

WINK

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In Search of an Office Fairy

BY LORRAINE HEATH

Wanted: Intelligent, organized, efficient, detail-oriented person to make my life easier. Benefits include peering into the glamorous life of a writer, reading books before they hit the store, casual dress (robes acceptable), flexible hours.

Ah, if only it were that easy . . .

When deadlines loom, my office begins to look like an unorganized mess – probably because it is an unorganized mess. I'm a piler. I pile all the research books on the floor around me, and stack the numerous details of a published author's life that need attention on the desk beside me. When I finally send that completed manuscript off, it usually takes me at least a week to clear the clutter that has become my life.

I often dream of having an office fairy that will come in and take care of all the tedious and time-consuming tasks that need to be done but keep me from writing. Unfortunately, I've yet to deter-

mine how best to find the perfect assistant and relinquish hold over the tasks, because all right, I'm also a control freak. One of the nice things about being a writer is that I have control over my characters . . . most of the time.

But how to gain control of my office? It might be easier than I realized.

Finding an Assistant

Like me, Anna Jacobs is interested in hiring an office assistant, but she can't figure out how to manage it effectively for everyday matters because she doesn't have a spare office where her assistant could work. Unlike me, however, she's "just started tiptoeing into getting help."

She's hired someone to proof-read the galley for each book, a job she doesn't enjoy. "The person is a friend and sub-editor of a newspaper and a writer herself, as well as loving to read my Anna Jacobs books, so I trust her absolutely.

"This saves me three days of work each time, saves eyestrain and also keeps me inside my present story – very important. I used to hate having to go back to the story I'd mentally left behind and drop out of my present tale. And since I write three long books a year, those three or four days multiplied by three books were time I could ill spare."

Patricia Kay also tested the waters by having an assistant one summer. She was looking for someone young and sharp and hired a college student, the daughter of a writer friend, who caught on really quickly so Pat didn't have to oversee her work much. While she had no problems working with the daughter of a friend, she could see that if there had been a problem, it would have created a somewhat difficult situation. To protect herself, she told her friend that she needed her daughter for only a week. "I figured I could stand anything for a week and if she turned

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Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

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

2006 Board of Directors

PRESIDENT: Brenda Hiatt Barber
9241 Castle Knoll Blvd.
Indianapolis IN 46250-3484
317-849-3356
brendahb@aol.com

PRESIDENT-ELECT: Patricia McLaughlin
3506 Dickerson St. N.
Arlington VA 22207-2908
703-237-2543
pmclinn@aol.com

SECRETARY: Linda Madl
4804 Rockridge Court
Manhattan KS 66503-7750
785-770-9363
linda@lindamadl.com

TREASURER: Deborah Gordon
1240 Noonan Drive
Sacramento, CA 95822-2507
916-448-1964
DBHGORDON@aol.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Annette Carney
PO Box 33204
Reno NV 89533
775-746-1680
annetecarney@sbcglobal.net

ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:
Pat Rice
15222 Strollways Dr.
Chesterfield MO 63017-7756
636-778-0075
price100@aol.com

CENTRAL COORDINATOR:
Tonya Wilkerson, Varney and Assoc.
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 2037
Manhattan KS 66505
Fax: 785-537-1877
ninc@varney.com

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

Address changes may be made on the website.
For members without Internet access,
send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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President's Voice

In with the New...

Happy 2006! It's a new year for Ninc and, just like every year, you all get to start by breaking in a new President. Try to be gentle. Most of you already know me, if only as moderator of Ninclink over the past few years. Perhaps foolishly, I've agreed to continue doing that during my term as Prez. That decision was partly prompted by the fact that no one else volunteered, but I don't mind. Really. Moderating our email link has given me an excellent opportunity to keep tabs on what issues are on our members' minds, and I intend to put those observations to good use during my term.

One of the first things I want to do as President is to thank the inimitable Vicki Lewis Thompson for all of her hard work over the past year. During her term as President, she acted as Ninc's representative to the Authors Coalition, which nets the organization lots of lovely money to spend on Ninc programs. (Turn in those surveys!) Vicki spearheaded shifting the Central Coordinator position, as well as many of the Treasurer's duties, to an accounting firm (which should make it much easier for future nominating committees to find Treasurer candidates) and worked hard to get the kinks out of our new online registration system (put in place by the equally inimitable Jean Brashear). She has also undertaken the arduous task of updating Ninc's Policies & Procedures Manual. All the while, she has patiently answered each and every one of my (increasingly panicked) questions about everything I'd need to do upon taking over the presidency. In fact, from my perspective, Vicki devoted most of her energies during her term to making *my* job easier. Then, on top of all that, she goes and sends *me* chocolate as a thank-you! Is this woman a class act or what?

While I won't pretend that taking the reins of an organization like Ninc isn't intimidating, I'm greatly reassured by knowing I'll have an outstanding Board to back me up. I'm particularly fortunate to have so many returning board members: Deborah Gordon as Treasurer, Linda Madl as Secretary and Annette Carney as Newsletter Editor. These experienced folks will be joined by the talented Pat McLaughlin as President-Elect, and Pat Rice as Advisory Council Representative. And, of course, the energetic Pat Roy as our Conference Coordinator, who at this writing is putting together the final details for a truly memorable gathering in New Orleans in March. (A treasure trove of Pats!)

As was no doubt true of most of my predecessors, I intend to accomplish more this coming year than is probably possible. (Hey, reality is for those who can't handle fiction, right?) Still, I plan to give it my best shot. One of my goals is to increase Ninc's visibility—and membership—by reaching out to various other writers' organizations where we've been so far flying under the radar. Lorraine Heath has volunteered to chair our Outreach Committee, but this is really a job for every single Ninc member. Talk up Ninc to your eligible friends. Request a stack of membership brochures—from Lorraine or Membership Chair Lillian Stewart Carl—whenever you'll be attending events likely to include eligible authors. In other words, proselytize! The more numerous and more varied our

members, the greater impact Ninc can have on issues that really matter to novelists, and the more we can learn from one another.

Of course, during my term I'd also like to achieve author royalties from used book sales, an end to all onerous clauses in publishing and agent contracts, generous fees paid to all author speakers, and world peace. Okay, I'll settle for three out of four. If anything I've mentioned so far is a burning issue for you, or if you have another one that I didn't mention, please don't hesitate to raise your hand and offer to head or serve on a committee to help make that dream a reality. Ninc is only as powerful as its members, but if enough members start rolling up their sleeves, that's a lot of power!

So drop me an email or post on Ninlink to let me and your new board know what you'd like to see Ninc

accomplish this year, and how you'd like to help. Oh, and if you'd like to send chocolate, that's fine, too.

Brenda Hiatt Barber

Wanted

Your favorite research or resource links for the Ninc website

Send to gingerchambers@sbcglobal.net

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:

Allison Brennan, Elk Grove CA
 Barbara Colley (*Anne Logan*),
 Luling LA
 Anita Gordon (*Kathleen Kirkwood*),
 Parker CO

Judith Hand (*Judith Leon*),
 San Diego CA
 Kristin Lewotsky (*Kristin Hardy*),
 Merrimack NH
 Rosina Lippi (*Sara Donati*),
 Bellingham WA
 Josephine Piraneo (*Angelique Armae*,
M.A. duBarry), Cobleskill NY
 Heather Graham Pozzessere
 (*Heather Graham, Shannon Drake*),
 Coral Gables FLA
 Laurie Vanzura (*Lori Wilde*),
 Weatherford TX
 Terri Wright (*T.A. Ridgell*),
 Fernandina Beach FL

New Members:

Megan Crane, Los Angeles CA
 Monica King (*Monica Jackson*),
 Topeka KS
 Barbara Plum, Mtn View CA
 Alice Sharpe, Brownsville OR
 Jill Strickler (*Jillian Hart, Jill Henry*),
 Spokane Valley WA

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

Stay in Touch with Ninc online.

Visit the website at www.ninc.com. Join the neverending e-conversation – for members only – by joining Ninlink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at BrendaHB@aol.com

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In Search of an Office Fairy

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out to be great, as I hoped she would, I'd just have her longer, which is what happened."

Pat admits if she hits the lottery, she'll hire a full-time assistant in a heartbeat. Ideally she believes the assistant should have her own office and computer.

Carly Phillips hired someone who used to babysit for her and began working full-time as a teacher, but was looking for extra income. Then she hired her 13-year-old daughter, but that situation lasted only a short time because her daughter grew bored. Carly explains that "the most difficult part is finding someone you are willing to bring into your house and around your family. The second most difficult part is training them. I wish we could all have a romance-knowledgeable assistant!"

Katie Macalister solved the stranger-in-the-house dilemma by hiring "a virtual assistant —she lives in Texas, I live in Washington. Although there are limitations to that arrangement, it's working out well." She discovered her assistant online. "We corresponded briefly when she sent me a fan letter, then I had a good deal of interaction with her on my message forum. When I decided I couldn't cope with everything and make deadlines, I started looking around at online virtual assistant companies. None of them really rang my chimes, so I approached the woman who was so helpful and supportive on my forums."

Katie felt it was important to hire an assistant who was not only familiar with the romance world,

but with her books in particular.

Ruth Glick found her assistant a little closer to home: her husband. Before he retired, he'd begun proof reading her manuscript and doing odd jobs for her. Now he's basically serving as her full time assistant, not only around the office but around the home. "He buys the groceries. (I like to cook, so if he will buy the food, I will prepare it.) He arranges trips and drives me around when we get there."

Emile Richards has had great success at working with an assistant for eight years. She had definite ideas about the qualities she was searching for in an assistant: "someone with organizational skills, word processing skills, research skills. My assistant has a degree in library science and lots of experience." A writer friend helped her find her assistant.

She recommends setting "one month together as a trial period, making that clear at the beginning —in writing— to avoid legal repercussions. I have chosen not to advertise the position with friends or with members of my church, because I don't want to be in the position of supervising or firing someone I'd see in other circumstances."

The Assistant's Duties

Katie's virtual assistant responds to email, telling people to be patient because Katie will get to them eventually. She helps a great deal with the message board by making sure new people are welcomed, questions answered, and small matters that crop up are handled professionally.

"She also schedules and re-

minds me of chat dates and interview deadlines. She sends out information for a monthly group newsletter I participate in, and does other miscellaneous things like organizes reader lists, etc. Assuming I will someday be off deadline and can get the stuff to her, I'll have her manage my book-seller database and help me with administrative things like contests and promotions."

Katie doesn't spend much time overseeing her assistant's work. "I'm confident of her abilities and know she takes her job seriously."

Susan Wiggs has "been working with an assistant for about five years. She bills on an hourly basis and takes care of nearly all correspondence (paper and e-mail), maintains mailing lists, as well as some promotional duties. Our long-term goal is to have her take over nearly all marketing and PR. It's been a huge time-saver and keeps me organized. It's like having a spare left brain."

Susan has no difficulty in handing tasks over to her assistant. "For me, the tough part is finding a 'spot' where this is possible. For example, I would love for her to handle preparation of travel, workshops and handouts, but the way my files are organized, I'd need to reorganize all that first. I completely trust Lori, since she is my sister and best friend. The only trouble we had was that she was so nice and responsive to my fans that they tended to strike up a regular correspondence.

"I should also add that I have a graphic designer for my newsletter and for custom-designed promo items like mugs. Oh, and a web designer who is fabulous.

"The way I work, no assistant could do any of my research. This is probably common –when researching facts for a book, you might be looking for something specific (like where Sam Houston was in March 1845), yet in searching that out, you discover he had a fondness for ginger beer, which is one of those authentic details that can bring the writing to life. You'd miss that sort of thing if someone else did the research. So I have to say, every fact (and mistake!) rests on my shoulders."

During the summer that Patricia had her assistant, she had her handle a huge mailing of over 700 newsletters, update her mailing list, do a lot of filing, and read a copy edited manuscript for her.

Ruth Glick admits, "There is no way I could write as many books as I do without someone else doing a lot of the work I hate and don't want to bother with." Her assistant/husband picks up the mail from the post office and handles mailing out contest entries and books she donates to various causes. He renews subscriptions and memberships to organizations, proof reads, and takes care of all the printing and photocopying.

"He does all the online book buying. He does any research I need –both at the library and online. We designed my web site together, and he keeps it up. All I have to do is send a message to the office in the basement, and it gets onto the web site. He keeps my computer equipment up to date. He also gets the taxes ready for the accountant, which he has always done. There's so much stuff that has to be done, and what I want to do is write –which he makes possible for me."

Carly has her assistant stuff SASE's, answer fan mail both in electronic and print, process "click and ship" mailing labels so the

mailman can just pick it up without anyone having to wait in line at the post office, package monthly contest winners, send out requested books, goodies, etc.

Emilie explains, "My assistant keeps my mailing list current, packages up books and promo material and makes the post office trips, does the first pass on my website email and reader letters, researches specifics and gathers research into notebooks for me, files and generally helps me stay organized." As her assistant became accustomed to the work, Emilie spent less time checking on her work, although she does still review all mail that goes out with her name on it, making necessary changes or additions. She's found that working with an assistant has forced her to become more organized.

The Benefits Outweigh the Cons

Carly had an assistant for several months, but was not pleased with the quality of her work so she let her go. She is planning to hire someone else, having learned valuable lessons with her first assistant. "I've recently decided that any person who I hire as an assistant needs to love romance and understand the online romance business. They need to be well spoken as well as extremely conscientious, diligent and meticulous. Not easy to find."

However, she believes she may have found the ideal assistant. While she will be off-site and long distance, her work will be overseen by Carly's publicist so it'll be a coordinated effort. She has plans for her assistant to update her database and help her with her mailings.

Katie recognizes that it's not all bliss having an assistant. "So much of the work has to be

'prepared' by me first, which is nothing against my assistant personally. But when a news blurb has to go out, or content has to be added to my website, I have to write it up first. That's just the nature of the job, I suppose."

Emilie feels she would be buried in paperwork without her assistant. "Additionally having her come regularly forces me to deal with paperwork once a week and take care of everything in a timely manner instead of putting it off." A downside is that "when I'm on deadline this is another hole in my week. However if I spend a little time organizing ahead of time, I can give her work to do and use my laptop in another part of the house while she works on my computer."

A Few Tips Shared

Katie believes the type of work you plan for your assistant to do has an impact on the qualities you should look for when hiring an assistant. "Doing mailings or maintaining a database would be fine work for a stranger. Someone you want answering e-mails for you, or representing you in a public forum, is IMHO better from a person who knows and likes you and will be genuinely interested in helping you."

Carly recommends that you "be honest and be willing to tell the person what you expect, when things are working and when they aren't. Consider having an attorney draw up a short confidentiality agreement for the assistant to sign."

Emilie admits, "She saves me work if I keep my hands off what she's done. I've had to learn to let go of details and trust her to do them well –and she does. She's here three hours a week, but both of us are flexible since she has another part time job

Bits'n'Pieces

Killer Fiction in the Northwest

June 2-3, 2006 Boise, Idaho—
A celebration of Sisters in Crime's
20th Anniversary

<http://www.partnersincrimeboise.com/murder.htm>

The guest of honor will be Sara Paretsky. Other attendees will include agents Meredith Bernstein and Jo Grossman, authors Ridley Pearson, C.J. Box, Joanne Pence, and more.

Interested in participating? Go to www.murderinthegrove.com and "Invitation to Speak." Authors are comped for speaking.

Street-Lit?

Rapper 50 Cents is supporting the G-Unit imprint, Pocket Book/MTV Books. The imprint will launch the first quarter of 2007 with books categorized as street lit. The line will include both novels and graphic novels.

Google—Will the Name Make a Difference?

Google tries for a name change, turning Google Print into Google Book Search. This is to emphasize the service is to locate books, not print them. Aren't the users going to print anything after they find the book? Google hasn't mentioned that.

Google Again—as a Landlord?

Yet another Google enterprise to make authors uneasy. Google reps are searching Manhattan for a partner for Google Rents. Yes, you got it. Google plans to rent e-books online, through Google, for a whole week. Wonder how the rent money will get divided up for this little venture?

"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes

In Search of an Office Fairy

▶ and I am sometimes away. She does work here, although I've given her work to do from home, as well, when I'm going to be away or need to write without interruption."

Emilie recommends when searching for an assistant that you "be clear about what you want and be certain a potential assistant has those abilities. Train the assistant so that she/he knows what you expect and need and can provide it without supervision. With a part-time person remember that she's only working for you a few hours a week and will need reminders and learning time. Reasonable expectations go a long way toward making the relationship a success.

"I've tried to assign the jobs I don't have time for, but also have no interest in doing to my assistant. But I'm also aware that I might not keep her if she's only doing boring work. So I try to vary

what I ask her to do. So far it's working. She's still here."

The Cost

Those interviewed paid their assistants from \$10-\$25 an hour with one author anticipating that she would eventually pay \$50 an hour as her assistant began to take over major marketing and public relations work. Everyone felt that it was well worth paying someone in order to free up time for writing. Katie believes she's not only paying for services but for something more intangible: peace of mind. "I know that things I just didn't have the time to do were being taken care of."

Lorraine Heath is still clearing the clutter out of her office, more than a month after meeting her last deadline. Her most recent release is A Matter of Temptation from Avon Books.

From an Assistant's Viewpoint

Tina Trevaskis who has not only worked the past year as Suzanne Brockmann's office assistant, but has also established a company geared toward providing assistants to authors—Simply Fabulous Authors, www.simplyfabulousauthors.com—cautions, "Assistant Services differs from PR in the respect that with PR, you are there to promote the author and an assistant is there to make an author's life easier. An assistant is really an extension of the author, there to be her right hand. An assistant can do a lot of the clerical and leg work that an author normally does but with the stress of deadlines and more pressing business or family issues, she doesn't have the time.

"Some of the things an assistant can help an author with include—answering fan mail, interacting with readers, message board maintenance, assembling and mailing of promotional material, handling holiday mailings, maintaining reader databases, polishing up promotional material and newsletters, etc."

Life + 70

BY ETHAN ELLENBERG

"Can I help you?"

"This is the home of Sondavid JaniceMary?"

"It is."

"I'm Fosworth Tiggywinkle. The man whose vid visits you've been deleting for the past 6 months."

"Oh my God. The lawyer. As I told you when you first contacted me, I don't know what you're talking about. You may think you're a lawyer, but I think you're some kind of nut."

"Indeed. Felons and fraudsters often describe me in just those words, but I assure you I'm not."

"Fraudsters. Listen buddy, I don't raise maneating plants for the hell of it. If you don't clear out, Calliope Michael Jackson is going to eat you for breakfast."

"That would be a mistake. They'd only send someone else, and then you'll owe even more money."

"More money? For what?"

"Did you watch the vid visit?"

"Of course not. Do you know how much junk vid I get?"

"Well then let me explain it to you. I represent the estate of Klepto Patent Industries, the foremost buyer of patents, copyrights, and legal obligations on Earth."

"Whup dee do."

"Indeed. Nevertheless, we are the owners of the legal obligations of your great, great, great aunt, Mary-Janice Davidson."

"That kooky writer with all the shoes?"

"That's right."

"But she's been dead for 70 years."

"Uh,uh. 69 years, 357 days."

"A math major huh? Ok, what's the punch line?"

"The punch line is you owe us one million four hundred and ninety seven thousand dollars."

"What? For what?"

"Well I'm sure you know that the erotic virtual visitation rights to her character, Betsy Taylor were sold to the Vegas Vixens in 2047."

"I certainly don't know that."

"And virtual Betsy has been...well entertaining customers for neigh on the last 73 years."

"You don't say."

"I do say."

"And a Mr. Ethan Ellenberg was Ms. Davidson's literary agent. Now when Congress passed the Klepto Industry relief act of 2031 making all literary agency clauses enforceable for the term of copyright, this made Mr. Ellenberg Ms. Davidson's partner at a 15% commission for that same period."

"I'm trying to follow you."

"The term of copyright—as you know—is the life of the author plus 70 years."

"I don't know. I *do* know my great aunt did die in the great Prada shoe and caviar riot of 2050. There's a 40 foot holographic statue of her outside the Bloomingdale's on Mercury. You must know it, the hologram constantly plays her dying words 'It was worth it. It was worth it.'"

"Touching. But my concerns are all financial. While it's true that the agency clause used by Mr. Ellenberg terminated on reversion of the original rights of the book from its first publisher to the author, the Klepto Relief Act extended it by force of law to life plus 70. This means that when the erotic virtual visitation rights to her character, Betsy Taylor, were licensed, Mr. Ellenberg should have received his cut."

"Don't tell me *he's* still alive."

"No *he's* not. But his literary agency was bought at auction by Klepto, and they've been pursuing the heirs of his clients ever since."

"You must be a popular bunch."

"Very funny. I'll have you know that 321 members of Klepto have been killed in the line of duty."

"Want to make it 322? Look, I don't have your money. This is insane. I didn't license anything to anyone. My family is spread out across the galaxy. My great, great, great aunt died in 2050. It's nearly 70 years later, how you can possibly claim anyone owes anyone anything? And as for erotic virtual visitation ▶

Life + 70

▶ rights—my God—that's so icky I don't even want to think about it. Guess Betsy was a pretty popular gal."

"She remains so. But the law is the law. Our rights are enforceable and we intend to collect."

"You've got to be mistaken. This is too greedy and insane for words. When those agencies started changing their agency clauses—without fully explaining things to their clients I might add—didn't anyone do anything? I mean by attaching their commission to the copyright, they did exactly what the copyright law was intended to protect against, the alienation of the original work of art from the artist's rights to it. And how about their fiduciary responsibility to their clients?"

"Yes, well, so it was argued and quite passionately by Mr. Ellenberg and others, but not enough agents or authors took up the cause and nothing really changed. When Klepto entered the picture I'm afraid that was it."

"Well *you're* really pissing me off, and I don't have your money so it may be childish but... Congratulations, #322! The delivery man is here."

If you have signed an agency clause that attaches the agent's rights to your copyright it is a fairly simple matter to change this, should the agent be willing. Any publishing agreement that contains such a clause can be amended with a simple letter signed by you and the agent which substitutes an agency clause that does not contain such a provision into the publishing agreement. There would be no reason for the publisher to object, as the agency clause does not effect their rights. Should the agent not be willing to change the clause, you may want to raise the points with them my article raises. I hope any reasonable person will see the inappropriateness of this clause once it's been pointed out to them.

Ethan Ellenberg heads his own New York based literary agency which concentrates on commercial fiction. He can be contacted at agent@ethanellenberg.com. Complete information is available on his website: ethanellenberg.com.

Who's on the Move?

Penquin Canada has promoted Helen Reeves to commissioning editor to acquire humor, fiction, YA fiction, entertainment, thrillers, genre fiction, and children's books.

Janet Evanovich will be president for Mystery Writers of America for 2006 beginning in February

Former Time Warner CEO Larry Kirshbaum opened LJK Literary Management on 40th St. in New York in December. Joining the agency are Susanna Einstein, and ICM agent Jud Laghi, who worked with Mark Leyner and Billy Goldberg on *Why Do Men Have Nipples?* The new agency has six clients, and states they will represent their authors in whatever direction they want to go.

Crown Publishing gains Barnes & Noble's Donna Passannante as marketing director for six imprints. She was the B&N event coordinator.

Pocket Books gets Anthony Ziccardi back as deputy publisher, as he leaves publishing director for mass market at Del Rey.

It's not official, but Joe Blades, Ballantine executive editor, is said to be talking about leaving Ballantine and publishing.

Bits'n'Pieces

Bookspan Goes to the Clubs

Bookspan announces its first original novel, *Lying with Strangers* by James Grippando. The thriller, coming out in May 2006, will debut exclusively with The Literary Guild, Doubleday, and Book-of-the-Month. Bookspan will have rights for six months, guaranteeing no trade editions in any retail outlets. Grippando also has another book coming out from Harper in 2006. Will the book club foray give the author extra exposure or have no tangible results in sales? This was done previously with James Patterson's *Honeymoon*.

For the Good of Ninc Order...

Due to the switch in conference timing from fall to spring, the annual business meeting will not include an election of officers, which has already taken place. But our bylaws require an annual business meeting be conducted at the conference and a quorum is necessary to conduct business. A meeting also gives members a forum to ask questions of the board, air concerns, etc. No vote is anticipated at this time, but your presence, in the form of a proxy or physical appearance, is necessary to ensure a quorum and a legal meeting. Please make sure your proxy arrives by **February 1, 2006**.

Proxy A

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

Proxy solicited on behalf of the Board of Directors of Novelists, Inc. for the annual business meeting of members to be held on March 30, 2006.

The undersigned hereby appoints Brenda Hiatt Barber, Pat McLaughlin, Linda Madl, Deborah Gordon, Patricia Rice and Annette Carney, each of them as his/her true and lawful agents and proxies full power of substitution to represent the undersigned on all matters coming before the meeting at the annual business meeting of members to be held at Hotel Monteleone, 214 Royal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana on Thursday, March 30 at 5 p.m.

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

Member please sign here: _____

Please print name here: _____

Please mail this Ballot/Proxy to:

Election Committee, c/o Julie Leto Klapka, P.O. Box 270885, Tampa, FL 33688-0885

Proxy must be received by February 1, 2006.

Send your Choice of Proxy Now...

Due to the switch in conference timing from fall to spring, the annual business meeting will not include an election of officers, which has already taken place. But our bylaws require an annual business meeting be conducted at the conference and a quorum is necessary to conduct business. A meeting also gives members a forum to ask questions of the board, air concerns, etc. No vote is anticipated at this time, but your presence, in the form of a proxy or physical appearance, is necessary to ensure a quorum and a legal meeting. Please make sure your proxy arrives by **February 1, 2006**.

Proxy B

Use to appoint a fellow NINC member as your agent.

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

Proxy for the annual business meeting of Novelists, Inc. to be held March 30, 2006.

The undersigned hereby appoints _____
as his/her true and lawful agent and proxy with full power of substitution to represent the undersigned on all matters coming before the meeting at the annual business meeting of members to be held at Hotel Monteleone, 214 Royal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana on Thursday, March 30 at 5 p.m.

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

Member please sign here: _____

Please print name here: _____

Please mail this Ballot/Proxy to:

Election Committee, c/o Julie Leto Klapka, P.O. Box 270885, Tampa, FL 33688-0885

Proxy must be received by February 1, 2006.

Your proxy will be distributed at the annual business meeting to the Ninc member you have designated.

First Draft in 30 Days . . . or more

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

I am a really slow writer. I resemble the Shoe cartoon in which our curmudgeonly friend says, “Typists type. Writers stare out windows.” First drafts, in particular, are agonizing. I spend an insane amount of time asking myself, “What happens next?”

If you’re one of those blessed souls for whom stories unfold in your brain like movies, I envy you. My stories unfold like a series of snapshots, one pitiful picture followed ever so slowly by the second pitiful picture, leaving me to try to figure out what on earth happened in between.

So, *First Draft in 30 Days* by Karen S. Wiesner seemed like a book I needed. In fact, when I saw the title, I had no doubts – this book is vital to my continuing survival as a writer. It has nothing to do with financial survival. It’s all about finding a way to make the creative process less painful. And since I enthusiastically reviewed this book for Nink a few months ago, our editor was most interested in a journal of my experience putting the book to use.

Day 1: Character Sketches

This includes physical descriptions, personality traits, background, internal conflicts, external conflicts, occupation/education, and miscellaneous notes. Apparently, I’m supposed to complete this information for each of the main characters in my novel. Since I already fill out a 22-page sketch for each of my characters, the actual task here isn’t a problem. The problem is doing it all in one day. Two days per character is more my speed, and since character development is one of my strengths, I stick with my own method. This does mean, however, that I start my grand adventure two weeks behind.

Sounds typical of my life.

Day 2 (aka Day 15 in Janelle Time): Setting Sketches and Research Strategies

This one was quite a bit of fun. I’d never before made drawings of my characters’ living spaces, or plotted out the town. I don’t mean full scale architectural renderings, but even just scribbles about where the bathroom is relative to the bedroom, or the hospital relative to the church, were new for me. I feel my story has solidified in a new way because of this.

Since my story is in an entirely fictitious town, there’s not much I have to research. I put the time into drawing house plans instead. Ms. Wiesner says, “Most of my characters and settings come to me instinctively, and they’re different for every book. My visions are extremely detailed, down

to stairs, carpeting, furniture, types of wood, even plants.” That’s quite a bit more detailed than I think, but the exercise of visualizing the floor plan has been quite beneficial.

Day Three: Plot Sketches

This is where I get into the meat of what I wanted to learn from this book, albeit two weeks later than “Day Three.” Wiesner talks about Subplot Threads, as well as Plot Tension, Release, Downtime and the Black Moment. I spend a couple of weeks on this step alone, pondering how I want to take both my hero and my heroine through this journey. I find it immensely helpful to be thinking about these main plot points in “broad brush” terms, rather than while I’m in the teeth of creating my next scene. This step takes me two days.

Days 4 - 5: Summary Outline

This is essentially just making notes about the scenes which begin the book and set up the conflict. It’s brainstorming at its best, at least for me, and I have fun with it . . . even if it does take three days instead of two.

Day 6: Miscellaneous Scene Notes and Closing Scene Notes

These are the brainstorming sessions for the middle and the end of the book. I take one day for each, and again, find the exercise very helpful.

Days 7–13: Researching Your Idea

Aha! A chance to “get caught up”, since my story doesn’t need a lot of research. I did spend a day on the internet looking up teenage alcoholism as well as heart attacks, but it was a pretty light day, work-wise. So now I’m only a week “behind.”

Days 14–15: The Evolution of Your Story

This is a detailed reworking of what I did in the Plot Sketches. Again, it’s broad-brush creativity, but it works well for me. Wiesner provides a worksheet for this step, as she does for each of the others. Going through each plot point, figuring out how my heroine and my hero would respond to each story thread reveals things I don’t usually discover until I’m into the dreaded middle of my rough draft. As the new ideas emerge, I go back to my Plot Sketches as well as my Summary Outline, Miscellaneous Scene Notes and Closing Scene Notes and adjust things accordingly. This is a vast improvement over having to go back through the first half of a written manuscript figuring out where to weave the new threads into place. I spend five days working on this, but am pleased with the results.



First Draft



Days 16 - 24: Formatted Outline

This is where I'm supposed to take all the notes I've accumulated and begin working them into a single working document, which is basically a running outline of the story. As bits of dialogue or scene details come to mind, those get written in.

Day 16: Using the Story Evolution Worksheet, as well as the Summary Outline, Miscellaneous Scene Notes and Closing Scene Notes,

I begin to create a scene by scene outline. Wiesner provides a worksheet with prompts for the POV character, the setting, the time of day. I'm adding space for the conflict which will propel the scene. Since I'm almost pathological about avoiding conflict, this will help me keep the necessary tension at the front of my consciousness as I write. (I'm not sure it will be safe to be around me while I'm working with all this tension taking over my brainwaves!) It takes me a couple of weeks to get all these scenes detailed.

Day 17: Incorporate Story Evolution Information into worksheet.

This is supposed to be a separate step, but I find it easier to work with this document at the same time I'm going over (and over and over) my previously mentioned worksheets.

Day 18: Incorporate character and setting sketches throughout outline.

I can see how this will be really useful when I get to it. (I had to stop my story-writing to put together this article before our beloved editor began to wonder if I'd forgotten the meaning of the word "deadline".) By the time I get to this step, I will have the bare bones of the entire story out on paper where I can look at it. Since my characters are so vivid in my mind, I often forget to add those tidbits of description which will make them equally real to my readers. In fact, in one of my early books, I handed the thing in only to have my editor point out that I'd left out all physical descriptions of my characters. Oops. Day 18 (which will now be occurring somewhere around Day 48) will ensure I never make that mistake again.

Day 19: Incorporate research into the outline.

This step will probably take me more than a single day. I'm dealing with an alcoholic teen, so I'll want to go over my outline with my research notes close by to ensure my character, and his family, are both medically and emotionally believable.

Days 20 - 23: Brainstorm to fill out the formatted outline based on the length and complexity of the story.

Oh, you mean I'm not supposed to be brainstorming scene by scene?

Having read the Wiesner's book through entirely before beginning, I know the way she works is to begin this formatted outline with the facts and scenes she's already made notes on, leaving gaps where she needs more, sort of like drawing a tree and a few basic branches, then going back through and adding twigs and leaves. My brain doesn't work that way. I know I have Scene A and Scene D, but I can't draft Scene D until I know what B and C look like. My process might be slower than Wiesner's, but it's what works for me.

Day 24: Create a Day Sheet and a Table of Contents

Since my book will be in the neighborhood of 100,000 words, Wiesner predicts my formatted outline will be nearly a hundred pages long. This is why she recommends creating a "Day Sheet" which is essentially a spreadsheet (or table) which has one line for each scene. The columns are for the chapter and scene number, the POV character, a running total for how many times a particular character has POV, and a "high concept blurb" which will remind me what the scene is about. The running total column will help me make sure the story is balanced in terms of POV.

I will then use the information from this table to create a table of contents, which is basically a navigation tool to help me find a particular scene in my hundred-page outline. (I'll follow her recommendation to put page breaks between scenes to make navigation easier.)

Days 25 - 30: Revise and Polish

These days will be spent taking my outline apart again. Each subplot gets isolated (using a method Wiesener calls "tagging and tracing") so I can make sure it's strong enough to support its part in the story. The same happens with the story goal, tension, and romantic tension. This will show me where the weak elements are so I can add or delete as necessary.

About tagging and tracing, Wiesener says, "Tagging, tracing and isolating plot threads are huge jobs. The good news is that you won't have to do this for every book. With experience, you'll be able to complete these steps in your head. ...You'll eventually come to a point when you instinctively know whether your outline is strong enough." She explains that she's now able to do this simply by looking at the high concept blurb column in her day sheet.

At this point, I will have what Weisener calls a "first draft." The next important step will be to put the outline away for as long as possible. Since I have no deadline for this (yet), I can let it "compost," as a friend of mine puts it (not actually referring to physically dumping pages in a black bin) for a couple of weeks or more. When I look at it again, I'll likely see places immediately that need further layering, such as character strengthening or heightening of tension.

Once I'm confident the outline is as good as it can be, I

will begin using it for the writing process. Before ending each day's writing session, I'll follow Wiesener's recommendation to skim over the upcoming two or three scenes so I can see how they will mesh with what I've already written. This will also give my subconscious time to work on these scenes before I begin writing them. Sometimes the story will take a direction different from the outline. That's the fun of storytelling, right? As long as what I'm writing each day feels satisfying, I'll assume I'm on the right track.

So even though I'm 60 days into the 30-day process and still not at the end, how do I feel about it?

First of all, the concrete steps given in this book helped keep me writing during a time when my writing could easily have stagnated. This fall, I've dealt with some health issues which had my energy levels at low ebb and my concentration almost nil. Knowing exactly what I needed to "figure out" for my story each day kept me going.

Secondly, I love having a means of developing and evaluating my story without having to read the entire thing repeatedly. I can see where the weaknesses are before they

get buried beneath layers of description and witty dialogue.

For those of you lucky souls who see your stories like movies in your imagination, this method probably seems ploddingly boring. That's okay. You have a gift, so just run with it.

For me, however, breaking the story development down into definable steps has actually helped free my imagination. Even my "staring out the window" time has been more productive. My prediction is that after using this method a few times, my worksheets will only vaguely resemble Wiesener's as I make them my own. Regardless, I feel truly helped by this book and plan to refer to it often. I would also recommend it for anyone who feels stuck in the writing process more often than they'd like.

Now that the story is coming together, Janelle Clare Schneider feels like she has an idyllic life – a beautiful office with a gorgeous view, time to spend playing with her story people and easy access to homemade café lattes.



I believe... Everyone needs a cheerleader.

While I was cleaning out a closet in my daughter's room, I discovered a totally useless object—a lone red and black pompom. What do you do with an old high school pompom? A masochist might relive high school days and then bury it in a treasure box, a clean-freak might pitch it, or...

"Why not use it," a small voice whispered.

"Use it?" At this point I was overwhelmed with the image of a demonically grinning middle-aged cheerleader shaking her not quite prime-time booty in front of leering (OK, leering is wishful thinking!) spectators.

Ohmigod! But the more I thought about it, the more appealing this image became.

Cheering energizes, and provides encouragement for the game ahead, so with that in mind I decided that everyone needs a personal cheerleader—or even a whole squad. However, choosing a cheerleader is an important decision because not everyone is qualified. My cheerleaders must:

Have the ability to perform accurate high kicks while commiserating with my pain. (This is a neces-

sity so my cheerleaders can boot me in the butt as needed when I'm wallowing, whining or just plain out of control.)

Be able to shake their pompoms and yell enthusiastically as they shout the "3-G" Cheer:

Get up. Get over. Get On.

Notice how "get moving" is a key theme for me? Why? Because that's what I need to hear, and that's what a professional does. Pros accept, learn from, and then move on to the next step, or the next project. It's how they survive.

So, what do you do with an old pompom? You can hang it up by your computer and look at it every day just to remind yourself that others believe in you, so you'd better start believing in yourself. Or you can periodically shake your booty while screaming loud enough to terrify the cat. I recommend this approach. You'll be surprised how good it feels!

Oh yeah—you might want to forget about the wearing the teeny tiny skirt.

— Lynn Miller



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Perfection

What happens if we let go of being perfect?

Oh, you don't expect to be perfect? Really. Try some of these stories on for size.

A couple of weeks ago, I was writing a weekly plan of everything that needed to be done in the upcoming seven days. An overdue book to finish. Two sections of a class to teach. A proposal for a conference to put together. Exercise five days. Cook for my son and his girlfriend who were coming to see me. Figure out what to buy beloved Christopher Robin for Christmas.

Oh, and lose five pounds.

What happens if I let go of being perfect?

Last night, I was working on a new collage. It's for a brewing book and I'm having a blast putting the collage together—it's bloody and earthy and very intense, and I'm waiting to see how it will all come together. I've been quite pleased at the colors in this one, the copper and pink; I've been creative with sparkly felt, layering mountain ranges and skies; getting some three-dimensional action going.

One reason collages are so much fun is that I don't have to be An Artist when I'm putting them together. They're just for me—complete play. I love the smell of paint and glue. I like the wordlessness of color and image—my collages tend not to have any words on them, just as a garden has no words. The color play is what refreshes me and sets free the brewing process.

Last night, I tried, for the first time, to write a word with glass paint. Rather than trying it on another piece of paper or anything sensible like that, I tried writing right on the collage itself.

It was a disaster. The color was a little bit wrong, which I didn't see until it was on there. The texture was too thin to hold the space in letters like "e" and "a". Upset, I tried to wipe it off, but the color smeared and did not wipe up at all.

I ruined it! The best collage I've ever done was in progress, and I did what I always do: heedlessly experimented and ruined it!

This is what happens to my books, too.

Before I begin writing, each book is perfect. It exists in the ether, a shining example of literary loveliness, each note sounding at exactly the right moment, each character full-bodied, fully realized, the landscapes not delectably painted backdrops but also wisely expressing metaphoric undertones to the work.

And each time, my craft and my talent are too small to bring *that* book into the world. If I but had the talent to bear a book into life as it exists in my imagination, the world would weep at the utter brilliance of these creatures.

Each time, I realize anew that I do not have that talent. Maybe there are a few writers who do, who write perfect books, or have written at least one. A treasured few of my favorites would certainly qualify — romance novels of such perfection that I am inspired anew each time I read them: *The Shadow and the Star*, by Laura Kinsale; *Night of the Phantom* by Anne Stuart; *Bet Me* by Jenny Crusie, *Green Darkness* by Anya Seton.

And yet, I suspect if I went to the writers of each of those novels and asked, "Did you know it was perfect when you were writing?," they would howl. "Perfect? Have you actually read this book?" They would point out the flaws, the messes, the places where they smeared the paint.

What happens if we let go of the need to be perfect?

I've had the slightly surreal experience the past month of working with four books at various levels of the writing game. One is the not-yet-written, still-perfect one that's brewing on the bloody collage. I love this book—at the moment, it's brilliant. I'm not going to write a single sentence of it yet, either, because the minute I do, it's ruined forever.

Book number two came in galleys to be reviewed. I was afraid to read it, not at all sure how it turned out. It was a challenge book. I took it on because I was feeling jaded doing the same kind of book at the same length. This book was shorter, with less romance, and a much faster pace.

It just about killed me. The learning curve was huge. I'm pretty sure other writers in the genre will snort over some of my beginner-ness. But it was good for me as an artist; good for writing muscles I hadn't used much. To my surprise, I discovered it wasn't a disaster at all. Not perfect, of course, because I do ruin each and every book I write, but it has a raw, gritty vividness I like very much.

Book number three is a straight romance, which I haven't written for awhile, and desperately love writing and reading. A year or two ago, I was in a van with another writer who splits her time between category and single title novels. We started writing around the

same time, and I confessed to her that I missed category. Desperately. I ended up on a rhapsody for category that lasted five minutes, about the things category can accomplish that is not possible anywhere else. When I came to a stop, silence fell. She looked at me for a long moment. "Anyone who loves anything that much should be writing it."

So I went to my Silhouette editor and asked if I could do some. She said, sure thing. So I'm writing them. And it's just as challenging, just as intense as I remember. It kicked my butt. I'd forgotten that it takes a kind of focus and immersion that a longer, less tightly focused book takes. I ended my days wrung out, demolished, emotionally drained and I'd think — huh?

I called my friend and told her I was no good at this any more. I forgot how to do it. She said, "Just keep writing. See what happens."

What happens if I'm not perfect?

Toward the end of the book, lost and doubting myself, a particular scene arrived. The Right Scene. The Focus Scene. THE scene. Of course, I ruined it, but even so—I liked it a lot.

The book needs more work. I shoved it, in slightly raw form, off my desk to my editor's in order to get some distance. It's ruined, of course, but well... eventually it will be less so.

What happens if I let go of being perfect?

Book number four is in copy edits. It's been a long, wild haul on this one. For awhile, I felt there were too many cooks, all bringing their soup recipes and special flavorings to the process, and I lost confidence in my own cooking. This book, too, made me work, but in this instance, I had to work to be true to my own vision, my own view of the world, whether that's popular or up to the moment or not. It meant getting real with myself in a way I haven't had to do for awhile, and it was hard.

Book ruined, of course. Absolutely flawed. But you know—I love it. It's the kind of soup I most like to cook. It made me cry. Maybe ten other people will cry with me. Maybe I'll get lucky and a hundred thousand will. But it's the only soup I know how to cook.

What happens if I'm not perfect?

The collage I ruined last night this morning looks intriguing. That smear of paint is begging for just the right thing to be placed in the middle of it. And the color is not wrong — it matches a tiny slice of felt that's in another corner.

What happens if I'm not perfect?

Art happens. Ruined and beautiful art.

Go ruin something.

Barbara Samuel has ruined many books, paintings, collages and even silk brought specially from Thailand. She'd still pick ruining things over being a secretary any day. Visit her website at www.barbarasamuel.com



New Year's Resolution: Rediscover the Joy of Writing

**Recapture the Magic
New Orleans
March 30–April 1, 2006**

... Thursday ...

Pre-Conference Workshop (Optional)

Robert Olen Butler

Writing from the White Hot Center

**Pulitzer Prize-winning author will lead us in creating stories
that resonate in our bones.**

... Friday ...

**Member-only workshops including *The Traumas and Troubles of the Creative
Life* with creativity coach Eric Maisel. Welcome reception**

... Saturday ...

**Sessions with industry professionals and
luncheon with keynote speaker, Nora Roberts**

**Would love to have you join us.
Register online at www.ninc.com**

Laissez les bon temps rouler! — Pat Roy

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