

N I N K

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True Vows — The Real Deal

BY OLIVIA RUPPRECHT

“The last time opportunity knocked, I was out back taking out the garbage” – Ziggy

Every now and then we get lucky. Opportunity knocks and we’re in the right place at the right time to carpe the hell out of the diem.

Indeed, our lives can change in a minute, an hour, a day. In less than a year, a baby can be conceived and born. Now there is also concrete evidence that in that same span of time a respected publisher can take an out-of-the-box concept hatched between an editor and a writer, let them run with it, bring in some amazing talent, and launch not only a new line/series of books, but create a brand-spanking-new subgenre of romantic fiction while they’re at it.

Well, kind of fiction. But not entirely. And it’s not exactly nonfiction or a memoir, either. It’s....

We did have to figure that out after Michele Matrisciani, Editorial Director for HCI Books, came up with the inspired idea of marrying romance to what HCI had a proven track record at doing best: true-life stories. It was imperative, however, to have the books shelved with fiction even if the stories were based on real people and actual events — which meant (a) finding stories that naturally lent themselves to being novelized and (b) finding skilled novelists with the ability to pull it off.

It’s exhilarating and yet a little scary to be given free rein creatively with complete financial backing to make something great happen. Because with such an amazing opportunity comes the weighty responsibility to *make something great happen*.

Michele explained how we went about tackling that feat in an industry guest blog she wrote for NINC last April, which can be found at this link for anyone who missed it: <http://www.ninc.com/blog/index.php/archives/meet-michele-matrisciani>. For the sake of convenience, here’s an excerpt that covers the nuts-and-bolts of what went on behind the scenes once HCI gave Michele the green light to hire me as her Gal Friday...er, Series Developer:

A full-fledged team, we quickly needed to scout the best true love stories and meet with potential couples, secure their interest, find the right novelists for each story, create an infrastructure and editorial process, research packaging concepts, give a name to the subgenre (we settled on Reality-based Romance™, aka RB Romance™), build a website, draw up two different types of contracts (one for novelists and one for the couples), and start a pre-publication promotion, all in less than a year’s time. Of course the HCI machine, comprised of talented web marketers, book designers, and publicists had a lot to do with getting the job done.

I am pleased to say HCI did all the above and more, and is now ready to launch the first three True Vows books into the world in October 2010...

It turned out to be September 2010, because CVS

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For members without Internet access,
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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. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

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Recommend membership to your colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online at

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

Refer members at ninc.com. Go to Members Only,
"Member Services" and click
"Refer a New Member to NINC."

Take NINC brochures to conferences.
Email Pari Taichert with your mailing address and
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NINC Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

The Blank Page

We've all faced it.

The blank page on a computer screen. The blank sheet of paper. The blank notepad or legal pad, or whatever you normally use to begin writing your opus.

The Blank Page. Worse, even than the Blue Screen of Death. (If you're a PC user, you recognize the term; if you're a Mac user, stop laughing.) Because with it comes, for many of us, a flood of self-doubt and something between anxiety and sheer terror.

That first sentence tends to be hard, doesn't it? Whether you're an outliner and have a framework or even detailed notes already on paper or you're a "pantser" without the faintest idea of what story you want to tell this time, that first sentence is a killer.

Maybe you just put your fingers on the keys and start typing. Or maybe you really do know what that first sentence needs to be and you're just trying to make it perfect. Maybe you write it and erase it, or parts of it, again and again. Or maybe you just get it out of your head and push onward, hoping that, in the end, instinct or practice or storytelling ability got it right, and you started your story in the right place and in the right way.

So the screen or the sheet of paper isn't blank anymore. And you have the beginning of a story. And maybe, just maybe, your anxiety level drops a bit, or the terror diminishes, or the self-doubt eases.

Or maybe not.

But, usually, a deadline or a mortgage or a payment due to the orthodontist or Uncle Sam, or just the story itself pushes us onward, doubt or no doubt. We keep writing, some of us feeling our way blindly and others following a careful path that no doubt contains unexpected detours here and there.

The point I'm making here — and many famous writers have made it far better — is that many, if not most of us, question our abilities at every turn. No matter how long we've been at this, no matter how much success we've attained in the form of money or accolades or sheer mind-boggling numbers of readers or the sincere respect of our peers, we tend to doubt ourselves.

Now, mind you, I know a handful of writers who truly do not doubt themselves or their storytelling and writing abilities.

I envy them.

You can call it ego, or a simple understanding of their abilities or just the easy self-confidence of the outgoing personality. Whatever. They have it.

Me, not so much. I doubt myself all during the writing process. Always have and, I assume, always will. Because if I haven't overcome that particular anxiety by now, after 30 years and more than 70 books, well ...

The Blank Page always scares me. I wouldn't call it terror, but there's a fair amount of fear there. Fear that, this time, I won't be able to do it. Fear that whatever I do produce will suck and ruin my career. Fear that even if I get the beginning right, the middle will collapse or the end fall apart. Worse, fear that when I get to the end, I won't know how to tie up all the threads of the story in a sensible, coherent, entertaining way.

Which would be okay, if it was something I felt only when facing that first Blank Page. But, nooooo.

With me, it's a series of hurdles. That first Blank Page. The ending of every chapter that has to make the reader want to read the next one. The middle, where some kind of climax or realization or twist needs to hit the reader unexpectedly. The second half, where threads are being gathered together and both my readers and my characters begin to understand what the hell's going on. And, finally, the ending, where the bad guy is exposed and/or defeated, ▶

President's Voice

and the plot threads weave together so that everything makes sense, and the good guys triumph — hopefully with a final surprise or twist or shock for the reader.

And the writer, usually, but never mind that now.

I've run this race and jumped these hurdles with every single book. For 30 years. Sometimes the race was faster or shorter, or the hurdles lower, and other times it felt like I was running a marathon with a few mountains rearing up right in the middle of my path.

And the killer is that I never know which way it's going to be when I sit down and start filling that first Blank Page with words. I never know if it's going to be fairly easy and move quickly, or be impossibly hard and crawl along at a snail's pace.

But there are certainties. I'm always certain when I first sit down that I'll never be able to write this book. Certain halfway through that I'll never be able to finish it. And when I do finish it, I'm always certain I'll never be able to write another.

Been that way, book after book, for 30 years.

You'd think by now I'd either be a lot more certain that I know what I'm doing and will most certainly be able to do my job, or at least that I'd be less fearful about it. Especially because, once the story is out of my head and on paper, I'm completely confident in discussing the work with agent and editor. Completely able to argue for why I did this or that. And always aware and wary of any suggested change that will change too much and affect either my voice or the story I needed to tell.

Weird, huh?

I still find that Blank Page intimidating. And the only real certainty I've managed to reach after all these years is that I've never *not* been able to start that story, or continue that story, or finish that story — and be proud of it.

Somehow or other, no matter what it was I was writing, I managed to pull it off. Always. So I hold on to that. It doesn't make me any less nervous, but at least it's something. Something that virtually always causes me to murmur, at the end of the story, "I did it. Fooled them all again."

They think I really know what I'm doing.

Maybe I'll think so, too, one day.

In the meantime, there's another Blank Page to face ...

— Kay Hooper



NINC is exploring the possibility of publishing back issues of the newsletter on the public page of the NINC website.

If you have contributed to our newsletter in the past and do *not* wish your material used in this way, please contact the *Nink* Editor.

Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

.Borders' new strategy – less books

Border Group has a report that sales are down 11.5% in the first half of the year, so the company has announced a new plan to focus on non-books products. There will be the Area-e digital book section (sales at Borders.com were up over 50%) and more bargain books along with the Build-a-Bear workshop partnering and improving the customer's experience. The experience will include more space in the stores and lots of signage so it will be easier to find books. (With fewer books, they might be easier to find even without the signs.) Other non-book materials include: educational toys and games for the kids, puzzles for adults and more paper products. It will be interesting to see what happens to the profit/loss percentages by January 2011.

True Vows

wanted to put the books into their stores if we agreed they could have them in September — and you better believe we busted butt to make that happen.

But we wouldn't be as ready as we are to launch the series if it weren't for the inaugural novelists involved, who helped give birth to HCI's signature subgenre of RB Romance™ and pioneered it with creative force, enthusiasm, and professionalism — Judith Arnold, Alison Kent, and Julie Leto. Novelists, Inc. members all.

As are the other novelists we signed up for the spring 2011 season once HCI decided *True Vows* wasn't just a three-book experiment, this baby had legs.

A quick aside as to why the series was dubbed *True Vows*. Initially it was just *Vows*, but the *New York Times* has a *Vows* section in their Sunday edition, and their lawyers got in touch. I suppose it is somewhat flattering to snag the attention of the *New York Times*, but nothing good ever came from a pissing match between legal teams, and HCI's money was better spent on promotion than squabbling over a branding device; hence, *True Vows*.

The Times people weren't the only ones to pay attention once we went public in *Publisher's Weekly* about our little venture into the romance market. *Macleans Canada* did an article, which was noticed by a lead reporter from *The Independent UK*, and his widely circulated piece caught the eye of the BBC and other media outlets that Kim Weiss, HCI's PR guru, had to turn away because it was too soon to advertise a product we didn't yet have to sell since the books were still in the process of being written.

Judith (aka Barbara Keiler), Julie, and Alison (aka Mica Stone) didn't have a lot of time to write their books. In fact, their turnaround time was nothing short of miraculous, particularly considering that no one had a template for creating a hybrid piece of work. And not only were they crafting novels from the body of information each received, they were being tapped for input on cover art, marketing, even the logo. Barbara actually came up with the visual of linked wedding rings for the O in *Vows*.

HCI's art director, Larissa Hines Henoch, asked for and got every point of view we collectively had regarding cover art. We needed a signature “look” and as it turns out, authors aren't the only ones who have to deal with rejection. Larissa had tons of experience with nonfiction, but very little opportunity to work on fiction covers, Fabio or otherwise. We asked her to go back to the drawing board several times and not once did she complain or seem frustrated. Instead she found it to be an exhilarating challenge and wasn't going to stop until she nailed it.

Our confidence that Larissa had achieved that outcome was confirmed by important resources including Sue Grimshaw, romance buyer for Borders bookstores, who took an early interest in us and has been terrifically supportive throughout. In fact we've been incredibly fortunate to have received an abundance of good will from the publishing community in general and the romance community in particular. We're thrilled to have virtuoso authors approaching us now, wanting a chance to spread their creative wings and explore this new thing called RB Romance™, which HCI had the foresight to trademark. However, one of the things unique to the series is pairing authors with the sort of stories they have a natural affinity for — which can present quite a challenge to synergize.

I'm pleased to say that the synergy was there for at least four additional books, as of this writing. Next spring we're button-popping proud to offer *True Vows* titles from Cindi Myers, HelenKay Dimon, Tara Taylor Quinn, and Jill Barnett.

So much can happen in a year. Less than a year ago, more like nine months, *True Vows* was an idea in its infancy and wasn't amply formed to really exist. A year from now...who knows? Publishing is a crapshoot at best, and no amount of talent or money or effort expended can ensure success, especially when it comes to something new to a world that doesn't always embrace change.

But every now and then you get lucky. Opportunity knocks and you're there at the right place, the right time, and you just throw that door open wide. You're the recipient of an amazing bouquet of flowers, an embarrassment of riches! Maybe it's fate. Maybe it's not. But for whatever reason...

You're not out back taking out the garbage.

Olivia Rupprecht, aka Mallory Rush, was once upon a time a bestselling romance novelist who became a ghostwriter of memoir and nonfiction for major publishers. Other hats in her publishing wardrobe include Nink Newsletter Editor (2003-2004) and Series Developer for True Vows, the first RB Romance™ series from HCI Books.

Turbulent Times for Dorchester

BY MEGAN FRAMPTON

Dorchester Publishing is now moving to a digital business model, publishing its books in e-format, and offering them through online sales outlets. According to Senior Editor Chris Keeslar, “The current plan is for Dorchester to continue through 2010 by e-publishing the list that was originally scheduled. ALL of these books will then be released in print trade form in 2011, slotted in the months that best allow us to take advantage of our new partnership with the sales

staff at Ingram Publishing Services, getting the best distribution in all regular trade channels. In 2011, slowly our trade program will adjust to match the electronic releases of our books.”

Founded in 1971, Dorchester is the oldest independent publisher. Despite its small size, Dorchester has had a remarkable track record, discovering and first publishing such authors as Christine Feehan, Victoria Alexander and Katie MacAlister, among others. In conference appearances, editor Chris Keeslar has said that Dorchester’s smaller size has actually enabled it to take risks in terms of genres and historical periods — something that currently established e-publishers are able to do as well.

So — what does this change in business strategy mean for authors currently published by Dorchester? The best answer is — no one knows for sure. Dorchester’s website, although updated with its switch to e-book publishing, continues to list books for sale at mass market prices (it should at this point be noted that Dorchester no longer has a dedicated web person). It continues to list Hard Case Crime books for sale, although Hard Case’s owner Charles Ardai has taken the line to Subterranean, saying its mass market pulp format doesn’t translate to e-book and trade (although in an ironic twist, Subterranean is releasing the first Hard Case Crime book in hardcover). For a digital publisher, having an inaccurate or outdated website is, if not inexcusable, extremely poor business practice. Also, at least one Dorchester author reports that her local indie bookseller’s manager was instructed by Cowley Distribution to “strip all their Dorchester books and do the returns NOW while they think they can get their money.” Scary.

What is certain is that Dorchester authors are in limbo, most are waiting on payment from Dorchester, and beyond reducing printing costs by moving to a print-on-demand and delayed print format, Dorchester’s e-book plan doesn’t seem as much like a strategy for the future as an attempt to save itself

Dorchester Timeline, 2010:

January:

Dorchester sells both frontlist and backlist titles of some of its major authors to Avon. Authors include titles from Victoria Alexander, Christine Feehan, Marjorie M. Liu, Katie MacAlister, and CL Wilson.

July:

Because of continually late payments to its authors, Dorchester is disinvited to RWA’s National Conference, and is not allowed to do editor appointments, spotlights or workshops. Editors Leah Hultenschmidt and Chris Keeslar attend the Conference nonetheless in unofficial capacities.

August:

Dorchester announces it will move from mass-market to trade paperback format, but those books will be delayed 6-8 months. All titles will be available in e-book format as originally scheduled.

Editors Leah Hultenschmidt and Don D’Auria are let go, leaving only editor Chris Keeslar on its editorial staff.

President John Prebich says Dorchester is outsourcing a number of functions and will be announcing several new partnerships in the near future.

Dorchester’s Hard Case Crime line moves to Subterranean Press, and its first title — a Lawrence Block double reissue — will be released in hardcover in early 2011.

September:

Dorchester’s previously scheduled books will be coming out in e-book, with a trade paperback format coming 6-8 months later. Dorchester is offering print-on-demand (POD) books through Ingram Publishing.

from its current financial woes (woes definitely felt throughout the publishing industry, regardless of house size).

On the other hand, Dorchester might be on to something — if they can make it through what is sure to be a bumpy transition. The *Wall Street Journal* says Dorchester's move is likely only the first such move among publishers. Readers, especially romance readers, have embraced digital technology, and older readers like e-books because they can adjust the font. One analyst quoted by the *Journal* predicts that digital books will be 20% to 25% of unit sales by the end of 2012, up from around 8% today. Balanced against the 25% drop in sales Dorchester suffered last year, going digital might be the only — if slim — chance for the company to survive.

Angela James, Executive Editor of Harlequin's digital-only imprint, Carina Press, agrees that more and more traditional publishers will be heading towards the digital market, "experimenting with digital-first publishing to supplement print programs and to stay current in the industry, not fall further behind."

Another good thing for Dorchester — albeit not for its authors — is that the royalty rate on previously contracted books is low, so if Dorchester retains rights, it can make the e-book available and keep most of the resulting sales money. Keeslar comments, "There is no current plan to renegotiate contracts already signed [but] on future contracted books, a new standard rate will be offered/applied." Dorchester hopes to begin acquiring again in early 2011.

James warns, "Digitally published authors will be looking at some of the same challenges facing traditionally published authors (how to attract readership, marketing, branding, etc.) while also struggling with new questions in areas of promotion, marketing and contract negotiation (advances, royalty percentages, "out-of-print," etc.) They also face the challenge of entering a market that, while not new, is very much in the growing-pains stage of development and experimentation. These growing pains make things that authors and readers have long taken for granted a new challenge — buying a book for someone as a gift, sharing a book that you've loved with someone you think should read it, and often most puzzling of all — how to know you're buying the right book for your device. These are challenges that print authors have never had to help their readership overcome, but are challenges that digitally published authors must be aware of and are actually, sometimes, so challenging that the digitally published author must work that much harder to instill in readers a desire for their book, via marketing and promotional efforts."

For now, most authors are going to have to wait and see what happens.

Megan Frampton writes historical, urban fantasy and contemporary romance. She can be found online at <http://meganframpton.com>.

Business Briefs

Life after Dorchester

Leah Hultenschmidt steps in as senior editor for Sourcebooks' romance imprint, Casablanca, a quick transition after being released from Dorchester Publishing. Based in Sourcebook's New York office, Hultenschmidt will acquire YA and mass market books. Casablanca produces approximately 100 titles annually.

BookExpo America (BEA) and American Library Association (ALA) Together, Kinda

Executives of Reed Exhibitions, parent company of BEA, are in discussion with ALA representatives about the possibility of taking over ALA's annual convention in June and midwinter meeting in January. According to PW, if a deal is reached, "Reed is believed to favor locating BEA and the ALA annual meeting in 2012 in Chicago, creating in effect two shows under one roof."

"First-sale Doctrine" in court

A friend of the court brief was submitted to the Supreme Court by the Associations of American Publishers (AAP) in early Sept. to uphold the Ninth Circuit court ruling excluding books in the Costco Wholesale Corp v. Omega, S.A. case. The court held that books are not involved in this case that concerns a dispute on the importation of wristwatches. A Supreme Court decision that would include the "first sale doctrine" could legalize importing books into the U.S. that had been produced for foreign markets and not intended for sale in the U.S.

A Chick By Any Other Name: Does Chick Lit Need to be Re-Branded?

Horror. Mystery. Science Fiction. Romance. Chick lit. Among all these other genre names, “chick lit” stands out. It is clever, breezy and evocative of a certain happy fluffiness. But does the very name “chick lit” keep readers and critics from taking a book seriously? Authors Alisa Kwitney and Robyn Harding answer ten questions about chick lit and why they love the genre but not the name.

Q: When you began writing, did you set out to write a chick lit novel?

Alisa Kwitney: Back in 1991, when my first novel was published, I don’t think the term had been coined. That was a long time ago, back before everyone had cell phones and surfed the internet, back when Mel Gibson was still insanely attractive but not openly insane. These days, a coming-of-age novel about a college freshman, which deals with issues of food, weight and romance would be called chick lit. Back then, it was called “a comedy of manners” and was actually reviewed in the *Sunday New York Times*.

Robyn Harding: When I wrote my first novel, *The Journal of Mortifying Moments*, I didn’t think about genre. I didn’t think about how my book would be marketed, where it would ultimately reside in the book store, or what color the cover would be. I just wanted to tell a story with heart and humor; a story that would be fun to read and fun to write.

Q: So when did you first discover that what you were writing was considered chick lit?

RH: In 2003, I sent my manuscript off to every fiction publisher in Canada (I’m Canadian), and within a few short months, I received rejection letters from all of them. According to these soul-destroying letters, Canadian publishers weren’t interested in *commercial* fiction. But when I submitted my manuscript in the US and the UK, I was immediately met with more interest. On the same day, I had calls from an editor in London and an agent in New York. They were both excited about my manuscript because “chick lit” was such a hot genre.

AK: My second novel, *The Dominant Blonde*, was written as a cross between a romance and a scuba diving caper. My natural tone tends toward dark humor, so when I was describing it, I called it “Carl Hiaasen on estrogen.” But when I submitted it, Avon said they thought the book could fit into their new trade paperback program. Somewhere along the line, I discovered that my book was now part of the chick lit flock.

Q: How did you feel about being labeled chick lit?

AK: I didn’t mind at all. I was a comic book editor, and I’ve always been a big fan of genre — I read romance, science fiction, horror, fantasy and mystery, as well as literary fiction. And my father was a science fiction author back when SF was considered pulpy trash. So I was thrilled to discover that my book happened to be part of a new genre that was both popular and clever.

RH: I was excited to be a part of this hot new trend. (Actually, I was so excited to be published, that they could have labeled my book “dog’s vomit” and I would have been okay with it.)

Q: Was there a downside to having your books published as chick lit?

RH: Around the time *The Journal of Mortifying Moments* hit the shelves with its pink cover (2004), I noticed that there were a lot of other pink books out there. Perhaps it was this saturation that led to something of a chick lit backlash. Suddenly, the term had become an insult. The genre was sniffed at by critics and journalists who dismissed it as mind numbing fluff. I soon realized that books with a female protagonist, a sense of humor, and a pink cover were somewhat marginalized.

AK: When chick lit was booming, there were a lot of lookalike covers on the shelves, and critics complained that the books all marched in downy yellow lockstep. In a cartoon from an English humor magazine, a picture of a Xerox

machine was subtitled, “Chick lit Author’s Writing Tool.”

But the truth was, there has always been a lot of variety in what gets called chick lit. The humor in chick lit could be clever and light or dark and raw. In some cases, of course, it could be facile and glib. Some of the books were better than others. Some of the books were wonderful. And, as in any genre, some entries were embarrassingly bad.

Most of the critics didn’t make any distinctions, because most of them didn’t bother to actually open the books and read them. In her 2007 *New York Times* column, Maureen Dowd wrote, “I took home three dozen of the working women romances. They can lull you into a hypnotic state with their simple life lessons — one heroine emulated Doris Day, another Audrey Hepburn, one was the spitting image of Carolyn Bessette, another Charlize Theron — but they’re a long way from Becky Sharp and Elizabeth Bennet. They’re all chick and no lit.”

In that column, Dowd claimed to have read the novels, but I saw no sentence that suggested that she had done more than glance at the covers and skim the back cover copy. If she had submitted that essay to a fifth grade teacher, it would have come back with a scrawled red pencil comment: Give specific examples.

Q: Publishing trends come and go, but the backlash against chick lit was particularly strong. Do you have any theories as to why so many critics and authors, many of them women, publicly disparage the genre?

RH: One of the best examples of this “dispute” is the battle of the anthologies. In 2006, an anthology was released called *This Is Not Chick Lit, Original Stories by America’s Best Women Writers*. In the foreword, ironically entitled, “Why Chick Lit Matters,” editor Elizabeth Merrick writes that it’s okay to occasionally escape into “cotton candy entertainment.” She even admitted to (gasp) sporadically reading celebrity gossip magazines when she’s trying to pass time on the treadmill. But she also said that chick lit is formulaic, full of stock characters, “numbs the senses,” and “reduces the complexity of the human experience.” Worse still, the genre was taking readers away from female writers of literary fiction who were more intelligent, thought provoking, and challenging, and who, obviously, were contributing short stories to her anthology.

In response, another anthology was released. This one was entitled: *This Is Chick Lit* (to be read with heavy emphasis on the *Is*, I’m sure). The editor of this book, Lauren Baratz-Logsted admitted that her anthology was “born out of anger.” Wasn’t it a shame, she wrote, that women were judging each other on what they were reading and what they were writing (though this sort of criticism dates back to 1848 when Charlotte Brontë insulted Jane Austen’s work)? In Baratz-Logsted’s opinion, reading was about entertainment, about escaping into a world with new friends, new relationships, and new problems to overcome — all of which chick lit books provide. She also said that to her, there are only two kinds of books: good, well-written stories and bad, poorly-written stories.

One of the most vocal critics of the chick lit genre (and contributor to *This Is Not Chick Lit*) has to be Curtis Sittenfeld (author of *Prep, American Wife...*). In her *New York Times* review of Melissa Banks’ new novel *The Wonder Spot*, Sittenfeld said that calling a female writer’s novel chick lit is catty, not unlike calling her a *slut*.

One theory I’ve heard to explain the antagonism between female commercial writers (chicks) and literary writers (lits) is this: literary writers envy commercial writers their sales, while commercial writers envy literary writers’ reviews and accolades.

AK: For years, women’s traditional art forms, such as quilting, were thought to be somehow lesser than male forms, such as crafting furniture. Traditionally female occupations, such as nursing, were undervalued. Most early women novelists were derided as “scribblers,” and I think it’s been subconsciously ingrained in us that traditionally male pastimes are somehow more acceptable than traditionally female ones. Otherwise, why would violent thrillers receive less derision than romantic and domestic novels?

Q: Is there a good definition of chick lit? What is a chick lit novel?

AK: In the beginning of the ’90s, most novels labeled “chick lit” employed a first person, humorous voice and a heroine in her 20s or 30s who worked in publishing, and contained tales of domestic and romantic misadventure.

(As an aside, this need not damn the whole genre as derivative pap. The classic detective novel employs a hard-boiled, first person voice and a hero in his 30s who works as a private eye, and contains tales of domestic and romantic misadventure, along with some crime and violence. Classic horror and science fiction novels tend to have elements in common, as well.)

In any case, chick lit’s coming-of-age and first-job-in-the-big-city novels were quickly joined by novels about women grappling with marriages, childbearing, midlife crises, betrayal, and divorce. Sometimes the books were dubbed “hen lit,” when the heroines were older; male writers’ domestic and romantic satires were termed “lad lit.” But, by and large, after 1998 or so, chick lit became a blanket term for almost any book written by a woman, provided it

contained elements of humor and domestic drama.

RH: I agree that initially, chick lit described novels about a young woman trying to come into her own; find Mr. Right, the perfect job, and lose ten pounds. But I've written about murder, betrayal, divorce, midlife crises, and the struggle to raise a family. But I do so with a sense of humor. And I'm a woman. To many people, that makes me a chick lit author.

Q: So when is chick lit not chick lit?

AK: At this point, so many different kinds of books are called "chick lit" that I feel like everything is chick lit, and nothing is. I read an article about Eastern European and Indian and Scandinavian chick lit and how many of these novels deal with issues of rape and oppression. I have to say, there is something that feels very odd about calling a book "chick lit" if it deals with serious subjects in a serious manner — even if the author also uses humor.

RH: Ultimately, it's the publisher who determines whether a book falls into the chick lit category. They choose the cover, the marketing, and the placement in the bookstore. My latest book, *Chronicles of a Midlife Crisis* is split between two narrators: one male, one female. And yet, it has a bra on the cover. (I'm not complaining. It's a very nice bra.)

Q: Why do so many chick lit writers seem obsessed with Jane Austen?

AK: I think it's tokenism. Jane Austen is the token domestic/romantic author who is granted literary status. But while Austen is wonderful, she is not the only sign of intelligent life in the romantic universe. There are other good writers out there who are concerned with romance and marriage but are not facile or shallow.

RH: I think a lot of us are obsessed with Dorothy Parker: her wit and intelligence.

AK: I love Dorothy Parker! Her ghost appears in the book I'm writing.

Q: Do male "lad lit" writers get treated differently than female "chick lit" writers?

AK: Absolutely. I've heard it said that if you want to write chick lit or romance and become a best-seller, write it under a man's name and have somebody die. And even though I loved a certain current bestseller, that axiom did occur to me when I read it.

RH: Nick Hornby is probably the quintessential "lad lit" writer, but based on his critical and commercial success, the label isn't looked down on like its feminine counterpart. With women's light fiction, we've got labels up the yin yang: Mommy lit, hen lit, knit lit, Christian lit, bride lit, widow lit, ethnic lit, and mystery chick lit. It's the same with films. A female-driven comedy is a "chick flick." A male driven comedy is... *a comedy*. It makes me wonder why women are subject to so many labels when men are not.

Q: Does Chick Lit need to be rebranded?

AK: I don't know. Sometimes I think we should embrace the "chick lit" label with a rebel "Dixie Chicks" spirit, and wear the downy yellow mantle with pride. At other times I think that the problem with labels is that they are, by definition, limiting. Interestingly enough, in the UK, where chick lit never went out of fashion the way it did in the US, a lot of reviewers no longer use the term.

At the end of the day, though, I did just decide to join a chick lit-themed Facebook group because I knew I would meet kindred spirits.

RH: I know that these labels come down to marketing, which I totally get. What I don't get are the sneers, the snubs, and the condescension. Why is women's humor so devalued? And what's wrong with wanting to be uplifted by a book or a film, to see the comedy in even the most dramatic situations? But when a reader e-mails me and says I made her laugh, or cry, or she felt like I understood what she's going through, I don't care about being labeled. I'm just happy to be a writer.

This interview was conducted as part of Fictionista Workshop's series "Exploring Chicklit." To find out more, visit <http://Fictionistaworkshop.com>

Multi-published author and former Vertigo/DC Comics editor, Alisa Kwitney, is currently working on a novel about a woman who is haunted by the ghost of her dead ex-boyfriend. You can find out more at <http://www.alisakwitney.com> or visit her on Facebook.

*Robyn Harding lives in Vancouver, BC and is the author of six novels. Her latest US release is *Chronicles of a Midlife Crisis*, published by Berkley Books. <http://www.robynharding.com>*

Women's Fiction vs. Romance — What's the Difference?

BY SHARON DEVITA

A few months ago, a writer contacted me because an agent she'd queried for her new women's fiction proposal had rejected it with a terse note stating: "This is a romance, *not* women's fiction." Which was, needless to say, news to her. She wanted to know what the heck the difference *was* between women's fiction and romance.

A lot of writers do.

In this precarious, unstable publishing market — the worst I've ever seen in 30 years in this business — it's *imperative* that you know *exactly what you're writing*. Genre is *everything* right now. And labeling a manuscript something it's not is a surefire way to get a rejection without even getting your manuscript read.

Tell an editor you have a great single title contemporary romance and, believe it or not, some houses will no longer even *look* at contemporaries, proclaiming contemporaries *dead*. (Trust me on this one, it's from personal experience!)

Tell the same editor you have a YA, angst-filled, vampire/werewolf series and your reception is likely to be a lot different.

So now, more than ever, *knowing your market and your audience* is absolutely key — as it's always been. Make sure you *know your market and your audience before you write one word!*

So what's the difference between women's fiction and a romance?

Everything!

Everyone reading this probably knows what a romance is: the story of a man and a woman who want, — need — to be together, but are separated by internal and external conflicts that must be resolved in a logical fashion by the end of the book. (For the record, I'm just addressing traditional male-female romances here).

At its essence, a romance is a love story. The story of two people falling in love and overcoming whatever obstacles are in their way in order to find their own version of happily-ever-after.

Now, before you look down your nose at "romances," think of some of the great romance writers whose books and characters have lived on in our minds long after we've read the last page. The late Kathleen Woodiwiss comes to mind, as does LaVyrle Spencer, and . . . Shakespeare. Yes, Shakespeare, who was truly the first "romance writer." Who doesn't remember Romeo and Juliet? The essence of Romeo and Juliet was about a male and a female who wanted — needed — to be together, but are held back by internal and external conflicts that must be resolved in a logical fashion by the end of the book. (Okay, death may not seem "logical" in this day and age; but "back in the day," so to speak, it was.) And that at its basic is what a romance is.

Romances can be told from the heroine's point of view, or the hero's (think Nicholas Sparks, who'd make a lot less money if anyone dared to call his books "romances," instead of "love stories." Women write "romances," and apparently men write "love stories." The difference? The number of zeros on the checks!)

Whose point of view are you going to tell your romance in? Or are you going to use multiple points of view? Both are allowed in a romance depending on what house you're writing for, and you should know what house you're targeting *before* you start writing — remember the "know your audience" rule? If you don't know your audience, you're not going to know what an editor wants and expects.

Category romances (Harlequin and Silhouette) are different from single title romances. Category romances are regularly scheduled romances that fit very specific guidelines of the publisher and come out on a monthly basis. When a reader picks up a *Silhouette Desire* or a *Harlequin Intrigue*, they know *exactly* what to expect because of the publisher's strict writing guidelines which generally include plot, viewpoint, and length guidelines.

Single titles are usually longer romances that are not written to any specific publishers guidelines and are not released on any regularly scheduled timetable, except as the publisher sees fit.

Do not confuse single title romances with women's fiction. They are two entirely separate animals.

While a romance is the story of a man and women falling in love, and the obstacles/conflicts they must overcome to be together, women's fiction *does not have to have a romance in it*. It *can*, and usually does, have a romance, but it's not the essence of the story, nor is it what the story is truly about. ▶

Women's fiction is about a *woman's journey*, or *several women's journeys*, it is generally *not* about a romance — *unless the romance is secondary to the woman's journey or part of the woman's journey, but it's not the main focus of your story. That's the major difference between a romance and women's fiction.*

Now, before you start packing a bag for your heroine's journey, think about the journeys all women go through in life. Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor, once said: "A woman's life can really be a succession of lives, each revolving around *some emotionally compelling situation or challenge, and each marked off by some intense experience.*"

Think carefully about that. Think about your life today. Is it the same as it was ten years ago? Twenty years ago? I'm betting it's not. So what's changed? How did you get from there to here? Your emotional growth, the changes you've gone through in life — or *how you got from there to here is your journey.* No one stays the same from year to year. Things happen. Life happens. Shit happens. A *woman's journey* is the very essence of women's fiction. And the detailed retelling of that journey *always* includes both change and emotional growth, which give women's fiction its complexity and depth.

Example: Let's say at 26 you're newly married, wildly in love with your wonderful husband, have a fabulous career you love, and are expecting your first child. You have your life all planned out, and it's all going to be just purr-fect.

But, there's an old saying, if you want to see God's sense of humor, make plans. Nothing is more true in life. No matter what our personal plans, we can't control everything that happens to us. We simply can't, and that's a gold mine for women's fiction.

Life at its basic is about choice and change. Some things we have a choice about, some things we don't. If your husband comes home one night and announces he's in love with his secretary and wants a divorce, you didn't have much choice in that decision, did you? Nor will you have much choice in the changes your life is about to undergo. You're about to embark on another journey, a journey that will cause pain, change, and growth, as well as *unforeseen consequences you have no choice in.* Think of *change as a consequence of choice* — whether a voluntary or involuntary choice.

But what if *you make the choice* to finally divorce your lying, cheating spouse? That's a choice that *you've voluntarily made* and hopefully you've looked at and weighed all the possible consequences. But, again this choice will present change, change that you might not fully be aware of, even if the choice was yours. That choice and change will start a new life journey for you.

Let's take a look back at our fictional heroine ten years later at 36. Her purr-fect life has taken a harsh detour. She's now a divorced single mom struggling to just pay the bills. She's just been fired from a job she hated, but desperately needed, and has just found out she has breast cancer. Her life's not so perfect now, is it? Did she plan all of this? Of course not.

So how did all of this happen? And more importantly, *why*, and *what effect* did all of this have on this woman? How did she get from there to here? That's her journey.

All of the changes in this woman's life have contributed to her emotional growth and have changed her in some way, or many ways. How has her outlook on life changed? Her view of the world? Her view of her self and her world? *That's her journey.*

As Wallis Simpson said "A women's life can really be *a succession of lives, each revolving around some emotionally compelling situation or challenge, and each marked off by some intense experience.*" Would you say this woman's life has revolved around some emotionally compelling situations? Absolutely. Divorce. Single motherhood. Unemployment. Financial problems. Health problems. Any one of these would be considered emotionally compelling and have the ability to cause drastic changes in someone. Put them all together and you have a lollapalooza of emotional angst as well as a gold mine for plotting your women's fiction and your heroine's journey. *How she got from here to there is the essence of women's fiction.* In simplest terms: the story of a woman's journey is all about the emotional growth, depth, and the changes a woman must go through and face as she copes with life.

Now, not all women's fiction is doom and gloom. Some of it is lighthearted and funny. Take the movie *It's Complicated* with Meryl Streep, Alec Baldwin, and Steve Martin. Meryl is the focus of the movie. She's a single mom of three grown kids, owns a successful bakery, but after 20 years of marriage her husband, Alec Baldwin, cheats on her and leaves her for some 20-something-year-old twit. Familiar story, right? Well, this is all just backstory. It's not her journey, at least not the one we're retelling, not yet, anyway.

When the movie opens, our heroine is still trying to cope with life alone after the brutal breakup of her 20-year marriage. Her ex has moved on, remarried, and is trying to have another kid. So why can't she?

Because she doesn't know how to be a "me" after 20 years of being "we." She feels like a fish out of water. She loves her kids, her career, and is quite successful, but her life still isn't "right." At least she doesn't feel it's right.

For years she wanted to expand her house, especially her kitchen, and now she finally decides to just take the plunge and do it, which marks the beginning of a new journey. She's a single, self-supporting woman, entitled to make her own decisions. This is her house and she's going to damn well do what she wants for a change. And she's wanted

to expand her kitchen for years, and now, she finally gathers the courage and *makes the choice* to just do it. She hires an architect, Steve Martin, who becomes *part of her new journey*. He is also the romantic interest, but remember, the romance is not the essence of this story or what the story is about. It's about *her journey to find the "right" place for herself in this new single life of hers*.

When her ex becomes unhappy at home with his new chickie, he starts longing for the settled, comfortable life he and Meryl once had. When he starts coming around again, treating Meryl like, well like the old days, she begins to believe that this is what she's wanted all along. Maybe if she goes back to her old life and her cheating husband, she'll be happy finally and "feel right" again.

Wrong.

They begin an affair, and Meryl suddenly becomes "the other woman," a role she's not comfortable in, especially because wife number two is still trying to get preggers. When her ex announces he's made a mistake, has *left* his new wife and wants to remarry *her*, Meryl panics and has to finally take a good, hard look at herself and her life. Today. And she suddenly realizes taking this jerk back is *not* what she really wants. She thought she did, but now she realizes she doesn't want to go backward, she wants to move forward (more growth and change). She finally and properly mourns the end of her once happy marriage (this plays a big part in her growth and change and her journey), which finally allows her to move forward with her life to a place that *does* make her happy and finally "feels right." And she finally realizes that her life and her happiness no longer depend on a man. Something she truly hadn't realized until now (change and more growth).

She discovers that after 20 years of marriage, she *likes* living alone, likes not having to worry about someone else, likes not having to cater her life and schedule to someone else's. She finally begins to understand that her happiness is *dependent on her, not on a man or a relationship* (more growth). And even though she is dating her architect, Steve Martin, and enjoys his company, she knows now a man or a marriage is not what she wants or needs. She finally discovers that she's truly happy with her life just as it is.

Was this an easy journey? Of course not, emotionally it was brutal and difficult, but I don't recall anyone promising life would be easy. And if they did, I missed it. Again, life is about choice and change. And the choices, whether voluntary or involuntary, and the changes those choices provoke are the essence of a women's journey and, of course, women's fiction.

Now, let me caution you. Choose the journey you want to write about carefully. It must be compelling, and it must be a universal situation that all women can relate to. Yes, that immediately brings up images of old, clichéd plots. But, it's the treatment of those plots that set books apart. Take *The First Wives Club* by the late Olivia Goldsmith. This was a book about four different women and their journeys. All of them go through a sudden marital or life crisis. Usual fare for women's fiction, right? What made this book so successful was the fact that Goldsmith took a standard situation — an adulterous husband — and turned it on its ear by having the women go after their husbands for revenge. It was a brilliant twist on an old, clichéd plot that worked brilliantly, and what woman wouldn't relate to the situation?

Now, when plotting your women's fiction, choose your heroine's journey carefully. Women's fiction is not the retelling of a woman's *entire life* — unless you're Barbara Taylor Bradford. You're retelling the story of *one specific journey*, the choices and changes that set in motion a woman's journey, and how she grows and changes along the way. So choose carefully, make sure you have enough plot points for proper change and growth, and above all make sure the story and the characters are *interesting*. Remember, character trumps everything. If a reader doesn't like or identify with your character, your story doesn't have a chance.

Finally, look around you. There are actual people — women whose real life journeys are more than fodder for a good book. Think Sandra Bullock. That poor thing, do you think she's been on a helluva journey? One she had any choice in? Unfortunately this is her *real* life. There isn't a woman alive who can't sympathize or empathize with her right now, or relate to what she's going through, which is why a woman's journey is such fabulous material for books. Think about Bullock's choices. She *chose* to leave her husband, rather than stay as other women have done. That was *her choice*, but was it voluntary or involuntary? In some ways it was both.

Personally I don't understand these idiot women who stay with these kind of men. It simply boggles my mind, so she gets bonus points from me for just walking away from him and the situation. But, we can't make that choice for others — except in fiction. Play with different scenarios as you begin to plot your women's fiction. What are the benefits of every choice that your heroine must face? The changes? The growth? Know the answer to these questions before you begin writing, and I guarantee you won't have any trouble telling the difference between a romance and women's fiction ever again. ▲

A former Adjunct Prof, Sharon DeVita is also an award-winning bestselling author of 31 books of fiction and nonfiction. You can contact her at: irisheagl@aol.com.

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Submission To Sale

“It’s not personal, it’s just business.”

— Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*

Last month in this column, I addressed the mindset of working without an agent — which is an important topic precisely because so many professional writers are involuntarily unagented these days. Now let's talk about submitting and selling without an agent. I have extensive experience in this area because, despite working with four agents over the years (and querying many others), I've made most of my book sales myself. That includes (but is not limited to) my first nine sales, as well as nine of my ten most-recent sales; so my self-representation experience includes submitting and selling my books in a wide variety of market conditions and career situations.

I always begin researching a market by studying current releases to see which houses are publishing the subgenre I'm writing — and, particularly, which houses are publishing it *well*. One way to research which specific editors are acquiring work that appeals to a similar taste as yours does is to look at the Acknowledgements pages of relevant novels, where the authors often thank their editors. Another is by tracking acquisitions throughout a genre. The Writer's Resource Page on my website at <http://www.LauraResnick.com> lists at least two websites that monitor and compile such information in science fiction/fantasy, my genre; look for similar resources in your genre.

You can also subscribe to publishing trade journals with markets/sales columns, browse publisher websites each month to see what new books they're releasing, and browse agency websites that regularly announce what books they're selling to which editors. You can subscribe to “Deal Lunch,” which announces (what else?) recent deals. Read interviews and blogs with editors in your target genre to see if you'd be interested in working with them, and to learn what they're looking for.

Also, ask other NINC members for market information and editor recommendations. If NINC members are unable to answer your questions, then join an organization, e-list, or online group where there are more writers in the genre you're targeting, and ask them for market information. If your questions are specific and intelligent (which are two key attributes to cultivate in your own behavior whenever asking other writers for help; exercising graciousness and courtesy is also advisable), you'll collect good information.

Another good way to learn more about the market is to volunteer to write articles about it, then contact and interview editors. Or volunteer to recruit editors for the NINC blog “Industry Guest” slot, which has to be filled every Wednesday, and then offer to make the process easy for editors by interviewing them over the phone or providing a written Q&A format.

For every fiction project you write, I recommend compiling a submissions list of primary markets, where you'd ideally like to sell your book, and secondary markets, where you'll send your project if it's rejected by all your primary markets.

I emphatically recommend simultaneous submissions. The “objection” that some places have to simultaneous submissions is based on their past experiences of reading a project, liking it, putting together an offer for it ... and then finding out that the author already sold it somewhere else without telling them, thus wasting their time. So I always include a line in my cover letters that says something like, “Please be advised that this is not an exclusive submission; in

the event of receiving an offer elsewhere, I will, of course, contact you immediately.” This has always proved to be acceptable even when I’ve submitted to places that have official exclusive-submission policies.

For a detailed discussion of the logistics of fielding an offer for a book that’s been submitted at multiple houses, and the additional issues created by conglomeration (when your submission is at several programs that all exist under the same corporate umbrella), see my June 2009 *Nink* column on this subject, titled “Acting Crazy,” which you can download from the *Nink* archives at <http://Ninc.com>.

After you send a project out into submissions, start working on another project. Pinning all your hopes on one project is no more sensible a course of action for a longtime career novelist than it is for an aspiring writer.

Additionally, don’t ever give up. I first wrote an urban fantasy series proposal 15 years ago that encountered multiple rejections over the years (one house alone rejected it five different times), a badly published first book, and a canceled contract; I am currently under contract for this same series at a major house *only* because I didn’t give up. My Rita finalist novel, *Fallen From Grace*, was rejected by nine publishers over a period of two years before finding a market. And many of my book sales (including the ones I just mentioned) have been with projects that various literary agents declined to handle and/or declared unsaleable.

If you’ve exhausted all possible markets for a project (which, be it noted, is *not* The Same Thing as quitting because you feel discouraged), recognize that the project’s dormancy is a temporary status, not a permanent situation. Keep following the industry; editors, imprints, market trends, and opportunities come and go. Fresh horizons for your project will appear; when that happens, submit again. There are only ever two reasons to give up on a project. The first is that you no longer *want* to sell it (ex. maybe you eventually lose interest in the subject matter or the story). The second reason is that you’re dead.

Something else to keep in mind is that the “no unagented submissions” policy at various houses was not created to prevent experienced career novelists from submitting there; its purpose is to reduce the size of towering slushpiles comprised almost entirely of amateur submissions that don’t meet professional standards of writing mechanics.

This is why I advise starting your submission letters with some version of, “I’m a multi-published professional novelist.” Get that information on the table immediately in any approach to an editor. The only time material was ever sent back to me because it was unagented was the one instance in which they never even opened the submission so they could read that sentence. As it happens, I received a good offer for that same project the next day, so I didn’t bother following up on that incident. But one way to get around such a problem is to phone or email the editor to say you’re a multi-published professional novelist, and you’d like to submit to her.

If an editor asks whether you have an agent, you can say, “No, I manage my own career,” or, “No, I work with a literary lawyer rather than an agent.” My own consistent experience has always been that the only time editors ask me if I have an agent is when they’re making an offer (because they need to know, at that point, whether to talk to me or to someone else); and I’ve never yet encountered an editor who’s had a problem with my *not* having an agent. But if an editor whom you contact won’t deal with you specifically because you’re unagented, don’t let her waste any more of your valuable time; just cross her off your list of potential editors and move on.

Writers often express anxiety about the waiting period for a response to an unagented submission. This is the wrong thing to focus on; the crucial question is not how long it’ll take to get an answer, but whether the answer will be an offer. (Also, a longer wait is not the universal experience. To date, my own waiting times have actually *decreased* since I quit working with agents.) In any case, the waiting period won’t seem nearly as long — or as fretful — if you’re busy writing your next project, and your next, and your next after that.

Another good way to pass the time is by thinking about what you’ll do when you get an offer. For example, you need to decide how much money you want for the book. You should have a response ready if (as has happened to me) a publisher calls you and says, “How much money were you thinking of for this?” For a detailed discussion of how to come up with an answer to that question, as well as how to evaluate an offer or negotiate for a higher advance, see my May 2009 *Nink* column, “Money, Money, Money.”

If you’re too uncomfortable discussing money or business to negotiate your own deal, you can hire a literary lawyer, for an hourly fee to do this. I prefer to negotiate the broad strokes of a deal myself (particularly the advances); but I definitely recommend hiring a literary lawyer to negotiate the details of your contractual clauses. You will not only get a much better contract than you are likely to negotiate on your own, you’ll also get a better contract than most *agents* negotiate. (The *Ninc.com* Directory provides a list of some reputable literary lawyers; and there are others out there — ask around.)

My legal fees for contract negotiations are a small fraction of what I used to pay in agency commissions, so I find the expense relatively painless. However, if you’re concerned that the legal fees will consume too much of your advance, another possibility is to pay for an hour of the lawyer’s time to advise you what changes to ask for in the ▶

contract, and then do the negotiations yourself. This can be an excellent solution when selling to a small press, for example, where the contract will usually be short and simple, the advance will probably be low, and the editor is likely to be used to negotiating directly with writers.

Finally, the most important thing to keep in mind is that exercising professionalism, resourcefulness, and common sense takes a writer a long way when doing business without an agent. That, at least, has been my consistent experience when making most of my book sales myself over the past 22 years.

Laura Resnick's unagented releases this year have been *Unsympathetic Magic*, *Doppelgangster*, and the mass market edition of *The Purifying Fire*.

Business Briefs

First Amendment v. "libel tourism"

After years of debate, the U.S. has a law that makes foreign libel judgments unenforceable unless the judgment is compliant with the First Amendment. *The Securing the Protection of our Enduring and Establishing Constitutional Heritage (SPEECH) Act* was signed into law in August. This is a direct response to "libel tourism" — looking for a court outside the U.S. — and curtails these efforts. A foreign plaintiff's law suit cannot deprive a U.S. citizen of her/his right of free speech.

The case of *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It* is the prime example. The author, Dr. Rachel Ehrenfeld, was sued in a London court by a Saudi businessman and his sons, even though the book was not published in the UK, only sold online and an excerpt published on the ABC website. Though Dr. Ehrenfeld didn't recognize the court's jurisdictions, the court ruled she and the publisher pay £10,000 to each plaintiff (£40,000) plus £80,000 costs. The book could not be distributed and the author was to publish a correction and an apology.

NINC Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY SUSAN LYONS

Got any news or information
for the Bulletin Board?

Send it to Susan at
susan@susanlyons.ca

NEW!

Adventures at the NINC Website: What does GIMP mean?

No, not what you're thinking, and I'm not being politically incorrect. Ever wished you could afford Photoshop to tweak digital images? Well, GIMP is the starving artist's version of Photoshop — because it's absolutely free!

How do I know this? I took a look at the Free Software page of the NINC website Reference section, compiled by Linnea Sinclair. There are loads of terrific resources available at <http://www.ninc.com>, if you log in as a member.

(What does GIMP mean? According to <http://www.gimp.org/>, it's GNU Image Manipulation Program. Doesn't that clear it up beautifully?)

Please help make the NINC Reference page even more fabulous by sending your favorite online resources to susan@susanlyons.ca.

Your Blog Needs . . .

As usual, your blog needs you. If you haven't signed up lately, do so. We always need industry guests and count on you to speak up with suggestions & email addys. And if you can ask your editor, agent, publicist, website designer, whoever if they would blog for us, even better.

Patricia Rosemoor

Not Your Usual Writing Advice — When Writing is the Day Job

BY JOANN GROTE

In the absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it.

— Robert Heinlein



What does it take to make writing the Day Job, a job that covers writing and living expenses with a little — or a lot — left over for savings and fun?

Anyone who has followed this column knows I have Pollyanna tendencies. I also have a practical side, so much so that I worked as a Certified Public Accountant before and during the transition to writing as my Day Job. From my practical side, here are some of the things that help make and keep writing the Day Job.

“Protect the work,” a friend advised Jennifer Crusie. This is one of my favorite pieces of advice. You protect the work by protecting your time, and by how you use your mind. Check out her article at <http://www.jennycrusie.com/for-writers/essays/taking-out-the-garbage-how-to-protect-your-work-and-get-your-life/>.

Time management isn't new to anyone reading this column. We all know about setting goals, establishing priorities, treating writing as “the job,” and using words-per-day or pages-per-day to keep on our writing schedule. (The old, popular Time Management CD set by Brian Tracy is still my favorite time management guide.) Time management when working from home, especially when living with others, takes extra skill. Mary Kay Ash, founder of the Mary Kay cosmetics empire, started rising three hours earlier than her usual time each day. She used that time to create nine-day weeks and take care of household chores. “At 8:30, if the beds weren't made, if the dishes weren't done, too bad. I had to go to work for the worst boss I've ever had — me.” I've always been a night person and thought I'd never change. Now I rise early and follow Mary Kay's advice. (Yes, it was hard at first.) I strongly recommend Mary Kay's autobiography, *Mary Kay*, to anyone starting a business.

Forty-plus-hour work weeks. If you are still dreaming of making writing the Day Job, or have just made the move, you might live under the illusion that if you are working only one job, you can cut back to a 40-hour work week. That probably won't happen. Ten or 12 years ago, RWA took a poll. Most members making a living from their writing wrote more than 40 hours a week. Forty-plus-hour work weeks are common for self-employed people in any line of business. Before I was published, I pictured writing fulltime as limitless time to explore my plots and characters, and writing without feeling driven by lack of time. In reality, writing as the Day Job translated into writing with an even greater sense of lack of time. Forty-hour work weeks, weekends, vacations and holidays (especially paid vacations and holidays), most of these don't exist, or I've re-defined them.

Save \$. “My one bit of advice,” says Barbara Keiler. “If you're going to quit the day job and write fulltime, is to save, save, save. Save as much of your earnings as you can. Even if you plan carefully, a writer's income is really hard to predict. There will be good years, bad years and profoundly sh**y years. Sock away as much money as possible and save it to help you get through those profoundly sh**y years.” Barbara knows how to survive. She's written fulltime for 27 years and produced 87 books.

Understand cash flow. Learning to live on advances and on royalties paid semi-annually can challenge the best money handler. I don't depend on my royalties before receiving them. I only count advances as “real” money in my initial budget for a period. After I've received the royalties I do use them in the next period's budget. If I receive substantially more than I hoped — see Barbara's advice above.

Diana Peterfreund says, “I always have the date fixed in my mind where by I either have to sell something new or get a day job. Always. Every time I sell something new, I work out when the money is coming in and budget it and figure out when my new D-Day is.”

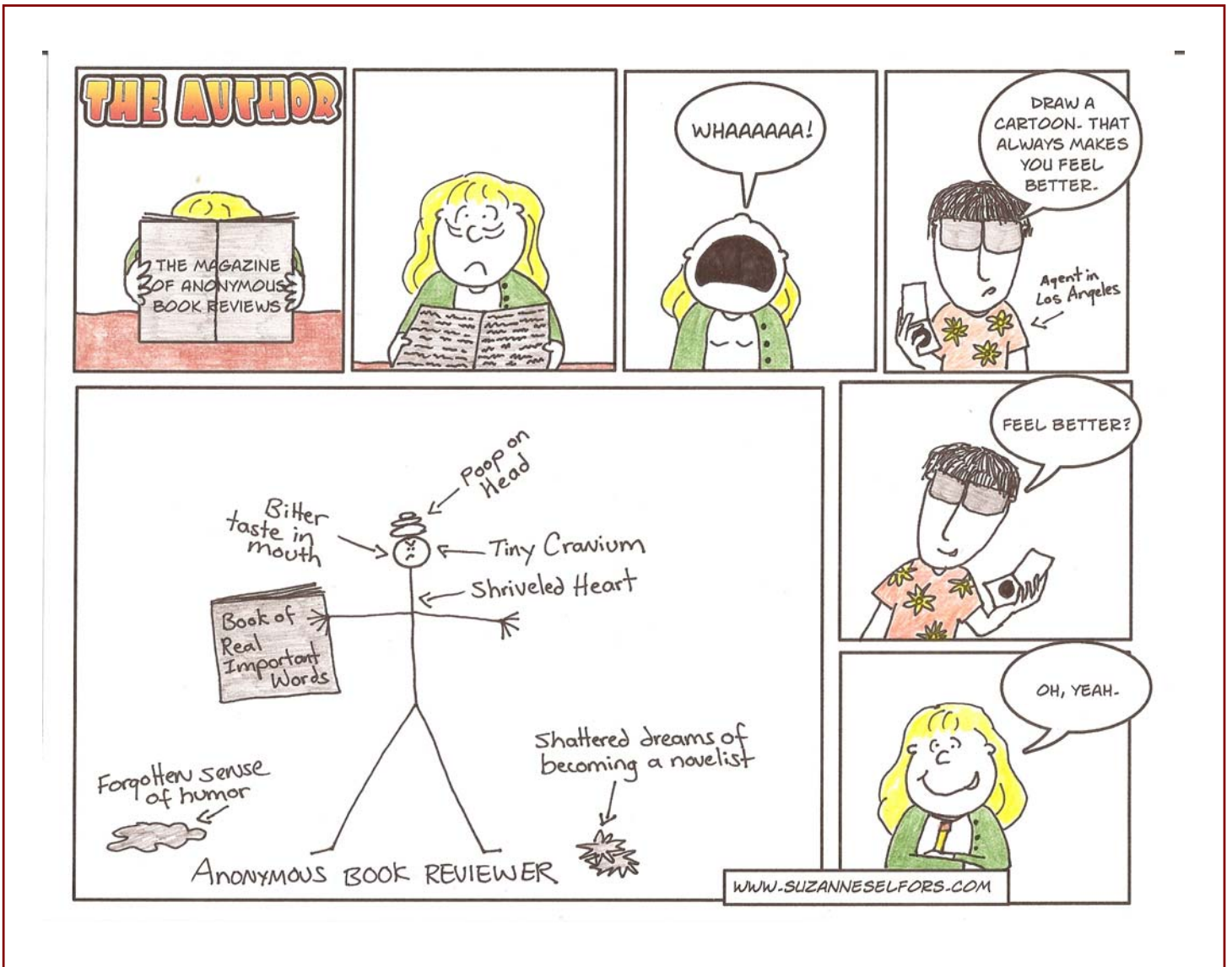
Which brings me to — **Keeping the work out there.** Even when under contract, keep at least one synopsis and/or proposal with your editor, agent, or a new market. You will complete your contracted manuscript and its

advance will end. The sooner you sign another contract, the sooner the next advance will begin to arrive, and the longer until your “new D-Day.”

Writing short pieces and articles. It isn't always possible to work another writing project in when you're writing a contracted manuscript plus synopses for future work. If you can manage the extra time, the additional money and exposure can be a plus. A novella or short story can create new readers. Research for a novel can become the basis for an article. After writing historical children's novels, I received an invitation to write a short hardcover biography of a Revolutionary War patriot. I knew the material well from researching the novels. Writing the biography took only a couple weeks, and linked my name with a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. It was a write-for-hire contract, but I considered it well worth the time in money and career benefits.

None of this advice is new, but it is easy to forget or set aside bit-by-bit, until a writer finds herself mired in time and money problems. I meet regularly with a good friend who owns a retail store. We share business problems and tactics for survival and growth. We're always reading or listening to new information on “how to succeed at business,” yet we agree that what's worked best for us are basic, simple, time-proven actions like those listed above.

Dream big. Live practically. ▲





WRITING is TAXING

By Diane O'Brien Kelly

They've Got Your Back

Getting a phone call through to the IRS can sometimes be a waiting game. What's more, when you call back to check on your tax matter, your chances of speaking again to the same staff member are equal to your chances of winning the Powerball lottery. You might find yourself being bounced from department to department, person to person, like an inflatable beach ball. So what's a poor person to do if he's getting the runaround at the IRS?

Fortunately, there's a solution. A little-known branch of the IRS called the Taxpayer Advocate Service can help you out if you've been unable to resolve your problems through the normal IRS channels. The Advocate Service was established a few years ago after a barrage of complaints by frustrated taxpayers who'd run into roadblocks when trying to deal with the enormous bureaucracy. Although the Taxpayer Advocate Service technically falls under the IRS umbrella, it operates independently from the IRS. On the whole, I've had good luck when referring clients to the Advocate for assistance.

The Advocate's office will assist both individuals and businesses. The Advocate Service was designed specifically to help those who, as a result of unresolved tax issues:

- ▶ are experiencing economic harm or are about to suffer economic harm.
- ▶ are facing an immediate threat of adverse action.
- ▶ will incur significant costs if relief is not granted, including fees for professional representation by an attorney or CPA.
- ▶ will suffer irreparable harm or long-term adverse impact if relief is not granted.
- ▶ have experienced a delay of more than 30 days to resolve a tax problem.
- ▶ have not received a response or resolution to their tax problem or inquiry by the date promised.

The Advocate Service will also assist in situations in which:

- ▶ a system or procedure has either failed to operate as intended, or has failed to resolve a taxpayer's problem or dispute within the IRS.
- ▶ the manner in which the tax laws are being administered raises considerations of equity, or have impaired or will impair a taxpayer's rights.
- ▶ The National Taxpayer Advocate (the head honcho of the Taxpayer Advocate Service) determines that a compelling public policy warrants assistance to an individual or group of taxpayers.

Every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have at least one Taxpayer Advocate office. To find the Advocate's office closest to you, consult Publication 1546, *Taxpayer Advocate Service — Your Voice at the IRS*, at <http://www.irs.gov>. Or you can call the Advocate's toll-free case intake line at 1-877-777-4778.

The service is free. Yee-ha! The service is also "confidential," meaning that the Advocate will disclose to the IRS only the information it feels will help resolve your case. Be careful about this, though. Assume anything you tell the Advocate will become known by the IRS. Be honest, of course, but also be careful about offering any information that is not specifically requested, as doing so can sometimes result in an expanded inquiry.

The Advocate staff is familiar with the IRS and can often better navigate through the muddy waters and roaring rapids of the IRS. The Advocate will also make an impartial review of your case. The Advocate may offer advice on how to avoid future problems, too.

Once an Advocate is assigned to a case, the Advocate will see the taxpayer through to its resolution. ▶

Although the Advocate's office will give you dates on which to expect further communication or decisions, don't expect things to happen overnight. In my experience, cases do seem to be resolved faster once the Advocate's office is involved, but it may still take weeks or even months to obtain a final resolution, depending on the complexity of your issue. But, with the Advocate's office involved, at least you won't feel that you've fallen down a never-ending rabbit hole. Also, don't assume that the Advocate will always side with you. Although they are there to help get your matter resolved, if the facts or law are against you, the best they can do is ensure you get a fair review and a definitive response from the IRS and let you know any appeal rights you might have.

To begin assistance, a Form 911, *Request for Taxpayer Advocate Service Assistance*, must be completed. This form can be filled in directly by you or can be completed over the phone when you speak with the Advocate's office. If you choose to fill out the form yourself, you can find the form at <http://www.irs.gov>, then fax or mail the completed form to one of the Taxpayer Advocate Service offices listed at <http://www.irs.gov/advocate>.

When you first speak to an Advocate, they will want to know what type of tax is involved, which types of returns, and the relevant tax years. They'll also want to know which offices you previously contacted within the IRS and when. For this reason, if you have a tax problem, it's a good idea to keep a record of your contacts with the IRS and retain copies of any correspondence you send to the IRS.

Hopefully, your life will be free of tax problems. But if a tax issue crops up, don't forget that the Taxpayer Advocate's got your back.

For further tax tips, check out the "Tax Tidbits" page on Diane's website, <http://www.dianeobrienkelly.com>. Got a tax question for Diane? Email her at Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com. Your question might be addressed in an upcoming issue.

Business Briefs

.Can Wylie be both agent & publisher?

Literary Agency Wylie's announced last month that it is establishing an e-publishing company, Odyssey Editions, to produce digitized versions of the backlist of clients including Saul Bellow, John Updike, and Philip Roth. Odyssey titles will be available exclusively on Amazon. The Agency's action has stirred up a firestorm of debate over who owns the rights to older editions of books—publishers or authors. Authors Guild has joined the fray <http://tinyurl.com/38ng6ms> arguing that publishers' refusal to raise royalties for e-rights is to blame for this development. On a side note, Random House is refusing to do business with Odyssey at the current time.

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Being followed: One way you get followers is by following other people. If people think you're interesting, they'll follow you back. This is why I would suggest posting some comments before starting to add strangers. For example, if someone starts following me and there's absolutely nothing on their page, or the only things there smack of self-promotion, I don't bother following back.

Now here's a good question to ponder: What do I think I get out of this? What makes me feel it's worth my while?

- ▶ I genuinely have fun with it. For someone who is very busy it's a quick and easy way to connect with the outside world. Nearly every day someone says something funny there that cracks me up, like the time a woman posted, "Nancy Grace's voice makes me want to sit on her chest and shove dirty socks in her mouth." Who says something like that? Apparently this woman I follow does. Or the time a woman posted, "Roof just caved in for second time." — I'm thinking, Maybe you should get out of the house now and worry about social networking later?
- ▶ I hear information there — about publishing, politics, who died — before I hear it anywhere else. Whether the death of Michael Jackson or the shortlist for the Man Booker Prize, it's like my town crier.
- ▶ I'm able to get useful information for writing friends; e.g., one time I saw an agent posting from wherever the big foreign rights fair of the moment was — Frankfurt, I think? — saying all the scouts were looking for X type of book. The thing was, I have an acquaintance who'd originally been published as a nonfiction writer and who'd been looking to get an agent for X type of book. So I copied the agent's comment, found the contact info on her website, sent it all to the writer acquaintance and said, "There, you have X, don't you? Well, send it to her." He did. Good karma, and I'd be surprised if it all took me more than three minutes.
- ▶ Yet more info for writing friends! I follow several agents. I find them entertaining and informative, plus seeing how they conduct themselves helps me advise other writers who may actually think I know something about who should represent them.
- ▶ Contacts I would be unlikely to make elsewhere. I've had some fun exchanges with Ron Charles of the *Washington Post* and writers too literary/successful to normally converse with the likes of me, like best-selling British novelist Chris Cleave, author of *Little Bee*, who I subsequently persuaded to do an interview with me for my "Disrespectful Interviewer" column at the online literary magazine *BiblioBuffet*. And the *New York Times*. When my letter about the Google guy was accepted for publication last October, I noticed at the bottom of the email of the man who wrote me back that it said, "Follow me on Twitter!" So I did. He's since personally forwarded one of my letters to the *NYTBR*, which they printed.
- ▶ Once you've established yourself as a real human being, people are happy to help. In the spring I put out a call for bloggers to help with a different type of book promotion. I put the call out on Back-



space, Facebook, BookBalloon, and Twitter. I wound up lining up 60+ stops for the tour: 5% from the first three places, the other 95% from Twitter. And in fall of 2009 when my YA novel *Crazy Beautiful* was published, it received more attention on the Internet than any book I've ever had published before and the overwhelming bulk of that attention can be traced back to Twitter.

A few other useful things for you to know about:

Hashtags: A hashtag looks like this — # — and is immediately followed by text. These are used to identify certain topics and if you just plug one into the search box in the middle of the page on the right-hand side, you can easily keep up with any conversation you want. At three in the afternoon on weekdays, I put in #GH and follow what folks are saying about “General Hospital.” On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, you can put in #litchat to follow great discussions about the writing life.

Wine: Here's a word of warning. If you, like me, occasionally enjoy a glass of wine while on Twitter, always think before you post. Twitter, like all social networking, lasts forever — or at least for now it does — so you want to make sure you post carefully and don't self-implode like the literary novelist who went after a reviewer from *The Boston Globe* in an unattractive, oops-I'd-better-go-into-hiding-for-six-months-after-this kind of way. Actually, I don't know for a fact that wine entered into that, but something of the sort does seem likely.

And those are the Cliff Notes! Or, you know, War and Peace.

Oh, one final word. As my own experience has taught me, I do believe a writer should give something more than one try before deciding it's absolutely not for them, because there is a learning curve in all this social-networking stuff and what may at first seem off-putting can with time become a welcome addition to a writer's solitary days. That said, if you give something a fair shot and you still hate it, there's just one solution: STOP! Life is too short to waste it on something like Twitter if you derive no personal pleasure from it. There are plenty of other things you could do to promote your work or connect with other writers. You could even do the old-fashioned thing: write a book and make it the best book you can.

So go forth and tweet — I know, I know, I hate that word too, along with the word “tweeps” — and when you do tweet, please tweet responsibly.

*Lauren Baratz-Logsted is the author of 18 books for adults, teens and children. Her most recent book is *The Twin's Daughter*. You can learn more about her life and work at <http://www.laurenbaratzlogsted.com>.*



NINC is exploring the possibility of publishing back issues of the newsletter on the public page of the NINC website.

If you have contributed to our newsletter in the past and do *not* wish your material used in this way, please contact the *Nink* Editor.

