

# NINIK

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## Book Marketing With Visual Content; 7 Ways To Stand Out With Images

BY JOANNA PENN

Think about how you surf the internet these days. Think about how you decide what to click on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media. Now multiply that by all those people who are overwhelmed by the amount of information and entertainment options online. Let's face it—in a sea of content, how do you stand out?

Visual images can be a way for people to make an instant decision over whether to stay and read any further. Posts with visuals also get more engagement on social media. It's the same concept as book covers—and we all know that people DO judge a book by its cover.

So what are some of your options as a writer to use visual content?

### 1. Use images on your blog posts.

I see so many authors ignoring this basic advice and writing articles on blog platforms with no visuals to entice the reader. This is a basic must-do for everything you write online. You can get Creative Commons licensed images from Flickr ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)), so it doesn't have to cost you money. Use the Advanced search option and then make sure you link back to the image provider, or use Compfight (<http://compfight.com>) to do the searching for you. All my own photos are available for you to use under a Creative Commons license on Flickr here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/38314728@N08/>.

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### 2. Make shareable images using quotes from your books.

There are lines within your books that will be perfect for sharing. First you have to find them, and if you have enough sales, you can find them on your Amazon page, right at the bottom, where the most highlighted passages are listed. You can, of course, go through the book with a highlighter and find some you like.

Then you can use tools like Canva ([www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)) or PicMonkey ([www.picmonkey.com](http://www.picmonkey.com)) to format the quote with a great image, or you can just use Powerpoint/Keynote and then save as *Continued on page 6* ▶

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Address changes may be made on the  
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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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### NINC has room to grow...

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.



## Celebrating the Best of NINC

Tradewinds Hotel, St. Pete, FL  
October 22-26, 2014

### ***Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow***

*"Publishers are buzzards, and we're the prey."*  
Anonymous

I don't think it's a really good idea to picture publishers as ravenous winged scavengers—mostly because they only dine on dying and dead meat, so what would that make us?

We may all be in this together (publishers and authors), as a business, but that doesn't make us friends or pals or partners either. We (or our "sales force"—agents) are in the market to sell our product for the best price we can get and on the best terms we can negotiate. Publishing houses take our "raw product" and (as it's supposed to work), edit it, plan a campaign around it, including cover and publicity, and then go out and sell it. The object being that everybody makes money.

When/if either participant in this business transaction fails to perform, there is contract language to refer to, for instance, if the author doesn't deliver the product or delivers an inferior product. And on the publisher's end? Well, generally, it's not been so much of a problem for the publishers because we signed away our rights.

Why did we do that back in the day, agree to hand so much of ourselves and our work over to the publishers? For the "newer kids on the block" who might think we were blooming idiots, that was because they were the only games in town. More so as the years passed, because one of those "games" could now own over a dozen imprints, and when we struck out with one, we were pretty much out of the game for all those imprints.

One side held most of the cards—and they exploited them because they could. That's just business. The other side didn't have alternatives and were all working as independent contractors. Most didn't even know each other, and nobody had yet banded together with their version of "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Now we authors have two things going in our favor: we have alternative paths to the market, and we talk to each other. Plus a third, and that one's a constant: we're the talent. It didn't take us too long to figure out we now held the advantage (though, yes, many are still stuck with a couple dozen of Yesterday's contracts in our files).

Meanwhile, publishers tried to understand what was happening. Authors were asking for rights back in record numbers. Until publishers figured out why, or even what they'd do with those backlist rights, they did what they could to grab as many of those rights as possible. I'd have done it, were I in their shoes and had a company to protect and hundreds of authors demanding return of their "product." A real run on the bank—so quick, close and lock the doors, don't let anyone else in or out, and we'll figure out what to do later.

It's later ....

We've all had some time to settle down, and now might be the time for authors to go back to the table, bringing with them other options for negotiation. For example, say I offer to sign a three-book con- ▶

tract, but either you hand over e-book rights for backlist books A-through-R, or you do X,Y, and Z with those books (that's where agents earn their chops).

Converting thousands of older titles into e-books or print-on-demand costs publishers a lot of money, yet those older titles aren't making publishers any real money in return. Why? Because they didn't update the covers. They don't have the authors volunteering to update the content. So the e-books just sort of lie there as #2 million out of three million other old books up for sale. If there's a reason other than a bookkeeping one (look, we're losing money here, tax write-off) ... well, I don't see it. Why not hand back the rights, write off the book, take the loss, take the tax break, and move on? That's how it's done in most businesses. There aren't many who hang on to their stock of Martin and Lewis coloring books, hoping they'll come back in demand. Take your loss, take your tax break, and do it better next time.

So what could the author do with these rights that publishing houses do not, perhaps can not? Let us count the ways, right? And well-handled backlist supports frontlist, always has. Publisher mishandling of rights they aren't really exploiting isn't smart. Time to get smart!

I think publishers are beginning to realize they can't succeed on a handful of bestsellers and their backlists that are repackaged and put out there six times a year, that the mid-list career author is still their main bread and butter and, yes, important to their future. Not saying we have the upper hand now, but I am saying the playing field is getting more level, and we're no longer taking that field either by ourselves or with our agents beside us, to face a full I I-man team that knows how to protect the ball, if not always what to do with it.

Bottom line? Well, for me, it's to stop thinking in terms of scavengers and dead meat on the ground. Time to stop thinking "us against them" or "them against us" and realize we're mutually dependent and can be mutually profitable. Our conference title last year was Profitable Partnerships. Our theme this year: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow.

As authors, we can't get stuck in Yesterday. We have to let go of some of it (while having learned our lessons from it). We have to live (and earn) Today ... while always looking toward the opportunities and challenges of Tomorrow.

So do publishers, agents, distributors, etc. They're not scavengers, and we're not prey. They offer services we want. We have the product they want and need. But remember, authors now have one thing more, something we didn't have when we signed contracts seven, 15, even 30 years ago—other opportunities.

We're NINC. We're the cool heads, the career authors in it for the long haul. So we gather information. We inform (because in information there is power and always has been). We invite the industry to Florida for mutually profitable conversation, and our members make their own decisions.

Publishers are also looking at Yesterday (rather fondly, I imagine), but they're slowly—oh, so slowly—beginning to realize that to survive they have to acknowledge that Yesterday's gone—not coming back—and Today is a whole new deal ... and they, too, have to look to Tomorrow. It's vital for their survival.

We want them to survive. We need them to survive. Why? Because their survival gives us more choices. It's, again, just good business. Again, that's where NINC comes in ... where NINC members come in. We don't go to Florida armed with Yesterday's frustrations. We go there, meet there, to make a better Today and to have a hand in shaping Tomorrow.

We provide the "product." We are blessed with the creative imaginations that truly shape what's hot, what's not, in the market today. We have a voice. The publishing industry—from agents to publishers to distributors and everything in between—know it. One more time: we have something we seldom had Yesterday. We have choices.

It's too late for any of us to go back and fix Yesterday, although we all learned so much to help us here in the Today. When publishing looks at Tomorrow, the first thing they see is the career author, because we're still the one "product" they need or else everything else falls apart. They know this. They want to know what we want in a publisher, in an agent, in a distributor. They want to sell to the customer, naturally, but now they're increasingly finding themselves in the position of having to sell themselves to us.

Authors aren't cans of soup. If there's no chicken noodle left on the shelves, the tomato soup sits there gathering dust, and the chicken soup buyer goes somewhere else. We're not buses. If the publisher misses one, another one will be along soon enough—or not. (Just ask any publisher who thought the house was bigger than the author who says no and goes on to set sales records with their competitors.) Professional,

dependable career authors are the one link in the chain that holds everything else together. We're the keystones. We're the lynch-pins. Without the career author, everything else falls down.

We're not prey. We're not Yesterday. And we're pro-active, more and better informed. We've got options. Best of all, we've got Tomorrow and, with any luck, progressive publishing houses, agents, and distributors will travel there with us.

That's why we invite industry to Florida. That's why, thanks to major input from NINC members, I wrote the First Word panel questions I wrote. We all have so much to learn, to share. That's why I'm going to be in Florida. That's why we all need to be there.

— Kasey Michaels, 2014 Conference Chair

**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.

*Business Briefs*

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

**Reorganization at Penguin Publishing Group Finalized**

At the beginning of September Penguin Random House CEO Markus Dohle announced the Penguin Publishing Group, with Madeline McIntosh as the president. Publishing divisions, key leadership, and imprints are listed in the table below.

*PW Daily*

Berkley and New American Library Publishing Group	Leslie Gelbman, president	Ace, Berkley, Berkley Books, Berkley Heat, Berkley Sensation, Berkley-Caliber, Berkley Prime Crime, InkLit, InterMix, Jove
New American Library	Kara Welsh, senior v-p	Celebra, NAL, NAL Accent, NAL Caliber, Obsidian Mysteries, ROC, Signet, Signet Classics, Signet Eclipse, Signet Select
Penguin Books	Kathryn Court, president & publisher	Penguin Books, Penguin Classics
Perigee	John Duff, v-p & publisher	HP Books, Perigee, Prentice Hall
Viking, Plume	Clare Ferraro, president	Hudson Street Press, Pamela Dorman Books, Viking
Tarcher	Joel Fotinos, v-p & publisher	Tarcher
Penguin Press	Ann Godoff, president & editor-in-chief	Penguin Press
GP Putnam's Sons	Ivan Held, president	GP Putnam's Sons, Marian Wood Books, Pintail
Riverhead Books	Geoff Kloske, v-p & publisher	Riverhead Books, Riverhead Trade Paperbacks
Blue Rider Press	David Rosenthal, president & publisher	Blue Rider Press
Dutton, Gotham, Avery	Brian Tart, president & publisher	Avery, Dutton, Gotham, Viking Studio
Portfolio, Sentinel	Adrian Zackheim, president & publisher	Current, Portfolio, Sentinel

# Book Marketing with Visual Content.

Continued from page 1 ▶ an image. Post them on any social media sites with links back to your books, blog posts, or profiles. You can do this for other people's quotes as well; for example, I did one for my podcast with mega-bestselling author David Morrell, the creator of *Rambo*.

## 3. Use Pinterest for story-boarding, research, and inspiration.

I love Pinterest, and I use it mainly for my own story ideas. I create a board per fiction book project, and it helps me capture ideas and images, as well as provide an extra dimension for my readers. I always share the Pinterest Board in the Author's Note at the back of my thrillers.

Register at <http://www.pinterest.com/> and download the Pinnable icon for your browser, then you can pin away when you're doing book research. I start my boards very early, so often they are named after my working titles, which generally change later. For example, my Ragnarok Board (<http://www.pinterest.com/jfpenn/ragnarok/>) became *Day of the Vikings* later.

For more ideas, check out *A Guide to Pinterest for fiction and nonfiction writers* by Frances Caballo. (<http://writerlycommunity.azurewebsites.net/guide-pinterest-fiction-nonfiction-writers-15-best-practices/>) You can also find a whole load of ideas on Pinterest for using Canva to create book covers on Pinterest's Canva Layouts page. (<http://www.pinterest.com/canva/canva-layouts-kindle-book-covers/>)

## 4. Use infographics.

These are perhaps best used for nonfiction books or for blog surveys or other useful information that begs to be shared. If you're someone who loves to play in Powerpoint/Keynote or Excel, you can prep the data there and then use the previously mentioned tools to format it.

You can also use services like Infogr.am (<https://infogr.am/>) or Easel.ly, (<http://www.easel.ly/>) or you could hire someone from Fiverr.com or PeoplePerHour.com to create one for you. For more ideas, check out 10 tools for creating infographics and visualizations. (<http://moz.com/blog/10-tools-for-creating-infographics-visualizations>)

## 5. Share ad hoc pics on your social media timeline.

When people tell me they don't have time for marketing, I usually point them to a smartphone and taking pictures. A picture creates a moment of connection, and someone will likely comment on it, favorite it, or click to follow your profile because of it. These are not pictures of you and your book! It is usually just something you see or that inspires you, for example, the sign that I saw in a shop window in Bristol, UK, was retweeted and favorited 48 times. It took me about a minute to snap the picture and share it.

Attraction marketing is based on being useful, interesting, inspirational, or entertaining—and you can do that with just one picture a day. You might think your life is boring or mundane, but where you live might be fascinating to people on the other side of the world, or even in the next state. Try sharing aspects of it on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest and see who discovers you.

## 6. Use SlideShare for your fiction or nonfiction book.

There's a whole article on using SlideShare for your book on my website. (<http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2014/05/16/slideshare-book-marketing/>) But basically, you create Powerpoint/Keynote presentations that are heavy on the visual side and load them up to SlideShare.com. From there, they can be shared easily on any social media and embedded within your LinkedIn profile. I made one for my political thriller.

## 7. Create Book Trailers and Book Research Videos.

Making a book trailer yourself takes some time and commitment, but it can be done! I must admit to having some doubts about book trailers as an effective use of marketing budget, as I don't see much evidence

that they really impact sales. But I have recently come around to the idea as translations mean the same content can be used multiple times, and with a proliferation of books, it's an effective visual differentiator. But be careful, there are services that cost a lot of money, and if you do it yourself badly, it can do more harm than good.

An example is my trailer in English for *Desecration, London Psychic Book 1*, which is on my website at <http://www.jfpenn.com/desecration/>. I've used the same video for the German and Italian versions of the trailer just by switching out the text. I also have Spanish coming, too, so I can reuse it all over again.

I outline the process for making a book trailer yourself on my website (read the information at <http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2011/01/07/how-to-create-a-book-trailer>). I made the *Desecration* trailer for around \$40, which included the royalty-free stock photos, video, and music from Incompetech.com (<http://incompetech.com/>). I wouldn't recommend spending a lot of money on this, but if you are feeling visually creative, give it a go yourself!

*Joanna Penn writes thrillers and dark fiction as J.F. Penn and runs The Creative Penn, a website for writers [www.thecreativepenn.com](http://www.thecreativepenn.com). This article first appeared on that website and is reprinted with the author's permission.*

## For more information, check out the following resources:

[12 days to visual buzz email series](#) - which includes more tips on where to find images, making 3D images, websites and logos (<http://visualbuzz101.com/12-days/>)

[26 ways to use visuals in your social media marketing](#) – Social Media Examiner (<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/26-tips-visual-social-media-marketing-strategy/>)

10 Reasons Visual Content Will Dominate 2014 – Wishpond - (<http://blog.wishpond.com/post/70300587846/10-reasons-visual-content-will-dominate-2014>)

### *Business Briefs*

#### **Downsizing at Ellora's Cave**

Patty Marks, Ellora's Cave CEO, announced in August the decline in e-book sales through Amazon as the cause for reorganization. The changes include laying off freelance editors as well as talking to Amazon about the approximately 75 percent sales decline. Rumors of bankruptcy are being denied.

*PW Daily*

#### **Barnes & Noble and Espresso**

Barnes & Noble is testing the Espresso Book Machine in New York City (Union Square), Paramus, New Jersey and Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. This is to judge interest in print-on-demand system for public domain titles, self-published titles, and hard-to-locate books. Books-A-Million has a similar procedure in place, as do numerous independent stores. On Demand, Espresso's parent company, hopes to have as many as 100 machines in place by the end of 2014.

*PW Daily*

# THE CARE AND FEEDING OF THE GIRLS IN THE BASEMENT, revisited

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

It's Monday morning and I drank too much wine watching the season finale of *Game of Thrones*. My manuscript in progress is kind of a mess of murky motivations. I wanted to write 3000 fresh words today because the book needs to get done by the end of next week, but instead I'm going to have to go fix things. I also have such a flurry of post-it notes on my To Do board that it looks like a color blizzard. A few of them have fallen off on the floor to be covered in animal hair so they'll never stick again. I probably need a better system, but that would add something else to the list.

Like every other professional writer at the moment, I am overwhelmed. Like everyone else, I'm juggling indie publishing with my New York titles. I'm supervising an assistant and a marketing person, testing covers with my brain trust, dancing between genres and names on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter (oh most loathed social media). I have hired an editor and copy editor who also need me to be on time with things.

There's gold in them thar hills, and we know it, and we are all chasing our own dream of unbounded wealth, or at least the opportunity to actually really make money. It's wonderful.

It's also exhausting. I haven't worked like this since I was a young mother writing category and historicals and juggling room mother duties and suppers and deadlines.

Sounds familiar, I'm sure. Indie publishing has imbued "busy" with an entirely new depth of meaning.

Which means it is more important than ever to fill the well, take time to nourish the girls in the basement who are doing all the heavy lifting. This is not for the soft or silly or unambitious. It is critical, necessary, the only way to prevent burnout and exhaustion, the only possible way to keep up with extremely busy schedules.

There are a million ways to fill that well—read or exercise or watch movies; engage in hobbies like watercolors or knitting or participating in living history; engage in a yoga practice or train for a marathon. The important thing is to walk away from work for some part of every day and take time to nourish yourself. It's also a good idea to have days off, which is a shocking thing to say in the current world, but no one can write seven days a week, year in year out, and not eventually crash. You have to take time to rest and nourish yourself.

It doesn't have to take hours. You don't need to take the whole day or even an hour. You just have to work in the little things that make you feel renewed, refreshed, ready to go again. For me, it's a matter of routines. I don't work weekends unless I'm at the very end of a book and have to finish. Instead, my husband and I go to tai chi, and I meet a (non-writing) friend for coffee. I go for a hike or head out to the garden. One afternoon a week, I fetch my two-year-old granddaughter from day care and we ... mess around. Nothing much, just spending time.

It helps to have a hobby, one that is absorbing and challenging and stretches your brain and creativity in ways that are not like writing. Mine is gardening, and it has been since I first planted some bachelor button seeds in a strip in front of our suburban house when I was 12.

Gardening in my part of the world is not for the faint of heart. I live at 7500 feet, with a scorching sun and hard winds and a short season. Oh, and hail. Lots of hail. I have resigned myself to mostly growing roses



as annuals and wonder if I'll ever get a second season of peaches from my beleaguered tree. It's a challenge, and I spend much of my time cursing, rubbing my aching back, and limping in on creaky knees. My husband shakes his head—he has no idea why anyone would engage in such a demanding, irritating, challenging pursuit.

But this is why:

This morning when I'm a little tired and not quite ready to get to work, I head outside for a few minutes. It's a big, messy sprawl of vegetables and flowers, pots and bags and beds, but just now the poppies are in full bloom, orange and pink. The early sun backlights their delicate, wrinkled petals. The peonies have opened next to the chives and the alliums I've nudged along are finally blooming exuberantly. The purple alliums with white peonies soften some annoyed thing in me.

In the plastic greenhouse, the peas are vigorous and blooming, and I keep poking through to see if there are any ripe yet, playing with recipes in the back of my mind. My granddaughter and I planted them (on one of our afternoons together) and I can't wait to show her what happens when you can pluck the peas and eat them. I checked the onions and damn—there are the wretched onion grubs back. Bastards! From a sprawl of mints, I dig up a few clumps of peppermint and tuck them amid the onions. Someone told me this would work, and it's the same person who told me radish leaves attract flea beetles, which will then leave everything else alone. That worked. Maybe this will, too.

I scrape some weeds out of the dahlias and thin the carrots, taking the skinny, inch long sacrifices to rinse and eat. The radishes are going to seed and soon the spinach will follow, but the corn is up and the cats are swishing through the lilacs to catch mice and birds and hummingbird moths, which they will bring to me as prizes. I toss a handful of new carrot seeds in a raised bed, cut one peony blossom and one dahlia, and come back inside. The fat white peony goes in a shot-size olive oil bottle I saved from a plane trip, and the dahlia goes in a triangular balsamic vinegar bottle with a wax mark of authenticity on the label. Because each is so beautiful, I shoot some photos with my iPhone for posting to Instagram and maybe Facebook, and then it's time to go upstairs and get to work.

Where I am nourished for having paused without words or thought or agendas, engaged in something entirely unrelated to writing. It's something hard, something at which I regularly fail, something that is often absolutely out of my control. It's humbling and quieting. It makes writing just one of the other things I do—challenging and overwhelming and delightful and absorbing. I also fail at that, but being in my garden, I understand that failure is part of the game. There is a lot about a career that's out of my control, too, like plummeting print runs and the rise of new genres that take slots from mine, and the up and down excitement and fear of all these changes. Like the garden—a sudden, late freeze that kills the blossoms, countered by the most extravagant lilac season in years. A feast of poppies and aphids demolishing the lupines. I make peace in the garden—if I can only grow roses as annuals, then I will grow them as annuals—instead of railing at a thing beyond my control. It forces me to face facts, not wishful thinking.

Gardening is my relief, but also, it fills the well. There's conflict (those grubs!) and there's reward (look at the peas!), and patience, and color and shape and silence and hope and light. There is the free wandering quiet that the girls in the basement can use to build something, review problems, fix things (like that pesky motivation problem—what is he thinking? Who is he, really? Ah ... he's not developed enough, is he?), create things, entire worlds. How can they do that work if I never give them any time to do it?

I once heard Bella Andre say "Balance is overrated," and I cheered her along with the rest of the room, because it's true. The current world, morphing all around us in ways that are unsettling and thrilling and exhausting, is a demanding one for writers and we can't be great at everything. The one thing that can't be allowed to disappear, however, is the immutable need to tend to the girls in the basement. To give them rest and quiet and lots of details and new ideas with which to fashion new material.

Your method of filling the well might be reading or knitting or running, but you should absolutely be taking some time most days to do something.

What have you been doing to nourish your girls?

*Barbara Samuel is the bestselling author of more than 40 books, including The Garden of Happy Endings, written as Barbara O'Neal. She blogs at A Writer Afoot, Reinventing Fabulous, and The Goddess blogs, and features mini blogs on her popular Facebook page. For more information, go to [www.barbarasamuel.com](http://www.barbarasamuel.com) or [www.barbaraoneal.com](http://www.barbaraoneal.com).*

# On Stage: Talking about Writing

BY SOPHIE MASSON

Some time ago, at a literary festival, I was in the authors' green room talking to a new writer whose first public appearance as an author was that very day. She was clearly very nervous, though trying hard to look as blasé as the rest of us more experienced speakers must have looked to her. (This, of course, was far from the truth—most of us still get stage fright to one extent or the other). Finally, she burst out with, “I wish I lived a hundred years ago, when writers didn't have to do this performance thing!”

It wasn't quite accurate, of course—talking about writing has a long history, with Charles Dickens and Mark Twain just two writers from the past who were greatly in demand as speakers—but many writers can understand her feeling.

It's true enough that these days talking in public is expected of every writer, and not just the famous ones. (The seriously famous ones can simply refuse to do it, thereby adding to their fame, ironically). Writers can't just write any more. We can't sit in our garrets away from the world creating marvelous worlds that will satisfy our readers; we can't just expect our work to make an impact on its own. We are expected to show ourselves off. To go on stage, and not just to talk about our books or read from them as Dickens and Twain used to do, but to make ourselves known as personalities, and even as that dreaded word “brand.” It seems that the reading public can't get enough of seeing and hearing writers in the flesh, whether that be at festivals, conferences, libraries, schools, bookshops, book clubs, community organizations, or writers' groups. And the pressure is strong to be articulate, entertaining, and informative in public, in speech, and not just the written word. We're expected, in fact, to be performers, and not just writers. But talking is different than writing. You might be a fluent word person on the page, but words might fail you miserably in speech.

Now some of us, who are naturally comfortable with the stage, enjoy performing all the time. Many of us enjoy it at least some of the time. And some of us hate it nearly all the time. But each of us has to learn sooner or later ways of dealing with that expectation we *will* perform. One way, of course, is to refuse all invitations to speak. But for most authors, that's not really a very helpful option. And not only because it's not helpful in terms of your career—it would also mean you miss out on the positive sides of being on the book-talk circuit, which not only includes connecting directly with your audience, but also getting to know fellow writers. I'm not the only writer to have formed lasting friendships with fellow authors I first met when we spoke at the same event. And in our big country, there are many author friends I only ever catch up with when we are speaking at the same event. Of course, connecting directly with your audience can be a great pleasure and a great success—but even if an event turns out to be a fizzer in terms of connecting with audience or books sold, there is usually the compensation of meeting fellow-toilers in the author talk field. And the gossip's usually pretty interesting too.

I've been speaking in public about writing for a couple of decades now. Mostly, I enjoy it, though always, I have a certain amount of stage fright before it. (Indeed, I think if I didn't, I wouldn't give a good performance.) Mostly, too, I establish a good connection with audiences. I did a lot of drama as a child and teenager and it's likely that early training helped, as did the fact that in my big, loud family, the ability to speak up and express yourself was pretty much a necessity if you didn't want to be steamrollered flat. But I don't naturally love being center stage—there are times when, rather than speak in public, I would prefer to hide in a corner and read a book, and I curse myself for ever having accepted that invitation. But once you're there, you're there, and you have to make the most of it.

So how to make the most out of it? Here are some things I've learned over the years.

**Remember, as any actor will tell you, each audience is different.** One size definitely does not fit all. It's not just a matter of the type of event or the age of your audience or the social environment. There

are some generalizations you can make, such as that primary school kids are generally easier to engage than high school kids, but talented high school kids can be very rewarding indeed to speak to; a regional festival audience will often be more appreciative than a more blasé big-city one that is more focused on the stars. But aside from those kinds of generalizations—and there are always exceptions to them—there is a strange alchemy happening, which means you can never be sure until you're actually on stage what mood an audience might be in: the most important thing is to never take it for granted, or plow on regardless on some pre-determined path. Which brings me to the next point:

**Don't prepare too much.** These days, I never write out a speech, unless it's going to be published later. I hardly ever write down more than memory jottings. In most circumstances, when I'm talking about my own books or the writing process, I have found it works much better if I "wing it" and am more spontaneous than planned. If I'm asked to speak on a particular theme, such as on a panel with other writers, I will think about the topic beforehand but hardly ever write anything down except for memory jottings or a striking image. The thing is that on a panel, especially when you are not the first speaker, if you've planned too much what you're going to say, you may find that the other speakers are saying pretty much the same thing as you—which is kind of boring for the audience! Better to stay on your toes and improvise. And if you have a tough audience—an experience I've had more than once—then if you are too focused on a plan, you will be thrown off track much more easily.

**Don't improvise completely, though, even if you have a tough audience.** These two points may seem contradictory—but in fact they are part of the same strategy. What you should try to have in your author-talk toolbox is a series of possibilities that you can pull out, depending on your instinct about the audience. For example, I was asked to speak about my books to a very rowdy group of kids at a tough school, and it became clear in the first few minutes that listening to a writer talking about her books was very far down their list of priorities. So I quickly switched tack and began telling them a story about a long sea voyage I was once on as a child, and the adventures we had. Well, they liked that well enough, but they liked it even more when I told them I came originally from France. All they wanted after that was to get me to tell them their names, and the names of things, in French. Peals of laughter ensued as they repeated them, and the whole hour passed happily if noisily that way. At the end of it, one of the teachers came to see me. I thought at first she might be going to rebuke me for cowardice, but what she said was, "Thank you. I've never seen the kids so engaged, and for a whole hour, too!" It's not always how it might seem, though—another group of kids in an equally tough school hung on to every word of my talk, and later sent me gorgeous illustrated stories they'd written, inspired by it. Whilst a very wealthy private school was another really tough gig, where I got blank, mocking looks and a "who are you" atmosphere and little response to anything I said. In the end, it was just a matter of getting through it and not losing my nerve. And wouldn't you know it, at the end of the talk, a few kids stayed behind to talk to me—they'd loved the talk, but of course couldn't show it in front of their peers. Speaking in front of young audiences, by the way, is very good training—they respond more viscerally.

Adult audiences, especially the generally polite ones at festivals, seem like a piece of cake then!

**Don't be frightened of stage fright!** As I mentioned earlier, for me, that certain nervousness before I go on helps to hone my performance, just as it hones my observational instincts in gauging the audience mood. A little uncertainty is no bad thing; though obviously being too nervous is not helpful!

**When speaking on a panel with other authors, don't go over your allotted time.** It's very annoying for the other speakers and doesn't leave a good impression with the audience, either. (Hopefully a good moderator will stop this problem happening anyway!) And, as I mentioned, be prepared to adapt what you planned to say in light of other people's contributions, and respond perhaps directly to a point they've made—this makes for a much more interesting and organic feel that will engage the audience much more than speakers just trotting out pre-prepared speeches.

**Don't expect too much from your talk. And yet don't be too dismissive of the possibilities.** They are not always measured in book sales or even immediate audience engagement. Who knows what effect it will have? Maybe none. Maybe no one will remember it. We have so much information and entertainment coming at us all the time that it can be hard to keep anything in mind for very long. On the other hand, you never know—something in what you say might inspire a budding writer, or

*Continued on page 13* ▶

# The Best Darned Writing Advice You've Never Heard

BY DENISE A. AGNEW  
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## Throw Out What You've Heard Before

Wait, I've already survived a writing career. What can you tell me about writing that I haven't heard before?

As a creativity-coach-in-training, I learned more and more each day about the inner workings of the creative artist, and most of it *I'd* never heard before. That's because the writing career advice we normally receive from conferences, workshops, editors, and agents deals with the writing world in a business capacity. That's where a creativity coach comes in and fills in the gaps for the artist.

Yes, you heard me right. You're an artist. While we're all negotiating the author career in a different way, and we've all come from different backgrounds, there are some sure fire things we need in our plan to survive a long writing career.

## Get Real

Artists tend to want things to be different than they are. We want to write those stories and have everyone like them. We want all critiques to tell us how wonderful we are, and agents and editors not to tell us to change anything in our manuscripts because we're brilliant. Reality tells us that writing a novel is rarely easy and selling our novels isn't easy. Faced with hard core facts, we can get into a rut and decide we aren't creative anymore, we don't have the time to write, we don't feel like writing, the rest of our life is taking over, we aren't making enough money at this gig, we are just tired ... we wanna quit!

Then we get real and discover we don't want to deep six a creative career that's provided us such joy in the past. So with that in mind, there has to be something else we can do to resurrect our faith in writing.

## Giving Fear The Finger

If we want the rush that comes with creating, with telling the unique story only we can tell, we face fear and roll with the punches when things don't go our way. It means not whining (unless it's to a good friend who gets it), it means making changes when the career we thought we wanted goes in a direction we hadn't expected. It means telling the Fear Monster that we're aren't rolling over and taking it. We have to face the fear, look it in the eye, and give it the finger.

## Take Your Own Side/Get Rid Of The Shoulds

A writing career is a marathon race. Most of the time, to survive those proverbial slings and arrows, you have to be your own best friend. That means realizing that you must make your own meaning. What does that mean? It means you have to understand why you're doing this whole writing thing. Why is writing important to you, and what are your real goals? Yeah, I said your *real* goals. Not the ones the writing community suggests to you right up front *should* be your goals such as becoming a *New York Times*-bestselling author. Do you really want that? What sort of sacrifices would you have to make to get there? Think long and hard about whether that "should" is one that will make you happy in the long run. If you analyze what *New York Times*-bestselling authors have to do/follow to reach that goal, you may decide those steps aren't in line with what makes you truly happy and content. Most of the clients I've worked with who are suffering through writer's blocks have discovered their "goals" weren't theirs or perhaps not the goals they value now. Once they've defined what they really want, they are rediscovering their love for writing.

## Explore Anxiety Management Techniques

Being a novelist is sometimes rife with anxieties. At least anxieties that the creative mind generates on its own. It is vital that you understand the role that anxiety plays in your life, where and how it manifests, and what you need to do to banish or lessen it. Many of these anxieties can be reduced or eliminated by exploring coping techniques such as daily meditation before a writing session. Mindfulness meditation has been around for quite some time, and there is a significant amount of information out there about the effectiveness it has had on people of all walks of life who need help with anxiety, PTSD and other issues. But it is certainly not the only meditation technique out there. Other helpful things to consider when trying to rid yourself of anxiety include Tai Chi, yoga, massage, and Reiki.

## Have A Life Outside The Page

Creating well in your chosen artistic career isn't always enough. You also need a life that includes relationships, perhaps a second career, activism, a disciplined practice (such as those things we mentioned above like exercise, yoga, meditation, vacations, relaxation, and enjoyment).

*Denise A. Agnew is the author of over 57 novels. Romantic Times Book Reviews calls her romantic suspense novels "top-notch," and she's received their coveted TOP PICK rating. Denise has written paranormal, romantic comedy, contemporary, fantasy, historical, erotic romance, and romantic suspense. Archaeology and archery have crept into her work, and travels through England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales have added to a lifetime of story ideas. A paranormal investigator, Denise looks forward to exploring the unknown. Denise is also a creativity coach. Visit Denise's websites at [www.deniseagnew.com](http://www.deniseagnew.com) and [www.creativepencoaching.com](http://www.creativepencoaching.com).*

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# On Stage: Talking about Writing

*Continued on page 13* ▶ lastingly touch a reader's heart. That's happened more than once over those two decades for me. And that is what makes it all worthwhile.

*French-Australian writer Sophie Masson is the award-winning author of over 60 novels for children, young adults, and adults, published in Australia and internationally. Her latest novels include The Crystal Heart (Random House Australia June 2014, to be released in the US in November 2014); 1914 (Scholastic Australia, August 2014) Emilio (Allen and Unwin, May 2014). She is also the author of two nonfiction books on authorship, The Adaptable Author: Coping with Change in the Digital Age (Keesing Press 2014, <https://www.asauthors.org/bookstore-item/the-adaptable-author>) and By the Book: Tips of the Trade for Writers (Sixteen Press 2013, available on Amazon) Sophie's articles, stories, and poems have appeared in many publications, both print and online, and she is a regular contributor to popular authorship blog Writer Unboxed. Her website is at [www.sophiemasson.org](http://www.sophiemasson.org). This article first appeared on the Writer Unboxed blog and is reprinted with the author's permission.*

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## Business Briefs

### "Under water" e-Reader

Kobo's Aura H20, a waterproof e-reader, was announced in late August. The device is designed to survive being submerged for 30 minutes without developing function problems. This is a direct response to 60 percent of customers' desire to use an e-reader near water. It will go on sale in early October. The cost is \$179.99.

PW Daily



Photo by Sabrina Ingram

## Not Your Usual Writing Advice

By JoAnn Grote

# The Magic of Numbers

*“Whether if soul did not exist time would exist or not, is a question that may fairly be asked; for if there cannot be someone to count there cannot be anything that can be counted, so that evidently there cannot be number; for number is either what has been, or what can be, counted.”*

— Aristotle

Numbers inspire us when we see royalty numbers we like or our books’ high listings on bestseller lists. They depress us when we don’t like our royalties or our books’ standings or sales numbers—or sometimes those numbers inspire us, too, to find a way to improve them. They frighten us when we aren’t sure the royalties will pay the rent, and make us happy when the royalties are several times what we expect and suddenly we can afford that research trip we thought was only wishful thinking. Numbers impress other people when they believe our bank account balances, advances, royalties, sales numbers, or bestseller standings are in the extraordinary range.

Numbers have power; they affect our careers, our lifestyles, other people’s perceptions of us, and our perceptions of ourselves.

Certain numbers have had special significance for centuries. We find similarities in their use in religions and mythologies. I recall years ago hearing a sermon on the many uses of the number seven in the Bible. Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Catholicism supposedly all teach of the seven heavens. There are seven steps in the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone.

Are there ways one might take into consideration the use of the number seven when writing a novel? Maybe. For instance, according to Judaism and Christianity, the Lord rested on the seventh day and gave an order for us to do the same: six days of creation followed by a day of rest. Practicing balance and keeping a consistent work schedule is a healthy life—and work—style.

A psychic who spoke at a workshop for a Moonlight and Magnolias conference in the late 1990s believed life happens roughly in seven-year cycles. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, in her classic work *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (Ballantine Books, 1992), speaks of life in seven-year phases, though she says “these are not to be tied inexorably to chronological age.” Estes also refers to the number seven as the “number of initiation.” When you look over your writing career, have you experienced a “seven-year itch”—a desire to initiate something new, to change what you write, how you write, or the market you target, that corresponds to a seven-year cycle? Perhaps you experience the “seven-story itch” and are ready to move on to another series after seven books in one location or with the same characters. Do your stories move through seven-chapter or seven-scene cycles?

Once a male friend of mine walked in a circle around a young woman he liked seven times, hoping to make her return his affections. It didn’t work, so I don’t suggest trying this in an attempt to win a contract with an editor or agent.

The number three also has connections with different religions, with myths, magic, and fairy tales. Christianity has the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hinduism also has a trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Buddhism has the Three Jewels, or Triple Gems: Bhuddha, Dhamma (or Dharma), and Sangha. Greek mythology had the Three Fates: Clotho, the spinner; Lachesis, the one who measures; and Atropos, who cuts the thread of life with her shears.

Rosemary Ellen Guiley says in *The Encyclopedia of Dreams; Symbols and Interpretations* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993 and Berkley, 1995), that the number three represents “the generative force, creative power, and forward movement” and “expresses a totality in terms of a beginning, middle, and end, which occurs in myth, folklore, and fairy tales as the triad: three wishes, three sisters, three brothers, three chances, blessings done in threes, and spells and charms done in threes.”

“The fairy-tale symbol of three follows this pattern: The first try is no good. The second try, still no good. The third turn, ah, now something will happen,” Estes wrote.

A fellow writer recently emailed me with a request for encouragement. “I’m at 36,000-plus words for the mystery; basically, yes, at the sagging middle. I can’t tell if it’s total crap or brilliant.” I responded, “36,000 words, a multiple of three, perfect! That’s the magic number. Always it means, ‘now something can happen’ — at least, according to Clarissa Pinkola Estes. So what seems like the sagging middle of your story really is the place where you are about to find your story’s magic center.”

We are accustomed to thinking of numbers in terms of elementary school math lessons: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and as defining specific quantities. Or didn’t your third grade teacher mark a problem incorrect if you added 1 and 3 and got 5? Any professional mathematician will tell you (if your high school teachers and college professors did not) that numbers are anything but rigid.

Politicians, authors, poets, and spiritual leaders also tell us numbers are not rigid.

I recall a speech by Debbie Macomber years ago in which she referred to President Lyndon Johnson saying that for every hand he shook, for every baby he kissed, he gained nine votes. Debbie said she applied that belief to her writing; for instance, responding to one fan letter might gain her nine more readers.

The 13th Century Persian poet and Sufi mystic, Rumi, tells us, “A merchant goes into a market, finds a table, and haggles; Love sees a thousand markets.” According to another translation, “The intellect saw a market and started to haggle; Love saw thousands of markets beyond that market.” A wonderful attitude for the business side of the writers’ world!

Lao-tzu, a philosopher of ancient China who is believed to have written the *Tao Te Ching*, might agree with Rumi, as one of the pieces of wisdom in the *Tao Te Ching* is: “Of the one comes two, and of the two, three. And from the three come ten thousand.”

Estes wrote, “By the time we come to the ‘three’ power of anything, that is, to the transformative moment, the atoms leap, and where there was lassitude there is now locomotion.”

Zero, the number that represents “no thing” or “no amount,” may be the most powerful number of all. According to Guiley, zero (0) is “the unmanifested, the nothingness which precedes all things, the cosmic egg which is the container of all life.” Zero, that void which precedes and contains all we create. What happens when one adds a zero, nothing, to any other number? The number immediately becomes ten times larger. Add two “no things,” and the number becomes one hundred times larger.

If you’re having trouble with a plot, try the power of three: three characters, three wishes, three prayers, three attempts to reach a goal, a little of the life/death/life process, or of the past/present/future the number represents.

If you’re feeling dissatisfied with your career, or are in the midst of a tumultuous time in your career, consider whether you are at the end of a seven-year cycle and at the initiation point of another.

If you are a bit frightened to face the blank page of a new story, give thanks for zero, the nothingness of the cosmic egg that contains all life, and jump into the power and joy of creating a story from what no one but you can see or hear—one more time.

*JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 40 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children’s nonfiction. Contact her at [jaghi@rconnect.com](mailto:jaghi@rconnect.com).*



## **WRITING is TAXING**

*By Diane Kelly*

# **Structure and Your Evolving Business**

Although we've all heard those instant-success stories of writers who hit a list with their first release and earn six figures right out of the gate, most of us writers start small, perhaps even incurring a net loss for several years before we begin to make a real living from our writing. Not only is the increased income enjoyable, but developments in your career could mean it's time to change the structure of your writing business.

A sole proprietorship is the simplest form for operating a small business. As the default form for an individual operating a trade or small business, no formational documents are required to be filed with the state government to establish or terminate a sole proprietorship. The sole proprietor format makes sense for most beginning writers and for writers whose net incomes keep them in the lower tax brackets. However, writers who earn enough to put them in the higher income tax brackets should consider whether changing their business structure could save them money.

The 2014 tax brackets can be found on page 6 of the estimated tax form here: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1040es.pdf>. Tax rates range from 10 percent to 39.6 percent on taxable income. The highest three tax brackets (33 percent, 35 percent, and 39.6 percent) kick in for single filers at taxable income of \$186,350, for married joint filers at \$226,850, and for married separate filers at \$113,425. These rates are important because they determine whether it makes sense to change your business structure.

Of course, federal income tax isn't the only tax a writer must take into consideration in making a decision about business structure. The writer must also consider the effect a change in structure will have on his or her state income tax, and also the effect on social security taxes.

Social security taxes are currently 15.3 percent of a taxpayer's salary or net earnings from self-employment. This 15.3 percent includes a 2.9 percent Medicare component and a 12.4 percent Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Income (OASDI) component. While the Medicare component applies to unlimited net income, the OASDI portion applies only to a combined salary and net self-employment earnings up to the annual limit (\$117,000 for 2014).

Let's consider each formal structure in turn.

From a non-tax standpoint, the Limited Liability Company (LLC) format can be preferable to a corporate format because LLCs are not required to follow corporate formalities, such as holding board of directors meetings and maintaining minute books. LLCs owned by one individual or by a married couple filing a joint income tax return are generally disregarded for federal income tax purposes. This means these LLCs are normally treated just like sole proprietorships, and report income and expenses on a Schedule C. However, by filing a Form 8832, an LLC can elect to be treated for federal income tax purposes as either an S or C corporation (discussed below). The election to be treated as a corporation cannot generally be changed for 60 months from the effective date of the election, so it's important to make sure the election is to your benefit before making it. Because an LLC is generally disregarded for federal income tax purposes, there is no real federal tax benefit to forming an LLC unless the corporate election is made. Nonetheless, an LLC does provide its owners with limited liability protection, which can protect a writer's personal assets if the writer is sued.



Be aware that, in some instances, forming an LLC can increase a writer's taxes. For instance, in the state of Texas, LLCs are subject to a state business income tax (known as the franchise tax), while sole proprietorships are not subject to the tax.

An S corporation is a small business corporation with no more than 100 shareholders, all of whom are individuals, estates, or trusts. S corporations (and LLCs electing to be treated as S corps) are "pass-through entities." This means the net income of the S corp is computed on an S corp tax return, Form 1120S. The S corp pays no tax with its return, however. The S corp income is instead divided among the shareholders, included on the shareholders' individual tax returns, and taxed at individual tax rates.

Because S corp income is taxed at individual tax rates, forming an S corporation does not allow the shareholder to spread income between the lower individual and corporate tax brackets. However, an S corporation can treat part of the corp's net income as the writer's salary and part of it as corporate income. Only the part treated as the writer's salary would be subject to social security tax. For example, if Tom Author has net earnings of \$100,000 from his writing business in 2014 and reports the entire amount of earnings on a Schedule C as a sole proprietor, he would owe a total of \$15,300 in self-employment tax. If Tom instead formed an S corporation and paid himself a salary of \$50,000, leaving the other \$50,000 in the S corp, the total social security taxes would be only \$7,650, saving himself an equal amount in social security tax.

There are some risks and variables to the S corp strategy. First, there are costs associated with forming and maintaining any corp, including filing fees and state taxes. Because this structure is more complicated than a sole proprietorship, and because an S corp return and payroll tax returns would have to be filed, the writer would likely incur additional attorney and/or accounting fees. Also, while sole proprietor income is not subject to unemployment tax, the salary paid to the writer would be subject to federal and state unemployment taxes. It would only make sense to form an S corp, or an LLC electing to be taxed as an S corp, if the tax savings exceeded these additional costs. As a final point, it's important to note that the amount paid as salary must be reasonable. What amount is reasonable depends on the facts in each case. The IRS takes a closer look at situations where S corp income is primarily derived from personal services provided by an employee-shareholder. In such instances, it's more likely the IRS will assert that a high percentage of the S corporation's income should be allocated to salary. Thus, there's a risk that if you do not pay yourself a high enough salary, the IRS could send you a tax bill.

Unlike S corps, C corps are subject to tax at the corporate level. The C corp tax rates can be found here: <https://www.putnam.com/literature/pdf/11936.pdf>. You'll notice that, like the individual income tax rates, the corporate tax rates are graduated, ranging from 15 percent to 38 percent. In some instances, the formation of a C corporation can reduce taxes by allowing the income to be divided between the writer (as salary) and the corporation, thus spreading the income over the lower individual and corporate tax brackets. Unless the income of the C corporation is high enough, however, the cost of paying a professional to prepare the separate corporate tax return as well as the costs associated with operating a corporation may exceed any tax savings. Moreover, the writer would have to be paid a salary from the C corporation, which would require payroll taxes to be withheld and reported and a W-2 to be issued to the writer at year end. Also, although the income splitting sounds great, the tax benefits might be nullified by an additional tax that applies to "Personal holding companies." A personal holding company (PHC) is a corporation with 50 percent of its stock value owned by five or fewer individuals and with 60 percent or more of its income consisting of royalties, interest, dividends, and rent. An additional 15 percent PHC tax is added to the regular corporate tax rates, thus raising the actual rates to 30 percent to 53 percent. The additional PHC tax could eliminate any tax savings generated by the income splitting and may even result in higher taxes for the business owner.

If you are earning enough net income to be in the higher tax brackets, it's worth seeking advice from your tax advisor on whether forming an LLC, S corp, or C corp is right for you. Be sure your advisor addresses all of the financial variables. If changing your structure could yield substantial tax savings, go for it! If you're not yet ready for a change, be sure to keep an eye on your bottom line and the prevailing individual and corporate tax rates because a change might be advisable in the future.

*Diane Kelly is a retired CPA/tax attorney who writes humorous romantic mysteries.*

# The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



## Remembrance of Things Past

*“The people who started NINC wrote women’s fiction, but increasingly, the organization has reached out to other genres. If the group is to continue to grow, we have to reach out to the writers of mystery, science fiction, Western, and all their variants. We are all practitioners of popular culture.”*

— Evan Maxwell, NINC President, 1994

This year is NINC’s 25th anniversary, and I look forward to celebrating it with many of you in a few weeks at the annual conference—which I will be attending for the first time in six years, so be sure to save me a seat at the bar!

In a fit of nostalgia, I have quoted above from Evan Maxwell’s “President’s Column” in January of 1994, the earliest *Nink* I could find in our online archive. In his first column as NINC president, Evan was recalling where we started and evaluating how far we had come in our first five years. If you’re curious about what NINC was like 20 years ago, the *Nink* archive at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com) is a good place to find out.

As it happens, this year is also my 25th anniversary in NINC. In 1989, I was a brand new writer. With my first three romance novels coming out that year and a fourth book under contract, I took this endeavor seriously: it was a business, it was now my profession, and it was paying my bills.

But I was frustrated by the writing organizations that existed at the time. In my experience or observation, authors’ groups in 1989 seemed to exist primarily to encourage aspiring writers, or were focused almost obsessively on their internal quarrels and problems, or were so narrow in their focus that their relevance was also narrow, or were so broad in their focus that commercial novelists got lumped together with poets and food writers.

So within a year of my first sale, I was disenchanted with the whole idea of writers’ organizations. I was (hard as you may find this to imagine) *complaining* about this to another writer one day, and she told me that she was a founding member of a new writing organization that was forming which might be of interest to me. The group didn’t even have a name yet, or bylaws, or an organizational definition. For now, it was just a group of about a hundred authors who were keen to form a writing organization specifically for published professionals.

She was, of course, talking about the writers who were on the road to creating Novelists, Inc.

I told her I was interested, and she had someone send me the group’s first newsletter. I recognized many of the names among the hundred(ish) original members of this new group, as well as the names of the five people who had created it.

NINC’s five founders, who were back then known as the Steering Committee, were: novelist Janice Young Brooks a.k.a. award-winning mystery author Jill Churchill, who served as NINC’s first president; Jasmine Cresswell, the bestselling author of (by now) more than 60 novels, who subsequently served as NINC President and *Nink* editor; award-winning romance novelist Maggie Osborne, who also later served as NINC President; *New York Times*-bestselling novelist Rebecca Brandewyne, who served on the NINC Board and the Advisory Council; and Marianne Shock, a multi-published novelist who drafted many of NINC’s early policies

and procedures, and who later became the administrator of the Authors Coalition of America (of which NINC is a member organization).

Those five women conceived this organization, started filing the paperwork, attracted the hundred or so founding members, and began planning the first conference. I read the group's newsletter, and I soon decided to sign up for the first conference.

That gathering was where I began many of my longtime NINC friendships, but I was brand new to the business and knew almost no one when I arrived there. I felt very awkward when I entered the lounge area for the first time. Probably I got a glass of wine and spent some time pretending to be fascinated by the art on the hotel walls, but I don't really remember.

I do remember, though, that it wasn't long before someone noticed me lurking, told me she didn't know anyone there, either, and we started chatting—and almost immediately wound up talking shop. (I wish I could say who it was, but I have a very blonde memory, and this was 25 years ago, after all.) And then someone joined us, and then someone else—and from then on, there was no moment throughout the rest of the weekend where I felt like I needed to pretend a fascination with generic hotel wall art. By the time I left, I knew almost everyone there.

Within hours of arriving, I think most of us felt an unusual sense of intimacy and fellowship at this conference. Not because it was a small group compared to most conventions, though it was, but because everyone present was a published, working novelist. It was the first writers conference any of us had ever been to where there was a common level of shared professional experience among all attendees. This, in turn, created a level of candor and honesty in the discussion groups and program sessions that was, for most of us back then, unprecedented, refreshing, and liberating. Those sessions were what established our conference as a place where you can be baldly honest with your peers about your professional life, as well as a place where we benefit from the wealth of professional experience and knowledge among our members.

(It seems absurd now, by the way, but back then, the notion of writers having program sessions that publishers, editors, and agents were not invited or allowed to attend was not only new, but rather controversial.)

In the program sessions, which included the industry professionals, there was also a different atmosphere than anyone was accustomed to at that time. Because there wasn't anyone present who wanted advice on how to get published, but there were a lot of people in the room who wanted royalty statements to be more transparent and contractual terms to be fairer to the author. These were not program items and group discussions that industry professionals were accustomed to encountering at a writers conference in those days.

At the time, it just felt like such a relief to finally *get down to business*. Looking back, though, I think our organization was the vanguard of a movement toward professionalism which has been growing ever since, wherein writers pursue informative and candid business dialogue with each other and with the industry.

Although the Annual General Meeting which our bylaws require us to hold every year is now a one-hour formality that the Board begs and bribes us to attend, the business meetings at the first conference took up at least a full day, were heavily attended, and were the most engaged, spontaneous, and passionate sessions of the whole event.

Although this organization owes its existence to the five founding mothers, who had the vision and the follow-through that created it, NINC is very much the product of those first business meetings, where members were so eager to share our views that we were standing in line to use the microphone. We discussed *everything*—including what to call this group, what sort of organization it should be, exactly what population of professionals it would focus on serving, how officers would be elected, and what sort of structure it would have.

In two of the discussions which I remember well, we arrived at decisions that have been central to NINC's character ever since: a writer must have two published novels to qualify for membership and the organization does not have writing awards or contests.

We probably all like winning writing awards, and some of us like voting on writing awards or judging contests. (I also like to monitor awards shortlists and finalist ballots, since those are great resources for finding recommended reads.) But we recognized early on that writing awards eat up a huge amount of time, ▶

focus, and resources in every group that has them, and we voted against making that trade-off in the organization we envisioned. To this day, I think we made the right decision about that.

The rationale behind two novels (not just one), both of them already *published* (not just under contract), was to ensure that NINC would be an organization focused on career novelists; if someone has persisted enough to get a second novel published, that's someone who's probably in this for the long haul. At the time, I thought they were setting the bar too high, and I voted against this. I thought the organization would grow too slowly and remain too small with such demanding entry qualifications. In retrospect, I was wrong and they made an excellent decision. It is precisely that high bar to entry that makes the membership of NINC such an extraordinary resource—unavailable in any other organization—and which perpetually keeps NINC relevant and educational for those of us who've been writing professionally for 20-30-40 years.

So at this year's 25th anniversary celebration, I look forward to reminiscing with whoever else was at the first conference, back before NINC even had a name—and to raising a glass to toast how far we've come in a quarter century, while remaining true to the founders' vision and to the decisions the original members made back then.

*NINC's resident curmudgeon was romance novelist Laura Leone back in those days, but she has for many years now been fantasy novelist Laura Resnick.*

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## *Business Briefs*

### **Authors United v. Amazon**

Over two months ago, the 900 writers of Authors United took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* concerning Amazon's dispute with Hachette. Now the group is being vocal about Amazon's negotiating tactics, which are said to have a negative impact on new and midlist authors. A letter by author Douglas Preston mentions that sales of 2,500 Hachette authors and 7,000 titles are showing the effects of the dispute. Sales are said to have declined 50 percent in the last six months. Janet Fitch's letter that went directly to Jeff Bezos was covered in the *LA Times*.

<http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-janet-fitch-letter-amazon-jeff-bezos-20140902-story.html>

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