush isn't anyone's idea of a good time.

And there's also the fact that 90% of the time, what the would-be writer wants isn't really an honest opinion; he wants to be told, "Damn, this is good! Hold on, I'll give you my agent's private address, and tell him you'll be sending this and he should be ready to auction it off for a million bucks." Or if the work's already been rejected a few times, he wants to hear, "Oh, look, I see the problem! Here in Chapter Twenty-Six, you need to switch these two scenes. That'd fix it right up. And make the princess a redhead, blondes are so passé—*then* it'll sell, you betcha!"

Alas, that it's never really so simple!

And sometimes saying no isn't simple, either. For example, my son's teacher, someone who puts up with the little

monster—I mean, the budding scholar—and who said all those nice things and who'll be giving him a grade...

I said yes. I was hoping that this would be one of those rare and wonderful times when the story in question is actually decent.

It wasn't. So I put off commenting until late in the semester before finally sending as diplomatic a response as I could manage, and recommending he try a critique group. I got a bitter-sounding one-line response, thanking me for my time.

But you know, the story has a happy ending, of sorts, because in mid-summer I got another e-mail from him, a longer and more cheerful one, saying that he *had* joined the critique group I'd recommended and was getting a lot out of it, and I'd been absolutely right, and by the way, he had belatedly realized that it had been somewhat inappropriate for him to have asked me in the first place...

It's always a pleasant surprise when someone actually takes my advice, and it works. Maybe someday that teacher will make it as a writer—he had a long way to go, but he's young, and he's capable of learning, which all too many would-be writers aren't.

In my experience, though, most would-be writers *don't* take advice, even when they've begged for it. Or sometimes they'll try to take it, but get it wrong and make everything worse.

So I do try to avoid reading any unpublished work. I say no when fans ask me. I say no when neighbors ask me, or my dentist. I say I don't have time. I weaken sometimes, when a friend who seems bright and good with words and like someone who *ought* to be able to write a novel asks, but I really do try to say no.

But sometimes I can't. When one of my sisters asked...

She's got a lot of the same genes, we grew up in the same environment, and *I* can write, so she ought to be okay, and hey, how can I say no to my own sister?

Fortunately, she's not bad. She's sold a few short stories now, though the novel still needs work. If she *had* been lousy, though, and I'd said so, we might have had an intra-family feud to rival the one that my grandfather started when he threw his niece out of the house in 1942.

My other siblings say they don't want to write, and I'm relieved to hear it. My kids say the same—and they've grown up hearing me gripe about wannabe writers, so they'd know what to expect.

The possibility that really terrifies me, though—well, this is someone I actually *encouraged* to try to write, back when I was young and stupid and hadn't yet realized what the consequences might be. Thank heavens, she wasn't interested. She wrote a little nonfiction, and watched me dealing with my work, and that was enough to convince her to stay out of the whole thing.

But I shudder when I consider what might have happened if she'd tried, at my urging, and had then showed no talent. I *like* being married. If I'd ever had to tell my *wife* she couldn't write...! **NINK**





# The Care and Feeding of the Girls in the Basement

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## FALLING IN LOVE

One of the great pleasures of being a writer is the ability to indulge our passions. Most adults in modern society are expected to take on an area or two of mastery, with a few amateur areas of interest, and that's that.

Look around. The neighbors on the left: he's mastered accounting, and has an amateur pleasure in golf, the Grateful Dead, and his collection of toy cars. She's an ER nurse who knows everything there is to know about trauma, and she spends her free time puttering with her astonishing cottage garden and reading Regencies. Long ago, he wanted to be a racecar driver, and for a brief, heady time when he was twenty, he followed the Dead around the country. She visited England as a young girl and longs to return, and she considered studying history, but her mother wanted her to be sensible.

You, on the other hand, are a dabbler. A jack-of-all-trades. It sounds so immature, doesn't it? A grown-up figures out how to focus instead of running from this to that all the time. And look at you! You love ER medicine and watching surgeries on television and could have been a physician, but you also love pool tournaments and could have been a contender on the stick circuit. You surely have the largest collection of something (I'll put my Black Plague memorabilia up against yours any day). You love water gardens and know how they work, including how to pour the concrete for the piping options. You have an amateur's talent for fine dance and an appreciation for a painter from the seventeenth century that no one has ever heard of. You can pick out

exotic fruits and know the names of all the pastas and recognize obscure castles and tidbits of slang from another language. You've a large collection of things you hope to explore, too: maybe travel through Egypt on a camel or fashions in the 1910s.

Writers never give up an old passion for a new one. We're mental magpies, gathering new obsessions and passions to add to the existing ones.

And yet, as time goes by, we can become like our neighbors—experts at one thing (say, ghost stories), amateurs at a couple of others (how-to craft articles, the odd time travel) and then leave the rest alone. It's often success that does it, too. We settle in to be grownup writers, productive and focused.

There's certainly nothing wrong with productive, focused work. Trouble is, the brain of a writer is a fine, bright thing, and it needs feeding. It needs passions to keep itself awake and moving. Unfortunately, daily life and the pressure of producing can sometimes leave the writer's brain a bit dulled. I have seen this in myself sometimes lately. I was shopping one afternoon in Santa Fe, browsing the shops without much interest, and a part of me—probably Hilary—leapt up and said, "What's wrong with you? Look at all this! Remember when this would have set you alive with yearning and hunger and dreams?" A few weeks later, I was in the local library for the first time and saw...remembered...*passion.*

We are our passions. Our work can only be real and true if we're tapped into them. I don't know what it is that sometimes makes me put away my foolish exuberances, tamp down on my delights, try to act like a forty-something mother instead of an ardent dreamer. It just happens every now and then.

And every now and then, I wake up again.

This morning, I am listening to Spanish guitar—two pieces, *Asturias*, by Albeniz, and *Juegos Prohibidos*. One is melancholy and sweet and yearning, the other dramatically passionate. Even after





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extremely uncomfortable. Sometimes, it will steal on me before I have a chance, as while watching the movie *Brassed Off* with a friend last week, and in one scene, the band plays such a rousing rendition of *The William Tell Overture* (I know, I know, serious music fans sometimes think it's corny, but I also like *Vivaldi*—a lot—so that should tell you something) that I had to sit forward suddenly, thinking, that non-thought of pleasure that makes music so especially delightful for those of us who are often driven to articulate every thought that crosses our minds, every experience we've ever had, every...everything.

In Spanish guitar, what I hear is yearning. Love. Big dreams. Passion. These particular pieces are on a CD I put together as a soundtrack for a book I wrote last year, about a woman who finds herself by reconnecting to her love for Spanish. I can hear bits and pieces of the book as I listen, but that's not why I want to hear it this morning. It's because I was reading Spanish poetry over the weekend, and then saw *Il Postino* (about Pablo Neruda) last night and then this morning, I happened to hear Joan Baez singing *Pajarillo Barranqueno*, and I remembered how much I like writing to Spanish guitar.

But the truth is, I love Spanish guitar so much because listening to *Astrurias* makes me think of a young man named Tim. I do not think of him consciously, or at least not often, but the spirit of him. He was a dashing guitarist who was legendary in his small Colorado town because he went to Juilliard, a name we said as if it was "Oz." He was gangly and longhaired and gentle, and much too old for me—22 to my 15—but I was smitten beyond all reason. I don't even remember why he came to my attention, only that it was the first time I'd been in love, and oh, I was! He came into my grandfather's gas station with his friends. He was connected to my young uncle in some way, and they all whispered stories of his tragic accident—he'd lost parts of two fingers on his left hand in a summer construction job, which ended his music future. When he came into the station, I could not speak for the yearning in my throat, though he was kind to me.

As fate would have it, my grandfather found a classical guitar in an abandoned car he towed off the highway. The young man offered to give me lessons. My grandfather, not knowing the depth of my passion, cheerfully offered to pay. I did not exactly wish to turn

them down, but I knew how it would be. My heart stuck in my throat for an hour once a week. And what if his hand strayed over mine! I would faint, I knew it.

Somehow, though, I did it. We became friends of a sort, my love fed like an underground stream on those long afternoons. He must have known, I think now, and yet he was quite perfectly gentle, kind. He told me things no one else in my world could know—things about music and New York and his life. Sometimes his hand touched mine, and I nearly did swoon. At summer's end, I returned home, and the lessons ended.

Fifteen has fickle heart, so when the lessons stopped as school began, I forgot him and fell in love with someone else, but the memory of buttered afternoons, carefully chaperoned by my grandmother clanking pans in the kitchen, remains. Not his face, or his poor, wounded hand which I found so tragic, but the sound of the guitar, swelling like a dance, and my own heart, swollen twelve times its normal size with unrequited longing. I fell in love with him, and with guitar, with music.

Words, you see, were too weak to express my feelings. Only that *Malaguena* or *Asturias* could possibly express the layering levels of passion I felt for my teacher, and I made up my mind: music was the thing to which I would devote my life. I had studied already—clarinet for a brief moment, then cello for quite a while, and choir for years and years and years. (I wanted to be a soprano because they always got the solos and the attention, but my voice ever grew huskier and I was doomed to be alto and back row my entire career).

The trouble was, as deeply and passionately as I loved music (and still do), I discovered that my love outstripped my meager talents. So now I weep when the music is beautiful. And I write about music and musicians—a doomed Georgian composer, a blues guitarist who lost his fingers in an accident (hmmm, wonder where that came from?), another blues singer who ruined her life. I sometimes chuckle over how much material I've wrung from a string of classical guitar lessons over a two-month period decades ago.

Music, whether I play or love, is one of my great passions, born that buttery summer when I understood its power. It has given me some of my best books, this love. Since I can't produce the music itself, I use what I have to put music on the page, express my love for it in some other way. It's a through-line. We all have them, usually a few of them. In addition to music, my books have through-lines about survival and Spanish and the meeting place between cultures. A friend of mine, Christie Ridgway, writes about lost fathers and California and our need to keep up appearances. Although she probably doesn't express it this way in her head, she's passionate about the dynamics of ego and how that functions to keep people functioning.

We fall in love with ideas, times, peoples, themes, dreams. Indulging those affairs—long or short—is one of the great pleasures of a writing life. We must make room for it.

The other night, I finished my pages for the day (yes, it's going a little better this week, thanks) and decided I deserved a reward. I wandered down to the new library, just opened after a year of major construction and redesign.

It was just before sunset on a Colorado November day. Something about the weather or the time of day or year, or maybe all three, made me feel a bit melancholy, and I felt a yawning quiet inside of me, that quiet of being emptied out of thought or plans, all of it gone into the work. The new library seemed just the right idea to nourish the quiet my brain yearned for, a simple treat that wouldn't be much of a challenge. I'd just wander around, check out the arrangement, come back home and have supper.

I should have known better. There I was walking up to the library I've visited a thousand times, where I spent so much time as a student and then a young writer and a young mother. It was where I ran when I was desperate for time alone, for a little space of something in my head besides meal planning, budgets, juggling writing time and family time and all the things that go along with all those tasks.

I'm not sure when I let the library habit slide away. For awhile, I had so much trouble taking books back on time that I ran up a stupidly huge fine and didn't let myself check books out. I think that's what started it. Whatever it was, it had been ages and ages since I'd been to the library, and it was a delight.

A delight, I tell you. First of all, the new building was brilliantly designed, inside and out. I wandered through the various floors, exploring the new set-up, the views through the windows—the Sangre De Cristos to the south and west, Pikes Peak and the Front Range to the north, the mountains vividly blue in the fading day. For awhile, sunset poured through the windows, streaks of red and pink blazing through windows designed to show us just such a beauty.

I admired the children's section, then the periodicals, then climbed the stairs (vertigo dancing with me on suspended stairs and glass all around) and entered the adult collection. Of course I had to see how many of my own books were there, and it was a satisfyingly large number. One copy of a novel about the city is even set aside in the reserved section—not to be checked out. Cool. I wandered on, admired the dizzying number of videos now available, and DVDs.

And then, I headed for nonfiction. Quiet there on a Wednesday evening. I needed to familiarize myself with the new order, so I just wandered up and down the stacks, nodding. And there, suddenly, were old passions

whispering around me like the ghosts of old lovers.

How I loved things! So many of them!

Here, in this stretch, is my passion for the Middle Ages. I brushed my fingers over the spines, *A Distant Mirror*, *Life in a Medieval Village*, Cantor's wonderful *Medieval Lives*, and I thought of the taste that drove me, night after night, to come down to these quiet stacks and read, and read, and read, trying to figure out how to resurrect it for myself, for readers, to share this drunken emotion with readers: *here is my Middle Ages! What do you think?*

The holographic image of my creation hung there in the aisle with me, a film in red and blue, edged with gilt. I adored that period so very much, falling in love, dreaming in velvet and lutes, so much passion that when I first saw an illuminated manuscript page at a museum in Denver, I had to duck my head, embarrassed at my tears of longing and gratitude.

I still love the Middle Ages, or in my case, it narrowed to the first half of the 14th Century. I still enjoy visiting, immersing, falling into the pages someone else has created. A fragment of song or a line of poetry can carry me off and I'm lost in it once again. Not the way you sit down to have a civilized lunch with an old boyfriend, but as if you've fallen right into bed with them.

Smiling to myself, I wandered on a little further, and there was another love, another time, another drunken rush of hungry devouring. There is my World War II period, triggered by the war tales of an old black man who'd been sent to Italy out of the deep South—and I wandered down the aisle with my breath in my throat, thinking of my collection of D-Day statistics (there was an obsession all by itself!), the letters from home, and London stories that did turn into a book I have not published. It was a bit ahead of its time when I wrote it, and I say that without modesty. It simply couldn't have been published then. I don't know that it ever will be, but that doesn't make the passion I spent on it any less valid.

I turned a corner, and laughed. Here is my disaster period: earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes; ah, and another—obsession of obsessions—Titanic. Which reminds me of another angle of our passions: there is a tendency to limit ourselves to falling in love with things we might be able to use in our work, and that's a foolish economy. I could not possibly use Titanic or write anything fresh or new about it, but boy did the girls and I have a good time finding out every detail we could, just for the sheer pleasure of understanding some new thing that had previously escaped our notice. (For the record, no one in my family will speak the words D-Day, Black Death, or Titanic in my presence. I'm sure there are such subjects your own relatives and compatriots avoid. There's that geek thing again.)

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▶▶▶▶ There they all were, stacked up around me in those lovely stacks, my obsessions and passions: cultures, countries, time periods, ideas. Herbs, greenhouses, midwifery; Atlantis and ancient Egypt and Merlin the magician. Ancient

Ireland and Celtic folktales. Ghosts, reincarnation, spiritualism. Rocks, jewels, gems. Ah, and here—yes! Joy!—here are diseases: black plague, tuberculosis, the 1918 influenza epidemic.

What are some of yours? Have you thought about them lately, your old lovers and passions? Which ones still call you into bed with them? Have you given them any time lately, just for the pleasure of it?

And what new ones are calling to you? I stumbled on one quite by accident—World War I. I've been trying for months to not indulge it, after wandering into the Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh last spring. I've seen a thousand war memorials, I was raised in a military town, I dislike war and don't want to think about it (especially at the moment). But the girls don't seem to care. I turned a corner in that memorial and entered the area with the WWI dead, and I don't know if it was the sheer numbers or the drama of the area or what, but it slammed me so hard I couldn't speak for a half hour, and it haunted me terribly. Then I happened to see Lawrence of Arabia, and my heart was plucked again. And then...it sounds so silly, but I saw an episode of a British comedy, *The Black Adder*, an episode about World War I soldiers. The characters had to go above ground, and they *died*. It was quietly done, with a fade to black, then the modern day fields where the trenches once were dug. I was absolutely demolished.

I'm stuck, I know it. It's quite likely there isn't much

to be done with it in terms of a novel, but I decided I'm going to indulge it anyway, for the pleasure of learning, feeding my brain, for the delight of discovery. Perhaps the girls will figure it out, and the drive to share something of the world, to say, "did you know about this? and isn't it tragic, and what did we learn?" will show up somewhere after all. That's partly what we're doing with our passions, too, of course, trying to communicate them to others. *Have you ever noticed that Spanish guitar sounds exactly like you feel at fifteen when you've first fallen in love? Did you know that fashion is a way of protecting ourselves? This is what I have observed about small communities and how they function—is it like your observations?*

These passions of ours are what make our novels unique and rich. The fact that we can indulge them is also one of the great gifts of the writing life. Go ahead—let free a reckless hunger, an ardent yearning, a delighted curiosity. Ride an elephant, listen to some piece of music you haven't heard in awhile, open the shutters and see what spirit climbs into sleep with you and whispers in your dreams. **NINK**

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Bits Bids a Fond Buh-Bye

To dedicated Bits columnist, the erstwhile Terey daly Ramin. Thanks for the years of keeping us clued-in in your own inimitable style, Terey! **And welcome** to Sally Hawkes, our new Bits compiler, who's already geared up on short notice. Welcome to the fray, Sally.

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