

N I N K

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Reclaiming My Website: An Impromptu Manifesto

BY JOANNA NOVINS

As part of resurrecting my career as an historical romance writer, I'm revamping my website. My first site was a thing of great visual beauty, but maintaining it made me miserable. To say that I approached the idea of revamping it with trepidation would be a gross understatement. I ignored it and avoided it like the first symptoms of the plague. But, like the plague, I knew that eventually I had to face up to it and do something about it. In the process of thinking about what I wanted to do with my new site—and what I didn't—I began to understand what it was about the previous site that had made me so unhappy.

First, there was the effort of making my career seem successful even at times when it wasn't. (There's nothing like a lovely fan letter praising your work that ends with a polite inquiry about whether you've retired to make you want to turn off that buoyant "Email the Author" link.) Second was the effort of making me seem like something I'm not: the sort of homey, folksy person a romance fan would like to have tea with. Yes, I do occasionally knit, and yes, I do live with an assortment of cats, dogs, and children, but homey, folksy, and tea...eh, not so much. In truth, I'm a coffee-swilling, introverted, über-history nerd with a twisted, often too-sharp sense of humor that might be great for writing witty ballroom repartee, but isn't so great in social settings with real live people.

My first step in redesigning the site was a decision not to do the "approachable" stuff: no newsletters, newsflashes, or contests. My next step was to be myself. As I mentioned, I'm an über-history nerd. The period doesn't really matter. I am fascinated by how people are shaped by history—both by personal experience and by social, political, and economic events of the day. I'm fascinated by how words and objects can encapsulate those experiences and provide a tangible link to the past. (Note, if you are one, too, check out *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* by James Deetz.)

I began marketing myself by advertising my nerd pleasures. I collect old books, and among my collection is an early 19th Century dictionary of English slang. I started tweeting the words at #oldslang, amusing myself by using them in a sentence. (For example, a "blue-apron" is slang for prostitute, so I mused can a blue apron be a blue stocking?) That Twitter feed is on my site. I hear other authors saying they hate to tweet. I'd hate tweeting about myself, but old slang? That's fun (and it attracts historical nerd followers, who are exactly the people I will want to pitch my books to.)

The bio page on the old site contained reflections about how coming from a *Continued on page 5* ▶

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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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leporej5@optonline.net

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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 Truth About Collaboration

I've been thinking a great deal lately about collaboration and how it relates to our profession. I'm sure some of this is because I've just published a collaborative novel and I'm currently collaborating with someone on a non-fiction book. However, the biggest reason I've been so focused on this recently is that it has become increasingly clear to me that collaboration is a key ingredient to success in book publishing today.

Until recently, collaboration mattered very little to writers, especially novelists. You wrote the book; your agent sold it; during the editorial phase, there was a certain amount of collaboration (depending on the quality of your editor); the publisher packaged it (maybe asking your opinion, maybe not), sold it to booksellers, and marketed it (or not, sometimes making you part of the process, or not). The work was essentially done in silos, and everyone had his or her function. This was even true within publishing houses, where departments talked to each other but didn't really work together.

When I started the Spectra science fiction imprint at Bantam, I broke the mold on this somewhat, buying and editing the books, brainstorming with the art director, putting together the marketing plans, traveling with the sales reps, and communicating directly with booksellers. That was possible because Spectra was an anomaly at Bantam, which at the time wasn't paying much attention to genre fiction. When Spectra started having bestsellers, my role became increasingly editorial, with the "experts" taking over many of the other functions. As I rose up the ladder at Bantam, it blew my mind to realize that key departments didn't report to the Publisher, who was presumably responsible for everything related to the publication. Even when I was Publisher of Avon, sales and production reported to others. Collaboration was minimal, even internally, let alone with the author.

We've spent a great deal of time at NINC over the past few years talking about how authors need to take responsibility for every phase of their publication, either because their publishers aren't doing it (editors don't edit, the house does little marketing for them) or because they've chosen to publish themselves. While I know this has been frustrating to many—where am I supposed to get those extra eight hours a day?—I think it has been beneficial to writers to learn how to be more intimately involved in the entire process. That said, I don't believe it is sustainable for two reasons: days haven't gotten eight hours longer, and there are limits to what most writers can accomplish alone.

We're at something of an editorial crisis in the marketplace. One of the classic self-destructive tricks that publishers pull is flooding the market with weak imitations of breakout successes. Readers want dystopian fiction? Get me every dystopian novel you can get your hands on! They want erotic romance (okay, we should have known that already, but we were in a meeting)? Put nine of them on the fall list—I don't care how you get them!

The upshot of this is commonly that publishers kill the market by underwhelming readers with knockoffs. After a while, readers give up because they've read 10 bad Knights Templar books in a row. What concerns me now is that we might be doing this with the entire fiction market. How much unedited, self-published crap will readers accept before they say, "You know, I'm just not enjoying this anymore"? This isn't an anti-self-publishing rant; I think you know that I'm hugely supportive of self-publishing done well. But part of doing it well involves working with an editor, a copyeditor, and a proofreader to make sure that your work stands out. That's a form of collaboration, and if your publisher isn't a willing collaborator in this area, you might need to find someone to collaborate with you before you bring your manuscript to your publisher.

For one brief moment, marketing was as much about pressing buttons in the new publishing world as it was in the old. There were two or three tricks that worked (in the past it was co-op and aggressive distribution, yesterday it was making an e-book free for a week or so or down-pricing the first book in a series), and if you or your publisher employed them, you were assured a high profile. This isn't true anymore. ▶

Co-op and aggressive distribution still have value, but there are fewer outlets for them. Free and down-pricing still help, but they rarely put a book over the top now. Meanwhile free promotion (at least it's free if you don't put a value on your time) like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and others have yet to deliver meaningful results unless you're able to amass a huge following. At The Story Plant, we're spending more and more money on advertising and publicity trying to get particular titles to pop. Meanwhile, we've just hired someone whose entire job is to talk about our books online all day (it's more complicated than that, but you get the point).

I'm not sure how much of an appetite any individual writer has for spending this kind of money to boost sales. There's another option, though: collaboration. Here, I'm talking about coalitions of writers promoting each other. There are some very supportive loops out there, and I'm guessing we're going to see some very creative solutions to this issue. I think collaborative and coalition marketing is going to be a huge movement in publishing over the next few years.

Then there's the matter of the bookseller. Overwhelmingly, book sales are online now, for both print books and, of course, e-books. The mechanics of online bookselling are materially different from the mechanics of selling in physical bookstores, and what helps a book sell in these outlets is also different. Online booksellers offer great royalty rates to self-published authors, but what they don't offer is access to their most valuable sales programs. You need to have a publisher account to have a chance at those. It's possible that this will change, but there's an excellent chance it won't. What this means is that, unless you're working with a publisher, you might never get the bookseller push that puts you over the top. The Big Six are still being very careful about the sizes of their lists (though that's loosening up on the digital side), so this is an issue. However, there's an emerging class of independent publishers—with either their own bookseller accounts or accounts through distributors—that are acquiring books and interested in working collaboratively with writers. Marianna has been doing a great job of profiling several of these in *Nink* and will continue to do so throughout the year.

I think the next phase of publishing is going to be about entities working in concert from the point at which a writer writes the final line of his or her manuscript. Not to make this letter seem like a long commercial for the NINC conference, but this is exactly what we're going to be talking about the entire time. It's even in our title: Profitable Partnerships. We're putting together quite a roster of people to address this. How we work together to achieve success is in my opinion the most important conversation for us to be having. I look forward to having it with you in October, but I also look forward to having it with you before then on the NINC loop.

As always, you can reach me at laronica@fictionstudio.com.

Best,
Lou

Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

French Say *Oui* to Google?

An agreement has been struck between Google and French authors and publishers that allows publishers and authors to determine what will be available to Google. The deal comes just before Google plans to file a motion in the ongoing Author Guild suit claiming that its book-scanning program falls under the definition of "fair use." Would it be an understatement to say that this is going to get interesting?

PW Daily

Redhook is Now a New Imprint of Hachette's Orbit Division

The new imprint will offer one or two titles a month, published in all formats. The imprint is to fill out the division, offering science fiction and fantasy as well as manga and graphic fiction from Yen Press. The first title published by the imprint will be Robert Lyndon's *Hawk Quest*, which will be released in April 2013.

PW Daily

Reclaiming My Website

Continued from page 1 ▶ long-line of Southern belles, who weren't afraid to "shade" the truth, influenced my writing. My updated bio page includes family photos from the 1920s, and the late 1800s; I also muse about the fact that my grandmother lived on the same street as Tennessee Williams' family and wonder, as my great-uncle did, whether there might have been something in the water in Columbus, Mississippi—'cause honey, there was a whole lot of crazy going on that street. Yes, it's personal, but if you want to know what a late 1800s wedding dress looks like in detail, check out great grandmother's. For a page called Esoterica, I'm thinking of featuring engravings from my book collection. I've posted a great late-1800s engraving of a flower seller on an Amsterdam street, determinedly hawking her wares on the Home page. As I did, I found myself writing a manifesto of sorts that sums up my own personal "newsflash": It doesn't matter whether you're publishing trad, or indie, or both, if you want to keep the joy, let your freak flag fly.

The Manifesto (or I'm baaack.)

For years my website was like an abandoned billboard on the highway: the advertisement stayed the same, but the information faded, became outdated, and parts fell away. To stretch the billboard metaphor further, you might say I left it up as a signpost in the wilderness while I went off to explore other literary roads....

I didn't mean to leave off writing historical romance (despite my mother's response to the news that I'd sold one: "That's great. When are you going to write a real book?"). I thought changing genre was what I need to do to keep writing. Though my books were well reviewed, even before they hit the market it was pretty clear my publisher wasn't interested in continuing the series. (Let me just say, though I wasn't thrilled, I wasn't totally devastated. My first experience in the publishing world wasn't exactly every young writer's fantasy—unless of course, that young writer is a masochist. In which case, it was AWESome.)

Note: This less-than-awesome experience included my agent, who I will not name and will not publicly bash. Except to say, if you're thinking of using her you're better off signing on with a used-car salesman. (Great at selling, hates to be bothered with questions about the fine print in the contracts, and really doesn't want to be bothered after she's made the sale.) I only mention the agent thing because if you stick with my story, you'll notice a theme. For those of you with short attention spans, it has to do with a) wasting time following other people's advice instead of doing what you want to do and b) wasting time waiting for other people to give you permission to do what you want to do.

A lot of people kept telling me, "If you want to sell again, you need to change genres." A lot of people kept telling me to "write what you know." And lot of people kept telling me I needed a "platform." This advice, coupled with the fascination people tend to have with my time at the CIA—yes, it was an amazing experience; no, I can't tell you the details—made me think I ought to write a contemporary romance set at the CIA. I will admit that my heart was not entirely in it. I mean, how excited would you be about writing about your job?

A lot of people also said if I was writing in a new genre, I needed to write a whole new book to get a new agent (because a lot of people said you can't sell a book without an agent). So, I wrote the book, sent it off to a bunch of agents and got a new agent. (Did I mention that agents take months to respond to queries and more months to respond to complete submissions?)

Not counting the time to write the book, nearly a year went by before I got my bright shiny new agent. She sent out my book. And a proposal for a paranormal romance set at the CIA. Then I waited. And waited. After six months, I decided, hey it's been nearly two years and I haven't sold a new book and isn't the whole point of agents supposed to be that they get you a faster response than if you send in the book yourself? (Call me naïve.) I pulled the book and the proposal, and left the agent.

My departure wasn't based solely on frustration. I also left because I wanted to try my hand at writing a genre the agency didn't represent. You see, my kids had started handing me books and demanding I read them. And because I was constantly telling them they should do stuff because I said so, I figured I ought to do at least some things because they said so.... ▶

Reading middle-grade and young-adult (YA) books blew my mind. There are a ton of rules (or so I've been told) about what you can and can't do in romance. They don't apply in YA and middle grade. Read Garth Nix's *Shade's Children*, Marcus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, or, of course, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. I wrote a middle-grade goblin book called *The Goblin Prince*. (As I was researching my historical romances, the *Souvenir* series, I'd read about miles of tunnels under the streets of Paris, and I remembered a wonderful book I'd read as a kid called *The Princess and Curdie*.) I was inspired, I had a blast writing the goblin story and, of course, I sent it out to agents.

While I didn't get any offers of representation, I got a lot of strong responses, so I knew I was on the right track. With all the advice about CIA rattling in my brain, I also decided to write a CIA-set YA. And I sent that out to agents.

After nearly two years of submissions, I got six offers of representation. I went with the "big name" agent whose clients had major deals and movie spin-offs. I was excited, she was excited—she even remembered my goblin book. Here, I thought, was an agent who wanted me for my "voice." She warned me she didn't edit, but what she didn't warn me about was that she would immediately hand me over to an associate. An associate who not only didn't edit, but couldn't even write a clear email, that is, when she bothered to write them at all.

I guessed at needed revisions and revised. The book got sent out. While I waited, I worked on revising the goblin book. The "big name" agent had been intrigued by a rewrite, but the associate never answered emails about a proposal, or even a chapter-by-chapter synopsis. When, finally, enough time had passed for me to completely rewrite the book, the associate sat on it for four months. Then she sent me a brief email that said basically, "I've had this for so long I suppose I should tell you why I hate it." Several more months passed, the YA spy book didn't sell, and the associate dumped me by email.

Though it might seem the case, I'm not writing this to bash agents. (Okay, yes, maybe, a little.) You'll notice I've not-so-subtly sprinkled in references to time. At this point, roughly four years had gone by. Most of it was spent chasing agents. But I also spent time working for a romance publisher. It was an educational experience, though I wouldn't necessarily recommend it to other writers. It's a bit like being a pig working in a sausage factory. Among the things I learned: books are products; a strong commercial hook is almost always more important than the quality of writing; and editors and agents aren't necessarily better judges of a good book than the college intern sifting through the slush pile. (Also, again not to agent bash, but in my limited experience, many agents don't pitch well and a shocking number don't negotiate contracts well, or at all.)

So, let me steer this rambling ride back to the billboard and the website. After all these years and all these experiences, I can say I have a pretty good understanding of what makes a book sell. (I've pulled best-sellers out of the slush pile and, though I haven't read *50 Shades of Grey*, I know why it has crossover appeal.) I'm also a far better writer than I was when I started out.

But I've realized that while I'd like to write books that make money, if writing is how I spend six to eight hours a day, I want to write books I enjoy writing.

So I'm going back to writing historical romance. Romances with lots of wild adventures, smart-talking heroines, and swashbuckling spies. Romances that don't follow a lot of other people's rules. Romances set during the French and American Revolutions, because that's the kind of rabble-rousing history nerd I am.

And even though although a lot of people say these historical periods don't sell, I don't care.

I'm not waiting for permission any more...I'm doing what I damned well please.

Published in historical romance by Berkley Sensations, Joanna Novins (aka Jody) spent over a decade working for the Central Intelligence Agency. She does not kill people who ask her about her previous job, though she came close once with an aging Navy SEAL who handed her a training grenade despite warnings that she throws like a pre-Title IX girl. Joanna holds a B.A. in history and a M.A. in international relations and international economics. You can follow her on Twitter @JoannaNovins, on Facebook, or on her new website (which hopefully will be up by the time this article runs) at www.joannanovins.com.



Profitable Partnerships: Publishing à la Carte

October 25-28, 2012

Crowne Plaza White Plains NY

Fee for NINC Members: \$375
(includes both First Word and Conference!)
Payable in one lump sum or three payments of \$125

Fee for Industry Professionals:
\$260 for First Word and Conference,
\$150 for First Word only,
or \$110 Conference only

Fee for Nonmember Writers:
\$195 for First Word only

Coming Soon...NINCThink Roundtables at NINC-NY 2012

BY MEREDITH EFKEN

The last few conferences have been about authors retaking control of their careers and their publishing decisions. This year, we're all about using that new sense of empowerment to create strategic partnerships within the publishing industry to accomplish our writing goals.

With that in mind, we have a line-up of top industry professionals from publishing houses, e-retailers, social networking sites, and freelance services, as well as independent authors ready to share their experiences and insights with us.

But we didn't want to stop there. Partnerships go *both* ways—and NINC members are also a wealth of insight and experience. The concept of “partnership” implies a two-way, peer relationship, in which both parties work together and benefit from each other.

We wanted to model this truth at the conference, so we invented a new type of session this year.

Is it a panel???

Is it a workshop???

No! It's NINCThink—an innovative series of roundtable discussions bringing together our conference speakers, industry guests, and...*you*.

There are 10 Roundtables—you can see the descriptions of each on the conference website. (<http://www.ninc.com/conferences/2012/roundtables.asp>) Each roundtable will have 12 participants comprising five to six industry guests/speakers, and six to seven NINC members.

For one hour, all 12 participants will discuss the main topic of the roundtable. It's an informal, chatty conversation among colleagues. The goal is to exchange ideas, discuss problems, and learn from each other, peer to peer. ▶

Each participant will be asked to submit ahead of time one question relating to the topic. One NINC member will be asked to be the group moderator and will randomly choose the questions. The group will try to get through as many of the 12 questions as possible in the hour.

The roundtable sessions will be open-door; conference attendees are welcome and encouraged to sit in and eavesdrop on the discussion. However, there will be no audience participation. Additionally, since we want these conversations to be as candid as possible, **we are making the NINCThink Roundtables a strictly “Twitter Free” zone.** This prohibition will include any form of live-blogging or social network updating on any platform.

The Roundtable page on the NINC website lists the industry professionals we’ve asked to sit in on each session. Want to discuss how to creatively connect with readers with Julia Coblenz from B&N? How about a

conversation with Donald Maass and Robert Gottlieb about the changing roles of agents, and how that impacts both indie and traditional authors? Are subsidiary rights your hot button? Got something to share, or do you need advice about decision-making in a tough market? Take a look at the Roundtable page and see which topics interest you and which of our guests you would most like to have a discussion with. There’s something there for everyone—indie and traditional author alike.

This is important, because, see...this won’t work without *you*. We need six to seven NINC members on each Roundtable. That’s 60 to 70 NINC members! Each of you have something valuable to add to one of the discussions, and we hope you are as eager to join in as we are to hear from you.

But here’s the deal—you have to be registered and paid up for the conference by August 31 in order to have a chance at one of the Roundtable slots. In September, you’ll have a chance to win a slot by taking part in a fun, easy online contest that we’ll be announcing in August.

But only people who are registered and have paid in full for the conference will be eligible to participate.

So if you haven’t registered yet, please do! We are

looking forward to benefitting from your thoughts and expertise on one of the NINCThink Roundtables. Check out the topics and which industry guests are participating in which discussion, and think about what Roundtable you’d like to be on. You don’t want to miss out on this opportunity!

Business Briefs

First Quarter 2012 Sales from AAP StatShot

Adult e-books are up 28.1 percent, hardcovers are up 2 percent, trade paperbacks are down 10.5 percent, and mass market sales are down 20.8 percent. Total sale of adult books is up by 1.8 percent.

PW Daily

Books-A-Million Purchase Being Questioned

The Anderson family attempt to purchase the outstanding share for BAM is getting a lot of attention. The bid for the remaining shares is in the first quarter filing with the Securities & Exchange Commission. The opponents are talking “low-ball” in terms of the Anderson offer, and there are seven stockholder lawsuits. The special committee reviewing the Anderson offer has no deadline on when it will give its opinion.

PW Daily

The Champagne Books Group

BY JUDY GILL

When J. Ellen Smith, owner and publisher of The Champagne Books Group, started her operation in late 2004, in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, no one expected the kind of expansion the company would experience almost from the day of its official launch on April 1, 2005. No April Fool, this lady; she may not have expected, but she certainly hoped when she began by publishing four romance titles every second month, that the company would take off as it has. It's not been by accident, either. Ms. Smith works long, hard hours to keep things moving in the direction she wants. "Today," she says, "I can't picture myself doing anything else. This is the first time in my life that I truly love what I do, and don't mind getting up in the morning to do it." This dedication shows in the way the company has grown, and continues to grow.



In the beginning, she made books available (and still does) at the company's website, www.champagnebooks.com; FictionWise; a now-defunct store called eBookAd; then, shortly afterward, on Mobipocket, followed by many, many more venues in the years since that first launch. Over the years, however, Champagne has picked and chosen where else to place its books. What began

as a small press has turned into, in Ms. Smith's words, "An independent press." She goes on to say, "When we have books that outsell some *New York Times* bestselling authors, it's hard to think of us as a 'small press'."

One of Champagne Books' titles, *Highland Captive*, recently went viral, selling many thousands of copies in only a few weeks and attracting attention in high places. Though proud of all the books she publishes (she wouldn't publish them if she was not), some of her notables are the above-mentioned *Highland Captive*, *Highland Promise*, *Celestial Dragon*, *Cover Me*, *The Best Man*, all the *BEAST* books (*The B*E*A*S*T* Within*, *B*E*A*S*T* Of Burden*, *Nature Of The B*E*A*S*T**, *Mark Of The B*E*A*S*T**). The bestseller and notable list includes books from all of its imprints and the titles mentioned above are by no means the full list. Her readers love ongoing series. "The nice thing about the digital world," Ms. Smith reminds us, "is that e-books don't have a shelf life of only a few weeks. Ours are available for a very long time."

The birth of The Champagne Books Group

Champagne Books was the first imprint, and remains both the parent company and the imprint in which the company places its mainstream, thriller, mystery, women's fiction, romantic suspense, and romance novels. The company expanded in the summer of 2009 when it launched Carnal Passions, an erotica imprint, and again in 2011 with the launch of BURST Books, which is the science fiction, fantasy and paranormal imprint. BURST came about as a result of people by-passing the Champagne booths at conferences—Ms. Smith attends many, always on the lookout for fresh, new talent—thinking the company "only published romance" novels. The advent of BURST successfully quashed that idea. Many of Carnal Passion's and BURST's titles are among those bestsellers mentioned above. Combined, the imprints now comprise the Champagne Books Group.

The CBG, like most e-publishers, does not pay an advance, but does pay royalties quarterly—on e-books, 30 to 45 percent depending on length and genre. (Erotica gets the highest rate and is in great demand.) The rates are negotiable, too, especially if an author has a wonderful book in which the editorial staff can see "legs" and a very good marketing plan. The company seldom offers multi-book contracts, but does ask for right of first refusal on any sequel or related book containing the same characters (on a 90-day response basis). The term of contract is a renewable three years. Once an author is contracted by the CBG and assigned an editor, all her/his subsequent submissions can go to that editor, not the general acquisitions desk

As a general rule, the company wants only original works, not backlist, though some exceptions have been made for a few self-published works if the material has not outlived its marketable period— ▶

especially if the work is a sequel to an earlier, self-published book, though the expectation is that all of the titles are stand-alone stories.

The CBG promotes its authors' books through the company website, other Internet avenues of promotion, mailing lists, bulletin boards, and often by advertising in popular reader publications, both online and off. Authors can expect their title and name to be tweeted all over the place. In return, the CBG expects the author to promote vigorously and widely with a strong web presence. Telling the company you have many contacts in libraries and bookstores doesn't really cut it. The CBG is an e-book house, not a print house, though the company does handle very limited bookstore marketing, usually for an author's hometown. However, that is a rare event because, as the publisher says, "It's not our business model to do print runs that are large enough to make it worthwhile. We are an e-book publisher." The acquisitions editor adds, "Telling me in your marketing plan you have great contacts with your local bookstores and libraries isn't going to go far because, as Ms. Smith likes to remind her staff: *we publish electronic books.*"

Books electronically published in any of CBG's departments must sell 100 copies electronically before going into print. This encourages authors to get out there and market their books on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, their own websites, and any other means at their disposal. The CBG holds worldwide English-language rights for the term of the contract, but all other rights remain with the author. "Of course, the 'map' is changing with the advent of the Internet," Ms. Smith says. "Boundaries don't exist like they used to, but foreign-language rights are there for the author to exploit. As far as print goes, an author could certainly negotiate which print rights to license to us, and which print rights they wish to retain, but for the most part, since we print digitally and print as needed, those rights (print on demand) are not usually negotiable."

The CBG distributes e-books widely in all the major online stores. Paperbacks—usually trade-size—can be ordered from Amazon, Lulu and the Champagne website. Books in high demand get moved into increased distribution for availability in bookstores.

This reporter asked "What would you tell a writer wanting to submit to any of your lines? (And if you say 'write the best book you can' I'll smack you upside the head next time I see you," to which the publisher replied, "I'd say, write a damn good book, make sure it's something we're looking for, and then stick like glue to the submissions guidelines on our site because my b**** of an acquisitions editor will certainly take notice if you don't."

As the b**** in question, I say, "Believe it, and tell your friends."

Judy Gill is acquisitions editor for The Champagne Books Group, as well as editor for several of the Group's authors and a free-lance editor at large. You can access all the lines and read the "wants" list at www.champagnebooks.com, and visit Judy Gill's own site at www.judyggbooks.com; and her editing site at www.theprosepolisher.com.

NINC Bulletin Board

NINC Bulletin Board Compiled by Kit Frazier / kitfrazier@yahoo.com

Have you filled out your Authors Coalition Survey yet?

NINC has been working with other author groups as part of the Authors Coalition to reclaim non-title-specific royalties from photocopies made abroad—here's how you can help: Answer a few questions about other genres you write in, including nonfiction, journalism, freelance, textbook, etc. It takes less than two minutes to complete, and helps you as an author retain and get paid for your rights, and NINC as an organization!

http://NINC.com/members_only/member_services/ac_survey.asp

Not Your Usual Writing Advice

By JoAnn Grote



Photo by Sabrina Ingram

Revelations of Spring

“The truth dazzles gradually, or else the world would be blind.”

— Emily Dickinson

Winter, spring, summer and fall; we’ve all known the seasons since first grade. Yet anyone who lives on a farm in the Midwest can tell you there’s a fifth season—mud season.

Mud season doesn’t fall in a definite slot on the calendar. It might come anytime from February through May. It doesn’t stand alone as a separate season, but blends with winter, spring and sometimes summer. Mud season escaped my attention until I bought a horse, Lady Liberty. How it warms the heart to look out the kitchen window and watch a beautiful bay mare run through the pasture with her black mane and tail flying. How it warms the muscles to clean that mare’s stall during mud season.

Usually I use a wheelbarrow to move the manure and used wood shavings from the stall to a nearby field. It’s difficult to maneuver a wheelbarrow through mud, and impossible to wheel one through a muddy field, or through a muddy corral. Therefore, I opt to remove the used and fragrant items pitchfork-by-pitchfork into the corral until the land dries sufficiently to remove the refuse from the corral to the field.

The pitchfork-by-pitchfork method isn’t easy, either. Walking through mud takes effort, agility and an awareness of what is happening around your feet. Mud clings to footwear, making one’s feet feel pounds heavier. It’s not uncommon for the mud to suck a boot or Tingley (rubber shoe protecting a boot) right off a person. It’s not fun to balance on one leg as one attempts to pull the footwear out of the mud and replace it on one’s foot. And corrals tend to have more than mud underfoot, transforming the mud into a slime that is slipperier than “plain” mud.

If one wants to ride a horse during mud season, they first must catch it in the muddy, possibly puddle-covered pasture or paddock. Then the horse needs to be brushed. Horses love to roll in the mud, and it isn’t wise to put a saddle on a mud-covered horse. Horses tend to get cranky when things like mud chunks get caught between them and the saddle.

Mud season is a lot of work. One can’t avoid the season or stop caring for a farm or animals until the season is over. One must simply live and work through it.

Most people experience at least one mud season in their lives. I’ve come to believe most writers experience at least one mud season in their careers, too.

You know when your career is in a mud season. You tug and yank for words like a person working a slime-stolen boot out of the muck. You wonder where your balance went, and feel like a horse-lover standing on one leg while attempting to replace a boot—one false move and down you’ll go, and be covered in sticky, stinking waste and mud. Instead of energy pouring into you and your writing fueled by words flowing with ease, when you attempt to write you feel your energy slogging, like a farmer pushing a wheelbarrow full of muck across a sucking, mud-sodden barnyard. Mud season isn’t as debilitating as a mid-career crisis, but it leaves one feeling exhausted and discouraged and makes writing harder than usual.

Don’t quit writing. Mud season ends.

Post-mud season revelations can be fascinating. One never knows what treasures the ground will push to the surface, items buried for years. As I understand it, the items are pushed up by the freezing and thawing of the land during winter and spring. Mud season can hide them until the right moment. ▶

One of my daily duties in the spring, or after the land begins drying after a summer rain, is to walk the corral looking for anything that might harm Lady Liberty. Our place was homesteaded in the late 1800s. Rusty nails (sometimes hand-made), broken glass, and china are shoved to the light of day after who-knows-how-many-years underground. In addition to protecting Lady Liberty from stepping on something that might harm her, scouring the corral stimulates my writer's imagination.

I've written several romances set on the Minnesota prairie in the late 1800s, so it's no surprise the things I find cause me to wonder who the items belonged to and how the person related to the item. Did the tea cup handle of white china with a blue rose come west from New England with an early housewife? Was she disheartened at the loss, or did she throw the cup on the floor and break it herself in a fit of temper and frustration at the daily grind of life on the prairie?

Who used the medicine in the old, thick-glassed medicine bottle, and for what illness? Did it come from a traveling peddler, or was it purchased in town at a general store, or did an old-fashioned doctor sell it to the patient?

Was the milky-blue glass from a ball on a lightning post broken during a storm? What other destruction might the storm have wrought? Did the family hide in the cellar?

Were the hand-made nails made by a farmer on the property, or by a neighbor, or local blacksmith?

Some things I've found I've used as details in stories; others have given me ideas for entire stories.

Often I'll walk right over or near a nail or piece of glass a number of times before seeing it. The time of day, cloud cover, the angle of the sunlight and the amount of moisture in the dirt all make a difference in whether I notice an item. Sometimes a colorful rock or an unusual-shaped twig catches my attention to the point I miss a nail lying beside it; apparently there are distractions in every area of life. Occasionally I'll pull a weed to find a chunk of jagged-edged glass beneath a leaf.

A writer crawling out from a career mud season likely will find hints of creative and/or problem-solving ideas similar to the manner in which I find bits and pieces of the lives of the farmers and their wives and children who lived in our house during the last 100-plus years. Seldom do I find entire bottles, pieces of crockery, or tools. Even nails are often missing their heads. I find bits and pieces that show hints of the original item.

If you are emerging from a career mud season, pay attention to the bits and pieces pushed to the surface of your life and consciousness during the last year. An idea that seemed too broken to develop into a story might look different to you as you move into a new period in your life. Or perhaps the idea will be a solution to a career problem such as whether to go with a certain agent, or to submit to a certain house, or self-publish a specific story. Pay attention to what distracted you from writing. Is there something close by it that is just what you seek? Those weeds you don't want to look at—is there something valuable lying beneath them? Sometimes we know there's a problem in our career, but it's too painful to look at it; yet when we muster the courage to look at the problem we find the solution.

I've read that diamonds are formed deep in the earth, and pushed closer to the surface through the centuries that follow. The pieces of other people's lives that I find lying in the dirt aren't diamonds, but are a form of treasure in this writer's life. I suspect all writers can find treasures, revelations of spring, pushed from the depths after a career mud season.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children's nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.

NINC Bulletin Board

JOT—Just One Thing . . . still needs volunteers—

If you're interested in seeing that we have industry guests again every Wednesday, please contact Patricia Rosemoor (Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com)

Authors Dish on Stage Presence: “Un-Mic Before You Throw Up”

BY NICHOLE BERNIER

Much is said about the things you’re supposed to do before your first pub date and readings.

But not all that much is said about how to be that charming author at the podium. Someone who glides up with a joke or thoughtful anecdote—perfectly entertaining and informative, no nervous stutter, no perspiration stains spreading like a levee broke under her blouse.

So I put the question to successful authors: How did you come by your stage presence? What tips would you offer debut authors?

Excerpted below are highlights of the group interview online. Many thanks to the authors so generous with their insights and experience.

Sara Gruen: I go out and blather about things that happened while I was writing or researching the book. The nice thing about just blathering is that you don’t have to look at notes or anything, so you can make eye contact with the audience and really connect. The first time I had to speak in public I thought I was going to die of nerves. But remember, the audience is there because they like you and want to be there!

Ann Napolitano: I was horribly shy. Before my first book came out I bought leather pants and got glasses (which I barely needed). I thought if I played a part on stage I would be better able to survive. As it happened my grandmother died the day of the first reading, so I was flustered and forgot both the pants and the glasses. And yet I survived.

Claire Cook: I stopped getting nervous once I realized it’s not about ME—it’s about making sure everybody who takes time out of their busy lives to show up has a really good time. My version is to try to connect with each person, chat and joke, tell the stories behind the story of the book, and read just a short snippet. But I think it’s so important for a debut author to feel free to find the style that suits her best.

Robin Black: I usually talk a little bit about how the stories came to be written and what a surprise and gift it is to me that I get to share them now. While writing them, I had convinced myself they could never be a book. I talk a little bit about what a kind of magical thing it is as a writer to see the imagined readers materialize, to engage with people who care about the books they read.

I really think the key to a good reading for me—even when there are very few people there—is consciously remembering what a gift they are giving me by being there. It’s a big deal to set aside an evening and leave the family or just leave the house. If the point of coming to a reading is to have some kind of personal encounter with an author, I want anyone who does that to feel as though that’s happened.

Jenna Blum: I like improv (surprisingly), and I often think if I broke my ankle on the way to a reading, I’d start by saying, Hey, I broke my ankle, cut me some slack and thanks for keeping me company tonight! I LOVE Q&A. Once the scripted reading is over, I can relax and bounce on my toes and limber up and see what the audience throws at me. Remember: you can’t go wrong because you know all the answers. You wrote the book!

Dani Shapiro: I try to remember that the audience is on my side. They want us to do well! It’s so easy to forget that when you’re looking out into that sea of faces. And speaking off the cuff (or seemingly off the cuff) for a few minutes puts everyone at ease.

I find public speaking much scarier than reading. In a reading, the material feels like a security blanket to me. I can always go back to the book and read a bit more. But that can be a crutch as well.

If all else fails, there are always beta blockers. Seriously. Quite a few writers I know rely on them.

Randy Susan Meyers: I prepared like crazy before my first readings. I went to as many readings as possible, taking notes, seeing how the audience reacted, etc. (And always always bought the author’s book, even if it was about repairing washing machines.) Then I bought and ingested the book *Naked At The Podium: The Writer’s Guide To Successful Readings* by Kahle and Workhoven.

Most of all, I try to really keep in mind that this is for an audience of readers, and it’s my job to provide something as good as I can make it. Be as unstiff, honest, and, hopefully, entertaining as possible. For the discussion ▶

and Q&A, it was reaching into an honest place and giving folks sincere answers that touched into the passion that made me write the book in the first place. MOST important, remembering that folks like things that offer mirrors—that which helps them get in touch with their own “A-ha.”

Caroline Leavitt: Don't be afraid to be personal. I had a planned out a talk for an author lunch, and I was third up. When I heard the other authors speaking—and they were all very personal—I got up and told the audience, “This is my planned speech and I'm throwing it away,” and I did. I spoke from my heart, which was both scary and exhilarating, but it went over so well I try to do this every time.

I discovered I *loved* it, and I was so happy to be speaking, that I think that joy was probably infectious. So I would say, remember the joy. You're an author! You get to speak! People want to hear you! Isn't that magic?

Marie Mockett: There is a big difference between reading for an audience who already knows and loves your work and wants to see you, and reading to people who have no idea who you are. In my head, I have to sell myself and my book to the people who don't know who I am and that brings tremendous pressure.

A number of years ago I had a job teaching standardized test prep. And though I was very nervous, I guess I learned to develop this persona—this other person who knew what she was talking about. She became the teacher, and she's the one who reads my work out loud.

My mother was also a performer for many years and I remember before my first reading she said: “It's not like you have to memorize anything. You get to read from the book.” And that sort of took the edge off of my nerves.

Cheryl Strayed: I am always bummed to go to readings where the author just gets up there, says a few words then reads for 30+ minutes. Even if the work is great, I think the reason for a reading is to get the story behind the story, a sense of the author, as well as a bit of the book.

I also usually have a raffle. Audience members put their names in a hat and at the end of the reading I choose three and give away three books by other writers I love. It gives me the chance to yammer on about someone other than myself and it also makes the atmosphere more fun and festive.

Before I go to the podium, I remind myself to pretend like I'm playing the role of a woman who is not nervous. This sounds silly, but it's true. I pretend to be a relaxed, confident, happy person even if inside I'm feeling uncertain, nervous or self-conscious.

I write key words on a piece of paper that I take up to the podium with me so I can glance down at as I talk to make sure I've remembered to say everything I wanted to say.

Alexander Chee: ► Detach. I like to tell myself, “Prepare to survive it,” because it will end and you will be alive. It's completely nonfatal, this reading business. Also you don't have to look anyone in the eyes while you read, as it isn't a speech, though as you approach, maybe pick three friendly faces to move between in the audience. I always try to remember, if they're quiet while you read it's because they're not just listening, but they are in it. It's not because they silently hate you, which I did think once but no longer.

► No cheese or dairy that day. If you do eat it, carrot juice is an antiphlegmatic and will cut the dairy from your voice. Also a good ginger tea with hot lemon, which is soothing. Sometimes I do a shot of bourbon or vodka, or I have a small glass of scotch, but only one and on a lightly full stomach.

► Dress comfortably but nice, like a second date. Go to the bathroom before it starts even if you don't feel like you have to, just in case. One friend was miked and ran into the bathroom and threw up, and the whole room heard—so don't bring your mike with you. Stand with legs slightly apart and knees bent a little, and try for a very still body from the inside out, so it radiates—no leg tapping or shaking.

► Right before you get up there, just be like, Okay. I'm going to blow this shit up. And then do it. This is the part where it's a little like being a rock star, even if you get out there and read one quiet tiny story.

Courtney Sullivan: The night of the reading... Breathe. Just breathe in and out a lot, and remind yourself to do so. A nice glass of white wine beforehand never hurt a gal, either. The first time or two may be scary, and that's okay. It will get easier and easier.

Try to think back to a time when getting up to read your published work in front of an audience was only a dream. Your dream is coming true.

Lastly, for events such as these, just remind yourself that the stakes are pretty low. If you stumble over a word, you will not have your book contract revoked, your children will keep speaking to you, the sun will rise tomorrow. It's just a bit of fun, that's all.

Joseph Wallace: I too used to be terrified about speaking in public. Then I started running these storytelling/creative writing workshops in the local elementary school. I tell offbeat stories from my own life to inspire the 10-year-olds to tell their own stories.

What I found was the key to author appearances in front of adults as well: Be open, approachable, confiding, self-deprecating, willing to make yourself look foolish—human—in front of others. I think grown-ups and fourth-graders are looking for pretty much the same things. We all want to feel like we're being treated as equals.

For example: To start *Diamond Ruby*, I put down a big thriller I'd been working on. I describe my wife's reaction to hearing that I was abandoning a 35,000-word manuscript I was writing on spec...to start a completely different manuscript I'd be writing on spec. The audience always laughs when I describe the look on her face, but they also feel like they've gotten a glimpse of the struggles and decisions of the writing process.

Dawn Tripp: For my early readings in 2003 I used to draft up a 10-minute talk, memorize it, deliver it. But it never felt alive. So halfway through my tour on my second novel, I tossed the script. Forget about it, I said. I am just going to go in and make it a conversation. I have a few bullets I will go to. But I keep the talk part short. Ten minutes tops. And I tell the story of how the novel started, where it came from, why it moved me then, why I was compelled to write it, why it still matters to me now.

Marisa de los Santos: I have trouble paying attention at readings (even when I love the material) if the author seems too mannered or sing-songy or too self-consciously writerly (if that makes any sense). Having said that, I do practice a little. Practicing makes me less nervous. And during a tour, I read different sections at different events, just to keep myself fresh and to shake things up a bit. I think it's easier to read a funny section, but every now and then, I go for serious; whatever it takes to keep me caught up in the story and fully present for the audience.

Daphne Kalotay: I went to as many readings as possible before my first book came out, to see the variety of approaches, and learned that there's no one way to give a great reading. You have to figure out what you feel comfortable doing and how to maximize those talents. Also, attending other people's readings is more than just good karma. It means that when it's your turn you won't get nervous, because the scenario is so familiar.

Holly LeCraw: A plug for joint readings: I just love the energy and I think it is a real eye-opener for the audience, especially the aspiring writers, to hear about the two very different, sometimes completely opposite, ways that writers approach their work. And there are almost guaranteed to be more people than if there were just one!

I always thank people for coming to the store and give a heartfelt little spiel about how important indies are and what a great thing they are doing for their community by supporting them. I feel so strongly about this that that's one part of the talk I don't have to worry about—that part is not about me, and so somehow it comes out more easily.

Juliette Fay: I try to make people feel brilliant for asking a question even if I've heard it 20 times before. For them it's a new thought. Also, I'm grateful they're interested enough to ask! Another thing I've learned is never to debate readers' impressions. If they announce that something didn't ring true for them I resist the temptation to give examples of why it could absolutely be true. They have a right to interpret for themselves.

Julie Klam: I am a big believer in starting with a joke having to do with something in the room at the moment (this is all very different when you write a dog book because frequently there are dogs in the room). Always err on the side of reading less. Also look at the audience during your reading—so they're with you—just look at them and smile or something. I think people like to ask questions (hear themselves talk) so I spend a lot of time with that. Be prepared with a few parts; not every piece works with every crowd. Also, ask to see pictures of their dogs.

Beth Hoffman: I simply tell my story. The real story of how I grew up on a rural farm with my grandma and grandpa and I kept imaginary friends in a shoebox beneath my bed. Through storytelling I'm able to take the audience on my journey from simple (somewhat backward) farm girl to painter, to interior designer, to business owner, to the coup de grace—how I nearly died of septicemia, and why that experience gave me the courage to go after my secret dream of writing a novel. I look at the members of the audience as if I know each of them personally. And I laugh quite a bit when I share silly and embarrassing anecdotes.

Nichole Bernier is a freelance writer and author of the novel The Unfinished Work of Elizabeth D. She wrote this piece as she prepared for her own book launch, which she is now reading so often that she's hoarse. Nichole can be found online at <http://www.nicholebernier.com>, and on Twitter @nicholebernier.

This post first appeared on July 28, 2011 on the Beyond The Margins blog (<http://beyondthemargins.com/2011/07/authors-dish-on-stage-presence-un-mike-before-you-throw-up/>). It is reprinted with the permission of the author.



WRITING is TAXING

By Diane Kelly

Risky Business

Writers are often concerned about their risk of audit, and rightfully so. An audit can not only be time-consuming, but the process can also be extremely stressful. So what are your chances of being audited? Data from IRS audit activity for 2011 provides some clues.

Of the total 140,837,499 individual tax returns filed in 2011 for the 2010 tax year, 1,564,690 were audited. Thus, the IRA audited approximately 1.1 percent of the total individual returns.

Of these audited returns, 30.9 percent claimed an Earned Income Tax Credit, which is a tax benefit for certain taxpayers who earn modest incomes. The fact that such a high percentage of the audited returns involved this credit is not surprising given the increase in fraud related to this credit.

The majority of individual returns that were audited involved returns showing total net income of \$200,000 to \$1 million. Of these returns, 3.2 percent were audited.

The audit rate of business returns with gross revenues between \$100,000 and \$200,000 was 4.3 percent, which was a decrease from 4.7 percent in 2010. The audit rate for individual returns with total income between \$200,000 and \$1 million that showed business activity was 3.6 percent. And 12.5 percent of tax returns showing net income of \$1 million or more were audited, while only 8.4 percent of these returns had been audited in the preceding year.

IRS staff conducted 25 percent of the audits in 2011 in person, up from 21.7 percent the preceding year. The remaining 75 percent were correspondence audits, meaning they were handled by mail with no face-to-face interaction between the taxpayer and IRS staff.

So what conclusions can we draw from this data?

Overall, the risk of being audited is low. Phew! But...

Returns showing business activity, such as a Schedule C writing business, are subject to a higher audit risk than individual returns that do not include business activity. This increased risk makes sense, however, given that writers take deductions related to their writing businesses. While employment income reported on a W-2 is straightforward and easily verifiable by the IRS, business expenses are sometimes “fudged” by taxpayers. To promote compliance, the IRS examines a greater number of business returns.

The higher your income, the greater your risk of audit. This too, makes sense. Generally, those with high incomes often have income from multiple sources, such as wages, business income, and investment income such as rents, dividends, interest, or proceeds from the sale of stocks or bonds or the exercise of stock options. With multiple sources of income, there is more chance for error. In addition, old tax law did not require investment companies to report the amount a taxpayer had paid for an investment (the taxpayer’s “cost basis”). Some unscrupulous taxpayers misstated their cost basis on their returns, thus fraudulently reducing the reported gain. New legislation requires investment companies to report the taxpayer’s cost basis in investments, which should reduce misreporting of gains.

What can you do to decrease your audit risk?

Following the rules will reduce your chance of being audited. Be sure to pay your taxes on time via withholding or timely estimated tax payments. File your tax returns on time as well. If you can’t get your return completed by April 15, be sure to request an extension and get your returned filed as soon as possible. October 15 is the absolute deadline for extended returns. Do not miss this filing date! In my experience, the IRS fo-

cuses much more closely on those who file or pay late, since such behavior indicates a disregard of rules and poor recordkeeping.

Do not lump other business activities in with your writing activities. Be sure to file a separate Schedule C for each business you operate. Each line of business has its own unique industry classification code that will clue the IRS in on what to expect on the return. For instance, while a landscaping business would be expected to generate a significant deduction for depreciation related to landscaping equipment, a writer would not be expected to incur large costs for depreciation since writing is not the type of business that requires a lot of expensive equipment or machinery. If you lump your spouse's landscaping business in with your writing business, the unexpected numbers might catch the eye of the IRS.

Keep good records of your expenses. Many expenses we writers incur do not fall neatly into the categories set forth on the Schedule C form. Thus, many of our expenses are reported as "other expenses" on Line 27a of the form. You'll notice that the form includes space on page two for the total of "other expenses" to be broken down into smaller categories. Large expenses that are identified only as "Miscellaneous" or with vague descriptions can be red flags. It's far better to break your expenses down into smaller amounts with specific labels.

Report everything you earn. Failure to report income is also an invitation for an audit. Be sure to keep accurate records of your income and report all receipts whether or not you receive a 1099 from the payor reporting the payments. 1099 forms can get lost in the mail or may be misdirected if you have moved during a tax year. Omitting income, even inadvertently, can raise suspicions and might encourage the IRS to delve further into your finances.

Proof your return before you send it in. Major errors can also invite the IRS to dig deep. Be sure to look over your return with a critical eye before you or your tax preparer files the return. If a large mistake is discovered in one tax year, the IRS will often decide to examine your returns for other tax years as well.

If you find yourself receiving the dreaded audit notice, don't despair. Many examinations are completed with the taxpayer owing little or no tax as a result. But be sure to cooperate with the IRS. Failure to respond or cooperate will only raise suspicions and frustrate the overworked auditor. A prompt, thorough, and well-organized response will raise the odds of a resolution in your favor.

Diane Kelly is a CPA/tax attorney and the author of the humorous Death and Taxes romantic mystery series from St. Martin's Press.

Business Briefs

DOJ v. Apple, et al: The Saga Continues

ABA CEO Oren Reicher sent a letter to the Department of Justice (DOJ) supporting the Agency Model for e-book pricing to protect brick-and-mortar stores. (<http://news.bookweb.org/news/aba-submits-comments-doj-re-agency-model>)

PW Daily

The DOJ requested permission not to have to publish in the Federal Register the letters they have received regarding the Apple, et al, price-fixing action due to the volume of letters received and the cost of printing them, which would be more than \$100,000. The department requested that, instead, it be allowed to post them on the antitrust division web site. A current total of 150 letters comprising more than 200 pages have been received and that number is expected to rise by the June 25 deadline. Hmmm, the word irony comes to mind. The final motion deadline is July 27.

PW Daily

Barnes & Noble stepped up to declare the court should drop the price-fixing settlement, indicating that the DOJ isn't working in the public interest. B&N also stated the DOJ view is misguided and harmful, a position that is supported by Penguin and MacMillan, the two publishers not participating in the settlement.

http://www.publishersweekly.com/binary-data/ARTICLE_ATTACHMENT/file/000/000/725-1.pdf

PW Daily

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Doing the Math

“You know your strategy is flawed if your problems mount when it succeeds.”

— Fareed Zakaria,
journalist

All the discussion in recent months about the Department of Justice’s allegation that five major publishers colluded on the price-fixing of e-books has included a lot of discussion about book prices, which has led me to think about math lately.

As it happens, I recently received an email from my seventh grade math teacher. He’d picked up a fantasy novel called *Doppelgangster* and realized that its author had been one of his students decades ago. When he emailed me to say hello, I was surprised that he remembered me, since I was a very poor math student. (Of course, it’s just barely possible that, despite my arithmophobia, I was loquacious and opinionated in his class...)

Later, as a high-school student, I slept through all my math classes. (An old friend inadvertently ratted on me last year, and my mother reamed me a new one despite the fact that it’s at least 30 years too late to punish me for this.) I had low math scores on my SATs, and my college major (languages) allowed me to skip math entirely—though I did have to read medieval Italian, so there was still some suffering. I was required to take a standardized test when applying to graduate school 20 years later, but I attended a master’s program that didn’t care that my math score strongly suggested I had let a poodle take the test for me.

Anyhow, I was touched that my seventh grade math teacher remembered me. Actually, more than that, he said that his early experience with me had influenced him: “You were such an extreme case, considering your intelligence, that I got interested in helping the ‘low’ kids, who turned out (shockingly!) to mostly have a lack of confidence and understanding of the basics. I could go on, but I’ll just say that math is a very poorly taught subject in most elementary schools and leave it at that. But you did inspire me in a way.” So apparently I achieved more than just wasting space in that classroom!

But despite my academic history, I’m actually pretty good with math that *matters* to me: money, sales figures, earnings percentages, splitting the bill, figuring the tip, etc. During the year I spent on the road in Africa dealing with multiple currencies, I could calculate in my head what a kilo of camel meat priced in Mauritanian ouguiya cost in West African francs, British sterling, or American dollars, and then subtract from that sum the local value of the pens that I was going to offer into the bargain (in those days, ballpoint pens were often good for bartering).

Math was also a source of conflict with my various literary agents. I always thought that an associate getting 15 percent of my income should be doing 15 percent of the work. I never found an agent who agreed, and thus math played a key role in my eventual decision to cease working with agents. Since then, I’ve been

steadily pocketing at least \$6,000 per year that I would otherwise be paying in agency commissions. So, despite my murky academic past, I can do math pretty well when it matters to me.

Which brings us back to the oft-stated assumption that the DoJ's lawsuit will result in lower e-book prices. In contrast to the anguished cries of doom that have been floating through our industry, I think that's a *good thing*—primarily because I believe publishers are pricing books too high for the marketplace. Not just e-books—*all* books.

I recognize that publishers have high overheads (staff salaries, production costs, office space, etc.), that the production and distribution of print books is very expensive, and that many of the same costs go into e-books (editing, copy editing, packaging, marketing). But consumers (including me) don't base their price-point tolerance on the producer having high overhead expenses. We base our purchases on perceived value. (Or, okay, yes, sometimes on acquisitive obsession and lack of impulse control. But work with me here—today we're focusing on the "perceived value" argument). And it seems to me that a lot of consumers find publishers' e-book *and* print book prices too high.

Despite the fiscal struggles of independent bookstores and the big chains, the two large *used* bookstores in my area have become so perpetually overcrowded in the past year, I don't even like to go there anymore. I can no longer find a day or a time when those stores aren't *jammed* with shoppers and when the lines at the cash register aren't long.

Although there are fewer retail bookstores in my area now than there were before, and the remaining ones have depressingly few customers when I go there, my local *library* has become as inconveniently overcrowded as my local used bookstores. Despite the installation of half a dozen self-service machines, when I want to check out, I usually have to wait in line behind multiple people carrying armfuls of books.

So I'd say that people here in the thrifty Midwest don't seem to be reading a lot less print these days; they're just buying a lot less print at retail prices—because those prices are too high for them.

And I can readily understand that. I haven't bought a new hardcover since 2010—because they cost too much. Frankly, so do many mass market paperbacks. Rather than replace my vanished backlist books by one of my favorite writers (I made four long-distance moves between 2003 and 2006, and some of my stuff ran away from home each time), I've been re-reading those titles via the local library. Much as I love this writer's work, it's too expensive to replace those 20 to 30 missing books at the \$8.99 price tag that's on almost every current paperback edition of these books—which novels, all decades old, earned out a long time ago and are now all pure profit for the major house that's *also* charging \$8.99 for almost all of the *poorly formatted* e-book editions of these titles.

A friend of mine who earns a good salary recently told me that she's gone back to being a regular library user, as she was in her salad days, because too many of the books she wants to read are too expensive. Her initial addiction to her e-reader has ended for the same reason: She finds the e-book prices (mostly \$12.99 to \$14.99) too high on the titles she wants to read. She doesn't care about overhead and production costs. From her perspective, book prices have simply reached a point where this voracious reader isn't willing to pay that much for them.

Many consumers, as we know, are also finding their affordable alternative in self-published e-books, which are usually priced between \$0.99 and \$6. Titles available in that range increasingly include well-packaged, well-formatted e-books by well-known writers—as well as by talented, commercially viable new writers who aren't under contract with a publisher. This isn't back-alley garbage (though there's plenty of that, too); this is strong competition for those consumer dollars. In an increasingly large number of instances, these e-books are as attractive to readers as the e-books that the big publishers are offering, and they're priced better.

Yes, there will always be readers who will buy a book they want to read at retail price, even when that price is high, instead of borrowing a library copy or waiting until the title is available in used bookstores. There will always be readers who'd rather read an author's new, expensively priced book than read (or re-read) any of her self-published backlist e-books priced 25-to-75 percent lower than the newest one. But will there be *enough* such readers in 10 years?—five years? two years?—to sustain multiple large companies trying to stay afloat by clinging to higher prices in a rapidly expanding sea of well-produced e-books (often by the same writers) that are *not* perceived as too expensive? ▶

I by now find it hard to see a promising future for publishers who won't lower book prices—particularly e-book prices—to a level that more consumers find attractive. After all, the business model of all the major houses is based on selling *many* units. These are not boutique operations. They're not structured to supply limited-editions of rare commodities to a small, elite market. The major houses are “mass market” businesses. Surely they need their pricing strategies to appeal to a huge number of readers—who have many more choices available besides paying suggested retail prices that they consider too high.

How publishers cope with (or fail to cope with) lowering overhead or increasing sales enough to compensate for lower retail prices will be up to them and their business acumen. My math stops well short of proposing specific cutbacks to them.... Except to note that one cutback they've often relied on before—reducing the *author's* advances and royalty rates—is no longer the viable solution for them that it once was. Because, much like consumers, writers have an increasingly wide variety of alternatives available for earning income from our books if we don't like the math we see in a new publishing contract from a major house.

Laura Resnick writes the Esther Diamond fantasy series for DAW Books, and her 2012 releases are Disappearing Nightly and Poltergeist. Her backlist e-books are available from most e-vendors and are all listed on her website at LauraResnick.com.

NINC Bulletin Board

Gear up for the NINC Conference: Profitable Partnerships—Publishing *a la carte*

The 2012 Conference starts Wednesday October 24 and will focus on exploring new publishing partnership opportunities with traditional books, e-rights and beyond. We'll have speaker panels, roundtable conversations, workshops, and more. Sign up now, volunteer and participate!

http://NINC.com/conferences/2012/registration_form.asp See page 7 for more news!

Other Conferences of Note:

The 32nd California Napa Valley Writers' Conference, St. Helena, CA. July 22 – 27, 2012

<http://www.napawritersconference.org/>

University of North Florida Writers Conference, Jacksonville, FL. August 4 – 5, 2012

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

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