

Novelists' Ink Novelists' Ink Novelists' Ink

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So You Want to Publish-It-Yourself

BY CAROLE NELSON DOUGLAS

All veteran authors (and therefore all victims at one time or another of publishing world snafus... such as the really, really bad cover, ghastly titles, benign neglect, earning cents from a product that sells for six or seven dollars) have day-dreamed about having total control over their work. Now, print-on-demand (POD) makes print runs economical at low numbers, so why not publish it yourself is not only a question, but a real possibility.

For a decade I've had a fan newsletter with a few thousand subscribers who'd supported buying two designs of Midnight Louie (my feline sleuth) T-shirts. I wondered if they'd support ML books I produced.

Test Run

So I tried a trial run with OPM (other people's money). Louie had debuted in a four-book miniseries for Loveswept romance that became one of those publishing nightmares the uninitiated can't believe happens. The ML Quartet may have

been the very first limited series concept in a romance line. I can't say for sure, because when the four books were sold in early 1985 and submitted from October 1985 to March 1986, scheduled for fall '86 publication, I never heard a word from the editor after a glowing acceptance of Book One.

While Loveswept pushed other limited series by veteran authors and years went by, my books (and acceptance money) were held back. The contract actually expired and had to be reinstated before the four books were finally published in mid-1990. They'd been cut up to 35% each without my knowledge, crammed two to a paperback, packaged in a way the romance buyer for a big chain advised against, and released as instant midlist nonentities. Blurbs I'd gotten from Nora Roberts and Sandra Brown were not used on the covers.

I was a wee bit upset about this treatment, but Midnight Louie was tail-lashing furious. Although lightly employed in the narratives, the chapters in his unique voice were cut the most: 40%. A 20-pound

enraged alley cat is even more formidable than an author in PMS (Post-Massacre-Syndrome). I immediately flipped the concept from romance quartet with a dab of mystery to mystery with an ongoing romantic quartet of humans. The 17th book in the Midnight Louie mystery series, *Cat on a Hot Pink Pursuit*, is just out.

A computer whiz (which I am not) appalled me in the late '90s by noting that floppy disks deteriorate over time. I realized that I had to restore the 1985-86 ML Quartet before I got too busy to do so, or the files vanished. One book, in fact, was already unretrievable. Thorndyke Press was just then starting Five Star, a line of library edition hard-cover books focusing on mystery. I sold them the restored Quartet and told my newsletter readers all about it. Whereas most print-runs then were 400 copies, Louie's books started at 1,000 and reprinted up to 3,000, becoming the line's best-sellers, a line that featured mystery heavies like Lawrence Block and Evan Hunter. Obviously, my loyal readers had

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President's Voice

Snatching Time

My all-time favorite book is Charlotte's Web. What's not to like? Good writing saves a worthy pig from being turned into bacon. If that isn't high-concept, then I give up.

On top of all that wonderfulness, the book's protagonist is a writer, which always warms the cockles of my heart. In these troubled times I sometimes question whether the pen is mightier than the sword, but in the case of Charlotte and Wilbur, it works out exactly that way. And let's not forget Charlotte's most excellent epitaph: "A good friend and a good writer." I'm definitely stealing that one.

As far as I'm concerned, E.B. White rocks, and now I've found yet another reason to love him.

Thanks to Ninc member Colleen Collins, I present you with the following E.B. White quote: "I think the best writing is often done by persons who are snatching time from something else—from an occupation, from a profession or from a jail term—something that is burning them up, as religion, or love or politics, or that is boring them to tears, as prison, or a brokerage house, or an advertising firm."

Relax. This is not going to be a column about Martha Stewart's recent incarceration. She already has enough PR. This is a column about us—commercial writers with lives.

As I read Ninlink or hear individually from members, I don't notice anybody lollygagging. I don't think there's a lollygagger in the bunch, if you want to know. And yet I've always had this picture of the writerly life as being somehow more... serene.

Early in my career—a poetry period which I've already admitted to in embarrassing detail—I sat in a critique group listening to a woman describe her life as a writer. After a leisurely breakfast, she read a little in the classics before settling down to her desk to pen a few lines. I pictured her at a Victorian writing desk in her peignoir using a feathered quill, but I doubt she gave us that much detail.

At noon she broke for lunch. After lunch she revised those lines and took a break for tea. Then, following a stroll through her manicured garden, she reread the lines she'd written and called it a day. In the evening she visited with other writers for fascinating discourse or read more classics.

She spoke not a word about interruptions or writer's block. Nothing about submitting her work to publishers and certainly nothing about rejections. I assume she had pots of money buried in the back yard because she didn't mention being worried sick about whether a royalty check would cover the rent. She lived the creative life.

And that was the life I wanted. It was not the life I got. I'd be willing to bet it's not the life any of you got, either. I thought that was because I was doing something terribly wrong, and that surely if I had that kind of nurturing existence I'd be the most creative person on the planet. If ideas didn't always flow it was because of my helter-skelter environment. I mean, who can think in the midst of chaos?

E.B. White, that's who. He wouldn't have written that about

“snatching time” unless he’d had to snatch a fair amount of it himself. No, I haven’t studied his life, so if you have you may be able to prove me wrong, but I sense a busy man in that paragraph, a man who had to grab his writing time when he could.

And guess what? He thinks that’s when the best writing is done. All of a sudden this pressure-cooker I

live in is not a detriment to my writing at all! It’ll make me brilliant! E.B. White says so. I don’t know about you, but I’ll choose to believe him, because the pace isn’t letting up for me, and probably not for any of you, either. Write anyway. It’ll be a masterpiece.

*Brilliantly yours,
Vicki*

Recapture the Magic in New Orleans

The annual gathering of the clan will be next March in New Orleans.

We’ll have pralines, mint juleps, and sessions in a circle, even if we have to go three deep to fit everyone in.

Pat Roy agreed to coordinate our 2006 conference and she would greatly appreciate session suggestions, moderator and speaker nominations. Any and all ideas on what would make this a terrific gathering for you.

patroy1@charter.net

Publish-It-Yourself

Continued from p. 1 ▶ made the difference. At one point I was asked to tell them to stop calling to inquire, because the books had gone out of print. They now list for oodles of money on used book sites, up to \$400 abroad. But of course the author doesn’t profit from that.

Going Solo with a Little Help from My Friends

I’d always thought ML’s short stories cried out for illustration, and all their rights revert to me a year after publication in an anthology. Having written science fiction/fantasy early in my career, I’d attended numerous genre conventions. I’d run the idea past several sf/f artists over the years, but settled on a Dallas artist who did delightfully vivid black-and-white drawings of cats, Brad W. Foster. I commissioned three full-page B/W

interior illos and a color cover for a Louie Halloween story set in the world of horror maestro H. P. Lovecraft, wherein Louie battles Cthulhu, a huge, tentacled, and evil sea god. I retitled it “Something Fishy” because the original title, while clever, was meaningful only to Lovecraft insiders.

For this cross-genre story, I asked *Mystery Scene* co-founder, mystery guru, and multi-genre writer and reader Ed Gorman for an introduction explaining the Lovecraftian sf/fantasy world to mystery readers. I put a quote about Lovecraft’s work and a list of his titles in the back matter, along with photo/bios of Ed and Brad. I included my own backlist and wrote the back cover copy, which included a photo of me with my only black cat, Midnight Louie, Jr. I dedicated the book to another mystery

maven advisor on the project, collector and former bookseller Sandie Herron. And her cats.

For production advice, I contacted Jim Huang of Deadly Passions Bookshop, a mystery bookseller, small publisher, and head of the independent mystery bookstores. He directed me to a POD program of a large firm that printed the Harry Potter books, among others. Berryville Graphic’s new POD program let you estimate a book’s cost on an online form. Being only 38 pages, the production cost was under \$2.00 a book, including my buying two boxes of heavier 70-pound paper to give the illos a solid background.

I had the artistic ability to design the book, but a group of “book ladies” I meet with monthly for breakfast included the director of a university press. She convinced ▶

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▶ me I needed a professional designer. The retired graphics professor she recommended cost as much as the illustrator, but she had the equipment and skills to produce a color cover in a format I couldn't, as well as classic book layout knowledge and some clever ideas.

Jim Huang said pricing the book was a crap shoot. Specialty chapbooks like this project—often in signed, limited edition versions with hardcovers—retail from \$40-\$45. I couldn't see my readers, who are Louie lovers but not necessarily committed book collectors, paying that. So I went with a perfect-bound trade paperback version. I adapted a spectacular color image of Louie silhouetted against a full moon into a lined bookplate for inscription, with the signatures of Ed, Brad, Louie, and me each signing on the moon in a different color of Sharpie pen.

Online I found lightninglabels.com, which could print 1,000 4-x-6-inch, full-color gummed matte-finish labels suitable for writing on with Sharpies for about 40-50 cents apiece. They came on a roll, so my stalwart husband, Sam, cut 300 plus 10 spares into individual pieces with an X-act knife and a ruler. They were mailed with colored sets of Sharpie pens (one color for each signer) to Ed and Brad for their signatures. Sam suggested that we print a B/W of the bookplate on the opening page of the book. I could sign that for purchasers of the Unlimited Edition, which I sold for \$14.95. With the color signed bookplate set in place over it, the price went to \$19.95. I also had to invest in 10 ISBN numbers, eight of which will probably be outdated by changes in this area before I can use them. I had to concoct a unique press name quickly. Online searches found every version of black cat in use, not to mention everything else with all the small presses nowadays, so I set-

tled on a phrase I had myself coined tongue-in-cheek to describe the Louie mysteries: cozy-noir.

Cozy Noir Press presses on

In all, the cost was about \$3500 and my gamble was on. Sam and I lost National Writers Union health insurance shortly after because the organization could no longer find coverage for its aging writer members. Five weeks after that, I fell walking the dog and broke my right arm for a hefty out-of-pocket cost. Where was that crystal ball when I needed it?

But my fall newsletter was about to mail with ordering details on "Something Fishy." It would either fail or succeed. In about two weeks or so, I had enough orders to cover most expenses. My readers wanted the more expensive Limited Edition of 300 more than three to one. Fewer than 30 of those remain after a year of marketing the book solely through the newsletter and my website, carolenelsondouglas.com. My writing schedule ranges from 270,000 words a year to 380,000 in the past year, so I haven't done more to market the books than put a PayPal button on my web page. I'm aware of many other ways I can market the book, but favor selling them via Alibris at a 20% discount. I've distributed a few to book dealers at conventions I've attended. The point is they exist and I can market and sell them as I have time to expand those efforts. Forever.

I entered Brad's art work in the Cat Writers' Association 2004 awards and he took home a First Place for Series of Illustrations. (The story, being a reprint, wasn't eligible for a writing category, but another Louie story "License to Koi," won a first in short story and... will be eligible soon for reprint.)

Profits have gone into producing a new ML illustrated short story, a CWA award winner called "Peyote Coyote." The CWA judge for "Something Fishy" wished that there had been "more" of these "unique and emotive" illos, so I've commissioned three more half-page ones for "Coyote." And upped the Limiteds to 350.

Headaches, Glitches, Etc.

There are self-publishing headaches. Berryville Graphics is out of the POD business. I must find another printer, a good one. When the first run of the Berryville books came I gazed at the boxes, held my breath, and said, "I hope to heaven there are no goof-ups."

There was a big one.

The cover image was designed to wrap around the tiny spine (1/4 inch) but hadn't been done that way, so the front cover image and type were off-center by a quarter-inch. The man in charge admitted that the book designer had clearly indicated the cover lines on her huge and detailed color proof, so they reprinted. Then, too, the book designer had worked only on hardcover specialty books, I realized when I thought about it. Therefore, the gutter (central margin) in the books was tighter than I would have liked. Perfect-bound paperbacks require a more generous gutter because the binding eats into them more. No reader has complained, but "Coyote" will have a much wider gutter.

Trade paperback covers curl, even with an anti-curl coating. I've talked to booksellers about this. They don't like it, but say that customers accept it. Mine have, although I find that about 10-15% of the books in a print run curl more than I'd care to sell, so I donate those or use them for promo. The books are small and easily stored and

transported, but get surprisingly heavy en masse. Berryville permitted one last run for current POD customers, so I reduced the type size 5% and ran another 400-some with improved center margins. Luckily, the book had been set in a generous 12-point type and could bear reduction without loss of readability.

I'm immensely proud of this little book, of the recognition given Brad's artwork, of being able to give him and Ed Gorman a photo/bio page promoting their own work. This book is the perfect promotional introduction to *Midnight Louie* for

those new to him.

The test will come with the next book, "Coyote Peyote." How many previous buyers will buy again? I'm upping the Limited Edition to 350. Two of the illos visualize a couple of "famous" continuing settings in the mystery series: Louie's "office" by the canna lilies and koi pool at the fictional Crystal Phoenix Hotel where he started as unofficial house detective before setting up as a PI on his own, and the "Ghost Suite" of the hotel where a 1940s Howard Hughes-like figure named Jersey Joe Jackson haunts the vintage decor.

It's a kick to see Louie's world

come to visual life and there are about a dozen more stories in the naked Louie oeuvre: "Sax and the Single Cat," set at the first Clinton inauguration; the new Poe/Louie outing based on a Poe fragment called "The Lighthouse;" an all-feline version of *The Maltese Falcon* that I'd love to see done as a short graphic novel . . .

The only problem is that, once a publisher, it's hard to kick the habit.

Cheers,

Carole

www.carolenelsondouglas.com

www.catwriter.com *

A Passion for Writing

BY HEIDI BETTS

I have a confession to make—I don't particularly like to write. I am not one of those people who loudly proclaims, "I'm a writer. I have to write or I would wither and die!" I do not roll out of bed every morning in anticipation of getting back to my work-in-progress, any more than most people roll out of bed at five in the morning, eager to put in a full day of work at the office—even if they really do love their jobs. Many days, I would be happy to just curl up with a book or watch a movie. Hey, wouldn't we all?

About the only thing that gets me to the computer at all (besides email and deadlines) is the fact that if I didn't write, I'd probably have to go out and get a real job. Yuck!

But recently, I read a book called *Passion* by Dr. Barbara De Angelis, Ph.D. And the more I read, the more it reminded me of why I started writing in the first place. It wasn't for fame or fortune (though either would be nice <g>) because I spent a good five or six years writing manuscript after manuscript before I ever sold a thing. And not only did people not think my choice of career was "smashing," most of them told me I was crazy to think I could ever be published, and continually tried to get me to give up my pipe dreams and go out to find one of those "real jobs" I spoke so

highly of earlier. (Yuck times two.)

But despite all of that, I stuck to my guns and continued writing. Continued sending stories out to publishing houses without knowing if I would ever make a dime from my endeavors, bearing the sharp slice of rejection each and every time it came.

Why the heck would I do that to myself? Especially if I didn't particularly enjoy writing.

And what I began to realize is that I'm not so much a writer as I am a storyteller. And writing is the medium I use for getting my stories out to the world.

I can't draw a straight line with a ruler, so I'm unable to tell my stories with paints and canvas. I'm petrified of performing in front of a crowd, so no way am I telling my stories through acting or song. And although I'm pretty good at spinning a tall tale verbally or exaggerating an actual event to my circle of friends, that doesn't provide a large enough audience or allow me to share the stories I really want to tell—hot, sexy romances.

What I am good at is writing. I have always had a way with words. It is usually a simple matter for me to picture something in my mind's eye—a person, a place, a situation, or line of dialogue—and then create that same vivid image in written form.

So even though I don't particularly enjoy the task of writing... even though I don't awake every morning ►

A Passion for Writing

► and make a bee-line for my computer... even though I can go weeks without writing a single word and not miss it much at all... I cannot stop telling stories, creating characters, developing romantic and larger-than-life worlds in my head.

That is my passion. And I was lucky enough to realize this very early on. To have the desire and determination not to let anyone sway me from my hopes and dreams, from my natural talents.

I don't enjoy writing as much as I enjoy having written. I enjoy telling a story from start to finish, even if it takes six months and four hundred pages. Getting myself to sit down, open a file, and get back to work is a groaning proposition; I can come up with a million-and-one ways to procrastinate when it comes time to write. But once I've gotten there, once I can pick up where I left off and again be swept away in the story I started to tell, that is my passion. And then, not only do I enjoy the writing process... I can't stop.

Just the other night, I went to dinner with my family. I had eaten earlier, so I wasn't very hungry, and since my family isn't easily offended or worried about what those around us think, they didn't mind when I took out my AlphaSmart and started writing. I'd been having trouble getting back into the first chapter of my current proposal for well over a week, but had begun to get a little work done in the car. And once that brick wall of writer's block had cleared, I couldn't keep the story out of my mind. I didn't want to eat dinner or make small talk, I wanted to get back to my hero and heroine and the beginning of their life together.

Writing is my job... storytelling is my passion. Having books published is the culmination of the mixing of those efforts. Seeing my stories bound and decorated so prettily on bookstore shelves is a real thrill, but I'm not sure that's why I do it. At least not completely. If I weren't published, I would probably still be writing... or at least inventing the same types of stories in my head.

And because I love what I do, that passion comes through in my writing. It brings my characters to life on the page and draws complete strangers into the worlds I've created. Anyone who knows the alphabet can write, but not everyone is passionate about it. Not everyone can paint a picture with words—and not everyone wants to.

Whatever your natural talents, whatever creative outlet you choose, you have to find your passion and let it run wild. Without passion, a portrait is just colors on canvas rather than a masterpiece. The Great

American Novel can be just words on a page; words that speak to no one, that touch no one's heart. Without passion, those of us writing romance might as well hang up our keyboards, because passion is what our genre is all about.

So the next time you sit down to write—however long it takes you to get there <g>—don't think about what editors are looking for, what will get you published fastest or that next contract, what your family thinks you should write, or how your critique group might be telling you to change your story. Look inside yourself, figure out how to make this book — and every book— the book of your heart, and then let yourself go. Write passionately, with heart and soul and feeling and abandon. Do that, and readers (agents and editors included) won't be able to keep from being swept up into those intense emotions with you.

Oh, and I highly recommend a quick read of *Passion* by Barbara De Angelis, Ph.D. It might help you tap back into your passionate nature, too.

Heidi Betts tends to do everything passionately, especially writing—at least when she can get herself to the keyboard. She is the award-winning author of six historicals for Leisure Books, and recently contracted for five contemporaries with Silhouette Desire, the first of which (Bought by a Millionaire) hit #1 on the Waldenbooks Series Romance Bestseller List. Her next Desire, Blame It on the Blackout, will be released in June. To learn more about Heidi or her books, visit www.HeidiBetts.com.

Bits'n'Pieces

New Review Editor with Style

Look for a position at *PW* in May—Reviews Editor—with Louisa Ermelino taking the job. Ermelino was chief of reporters at *INSTYLE* magazine and has been a reviewer in both trade and consumer magazines. Not a stranger to fiction, she teaches at Columbia and has written three novels. She will oversee the renamed Reviews section previously called *PW*'s Forecast.

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

The Patriot Act: Just How Scary Is It?

BY SALLY HAWKES

Several months ago the Internet carried the sensational news that a romance author's house had been invaded by the FBI in the middle of the night. The subject was briskly discussed on various writers' lists, and blame was placed on the USA Patriot Act.

From what I understand, the author sent a letter to the *Romance Writer's Report* about this event, and there was an online interview. She stated that the raid was due to her current WIP about terrorists and that she had been corresponding by email with certain questionable groups in Cambodia about terrorism, etc. It was exciting; it was an outrage; it might not have been true. Maybe, maybe not, but more about that later. The discussion over this news brought up lots of questions about The Patriot Act. I've worked with it for several years as it affects librarians and libraries. So, here is a very basic overview of what the USA Patriot covers.

On October 26, 2001 Congress passed the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Congress reacted strongly to the tragedy by combining several existing laws, including FERPA (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), ECPA (Electronic Communications Privacy Act), and FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act).

As rumors began to fly about the extent of the next law and what could happen, professional organizations such as the American Library Association began to look into the particular problems with privacy. The biggest concern was: what would the new law allow the FBI to do under the USA Patriot Act that the law enforcement agency couldn't do under previous laws?

In its simplest form, the law requires a special warrant to be signed by a specific federal court in

Washington D.C. The warrant is issued with the name of a specific *foreign national* and must show evidence of terrorism or intent. This is where questions arise. If the FBI shows up with a subpoena or a search warrant, are they acting under the USA Patriot Act? Not necessarily. For those who aren't mystery writers, there are differences in what someone can do in response to a subpoena versus a search warrant. With the subpoena, a person has some leeway and can contact an attorney without incident. The search warrant allows the search to take place immediately without legal counsel, although legal counsel can be contacted while the search is in process.

Other issues with the USA Patriot Act add to mix: Section 215 (the gag order) and Section 505 (the National Security Letters). (It became 18 United State Code § 2709.) Privacy issues are the real concerns of these two sections. Section 215 asks for the production of any tangible thing (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items) for an investigation to protect against international terrorism and clandestine intelligence activities. This is a sealed process that means the order cannot be discussed with anyone outside legal counsel or those involved in the procurement of materials. Section 505 allowed the FBI to issue National Letters of Security to acquire information from electronic communications service providers including subscriber information, toll billing records, and other transactional records "without any judicial oversight or opportunity for challenge."

The good news is that Section 505 was challenged in court (*Doe vs. Ashcroft*). A federal district court in New York determined that the secret issuing of a subpoena violated the First and Fourth Amendments to the Constitution and the nondisclosure portion of 2709c can't be separated for other portions of 2709. In other words, there is no allowance for due process since legal counsel ▶

Patriot Act: How Scary?

▶ isn't allowed. The government is appealing.

Representative Sanders of Vermont announced on March 9, 2005 that he is reintroducing the Freedom to Read bill to take the teeth out of Section 215 of the Patriot Act. Two previous versions ended. The first version never coming to a vote in 2003. The second (which was amended to an appropriations bill) was rejected by a narrow margin after some interesting political maneuvering in 2004.

More potential good news.... The USA Patriot Act has a sunset provision that ends its power in December 2005.

Now, how does this relate to the romance author's claims of being raided by the FBI? First, unless she is a foreign national, the raid probably wasn't part of the USA Patriot Act, but a different type of investigation. A search warrant could have been issued for another reason, allowing for search and seizure of property without prior warning.

Just how many FBI visits since 9/11 are being attributed to the USA Patriot Act? No one knows. It is also possible that the FBI isn't disabusing these assumptions when a case is mistaken for USA Patriot Act status. Attorney General John Ashcroft repeatedly assured the public that Section 215 hadn't been used in libraries, didn't he? Only he didn't mention that process was sealed, except to legal counsel.

I had a question come from a library in rural Arkansas where a local policeman was attempting to gain information citing the USA Patriot Act. What average citizen, non-criminal that is, doesn't want to help the police? So, they don't question that a local policeman would be trying to use a federal law to investigate a local crime. We see it all the time on *Law & Order* and other police shows. Jerry Orbach as Lennie Briscoe would use that sweet smile and say, "Well, I *could* get a warrant, but why don't you save me the trouble?"

Although we don't have the final word on the romance author, reasonable doubt entered the case with the disclosure she taught seminars on how to avoid paying taxes. So, was it USA Patriot Act or tax evasion? We shall see. It doesn't mean the USA Patriot Act isn't something that should be ignored as a danger to personal privacy. We need to be a little cynical along with our sense of justice and patriotism.

Foreign nationals aren't the only people who can lose their privacy in the current legal climate. In February, 2005 (*Illinois vs. Caballes*), the U.S. Supreme Court extended the rights of law enforcement to use drug or bomb-sniffing dogs to search people in airports, schools, office buildings, or highways. The court stated that the search doesn't violate the privacy rights of a stopped motorist even if there is no reason to suspect the motorist of another crime.

Sally's day job is the Coordinator of Library Network Services for the Arkansas State Library. She basically works as an automation consultant to Arkansas libraries, also providing information on legal issues such as copyright, USA Patriot Act, and computer filtering.

She served as Intellectual Freedom Chair for the IF Committee of the Arkansas Library Association for three years.

If you're interested in more details about the USA Patriot Act and other privacy issues:

Privacy.Org — daily news, information, and initiatives on privacy

The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) is a public interest research center in Washington, D.C.

The Center for Democracy and Technology works to promote democratic values and constitutional liberties in the digital age

ALA Washington Office

Online Privacy Alliance

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

Privacy Times.com

Public Interest Research Group

ACLU

Writing from the Inside Out

by Dennis Palumbo

REVIEWED BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

It was the subtitle which caught my attention first: "Transforming your psychological blocks to release the writer within." Since I have enough psychological blocks to build a neighborhood, I knew this was the book for me.

Dennis Palumbo begins this book with an introduction which details his latest wrestling match with Writer's Block. "What (does this) mean?" he asks. "What does it say about you if you struggle with these feelings on a daily basis? It means you're a writer. And that's all it means."

You mean my daily struggles at the keyboard don't prove once and for all that I'm an impostor? That ray of hope alone was enough to keep me reading.

The book comes in eight sections following the Introduction. "The Writing Life" is seven essays on . . . well, the writing life. He talks more about writer's block, as well as inspiration, your love for the words you've written, and the daily practice of writing just for writing's sake. He also talks about the inherent risk in what we do—putting ourselves out there in the form of words on paper, words which can be rejected, misrepresented, or, worst of all, just plain ignored. We take daily risks, as well, in that we pour our hearts into what we do, not knowing if the world will value it financially. But we keep writing, simply because we are writers.

My favorite section is "You are Enough." Five essays talk about various aspects of the feeling that I should be someone else, or living a different life, or just plain be other than what I am. I loved being reassured that who I am is exactly what the story needs. Every other paragraph, I found myself reaching for a colored highlighter to make certain sentences easy to refer back to.

"Grist for the Mill" discusses those painful feelings of Envy, Fear, Doubt, Self-Criticism, Disappointment, and Discouragement. Instead of suggesting I should work to eliminate these feelings, or at least ignore them, he suggests ways of mining them for what they can contribute to the work.

"The Real World" deals with deadlines, rejection, ageism, and other thorny issues related to the business side of what we do, and "Page Fright" talks about work habits. (To my surprise, he doesn't have any tried and true formula for the "ideal" working day.)

"Hanging On" and "Dispatches from the Front" contain essays offering a variety of encouraging messages about this work we love and love to hate.

I found this book particularly easy to benefit from because not only is Mr. Palumbo a psychologist, but he started out as a writer. He was even fairly successful writing Hollywood screenplays. In other words, he knows my world. He captures the essence of what it's like to live with one foot in the tangible world, and the rest of me in the realm of imagination.

He concludes with two maxims:

1. Every successful writer started out as a struggling one.
2. Even the successful ones still struggle.

Ahhh. So struggle isn't my signal that it's time to give up my dreams of grandeur. It means I've earned my place among the ranks of those I admire. Now that's enough to keep me writing yet another day. *

Bits'n'Pieces

**ABA
Announces
without BEA**

Book Sense's *Book of the Year* Winners were announced last month, but not through BEA.

ABA announced Bloomsbury's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* as the leader for fiction, and Random House's *Shadow Divers* as the top nonfiction title. The winners are determined by a vote of independent booksellers on what book they most enjoyed hand-selling during the year.

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

Crayon on my Keyboard

“Perfectionizm”

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

It is now 7:40 pm the day before this article is due, and I’m just now getting started. No, the Little Realities didn’t have anything to do with it this time. It’s been good old fashioned procrastination.

I’m aware we Creative Types have developed procrastination to an art form. There are days when my procrastination is simply that early, clearing-the-throat kind of thing my Muse seems to need before the ideas start flowing.

The procrastination relative to this article, however, is a cat of a different stripe. This time, it’s a side effect of being a certified (or is that certifiable?) perfectionist.

I remember the first time someone suggested I might be a perfectionist. I responded, “But I can’t be. There’s nothing I stick with long enough to get it done perfectly.” Before the sound of my words had faded into the air, I realized the irony.

Perfectionism doesn’t mean I insist everything I do be perfect. Rather it means I feel I’ve failed when it isn’t perfect. It’s a fine distinction, but it makes all the difference.

It also means I sometimes slam the door on the Girls in the Basement.

You see, the Girls often send me brilliant suggestions. Though my story ideas don’t usually take the form of “movies in my head,” I can still feel the emotions the Girls tell me about. The stories are the kind I would love to read, the kind that would induce me to serve popcorn for supper so I wouldn’t have to take time away from my book to make a real meal. (Popcorn has the added benefit of being a gastrointestinal filler I can consume one-handed, so I can read while I eat. Bonus!)

But I know I can’t live up to the ideas. I feel the story, but I know I’ll never find LR the words to convey it adequately. So, I go sort the LR’s art supplies, or give

the laundry room a thorough cleaning.

The Girls should feel wounded by my rejection. Any day now, I expect to find the cellar door locked from the inside. Instead, they just keep sending stuff up to me. When I decide to give the ideas my best shot, the Girls even send me scenes to work with, and on really good days, outright dictate so all I have to do is keep up.

Yet, tomorrow and every day that I choose to continue writing, I’ll have to battle through the anxiety again.

The beginnings of an answer have come to me recently, through one of those magazines I’m always reading. The quote is in reference to physical fitness (and made me feel much better about my yoga practice which is still very much in the “practice” stage). “Sometimes it’s enough simply to try hard. Sometimes our skill is perseverance.”

Not only does this quote comfort me when my Female Warrior pose looks more like “munchkin falling off a bike,” but it lends me courage when what I see on my computer screen looks too much like Snoopy’s famous, “It was a dark and stormy night.”

If it were enough simply to “try,” I could justify 30 minutes at my computer followed by hours of non-writing activities. I tried, didn’t I?

No.

What is enough is to “try hard.” For me, that means sitting in my office chair, with what Eric Maisell calls “starting mind anxiety” so thick I can smell its garlicky breath. I stay with it. I write one sentence describing the scene the Girls have given me. I don’t let myself edit that sentence before I write another. So what if it’s dry, dull, slow, and boring? I just keep typing. I’ll fix it later, I tell myself as I keep adding words to my count for the day.

What amazes me is that when I reach my daily quota, I don’t care anymore whether the words are

perfect. I've found the delight of accomplishment for accomplishment's sake. Sure, when the rough draft is finished, I'll go back to revise, edit, and polish. That's the part of the process I love. But for the first draft, the daily word count is pretty much all that matters.

We're now in the phase of living faced by military families on a regular basis. Here in Canada we call it "posting season." Three months from now, I'll be living in a town I've never seen before. At the moment, however, I'm living in a "perfect" house. The real estate sign on the front lawn means every day, I make sure our house (it doesn't feel like "home" anymore) is perfect. No dust. No tufts of dog hair on the carpet. No dried (or soggy) Cheerios on the dining room floor. The bathrooms gleam. Yep, I've achieved perfection in one area, anyway.

That achievement has forced me to acknowledge the complete lack of satisfaction in perfection. Oh, I love the tidy house. But it's only my over-developed sense of order that's satisfied. The part of me I like best—the messy, detailed, highly sensitive core of me—is far more fulfilled by 1,000 awkward words.

It's beginning to matter less that my stories may never live up to the shining potential I feel when the idea is in its early bloom. It's no more than a daydream at that point. It may lose some of its luster as I wrestle it into written form, but it gains value. For me, the fulfillment in being a writer is in the process. Yes, I love "having written," but that satisfaction lasts only a week or two. That which feeds my soul is the daily, angst-laden process of putting the words out there where I can see them.

Perfection not required.

Hmm. I'm impressed with myself. The column didn't turn out as lousy as I feared, and I actually came up with more than 25 words. Maybe there's something to this non-perfectionistic approach, after all.

Nah. Couldn't be.

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:

Johanna Asmi (*Susanna Carr*), Redmond WA
 Andrea DaRif (*Andrea Pickens*), Fairfield CT
 Barbara Freethy, Burlingame CA
 Donna Hill, Brooklyn NY
 Jenna Kernan, Rye Brook NY
 Julianne Moore (*Jule McBride*), New York NY
 Jacqueline Navin, Bel Air MD
 Jennifer Orf (*Jennifer McKinlay*), Scottsdale AZ
 Linda Palmer, Studio City CA
 Kathleen Pynn (*Kathleen O'Brien*), Maitland FL
 Mauri Stott (*Samantha Hunter*), Syracuse NY
 Lisa Wanttaja (*Lisa McAllister, Catriona MacGregor*),
 Auburn WA

New Members:

Lori Avocato, Meriden CT
 Douglas Clegg (*Andrew Harper*), Groton Long Point
 CT
 Alisa Kwitney, Stanfordville NY
 Stephanie Lehmann, New York NY
 Jo Manning, Miami Beach FL
 Terri Reed, Portland OR

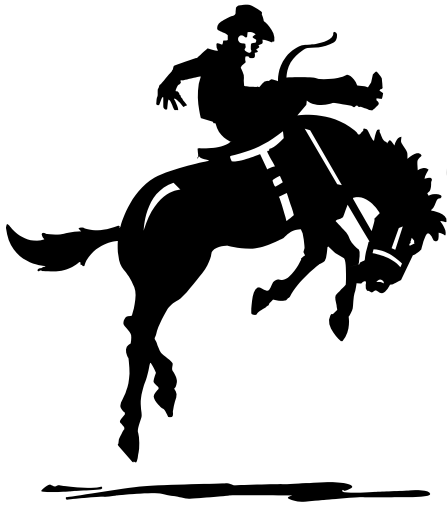
Ninc has room to grow...recommend membership to your colleagues. Prospective members may apply online at www.ninc.com.

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Visit the website at www.ninc.com. Join the neverNinlink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at BrendaHB@aol.com

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Comeback Kid

Up from the Mat

BY ARDATH MAYHAR

As most of us find, from time to time, life can deal us some knock-out blows. That happened to me several years ago, and the result was almost six years of non-writing. For one who had written an average of three to five novels a year for twenty years, that was devastating. I felt as if I had suddenly been declared an unperson.

To my dismay, as I recovered from both a family loss and a serious injury, I found my creative impulses nonexistent, and they remained that way for years. Effort did not budge them. Discussion seemed useless. Luckily, I had taught fiction writing and done book doctor work for many years, and I was able to continue with that, which kept my hand in, but even with that I felt only half alive.

Then, without any warning, the telephone rang one night in 2004, and an editor I had not been in touch with for twenty years said, "What is going on with your work?"

When I explained what was not happening, as well as informed her that most of my published books were out of print, she told me she wanted everything that was not otherwise committed, both previously published and unpublished. "I own my own e-publishing company," she said, "and I want all your work up on my site."

Do not misunderstand. This did not mean advances—I didn't expect them or ask for them, as I can live quite comfortably on my Social Security and what I can make teaching. It does mean regular royalty payments, small but better than a poke in the eye with a stick.

However, at the age of 75, I am not looking to make a pot of money. My needs are modest (almost invisible, in fact), and my main requirement was to find homes for the 20 or more novels and collections of short stories I had on hand when publishing went into the hands of corporations and my work ceased selling, after I had over 40 novels published by commercial houses. Leaving my "children" to die in the darkness of files and boxes was not something I could bear to contemplate.

I also hated to burden my sons with the task of trying to find publishers for the ton of work in my files. They are busy men, and I dreaded asking them to do this difficult and unrewarding work. My long-lost editor's offer seemed providential, for it would make my books and stories available to any who were interested, as well as relieving my sons of the task of marketing them.

You who are young, supporting families on what you make by writing, cannot, of course, afford to do this with new work. But with today's short in-print life of books, the opportunity to keep out-of-print work available can benefit even those whose new work continues to be in demand, if one can manage to retain rights for e-publication.

Those who are elderly and have many out-of-print books might find such e-publishers as Alexandria Digital Literature (www.alexlit.com), Fictionwise (www.fictionwise.com), and Renaissance E Books (<http://renebooks.com>) useful avenues to explore. I have found the editors and publishers of these alternative venues to be kind and dependable people, and the contracts offered by such companies are usually quite reasonable—even generous—to their authors.

At this point, a new title of mine is coming up every two weeks at REB and at regular intervals at Fictionwise. I got busy and converted everything available into the format desired by my editor (most such publishers like Rich Text Format or Word Documents).

Now almost everything pre-existing that providential phone call is already with my new publisher.

Perhaps not so strangely, on the heels of that renaiss-

sance, I have begun to write again. I am presently completing one of the half-dozen novels left partially done when my life fell apart, and several more of those wait in the wings. I have completed a strange sort of memoir, at the request of my editor, and it is waiting to be released.

Though I was pretty well knocked to the mat, I am now on my feet again, working at the craft I love and

still teaching and editing for beginning writers.

I hope you have not had the same kind of knock-out punch that laid me low for so long. Yet if you are suffering the effects of such a thing, let me offer you encouragement. It can end. It has ended for me. Just remember to keep your spirits up and your eyes open. When I die it will be, I hope, with the keyboard under my fingers and my eyes on the monitor. *

Bits'n'Pieces

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Ingram on the Move

O'Reilly Media has been signed as Ingram's first major U.S. distribution client. In turn O'Reilly will bring current clients to Ingram in September, including Syngress Publishing and No Starch Press. The change will allow O'Reilly books direct shipment to Canada and the European Union. Another client announcement is expected at any time now. Rumors cite Perseus or Random.

Grisham Doesn't Bother with Fiction This Time

Don't expect a novel from John Grisham next year. He is taking a rest from fiction to bring out a true crime book instead. The book covers the story of Ronald Keith Williamson, a baseball prospect who went to prison for a murder he didn't commit. The Death Row inmate was exonerated by DNA. The publisher is calling the story the ultimate legal thriller.

Amazon as Publisher

According to the grapevine Amazon has been shopping agents to find authors to write short stories, essays, etc. to be sold online. Readers would pay \$.49 per download for the Amazon exclusives. There was no mention of what the author's earnings would be at this point. Word count would be 2,000 to 10,000 and include story updates as well as alternative endings to novels. An audio portion is also in the works. No names have been mentioned but the terms "high profile" and "original work" are being tossed around.

While agents seem to be embracing the move, publishers are wondering just how successful this venture will be.

Another Trade Is Born

Dial Press Trade will appear this fall. Susan Kamil will head the imprint as vice president and editorial director. The line will include both fiction and nonfiction, encompassing Dial hardcover titles, as well as other Random and non-Random imprints. The first list debuts four new trade paperbacks and approximately 40 backlist titles from Bantam and Delta.

Phones and Reading Again!

The release of the third Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants book, *Girls in Pants*, became one major phone call. Random House decided to experiment with the fact that 170 million Americans have cell phones—almost half that number reported to be U.S. teens or tweens. As reported before, RH has already invested in wireless publisher Vocel. Rand McNally went wireless with maps and directions that could be downloaded on Sprint two years ago, and will soon expand with GPS enhancements. Merriam Webster is working on word games for PDA, then for cell phones. Tyndale House is working with Airbourne Entertainment to produce Left Behind Mobile Prophecies through Verizon and Alltel. Airbourne has previously worked with Berlitz on travel oriented applications and helped Anne Geddes sell her photos as cell phone wallpaper in 2004.

Compiled by Sally Hawkes



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Keeping The Faith

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.”

— Shunryo Suzuki-Roshi

There has been talk on one of my email loops about the changes and ups and downs we all experience after five or ten or thirty years in this business. Several writers on the list are discouraged by the business, by crushing career news, and financial setbacks, and the challenges of living as a writer.

What ended up under discussion were questions of

faith. How do we keep going? How do we find that fire? Where did it come from in the first place? And how did it get lost?

Writer Raphael Cushnir says the dark night of the soul comes to all of us in different ways, but the emotions we experience during that dark night are all the same. A long time writer who is struggling with reinvention or renewal is struggling with a disturbing set of questions: was she wrong, all this time, about her vision? Is he, after all, a fool for loving this work (as all those voices of Cousin Harry and his mother and Aunt Jane come back to haunt him), trying to make it a life?

While this discussion was going on, I was also talking with a different friend, a writer who is just now beginning to make sales to nonfiction markets. He’s been in the music business a long time and wants to write for a living so he can stay home with his wife and daughter. He’s a pretty talented guy. He’ll probably do it, and the writing life can’t be any worse than the music life, so I’ve felt less guilty than usual sharing the details of my career with him. We lost touch years ago,

long before he actually made it into the music world and I made it into the writing world, and through the delights of the Internet, have been spending many happy hours talking about old times and new times and histories.

And writing. He was always one of the companions who understood creativity. Writing now burns in him the way songs once did.

He sent an email (from Ireland. I love writing that: my friend in Ireland. Very nice of him to end up there) that poured out his desires, his path thus far, what he thinks he might be understanding, what he has yet to figure out.

His longing filled me with a bittersweetness, a swift wish to return to the beginning, to the magic. I find myself feeling cautious in my replies, as if he's just fallen in love and I'm an old married hag, reluctant to douse his fever.

"So, tell me," he emailed. "How did it happen? How did you sell your first book?"

The question triggered a flood of memories, probably not unlike yours. The facts are quite simple: I was 29 and 6 months. It was November 22 (never mind the year), which fell just before Thanksgiving. It was a category romance I had called *The Phantoms of Autumn*, about a classical guitarist and a writer who met on a train journey. My advance was \$4000, which was almost precisely double my annual income as a bowling alley cook and attendant—a job I'd taken to stay focused on writing work—and more than enough to get my phone turned back on.

Beyond the facts, of course, are a host of emotions and memories. The late nights with my headphones on while my very young sons and husband slept in their beds. The jumble of undone housework that meant I never, ever allowed anyone to "drop by." The cloistered life I led during that passionate period when I had no time for anything but the books, the boys, the family.

I remembered, too, how I'd stood in my kitchen a few weeks before that magic phone call, weeping bitterly over a rejection that dashed a very real hope I'd had of making a sale to a literary magazine where the editor liked me. I didn't know how much longer I could stand to see yet another SASE with my handwriting on the outside, knowing it meant a rejection. My fire, my belief in myself, was dwindling, and I didn't know how I could keep going on like that, believing when no one else did. When I look back, I'm not sure how I discovered the chutzpah to believe so absolutely that I would sell a book eventually. But I did believe, with a depth of faith that—

Well, more of that in a minute.

The facts of that first sale don't reveal how many pages I wrote trying to get there. As you did, I'm sure. Thousands. Many thousands, probably. Poems and

short stories and aborted novels, and finished novels that were not particularly good, and journals and papers and articles that were published in first the college newspaper (where I also had my first column) then in the local newspaper. They don't reveal how many pages I read, hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions, considering how fast and voraciously I put books away in my teens.

What I found myself nostalgic for, telling Tom about that first sale, was the time when I was yet dreaming. The time when there seemed to be magic held in the pages of every writer magazine, every tale of every writer's first sale, every breath of lemon-scented hope that came on rejections scribbled by editors at magazines and publishers. I spent endless hours reading, dreaming, plotting out books, scribbling new ideas, jotting down new ideas for things. There was nothing I didn't want to know, no stone I could leave unturned. I thought of nothing much but writing for a living.

I'm sure you were much the same.

When I wanted to try to sell romances, I read them with a serious eye, taking them apart, highlighting the passages that illustrated the techniques the writers had used to increase curiosity, or sexual tension, describe something, or create a mood. I kept my favorites at hand when I needed to know how to do almost anything, so I could refer to the masters' techniques. I still remember the books I studied so intently: Rebecca Flanders had an entire section of her own in my notebook, as did Sandra Brown.

I remembered, too, walking my five-year-old son to school in the mornings that fall. I would say to him, with a sort of Julie Andrews, *Sound of Music* lilt to my voice, "One of these days, there will be a note in that mail box that says, 'yes, Barbara Samuel, we would like to buy your book.'" He, small and blond and beautiful, would say, "I know!"

And he was the one, the day the call came in, who said, "Mommy, they said yes!"

(He is also the one who later said, "I will never be a writer. Give me a cubicle, a regular paycheck, and health insurance.")

I didn't write all those things to my friend, though I wrote a few of them, to entertain, to inspire—he's yearning so hard for book publications that his desire is a living being. Afterward, I found myself awash in a strong sense of nostalgia, tasting something in memory that I couldn't quite capture. Not quite hope. Not quite dreams. Something else.

And as will happen when I'm being instructed to Pay Attention, I experienced a most unhappy writing week. For one thing, the words themselves were being very, very stubborn. I'd sit for a day and write a total of three or four pages. Agonizingly slow work, that ▶



The Girls in the Basement . . .

▶ beginning stretch where every detail is world building, and each new fact requires some thought.

I'd also had a delay with one book and a problem with another business issue, and I felt sorry for myself for not having exactly what I wanted exactly when I wanted it. I couldn't seem to settle in and do my work no matter how I chained myself to the monitor. I grumpily wondered what the whole point of it all was—why bother? It would be much easier to open a restaurant or go lead adventure tours somewhere.

Oh, and let's not forget that it is spring. I'm an outdoor girl with a passion for gardens. Who wants to sit inside and write books when there are flower beds to be weeded, roses to be pruned, trails to be hiked? Not I. Not when the grass is greening under a brilliance of blue Colorado sky and the cats are coming in from the backyard with their fur matted and scattered with seeds from their rolls in the warm dirt.

Things feel stirred up in me, too. I'm thinking of the discussion of long careers, and how to keep them going for even longer—the flexibility and lightness of attachment required, the terror of seeing how capricious the whole thing is. And I'm having this discussion with my friend (in Ireland, remember).

I'm also teaching an online voice class to a small group of very talented aspiring writers who are struggling to understand their vision and song. Their hunger to publish reminds me, too, how important to me it once was to cross that line.

Where is our faith? How do we tend it during a

dark night of the soul? It comes from trying to hold a beginner's mind. A beginner's passion. When it becomes difficult to remember why we're writing books, it can be a good thing to go back to the memories of the beginning and the dream itself. What was it you dreamed about? What did you hope to accomplish?

In the beginning, we're open to a dozen answers to whatever question might be posed. We're willing to fly, reinvent, start over, try again, burning and burning with the longing to have our words read. As we become experts, sometimes we can become entangled in the desire to be read a certain way, to expect certain rewards from it, to demand the writing serves us, instead of the other way around.

I am not discounting the difficulty of this business. It's brutal, and only the most resilient survive. But some do, and it's worth considering how it happens. Has your faith faltered? What can you do to bolster it?

As I type this, Julie Andrews is singing in my head: "Let's start at the very beginning..." Which makes me think I should go watch *The Sound of Music*. It was always one of my favorites, hopeful, uplifting, happy. It's all about perseverance under difficult circumstances. Another one I like is *Fame*.

What are some of yours? What can you do to go back to beginner's mind this month?

Become a beginner. Believe.

Barbara Samuel once got in trouble for singing Sound of Music songs under the awning of a funeral home with her best friend from junior high, who also showed up via Internet recently.

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