



The official newsletter
of Novelists, Inc.,
a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction



VOLUME 32 : NUMBER 5
MAY 2021

Nink May 2021

Contents

- ◆ President's Voice ~ Tawdra Kandle
- ◆ From the Editor ~ Harper St. George
- ◆ NINC Conference ~ Lisa Hughey
- ◆ How to Build a Strong Relationship with Your Editor ~ Joanne Grant
- ◆ Author Perspective with Cheryl Bolen ~ Barbara Meyers
- ◆ Do Facebook Ads Still Work? ~ Michelle Fox
- ◆ All I Need to Know About the Writing Life I Learned From Being In A Critique Group ~ Michele Dunaway
- ◆ The Mad Scribbler: *Bios Graphia* ~ Laura Resnick
- ◆ Member Discounts Highlight: AuthorBuzz
- ◆ NINC Membership Benefits
- ◆ About NINC

President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



I'm writing this month's column while on a visit to New Jersey to see family. This is the first major road trip we've taken since last March, when we were already on our way here around the same time that the pandemic got very serious. It's been interesting to catch up with our vaccinated family in safe situations after last year, when we couldn't see any of our extended family.

For both my husband and me, while we took the COVID-19 crisis very seriously, not much changed about our daily lives. In our part of Florida, aside from a brief period of two or three weeks, everything remained open. But working from home was already our norm, and we didn't have young children to school remotely. We made some small, key changes to keep safe, and we kept working hard.

However, I'm well aware that we were the exception and not the norm—and even if I hadn't been, reading a recent discussion on the Ninlink group would have been enlightening. One member shared [this article from the New York Times](#). It's called "There's a Name for the Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing." In this piece, the author describes that state of being between depression and flourishing, "a sense of stagnation and emptiness." Apparently, from the comments on the article by our members, what the article unpacked is a nearly universal feeling.

Last year, many of us existed in a sense of heightened anticipation or dread. We didn't know how COVID was going to impact our world; we might have been anxious about our own health and that of our loved ones. Plans were abruptly canceled, and most travel was postponed. Our lives were upended.

A year later, we may be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Vaccines are rolling out. Reopening is either imminent or happening, depending upon where we live. Yet as the *New York Times* article pointed out, many people aren't optimistic about 2021, and after over a year of uncertainty and fear, some may have moved into a state of being "indifferent about our indifference."

As fiction authors—novelists—we cover the spectrum when it comes to work styles and routines. I know that some of us found our creativity and normal processes affected by quarantine, isolation and anxiety over the pandemic. We may have had to push back deadlines or postpone planned books as we struggled to get through 2020. Even now, if we're languishing, climbing back on the proverbial horse might not be easy.

What is encouraging to me is the empathy and support I've seen among our members. Sometimes, simply realizing that we're not alone in our struggles is enough. If it isn't, I've noticed how helpful the NINC family has been to one another in sharing ideas, encouragement, and links to more information or possible avenues of other help. This is one key reason why we're here. We're a network of creatives, and during this time, that network is more important than ever.

We might not all be able to be physically together in 2021. Reduced conference registration limits (while we hope to open conference registration again soon, as *Nink* goes to print, we don't have a date for that yet) and travel restrictions mean that this might not be the year we return to being completely normal in that respect. But we can still offer each other virtual support and compassion.

If you find yourself languishing in mid-2021, don't worry; you're not alone. If you'd like to talk to others who are experiencing something similar, reach out to your fellow NINC novelists. Together, we'll find our way back to flourishing ... eventually.

Tawdra Kandle

Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today best-selling romance author with over 100 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance.

About NINC

NINC remains committed to serving all of our members, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

About *Nink*

Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members; [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The Pro Services Directory, member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#).

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

From the Editor

By Harper St. George



I hope everyone is having a great spring. Here in the Atlanta area we've been buried under pollen for a few weeks now with no end in sight. The weather has been so beautiful that I've been braving the accumulation to get in some outdoor writing sessions. My allergies have not been thanking me. I hope you and yours are safe and healthy wherever you are in the world.

It's already May which means I've been editor of *Nink* for almost half a year. Where did the time go? As you may remember, we've been able to bring on an acquisitions editor to continue to help source the informational content you've come to expect from *Nink*. I am sorry to inform you that Cheré Coen, who originally filled that role, has had to step back. There was an unexpected health situation at her place of business that has caused her to take on greater responsibility there. I am sorry to see her go and thank her for her tireless work ethic and enthusiasm while she was with *Nink*.

However, there is good news. I am happy to report that NINC member and *Nink* contributor Trish Milburn has stepped up to take on the job. Trish is an award-winning author of romance and young adult fiction. She has experience working with publications both in writing and editing. She has already hit the ground running and is proving herself to be amazingly efficient and knowledgeable.

If you'd like to pitch an article for an upcoming edition of *Nink*, Trish can be reached at ninkacquisitions@gmail.com. Please feel that you can also reach out to me with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future *Nink* content at ninkeditor@gmail.com.

Nink editor [Harper St. George](#) is the author of historical and contemporary romance novels. She lives in Georgia with her husband and two children.



Programming for NINC 2021 LEVEL UP continues to move along. We are thrilled about our speaker lineup and will begin sharing it soon! We are also fortunate to have many sponsors on board. And we're excited to return to St. Pete Beach.

We are still waiting for the CDC to update their large gathering recommendations, but I am hopeful that we will be able to expand our attendees. We will keep the membership updated and give advance warning before we re-open registration.

As a reminder, if you register and then have to cancel, the refund policy is for 80% of the registration fee (unless you have a medical excuse—unfortunately not being able to travel due to COVID does not qualify).

Hope to see you at the beach!

Lisa Hughey
2021 NINC Conference Program Chair

How to Build a Strong Relationship with Your Editor

By Joanne Grant



Like any relationship, the relationship you build with an editor may take time. But when it's right, it can be magical and beneficial to your publishing career. Here are some key tips to help foster a healthy rapport with your editor.

I want to note up front that relationships require respect and effort from both parties. You cannot control how your editor works, but you can set the tone of how you want to work together to get the best result from your relationship.

Professionalism

First and foremost, your relationship should be professional. This is at the root of your healthy editor/author relationship and everything else stems from here. I don't mean you should only behave in a strictly formal, business-like manner. I've had some of the most amazing, fun times with my authors over the years that were certainly *not* formal!

Professionalism is remembering that fundamentally an editor and author are two business people entering into a legal agreement from which both will benefit: your publisher wants your book, you want your book to be published, and therefore you both stand to make money from each other.

All good relationships are based on mutual trust and, whilst this can take time to earn and build, remembering that it is a professional relationship can help with this. Trust that your editor has the best interests of your work at heart because they want your books to be successful—it is their job!

- Professionalism shows itself in the way you hold up your end of the publishing deal. This includes:
- Putting in your best effort to produce quality work.

- Being open to constructive feedback and executing revisions—the revision process benefits both parties.
- Taking personal responsibility for your work, such as fact checking and improving your craft.
- Keeping to deadlines, but being in touch in good time if you're behind schedule. Your editor will thank you as they are working multiple deadlines.

Communication

Communication is key: when it goes wrong, it can cause unnecessary worry and conflict and cause long-term damage by undermining trust. If your editor doesn't ask how you prefer to work and communicate, then I would actively encourage you to raise the conversation.

For example, you may find telephone conversations difficult, preferring to receive feedback in writing first so you can absorb the information and follow-up with a call. Or perhaps you prefer the immediacy of a call to discuss your work so you can bounce around ideas and solutions. There is no right way to work with your editor, only the right way for *you*.

Your editor will likely have a default style of working but that doesn't mean they can't adjust to your needs. But they won't know if their way of working isn't good for you unless you tell them!

The practicalities of working life mean that email will be the primary mode of communication, and we all know how easily emails can be misinterpreted. For example, a terse response to a simple question may leave you thinking, "Have I done something wrong?" or "What are they not telling me?" when in fact, the email was bashed out quickly to get the information to you in between meetings. Which is why I feel a lot can be gained in building a rapport and clearing up misunderstandings through an occasional conversation, even if you prefer emails.

Furthermore, in an ideal world authors and editors would meet once a year in person. So much can be achieved in terms of relationship building if it's face to face. After all, most of human communication is non-verbal, plus it opens up opportunities for that fun I referenced.

However, I worked for years with authors I never had the chance to meet, yet managed to build good relationships, so you can work with what you've got.

Here are some further tips on effective communication between you and your editor:

- Be open and honest about concerns and misunderstandings rather than letting them fester.
- Keep communication respectful in tone and language.
- Use moderate responses in reaction to revisions, publishing news, etc. Remember, it's a business relationship. If you feel the need, vent first, delete, re-write, then send.
- Be patient in waiting for a response from your editor, even if two days feels like two weeks when you've sent in your latest manuscript.

Boundaries

As you work together and build up trust and respect, it is likely you will connect on a personal level. This is part of the author/editor relationship that can be so special. I went on to become long-term friends with authors and that personal connection for me was a truly wonderful part of being an editor.

However, being mindful of the boundary between personal and professional is important to protect you both. Your editor is your cheerleader, your in-house champion, but they fundamentally represent the publisher and there may come a time when they need to deliver some difficult news. For example, they may have to relate sales results, an advance rollback or even that your contract is not being renewed. When the boundary is in place you can more readily accept the news as a business decision or an aspect of the marketplace. However, if you're too far over that boundary, it can hurt you on a personal level, knock your confidence and break that bond with your editor.

So, can you protect yourself and still have that fun, easy rapport with your editor? I believe you can, and again, it all comes down to professionalism. Here are some suggestions:

- If you don't have one already, consider hiring an agent as your mediator. They can handle the main business chats so you can focus on the creative process with your editor.
- Even with an agent, remind yourself that your editor is working on behalf of the publisher. "It's not personal, it's business" is a good mantra.
- Keep aware of when the personal chit-chat ends and the business talk begins. Separate them if necessary, and/or ask your editor to clearly signpost specific business conversations so you're not blindsided.
- If you do get to have an in-person meet with your editor which is more social in tone, recognise when the time for work chat has ended and don't overstep that boundary.

What to do when it's not working...

Like any relationship, it may not work out, often with no fault on either side; you're just not a good match. If you find yourself in a situation with an editor that is becoming detrimental to your writing, it is important for your own career to address it.

I know from experience that authors are wary of "complaining" about their editor because they like their editor and don't want to upset them, they worry that they'll be seen as troublesome, or think it may harm their career at that publisher. None of these reasons are coming from a place of professionalism or healthy boundaries.

Let's get back to what this relationship is all about: selling books. If you cannot produce your best work because this relationship is failing, then it is in the publisher's best interest to look for ways to fix this.

So, what can you do?

- I would encourage a conversation with your editor first to see if you can find a resolution to whatever issue is at play. Often it is a misunderstanding caused by a communication disconnect and an honest conversation can help.
- If you've tried to address this with your editor directly, or don't feel as though you can, then involve senior members of the editorial team. You can speak to them directly, or go through your agent.

Remember, you are under contract with a publisher who wants your books, so finding a solution is beneficial to both parties.

Keep in mind these three key points: professionalism, communication and boundaries. They will help lay the foundations for a strong relationship with your editor. A healthy relationship benefits your publishing career, because when you're connecting well with your editor, that's when the magic happens. You'll produce your best work and you may even have some fun along the way.

Joanne Grant is an editorial coach with over 16 years of editorial expertise working for Harlequin. Joanne has edited hundreds of romance novels over the years and understands how to coach authors of all genres to overcome their barriers and deliver their best work. If you're interested in finding out how she can help you achieve your writing goals, get in touch—Joanne loves to chat! For inspiration, tips and offers, sign up to her [newsletter](#), join her Facebook group [Motivation for Writers!](#) or connect on Twitter [@JoanneMGrant](#).

Author Perspective with Cheryl Bolen

By Barbara Meyers



Cheryl Bolen

“I will never forget the early struggles of snail mailing queries and sample chapters of my work and waiting long months to get a response. I kept spiral notebooks of rejection letters and had charts (this was before spreadsheets) of agents and publishers I’d queried.”

Any author with a writing career spanning 30-plus years is likely to relate to [Cheryl Bolen’s](#) experience as she began her author journey that led to a first sale to Harlequin Historical in 1997. During the following eight years, without an agent, there were 10 more sales, all historical, mostly published by Kensington. All were only available in mass-market paperback. In 2011, the once-again unagented Bolen received rights back to four books and chose to republish them herself. Thus began her career as an indie author, and with the release of her 45th book later this year, Bolen never looked back.

The power of persistence

Decent sales numbers that were hampered by small print runs caused Bolen’s career to flounder between 2006 and 2011. During that time she never stopped writing, never stopped trying to get a good agent (she signed with several over that period, none of which, she said, had a good work ethic), and never stopped trying to sell more books. She survived a hurricane which destroyed her house, as well as a bout with breast cancer.

Indie publishing = the game changer

“Five months after I started indie publishing, I sold 37,000 books in one month,” Bolen said. “That first year of indie publishing I wrote out a check for a brand-new car with proceeds

from one month's royalties. That was in 2012. I went from struggling to make a four- or five-figure annual income to making six figures every year."

Since her success in indie publishing, three large publishers have invited Bolen to write for them. She wrote for Montlake and Love Inspired Historical, but her best source of income has been the books she controls under her own Harper and Appleton imprint.

"I just want to write books."

Bolen claims to still suck at promotion, but she has what she describes as "a moderately successful subscriber list" of 14,000 for her newsletter, which she puts out about a dozen times a year. She's also been blessed with numerous BookBub ads. Hiring reasonably priced help to create advertising has led to pleasing results with a solid return on investment.

In 2012 she and 11 other historical romance authors banded together to create The Jewels of Historical Romance website as well as a Facebook readers group, Jewels Salon, to interact with readers and promote their work. The Jewels website offers a place to meet the authors with links to their websites, newsletters and social media, as well as links to sales venues for new releases, special sales, and deals like boxed sets. The authors interact with lovers of historical romance via Facebook Salon, sharing historical photos and trivia.

"We are supportive of each other in all ways, and that includes sharing each other's promos," Bolen said. "Our group is a sisterhood, and it's essential to the dynamic of the group that we genuinely care for each other. I owe my indie career to my fellow Jewels of Historical Romance. Yes, I was already successful when I joined the group, but I attribute my staying power to all the Jewels. I truly mean it when I say I love each of my fellow Jewels."

A day in the life

"I don't consider myself a fast writer, but I'm fairly disciplined," Bolen said. "I sit at my desk pretty much all day, every day, but I don't write all day. I am comfortable writing 1,000 words a day, 5,000 words a week. They will be pretty polished because I typically won't go forward until I'm happy with my prose. Once I meet my goal, I give myself time off."

Much of her day is spent on other aspects of writing. She has more than 100 titles that she manages, counting her foreign editions, of which she controls every aspect except the actual translation. There's always something to work on. "When you're an indie writer, you wear many hats."

While she spends a lot of time sitting at a desk, she makes it a priority to start every day with exercise. Bolen is big on fitness, walking with a fellow author each morning. "It's great to have a writing buddy with whom to talk shop. She's come up with several of my titles and also helps with plot problems. It's so important for authors to build exercise into their daily schedules."

Meeting goals = rewards

Bolen is a big believer in dangling the carrot. She makes herself earn fun time and activities like shopping. If she writes “x” amount of words in a week, she allows herself a shopping trip and gives herself at least a one-week vacation at the completion of each book.

In the first five years of her husband’s retirement they traveled to Europe eight times, went to California and New York, and took tons of gambling trips to Las Vegas and Laughlin, Nev.; New Orleans and Lake Charles, La.; and Biloxi, Miss.

The most meaningful part of the writing journey

“Being a professional writer has enriched my life immeasurably. It’s wonderful to be able to go to your desk every day to do what you love to do the most and to get paid for it.”

“I’m very appreciative of my readers, but the absolute best things about this writing journey (other than the million-plus dollars I’ve made) are the friendships I’ve made with other authors,” Bolen said.

What she would change if she could

“Now that I’m in my third decade of being a published author, I have reflected back over the process and have come to realize that even the things I once thought negatively impacted my career have turned into positives. I can finally say I’ve really been lucky. I have no regrets—other than wishing I were Julia Quinn!”



Barbara Meyers writes contemporary romance, women’s fiction, oddball fantasy, and more. Her latest release is the romantic Christmas novella, *A Family for St. Nick*. Want to be featured in an author perspective in *Nink*? Contact her at barbmeyers56@gmail.com.

Do Facebook Ads Still Work?

By Michelle Fox



There's a lot of noise about Facebook this year. Are authors losing one of their best advertising outlets? Do ads still work? What is IOS14? Should we delete our profiles and go somewhere else? Or, is there more to the story?

The backstory

Facebook is under fire from all sides. They're mired in politics and anti-trust lawsuits, and are embroiled in a dispute with Apple over how consumer data is used.

Why is this happening now? Is it because "the public" has "woken up" and "demanded" privacy? No. That's just the PR spin corporations use to make themselves look good and consumers feel like they have power.

This conflict is actually the convergence of several changes happening in technology, society, and commerce. [The big tech giants have entered a new phase of competition, where their business interests overlap, creating friction and triggering turf wars.](#)

As billionaire Kevin Plank says, data is the new oil, and in this next phase of the Data Revolution we'll see increasing competition for who controls what data as more human activity and commerce goes digital.

If you think Apple truly cares about privacy, consider this: [20 percent of their profits last year came from a payoff from Google to make Google the default search engine on Apple devices.](#)

Apple cared so much about consumer privacy ... they sold it to Google and let Google track users to their heart's content. This deal is now the subject of legal scrutiny.

(Three guesses on the one thing Facebook didn't pay for...)

Furthermore, Apple doesn't apply any of their new limits on user tracking to their own network. They have no issue tracking their users.

Let's discard this notion that Apple is somehow a noble knight who has come to save us from the Big Bad Tech Wolf. The reality is they want to monetize their data and their user base just as much as Facebook or Google do.

From this background emerges the first big turf war to hit authors in 2021: the IOS14 update. This is Facebook's attempt to meet Apple's new standards for consumer tracking and privacy, and authors using Facebook ads in 2021 will need to make some adjustments. Here's the actual playbook for the little guy trying to run a publishing empire.

Verification is key

Verification is Facebook's favorite word in 2021. They want to know who they are working with, and to do that, they now require two-factor authentication on accounts running ads. [Here are their instructions on how to set it up.](#)

Facebook also wants additional levels of verification. All authors who use Facebook's Business Manager will need to [verify their domain](#). Some authors may also have to [verify their business](#), and personal identity, too.

The problem for authors is that we set up LLCs or S Corporations as small presses and then publish, promote, and operate publicly as our author name, which doesn't match our legal or business names. This creates a disconnect between website, Facebook page, profile, and business documents that complicate business and identity verification.

Facebook also won't tell you what verification they want, but has no qualms about shutting down or freezing accounts without notice. If you're locked out of your account or can't run ads or find your page access revoked, set up two-step authentication and domain verification. Contact chat support if that doesn't restore access.

Start with the basics now: two-factor authentication and domain verification. Long term, reconcile names between your profile and pages and business documents and be ready to verify your business if necessary. I don't recommend volunteering for business verification because Facebook is picky about the documents, but it's time to be prepared.

Pixel changes

The pixel (a piece of tracking code advertisers use and the main bone of contention with Apple) will see new limits on functionality with the IOS14 update. While most authors don't use the pixel, that doesn't necessarily insulate us because all the changes are being rolled out globally.

If you do rely on the pixel in your ad strategy, you'll have to recalibrate and adjust. [Workarounds are already emerging, and it looks like Facebook will soon have them in place.](#)

However, even with workarounds, things won't function quite like they used to. Pixel users may notice a marked drop in ad performance. This appears to be related to IOS14 and it can happen *even if your ad isn't actively using the pixel.*

The solution is to [update the pixel for IOS14 until Facebook is happy](#) or turn it off, especially if you're not using it for that ad. When you're setting up new ads, turn off the pixel in the ad creation phase (when it's not relevant to the ad).

IOS14 and ad performance

The IOS14 update also impacts ad performance, data reporting, and the functionality of the ads interface. Authors are going to see some wild stuff! Here's what's what.

The big change is there can now be a three-day lag in ad results reporting. You may set up ads and see nothing happen in your interface.

Zero reach. Zero clicks. Zero spend.

For days.

It's not a glitch and there's probably nothing wrong with your ad. The lag is the new normal. It doesn't appear to have rolled out universally yet. I'm hopeful they'll create a modeling method to compensate for the gap so some authors may never see it.

Facebook has changed the ad metrics columns defaults in the ads interface as well, making them pixel-centric. You'll need to customize them again to show metrics that are useful to your ads.

As IOS14 rolls out, authors may see long-running ads falter. One, it appears they are no longer supporting older ad formats. Two, they may have eliminated interest targets in your long-running ads. Three, older ads often have the pixel turned on even if it's not in use. You can try editing an ad to turn off the pixel (if it's on), but otherwise the answer is to start a new ad.

If the issue is that interests have been eliminated, you can edit saved audiences to remove them, or if the audience wasn't saved, you'll have to start a new ad. New ads using previously saved audiences where targets have been eliminated may not run and you won't always see a flag unless you go in to edit the ad.

Another new pattern is an initial high cost per click. Big spikes in ad costs will make you think you should turn off an ad. Don't. Wait and see. This typically resolves on its own.

Time is the real name of the game for Facebook ads in 2021. It takes longer to get ad data and for ads to find a performance groove. Ads may need more than the usual five-day learning period to sort themselves out.

IOS14 impact on audiences and ad costs

Another possible fallout from the IOS14 update is a decrease in audience sizes. Apple users are 14 percent of Facebook's user base, and Facebook will lose a lot of app-based tracking data.

I suspect the impact will be temporary, though. Facebook is rapidly recalibrating how they collect data and improving data capture on their wholly owned app properties. Any decrease may resolve as they adjust their data model and algorithms.

Ad costs may increase as well. With the pixel losing functionality, businesses that relied on it may come in and take up more space in interest targeting, making ads more competitive. This

could be the new status quo or it may be temporary as Facebook rolls out different workarounds for IOS14.

What should authors do?

Aside from the advice above, periodically search for articles about IOS14 and Facebook ads and see what's new. As an example of how important this is, this article has already been updated four times with new information in less than a month. It's possible parts of this article will be obsolete in the next five minutes. Things are moving fast.

However, my testing shows that long-term performance with low costs is still possible. As a data point, I'm on month three running the same ad with the same return. Ads work, but you'll need to fiddle to figure out what makes Facebook tick now.

During the first quarter of 2021, I analyzed several hundred Facebook ads for books and cross-referenced them with sales rank. Ninety percent of those ads have books that are ranking higher than 50,000.

Ads are working. Don't get scared off by big changes.

The book business landscape is never the same for long. With digital marketing, change is the only constant. The key is to do your due diligence, keep marketing skills sharp, and write more books.

USA Today and NY Times bestselling author [Michelle Fox](#) lives in the Midwest with her husband, kids, the occasional exchange student and an ancient black lab. She loves fantasy and romance, which makes writing paranormal romance a natural fit.

All I Need to Know About Writing Life I Learned From...

Being in a critique group

By Michele Dunaway



It's mid-February when I write this, and I've admittedly been unsettled. One, I realized I wasn't doom-scrolling Twitter nonstop. Two, my school district announced a teacher reduction-in-force. While I'm fine, others aren't. Three, I read the February *Nink* president column and Scribbler for the first time when it was distributed Feb. 5, which felt weird. March's issue will mark the first newsletter I didn't see *Nink* in some form of pre-production for the past 3.5 years. Fourth, I'm waiting to find out if my latest work-in-progress is rejected or not.

As I do when I get in periods of flux, I control what I can control. I looked at a house to ensure I wasn't missing something better. I updated my resumé. I also began editing a new first draft after my partners sent back the pages. In turn, I also critiqued their work.

And realized the entire critique process is more than a give and take of pages. Here's what I've learned.

It's about taking initiative

My critique group formed because of a post on the NINC critique loop. I didn't know the writer making the original post, but I wanted what she did—to exchange pages with other authors and critique with regular frequency. I sent off an email, and when I heard back, I learned I wasn't chosen. However, she told me that she'd received an overwhelming response, so she'd pass my name along to someone else if I was game. I was. That person was the one who took the initiative to put our current group of four together.

As authors, we are used to taking initiative in most areas of our writing lives—hiring people to represent us, or to create our covers, or to professionally edit us. But when it comes to

taking initiative in other areas, we are used to working by ourselves. Many of us find ourselves feeling we aren't worthy. Or we feel we are being a burden if we air our problems.

But being in a group like NINC means you aren't alone—you have a group that has your back. Asking questions on the loop, asking other authors for advice, or taking advantage of NINC resources, even the Linda Kay West Fund, simply takes some initiative. NINC president Tawdra Kandle outlined some NINC member benefits in her February column. If you need them, don't hesitate. Take initiative, email and ask. The worst that can happen is someone says no. However, you will find that most...

People want to help you

When I teach my English III students excerpts from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, one of the first things that I point out to them is that when Thoreau begins to build his house, he borrows an axe. Notice he didn't own one. He borrowed it, which symbolizes Thoreau's first lesson—allow others to help you.

I ask my students to create a list of when people helped them do something with no expectation of receiving anything in return. Case in point—I texted a journalism colleague and told him I was revising my CV and if he could send me his. He did, inspiring me to reformat mine.

People are going to be interested in your endeavors. They want you to succeed. When you take the initiative to ask for assistance, most people will help when you do, or if they can't, they will often point you in a new direction.

My critique group has answered questions that didn't relate to the WIP they'd just read. They've given me advice and been there for me.

But remember Thoreau? He tells his readers he returned the axe in better shape than when he got it. He understood the responsibility of receiving the gift of help was to take care of that gift.

When more than two people say the same thing, it's probably you

My biggest worry when critiquing is that I'm being too harsh in my feedback. I'm blunt by nature and I worry about how I might be perceived. In turn, I hope my group is as blunt with me in return (they are).

One of the biggest things I've learned through critiquing is that when two or more people are saying the same thing, it's on me that I didn't communicate the information well. Sure, we can ignore poor reviews and social media comments, but when you are working with people whose help you have solicited the onus is different. If more than one person says something, such as that they found my scene confusing or my plot points tedious, I should listen. It's hard, getting feedback that tells us we didn't do something correctly. But as writers our first drafts are often big ideas on paper that lack refinement. And that's okay. That's why we have people read them. Yet, after having written most of my novels without using critique partners or beta

readers, I'll admit I had a bit of an ego. I knew what I was doing. It's a bit like professional development in teaching—after 32 years, what can you teach me?

Turns out, quite a lot. Reading my critique partners' comments has taught me a lot about myself and my own writing. Reading their work and offering feedback showed me the writing process from angles beyond my own experience. Turns out you can teach an old dog new tricks.

When things don't work, change them

Just like I had to adjust to teaching in a pandemic, just like I have to revise my scenes following feedback when things aren't working, you find a way to fix it. However, as writers, we often get into our rut and stay there. We know what works and stick with it, often far after it no longer does.

My critique group started out with the idea of a three-week turnaround. Week 1—send pages on a Monday. Week 2—return pages. Week 3—Zoom and talk.

We discovered we couldn't make a consistent Zoom schedule work. So we dropped that and now exchange pages every two weeks. We Zoom when we can. We also formed an IO group as trying to do emails to everyone got too confusing.

Most of us don't like change. However, deadlines change. Markets change. Groups change. Circumstances change. I could go on. So joining my critique group has reminded me to remain flexible and to seek change, especially when it makes things better and adds to growth.

You need people to hold you accountable

Another thing my group taught me was how much I needed people in my life to keep me accountable, even if I didn't know it before. This pandemic has upended our traditional sources of support. We aren't traveling like we did. We aren't attending conferences or meeting our readers in bookstores. Many of us have Zoom fatigue (a real thing) and worries we didn't have a year ago.

Knowing I have to have pages for my critique group, and knowing they were going to ask me about my writing, and knowing they are cheering me on through this process (and me them) keeps me going through this rough, uncertain time. As writers, since we do work alone, having an accountability partner matters. It might be a spouse. It might be a good friend. It might be an assistant, or a colleague from NINC. Through being in a critique group, I learned I needed cheerleaders and taskmasters.

I knew I'd better my writing by working with other authors. But I didn't realize I'd discover so much about life or that personally I'd grow through the process. That might be the best lesson of all.

Michele Dunaway is the author of over 26 contemporary romance works.

The Mad Scribbler

Bios (life) Graphia (writing)

By Laura Resnick



“The questions raised by the Bailey affair are timely and timeless.”

—Judith Shulevitz, *The Atlantic*, April 27, 2021

Award-winning author Blake Bailey’s 900-page biography of novelist Philip Roth (1933-2018) launched in April as a hardcover *New York Times* bestseller. Yet by the end of the month, his publisher announced it was permanently withdrawing the book from publication, adding, “Mr. Bailey will be free to seek publication elsewhere if he chooses.”

Even by the standards of the fast-spinning 21st century, that’s a pretty dizzying turnaround.

Philip Roth was one of the most lauded American novelists of his generation, winner of many prestigious awards. He chose Bailey, a former middle-school teacher and noted literary biographer, to write this book (after firing his previous biographer). Roth gave him unrestricted access to his personal correspondence and unpublished works, and he spent many hours in interviews with Bailey, who finished the work after Roth died.

The launch of *Philip Roth: The Biography* last month was triumphant: bestsellerdom, lots of publicity, and mostly good reviews. All that attention for the book attracted quite a bit of attention to Bailey, too.

As a result, women who had tried to forget Bailey became very aware of him—and started talking about him. Consequently, as of this writing, Bailey is publicly accused of two rapes, attempted rape, and multiple instances of sexual misconduct.

The public allegations first emerged among the author’s former middle-school students in New Orleans. They had viewed him as their mentor, and he remained in touch with them over the years. A number of them now say, in retrospect, they believe Bailey was sexually grooming them.

The Times-Picayune/New Orleans Advocate [reported](#) on April 20: “[Bailey] is now facing accusations that he fostered close relationships with girls he taught and then exploited their trust to pursue sex with them early in their adulthood. Three of Blake Bailey’s former students described sexual encounters with him... one [Eve Crawford Peyton] accusing him of rape, after he spent years staying in contact with them under the guise of mentorship. A fourth [Elisha Diamond] said she fled from a bar meet-up during her freshman year in college when he slid his hand up her thigh following a series of suggestive remarks.”

Another former student, Caryn Blair, [came forward](#) after reading those accounts and realizing her experience was not, as she had previously thought, “a one-off thing” for Bailey. She described an encounter in which she physically fought off his sexual advances.

Bailey denies all sexual misconduct allegations made against him.

Next, according to *Vanity Fair* [reporting](#), book critic Dwight Garner told colleagues at the NYT he believed the former students’ allegations were true because in 2015, while Bailey was an overnight guest in Garner’s home, he raped another houseguest. Publishing executive Valentina Rice had confided to Garner in 2015 but never reported the assault. Now she agreed to go on the record and gave the details to the NYT.

Bailey’s literary agency dropped him before the NYT story was published. His publisher, W.W. Norton, announced it would “pause” promotion and distribution of his book.

Reporting also revealed that Ms. Rice had sent an anonymous letter, accusing Bailey of rape, to his publisher in 2018.

“Encouraged by the #MeToo movement,” Alexandra Schwartz [wrote](#) in the *New Yorker*, “Rice emailed the president of Norton, Julia A. Reidhead, from a pseudonymous address. ‘I have not felt able to report this to the police but feel I have to do something and tell someone in the interests of protecting other women,’ she wrote. ‘I understand that you would need to confirm this allegation which I am prepared to do, if you can assure me of my anonymity even if it is likely Mr. Bailey will know exactly who I am.’”

Rice never received a reply from Reidhead or anyone else at Norton; but she did hear from Bailey, who told her that his publisher had forwarded her email to him. He denied any wrongdoing and implored Rice to cease making her allegations.

In response to this information coming to light recently, Norton issued a statement: “We took this allegation very seriously... We did take steps, including questioning Mr. Bailey about the allegations, which he categorically denied. We never knew the identity of the email’s sender, and we were mindful of the sender’s request for a guarantee of anonymity.”

Within a few days, on April 27, Norton announced it was withdrawing *Philip Roth* from publication (as well as a previous book of Bailey’s, *The Splendid Things We Planned*). The digital editions of the Roth biography disappeared from online vendors within a day, though the print edition is still available; presumably it is existing warehouse stock. Recorded Books, which published the audio version of *Philip Roth*, is also reportedly removing the book from the market.

That’s where the matter now stands. And there’s a lot to unpack here.

First of all, I’ve seen this event erroneously compared to the announcement in March that six Dr. Seuss books are being removed from publication. There is no corollary there. The Dr.

Seuss estate privately retained a panel of experts to review and make recommendations about the catalogue of books it owns; based on those recommendations, the managers of the literary estate made an independent decision to withdraw certain decades-old books from publication that they believe “portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong.” (This was the subject of my April column.) That situation bears no resemblance to a publisher withdrawing a brand-new book from publication, against the will of the author, because of allegations that the author is a sexual predator.

There’s also the question of what Norton should have done upon receiving the 2018 letter alleging the sender had been raped by a writer they had under contract. If my publisher received an anonymous letter accusing me of a horrifying deed, I’d like to think that they’d take my denial seriously and consider the weight of our real relationship against the flimsiness of an anonymous allegation. However, the sender did offer to confirm the allegation, and it’s a serious one.

When recently announcing that the company would withdraw the Roth biography from the market, Reidhead [said](#) in an email to company employees, “As a publishing company we are limited in our investigative abilities, but we recognize that there may be situations, such as allegations of potentially criminal conduct, where we should actively consider bringing in outside assistance.”

Which is not a bad idea. But just as there’s no indication of what Norton did in 2018 to take this “very seriously” beyond asking the author about it, there’s also no indication that Reidhead “brought in outside assistance” prior to making this unusually disruptive (and expensive) decision to withdraw a brand-new bestseller from publication.

After reading at least a dozen articles about this mess, it looks to me like the publisher said in 2018, “It’s only one allegation, no need to do anything,” and then said in 2021, “OMG, now it’s at least half a dozen allegations, we gotta do something!”

What stands out to me is that there should be a plan, a policy, and a procedure to follow. Because Blake Bailey certainly isn’t the only writer who ever will be—or ever has been—accused of sexual assault, or of other deeply egregious behavior.

Indeed, I have previously written in this column several times about similar issues. In July, for example, I wrote about two science fiction/fantasy authors who were dumped by their agents and publishers after being publicly accused of multiple incidents of sexual harassment. A few weeks later, I recounted on Ninlink the similar fate of a third sf/f writer. In all of those instances, the publishers or agents who cut them loose stated publicly that it was because of the harassment allegations.

Stuff has hit the fan before, and it will hit the fan again. So publishing companies—and literary agencies—ought to have an actual plan for what to do when someone who may or may not be credible alleges that one of their writers (or employees or associates) engages in conduct that’s actionable, or criminal, or egregious enough to merit serious evaluation.

After all, Bailey’s attorney, Billy Gibbens, made a point worth considering: “Norton made the drastic, unilateral decision to take Mr. Bailey’s books out of print, based on the false and unsubstantiated allegations against him, without undertaking any investigation or offering Mr. Bailey the opportunity to refute the allegations.”

Look, having read all the allegations (so far) in detail, I find them credible. Also disturbing. I believe Bailey's accusers. And I don't believe someone needs to be arrested, tried, and convicted in a criminal court before his publisher can justify dumping him. But I do think Norton's actions seem chaotic and impulsive when they should instead be disciplined and measured.

Finally, there is the question of whether a company is wrong for declining to publish a writer for being a flawed, offensive, or really bad person.

I think this subject is far too often inaccurately framed as publishers engaging in censorship, or smothering ideas they don't like, or denying readers access to someone's work. This is nonsense for two key reasons.

First, publishers are very selective every single day about what they do and don't publish. They decide to publish or not based on whether they think a book is good, whether they believe it will make money, whether they trust or despise the agent representing it, whether they love dealing with the author or think the author is a nightmare, whether they've got enough budget or open slots in the schedule or too-similar works already under contract, whether they're in the mood or not, etc. So not publishing a book because they disapprove of the author, his behavior, or his ideas... That's not unique or special, it's just another entry on their long list of reasons for not publishing a book.

And second, when a publisher doesn't publish a writer, they're not preventing him from sharing his work with the world; they're just declining to invest their own resources in partnering with him. As Norton said in their announcement, "Mr. Bailey will be free to seek publication elsewhere if he chooses." Another publisher may well want that book. If not, then Bailey can self-publish it. He can distribute ebooks, post the text on his blog, recite the book aloud to passers-by, and release it in podcast installments. If none of that is as prestigious or successful as publishing with Norton was, well, he's not entitled to prestige or success—only to his freedom of speech.

Laura Resnick writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction. She has been dumped by many publishers.

NINC Member Discounts



AuthorBuzz and **KidsBuzz** are offering NINC members a discount on any—or each—of their promotions. At Author Buzz the author writes short notes to librarians and booksellers, book clubs and individual readers. Some note possibilities include website links, review snippets, info on giveaways and promotions, and material to include in newsletters. As your marketing partner, AuthorBuzz shares your note, book cover, and sometimes your author photo with successful online publications including Shelf-Awareness.com, DearReader.com, BookMovement.com, PublishersMarketplace.com, KindleNationalDaily.com, and Booktrib.com, reaching many thousands of potential readers.

An additional service, **Ads Plus**, finds blogs, social media, and other online outlets to promote your book, as well as designs, writes and creates the ads.

AuthorBuzz has over a dozen packages with different pricing to consider, from a basic plan to one that focuses on book clubs. Other possibilities are geared specifically to ebooks. KidsBuzz focuses on getting children or young adult books to the right marketing audience.

Created by best-selling author and marketing professional M.J. Rose, AuthorBuzz has been buzzing authors since 2005. Go to authorbuzz.com for more information and our Discounts and Freebies page under Member Benefits to learn how to access our discount.

Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

Networking

The email list for Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>

Follow NINC on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc

Conference:

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

Newsletter

Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>

Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>

Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

Website (you must be logged in to access these services)

Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>

Pro Services Directory: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/pro-services-directory/>

Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>

Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

Welcome Packet: *A link to the new member packet will be included as soon as it's been updated.*

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



Founded in 1989

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.

Founders

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

2021 Board of Directors

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

- President: Tawdra Kandle
- President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

Advisory Council

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks
- Laura Parker Castoro
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher
- Kay Hooper
- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto

- Pat McLaughlin
- Kasey Michaels
- Julie Ortolon
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

2021 Committees

Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.

- 2021 Conference Committee
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
 - Programming Chair: Lisa Hughey
 - Assistant Prog. Chair: Tawdra Kandle
 - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
 - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Authors Coalition Representative: Laura Phillips
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
 - Hildie McQueen
 - Gwen Hernandez
 - Lynn Emery
 - Pamela Kelley
 - Pook Burroughs
 - Samantha Silver
 - Alison Perry
 - Misti Boehm
 - Harper St. George
 - Ellis Leigh
 - Malorie Cooper
- Social Media Committee: Violet Howe
- Membership Committee
 - Sarah Woodbury
 - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
 - Editor: Harper St. George
 - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick

- Nominating Committee:
 - Malorie Cooper
 - Tanya Anne Crosby
 - Kristine Smith
 - Jenny Gardiner
 - Judi Fennell
- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin
P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353
admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

***Nink* Newsletter**

May 2021 edition – Vol. 32, No. 5

Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members.

To request reprint rights or to **submit an article proposal**, please contact [the editor](#).

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF, mobi and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information.

To change subscription preferences, please contact admin@ninc.com.

Copyright ©2021 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.