

Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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Send Address Changes to Central Coordinator

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President's Voice

MOVING FORWARD

Ninc is taking a big step forward this fall. Our website, under the able guidance of our webmaster Craig Johnson, is an asset to members, but it will soon be a better tool not only for members but for the Boards of the future.

After studying the issue, the Board voted to make an investment in the future, and the transformation is underway, though you can't see it yet. One of the features many of you will really like is that you'll be able to renew your dues and pay them online. You'll also be able to keep your own information current by going to the site yourself and altering your personal profile, a benefit not only to you but also a time and money-saver for Ninc because those changes will no longer have to be done by our Central Coordinator. In addition, the online roster will always be current—or at least as much so as each of you takes responsibility for making it.

Prospective members will be able to apply online and pay there as well, instead of having to print out the form there and fax or mail it in, along with payment.

In addition, conference registration will be available online, we hope, in time for the next conference, though this feature must take a back seat to our need to be ready for our mandated fall deadlines for dues renewal forms first. Craig is working hard, however, to get it in place, as well.

We're set to go live at the beginning of September. Before then, you will receive a letter with your new User ID and password. The whole process is a sizable enterprise, and we'll be tweaking for a while, I'm sure. It's our goal to have the system in place and fully functioning before Vicki Lewis Thompson takes over as president, though until we get a full year's cycle completed, we're likely to continue refining the ways in which Ninc can more fully use the power of this exciting innovation.

And what about those of you who are not part of the cyberworld? Though the ultimate efficiency of the system would be achieved if everyone were, fear not, beloved Luddites—you can still do everything as it has been done and send payments and forms to David Brooks as in the past. He will add your information to the system manually.

Payment methods online will include Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover, and PayPal. And yes, we'll still take good old-fashioned checks, for those of you who prefer that method. Please note, however, that we're moving the site to an e-commerce host with all the attendant extra security so that those paying electronically will enjoy the protection of any other secure site. Your credit card information will not be recorded by the website—it will only be used to process your payment.

It will look much like the old site, so don't worry that you'll have to learn a whole new universe—the changes are mostly behind the scenes. But because our database will be housed on the site (again, securely and backed up), a marvelous array of new reports will be possible for future Boards from newsletter labels to conference registration updates to agent lists to membership tallies. In addition, our storage space on the new site will be larger to accommodate the ability to, as I've said before is one of my goals, make it more possible to store information that will relieve future Boards from having to reinvent the wheel so often. This is being done, however, at a minimal increase in monthly costs but should save Ninc money in a variety of ways by reducing manpower demands.

So...upward and onward.

— Jean Brashear

Isabel Swift, Vice President, Editorial recently announced several changes Harlequin is planning for July 2005. Harlequin Temptation will no longer be sold in the North American retail and direct mail markets. Flipside will no longer be published. Harlequin Blaze will increase by two titles per month. The Intimate Moments line will be reduced by two titles per month. Harlequin Historicals will be available only through the North America direct mail business and overseas. Harlequin will not be acquiring for their American Romance line for several months. All these changes and those announced at the Ninc Retreat (see the recap in the May 2004 *NINK*) are in response to an ever-changing market.

Copyright Revisited

Continued from page 1

▶▶▶ protected from selling his or her creation to a third party who would subsequently own it and keep all the revenue from it, cutting out the creator.

To provide that protection, the copyright law essentially forbids the sale of intellectual property to any third party. When any author signs a standard publishing agreement, he is not granting ownership of the book to the publisher. He is licensing the book to the publisher, and the clauses of the book publishing agreement specify the terms of that license.

To illustrate how significant this is, let's review some of the protections a standard publishing contract includes.

The first thing that leaps to mind is the out of print clause. The publisher does not "own your book in perpetuity." If the book is no longer available for sale, you can reclaim it and the license ends. This can even happen within two or three years after first publication if the publisher is not successful with your book. The publisher has other important obligations—to pay royalties on copies sold and to report to you on a regular basis. If the publisher fails to do these things, the author can demand they be done and, ultimately through the courts, reclaim rights if the publisher has breached the agreement (albeit a long, costly process).

Along with these protections that help the Author, the standard license in a U.S. publishing agreement is for the term of copyright, which is currently the author's lifetime plus 70 years. This is a very lucrative license. A classic book—one that sells ten thousand copies per year

or more long after first publication—is a cash cow. If the publisher keeps this book in print, there is no way the Author can reclaim it or negotiate new terms (like a higher royalty rate) or change the license in any fashion. To give you an even better idea of how valuable this is, you should know that when a hardcover publisher licenses paperback rights to a second publisher they license rights for set terms—three years, five years, seven years or more. They never license the book for the term of copyright—they certainly know how valuable this license may be over the long term.

Let me stop here and try and keep this easy to understand. I'm saying two things here that are almost contradictory. First I'm saying that a publisher should never own the rights to the book in perpetuity and should never own copyright. I'm also saying that despite these admonitions, a publisher can essentially get the same rights and powers by simply licensing the book instead.

Let me articulate the other two elements I am focusing on, before I wrap this up and make my final point.

A grant of rights that says it is made in perpetuity contradicts the letter and spirit of the copyright law. In the contract I examined, it is almost contradicted by the contract itself. This contract did have an out of print clause. It wasn't a contract in perpetuity because if the book was no longer in print, it could be reverted. I've also seen agreements with no out of print clauses and these are probably the most dangerous of all. Lacking that clause, if you wanted to regain your rights, you'd have to sue under the copyright act and hope ▶▶▶

Copyright Revisited

▶▶▶▶ a sympathetic judge would agree that the license itself was flawed and contradicted the copyright law or the author entered into the contract under false pretenses.

The third and final element in this contract was the transfer of copyright from the Author to the publisher. This should never happen. The originator of intellectual property should own the copyright and have the copyright registered in his name. Nevertheless, it is true that Authors can transfer the copyright to a third party. Some authors do this themselves when they form a corporation to hold their copyrights. Other authors may indeed sign a publishing contract that transfers copyright to the publisher, however unorthodox that is. The copyright law does allow this.

Ironically, as I've been trying to make clear in this article, it is not necessary for the publisher to insist on a contract in perpetuity or to own the copyright in order to completely exploit the rights to a work. If you sign a standard publishing agreement and license all rights to your book—including dramatic, commercial and merchandising, electronic, etc.—the publisher could well control all these rights. If the book is kept in print, the license would continue, without any legal basis for termination, for the author's life plus 70 years. At that point, with copyright expiring, the license would become non-exclusive because the book itself would no longer be protectable under copyright law but would pass into the "public domain."

I wrote this article for two reasons. The first was to call authors' attention to three elements that I found did not belong in a standard author/publisher book publishing contract. The second reason is almost more important: to raise authors' awareness to the long term stakes involved in signing even a standard publishing agreement.

We can react with shock and horror when we read a publishing agreement that transfers ownership, says that it exists in perpetuity and demands transfer of the copyright to the publisher, but the basket of rights that are acquired in a standard, wholly legitimate agreement are also quite extensive and hard to change after the contract is signed. If you give up performance rights, your publisher will make your movie deal. If you give up translation rights, your publisher will license foreign editions. If your royalty is sub-par, even 50 years from now, you will have no legal basis to re-negotiate it.

I want authors to understand and appreciate this. One reason among many to retain subsidiary rights is

that whether the publisher does a good job with them or not, they will indefinitely hold them if granted in the original contract.

I also want publishers, particularly small publishers, who may not have an agreement that conforms to a more standard publishing agreement to embrace the standards these contracts uphold. They lose nothing, as a practical matter, by working with a license, for term of copyright. So long as the book is in print, it cannot be taken away from them and the royalty rates can't be changed. The whole publishing environment will be improved when contracts are fair and transparent, particularly when so little is gained by provisions that contradict the letter or spirit of the copyright law. These provisions only serve to alarm authors and agents and seem to assert an ownership and a prerogative that is inconsistent with the author-publisher relationship.

Ethan Ellenberg has led his own New-York-based literary agency for the past 18 years. Ellenberg notes: We are eagerly seeking new clients in all genres of commercial fiction. Additional information and complete guidelines are available at ethanellenberg.com. Please follow our guidelines carefully.

Bits'n'Pieces

New Jobs

Liza Baker moves to Little, Brown for Younger Readers as executive editor-director of special projects. This is a new position that will oversee sports and tie-ins, licensing other projects for mass-market customers.

Jerome Kramer, co-founder and co-owner of *Book Magazine*, takes an as-yet-undisclosed new job at Kirkus.

Bookselling in the UK *isn't any easier . . .*

Take a look at agent Simon Trewin's observation in the *Independent* concerning publishing: "Signing that elusive publishing contract can often be the beginning of recurrent nightmares rather than of dreams coming true." Article available at: enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books/features/story.jsp?story=533402

Bits Compiled by Sally Hawkes

Why Homer Would Be Proud:

Or a different take on the evolution of genre fiction

BY CHERYL ZACH

Genre fiction has a bad rep. We all know it. Often considered a less worthy stepchild to more literary compositions, genre and mass market books are, dare I suggest, underestimated. After all, where did it all begin?

Go back a few thousand years, when a storyteller named Homer spun sagas that captivated his listeners. Homer was Greek and legend has it that he was blind. All we really know about him was that he could tell a hell of a fine story, and a good thing, too. The Greeks of that period, though relatively civilized, endured a brutal existence. A bad harvest or a new round of plague could cut their short lives even shorter. There were always the mysterious sea people or other enemies ready to invade, or neighboring city-states eager to instigate bloody civil conflicts. Stressful times, right? So, gathering around the fire after a hard day, these men and women relished an enthralling story that would take their minds off their own troubles.

And could Homer deliver! His epics dealt with heroes of great strength and courage yet achingly familiar vulnerabilities, with women who were beautiful and wise and sometimes vengeful, with evil, greedy villains. His stories had plot twists to make the most jaded warrior gasp, and though they might include strange monsters and amazing settings, they were also based on psychological truths which gave the fanciful adventures and the—yes—romance a solid foundation. After countless retellings, Homer's tales were eventually written down and saved for later generations to enjoy.

As millennia passed, literature meandered through many transformations. Monks shivering in drafty monasteries copied holy writ and solemn sermons. During the late middle ages, romance tales about doomed lovers appeared to the delight of readers both male and female. Renaissance authors penned sonnets and plays about love, adventure, history, and the vagaries of human nature. England's Puritans banned frivolous pursuits such as drama and dancing, offering in their place bracingly moralistic poems and essays such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The eighteenth century evolved satire to new heights (or maybe depths); the romance poets and novelists of the early nineteenth century celebrated love and mystery and gothic intrigue until Victorians sought to tame their extravagances and channel literary works into fiction and nonfiction which often examined the scientific and philosophical workings of the universe and man's

place therein, or offered moral lessons to adults and children alike. (A lot of oversimplification, here, but bear with me.) However, seeds of change had been sown. Novelists such as Dickens and Kipling appeared, with absorbing stories which were eagerly read by readers of all classes.

Then, toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth, a radical shift occurred. Up to this time, written work (except for drama which by its nature had a wider audience) had been mostly the province of the privileged and affluent, who had sufficient leisure time and money to linger over a witty satire or deep philosophical tome. Of course, stories were still told around cottage hearths, but literature had been most often the plaything of the upper classes. Then the Victorians, in their well-meaning, moral way, began to offer elementary education to the populace. As the new century began, an increasing percentage of English-speaking people, even working class people, far from wealthy people, had joined the reading public.

Instead of celebrating this monumental achievement, the writers of the period felt threatened. The idea of the "alienated artist" and "art for art's sake" became part of any serious artist/writer's philosophy. Who wanted to write to the masses? How could greatness be so achieved? A period of "literary" work began, as authors, not wanting their work to stoop so low as to appeal to the ordinary person, wrote poems and essays and novels of undoubted genius but deliberate obscurity. (Remember reading T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" in college, when the footnotes took up more of the page than the poem?) The average working stiff who labored long hours in the factory or the field or the kitchen, making Model T's or wiping toddlers' noses and bottoms, had little energy at the end of the day to decipher cryptic poems or obtuse novels. These readers wanted rousing stories of adventure and romance, and happily, writers appeared to fill that need.

In the 1930s and '40s, inexpensive paperback novels and magazines—filled with fantasy, mystery, science fiction, romance, or horror stories—multiplied. The Golden Age of Pulp nourished budding writers and prolific readers alike. Even when the heyday of pulp faded, genre fiction hung on stubbornly, fed by the unending appetite of readers who wanted emotional, and not just analytical, fulfillment from their leisure time reading.

Modern mass market fiction continues to offer involving, emotion-filled, page-turning stories ▶▶▶

Proud Homer

▶▶▶ where good conquers evil and love is rewarded, where a tired twenty-first century worker, weary from balancing professional, business, family, and community responsibilities, can escape the news of the day, with its blare of enemies without and within, diseases, accidents, terrorism, and more, and find solace in a fictional landscape containing absorbing narratives, bigger than life characters, and satisfying endings.

So, my suggestion is that genre fiction traces its honored ancestry back to one of the original greats of literature, and that genre fiction, a type of writing to be celebrated, not denigrated, fulfills many of the same purposes today that it did when Homer's tales were first repeated around those ancient Greek hearths. At its best, genre fiction provides both escape and affirmation. It asserts the endless potential of the human spirit even as it offers us heroes, of both sexes, when we most need heroes to believe in.

Whether you are romance or mystery writers, spinners of SF or family sagas, hold your heads high and shrug off the occasional snide putdown by those uneducated (or too educated) people who don't understand the value of the books we write.

Because, believe me, Homer would be proud!

When Cheryl Zach completed her M.A. in English, she ran screaming from the halls of Academia and swore she'd spend the rest of her life reading only books which she really wanted to read. With her daughter and writing partner Michelle Place, she writes Regency historicals as Nicole Byrd; Byrd's most recent novel is Beauty in Black, Berkley.

Duo-logue

BY PAT MCLAUGHLIN WITH VIRGINIA ELLIS

A Conversation on Brainstorming

Pat: I'm always fascinated by how people brainstorm. And what works for different people.

When I was a kid my family used to recite that doggerel about me:

There was a little girl with a little curl

Right in the middle of her forehead.

When she was good, she was very, very good

When she was bad, she was horrid.

And that hits my experiences with brainstorming, too. When it's good, it's so amazingly good and when it's not, it's "horrid." And you and I have had some that probably fall into each category, eh?

I keep trying to sort out why some brainstorming sessions work and others don't, why some combinations of brainstormers work and others don't.

Venue doesn't hurt. I'll never forget brainstorming with Barbara McMahon in the pool at the Orlando RWA Conference between rides on the water slide. Certainly brought out my inner child. <g> But a fun setting isn't essential: I had a tremendously productive brainstorming session with Kate Moore at the crammed Dallas-Fort Worth Airport during a long afternoon of flight delays.

Gin: Some authors don't like to brainstorm anytime, anywhere and I can understand that. I know in my own case if I've already set the story in my mind, I don't want to talk about it much. Over-explaining or even making detailed outlines takes the "juice" out of the writing process for me. I've also seen instances where too many "cooks" spoil the final product. Criticism or simply a lack of enthusiasm can derail an author's excitement.

Pat: Amen to all those points. All those are dangers I've encountered. Early in my writing I lost an entire story because of the "cooks" — never did get it back. I'm working now on recovering one that lost the juice from a group "brainstorming" my story when I hadn't invited any brainstorming.

Lack of enthusiasm is such an insidious story-sapper. It's like buying a house and seeing all the potential of what it *can* be, but all you hear from family and friends is what it isn't now. So what if the windows are dirty — can't they see the great view they'll have when they're clean?

And yet...and yet, I can't imagine giving up brainstorming entirely. The optimist in me keeps going back to brainstorming situations (mutually agreed-upon ones, not uninvited <g>) because of the magic when it works.

Sometimes I think brainstorming difficulties arise from my peculiar

writing method: Writing out of sequence, retroactive plotting, knowing some details from the get-go yet some big elements not showing up until they emerge on the screen...or (nightmare!) not showing up at all. That's when I'm most desperate for brainstorming.

Despite the peculiarities of my writing method, there are a couple people I can call (always seems to be long distance) who always seem to come through for me. So maybe it isn't my method.

So, what is it?

Gin: I think the most important thing about brainstorming is being open-minded. Now, after saying that I don't mean that you have to take every suggestion someone throws out. Brainstorming is just that, a throwing out of ideas. Some are silly, some don't fit the category or genre, others might take the story in a new and exciting direction.

Certainly it's much easier to brainstorm a story *before* the book is written — that's when the creative process is wide open.

After the story and back story are set, the only way to brainstorm is to have an intricate knowledge of the characters and the plot. To me, that falls in the realm of critiquing rather than brainstorming.

Pat: Now, see, I don't agree that after the story and back story are set that the only way to brainstorm is to have an intricate knowledge of the characters and plot. I see no reason that looking for ideas on an individual element can't be as open and free-wheeling as looking for a general story line. (And it's a whole lot more useful for me because I generally have my story line; what I need is some help filling holes or ramping up the tension at a specific point.)

So someone comes and asks you to brainstorm a certain element — why not just throw out ideas? Do lists of twenty (or fifty or whatever).

I did this over the phone with Gina Wilkins this spring. She's done it many, many times for me. She's one of my long-distance saviors. This time she had one element that she wasn't satisfied with as it had been set in the synopsis. She told me the outline and I started popping off ideas. She said, nope, nope, nope. Sometimes with some explanation, sometimes not. (But, really, why should she explain? It's her story.) I just kept popping ideas. And then one hit. Ta-da!

I do think it's vital with that type of brainstorming (probably with all brainstorming) to accept — no, more than to accept, to respect — the story for what it is. Not to try to change it, but to work within its character and *feel*. To catch the rhythm of that story's pulse.

And not to get attached to any of the ideas you're popping off or even a body of ideas. That can be difficult, but it's essential.

So I agree that being open-minded is essential — for

both the brainstormer and the brainstormee. However, the person to whom the story belongs is the only one who knows whether the idea works or not, whether it feels right, whether it matches the internal rhythm of the story that's beating in the writer's head.

So I'd say it's even more important for the brainstormers to be open-minded than for the brainstormee.

Gin: Yes, that "not changing the story" is the hard part. On the surface, that would imply that your brainstormers should be writing for — or at least be very familiar with the perimeters of — the target genre. By that I mean, if a person writing category romance brainstorms with authors who are writing something else — anything from horror to "women's fiction" — those authors are going to throw out ideas they think are interesting or different. Those ideas might not be right for category.

Then there's the "big book" syndrome and I have to say I've been guilty of this...trying to turn a perfectly good category idea into a blockbuster.

I've brainstormed with a few of my friends who have come up with the nut of a *great* idea — not good, *great*. An idea I just itch to take ten steps further and make into a bigger, and in my mind, more exciting story.

Unfortunately, it's impolite to hit people when they don't do what you want them to do. And, BTW, it's bad form to swipe those good ideas for use in your own work.

Pat: Okay, Gin, I'm not worried about you swiping from me, but that hitting part has me scared.

Gin: That's where trust comes in. Including trusting I won't hit you.

Trusting the people you brainstorm with is imperative. They should be writers — or avid readers — who take the process seriously. They don't try to be funny and talk about aliens when the story is supposed to be about Texans. They don't get mad if their every whim isn't written into the book. They don't mind a certain number of "nopes," from the author who is working through the problem.

Pat: I'd rather have space aliens in Texas than be told the obvious. Say you ask for lists of twenty on a heroine you're working on and you get: "You need a reason she quit 'The Apprentice' even though she was the clear favorite and bought that ranch in Texas."

No kidding. And not helpful at all. I want specifics: "She realized she never wanted to work for anyone after being exposed to Donald Trump," "She so hated the other contestants and staff and The Donald, that she wanted to get far away from people, but she couldn't afford an island." "She developed a deadly allergy to cities." "After too many sushi



Conversation on Brainstorming

▶ ▶ ▶ lunches she craved beef.”
Without specifics, it’s just too frustrating.

Gin: I think one important way of soothing the frustration level is to set time limits. Each person should be assigned a block of minutes or hours. During those hours, only the work of that author is discussed. No drifting off to someone else, no gossiping, no bitching. If the session is to be one hour long then everyone in the group should spend one hour on the work. They’ll appreciate that time limit when their turn comes around.

Pat: I agree (Hey! We agreed!) that a set amount of time for each person’s story is good. Although, clearly there needs to be time also set aside to gossip and bitch. I also want time later to revisit each person’s story, because I find that ideas often bubble up after the assigned time.

But I’m not a big fan of super-regimented sessions. In fairness, I’ll admit I’m not a big fan of super-regimented anything. But brainstorming, especially, would seem better served by allowing the creativity plenty of elbow room. It’s *brainstorming* and storms are not organized and orderly.

Gin: To me it’s more of a fairness issue than an organizational one. Being a Sagittarian I want everyone to know the rules and to get their turn.

If someone feels overlooked or under-served by the group, then they are more likely to withhold their contributions or stop showing up.

Pat: I’d like to go back to what you were saying about brainstormers throwing out ideas that fit their type of writing rather than the type of story the brainstormee has on the table. I’m not arguing that that doesn’t happen. But I wonder why.

Surely the brainstormees watch a variety of genres of movies, read a variety of genres of books, and they recognize the differences and respect those differences. Why can’t the brainstormers simply remind themselves which genre they’re in and adjust their thinking? Is that asking too much? I truly don’t know. It doesn’t seem to me that it should be.

But I also know that my background as an editor has helped train me to think that way, to accept and respect a story for what it is, to deal with it on its terms and not try to make it over. To be—as a contributor to that story as a brainstormer and/or editor, yet not the writer of it—a chameleon.

Gin: Because writers, especially those who’ve been in the business for a while, very often are on a mission to

do something different—something fresh.

Whether we write inside a genre or out, we’re all looking to start the next trend or at least be surfing in on the first wave. Personally, that quest keeps me interested, psyched about the next book and the next.

Remember that old writer’s tale about ideas being like the weather? That they rain down across the country from West to East? Well, honey, since you and I live on the East Coast, we need all the storms we can get.

Pat: That goes back to what you said about someone having the nut of a great idea that you itch to take ten steps further and make it “into a bigger, and in my mind, more exciting story.”

Because the story isn’t *in* the brainstormer’s mind, it’s in the brainstormee’s mind. The bigger, more exciting story is *your* story. The something different, something fresh is *your* story.

But the brainstormer signs up to serve the brainstormee’s story.

And maybe that’s what makes brainstorming so challenging—that it goes against the writer’s instinct to make everything we encounter a potential story for themselves. See a tableau at the grocery store, tuck it away for possible use. Watch a movie, rewrite the ending to suit yourself. Talk with a friend about her troubles, mentally tweak the dialogue to improve the pace. I suspect it’s part of our hardwiring.

But brainstormers have to turn that off. They have to let go of the control. Contribute a few strokes on one of the oars, yet accept and respect that it’s someone else’s boat. Not easy when they’re used to being the captain themselves.

You know after this conversation, I’m even more appreciative of the brainstorming that works. In fact, I have a little spot I could use some ideas about. Think I’ll go call Gina Wilkins. <g>

Here’s hoping we get hit regularly with good old N’reasers of ideas, Gin!

Pat McLaughlin has not yet learned to kill e-mails from NINK editors (and Lorraine looks so sweet!) unopened. She has learned, however, to rope in friends like Gin. She’s just finished her twenty-second book for Silhouette, writing as Patricia McLinn. She continues to edit part time at the Washington Post because her mortgage company insists. You can visit her website at : www.PatriciaMcLinn.com.

Virginia Ellis has written, as Lyn Ellis, a dozen romances for Harlequin and, as Virginia Ellis, hardcover women’s fiction for Ballantine. Her next book, co-written with Susan Goggins, is the beginning of a vampire series set in Savannah. The Garden of Good and Evil will be published in June 2005 by Del Rey under the pseudonym Raven Hart. Visit her online at: www.virginiaellis.com.



Sticky Notes from the Edge

Cheryl Anne Porter

Writers, A Breed Apart

Florida is hot this summer. (Bet you didn't know that!) I really like it here, though. And part of what makes my neighborhood a great place to live is all the dogs. Seriously.

Dog number one is Harlow, our tiny Jack Russell terrier who thinks she's Zena, Warrior Princess. Across the street is another JRT, a little female named PK. I have no idea what PK stands for, but I spend many entertaining hours making up possibilities. Clearly, I don't have enough to do.

Anyway, PK is very sweet. Although she tries to befriend the irascible Harlow, it's no go so far. So much for that whole Zena and Gabrielle dynamic.

Next, down the street on the right is a less-than-macho West Highland terrier. Dudley has had his cute little butt kicked more than once by the impudent Harlow. Poor thing, now he just hides when he sees her headed his way.

Next to Dudley's house, there's Brownie, a chocolate Lab capable of making a standing track-and-field-like leap of six feet or more. Guess who he lands on? So much for amorous intentions!

At the end of the block is the world's LARGEST and friendliest St. Bernard "puppy."

Otto's feet, alone, are the size of dining room tables. And Otto, too, is in love with you-guessed-it, Harlow. She, of course, wants less than nothing to do with this glandular case of a suitor.

A sometime visitor is Rob Roy (from *Black Beauty*) – part JRT and part dachshund (talk about

conflicted). Robbie's sweet, very regal, and soft as a mink. Although I'm guessing here. Not much opportunity to feel minks in Florida. Did I mention that it's hot?!

The elegant Robbie wants nothing to do with Harlow. She, of course, adores him.

Perhaps you're wondering by now, what does this parade of canines have to do with anything, Cheryl? I'm glad you asked. Because as I've watched this four-legged assortment, I began to notice that we writers are not so far removed from those dogs as we might think. There are timid writers (like Dudley) who are afraid to submit their work. And how about the Brownie sort? Writers for whom the very process feels like a daily six-foot fence jump. There are the Harlows of the literary world who feel they must fight a battle for every word on the page. And those lucky Rob Roys who manage to make creativity look so elegant. Recognize anyone you know?

So there you have it. A totally unexpected parallel between the literary and canine worlds. Flash...writing goes to the dogs...film at 11. So how long do you think it'll be before some enterprising artist, inspired by that famous doggie painting, immortalizes a round table of authors smoking cigars and playing poker?

The author would have you know that, while she'd look very cute smoking a cigar, she'd much prefer that you send presents and money. Especially money.

Bits'n'Pieces

E-Reader of the Future

Sharp introduces a new super-slip e-reader in Japan. Although it isn't planned for production until 2007, this may be an indication of where the market is heading.
www.engadget.com/entry/4103333888821866/

The Buzz in the Biz.....by Peggy Webb

A Conversation with Sandra Brown

Sandra Brown is the author of 65 novels, 51 of them *New York Times* bestsellers. To say she is successful is an understatement. Articulate, professional, focused—the native Texan is a woman who makes writing look easy.

Not so, is what she told me when I caught up with her between books. *It never gets easy*. Her words will resonate with every writer who has ever struggled to finish yet another mystery, another romance, another literary gem.

Although Sandra has sold 70 million copies of her books in 30 languages and has garnered a shelf full of awards that include the American Business Women's Association's Distinguished Circle of Success, B'nai B'rith's Distinguished Literary Achievement Award, and Romance Writers of America's Lifetime Achievement Award, she says she lives daily with the fear that it will all vanish. Driven by fear and buttressed by talent, Sandra has seen *Hello, Darkness*, *The Crush*, *The Switch*, *Unspeakable*, *Fat Tuesday*, and *The Alibi* take the top five spots on the *NY Times* list. Her novel *French Silk* was made into an ABC-TV movie.

What's more, she's a genuinely *nice* woman who is easy to talk to, easy to like, and easy to applaud. It's my pleasure to share her insights.

NINK: Sandra, when and how did your writing career begin?

Sandra Brown: It began after I got fired from my job. I was working part-time for a TV station in Dallas. My family was not dependent on the income, but the job was a good creative outlet for me. I had young children at home and needed that break. When the job went away, I started thinking about what else I wanted to do. My husband encouraged me to write. He said *you've been talking about this forever. Either just keep talking or do something about it*. That's when I started writing. It was 1979.

The romance genre was really exploding at that point, and I was advised that would be a hot market to get into. I wasn't familiar with romance per se and I was totally unfamiliar with category. I bought some romances, and then read and studied them. I also studied books on plotting. I feel as though I have an innate story-telling ability, but I had to learn to tell a story that could be appreciated by a reader. From day one I approached writing like a job. I told myself, *if I'm going to do this I'm not going to dabble: I'm going to do it seriously*.

My first book was with Dell Candlelight Ecstasy. I was one of many writers who were instrumental in getting that line started. Vivien Stephens was the editor at that time, and

she was seeking more sensual books. She cultivated me, Barbara Delinsky, Jayne Krentz, and many other writers who could come up with books every three to four months. We were prolific and writing according to the trend.

NINK: You launched both *Loveswept* and *Harlequin American* in 1983, but *Slow Heat in Heaven* reinvented your career. How did that happen?

SB: Actually I reinvented my career two times. *Slow Heat in Heaven* was my declaration of independence. It was my first book for Warner. I was working with an editor and a publisher who said, *you can do whatever you want to do, no restrictions*. Though the word has been over-used, *Slow Heat in Heaven* was a *crossover*. It was a change from a creative standpoint.

From a career standpoint, the change came when I made the *New York Times* list in 1990 for *Mirror Image* (Warner).

NINK: Was there ever a time when you thought your career was doomed?

SB: Not doomed. I certainly had some stumbling blocks along the way. I won't get too specific...but when you're working with an editor and the editor gets replaced or decides to leave...or when a particular trend comes along that doesn't mesh with what you're doing and your editors are telling you, *everybody's reading this kind of book...you think, so where does that leave me?*

Sometimes personal things interfered with work. My husband had a serious accident which required my full attention. My mother had brain cancer, and I nursed her for 18 months. Life has put obstacles in my path.

During all of the tough times, I would focus on my writing. If you get sidetracked with *oh, woe is me*, your negative thoughts become a self-fulfilling prophecy. There were things over which I had no control. When something happened that I could not change, work was a panacea; it always kept me grounded. No matter what was going on in my life, I still had my writing.

NINK: What advice would you give to writers who feel their careers are floundering?

SB: First of all, remember that you are a human being. You wouldn't be human if every once in a while you didn't doubt what you were doing or your ability to do it. Stop thinking about and dwelling on things you cannot change. Instead, focus on the writing.

Don't try to predict market trends or publishing anomalies. We can't dictate our editors' lives, our publishers' vagaries. The only thing you have control over is the material. Let that be the main focus. The rest usually

works itself out. Do the best you can do, then work within the new parameter.

NINK: *There are many talented writers in this business, but very few attain the sort of success you have. What factors contributed to your success?*

SB: At the risk of sounding smug, staying focused on the writing is what I've done. A lot of my success has to do with the good fortune of working with editors whose instincts and advice I trust. I've also had the good fortune to work with an excellent agent who not only looks at the contract, but looks at the career and keeps me on a path for an ultimate end.

If I had my way I'd be more successful. It's a constant striving. I don't know if anyone ever sits back and says, *gee, I'm there*. I have a constant compulsion to improve. I have an on-going dissatisfaction with my work. I want every book to be as good as I can possibly make it.

In the end though, you have to forgive yourself for being human, and then just go and start another book.

Here's another thing...I've worked with so many different people in this industry—so many publishers and editors over the years—and I'm still on speaking terms with everybody I worked with. I believe that maintaining professionalism and a sense of privacy have been beneficial. I don't even know who my agent's other clients are because we never talk about them.

A good lesson is to mind your own business. You can't waste time worrying about the careers of others. Concentrate on your own.

I've always tried to keep a professional demeanor and conduct myself in a professional manner even when I didn't like something and had to say so. Anyone who cuts off his nose to spite his face is not too bright.

NINK: *What changes have you seen in publishing over the course of your career?*

SB: It's much harder for new writers to break in. When I first began writing, there was a hot market for my product. I was lucky in that respect.

Now publishers are hesitating to take risks on new authors, and the mid list has all but vanished. That said, there's always the notable exception. *Harry Potter* was a huge risk that paid off for both publisher and author.

Across the board, competition is stiff. Publishers are cultivating their roster of bestselling authors such as John Grisham, Stephen King, Mary Higgins Clark. With those authors filling the slots, it's much harder to get a lead title slot.

Even bestselling authors don't stay on the list as long as they once did because there's always another crop of books coming out that will be equally as strong.

NINK: *What are the numbers now?*

SB: I don't have statistics in front of me... Books that at one time stayed on the *NY Times* list eight to ten weeks might now stay on only six to eight.

NINK: *What trends do you see emerging in publishing?*

SB: My daughter and her friends read the chick lit books, the *Sex in the City* spin-offs. They're so different from what

I've written. She comforts me by saying, *we can consume these, laugh, and have a good time, but when we want something weightier we read other books, too.*

Thankfully, millions of people around the world still want to read what I'm writing. The human condition is the same as it was when Shakespeare was writing. Everybody identifies with envy, emotional pain, hatred, greed... Trends will come and go, but when you look at classic literature—Shakespeare, Dickens, Hardy—everybody was writing about the same thing: the human condition.

NINK: *What do you consider your greatest achievement in publishing?*

SB: Longevity.

NINK: *What's next for Sandra Brown?*

SB: I just finished *White Hot*, which is coming out in August just before Labor Day. It takes place in rural Louisiana, where one family owns the only industry and, therefore, everybody in town. It's more of a pot boiler than a mystery, but still there is a murder, a whodunit plot.

Already I'm plotting a new book. It never stops.

NINK: *Is there something about you people don't know?*

SB: I was interviewed not too long ago and asked a similar question. I think what people don't know is how insecure I am, how I agonize that it's all going to go away. I live daily with that fear. I don't think people perceive me in that way.

Readers probably don't realize how much I agonize over each book, each phrase, each word. They probably think, *she's written 65 books and had all these bestsellers; it can't be that hard for her.*

The fact is, I find it harder now than when I was writing category romance. It never gets easy. We keep raising the bar on ourselves. **NINK**

Bits'n'Pieces

Forensic Research Help

- ▶ "Forensic Entomology Article Collection" by Mark Benecke: www.benecke.com/maden.html
- ▶ www.crime-scene-investigator.net
- ▶ www.thecrimeconnection.com
- ▶ DNA & Forensic Science Criminal Investigations: www.karisable.com/crdna.htm
- ▶ Court TV's Crime Library: www.crimelibrary.com
- ▶ Elder Hostel Program in Pennsylvania—three days, November 2004. Click on programs: www.roadsscholar.org



Don't Mess with My Mess, er, Desk...

Dear Annette:

Why do I let my desk become cluttered? I don't need tips on arranging the clutter. I have books on that subject cluttering my office <grin>. What I want to know is, why do I find security in the mess?

Signed: Drowning in Paper

Dear Drowning:

Good question. If you're fine with the clutter, then you go, Girl. But, at the risk of second-guessing someone else's intentions, I'm wondering if "security" is the real feeling here. (If you were fine with the clutter, I'm thinking you wouldn't have asked <g>).

It sounds from your note as if you'd like to de-clutter; you just haven't found the motivation yet. If organization's your goal, my suggestion is to focus on *why* the mess provides security.

Or perhaps, why having no mess would make you feel insecure. I add this twist because my neighbor, a wise man, suggested to me that getting rid of clutter takes courage: the courage to admit we made some poor purchases or squandered too much time on a project that's not going anywhere, the courage to trust our judgment about what to dump, and even more powerfully, the courage to pare extraneous distractions from life so we don't have excuses for not reaching our goals.

Even if you don't buy into New Age ideas like Feng Shui, it's not hard to argue that objects in our life carry

meaning. They either energize or drain us.

So what are the mounds of paper, piles of books, etc. doing for you? At the risk of sounding a tad Freudian, the following are some possible ideas.

Reasons clutter feels good:

1. *Clutter can be an excuse we hide behind for not dealing with life issues.* One clear example would be someone with a disaster of a desk and a disaster of a financial life who argues, "My finances are a mess because I'm disorganized." For some people, this would be preferable to admitting that they can't handle their financial choices and responsibilities.

Kind of harsh, I know, but I think many of us fall into this type of trap. I know I've been guilty more than once. It's actually a pretty insidious excuse that, unfortunately, works all too well. I mean, how could I possibly deal with writing that irritating synopsis/blurb/bio my editor wants when I have to shelve the three piles of books perched on the edge of my desk before I could possibly get to it?

2. *Sometimes we clutter because we're holding onto something or someone.* An example I read was of a woman who kept old love letters from all her old boyfriends to remind her that she'd been loved. Kind of an extreme example. For a writer, I can imagine how keeping reams of research and paperwork from the last book could remind one that she's successful, productive, and busy.

3. *Thinking that structure will stifle creativity.* Some people refuse to get organized because they believe it will damage their creativity. To a certain extent, I can see their point. Writing is hardly a "tidy" occupation. Much as I try to keep all my notes, scene ideas, etc. on my computer, I still end up with scraps written on napkins and sticky notes obscuring half my computer screen.

Still, I think it's fair to ask: is the mess getting in the way of your writing? That's the sixty-four thousand dollar question. If it's slowing you down, it's got to go.

4. *Disorganization makes people feel busy.* I know I often feel the panic of a blank screen staring me in the face at the start of a new scene, or God forbid, a whole new WIP. I can imagine how, for some people, having a desk that's too clean, too unused-looking, might make them feel like they're not being productive.

5. *A fear of poverty or scarcity.* This may fit for us writers. Stay with me. Often people who live in clutter can't bear to part with things because they fear scarcity. When I read this, it occurred to me that a writer could fear a scarcity of ideas. Perhaps having a brimming desk represents an abundance of new and exciting plots, or the promise of future stories. Just a thought.

And here's another thought: maybe the clutter is working for you. I mean that in a good way. Really. On the website Economist.com, I just read a fascinating article called "In Praise of Clutter" that addressed this very issue. The author contends that one person's paper-

choked desk is another person's creative brain at work. He argues that workers who have chronically messy desks aren't necessarily disorganized or too lazy to file. They simply use their workspaces as graphical representations of their thought processes, as literal, physical maps of what's going on in their heads.

Or maybe what's on your desk just looks like clutter. Research suggests that there are filers and there are pilers...and being a piler isn't necessarily bad. Filers, well, file away their paperwork while pilers, um, pile it into heaps or zones that make sense to them. The real key to the research was that both methods appeared to be equally effective for those who used them.

I guess that's the bottom line. If the sea of minutia on your desk makes your muse sing, who cares if it would make Martha Stewart faint dead away? But if in your heart of hearts, you know it's sapping your creative juices, taking a good, hard look at what's stopping you from sweeping it all into the trashcan might be worth the soul searching.

Annette Carney is a psychologist and writer. You can "Ask Annette" in strict confidence at one of these contacts: email: annettecarney@sbcglobal.net, fax: 775-746-4560; phone: 775-323-0445.

Bits'n'Pieces

Fiction Sales Get Help from Political "Events"

Good and bad news to be out the same day as Bill Clinton's *My Life*. While *Ten Big Ones* sold 1/10 of the Clinton copies, Janet Evanovich was #2 at Borders. Booksellers state the Stephanie Plum series has increased sales with each book and have no proof that the former president's book boosted sales, but first day sales were up and sales were huge at mass merchandisers, according to St. Martin's v-p Matthew Shear.

Another sales influence was *Fahrenheit 9/11* over Craig Unger's *House of Bush, House of Saud*, since Unger was interviewed in the film. The book had a six-week stay on the *New York Times* list after publication in March and is experiencing new life since the movie debut and a new cover.

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Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@comcast.net

"This, for me, is the great fun of writing: to seduce the reader to continue the story purely with the force and the grace of the prose."

Elizabeth George
Write Away

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:

Linda Ann Allsopp (*Liz Fielding*),
Armmanford, Carms, UK
Jamie Denton, Rouseville PA

New Members:

Glynnis Campbell, Panorama City CA
Holly Fuhrmann (*Holly Jacobs*), Erie PA
Melinda Rucker Haynes, Renton WA
Lori Karayianna (*Tori Carrington*), Toledo OH
Jeanie LeGendre (*Jeanie London*), Tampa FL

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



The Care and Feeding of the Girls in the Basement . . .

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Singing the Blues

One of the greatest blues songs of all time has to be the version of “Summertime” as sung by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. It starts out floating like chiffon on a soft wind, the first light notes, the simple dance of it.

Then comes Ella. “Summertime, and the livin’ is easy,” she sings, and you know it wasn’t. Not for her. Not for anyone who sang that song at that time and place.

But there’s that horn—that unbelievably perfect trumpet—and you can almost see a wide, slow, muddy river through a break in thick trees. The fish are jumping. The cotton is high. There’s a sheen of light over the land. It’s summertime. What does the rest matter?

That’s the whole point of blues, singing when the living isn’t easy. The blues make things bearable that might not be otherwise. It’s been a season of loss for so many of us, personally, and on a much larger scale, for our nation and our planet.

Like it or not, our old world shattered with 9/11 and a lot of what has come after has been pretty grim. I was raised in a military town during Vietnam, and my sense of honor asks me to watch the PBS list of dead soldiers every night. But I’m not as brave as I’d like. Some days, some soldiers go unacknowledged by me. I’m sure they are acknowledged elsewhere, by others, but I feel I should be there, too. It seems the least I can do for them in return for their dying. Look at their faces, their names, their home towns. Honor them.

Summertime, and the living is easy...

In my community, it’s been no easier. On an email list to which I’ve subscribed for a decade, there’s a season of personal trials. Death has trod through us, scooping up one and another and another. Trouble has been banging a gong, shattering the serenity.

And personally, I’m quite melancholy this sunny almost-summer morning. I can’t settle in to write the book so I’m here, writing about life and writing. It’s been another little dark stretch. Someone I’ve known for a long, long time died rather suddenly a few weeks ago. He died on an anniversary of my aunt’s death. A few days later, it was my mother-in-law’s birthday, the first one without her, and I missed her all day. Someone I’ve known a long time has spots on his lungs.

Even smaller, lesser things: my eldest son broke up with his girlfriend and I’ve been on the phone and on email with both of them, dealing with broken hearts. *Ow*. It’s so much harder to be a mother when they have broken hearts. What can you possibly say? It hurts like the dickens and there isn’t anything I can say that will make it feel better. As a MOOS, the mother of only sons, I’m always falling in love with the girlfriends, but this one was really close to my heart. I’ll miss her wretchedly.

My best friend of the past twenty-five years, who now lives only a hundred miles away, is moving to Atlanta. Thousands of miles away. I know I can visit her. I know it’s a good move for her and she’ll be happier

living around her family. But I hate that she won't be an hour away anymore.

Even lesser sad things: my other son wrecked his car. It's going to be a total loss, though he can't seem to get his mind around that idea yet. It's sad that this great bargain is probably totaled now.

I need to wallow. That's the truth. Wallow and whine and complain and moan and cry.

Summertime, and the livin' is easy...

There is restlessness in me, too. That stirring of far-away-ness, the hunger for something... else. I'm living between two cities and can't make up my mind which one I want, or if I want another one entirely. Maybe I'd like to go to Mexico City and study Spanish, because I said I was going to from the time I was twenty. So what's stopping me (except I'd miss my dog desperately)?

The work seems hard these days. Not all of it—but the work that's testing me is really testing me. I'm not as successful as I'd like in getting things on the page. Sometimes, I'm scrambling very hard and feel as frustrated as Jane Fonda in the movie about Lillian Hellman, when she's typing away on a table by a window and gets so annoyed with the work that she stands up and shoves the entire typewriter out the window. (Wouldn't it be so satisfying to do that sometimes?)

Summertime...

My grandmother is 85 and has been in and out of the hospital. She's frail now, and never was before. I was visiting her at a therapeutic center (nursing home) where she had to go to get her strength back recently. My mother, her brother, and I were talking to the therapists and social workers, trying to navigate the maze of medical benefits, Medicare, insurance, and balance it with the care she desperately needs. It was a tiring day, and my grandmother was somewhat querulous, as I suppose she had a right to be. It wore her out. My mother was settling her with her magazines and pudding and bottle of water. My uncle and I were standing in the doorway, staying out of the way.

The hallway stretched in institutional blandness in either direction, and from a room not far away came the sound of a woman moaning. The door to the room across the way was open and I saw the bed, the light, the little television, the accoutrements of illness. I fell adrift in my thoughts, wishing there were a way to pinpoint the Last Good Day of Life Before the Great Decline so this would never have to be my future.

My uncle made a sound and I looked at him. He's in his early fifties, still a handsome scoundrel who left behind a wild life to settle in with his children and wife, but he still has a chopped Harley, red, that's his pride and joy.

He wiggled his nose, touched the corner of his eye and said, "The boys want my bike, so I guess I'll just have to buy me a cheap Yamaha."

I'm not brave enough to crash a bike into a wall, but my sister and I have a deal to stock pile drugs we can help each other take at the appropriate time.

Summertime, and the living is easy...

An hour or two earlier, my mother and I had to go across the street to the grocery store for a few supplies for Grandma. The clerk at the checkout was as kind as morning, chatting about the blouse and earrings my mother wore. I noticed that my mother looked strained, and the clerk had probably noticed the collection of odd items that we were buying, and correctly surmised we were visiting someone in the nurs—*oops*, therapeutic center—and maybe it's not the greatest day for any of us. She was so kind she made my heart ache, and there was something about her that made me think she's always like that. Spreading joy to customers, day in, day out. I wonder how many people she sees in a day. Forty? Sixty? A hundred?

Who knows? It makes me dizzy to think of her little ripples of joy spreading through the summer afternoons, to a house in a little dark neighborhood; a slightly older model car that carries its owner to a factory, or a call center, or the Wal-Mart.

I suspect she has the secret, that grocery store clerk. It's not the best of jobs, is it, being a clerk? Though in that blue collar city neighborhood it probably beats a lot of others. She's earning a good hourly wage, no doubt has health insurance and some other benefits, and although she has to be on her feet, the job's not physically demanding in ways that break a body when it gets to be a bit older.

But you don't say at seven, "I want to be a grocery store clerk when I grow up."

And yet, there she is, her sturdy self planted by the register, smiling and cheering up everyone who comes through her line. A single point of light setting other points alight all day long every day. How many times has that smile had a rippling effect on someone who might have taken the wrong turn later on that day? Someone who might have taken a drink they couldn't afford, or picked a fight or run a red light in fury?

Summertime, and the living is easy...

In the basement of my creative self, where the younger girls are whining about how unfair it all is, and the rebel is out trying to pretend nothing hurts by whistling at boys, Roberta, the elder with her straight legs and deep bosom, puts on a hat and looks at herself in the mirror. She applies plum lipstick, blots it with a tissue.

She says to me, "Child, how do you think you ever get to be wise? By living easy?"

Ah.

"Take notes," she says.

Oh, it hurts to think of those soldiers, their mothers. It's killing me to think of them because I





▶▶▶ have two sons and all their friends, and most of those kids are that age and it's terrible. Terrible. It's always terrible. I hate it. It makes me cry. And yet, there it is: war and soldiers and loss are always with us. The opposite of love is hate, or maybe fanaticism. The

opposite of life is death. Eternal themes.

I have reached an age where I can't duck the loss of the elderly ones I've loved. But loving means losing sometimes. How can you choose not to love them anyway?

Little things go wrong. A good car gets smashed, and the driver might learn to drive more carefully. Or maybe he won't. A child's heart is broken and she gets tattooed, as we all were, by the piercing pain of first love.

But, it's summertime.

Summertime...and there is dawn, when the light is soft and the air hasn't yet heated up. The roses are heavy with buds, and the grass is long enough to hide a cat, and life oozes into the world with a scent and headiness that's almost unbearable. This is a world where

people die, and bombs fall, and doctors are trying to save lives that slip away.

But it's also a world where Ella can sing that song, and Louis can play that horn, and the sound is so perfect and clean and exquisite that your heart can break with the beauty of it.

Summertime...and there is a delphinium blooming higher than my head. Summertime...and there are my sons, lying in bed too late in the quiet mornings, and my dog snoring on the couch because he thinks I can't see he jumped up there. Summertime...and there is my grandmother giggling over some joke she remembered my grandfather told her.

Singing the blues has always been about making something beautiful out of sorrow or trial. The thing I sometimes forget is that without the trials, the blues would not exist at all. If not for the oppression, if not for the hungers, if not for the unfairness and the losses, there would be no Ella singing that song.

Summertime...and the livin' is easy...

It isn't, and we all know it. It's big and messy and full of tragedy. It's hard to understand it. But that doesn't mean it isn't fabulous, just as it is.

Blues and all. 🎵

Bits'n'Pieces

Favorite Quote for July

In response to Book Sense Book Awards, given to books that booksellers most enjoy hand-selling over the year:

"I don't understand why, when booksellers have the opportunity to promote quality hand-sold fiction, they choose to rubber-stamp a book that's already a commercial success."—Anonymous sales rep. *The Da Vinci Code* won for adult fiction.

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