

NINK

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Branding

It's Not Just for Livestock... or Toilet Paper Anymore

BY LYNN MILLER

Overheard at a local bookstore.

Scene: Two women sitting in the coffee area at B&N

Woman #1 – Have you read Selena Overwrite's newest book?

Woman #2 – No, I haven't read anything by her. What's she like?

Woman #1 – (fanning her sweating brow with her napkin) Whew!!!! Steamy, sexy, intense.

Woman #2 – I'll have to check her out.

At another table, two men are catching up also.

Man #1 – Whaddja buy?

Man #2 – (sliding book from bag)

Cleve Wolf.

Man #1 – That his newest? What's it like?

Man #1 – Action, Adventure, hero always scores.

Man #2 – (nods) Wish I knew his secret.

Man #1 – He's rich, good looking and has a cool job.

Overheard on the phone.

Publisher talking to agent: I like the work, like Author X's writing, I'm just not feeling this book. Nobody expects to see this kind of stuff from Author X.

Agent to Author: No go on the sale, the book doesn't fit your brand.

Author – What brand?

Agent – What you usually deliver.

You've built an audience with hot romance. Now you want to do a 360 and write a book about a dog? Unless it's about a woman with a dog whose sex glands have run amuck and it causes problems with the hero that they resolve by falling into bed, no one will read it. If you want to do this, we need to niche brand it, and sell it somewhere else.

Writer: Brand my work? I'm having enough problems trying to write the book, much less worry about stuff like that. Isn't that the publisher's job?

Agent: Not if you're smart it isn't.

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President's Voice

It's Not Over 'til It's Over

While watching the World Cup semifinal game between Italy and Germany on July 4, it occurred to me that the match could be seen as a metaphor for life—or, more specifically, the writing life. For those who didn't see or read about the game, there was no score by either team during the whole 90 minutes of regulation time, or the first 28 minutes of the 30-minute overtime. As the game progressed, the announcers pointed out repeatedly that Germany had never lost a match in Dortmund. As the overtime period drew toward its end, the game still a scoreless tie, it looked as though the match would be decided by penalty kicks.

The announcers told us—again, repeatedly—that Germany was 4 - 0 in penalty kicks, while Italy was 0 - 3. In other words, it was looking

bad for the Italian team. After two hours of nearly nonstop play, every player on the field was clearly exhausted. This had become a test of endurance. Then, with less than two minutes left in overtime, the Italian team scored a goal. And then another, a minute later. The final score was Italy 2, Germany 0.

Now how, you may be wondering, does this relate to writing? Or maybe you're not wondering, since I sort of tipped my hand with that "test of endurance" line. Because, as we all know, frequently the difference between a successful writer and an unsuccessful one is persistence. The writer who keeps getting back up and trying again after her line folds or his editor leaves or the last book's numbers tank or a whole genre collapses is the one who lives to write (and publish) another day.

Admittedly, some setbacks are much harder to bounce back from than others. In this computerized bookselling age, bad numbers (which are most frequently a failure on the publisher's part and not the author's) can follow an author for years, making subsequent sales difficult. Some authors who are virtual legends in their respective genres, with 30, 50, 100 books published, are now having trouble selling because of one book's bad numbers, or because they're not writing the New Hot Thing for that genre. Yet very few of these writers are giving up. They would never have reached their former levels of success if they'd been quitters.

Still, it's hard. And it gets harder and harder as we get older and look around at friends and family in "traditional" careers retiring and, worse, enjoying retirement. Is there a point where a writer should simply say "enough" and decide that trying to break back into the market One More Time simply isn't worth the effort? I suppose that depends on each

individual. If you've said all you have to say and the muse is no longer calling you back to the keyboard, there should be no guilt attached to retiring from a writing career—any more than an accountant or teacher feels guilty on retiring. But as long as writing is still something you enjoy, keep getting back up and moving forward until the market cycles back around or you click with that one editor who "gets" you and your stories. No editor or agent or segment of the readership can decide when your writing career is over. Only you can decide that.

I watched those soccer players running up and down the field, two hours of sweat pouring from their bodies, exhaustion battling with determination as the final minutes of the match ticked away. But when one player slowed down or stumbled, another picked up the slack or urged his teammate on. That's where an

organization like Ninc can help in the seemingly endless series of obstacles that make up a writing career. We all stumble occasionally, or are tripped by forces beyond our control. But we don't have to fall flat on our faces, not when we have colleagues, friends, who can catch us by offering encouragement and suggestions based on their own experience in the business. Even if you seem to have ground to a standstill, that kind of assistance can help you to regain your momentum, leading to another sale—and then another—before time (or your cache of story ideas) runs out.

No matter what the pessimists say about falling print runs and narrowing niches, no matter how bad the odds sound, let Ninc be your team, and let's urge each other on to victory—however we choose to define it.

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber** :)

Election Notice

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**Proposed Nominees for 2007
Nominating Committee**
(Listed in alphabetical order,
five to be elected):

Ken Casper
Dee Davis
Marcia Evanick
Roz Denny Fox
Toni Hertzog

As set forth in article IX, Section 4 of the By-laws, additional nominations may be made in writing if signed by the nominee and at least ten (10) active members who have not signed the nominations of any other person for the same position.

Such nominations must be made by August 18, 2005. Mail all written nominations to Julie Leto Klapka, 11720 Palmer Dr., Tampa FL 33624-4546.

Branding

Continued from page 1



Okay, so I made all that up. I didn't hear that at my local bookstore or on any conference call. BUT, I could have. The purpose of a brand is to create a recognizable product, and create the appropriate buzz around it. It doesn't matter what the product is, as long as you are building a bond with the audience.

How do you identify your brand?

If there is one thing that seems to hold true, it's that you can brand anything—if you understand how to think about it. The real problem is creating the *unique brand* that really stands out from everyone or everything else. So, I'm going to share a process with you that we at Parke Media recently used for a client. This sample process was not used for a writer, but for a series of networking conferences for a women's organization.

This women's workshop series already existed. It was focused on an internal corporate market, but our job was to make it viable to an external market, and generate new revenue. I've chosen this example because it is a *soft concept approach*, rather than an actual product you can touch, such as shampoo. An author and a book is a product as well as a creative endeavor, so the basic steps are the same. Hopefully this example will help you think of using this process in terms of creating your own writer's brand.

Branding Example: Women's Workshop:

With all of the products and services competing for attention, the need for a strong brand identity is key.

1. Identify the Core Message:

Our branding efforts will be focused around the concept of the existing program, which is: "To empower and drive professional and personal change by unleashing the talent of women so they can rise to new levels of confidence and power, and sparkle in the global marketplace."

By creating a brand image that communicates this core message, our client's company can help participating women reach their potential, both professionally and personally, while creating a new revenue source for the company through licensing the initiative to potential customers at the same time.

What branding can do:

Differentiate a company, program, or product from competitors and build value.

Serve as a short cut for the emotional, intangible connection that a customer has with a company and its services or products.

Filter through the marketplace noise of other products and services.

Establish and build customer loyalty.

2. Beginning the Process:

Analyze the competition, the current audience perceptions, the company and its operations. (For a writer it is the publisher.)

Branding is about creating a credible message by capturing elements that no other person or company can duplicate.

Branding will mesh the tangible assets and values with intangible assets and values.

Branding Includes:

Brand strategy: The thoughtful exploration of customers, target markets, competitive dynamics and white space opportunities to create and sustain a differentiated positioning. (*What are you going to do to meet your objective? How are you going to do it?*)

Brand identity: The associations that a firm would like its customers to have. Brand is a unique service based on the benefits and values it delivers. (*What do your books offer that no one else's can?*)

Brand personality: Assign possible personality traits, and evaluate the relationship they have to customers. This defines how the brand will be presented. (*For example, an author may be striving to create an intense emotional experience with his books, or a fun, light-hearted experience.*)

Brand image: The current perceptions of the customers, both positive and negative. (*Especially useful in repositioning yourself, or in writing for more than one genre.*)

Brand positioning: The foundation from which all of a firm's internal and external communication strategy should be derived. All of the elements build emotional

and self-expressive associations consistent with brand identity elements. *(Think of this as a book with mystery elements being positioned within a mystery line when it really is at heart, a fantasy. Obviously the wrong readers will buy it, and there go the sales, as hard-core mystery fans spread the word. It might work out well, but the chances for going the other direction are more likely.)*

Steps in the process:

Build awareness of the product & pre-dispose potential customers to want it.

Step 1. Understand the internal brand expectations.

Step 2. Understand the marketplace, assess possible trends and impact on the development of the brand.

Step 3. Develop a profile of current customers.

Step 4. Develop brand identity.

Step 5. Develop brand positioning.

Step 6. Develop consistent communications

Vital questions to consider:

(These questions directly pertain to the women's workshop example used but you get the idea so you can develop your own...)

Who are the women who take this workshop? Or who are likely to respond?

What type of ownership do they get from it?

What type of life experience do they receive that might make a difference in their lives?

How can they use the initiative to integrate the change that results into professional and private lives?

How do they keep on growing?

What is the ultimate goal of the program, short term and long term?

Is there a reconnect or feedback process that helps analyze the success of the initiative?

Additional Opportunities: 3 items to consider as we develop this women's workshop initiative for licensing:

Build a brand image and then sell the image through a series of marketing communication materials designed to sell the program. *(For an author this is a review of your entire communication strategy with your audience. What works, what doesn't, how can you make it better, etc. I covered some of these topics in the "Grassroots Advertising" article.)*

Expand the in-house product and the available materials, to strengthen the potential for marketing the product to other companies or organizations. *(You could think of this as potential line extensions, or picking up a character and continuing on in a new creative way, etc. Or you can think of resale potential according to contract and copyright provisions.)*

Add value to the product by considering other communication materials or ideas in addition to the existing workshop. *(This can be directly related to an author's current work or upcoming work to build anticipation and interest. Or it can be...)*

Build in reconnects in the form of A.M. or P.M. casual get-together to re-connect or share new information, learning, recharge, etc. *(Consider workshops, personal appearances, bookstore meet and greets or programs, etc.)*

Re-connect via a "conversation" online. *(Enough said.)*

Website targeted to women, with topics that relate to the workshops and appropriate to the information women need to succeed in all areas of life. Website could

also contain links for more knowledge, etc. *(To an author it might relate to a topic in the book, such as women's relationships after divorce, setting you up for success, etc.)*

Online newsletter. Up-dateable and keeping new topics in front of the participants.

Choose a special project that might relate to your audience, and put the effort of the organization or individual behind it.

But you're not a program, you're an author:

It doesn't matter. You apply what is relevant to the branding process. The funny thing is that many authors already do this without realizing they are doing it. Think of your favorite writer and describe his/her work in three adjectives. Is the description consistent regardless of what book is written? If so, this is a brand description. It is what you expect each time you pick up that writer's new work. It can be a very powerful tool, or it can become a stifling weight around one's neck.

Branding creates expectations in the audience, a certain type of approach, voice, plot structure, etc. When an author doesn't meet those expectations, it is time to look at how the author has either missed the mark, or grown beyond her current brand. Or is it time to consider "line extensions?" Is it time to add new products to the existing established one? Which in an author's case might be a different type of book all together that can rely on the expectations met by the author's previous books, but puts that author in a totally different arena.

A good example of this is Nora Roberts as J.D. Robb. She still meets the expectations of the audience who enjoys her single title romances and characters, but now she adds an involved futuristic suspense/crime ▶

Branding

► structure to the character's romance.

In the next article on branding, we will explore opinions from editors, agents and writers about the

success of branding, and the branding process. If you have questions please email me, lnmiller@parkemedia.com. I will try to get some answers from people we are interviewing, as well as from

other professionals in the field.

Lynn Miller, one of our very own Ninc members, is the president of Parke Media, a creative marketing and advertising agency.

Stand by Me: How We Can Help Each Other

BY PARI NOSKIN TAICHERT

The following is an excerpt from Pari's shared blog, Murderati. Murderati is a blog by seven mystery writers dedicated to "Mysteries, Murder and Marketing." Check it out at www.murderati.com

A few years ago, I was presenting at a retreat sponsored by A Room of Her Own Foundation. Lisa Tucker, a novelist who'd just made a bundle on her first book, was the featured speaker. In an engaging, but absolutely adamant, way—she exhorted the writers there to buy each other's books rather than always complaining about how little money they had.

Since then, I've thought often about her words. During the last two months in particular—I've been to three mystery conventions and the *L.A. Times Festival of Books*. At each event, I've met so many authors and seen so many old friends. There's no way I could begin to buy

all their works.

So, how do I put my money and actions where my mouth is? How do I support my fellow authors, my friends in this industry? How can I encourage new authors/writers? How to do all of this while still plugging away at my own craft and the marketing thereof?

I'm not sure where the balance tips into martyrdom or a lack of generosity. Though Lisa suggested buying books as a sign of support, I simply can't do that as much as I'd like. Even if I could, I wouldn't be able to read everyone's works—my life is far too scattered and too full to take hours for that pleasure right now . . . alas.

But I think it's important to consider how we can tangibly help each other in this odd profession we've chosen.

Here are a few ways I've found to do it.

I hope some of you respond to this blog with the most satisfying methods you've found to support

your fellow authors.

1. Post formal reviews and positive comments about someone else's books on *DorothyL*, *4MA* and other listservs. Do the same for review sites such as Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble etc. Here, it's important to be honest; I think readers of these electronic missives can smell backscratching as opposed to sincerity.

2. Cross-sell at joint book signings. One of the most enjoyable hours I ever spent was at the *LAT-FOB* when *The Clovis Incident* first came out in '04. I sat next to Laura Levine. We cross-sold each other's books and had a blast. We also became fast friends that day.

3. Take your friends' promo pieces to the conferences/conventions you attend. I try to do this as often as I can. Their bookmarks/postcards don't weigh much and, hey, someone might find a new author to read.

4. Ask your library to carry the books of authors you care about. Though the Albuquerque Public

Library system is wonderful, I often can't find books by friends from smaller publishers—or who don't have major name recognition.

4.a. Ask your favorite bookstore to carry the books of authors you care about. 'Nuff said.

5. Offer marketing suggestions. Often we can't see our own best assets. A fresh pair of eyes might come up with a great idea that can help a friend get the word out. I've done this for other people and it's been wonderful to see that click—the epiphany—when the idea is hot.

6. Talk-up authors you like. If you do, they might get invited to present at conventions/conferences/civic groups/signings. Your good word might land them an interview on television or radio. I do this frequently. I know it's tempting to save all our leads for ourselves, but it also feels marvelous to share. At the very least, tell other readers you know about works you enjoy.

7. Find ways to cross-promote. Celebrate friends' successes. We're doing it right here on this blog. It's wonderful not to feel like you're alone on the publishing path.

8. Show newer authors the ropes (if they want the info). I try to be accessible to newer authors. If they want the benefit of my meager experience, I'm glad to help them avoid the mistakes I've made—and gain from my smarter efforts.

9. Use your websites to promote others. Yep. This gets into link exchanges and that kind o' thing. I think these are moderately useful. One problem, though, is that strangers ask you to link as well. Personally, I don't do that. If I don't know the author or his/her work, I won't exchange links because it doesn't feel honest to recommend someone in that way. Related to this is posting on other authors' blogs. It's a good way to converse and help them attract more posters.

10. Commiserate. There are times when all another author needs is someone who understands and who can keep what's said—or written in an email—confidential. I know this has been one of the biggest ways I've been able to support friends in the business. They've shown me the same kindness.

The ways I've found to support other authors abound. The ones I mention above are those that came to mind while writing this piece.

To me, it's important to try to see beyond our own careers and to be positive citizens in our mystery community. If we do, we'll strengthen our genre and create goodwill every step of the way.

Please, if you have other ideas about how we can support each other, post it here. We can all learn from your experience. I know I'm ready for more ideas. ▲

Thriller in Arizona

International Thriller Writers gives its first awards at Thrillerfest. Christopher Reich's *The Patriots Club* was named Best Novel, Adam Fawer's *Improbable* received Best First Novel, R. Cameron Cooke's *Pride Runs Deep* was cited as Best Paperback Original. Michael Haneke received Best Screenplay for *Caché* (International English title, *Hidden*), with Clive Cussler named the first Thriller Master.

<http://www.thrillerwriters.org/index.php>

Bits'n'Pieces

Don't Know Much about "Main Selection" for a Book Club?

Check out Tess Gerritsen's blog <http://www.tessgerritsen.com/blog/> on June 16 for background about getting selected for one of the various book clubs.

"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes

INTRODUCING.....

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

New Applicants:

Wayne Jordan, St. Michael, Barbados
Robert Mayer (*Robert Doherty, Greg Donegan*), Hilton Head Island, SC
Michelle Rouillard (*Michelle Rowen*), Mississauga, Ont., Canada

New Members:

Deloris Lynders (*Delilah Deolin*), Boerne TX
Jordan Summers, Scottsdale AZ
Tracy Anne Warren, Abingdon MD
Carrie Weaver, Chandler AZ

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



Recapping the Magic:

Writing from the White Hot Center... A Workshop with Robert Olen Butler at Ninc New Orleans

BY KELLY McCLYMER

The Literary Writer stood in the middle of the Queen Anne ballroom, microphone in both hands. Around him, genre writers sat around white linen-covered tables, settling their bodies into the meager cushioning of straight-legged banquet chairs.

"We are all writers, no matter our genre," the Literary Writer said. "As writers, we all want to tell the stories inside us."

"Tell us what we don't know," one genre writer demanded from the back of the room.

"There's nothing you don't know," said the Literary Writer, coiling and uncoiling the thick black microphone cord at his feet as if it were a whip, and he a lion tamer surrounded by hungry lions. "If you don't avert your eyes."

The genre writer crossed her arms and glanced toward the silver coffee urns in the back of the room. "Tell me how, then. And be quick about it. I have a book due in a month, and a synopsis to write before dinner. And my doctor just told me I have to give up caffeine."

...wait...

...no...

Ours was the New Orleans conference. And it was there, where the street signs listed permanently to the right thanks to a Hurricane named Katrina, that I came to uncover the secrets to writing that would be found in workshops such as Contract Review and Collage. And thus it was there, in that recovering world of jazz and blues and warm March winds that I found

myself shivering under one of the many relentless air conditioning vents in the Queen Anne Ballroom, the lights from the chandeliers reflecting tenfold in the mirrors as the Pulitzer Prize-winning literary author said, "Writers can never avert their eyes. Imagine Michael Jordan going for the basket, and in that moment, in order to make that basket, he must relive the death of his father. That is what we writers must do every day."...

Okay. So much for literary interpretations of what I learned from Robert Olen Butler. Here's the short and sweet of it: I learned nothing—and everything. I learned that "writing from the white hot center" is hard. That it requires patience, diligence, sweat, tears, and sometimes even blood sacrifice (oh wait, no, I'm getting that last one confused with the workshop on voodoo). To those of us who have written books that failed, books to short deadlines, books while those around us fall ill and sometimes die, that is nothing new. So why, then, did I come out of Butler's workshop energized, determined, and feeling that I would never again be the same writer I had been before I sat my derriere down in one of the Monteleone's banquet chairs?

One reason may be that Butler only recoiled slightly and did not avert his eyes from the ugly commercial truths that frustrated genre writers threw at him: we write on

short deadlines; our editors sometimes demand we change a character into a dog because "pets are sympathetic"; we don't have years to develop character and massage the language in a scene until it is flawless to our ears; we have deadlines to meet and mortgages to pay; we have rules to follow if we want to please our readers.

Butler's determination that a writer must not avert their eyes from the scene comes from his training as a method actor. He likens the process to "method writing." The writer becomes the character in the scene—a waiter does not walk through with a tray of food, he walks through carrying a tray of sizzling steaks, if the character can only afford a hamburger. Or sizzling cuts of tenderloin if the character is a butcher. This is not new advice, of course. I have heard it before. I have taught it to my students—be specific, reveal character through action and detail, avoid the laundry list of detail to choose the details that *matter*.

But Butler goes further than reminding me not to avert my attention from finding the right word to precisely convey the smallest of details. He advocates exploring *every* possibility in the story to be told. He calls this exploratory process *dreamstorming*. And as soon as I heard the term, I knew it was a process for me—a too often timid,

don't-want-to-put-a-foot-wrong-and-waste-time writer (though I dream, one day, of being a fearless lion about what I put on the page). In dreamstorming a book, a writer simply sits with a stack of 3x5 cards at hand and thinks about the story, about the characters—a waking dream, if you will.

Dreamstorming is not for the faint of heart or impatient (unless, like me, the faint-of-heart impatient writer is ready for change). During the dreamstorming process, Butler suggests that a writer avoid the temptation to begin writing the scene. During dreamstorming, for each scene dreamed, a single line, a few words on a 3 x 5 card—Melinda dies in a car crash—suffice. His own experience has taught him that a critical dreamstormed scene will not disappear, it will become richer still when—if—it is explored again in the “don't avert the eyes” writing process that occurs after the dreamstorming process ends.

Dreamstorming is meant to free the writer from the constraints of words, and scenes and action written too early, words that solidify the story too soon. No possible scene that presents itself to the dreamstormer is left unexplored in the dreamstorming process. The process is meant to take a writer into the “white hot center” that is reflected in the title of Butler's book on writing, *Writing from the White Hot Center*. Safe is not a word to be used in dreamstorming. Predictable is not for the dreamstormer. Freedom to dive deep into that white hot center of what a writer knows about the world, about people, about life. Freedom to follow conflicting paths to their natural dead ends or surprising revelations—that is the power of dreamstorming before writing. That is the beauty of dreamstorming, says Butler (he advocates weeks or months of dreamstorming, until no more scenes present themselves to the writer patiently waiting for them to come—bowing to the realities of

genre deadlines, he suggests taking at least a week or two).

The freedom of dreamstorming on the scene level must end, of course, with a formidable stack of 3x5 cards representing all the possibilities. Perhaps, at the end of dreamstorming, a writer may have three 3x5 cards that represent scenes that cannot coexist in the same novel—Melinda dies in the crash, Melinda lives, Melinda is permanently injured. Each scene is vivid, imagined unflinchingly from deep within the writer's white hot center. But only one of those scenes will work for the book. How to decide which one?

Butler advises that a writer clear off a large space and deal out the cards in order from beginning to end (he also imagines that writers have such large spaces to clear, but that's a subject for another article)—shuffling where needed in the process, and putting conflicting scenes parallel to each other. He has found that sometimes the right scene is clear, by instinct. Sometimes it made clear by examining the revealed shape of the book in the arrangement of the 3x5 cards. And sometimes none of the scenes are right and a new scene must be dreamstormed to fill a gap revealed by the final arrangement (Melinda avoids the accident, saving a litter of kittens with her crack driving skills).

It is after the process of dreamstorming, after the careful consideration and reconsideration of the arrangement of the 3x5 cards, that Butler then gives his most prosaic (to working genre writers) advice about his version of “method writing”: pick up the first 3x5 card and sink into the white hot center of the scene you dreamstormed, begin writing, write every day, do not stop writing until the book is done. And, of course, do not avert your eyes. Ever.

If you want to know more about Butler and the process of dreamstorming, you may find his

book *Writing From the White Hot Center*, by Robert Olen Butler, at bookstores everywhere.

Kelly McClymer has written seven historical romances, and three young adult novels. She is going into her own personal white hot center to write her newest novel using Butler's technique (with a few unavoidable Kelly-tweaks). She's looking forward to the freedom to explore the possibilities, no matter how off the wall, uncomfortably hot, or challenging.

Maple Leaf Economics

The difference in Canadian money and the declining US dollar had publishing talking about lowering Canadian prices on backlists as well as new books. The price difference is about 20 percent. Booksellers say the markup is reasonable because of the higher cost of book distribution in Canada. This is the same justification used for why book royalties are lower in Canada. Someone's logic is off. Some publishers are offering extra discounts on backlist titles over a year old, and others are planning on repricing, a process that could take up to a year.

Bits'n'Pieces

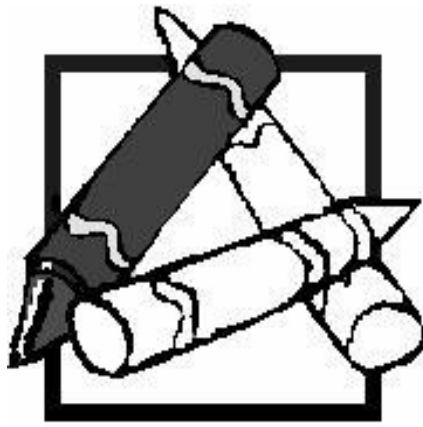
Copyright Also Rises

The last raise was in 1999. As of July 1, 2006 the new filing fee for the US Copyright Office is \$45.

Personnel

Karen Watson takes over as co-director of Tyndale House's fiction line, while Stephanie Broene becomes acquisitions editor.

**Crayon
on my**



**Key
board**

One Page at a Time

Those of you who have a writing routine that works for you, a steady flow of contracts, or an abundance of self-motivation probably won't be interested in this column. For the rest of us, here's something I've learned that is making a huge difference in my writing life.

I've spent the past eight months recovering physically from hypothyroidism, and emotionally from a variety of changes and issues. In sharp contrast to a year ago, my love for writing is back, but I've found my "production" to be sporadic. It really bugged me that, with both the Little Realities in school full time, I was spending only two days a week, if that, actually writing.

Part of the problem is that the Little Realities are now in the "extracurricular" phase of life. This means at least four out of seven evenings of each week are taken up with something related to their extracurricular activities. We allow each of them one activity only, but even that has me out interacting with the rest of the world more often than I find comfortable.

Being an introvert, this means my days "alone" are often spent recovering from the previous evening's activity. Recovery involves activities that replenish my emotional reserves—sewing, gardening, scrapbooking—and activities that simply must be done, like cleaning bathrooms and tidying the kitchen.

But the bigger factor is what I call the "elephant syndrome." Because I'm still in the process of getting my writerly senses about me again after a four-year hiatus, I felt I needed an unbroken span of hours before me in order to get anything meaningful done. Thus, if I had an appointment at 11 a.m., I wouldn't even try to write at 9 because I knew I'd be interrupted. In other words, I was looking at the whole elephant and getting overwhelmed.

Then a discussion came up on Ninclink about keeping balance in our lives. Veteran writers talked about how

they refused to let writing consume their every waking moment, or reminisced about a time in which they did become consumed and the heavy price they paid for it. This resonated deeply with me, because along with all the things I felt interrupted or prevented my writing, I was also feeling hugely guilty for not getting at least 2,000 words written every day.

Mention was made of the advice from a well-known veteran who said she writes 500 words a day, every day, no matter what. When you think about it, 500 words every day works out to 3500 words a week. At that rate, a book a year is easily doable.

I decided to try it. 500 words is an easily achievable goal for me. I could make that commitment to myself and not fear disappointing myself as I have so often in the past.

I've been using that method for two months now. I feel as much a new woman as I did when my thyroid medication started working. I'm actually making progress toward my dream of being published again! In fact, just two hours before writing this column, I emailed my completed proposal to my ever-so-patient agent.

As anyone who is "between contracts" knows, it's easy to feel like a fraud, to feel like you should have handed in your Real Writer card years ago. The steadily increasing tally of words written reminds me daily that I am, indeed a Real Writer. If I'm having a discouraged day where I just don't want to face the writing, I can talk myself into slogging through "just 500 words." If those 500 words are pure dreck, I can shrug it off. It's just 500 words.

More often than not, by the time I reach my 500 word goal, I'm on a roll. I've had more than a few 2,000-word days. Those are the days when I feel like dancing. Yes, I really am a writer! Yes, I can be published again!

The best part for me is after I've written my words for the day, I often still have three to four hours remaining before the Little Realities come home, time I can spend doing whatever brings me joy, even taking a nap, and I can do it guilt-free because the writing is done. In other words, the 500-word-per-day objective still gives me ample time for the restorative activities I need. Such a small goal, and yet it enables me to achieve balance between the world of my imagination and the world of my loved ones.

Because I've been working on a proposal, I've had to figure out a way to make this system work while doing revisions. (I know some writers who do their "creating" in the morning, and revisions in the afternoon, but I'm not there—yet.) Once I got the rough

drafts of the synopsis and opening chapters written, I then told myself each day's goal would be to revise a scene. Again, once I had the single scene revised, it was often easy to carry on to the rest. Even if it wasn't that easy, or if I had commitments which prevented me from doing any more, I could still continue the rest of my day with the emotional high of having accomplished at least that much.

500 words a day. One scene at a time. Bit by bit, the story is being told.

This method has surpassed its previous value now that the Little Realities are out of the school for the summer. Janelle is pleased to report continuing progress on the story in spite of ever-present company of the somewhat demanding type.

Kensington Gets the Vibe

Vibe Street Lite will appear under the Vibe Books imprints when the music and culture magazine begins a new partnership with Kensington books. Four original trade paperback novels will be published in January 2007, aimed at the readers of *Vibe* and *Vibe Vixen*. Vibe editorial director Rob Kenner will work with Kensington's Karen Thomas. The new imprint should take urban fiction to the next level, while Vibe Books will look into other categories beyond street-based fiction and nonfiction.

Bits'n'Pieces

Where to Buy Your Own Books?

This was a question on the Ninclink last month.

Mary Jo Putney supplied The Book Rack in Timonium, Maryland where you can get author copies at a 40% discount. There is a 5% Maryland sales tax, and an UPS charge, if you can't pick them

up in person. The phone number is 410-667-6897. Charlotte Hubbard reported on Author!Author!—author-author.net. They also offer a 40% discount and free shipping with order of 50 copies or more. The site is affiliated with NovelTalk but you don't have to be one of their clients for the discount.

T-Shirt from an Imaginary Place

Protect.org's Novel-Tee's Program has issued T-shirts that advertise fictional locations from the novels of Andrew Vachss, Joe R. Landsdale, Nick Hornby, and F. Paul Wilson. The organization is a political lobby that focuses on protection of children from abuse and exploitation. The marketing idea has earned over \$10,000 from t-shirt sales already. Sales are done only from the Protect.org website at \$20 plus shipping. PR manager Lou Banks says, "In a cool subtle way, they scream I'm a literary insider." The themes of the shirts come from the writing, and not the book jacket. The organization welcomes inquiries from authors wishing to participate. (See the website for info.) <http://protect.org/shirts/index.html>

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BOOKS...ABOUT BUSINESS

Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide

REVIEWED BY PAT MCLINN

WOMEN DON'T ASK:
Negotiation and the Gender Divide
Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever
Princeton University Press 2003

Despite the title, this book is not only about—or for—women. It's about a negotiating style that is not limited to women, although it does show up most frequently among women. (And for brevity's sake, I'm going to refer only to women in reference to this style.) So, what? you might be asking. You've gotten through life just fine by simply not negotiating. Or you feel you are an assertive person, perhaps of a more recent generation, so this doesn't apply to you, right? And what if you're a man?

Read the book. You haven't gotten through life as well as you might have. You likely aren't as assertive as you think you are (and generation doesn't make the difference you might expect), and maleness isn't an automatic free pass into successful negotiation. Plus, male or female, if you are married to, related to, work with, or encounter women, you should read the book.

WOMEN DON'T ASK caught my attention immediately by citing research by Babcock, a professor of economics at Carnegie Mellon, on the cost of not asking. Babcock and others estimate that a failure to negotiate starting salary for a first job out of college can cost a worker half a million dollars in earnings. That's from a single negotiation chance not taken. According to a study, women who continue to negotiate salary over the course of their careers will make a million dollars more in their careers than women who don't. A million bucks.

Okay, but that's a carryover from pre-liberation days, right? Or the women not negotiating don't have power/education/smarts, so they can't negotiate, right? Nope. One of Babcock's studies looked at recent students graduating with master's degrees from Carnegie Mellon. Eight times as many men as women negotiated their salaries—EIGHT TIMES. And the men who negotiated upped their starting salaries by 7.4 percent.

This book also points out that money isn't all that's at

stake. An employee accepting lower pay would seem to value her/himself less than one who asks for more—and the employer will accept that employee's self-valuation. That then influences evaluations, which determine promotions. So this effect multiplies over time in what sociologists call "accumulation of disadvantage" or, as these authors quote one expert as saying, "molehills become mountains."

When women do negotiate, they set lower goals. Some see this as "safer." Indeed, they might improve their chances of getting what they ask for, yet will likely get less overall. A study Babcock and colleagues did of Ivy League MBA students showed that men did 30 percent better on average than women in negotiations. Why? Their targets. A woman might ask for \$50,000 and get \$50,000 and feel good. But a man would tend to set a goal of \$65,000 (30 percent higher than the woman's target.) Maybe he doesn't get what he asked for, but if he gets \$55,000, he's still 10 percent better off than the woman who met her lower target.

Babcock details how women tend to shoot too low (with emphasis on how important the first offer from the other side is in the outcome of a negotiation), and then how they concede too much, too quickly.

Even when not discussing salaries, *WOMEN DON'T ASK* is strongly focused on the workplace. However, it doesn't require much imagination to apply the examples and principles to the business of publishing. In addition, the authors venture into everyday opportunities for negotiation, including a chapter on negotiating at home.

The book delves into societal causes for women's reluctance to negotiate, and the societal costs of women's failure to negotiate (along with the costs for the individual, which I've put more emphasis on here.) It also recognizes that a negotiating style more common among women of viewing it as a collaborative process can produce the best outcome—if both parties are employing that style. However, if one party is going for collaboration and the other is competing, guess which one wins?

For more on the book (and some eye-popping statistics) check out <http://www.womendontask.com>. And read the book! ▲



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Celebrating The Ones Who Came Before...

I am afraid I've fallen in love again.

In a way, I'm relieved. It seems it's been awhile since some vague snippet fell into the furrows of my brain and grew into that intent, focused need to know we all as writers recognize. It feels lovely to be consumed with curious passion, that hungry leafing, learning, exploring.

Whilst in England recently (where one says "whilst" in perfectly ordinary conversation), I had an opportunity to visit Sissinghurst Gardens. The girls and I are in absolute agreement about gardens; we adore them. Sissinghurst has been on my list for many years.

Many of you are nodding at this, knowing it well; perhaps it's a place you hope to visit yourself, or you've already done so. For those who do not know it, Sissinghurst is renowned even in a country of gardens. It's in Kent, which bills itself as the Garden of England, and a crown jewel it is. Set among the walls and ruins of a 15th Century manor house, it was the loving creation of a husband and wife, two titled and monied Englishfolk, over the thirties, forties, and fifties. It was very close to my hostess's home, and she is an avid gardener who visits Sissinghurst often.

So, on an early June day, we set out, my fellow passionate gardener and I, along with the amiable Christo-

pher Robin. The weather was absolutely perfect—sunny and clear, promising to be hot later in the day, and there was a tour bus in the parking lot, which I worried would mean the place would be too busy. It was not.

The gardens are set on the sprawling grounds of the old manor house, which replaced an older castle. A tower and parts of the wings still stand, sturdy and livable, but much of the rest of it was in ruins, open plots of ground into which Vita and her husband Harold planted their extraordinary gardens. The buildings themselves caught my attention a little more than I had imagined, but the tower especially. Four stories, stuck like an arrow into the middle of everything (though of course, it was more that everything had fallen down around it).

A woman behind me remarked, "Oh, that must be where she wrote."

I blinked. Wrote what? I wondered, still just this side of the tumble, as when you have only noticed the dark head of that man in the party who will one day be your husband. My party and I entered a room that showed Vita with her dogs. It said she wrote novels. Poems. Essays and travel pieces. Articles about gardening and dogs. She kept a diary and wrote copious letters. She wrote.

A little frisson walked up my neck. In a black ▶



The Girls in the Basement . . . Celebrate...The Ones Who Came Before

▶ and white photo, she stared haughtily down her ever-so-aristocratic nose. She loved to travel. She loved flowers. She loved dogs. She would likely have looked down that classist nose at my American accent and working class world, but there I stood, smitten, knowing the truth of things, that we were kindred, linked by our common passions and our need to explore them all through the written word.

Why Vita? Why there, when I was touring the medieval and Georgian worlds I love, when I was journeying to Scotland, which had whispered sweet nothings in my ear in the past (and would do so again)?

She wrote:

I am glad to find that I can still be swept by a sensation I cannot logically explain to others;

That I am still capable of an irrational passion,

I who had grown so ordered, rational,

I have established my contact with irrational humanity.

Why Vita?

That day wandering the gardens, I wanted to weep over a stand of red poppies as tall as my shoulder, blooming in silky splendor in the sunshine. I shot a dozen photos of one particular window, standing in the middle of everything, but it was in the tower where I tumbled, looking at her desk and the view of the gardens and the wall that said VITA in tiles. There, I could sense the spirit of the passionate, prickly, fierce woman who once lived there, wrote there.

Why Vita?

She was never the writer she wished to be. She lost her family home, a property she loved, to the patriarchal property laws of England. Although she created a satisfying partnership with a man who loved her all her life, she fell in love with women, over and over again. She was arrogantly aristocratic and judgmental. She was difficult and opinionated. There must be easier historical figures to get a crush on.

But we don't ask, do we? They simply arrive, and carry us away. It's part of the weird makeup of a writer. We just do this, fall in love with inappropriate people. Fall to minute, particular passions.

I spent the rest of my vacation reading a collection of her writings, and a small novel. She was not a particularly brilliant writer; certainly she was eclipsed by her most famous lover, Virginia Woolf. Her mind was sharp

and clear and witty, and she was gifted with a certain eye for detail, and certainly there is passion, but that little something that would have made her brilliant is missing. We don't remember her for her writing. We remember her for the splendiferous gardens she created (which, ironically, have kept her writings alive).

She knew it, too, I think. Her reach exceeded her grasp. And yet, writers write. So she wrote. She wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote. She wrote about everything she loved—her homes and flowers and the art and science of gardening. She wrote about her travels, and wrote letters back home to share what she'd seen. She wrote about dogs and love and the society she lived in. She wrote poems and essays. She wrote articles and diaries and wrote down her dreams.

I find inspiration in that dailiness, in the simple, stout-heartedness of it.

A decade or so ago, I fell in love with another set of writers and artists. They came to New Mexico in the 1910s and 1920s. Mabel Dodge Luhan led the charge, one that eventually included Georgia O'Keefe and DH Lawrence, among others. A wealthy New York socialite, Luhan was restless and driven, and wandered the world before she arrived in the sleepy, very old village of Taos nestled in its spectacular setting, and spied a Taos Indian she decided she would have as her own. (Never mind that he had a wife, and she a husband, never mind that Lujan is really spelled with a J—her Anglo friends would never pronounce it correctly, so she changed the spelling.) She was less romantic a figure than Vita, but I found myself fascinated by Mabel, too. What an undertaking it was to come to Taos in those days! And what did it take to eschew the entire established world you'd taken for granted in order to live a different life, one with an Indian husband, in a tiny Hispanic/Indian community that only boasted great light?

Because she did undertake the calling, and because she wanted to be surrounded by the artistic and creative friends she'd left behind, an entire community developed. (Can you imagine O'Keefe's work without the skulls and bones and adobe churches she painted there?) It was this, the community that emerged on the blue Taos plateau, in a century still new enough to be unmarked,

that captured my passion. What would it have been like to be one of those artists, I wondered? Leaving everything behind, all the markers of their privileged lives, the soft toadying, the luxury, for a place that could be as prickly and difficult as the cactus and the hard sun? An adventure, surely. A terror, too. Marriages and long partnerships didn't survive the move.

Did they do it for art? Not necessarily, though bigger works of art and literature came out of their travels, and going to Taos freed the best of Mabel Dodge Luhan, who was only a middling writer, but a brilliant facilitator of art in all its forms. But they were simply following their restless hearts where they led them, and their lives—and the bodies of work they left behind—were shaped by those choices.

I still feel a whisper of magic if I think of Luhan's Taos. Something about her, those times, the work they all did, gave me courage. I returned, over and over, to Taos, then into Chimayo and further, into Santa Fe, listening. When I drove the high road with a friend, I wondered what it had been like to be a woman writer or artist, untethered, on that road in 1920. With only the art itself to lead you, or rather your service to that art. I don't know that I found answers, precisely, but I found courage, and that amounts to the same thing. Mabel and Georgia and the others heartened me, gave me the courage to go where the work took me, to serve it, and my life without trying so hard to make it THIS or THAT. They were women of means and art, and they strode out bravely, and in that way, they were mentors to the fledgling writer emerging.

Vita Sackville-West was their contemporary. She even met Luhan (and in her titled British way, was not impressed) on her tour through America. She, too, was a brave and intriguing, and rather tortured character, certainly bigger than life with her adventures and love affairs. She was a very productive writer, a mother and an adventurer, and devoted friend.

She's a new mentor for a new stage of my life, partly for her travels and her gardens and even her imperiousness, which I find I quite like.

But it is the dailiness and breadth of her work that so inspires me at this stage of my life and career. In an age when we're encouraged to specialize, brand ourselves, I like discovering a writer who wrote everything, who shaped her world with these tools we all use. Words. Just words. All those essays and poems and novels and articles and journals and letters! How utterly, utterly wonderful, to spend a life writing and writing and writing like that.

Then at the end of a chapter or trip, to go into the garden and mull the positioning of roses and poppies, the drape of a vine over a wall; to admire the water with willow branches floating over the surface, and create something else entirely. How marvelous! I can't imagine

a more satisfying combination of legacies. To love a child and lovers and dogs and books and gardens and travel and do them all, day in and day out, until your time is finished.

At the end of my trip, I went back out almost immediately to teach at a conference at which the honored speaker—o most honored!—was Ray Bradbury. At the age of 14, I read *Dandelion Wine* compulsively, and like so many others, he is one of the writers who turned my head, made me long to make the written word my quest, and although I consider myself quite adept at these things now, I was stricken to almost paralyzing shyness in his company. I knew if I did not take the chance to speak to him that I'd curse myself forever, so I screwed up my courage and went over to his chair and bent down and babbled something about how much I loved his work and how much he'd inspired me. He smiled and touched my cheek and nodded and that was enough.

Later, he sat on a stage and exhorted the rapt room of four hundred to "follow your loves," and "beware your intellect," and my favorite: "write all the lousy stuff out of you." At the age of the 86, after a stroke, he's still writing every day, employing that dailiness, that ordinary writing practice that I so admire in Vita. Last week, he said, he wrote a short story, a poem, a criticism of the LA political system, and two essays.

What have you done this week? (What have I?)

Who are your mentors, living and dead? How have they shaped your beliefs, your career, your life? Maybe we all need little pictures of our mentors, and to remind us of the good that happens in the world when we're each true to our paths. What happens if I go to Taos? What happens if I fly to England and visit a garden? What happens if you listen to the girls when they say, "Oooh, go look at that person some more!"

Who are your mentors? Celebrate them. Write a letter of gratitude, or send an email, or if they are no longer living, write an unsent letter. I'm following my passion with Vita, to see where she takes me, what she has to show me. We are kindred.

And though it is cheeky to say it, Bradbury is my brother, my kindred, too, and maybe I need to write him a letter while I still can.

Barbara Samuel writes essays, columns, novels, poems no one will ever see, articles, and blog bits. Her current novel is Lady Luck's Map of Vegas, just released in paperback.



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