

NINK

December 2006
Vol. 17, No. 12

Using the Web for More than Googling Your Name

BY SHIRLEY JUMP

This may come as a surprise, but the internet is there for more than just playing online poker, googling your name, the good and bad things people have said about your latest release and obsessing about your Amazon ranking. It can also be a pretty effective marketing tool.

Now, depending on who you ask, internet marketing makes up either a very big or very small portion of book purchasing decisions. Either way, you can't ignore the fact that internet usage is growing by leaps and bounds, and that tomorrow's readers are more and more web-savvy and are using the internet to research their buying decisions on everything from popcorn to pop records. *Computer Industry Almanac* estimates there are more than 1.12 billion internet users in the world as of 2005. That's a lot of people on the web, without a doubt.

THE BASICS

Most experts agree that authors should start with a

website, an online newsletter, and maybe a blog or some kind of online reader interaction. These are relatively easy and inexpensive ways to maintain an online presence. The key, however, is to remain current. It doesn't help to stick up a website and not update it for six years. Readers will stop by once, twice, but won't come back again if your latest book cover is from 1998.

Toni Blake said she hadn't done a lot of online promo until the release of *Swept Away*, her first single title for the Avon Red line in September 2006. She created a website, investing the bulk of her budget in designing a professional, attractive site, and attached a sophisticated newsletter to the site as well as an ongoing contest. "I was [also] fortunate enough to be invited to do a lot of guest blogs, including one at Squawk Radio, plus I did a number of interviews at various romance sites."

Toni said networking helped her become part of Michelle Buonfiglio's Romance: B(u)y the Book nationally syndicated online column. In addition, she maintained ongoing, regular participation in an online readers' loop so that readers would get to know her. "I [also] made a point of post-

Continued on page 4 ▶

INSIDE: *President's Voice: Thanks for the Memories...2, Marketing: Writer as Entrepreneur...6, Treasure Hunt: Inside the Mind of the New Consumer...8, Something He's Been Meaning to Say...10, San Diego Conference Update...11, Crayon My Keyboard: What's Important...12, Bits...13, 16, Girls in the Basement: Calvin's Mother...14*

Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne*	Victoria Thompson
Janice Young Brooks*	Steven Womack
Jasmine Cresswell*	Barbara Keiler
Maggie Osborne*	Pat Rice
Marianne Shock*	Anne Holmberg
Linda Barlow	Jean Brashear
Georgia Bockoven	Vicki Lewis Thompson
Evan Maxwell	

* Founder

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

2006 Board of Directors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Copyright ©2006 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved.
No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in
any manner without written permission.

President's Voice

Thanks for the memories

They say that the older we get, the faster time seems to go, and that's certainly been my observation. When I was a little kid, if a friend couldn't come out to play for an hour, she might as well be gone for the whole summer. An hour seemed like an eternity then. Now, whole months go by in the blink of an eye. Wasn't I just writing my *first* President's column a few weeks ago? Though my year as Ninc President has gone quickly, it's been a great year that I'll remember fondly—well, mostly fondly—for the rest of my life. I wouldn't be able to say that if I hadn't had such a wonderful organization to work with, headed by an awesome board and assisted by fantastic committee chairmen and members. And now, I want to use the rest of my final column to thank some of those people individually.

Pat Roy and Pat McLaughlin both get Above and Beyond awards for the past year and more. Despite the enormous and unprecedented challenge of having our conference city decimated by Hurricane Katrina, Pat Roy persevered and put together what many people have lauded as the best Ninc conference ever. The amount of work that went on behind the scenes to bring that about was more than most of you will ever realize, which makes it that much more amazing and laudable that Pat Roy agreed to coordinate our 2007 conference as well—and is doing another stellar job. Because of the special challenges we faced after Katrina, Pat McLaughlin was brought into the Board loop a few months earlier than she should have been, which is why she also deserves this award. Not only is she acting as our Author Coalition representative for her two years of Board service, but she had a baptism by fire four months before her official term as President-Elect even began. Susan Gable gets a special thank-you as well, for agreeing to be our conference registrar yet again for San Diego, after doing a marvelous job in 2005 and 2006.

Deborah Gordon deserves a big "thanks" from all of us for the work she has put into streamlining the Treasurer's job over the past year and a half. She and Tonya Wilkerson, our new Central Coordinator, have worked tirelessly together to bring Ninc's business procedures into the 21st Century, something that will benefit all of us. In that, they've been helped by Craig Johnson, our webmaster, who has been doing a great job for years, but who this year has done even more for us, getting the last of the kinks out of our online conference registration, dues renewal and member database systems. He has also implemented all of the tireless Ginger Chambers' changes and additions to the Ninc website, which I hope all of you have been finding useful and informative.

Annette Carney is finishing up her second year as Newsletter Editor, a difficult and frequently thankless job, which she has handled with professionalism, enthusiasm, creativity, and grace. Thank you, Annette! I also want to thank Lorraine Heath, who served as Newsletter Editor in 2004 and who has agreed to reprise that role for 2007. I hope everyone will

let both Annette and Lorraine know how much you appreciate their willingness to give so much time and effort to the organization.

Thanks also to Linda Madl, our Secretary for the past two years, who has agreed to serve one more year, giving much needed and appreciated continuity to the Ninc Board. Linda has also spearheaded the creation of Ninc's archives at Kansas State University and continues to be our liaison there and with Tonya at Varney and Associates. Speaking of continuity, Pat Rice has been great as our Advisory Council representative, a job she's also agreed to keep for 2007. Meanwhile, Lillian Stewart Carl, our Membership Chair, has reached her mandatory limit of three years, so will be stepping down after doing a phenomenal job behind the scenes to make new members' entry into Ninc as smooth as possible. Holly Jacobs has agreed to take over as Membership Chair and Lillian is currently showing her the ropes. Thanks, Lillian and Holly!

I also want to extend my appreciation to Julie Leto

Klapka for serving as Elections Chair, to Joan Wolf for the work she's doing as head of our new Used Book Committee, to Laura Phillips as chair of the Outreach Committee, and to Stephanie Feagan for heading up this year's Audit Committee. More thanks go to those intrepid souls who will be serving on the 2007 Board: Laura Resnick as President Elect and Beverly Brandt as Treasurer. I hope they'll have as much fun working with Pat McLaughlin, Linda Madl, and Pat Rice as I've had. For this amazing incoming Board, we need to applaud the 2006 Nominating Committee, chaired by past President Vicki Lewis Thompson.

Finally, I'd like to thank the members of Novelists, Inc. for making this the best writers organization on the planet. I'm incredibly honored to have been trusted with the helm this past year, and I eagerly look forward to what Ninc will become in the future, under its stellar new leadership.

--Brenda Hiatt Barber :)

2007 Ninc Election Results....

The election results are final, and are as follows:

2007 Board:

President: Patricia McLaughlin
President-Elect: Laura Resnick
Secretary: Linda Madl
Treasurer: Beverly Brandt

2007 Nominating Committee:

Ken Casper
Dee Davis
Roz Fox
Toni Blake
Kayla Perrin
Gina Wilkins

In addition, Lorraine Heath has agreed to be the newsletter editor for 2007, and Pat Rice has agreed to remain as Advisory Council representative for another year.

Using the Web for More than Googling

Continued from page 1



ing and taking part in conversations on message boards associated with my publisher, where I know romance readers hang out.

"Results of all this?" Toni said. "Nothing definitive, but I can say that many people on the readers' loop, and some on the message boards and blogs, indicated that they were going to rush out and buy my book. Whether or not they actually do, I figure that makes anyone who reads their comments think people are buying the book and that maybe they should, too. And many folks on the readers' loop posted messages praising the book after reading it, and I think word-of-mouth is really the best publicity. A couple of the readers very kindly blogged about the book on their personal blogs."

Jenna Petersen/Jess Michaels has not only her two websites but also maintains The Passionate Pen. "I've run The Passionate Pen since 1999, which gave me a huge platform when I sold. I get over 200,000 hits per month. This was a huge potential readership that was cultivated over many years." She has a wide variety of visitors, and continually looks for ways to update and change her web efforts, to reflect the changes in her own web habits. She figures if she's looking for something new or different so are her visitors. "I really love the instant quality of the internet and the feeling you can give readers that they really 'know' you. It creates a very loyal readership."

Phoebe Conn had Novel Talk update and host her website for her first release for Leisure and has stuck with the company ever since. She finds the fans who visit her via the web are wildly enthusiastic. Though she's not sure how many books the site helps sell, "I don't believe we can be without a colorful website."

THE SEXY STUFF

Then there's the sexy stuff, which means the big bucks stuff. Podcasts. Video trailers. Flash animation. The fireworks of the internet, all wham-bam, wow. I admit to having a video on my own website, courtesy of Pizzazzy Productions, which is very cool and definitely gets readers talking. It's for my February 2007 book, so it'll be a while before I know if it spurred sales or not. It does, however, give readers a very visual indication of the book, and in a digital, visual age, I think that's a help.

Michele Albert said she's "seduced by the coolness" of these cutting-edge options and would love to give them a try, when budget allows. "I've also wondered if providing a freebie eBook download could draw in new readers. Everybody loves free stuff, so a freebie enticing readers to check out my books strikes me as practical. I haven't tried this yet because 1) I'm not sure what to write, and 2) a freebie eBook also strikes me as an open invitation to less scrupulous types to plunder at their leisure."

THE TIME FACTOR

The biggest problem most authors run into with web marketing is time. Time spent on the internet is time spent not writing. Time spent not writing is time spent not earning money. And where web results are so hard to measure (clicking on your Amazon ranking doesn't tell you anything, or at least that's what they tell me in Amazon-aholics Anonymous), it's difficult to know what the best balance of hours should be.

Michele Albert said she has decreased the amount of time she spends on web marketing. "My attempts appeared to result in providing perks for existing readers rather than gaining new readers." Right now, she concentrates mainly on a website, newsletter email list, and blog. She's also planning a separate site for a new series she's started. The website has had the best response and results.

An interesting balancing act for Toni Blake has been combining the two "selves" of her online gregarious self and the solitary writer self. "I had a little difficulty transitioning 'back into my shell' once I'd come out of it online. On one hand, I've found that I really enjoy communicating through some of these venues and talking with readers, but I now need to find the right balance of how much time I spend on that versus sinking into my work."

THE DRAWBACKS

The biggest drawbacks to the web? Spam. The psychos.

The one weapon we all have?

The Delete key.

GETTING PUBLISHERS ON THE BANDWAGON

And then there are the publishers. Not all of them have exactly...well, caught on to the whole web thing. Some have. But some have websites that are not exactly working for them—or for their authors.

Michele Albert said that while Simon & Schuster has been great about sending out email newsletters and building their message boards and online bookstores, there is room for improvement in other areas. She'd like to see them "show a little more love to their midlisters and newbie authors. I accept that it's cost-prohibitive to do much in the way of promotion for these kinds of authors in a bookstore, but that doesn't hold true at their own website. Every little bit helps—and while available space is finite in a brick-and-mortar bookstore, in virtual space there's theoretically room enough for everyone."

Jenna Petersen/Jess Michaels said "Avon has a pretty good site with individual author and book pages for each of us and our books. They are supportive of the AvonAuthors.com website and they use my efforts in their promotional package for me."

Toni Blake agreed. She said Avon has been very proactive on the Web and the Avon editors even have their own blog. The company is working hard to increase their online presence.

In the end, Toni Blake said it does come back to Google. Not us googling ourselves, but what happens when readers google us. A strong online presence does one thing: it creates the illusion of success. "Many people said to me—including a number of authors I respect—something like: 'Wow, you're doing great! I see your book everywhere!' I asked them a question or two, I understood that they meant they'd seen people talking about my book online—or they'd seen one of my blogs, or a book review.

"Again, this may not translate into book sales—who can say? But if you feel you're seeing a book 'everywhere,' you may be a lot more apt to buy it than a book you haven't seen everywhere, so overall, I consider my online promo—most all of it free—a success."

...and speaking of success, Shirley's latest release, Sugar and Spice, just hit both the NYT and USA Today best seller lists. Congratulations, Shirley!

Open to the Public: BISG's ISBN-13 Readiness Directory

As part of its ongoing facilitation of the transition to ISBN-13, the ISBN-13 Task Force has opened the ISBN-13 Readiness Directory to the public at:

http://www.bisg.org/isbn-13/survey/isbn_directory.html

The ISBN-13 section of the BISG website is averaging more than 30,000 hits a month. More than 200 people have downloaded the ISBN-13 webinar [an online seminar], and 150 companies are now participating in the ISBN-13 Readiness Directory. The single most popular page within the ISBN-13 section averages 6,000 hits a month. Visit <http://www.bisg.org/isbn-13/index.html> to view ISBN-13 for Dummies® for yourself.

MARKETING: *The Writer as Entrepreneur*

BY BARRY EISLER

These thoughts originally appeared on MJ Rose's Buzz, Balls & Hype blog in August 2005. Barry's blog, The Heart of the Matter, can be read on his website: www.barryeisler.com. Ed.

All writers think of what they do as an art. Smart writers understand that writing is also a business. Really smart writers see themselves also as entrepreneurs.

As a veteran of both a Silicon Valley technology law firm and a Valley start-up, I've known people who labored for years late at night and on weekends to create a new product while holding down a full-time day job; who, when the prototype was ready, found a venture capitalist to help make the prototype commercial-grade, validate the product by attaching the venture capitalist's imprimatur to it, and introduce the entrepreneur to prospective customers; who then started a real company and learned to run it, creating new products and selling them to new customers in new markets.

You can learn a lot by applying this classic technology entre-

preneur model to what writers do. The writer labors alone for years creating the first cut of a manuscript (product). When the manuscript is ready, the writer finds an agent (venture capitalist), who invests not money, but time in helping the writer re-write and otherwise tune up the manuscript. When the manuscript is more ready, the agent introduces the author to publishers (customers), with the agent's imprimatur helping to get the publishers to take notice. The publisher buys the book; the author quits his day job, and thereafter devotes himself to his new business—writing new books (creating new products) to sell to his original publisher (the original customer) and to new ones (foreign sales and subsidiary rights).

In technology, the closest analogue to the writer's business model is the so-called fabless semiconductor company. Big semiconductor companies like Intel run multi-billion dollar fabrication plants to manufacture their chips. But there is also a smaller breed of chip company that doesn't run the fabs, and instead only designs chips and then licenses the design to the Intels of the world for subsequent manufacture, distribution, and sale. These fabless companies create nothing

but intangible intellectual property (copyright, patent, trademark, trade secret). Their business is licensing that intangible property to someone else. Likewise the writer: the product you sell to your publisher isn't really a book, but rather the underlying copyright in that book. The publisher then prints the books, markets them, and sells them.

From this model, several important points emerge:

First, creation of the product (writing the book) is only the first step. You are now running a company (albeit a sole proprietorship), and your company is responsible not only for creating the product, but also for marketing, branding, and selling it. Yes, other people will be involved in these efforts (see below), but the ultimate consequences of success or failure will be yours alone. Run your company accordingly.

Second, although in various ways your and your editor's interests are aligned (you both make more money from a better book), and although your editor might also become your friend, the most fundamental aspect of the writer/editor relationship is that of salesman/customer. Never lose sight of the fact that your editor is your customer. Before any-

thing else can happen, your editor must decide whether to buy, and how much to pay for, the product (copyright in a book) that you are trying to sell him. Do you feel that your manuscript is weak, but that once you show it to your editor, she'll help you make it better? Maybe she will. But, in any other industry, would you show your customer a product that you didn't feel was ready? Bear in mind, "ready" doesn't mean perfect; it means good enough to accomplish your objective, which in this case is a sizeable advance; the editor's enthusiasm sufficient to infect the publishing house (no corporate customer makes a buying decision alone, and you have to remember that not just your editor, but the entire publishing house, is your customer); the customer's ongoing impression that you are professional and can be trusted to turn in nothing but similarly "ready" products in the future.

It bears mentioning here that, unlike your editor, who is your customer, your agent is more like your partner. Your editor is buying something from you. When he does, you and your agent will make money the same way (by dividing revenues, commonly 85/15). This financial dynamic puts you and your agent on the same side of the negotiating table. But even here, as in all partnerships, the principals will stay together only so long as they each believe it is in their interests to do so. Accordingly, the points in the paragraph above bear thinking about in relation to your agent, as well.

Third, strictly speaking, readers are not your customers. They are not even your publisher's customers. They might not even be your publisher's customer's customers: Putnam sells to Ingram,

who sells to Barnes & Noble, who (finally) sells to a reader. There are many layers of distribution, marketing, and sales between you and what is known in the software business as the end-user—the reader. Obviously, this doesn't mean the reader is unimportant to you; the reader is still your indirect customer, and if readers stop buying, so will everyone else in the customer chain. But it does mean that your marketing efforts should be directed, to the extent possible, at all levels of the customer chain. Almost all writers know they should market to readers; author websites are a good example of this type of effort. But how many writers recognize, too, that they need to market to their publishers? Does Dell Computer want to know that Intel is investing in chip R&D? Of course it wants to, and Intel markets not just to end-users (computer customers), but to the Dells of the world, too. Similarly, you should keep your publisher apprised of your own R&D efforts: conferences you attend, connections you make, ads you take out, media coverage, etc. When your customer sees you investing in yourself, your customer will be confident that she ought to invest in you, too.

It all comes down to this: as an entrepreneur, you have a unusual degree of control over your business future. That is to say, you are unusually responsible for that future. Some people find this degree of responsibility intimidating, and this is one reason entrepreneurs are rare. But if you believe in yourself and you know what you're doing, what could be more comforting than knowing that you are in charge of the course of events? All that's needed is the right roadmap, and I hope the points above will provide a good start. ▲

Suggested Further Reading:

- Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*
- Bill Davidow, *Marketing High Technology*
- Roger Dawson, *Secrets of Power Negotiating* (audio course, available from Nightingale Conant)
- Guy Kawasaki, *Rules for Revolutionaries* (and all of Kawasaki's other books)
- Brian Tracy, *The Psychology of Selling* (audio course, available from Nightingale Conant, also available as a book)

Treasure Hunt: Inside the Mind of the New Consumer

by Michael J. Silverstein with John Butman • Portfolio Hardcover, 2006

REVIEW BY PAT MCLINN

The most important lesson to learn from this book is what Michael J. Silverstein, senior vice president of The Boston Consulting Group, terms the “bifurcation of the consumer goods market.”

Consumers are increasingly buying at both ends of the price spectrum, by paying a premium (trading up) for items they particularly care about and scrimping (trading down) on items they don’t care as much about and/or on items they feel can meet their needs/wants at a less expensive level.

The trading up market has grown 15% a year for the three years before *Treasure Hunt’s* publication. (Silverstein is also the co-author of *Trading Up*; he recaps the basics of *Trading Up* in *Treasure Hunt*.) To draw consumers, premium-priced must be high quality and match the consumers’ individual value calculus (more on that later).

The trading down market is the most massive, but with ferocious competition and basically no buyer loyalty. The consumer expects basic low-cost goods that still deliver reliability and good value.

And this trend toward up and down is expected to last at least another decade.

Few consumers buy all up, or all down. Instead, individual consumers are mixing and matching up and down depending on the category of products.

Where consumers are not buying anywhere near as much as they used to is in the middle, resulting in “death in the middle for the average middle-market producer.”

If you’re a mid-list author your heart might have just sunk to your toes. Or—more likely—you muttered, “So tell me something I don’t know.”

He does say, that, while the middle market is shrinking it remains—for now—the biggest piece of the pie.

Alas, Silverstein does not have automatic solutions for producers. He does say the options in response to

this market bifurcation are: Go for the premium trading-up market, go for the trading-down discount market, span the poles or hold the middle. Which pretty much covers the spectrum, without much nitty-gritty advice about which one might be best.

However, he does offer a few insights authors (and all of publishing) might consider.

Consuming has become a skill, a pastime and a duty to get the best value. Consuming has become “a treasure hunt” aiming to find the perfect value every time.

In the past, there was at least the impression that demographics and income could predict a consumer would buy in a certain way. Not any more. Silverstein emphasizes that the choices consumers make about where they will trade up and where they will trade down are highly individual, based on personal priorities and tradeoffs. They “confound traditional demographic and psychographic categories” and are “delightfully unpredictable.”

Companies that succeed understand the ever-changing value calculus of the consumer.

How to understand these unpredictable consumers? Silverstein is dismissive of standard focus groups and marketing surveys. He’s much more supportive of ongoing conversations with consumers and—especially—shopping with and experiencing the product with the consumer. He points out that if you’re selling fast-food burgers, it’s essential to do eat-alongs with consumers so you know what’s important to a mother who’s grabbing lunch with two squabbling toddlers in the backseat and a list of errands a yard long.

Easier said than done with reading, I know. How can you do a read-along? I’m mulling that. (If you have ideas, let me know.) On the other hand, on-going conversations with book-buyers—and shopping with them—are do-able. Harder for individual authors (the book-buyer could feel obligated to buy your book—not a Bad Thing, but it skews the consumer’s input).

What you’re trying to connect with is the consumer’s

value calculus—insight into where they trade up and where they trade down and why. Those choices are generally based on how they assess (usually unconsciously) how each purchase ranks on what Silverstein calls “the ladder of differences.” This ladder consists of the technical, functional and emotional benefits of an item.

A genuine technical improvement in an item produces functional improvement, which in turn gives the consumer emotional benefits. For these, consumers will pay a premium—trade up. Middle-market consumers will distort their spending to purchase something they feel offers quality, features and accommodations that fit their needs. That means that to earn a spot in each consumer’s budget each item competes not only against other items in its category, but against items in every category.

So a potential book-buyer who sees higher technical, functional and emotional benefits from a premium body lotion than a book, will bypass the book.

In other words, books are not competing only with each other for buyers’ dollars, or even with other entertainment opportunities. Books are competing with everything consumers spend money on for every single dollar.

To make it more difficult for those of us writing for adult audiences, Silverstein cites 57 percent of adult consumers as saying they don’t spend money on themselves until the needs and wants of their families are met. And this is especially prevalent among women—the biggest book-buyers. ▲

Some thoughts from *Treasure Hunt* for publishers:

Have mass-market paperbacks priced themselves out of trading-down’s low-cost, good-value arena and into the dreaded middle? Judging from *Treasure Hunt*, Michael J. Silverstein would say yes. What does he say to companies who find themselves in that “deadly middle”?

- ◆ Escape the middle. Look to move up or down or both. If you chose to play in the middle, don’t have it be your only area.
- ◆ Drive costs down and quality up.
- ◆ Look at your offering from the POV of an outsider. Get at the truths beneath the accepted assumptions.
- ◆ Listen, listen, listen. Understand the nuances of consumer dissatisfactions and track the root causes—not just what they initially say their dissatisfaction is. Don’t be satisfied with the surface. Go for a personal connection.
- ◆ Focus on your customers who are the “cravers,” those who tell their friends about a product they love.

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:

Karen Robards, Louisville KY

New Members:

Elaine Isaak, Lee, NH
Kelley St. John, Gadsden, AL
Judith Stanton (Fiona Carr), Pittsboro, NC

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

Something He's Been Meaning to Say for Years...

BY GARRISON KEILLOR

Tribune Media Services

Okay, let me say this once and get it off my chest and never mention it again. I have had it with writers who talk about how painful and harrowing and exhausting and ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE it is for them to put words on paper and how they pace a hole in the carpet, anguish writ large on their marshmallow faces, and feel lucky to have written an entire sentence or two by the end of the day.

It's the purest form of arrogance: Lest you don't notice what a brilliant artist I am, let me tell you how I agonize over my work. To which I say: Get a job. Try teaching eighth-grade English, five classes a day, 35 kids in a class, from September to June, and then tell us about suffering.

The fact of the matter is that the people who struggle most with writing are drunks. They get hammered at night and in the morning their heads are full of pain and adverbs. Writing is hard for them, but so would golf be, or planting alfalfa, or assembling parts in a factory.

The biggest whiners are the writers who get prizes and fellowships for writing stuff that's painful to read, and so they accumulate long resumes and few readers and wind up teaching in universities where they inflict their gloomy pretensions on the young. Writers who write for a living don't complain about the difficulty of it. It does nothing for the reader to know you went through 14 drafts of a book, so why mention it?

The truth, young people, is that writing is no more difficult than building a house, and the only good reason to complain is to discourage younger and more talented writers from climbing on the gravy train and pushing you off.

Young people are pessimistic enough these days without their elders complaining about things. Shut up. Life is pretty good when you grow up. You own your own car, you go where you like, and you sing along with the radio or talk to yourself or chat on your cell phone. You pull into the drive-up window and order the Oreo Blizzard. What's not to like?

One day you get lucky and find someone who's willing to pay you to

do something you do well or can fake, and on this you can build a life. You marry someone loving and sensible who makes you laugh, and you beget children, and go through the poop and puke and snot years, and somewhere around the age of 5 or 6, your kids start to fascinate you. There is nobody like them, except perhaps you. You would run into a burning building for them, and at the same time they're the cause of exquisite worry and consternation. At the age of 12, they look at you as if to say *Your replacement has arrived.*

Meanwhile, you march forward and sample the pleasures of life. You read history and learn to grill fish in beer batter and find comfortable shoes. You go to Rome. You go to Montana. You come to love baseball and old jazz and the art of conversation. You admit to yourself that you don't care for Walt Whitman or Proust or Henry James, and you forgive yourself for that and pick up Elmore Leonard and J.F. Powers. You discover the pleasure of discarding stuff. You find a hairstyle that suits you. You go back to Montana.

Eventually you cross the line into your forties, the mortgage years. And the fifties, when you stand weeping at graduations and wed-

dings, and then, in the blink of an eye, come your sixties, and now you're on Easy Street. People who used to ignore you now treat you with reverence. There is great silence when you natter and pontificate, and people ask the secret of your success. You have become eminent. Inside you feel mischievous and jokey, but other people see you as a laureate, so you learn to harrumph.

Clarity is hard. Honesty can be hard. Comedy is always chancy, but then so is profundity. Sometimes one winds up as the other. Illness is, of course, to be avoided, and also megamalls and meetings involving vice presidents. But writing is not painful, no more so than a round of golf. Nobody was harmed in the course of writing this

column. That is all I have to say at this time. Thank you.

Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" can be heard Saturday nights on public radio stations across the country.

(c) 2006 by Garrison Keillor. All rights reserved. Distributed by Tribune Media Services, INC.



San Diego ~ 2007

March 15, 16, & 17 —
The US GRANT Hotel

*Attend the NINC Conference
in San Diego this March,
2007 and discover the power
of "NO."*

NO tedious sessions on how to format your manuscript.

NO wide-eyed wanabees grilling you about how to get an agent.

NO heartrending pleas on how they can sell their manuscript so they can feed their children.

NO persistent strangers offering you the opportunity to write down their story for a split of the profits.

Instead, get a laid-back, professional attitude, meet old friends, make some new ones.

From negotiating skills and strategies passed on by the head of the Author's Guild legal department to the down and dirty of the business over drinks with kindred spirits and the chance to laugh and let your hair down in the acting for writers class, a Ninc conference is like no other conference around.

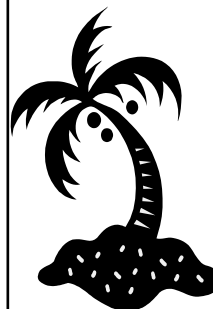
So when your sweet darlings ask what you want for the holidays, tell them you would love an airline ticket to San Diego, a night at the

US GRANT, a chance to mingle with kindred spirits and talk about what's important.

Please join us in San Diego next March. Register online now at www.ninc.com.

See you in San Diego,

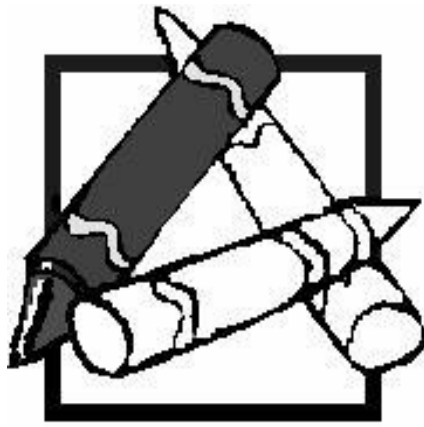
*Pat Roy, Pat McLinn and
the entire Conference Committee*



**Registration
Fee
\$325**

The registration form is available online or within your September issue of *NINK*.

**Crayon
on my**



**Key-
board**

What's Important?

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

I recently read an article in which the author talked about her 10-10-10 rule for making decisions. Whenever she is faced with the need to make a decision which seems impossible, she asks herself the following three questions: What will be the impact of my choice 10 minutes from now? 10 months from now? 10 years from now? While I can see the benefits of this approach, most of my daily decisions aren't going to have much impact 10 months from now, never mind 10 years from now.

For example, one of the Little Realities loves to play hockey. The team manager has set up a fundraising activity for this coming Saturday. I have a busy weekend already, so do I want to add one more thing to it? On the other hand, I do want to support the team. Ten months from now, I'll be the only one who remembers whether I helped with this fundraiser. Even the Little Reality who is my reason for being there won't remember.

So how do I go about choosing between two equal options? After ending the summer feeling ragged and worn down as a result of allowing myself to get too involved with good causes, I've realized the need for "activity triage." A single question has emerged as my key to decision-making: What is most important to me?

Of course meeting my family's needs is at the top of my list of "Important Things." I've had to come back, though, to the epiphany that struck me when the Little Realities were babies. If I don't meet my own needs, I can't meet theirs.

So in meeting my own needs, what's important? Solitude, rest, time to play with my scrapbooking and my quilting, time spent with friends.

Which brings me back to the question of this weekend. What's most important to me—playing "good mom" on the hockey team, or preserving some quiet time for myself? The decision suddenly becomes easy.

This is also working for me as I work to rejuvenate my writing career. I have a proposal out making the rounds of

publishers. I'm working on another series proposal. The overachiever voice in my head tells me unless I'm pounding the keyboard for hours every day, I'm not going to realize my publishing dreams. I have nothing against hard work. I enjoy getting so deep into a project that I lose track of time. But do I want publication so badly that I'll give up enjoying life to get it? Nope. When I do get the contract I'm longing for, I'll have a deadline to adhere to, and I'll probably have to work some ten-hour days to make it happen. But for now, I don't have that pressure. I meet my writing goal for the day, and then I do something that makes me feel happy to be alive.

Another thing that's important to me is hearing about the successes of my writer friends, even those I know only by email. Every writer's loop I'm on seems to be bogging down with the bad news these days, perhaps as a reflection of what we're feeling about life in general. Political, economic, and environmental uncertainties are taking their toll on all of us. So I seek out the happy news, the new contract that's been signed, the cover that's actually really good, the nice review. I'm ecstatic when I hear about a struggling writer who has finally had a breakthrough. I'm also delighted when the continuously published friend gets another multi-book contract. Her continuing success helps me remember that the good stuff can happen to any of us. It fuels my hope for another day or week or month of waiting for good news from my agent.

"What's Important?" has also had an impact in the physical side of my life. I've often read the opinions of health experts who say if we exercise for general health reasons, we're more likely to stick with it than if we do it just to lose weight. Accordingly, I told myself that my exercise was for health—I'd be healthier if I could lose 30 pounds. I'd have spurts of dedicated exercise, but much longer spells of couch-potato-ing.

Then came the dreaded annual physical. Not only did I have to endure, as every woman must, the various indignities associated therewith, but I also had to listen to my doctor

tell me my cholesterol count isn't good. He said the good news is that my particular problem responds best to increased exercise, and moderate diet changes.

That's when I discovered how right the experts are. What's important to me is being healthy for the long haul, knowing I have a reasonable certainty of seeing the Little Realities become adults and enjoying retirement with my Hero. When it's my health at stake, rather than just my appearance, I find it much easier to get my body moving. I have a two-mile walking route that takes me along the shore of the lake, and through a beautiful wooded area. It also takes me along two major traffic arteries in my neighborhood, but those are endurable because of the lake shore and wooded areas. Two side benefits have occurred—I feel better both mentally and emotionally after each walk, and my jeans are getting baggy. Yet the walk occurs each day because it's related to something Really

Important, rather than just Nice To Have.

By the time this column makes it into print, the holiday season will have descended up on us. Rather than feeling like I'm on a treadmill with no off switch, I'm already asking myself what's most important to me in this time of year. Christmas cards, both giving and receiving them, are one of my primary delights. So this year, instead of letting this job get sidelined until the last minute, I'm setting aside a day early on, before the plethora of obligations overwhelms me, to indulge myself in this pleasure.

Speaking of the holidays, I'd like to wish all my fellow Ninc-ers the best of the season, and good health, lots of contracts, and saintly editors for the coming year.

Janelle Clare Schneider has developed a list of Things That Are Important, which includes a really good latte to start the morning, and a nap in a sunbeam to start the afternoon.

Bits'n'Pieces

On the Move

Ben Sevier left St. Martin's to be senior editor at Touchstone Fireside.

Harlequin Stays Down

With a strong Canadian dollar, Harlequin's third quarter report is down 13%. Sales are down C\$3.7 million in the quarter and earnings are off C\$1.2 million. Overseas sales are up, but North American retail and direct sales remain down. To cut costs, 40 jobs were eliminated, primarily in the North American region.

New Standard for Digital Publishing

The International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) released a new technical standard last month. This is to help facilitate digital content creation, and distribution as well as usage. IDPF also announced a new standard for packaging a digital publication. This standard covers publication content, metadata (descriptors), signatures, encryption, rights and other information into one standard file. The Open eBook Publication Structure Container Format (OCF), allows publishers to package a single publication into one file. It simplifies delivery and usage for publishers, and resellers. Consumers can exchange unencrypted eBooks and other digital publication between reading systems supporting the new standard. OCF files are identified by the file extension ".epub". For details, go to <http://www.idpf.org/ocf/ocf1.0>

How to Create Better Sales Numbers for Literary Fiction

Jumpstart is a new program started by the Literary Ventures Fund. Booksellers have the option of big discounts on titles promoted by LVF with a non-returnable agreement to prevent returns. According to Zachary Marcus, a strategic director for LVF, bookstores "limit their buy of a good book to one or two copies, when they want more. This reality limits the break-through potential for good books."

"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes

Stay in Touch with Ninc online.

Visit the website at www.ninc.com. Join the never-ending e-conversation—for members only—by joining Ninclink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at BrendaHB@aol.com

Controlling Your Listserve Preferences through Email:

Subscribe	NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Unsubscribe	NINCLINK-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com
Switch to Digest	NINCLINK-digest@yahoogroups.com
Switch to Individual Mail	NINCLINK-normal@yahoogroups.com
No-Mail	NINCLINK-nomail@yahoogroups.com



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Calvin's Mother

When I was a girl, I wanted to save the world. It started young. My seven year old self was urging adults to pick up litter on walks through the city. In the fifth grade, I passed around a notebook with questions in it like, "do you think we should be in Vietnam?" At twelve, I planned to go to the reservation to teach, and by college, I was going to become a foreign correspondent so I could show the world what was really going on, genuinely believing they would listen. And of course, always, I wanted to save all the cats in the world.

What has this to do with writing? Well, I ended up writing novels instead of trying to save the world. I'm not writing serious investigative pieces for the *Village Voice* or traipsing through Iraq or Africa, dodging car bombs or helping kids to read. I'm not even writing toward *destined to live long after me*, or *tries to change the world*, like Harriet Beecher Stowe or Upton Sinclair. I'm just writing commercial fiction, writing for money, writing happy endings.

A few weeks ago, I read "Publishing While Black," a blog by Gwyneth Bolton (<http://blogginginblack.com/2006/10/20/publishing-while-black/>), which in part explored the practice some bookstores indulge of segregating books by African American authors in a special section. There is quite a debate about

this in the AA writing community — some writers deeply want it, others do not.

But for me, the electric moment in reading her blog was her mention of the poet Nikki Giovanni. In an instant, I was transported to a day when I was about eighteen or nineteen, when I found a box of books in the basement of a house I was renting. Amazing books. Electrifying.

Radical and intense and upsetting. I read everything in the box, *Soledad Brothers* and Angela Davis, poetry by Nikki Giovanni and the man who would become my great passion for a time: James Baldwin; Julius Lester's *Revolutionary Notes*, which I had for years until it finally fell to pieces of crumbling yellow leaves on the floor of my old office on my last move. I have kept one book, *American Negro Poetry*, published in 1963 (edited by Arna Bontemps.) I fell in love with Georgia Douglas Johnson and Paul Laurence Dunbar and Richard Wright.

Now, it's true that it didn't take a lot to get my crusader instincts riled up, but it's also true that I was an intelligent and hungry reader. I thought I'd read or knew about pretty much every important writer in the canon of 20th Century American literature. What I felt, over and over, as I read, was, "Why didn't I read this in school?" And maybe, in the '70s, it was too soon to read *Soledad Brother* in school, but certainly not *American Negro Poetry*. It made me angry. I felt cheated and hood-

winked, as if some vast portion of the truth had been hidden from me. Which, of course, it had.

The house I rented was in a neighborhood going to apartments and light industrial uses. I was working the breakfast shift at a local diner, bored with life and my choices, trying to write short stories and not getting very far. There was a tiny strip of plantable earth that ran between my driveway and the house, and I sowed it with ordinary flower seeds like bachelor buttons and zinnias and a dozen varieties of snapdragons. The flowers attracted two little boys, Calvin and Jewel, who lived in the apartments right behind me. Calvin was nine years old, with big dark eyes that never missed a thing. He liked digging with me in the dirt, pulling weeds, and would do a lot of chores for the cookies I baked. He liked sitting with me on the back porch steps in the evening while I smoked cigarettes. In the fall I was starting college at the local community college, and Calvin would go back to school, too.

Calvin was my first experience with a lost boy (though certainly not the last), though it took awhile for me to realize that he was lost. He was always well-tended, and although I only had one short encounter with his mother, she seemed ordinary. I never had reason to suspect there was anything amiss in his world. He was just lonely in the way of boys who are too bright for their peers, with that vast, wide ranging ambition of geeky children: he loved astronomy and botany and cooking science.

As the summer passed, he sometimes would eye the spare bedroom in my house and say, "I could live there, couldn't I?" And I would just smile. He would smile, too, and shrug.

School started. I didn't see Calvin for a couple of weeks, and finally, his brother was outside playing one afternoon and told me Calvin had run away.

I didn't understand what he meant at first. Run away? At nine? Why would he do that?

He shrugged. "They put him in a foster home."

A month later, my landlord put the house up for sale, realizing he could sell it to a business and make some money. I had to move to an apartment, and I broke up with my boyfriend and I left town to go to university, where I studied journalism and women's studies and made friends with Arab students from Kuwait and Libya, and a girl from my town who was just as mad as I was about the whole mess of everything. I studied with a truly eccentric African American instructor who illuminated an entire canon of black American writers, and I planned to go abroad and write about the people of the world.

But I didn't. I fell in love and got married and somehow had a baby and somehow remembered what I really wanted was to write novels.

I never saw Calvin again. He lives in my memory as a beautiful black child, nine years old, with a perfect nimbus of nutmeg hair that glittered in the sunlight and mischievous eyes and a checkered button up shirt. If I think of that box of books, those radical texts that shook up my world view so completely, it's always Calvin's face I see first, with the big new teeth in front, and his little grin. Books and life get mixed up like that, the books we read, the books we write—they're all threaded with the life we were living while they passed through our hands.

I wonder sometimes, what happened to him. Not often, but every now and then. His chances were not great. I like to think that he landed somewhere great and found a teacher who loved him who encouraged him to apply for scholarships. I like to think his mother and he got back together and they moved back to her people in Alabama and he became a science teacher and married a pretty woman down the street. Or maybe he went into the Navy and some officer saw his talent and put him in OTC. It's not that likely, I know. But it wasn't likely that the girl who was planting bachelor buttons and working the diner actually ended up writing novels, either, and it happened.

Because of those books I found, which set me out on a path I didn't know I was going to take. Because they probed and poked and awakened some song in my head, some dream that was worth pursuing. Books do that.

The person I think about now is Calvin's mother. I didn't know much about her. Once she saw me waiting for the bus and gave me a ride to school. She was pretty and tired and not very talkative. The school was far away and it was really nice of her to drive me so far.

I think I knew her family was far away, in the South somewhere. She didn't have any family in the area. She worked the graveyard shift at a local manufacturing plant. I think now, as a mother, how tired she must have been all the time. How grim those apartments were. She took good care of those children. They were exquisitely well cared for, always perfectly neat. They were smart and open-hearted.

But something went wrong. For her. For Calvin. It was probably exhaustion. If I could go back to that girl—me pulling up weeds in the driveway, I would take some flowers to that exhausted, lonely mother. I would invite her for dinner.

When I pull up that memory of myself at eighteen, pulling that neglected box out of a forgotten corner in my spidery basement, I cue the mental music as that girl lifts out the first book, opening the cover to see what's



The Girls in the Basement . . .

▶ inside. From the distance of decades, I can see how my life shifted in a thousand ways, in that exact instant: I opened a book and began to read.

And my life changed.

You know, I'm not Toni Morrison, writing books that will change the world. I'm not a literary lion, or a crusader. My books are happier than that—and heaven knows that happiness, like flowers and beauty, are rare enough we ought to treasure it.

My writing will not change *society*, but if I'm true to the work, I can change a life. A little bit. Maybe sometimes a lot. I can write for Calvin's mother, to give her a break, a moment of peace, a flower of quiet and beauty in a world that has enough challenges in it. As Paul Laurence Dunbar said:

"A minute to smile and an hour to weep in...and that is life." Not such a small thing to help provide that minute of smiling for some weary soul.

Barbara Samuel has been writing professionally for eighteen years. Her most recent books are Juliet's Law and Lady Luck's Map of Vegas. Visit her blog at awritertfoot.com

Bits'n'Pieces

KiminiTRU 2007

Harlequin's new YA line, especially targeting African American readers, debuts Feb. 2007. Linda Gill is the managing editor, and Evette Portee the series editor. The line will cover the expected topics—high school and relationships (friends, family and boys). Launch titles are: *Indigo Summer* by Monica McKayhan and *Fast Life* by Cassandra Carter and continue with one book a month from other authors. Porter cites ages 14 to 19 as the readership of age-appropriate books covering stories about all walks of life—suburban and urban.

Dreamin' in Texas in 2008

Dreamin' 2008, sponsored by the Dallas Area Romance Authors is looking for workshop proposals. The conference is April 4-5, 2008. Speakers will have coach air fare paid (or gas allowance for those driving), as well as 2 nights lodging, and comped registration fee. There is a major book signing Friday evening, and workshops all day on Saturday. Details: [http://www.dallasromanceauthors.com/conferences/Workshop proposal submission deadline: January 15, 2007.](http://www.dallasromanceauthors.com/conferences/Workshop%20proposal%20submission%20deadline)

Lorraine Heath, Dreamin' 2008 Conference Coordinator

Imprint Trend or One Publisher's Idiosyncrasy?

As of April 1, 2007 Thomas Nelson books will only have the publisher's name and logo, no other divisions. All 18 imprints will be phased out. Executive V-P and Chief Publishing Officer, Tami Heim, calls this on "an inside-out way of looking at the market." This model, called One Company Initiative, is looking at how people really shop—author, message or topic, according to Nelson's research.

NiNK a publication of Novelists, Inc.

An Organization for Writers of Popular Fiction
P.O. Box 2037
Manhattan KS 66505

Publishing Services by Huseby Agency, Ltd.

FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FARGO ND
PERMIT #281