

WINK

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Be Careful What You Wish For

BY LINDA BARRETT

I've been feeling blue lately. Depressed. Not my usual energetic, get-up-and-go self. It's been about thirty years since I've felt this way, so maybe I'm overdue. Sure, I've had worries in the interim—health issues, employment issues—but that's not the same as feeling generally bluesy. I do not like this feeling! I don't like being sad and uncomfortable in my own skin, especially when the causes are elusive. All I do know is that they are related to my writing career, but not to the writing itself.

Recently, I hosted a special dinner at my home for ten friends. I had a ball preparing the menu, making shopping lists, and dressing the dining room table in my good china and silverware. I loved cooking the meal while singing along with Celine and Neil and Rod. Eventually, as I looked around the table at my guests—chatting and laughing and enjoying each other's company—I found

myself trembling, with tears running down my cheek. In that moment, a Gestalt moment slapped me in the face, and I solved a piece of the depression puzzle. I've missed my friends. I've missed Sunday "happy hours." I've missed saying "yes" to invitations because I've had to say "no" so many times. Deadlines don't wait. They are part of legal contracts, and I'm a responsible, on-time kind of gal.

In each of the last two years, I've written two Superromances at 85,000 words each and never missed a day downtown at the job that pays a lot better than I'm earning with my writing. So, I've tried to increase book sales. My efforts have not been enough, and will never be according to the little voice in the back of my head. This little voice always reminds me that no matter what promo I'm doing, "It's not enough. It's not enough." That refrain goes along with, "But other series writers are doing such-and-such, and their books are sell-

ing big time." Maybe the voice is right. Maybe other writers are. And then again, maybe they're not. I'll never know for sure.

A constant nagging of uncertainty. A constant feeling of guilt. How much time and effort besides the writing are enough in this business? How many on-line chats are enough? How many conferences? How much blogging? How much financial investment on promo? What makes a book sell? How much of her life is reasonable for a category book author to expend on the peripherals? And in today's market, have these peripherals morphed into necessities? There are too many questions that don't have answers—answers that satisfy me. There are too many intangibles and not enough concrete proof. So, I live in a state of uncertainty about my career, an anxiety that is zapping my energy, making me sad, and at times, angry and unproductive.

Productive. A word reminis-

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Novelists, Inc.

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President's Voice

Let the good times roll!

I'm writing this on the plane, returning from what I can only call a triumphant visit to New Orleans. The triumph doesn't belong to me (though I'm certainly elated and relieved) so much as it belongs to New Orleans and its people, for all they have achieved in such a short time. As you know if you read last month's column, Pat Roy and I went down to check things out for you in advance of our conference. I was determined to be honest with you, no matter what we found, and I confess I was more than a bit worried after some of the conflicting reports I'd heard. Happily, I can report that the French Quarter, at least, is BACK, with all of its old *joie de vivre*, along with an indomitable spirit that has earned my respect for New Orleanians forever.

I know there is still devastation in New Orleans, but I didn't actually see any between the airport and the Hotel Monteleone, despite a meandering shuttle ride. It's true that many, perhaps most, of the workers who keep things running still aren't in their own homes, but every one we met seemed cheerfully determined to do everything possible to bring the Quarter back to its former glory. And, to a great extent, they've succeeded – and then some. It's less crowded, of course, and cleaner than I remember. Crime, we were told by several people (two of them policemen), is lower than it's been in more than twenty years. And yes, it smells fine – better than it did last time I was there a few years ago, actually.

We walked the Quarter for two days, exploring, asking questions and taking notes. On Royal Street, where the Monteleone is located, at least 80% of the shops are open: jewelry stores, art galleries, clothing boutiques, Voodoo and Wicca shops, antique stores, and plenty of tacky souvenir shops. Nearly all of the restaurants in the Quarter are open, though many are hurting for business, at least on week nights. We can personally vouch for the quality of the food at the Alpine, Maspero's Café, and K-Paul's. The beignets at Café du Monde (which is again open 24/7) are definitely up to standard, and we have the tight waistbands to prove it! Musicians and vendors are set up along Jackson Square, playing their jazz, displaying their artwork and offering tarot readings. Not quite as many as before, but we were told that more are returning every week. Bourbon Street was hopping, with music pouring from the bars and signs advertising cheap drinks everywhere.

The hotel itself is stunning and uniquely appropriate for our group, with its long literary tradition. Our room, which we were assured was representative, was opulently large, with every amenity you'd expect from a world-class hotel, to include fluffy white bathrobes and a nightlight in the bathroom. Even with a reduced staff, service was impeccable. Rumors of no room service are unfounded. Their temporarily "limited" room service menu looked pretty extensive to me. The Monteleone is renovating its fitness center and spa, which will be open in time for our conference. Not only were they full for the weekend of our stay, they were already

booked solid for all of Mardi Gras. We met with staff and toured the beautiful conference rooms we'll be using and came up with a few improvements for flow and the best uses of the space. The view from the Riverview Room, where we'll have our Friday night cocktail reception, is awe-inspiring and the Queen Anne Ballroom for our general sessions and La Nouvelle Orleans, where Nora will give her keynote luncheon talk, are historic and lovely.

We also met with Paul Willis of the Tennessee Williams Festival and he was excited at the prospect of having our members join their author speakers for a cocktail party Wednesday night and a bash in the Garden District on Saturday night. Marvin Andrade, sales manager of the Monteleone, took us out to an incredible dinner at K-Paul's Kitchen (we even met Paul Prudhomme himself!) and has offered to look into transportation options for the Saturday night party. Marvin told us over and over how much they appreciate our business. In fact, whenever Pat explained that she was collecting menus or tour brochures for an upcoming conference, someone thanked us for bringing our

business to New Orleans. They need us, they want us, and they're determined to show us a good time. I'll let Pat tell you about all of the tours she researched and the restaurant menus she collected, but trust me, there are more than you'll have time to experience, even if you come early and stay late.

In short, the only way you can fail to enjoy this conference is if you don't come. So . . . y'all come!

— *Brenda Hiatt Barber*

Celebrate Creativity
Copyright Awareness Week:
March 6-10
Find out more at
www.csusa.org/caw/caw_2006_home.htm
Sponsored by Copyright Society of USA
(www.csusa.org)

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:

Lisa Ellis (*Lisa Kleypas*),
New Braunfels TX
Annie Solomon, Nashville TN
Wendy Wax, Marietta GA

New Members:

Barb Heinlein (*B.J. Daniels*),
Bozeman MT
Sabrina Jeffries (*Deborah Martin*,
Deborah Nicholas), Cary NC
Lynn Kurland, Salt Lake City UT
Holly Lane (*Sarah McCarty*),
Bloomsbury NJ
Suzanne Macpherson,
Rolling Bay WA
Pam Ford Stutz (*Pamela Ford*),
Wauwatosa WI
Robin Wells, Mandeville LA

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

Be Careful What You Wish For

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cent of factories, as though I am a story-telling machine churning out one book after another with interchangeable parts. Wrong! I know this. You know this. And yet, I'm measuring myself by the numbers. Let's see, eight Supers released in five years and a ninth just mailed to Toronto. And I'm still working downtown at the day job. Do I measure up? Am I productive enough to have a "real" career? If my next two proposals are approved, and I stay on schedule... what then? Sometimes, the thought scares me.

My younger self had a terrific social life in high school, was president of her college senior class, and spoke before thousands of cap-and-gown clad graduates. The maturing adult held "normal" jobs that were all people oriented: teacher, personnel consultant, job training and education program manager. My day job is still similar to these—and that's why I can't leave. It is the one place I'm with people, working with clients and socializ-

ing over lunch with the staff. The extroverted Linda is in her element here.

Like many other aspiring writers, I learned my craft in bits and pieces. A night class. A workshop. Reference books. And writing, writing, writing—always writing—on legal pads in the evening after the kids were in bed. Or in my car while waiting for the boys after school. Or at thirteen straight years of Little League games with a tiny pad on my lap. I rarely missed a play involving my sons, and wound up writing some cute kids-and-baseball poems that were published in small magazines. Writing satisfied a piece of my soul then. It fills my soul now. And for that, I am so thankful.

But I've got the blues, and I don't want 'em. So the promo is going. All of it—except for my website, and I've got help with that. I'm going to stretch deadlines from now on. Instead of two books a year, I'll take eighteen months to write them. I'm always so early turning in my manuscripts anyway, that so far I've never experienced that "deadline hell" many

authors talk about.

I'm taking back my social life. I'm taking back my friends. I'm taking back a Sunday or two a month for a "happy hour" or to visit a museum, to hear a concert or go to a movie. I need to break away for my sanity's sake, and for the sake of my husband, who has been so supportive of me in this not-so-new career. My extroverted side simply needs more room.

When my first manuscript was bought in 2000, a very wise lady said to me, "Guard your time. Don't get caught up in chat rooms and with other activities that eat away the hours and sap your energy. In the end, Linda, it's always about the story."

I agree with her because I am a writer. It is the story that warrants my energy and effort, and it's where I will invest my time—no matter what others may do. Instead of singing the blues, I'm looking forward to some blue skies where the only voices in my head will be those of my characters. ▲

Avon Heats Up

Avon Red, the publisher's newest erotica line, launches in June with two anthologies: *Parlor Games*, and *If This Bed Could Talk*. Books will be available in both trade and e-books editions. In September, the line will publish one title per month. Six titles have been signed so far, including Toni Blake's *Swept Away*, and Cathryn Fox's *Pleasure Control*.

Bits'n'Pieces

ThrillerFest for Writers... Not a Michael Jackson Expose

Arizona in the summer has a little inducement this year. ThrillerFest at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa, June 29 – July 2, in Phoenix, will put Lee Child, as his character Jack Reacher, on trial. He's not the only player, with Paul Levine on defense, Michele Martinez as prosecutor and M. Diane Vogt passing judgment. Word is that journalists and reviewers should apply for the jury. Also a mock autopsy is on the event list, performed by Tess Gerritsen. Not quite the same old writers conference fare, hmmm?

<http://www.thrillerwriters.org/thrillerfest/>

"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes

Farewell to Gin Ellis

"I've had what the old Chinese curse would have called 'an interesting life' " – Virginia Ellis, Dear Reader letter

Gin (Virginia) Renfro Ellis died at her home in Woodstock, Ga., in mid-January.

Gin came to writing from the visual arts, having been a professional photographer who counted among her clients the NFL, Contel, and IBM. One of her photographs became a billboard in Times Square. Throughout her writing career she continued to enjoy creating as a graphic artist (among many creative talents), including one-of-a-kind greeting cards.

Once she turned her attention to writing, it was just a matter of time. Her first book, a Harlequin Temptation, *Dear John*, won the Maggie Award, the Waldenbooks award for bestselling series book in 1994, and was a finalist in two categories for the Romance Writers of America's RITA award. For the 12 books she published solo, she earned RITA finalist honors four times. *The Wedding Dress* and *The Photograph* were voted among RWA members' top ten books in their respective years.

Taking a new creative tack in her writing, she teamed with Susan Goggins under the pseudonym Raven Hart to start a Southern vampire series. The first, *The Vampire's Seduction*, comes out in April from Ballantine. They had recently completed the second book.

Gin didn't stop at writing. She was among the founding members of the group of authors who created BelleBooks, a small press specializing in Southern fiction. She served as art director for BelleBooks, contributed to the popular Mossy Creek and Sweet Tea series, directed the website for a short time and even took a turn in the editor's chair as the acquiring editor for the second and third volumes of the Sweet Tea series.

Along with membership in Novelists, Inc., Gin was a long-time member of the Georgia Romance Writers and RWA, and a more recent addition to her neighborhood weekly poker game, all of which brought her great pleasure – especially if she was winning.

She was adamant that our usual senses were not up to the task of taking in all that there is, and was fascinated by possibilities that lay beyond certainty. A particularly vivid dream brought *The Wedding Dress* to her. She was a generous and insightful tarot card reader.

Her "interesting life" suffered an early loss that some people never recover from. Her husband, Alton Ellis, was killed in May 1969 in Vietnam. His name is on the wall in Washington, D.C. He was 21. She was 17.

"It's one thing to watch the news, hear the body count and see the coffins being shipped home, it's another to bury a future," Gin wrote in a letter to readers at www.PatriciaLewin.com, the website of a long-time friend.

Gin had another major hurdle to overcome when an aneurysm on her aorta resulted in open-heart surgery in October 2002. It was terrifying, but she came back from that surgery, writing – and living – even better than before.

As evidenced by her accomplishments as a photographer and author, Gin never gave up on the future. After Alton's death, she went on to Broward Community College, then the University of Florida in her home state. She traveled extensively, and was more than game to cross New Mexico mountains, even when the road dwindled to gravel, then it started to snow – because she was looking ahead. To where the road was going.

In fact, her looking-ahead approach could make Gin not the best person to whine to about the vagaries of a publishing career. She was most likely to respond, in her particular clipped drawl, "Well, that's the way it is. All you can do is get on with it." Or, more succinctly, "Get over it."

On second thought, maybe she was the best person to whine to.

Reacting to the news of Gin's death, Barbara Keiler wrote on the NINCLink, "Along with my grief over losing Gin is my sorrow for those of you who never got to know her. She was smart, funny, brilliantly talented, amazingly intuitive and always, always a joy to ▶

Farewell to Gin Ellis

► be around. Oh, and she was beautiful (although I can imagine her laughing and rolling her eyes if she heard me say that.)”

Exactly.

In the end, though, the words to best tell Gin’s story are her own.

“Writing, in some ways, has been my salvation,” she wrote in that website letter to readers. “I began as a journaler—writing page after page of whatever I needed to get out of my thoughts. Somewhere around 1988 I began to write books. I had a hard time at first because I resisted writing about reality. I didn't want to write about how sad, in my experience, life could be. In other words, I had lost my faith in happy endings. But, a good friend of mine set me on course. She said, ‘In fiction, you’re God. You can write any ending you want. Write your own happy ending.’ ”

Some, trying to absorb the blow of Gin's loss to us, might argue with her about happy endings, but Gin had an answer for that, too.

In an interview with www.SouthernScribe.com, she was asked what distinguishes Southern fiction. She responded:

“I read somewhere recently, (sorry I can’t remember the exact quote or author who said it) that Southern fiction stands out because it always has God in it. What I think that means is that there is something greater involved than the characters themselves, ‘fate’ if you will. The characters can fight the battle, but God is in charge of the outcome.”

Gin fought a great battle.

She is survived by her mother and two sisters, and by a host of sorrowing friends, admiring fellow authors and grateful readers.

Pat McLaughlin

Want to Talk to Your Readers, Amazon Style?

Well, how about sending messages to readers who have already bought your books through Amazon? Amazon Connect is designed to let authors send messages to readers through the Amazon home page. Recipients will need to sign up for the service, or have purchased an author’s book. Posts will appear on book detail pages, blog pages, and special author promo pages. For more, log in to https://www.amazon.com/gp/arms/role/ref=cm_arms_cr/102-7952137-5857761, or read the press release about the service: <http://biz.yahoo.com/bw/060201/20060201005402.html?v=1>

Bits'n'Pieces

Who’s Gone Where?

Ali Bunn departs Curtis Brown UK to open Gunn Media Enterprises. Juliet Ulman is promoted to senior editor at Bantam Dell.

B&N Announces 2005 Discover Great New Writers Awards

This program began in 1990 to bring attention to “new and those previously underappreciated” writers, who demonstrate a literary quality that could be neglected in a crowded market. Winners for fiction and non-fiction receive \$10,000, and one year additional promo from B&N. Second place finishers receive \$5,000; third place \$2,500. Winners will be announced March 1.

Fiction nominees—Kitty Fitzgerald, *Pigtopia*; Uzodinma Iweala, *Beasts of No Nation*; Catherine Tewish, *Tenney’s Landing*

HarperCollins Says They’re Looking to Make Money with This Digital Version?

HarperCollins started a new digital effort early this year. Bruce Judson’s backlist title, *Go It Alone! The Secret to Building a Successful Business on Your Own* has been published in a free digital version. This test case is exploring new ways to make content profitable online, although the 2004 title is already on Judson’s website for free (ads in page margins). The book is also part of Amazon’s “Search Inside” and Google Print. The model isn’t set for new titles or novels as yet, which may be a good thing for those authors.

Duo-logue

The Resolution

This is my final Duo-Logue. I'm departing for the multi-loguing of Ninc's board. I'd hoped to wrap up my Duo-Logue column efforts with another discussion with a fellow writer. It seems, however, that the people I asked are significantly more disciplined about saying no than I was, both when I agreed to do this column and later when I agreed to be on the board.

So this final Duo will have merely me as a semi-Solo.

It's only semi-Solo, because I could qualify for an advanced degree in Devil's Advocacy. (The greatest time-saver I've discovered on the Internet is using OTOH for "on the other hand." With four keystrokes instead of 17, it's probably saved me thousands of dollars for carpal tunnel treatment, too.)

Since I'm writing this in January (The Time of Resolutions), but you'll be reading it in March (The Graveyard of Resolutions That Didn't Die in February), this duologue is a discussion between the author who makes resolutions, and the one who doesn't keep them.

Resolved Pat: Okay, this year, we're going to be organized and efficient. And that starts with having goals.

Unresolved Pat: Groan.

Resolved Pat: Written goals.

Unresolved Pat: I have better things to write.

Resolved Pat: Goal-setting is the tool of the organized and efficient.

Unresolved Pat: And your point is?

Resolved Pat: You could use some good goals for the coming year. It will make you more productive.

Unresolved Pat: Hah! It's the terror of missing a deadline that makes me more productive.

Resolved Pat: If you had smaller, incremental goals you wouldn't have to experience that deadline terror.

Unresolved Pat: When I have smaller, incremental goals, I meet them just fine. But when I come to the deadline crunch, I realize the bulk of what I wrote during that evenly paced, incremental goals period of yours has to be trashed and I have to write like a maniac to get things down the right way.

RP: Do you know for sure that that's true? Perhaps you're simply ensuring that your "method" endures.

UP: Heck, no, I don't know for sure. But my gut twists and the pages lie there like aging road kill. So I'm not willing to take the risk of *not* trashing them first, then replacing them by losing myself in a spell of binge writing.

RP: Until you really test my method, you can't know.

UP: C'est le guerre, which is French for tough—uh, toenails. Since the test would mean sending in something that twists my gut in order to see what reactions the editor and possibly the readers have, I'll do without that test. Why risk a method that's worked so far on a gamble?

RP: Because you need goals.

UP: Why?

RP: Without goals you're standing in place.

UP: Not necessarily. As long as you're moving, you're going *somewhere*.

RP: If you're in a rut, you're just digging yourself deeper with all that unfocused movement.

UP: Then you're going to China. (Get it? Digging so deep into your rut that you're going to China? ... Boy, you don't have much of a sense of humor.)

RP: I'm your serious side. And I want to know how you will know where you're going if you don't have a destination, a goal?

UP: Okay, you want serious? How about how you react to goals?

RP: I don't know what you're talking about. Perhaps we should move on to—

UP: Ah-hah! Got you on the ropes now. You know exactly what I'm talking about. You're the one with the yard-long teeth that hang on in pig-headed determination to meet whatever stupid goal you happen to have set. Even a crowbar won't pry your jaw open once you've set those teeth.

RP: I resent that. And the goals are not stupid.

UP: I have two words for you: Jewel Quest. ▶

Duo-logue

▶ ▶ ▶ RP: Whimper.

UP: You said you were just going to play until you found out if you were as good on your own as you were with your sister assisting you during your very first try at that computer game.

RP: It was a natural curiosity. A curiosity that has served us well –

UP: Four-fifteen a.m. Cramped hands. Hunched shoulders. Bleary eyes. A total and complete waste of time.

RP: Well, we did determine we were as good a player without Cathy's help, except for that tiny weakness in moving laterally. With a little more time –

UP: Stop! Remove your hand from that goal-setting button. Step back slowly. That's it. Easy. No, don't even look at it. You will *not* set a goal to improve your lateral move ability in Jewel Quest.

RP: Okay, okay. And I will acknowledge that Jewel Quest is an unworthy goal. But what about worthy goals? Like career goals?

UP: Do you really want to have that discussion here? We both know of career goals you set that you have not been able to let go of when you likely would be better off releasing them and stepping around them. But once having set a goal, you can not shake the belief that not achieving it feels like a failure.

RP: You haven't complained in instances when that attitude has pushed us past where you thought we could get.

UP: True. But, sheesh, you've got to learn to let go, woman. Just to survive I've had to learn to work around you. Even setting page-number goals is dangerous because, by gum, you will fill those pages with something, no matter if it's dreck or if it takes the story in the entirely wrong direction.

RP: Well, you would just dither around until panic set in if I didn't keep tabs on you.

UP: Tabs? I'm the one who keeps TAB in the house. Gotta have my caffeine and carbonation.

RP: Ha. Ha. Ha. You know what I mean. And you did find setting goals of completing certain scenes in a certain amount of time useful.

UP: Sure. At least then the 4:15 a.m., cramped hands, hunched shoulders and bleary eyes were worthwhile. But you'll notice that most of those

scenes came well after I'd slashed most of what you'd written under your oh-so-organized X-pages-a-day regimen.

RP: *We* write those pages, Toots. The good ones and the bad ones.

UP: I've got my doubts about that. I think you mostly write lists.

RP: Lists are good. Lists are a tool of the organized and efficient.

UP: Lists depress me. They mean I have more to do than I can carry in my head. So they are proof that either I have a whole lot more to do than I used to, or my head's carrying capacity has dropped. Either way, it's depressing.

RP: I don't know how anyone can't see how wonderful lists are! You can stop worrying about whether you'll forget the things you have to do because it's all there in nice, neat – well, in your case, not so neat – writing. And as you accomplish each item you get to check it off. Or ... ahhhh... bliss ... cross it out with emphatic strokes.

UP: That's part of the problem. The lure of crossing out items on the list is so strong that you focus on wiping out all the easy-to-accomplish stuff like "unload the dishwasher," "call for hair appointment," or even "refinish dog's food holder." While that lone, short, but all-important word "write" sits there and sits there, struggling to overcome the advantage all those busy-work items have of easily bringing you that cross-off joy.

RP: *We* could list each page as a separate goal.

UP: NO! No, no, no! Then we'll be focusing on the goal of writing a page, instead of what's on the page.

What's on the page – *that's* the goal. That's all we can count on. It's us and the words on the page.

RP: I won't disagree with you there. But it's for the good of the writing that I want you to have a goal. A goal will give you something to aim for. It will give you a direction.

UP: Most of the time that direction is down. You know how you get if, heaven forbid, you don't reach one of your precious goals. You go into a tailspin, and you know what happens to the writing when you're a funk. You drag me and the writing right down with you.

RP (hanging head): I must admit that's true. (Reviving)
But I shall resolve to set more attainable goals. Yes, and I shall resolve to let go when it would be wiser to let go than to hang on.

As for *your* resolution—

UP: Uh-huh. No way. No resolutions for me.

What I don't make, I can't break.

RP: But you *have* to have a resolution. It's unnatural not to.

Wait a minute. Hold on ... I think I have one that even you will like: to follow that old Prayer of Serenity when it comes to dealing with this business. You know the one—about changing what can be changed, accepting what can't and learning to know the difference.

UP: Grumble, grumble, grumble.

RP: What was that? I couldn't make you out.

UP: That's because this is a G-rated newsletter.

The cleaned-up version of my response is: Great prayer, but I'd rather have the instruction manual, thank you.

How do you go about changing what can be changed?

How do you accept things you can't change?

How do you stop them from gnawing at you, eroding your energy and faith and hopefulness?

And, above all, how on earth do you learn to figure out the difference?

RP: You could make *that* your resolution—to answer those questions.

UP: Are you kidding? My resolution is to keep asking questions and get someone else to do the answering.

Pat McLaughlin is deeply grateful to each of the generous writers who collaborated on the DuoLogue with her over the past two years. She thanks them for their wisdom, humor and, especially, their willingness to answer her many questions. Writing as Patricia McLinn, author of the current Delphi Books release The Games, she does have one final question: How does one get NBC's Today show to do one last Winter Olympics feature on, oh, say, a novel set at the Winter Olympics?

Bits'n'Pieces

Essence Not Afraid to Enter Book Club Arena

In February, *Essence* magazine started the Essence Book Club Recommended Read program, targeting new releases, classic fiction, and nonfiction. Five books will appear in 2006, six in 2007. The first selection is Pearl Cleage's *Baby Brother's Blues*. So far there are 1,500 online members, six weeks after the first announcement in the magazine and on the web page, www.essence.com.

French Invasion

At the beginning of February, the Time Warner Book Group was purchased by leading French publisher Lagardère for \$537.5 million. The Time Warner Book Group will be renamed. For more information, check out an article mentioned on the NINC list by Sherry-Anne Jacobs—"Why German, French, and British companies are devouring American publishers." <http://www.slate.com/id/2135755/fr/rss/>

Want to Make Money? Get into Used Book Sales

The Book Industry Study Group is bringing out new statistics on used book sales.

While the study shows an 11% growth in used books sales, the study suggests an actual decline in traditional store sales (excluding college book stores). Online sales are taking off, and apparently account for the increase.

(Thank you to Rebecca Brandwyne for posting the BISG link to NINC list.)

<http://www.bisg.org/news/press.php?pressid=29> Press Release for a quick look at findings

http://www.bisg.org/docs/BISG_Used_Book_Study_Preview.pdf Summary of the Findings

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Sleep Apnea: The Dream Stealer

BY MARJ KRUEGER

For those of you who can hop into bed at the appropriate time, sleep the sleep of the just or the innocent, and jump up when you're through, refreshed, reinvigorated, and ready to face the world... don't tell me who you are. I might be tempted to use some of what I learned while living in the New Orleans area, and you might find yourself with mysterious pricking feelings.

But don't stop reading. Just because you don't need to know this now, doesn't mean that you might not need it in future.

And nobody should kid themselves that this is a problem that can be put off, ignored, or toughed out. Sleep apnea can kill. This is not merely my opinion, but the result of a recent scientific study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. People with sleep apnea are twice as likely to have strokes as people who don't. If the sleep apnea is severe, the numbers go to three or more times as likely to have strokes, two or more times as likely to die, have permanent damage, or face a long period of physical therapy, which may or may not do any good.

An earlier study, published in the same journal, shows that people with sleep apnea who die of heart attacks, are much much more likely to die in their sleep than people without sleep apnea who die of heart attacks. Conclusion: something about sleep problems causes the heart attacks.

This isn't as odd as it sounds. One of the symptoms of sleep apnea is low blood oxygen. In my case, as low as 35-40%. Oops. Talk about a strain on the system. And where is that strain likely to have the worst effect? Well, friends, in that hard working, oxygen-needing muscle called your heart.

So pay attention, even if you don't need the information right now. The life you save may be your own. (Or a friend's or loved one's.)

Symptoms of Sleep Apnea

- Snoring or loud breathing during sleep
- Snoring that is interrupted by a silent period, followed by a loud snort or gasp, and the renewal of snoring
- Awakening feeling like you haven't slept enough,

or even at all

- Abnormal daytime sleepiness, even falling asleep
- Morning headaches
- Weight gain
- Feeling lethargic, groggy, like you can't focus
- Waking up with a dry mouth or sore throat

There are other symptoms that may be associated with sleep apnea, including high blood pressure. Granted, there are dozens of different sleep problems besides apnea, and other physical problems that can cause any or all of these symptoms. But if you have several of these symptoms, especially the snore-silence-gasp-snore succession, you may well have apnea. (And if not, you almost certainly have something unpleasant that needs to be looked at.)

Perhaps I'd better give a short definition of what sleep apnea is. There are three types of sleep apnea. The most common is obstructive sleep apnea. (OSA.) Basically, while your body relaxes in sleep, some part of the breathing system relaxes too much, or even closes down, for example, the throat collapses and blocks breathing. Your lungs don't have anything to work with, your blood oxygen drops like the proverbial rock, and your body goes AAAAAAGH! You wake up momentarily, shift a bit, the obstruction is relieved, your breathing normalizes and you sink back into sleep. You probably don't even realize that it's happened. But it can happen thirty or forty times an hour. Or more. Which means you aren't getting down into the good, deep sleep, you are staying at the shallow level. When you wake up, you don't feel like you've slept at all. Because, as far as the good sleep goes, you haven't.

Central sleep apnea is caused by some glitch in the central nervous system. The brain fails to control the muscles that you use to breathe correctly. Oh, yipes, oh joy. Or, as my practitioner described one version of central sleep apnea to me: "The body's systems slow down as you sleep. Each level of sleep is more of a slow down. Sometimes the body forgets/fails to stop the slow down, and your breathing becomes inadequate." Doesn't that sound like fun? And even more fun, central sleep apnea is often associated with some major systemic problem, stroke, arthritis, congestive heart failure ... and a whole assortment of nasty diseases.

And a few lucky people have combination sleep ap-

nea, i.e., BOTH obstructive and central.

Diagnosing sleep disturbances

So OK, you think you have sleep apnea, or some other chronic sleep problem, what next? Sorry, but there's really only one answer: a doctor or medical professional. Now.

You may try reading some books on the subject, or using herbs or other remedies. They may help. Melatonin has a lot of happy users. Some folks like valerian. And making sure that you are eating well, and getting all your daily quota of vitamins and minerals may help. Exercise, even in moderate doses, may help, too.

But in the long run, if you're still having problems, or think you are, there's no substitute for the professional. Your own GP, or some other specialist you are going to, may have a recommendation. A friend may say, I went to so-and-so, and they really helped. You might even try going backwards, calling the companies that supply the sleep equipment but don't prescribe, and asking them to recommend a physician. (They'll undoubtedly give you the names of those professionals who use them, but it's at least something.)

There is a non-profit organization called the American Sleep Apnea Association (ASAA). They do not endorse or recommend any group or person, but they list physicians, sleep centers, etc. that are accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. (The AASM, and you can also get info from them, is the professional society in the field of sleep medicine that accredits professionals and sites, assuring that they adhere to the AASM's standards.)

But if you can't find a name any other way, sigh, open your yellow pages, find the appropriate section, and use the old shut your eyes and stick in a pin technique. Because something has to be done, and the sooner the better.

There are two kinds of sleep professionals. One is a pure sleep doctor, does nothing else, takes only patients with sleep problems. The other is a doctor who does sleep problems as a side to whatever their specialty is, or they may even be GPs who also do sleep work. I can't tell you which way to go. The sleep specialist has obvious advantages, but the physician who also does sleep work may do so because there is a connection. My first sleep doctor was also the pulmonary specialist I was going to. There's an obvious connection, since if you can't breathe right, you aren't going to sleep well, and worse, the sleep equipment used to treat apnea won't work usefully if you can't breathe well.

ENTs are another group who may well also help with sleep problems. A word to the wise: an ENT may well want to do surgery. If you need the surgery anyway, that's fine. But there's a technique of clearing out throat tissue (UGH!), or nose or sinus tissue, to help sleep problems that is still used, although is now not believed to

help that much. But a professional who has been doing that kind of work for years may well continue to do so ... and you may not need it. And it has a nasty recovery period.

So, on to the nitty gritty. You think you have sleep apnea, or another sleep problem, what can you expect? Unfortunately, this is not something that can be detected in a simple office visit, or by diagnostic tests, such as say, a blood test. Yes, physical problems that can cause or exacerbate the apnea (for example, asthma) can be detected. But there is only one way to diagnose actual apnea, and that's a sleep study.

There are two levels of sleep studies. One is the full hospital style, in a room with equipment all over you for hours if not overnight. The other is simpler; take the equipment home and bring it back in the morning. The home version is a) cheaper and b) a lot more convenient. However, it is also much cruder. It may—just maybe—show that you are clear, and have some other sleep problem. Or it will show that yes, there is some problem here we need to look at further. Which means, oh joy, the hospital.

So, OK, you've gone to the professional, and the next step is the overnight sleep study. This is so much fun, you aren't going to believe it. Basically, you show up mid evening, change into your night clothes, and the sleep tech sticks equipment (mostly electrodes) all over. The bed will likely be a normal bed, not a hospital bed, which is one advantage, as far as sleeping goes. It will likely be at least double bed size and the mattress will be quite comfortable.

You will be asked to sleep on your back, which is the worst position for apnea patients, and with at most, a couple of thin pillows. They want the worst case scenario in re your apnea. You'll think you'll never get to sleep like that, especially if you have a problem—acid reflux, say—which is exacerbated by lying flat and on your back. But surprise. You may well be off to dream land before you know it. (If not, you are allowed to be frustrated and furious.) If there's trouble, they may well give you a light sleep medicine.

If you have apnea, one night may not be sufficient to fine tune the equipment for you. In which case, sigh, you may have to come in for a second night. It goes the same way.

Before I forget, if you have trouble getting the electrode stickum out of hair or beard (if you're male), a towel soaked in warm to hot water and laid on the stuff should soften it enough for pain-free removal. Patience, in this case, is a virtue. A word to the wise, unless you like bald spots.

With a very mild case of apnea, there are several methods short of the ultimate equipment for preventing apnea, that may help. If you're overweight—and some but not all apnea patients are—losing weight may help. Avoiding alcohol and bedtime sedatives may ▶

Sleep Apnea

▶ ▶ ▶ help. If these don't do the trick, the next step is the equipment. And depending on the results of the medical evaluations, the equipment may come first.

There is a gadget—I haven't used it so I don't know much about it—which is fitted into the mouth, and helps to keep the passage open. You'll usually get this installed/fitted by a dentist. Again, this is for mild cases. Surgery may be advised—I know someone who had it—but seems to be going out of fashion, since it may not help.

Then there's the Big Enchilada equipment, the way to keep the breathing passages open and apnea "events" from occurring. It is crude, but seems to be effective, for most patients, anyway. The machines, called CPAPs—for Continuous Positive Airway Pressure—or BiPAPs (I'll explain the difference in a minute) force air down your breathing passages and keep them open. This is the theory, anyway. It is very important that the pressure be properly adjusted for you. Too much is as bad as too little. Hence, the possible second overnight study.

The newer machines are portable, and come with a handy dandy backpack-style carrier. I understand that the airport inspectors are now used to the things, and you shouldn't have too much trouble getting on the plane with them.

The CPAP (or BiPAP) plugs into a standard socket. At the front of the machine, you insert a flexible hose, which leads to the mask, which you wear on your face. The commonest mask is simply a small triangular shape, edges something soft like gel, that sits on your face, held on by a strap or straps, and over your nose but not your mouth. (Larger ones include the mouth, but they are much harder for people to adjust to.)

There are newer masks which have nasal "pillows" which fit directly into the nostrils. These are connected, in one case, to a large C-shaped piece which goes over the nose and clamps onto the head. In another, the nasal pillows are attached to a little arc of plastic tubing, which sits under your nose like a mustache, which in turn attaches to a hose, and so on. This one has a pair of hard straps that come off the ends of the arc, go up onto the cheeks, where they divide again. One pair goes around the head, and the other over the top, meeting in the back and on top of your head, with widgets for adjustment.

You're going to have to experiment with the masks to find the best fit. Do as much of this in the office as you can manage. Don't be satisfied with the over the nose

masks. Ask to see/try all their masks. Once you go home with the mask, it's probably yours. You may get a few days of trial period, but not all companies give you that much. So don't just say, yes, when the tech who is fitting you says, "That's the one." Make them show you everything, let you try on everything. The ones that go over the nose have to be fitted carefully. If they are too big, they'll suck your lip in—UGH!—or pinch the sensitive area under your eyes. If they are too small, they may block your nose, and make the whole exercise useless. So don't just try the masks out. Make them attach them to the machine, and sit and feel how they feel. An ounce of prevention is better than buying a mask you then have to replace. They aren't cheap.

Also, they will almost certainly start you off with the CPAP. This is the simpler, less expensive version. Make sure they rent you the machine, in case you upgrade in a few months. Also insist that they credit the rental toward eventual purchase, whichever way you go.

A CPAP machine provides continuous pressure throughout the breathing cycle, the BiPAP, dual pressure. When you breathe in (the critical stage) the air pressure is correct for what you need to keep the passages open. When you breathe out, however, you are pushing against that pressure. On a CPAP machine, that pressure doesn't change. A BiPAP machine drops pressure when you exhale. It's MUCH MUCH more comfortable and easier to use. Some doctors will automatically prescribe the BiPAP if the pressure you need is above a certain number. Others will make you try the CPAP and see if it's sufficient. My advice is, try to talk them into the BiPAP to start with, unless your apnea is moderate and the needed pressure low.

One final unhappy comment: These procedures aren't cheap. Check your insurance policy carefully in advance, because not all insurance covers sleep problems. (Though they should!)

Another unhappy comment: Children can have sleep apnea, too.

Yet another: Sleep apnea is more common among African Americans, and MUCH more common among African American children. A word to the wise ...

Finally, medical professionals estimate that only ten per cent of people with sleep apnea have been diagnosed and are being treated. That means that nine times as many people are out there, risking strokes, heart attacks, high blood pressure, and an assortment of other unhappy symptoms. Don't you be one of them! If any of these symptoms seems familiar, go to a doctor and find out, sooner rather than later.

Good luck! And always... write on... live long and prosper! ▲



Miller's Musings

IF YOU THINK WRITING'S HARD... BABYSIT!

My daughter asked me to babysit for my first and only grandchild, Skye. It didn't take long to see why Sara gave me a sympathetic look when I said "Sure, maybe I can also work some while she plays with her toys." Then I remembered that at 14 months Skye is the size of a pixie, has the tenacity of a bulldog, and is faster than a jaguar on speed.

First I rescued Elmo from the toilet (and should you need this info, Elmo will dry out and *still* sing his song whether you want him to or not); then I put all of the DVD's back on the shelf, re-rolled the toilet tissue, and chased Skye down the hill after I discovered she'd slipped out a not-quite-shut patio door and was racing after the cat. Only an hour had passed and I was ready for a nap. Either that or a stiff drink. When her mother finally returned, which seemed like five years later, Skye gave me an adorable smile, bobbed her blond head and puckered up for a kiss. I promised to babysit again in 2010.

In retrospect that time with Skye was delightful, removed the need for my workout class, and was very productive for a writer. I learned three things from that little imp.

Focus—See the target. Hit the target regardless of what or who is in the way.

This I learned when she was playing with a junkyard of toys on the floor and saw a dropped paperclip. Her eyes firmly on the distant prize, she walked over stuffed animals, slipped on books, and bumped into the chair on her way to that yellow paper clip. Although Skye's attention span is limited, her com-

mitment at each moment is total. What if we were to do that—except for the slipping and bumping bit—what could that do for our writing?

Change your perspective—experience the new

I found Skye on the floor, stretched out on her tummy, eating dry cat food from cat's dish. Obviously, my cats were rather miffed. But what if we try it? Not the dining preference, but the change of perspective. Make the opportunity to see life from a different point of view? Try lying on the floor and looking up at the ceiling imagining the ceiling is the floor. You'd have to step over the door to enter the room, sit upside down in the chair, etc. Or if you generally eat at one spot in the dining room, sit at another. Do you see something new? Try this when you're stuck in a writing spot and can't move forward with your story.

Determination—keep going until you get there

On Skye's cat-chasing journey down my steep side yard, she kept falling, and sometimes falling and rolling. Each time she got back up and continued on. No wonder the cat was terrified. If I hadn't caught up with her, she would have chased that cat until her little legs wore out. This got me thinking—if a baby can do it so can we. I know it's often easier to quit than keep going, especially in a profession full of so many ups, downs and rejections. Don't do it! When you fall down, get back up again. Keep going until you master your goal.

Find a way to use these three techniques, and who knows what you might accomplish. One word of advice though—don't try to work while you're babysitting. I ended up with peanut butter on my keyboard.



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Celebrating You. You, you, wonderful you.

Contemporary American society is a brutal place to be a human being. If you are rich enough, you are not thin enough; if you are both rich and thin, you are not young enough, and why haven't you gone and taken care of those wrinkles? If you are rich enough, thin enough, young (or Botoxed) enough, then you haven't enough education, or the right education, or the right city, or the right coast, or the right wine or the —

Whatever. Clothes. Car. Hairstyle. Job.

Don't get me wrong: when I start a list of life blessings, right at the top of my list is; born in America. White. In Colorado, for God's sake, which has to be one of the more spectacularly beautiful spots on the continent. I mean, as privileged humans go, all that put me right at the top of the world's minions. I know it's lucky to be born an American. (That also does not mean I approve of all our government does, but this is not a place for politics.)

But it's a rough place to try to be a plain old human being. To be you. To be me. To be our plain old ordinary selves with bad breath or bunions or a belly. To have habits of procrastination or an extraordinary fondness for chocolate or wine. To hate exercise and never do it. Ever. To sometimes be mean to others or selfish or stupid or irritating. Snore. Snort while laughing. Waddle while walking.

Today, the subject of celebration is you. Just as you are.

Gabrielle Luthy, an Australian romance writer currently living in Paris, writes a blog I find absolutely irresistible. Just before the New Year, she wrote:

"I see people in Blogland making long lists and I just want to yell 'Stop!' Because even before they hit the New Year they're beating themselves up. Stop that bullshit, people, really! You're fine the way you are, saddle bags, double chins, one language, bad cooking, daggy wardrobe, and all. Seriously. You. Are. Fine. No, wait—you're gorgeous! Go

learn how to cook Mexican or speak Italian if you really want to, but for Chrissakes, have fun while you do it! Not just because it's something else to tick off on your life plan." (Read the blog, *Diary of an Adult Runaway*, at <http://gabrielleluthy.blogspot.com>. Truly one of the best blogs out there.)

This month, our celebration is of ourselves. For today, accept yourself exactly as you are: tall, short, thin, fat, wading through piles of money, searching through the couch cushions for quarters. Just so. Just as you are.

And don't just accept. Revel in your quirkiness. Your uniqueness. Your single, honored, only-ness. Make of it an art form of wondrousness.

One of my "weaknesses" is pastry. Glazed raised doughnuts, freshly made and still a tiny bit warm. Flaky filled turnovers, perfect little cakes from Scottish bakeries, the splendors of a native German baker who serves her strudel on painted china. Keep the pies, the cakes, boxes of candy or piles of mashed potatoes and give me the apple fritter. Since I was not blessed with grandfather's metabolism (or, happily, my Aunt Lois's, either) it's not something I allow myself to have every day.

But once a week or so, I tuck my good notebook and a flowing gel pen into a canvas bag and I walk down to my local Starbucks. It's a hefty walk. I've never bothered to measure it exactly, but it's a solid half hour down the hill, and a little more on the way back up. I love to walk, especially now that my view, all the way there and back, is watched over by the mountain gods. The air and exercise invigorate me. The sunshine feels healing, easing all those kinks down the back of the neck that come from so many hours at a keyboard. My shoulders drop a little. My arms start swinging a little more freely.

The reason I go, however, is for a pastry. Something

filled and flaky, whatever is left after the long day, and a very big latte, with skim milk – which isn't a way of giving up calories at all. The skim milk froths better, and I like the lighter texture with a pastry.

I am, as a matter of fact, writing this column from Starbucks this very minute. The pastry is an almond croissant. The winter day is bright and cold, and I had to wear earmuffs and gloves. I feel vaguely European and clever, walking down to the shops for a wine for supper and a loaf of good bread, then stopping to write this column here, by hand, with my lovely indulgence.

It's also Friday, so the place is packed with adolescents in a slightly hysterical mood of planning for the weekend. I knew they would be here and planned to arrive now, after school, so I could listen to their chatter and admire their preening vanity and self-consciousness and utterly self-centered, self-referential selves. They're a pampered and well-tended lot, this particular group, drinking their mochas and green tea chais. Every last one of them is unbelievably beautiful, though they certainly would not say so – they'd point out the plump girl dressed in black, her red hair combed into a short, stiff style that accentuates her differentness – not her, they would say. Not me, she would say.

But there's the perfection of that sixteen year old skin, absolutely flawless, the color of egg whites. Her blue eyes, kohled to a depth of a quarter inch, are hyacinth, and she has lips like Angelina Jolie. She knows politics and has a deep understanding of a novel they've just read for class.

I like teenagers. I love their defiant self-seeking, truth-telling, cause-seeking selves. I love their bullshit detectors. The anxious conformity cloaked as defiance. Three girls were just discussing their mothers and how they'd stood up to them, proud of their fledgling wing-flaps toward themselves and their own ideas. Which is why, of course, adolescence is so painful for parents.

Teenagers are also earnest. Even the cynics are earnestly cynical, a cynicism perfected as mannered as if no one has ever expressed cynicism before.

And you may have teenagers at home, so will not quite share my adoration, but the point is today that they are so self-referential and so interested in themselves and who they are. Adolescence is about the self, about discovering who the self is and setting it apart, with clearly defined edges, as a brand-new, never-to-be-repeated being.

At thirteen, fifteen, seventeen, the heart and soul of the individual is as raw and pure a form as it ever will be. Time and choices steal away some of our mightiness at that age. The vastness of possibility narrows; it's tempered (and rightly so) by the desire to serve others, to make a living, create long-term bonds with others.

It's a natural evolution, but it can mean some of that wonderful celebration of ourselves is lost. My heart says – like the seventeen-year-old I was – that one cannot wear too much jewelry, and if it has bells, all the better. It says, let's not wear shoes. One of the girls in the basement, Hilary, is

the sacred keeper of that seventeen year old self. She makes us buy India cotton that smells so distinctively of its dye; she nudges us to buy crystals and dome shaped stones.

But myself, that self I'm celebrating today, is not just a seventeen year old. She's thirty and a soft, plump mother with oversized glasses who bakes cookies for tea for the children every afternoon, and a skinny, tanned, geeky four year old who examined cat ears and paws in minute, scientific curiosity, and the forty-something who is quite proud of her blooming begonias and muscled calves.

That self who is not, frankly, all that good with money and gets prickly over politics and is too touchy about things sometimes, and loves pastries and gets grouchy in traffic. (Oh, you've never heard such swearing as me on I-25 on a Friday afternoon!)

That self who loves books and has somehow landed in a life that is all about books – reading them and writing them and talking about them and teaching about writing books.

There has never been another me. There has never been another you. The great lesson in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* is that the world is lucky to have us, and we are lucky to have the world, in all our messy glory and despair, in this very minute. The great gift is our life, just as it is, and the pleasure comes in knowing that.

There has never been a you in the world until now. And there will never be another one. Take some time today to celebrate the marvelous, flawed, amazing being you are. Right now.

Homework, if you want to try:

What is the single best thing about you?

Now list 12 other things that are great about you. I know, I know, it feels like a kiddie exercise. Do it anyway. You might be surprised.

What is the thing you most love to do? Find some time to do it this week. This week. No excuses.

What is your guilty pleasure? Is it pie? Eat some. Is it flowers on the table? Buy some! Is it lying on the couch and reading for a whole, uninterrupted afternoon? Do it!

And this one is hard: when you hear that little voice popping up that says, "yeah, but, you have that wattle under your chin and you aren't beautiful or rich or young or thin or college educated or in a big house..." tell it to take a flying leap off the nearest bridge. Just keep telling it you aren't listening.

Celebrate you this month. You, wonderful you.

Barbara Samuel has a lot of guilty pleasures, one of which is writing this column. She has two books out in March, The Diamond Secret, a Bombshell as Ruth Wind, and a richly scented women's fiction from Ballantine, Madam Mirabou's School of Love, and you can read all about it on her webpage, www.barbarasamuel.com



Last Call

Recapture the Magic
March 30—April 1, 2006
Hotel Monteleone—New Orleans.

Cafe du Monde is serving beignets 24 hours day. The Royal Street shops are open with their take-your-breath-away Tiffany lamps, sculptures, art, jewelry, and antiques. Music pours out of the clubs along Bourbon Street. Musicians, artists and tarot card readers are back in Jackson Square. The French Market is open and Southern Candymakers is turning out their addictive pralines.

Brenda and I checked this all out personally (anything for Ninc) and found everything from the room service at the Monteleone to the French Quarter restaurants and shops up and running. Air and water are just fine and everywhere we went, people expressed their heartfelt appreciation for visiting, for believing in them.

See for yourself. Go to our www.ninc.com conference page and click on the New Orleans Recon Pics link.

Your registration fee will include a number of meals—Taste of New Orleans supper on Thursday followed by the traditional Dessert Buffet later that evening. Friday and Saturday morning you will be treated to the full breakfast buffet at the Monteleone's Le Café. Saturday's luncheon with Nora Roberts is included and we've been invited to join the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival gala party in the Garden District on Saturday night where I'm told the food is out-of-this-world wonderful.

The Hotel Monteleone is offering us deluxe rooms at \$169/night and Eve Gaddy, bless her soul, is matching up roommates again this year. evagaddy@cox.net **Note: Our room block rate ends on March 8. Reservations made after March 8 will be at the regular Hotel Monteleone rate.**

Because this has been such an unusual situation, we've decided to drop the late fee for registration. You can register at the regular rate of \$325 (plus \$65 if you wish to attend the all-day workshop with Robert Olen Butler—*Writing from the White Hot Center*).

However, registration will definitely end on March 15. We're all volunteers here, working the conference in between writing, raising kids, jobs, etc. and we need a few days to print up badges, pull together conference packets and pack our own bags. So use the form or go online, but don't pass up this chance to be part of a unique and wonderful, and unlikely ever to be repeated experience.

Looking forward to seeing you all in New Orleans. ***Laissez les bon temps rouler!***

— **Pat Roy, Conference Coordinator**

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