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President's Voice

By Diana Peterfreund



I've been on a kick of watching romantic comedy movies recently. Maybe it's to get a break from dismal world news, or to de-stress after a long day of working on NINC or my own novels, but I've slowly been making my way through the streaming offerings on Netflix, as well as my own significant collection of rom-com DVDs.

Everything I've watched has been from the 90s or later (maybe I'll go on a classics bender next month, but this is my current mood). I've also been posting my reactions to these movies on social media, which has prompted a boatload of suggestions and further discussion.

Here's what I've learned from this experiment that I can apply to my own creative life:

Art doesn't always age well.

Movies I adored as a teen or young adult now strike me as trite or even offensive. Why had I glossed over the fact that the characters of *You've Got Mail* conduct their love affair—even going so far as planning to meet for a blind date—while living with significant others?

Forget Tom Hanks's film-length deception of Meg Ryan or the icky ethics of corporate bookstores—these guys are already cheats.

I snickered five minutes into my re-watch of *My Best Friend's Wedding* when it's revealed that Julia Roberts is both a major metropolitan food critic and worried about being a spinster before her twenty-eighth birthday.

Nowadays, she'd be toiling at unpaid, *The Devil Wears Prada*-type internships and maybe considering an app more serious than Tinder.

This is a well-known phenomenon in the book world. We often talk about whether a title "holds up." As times and tastes change, stories that held the audience riveted might seem dated, slow-paced, or, worst of all, at odds with modern mores.

The children's book that is now horrifically racist, the romance novel that explains why "bodice-ripping" became a term, the sexist "Golden Age" sci-fi. I have friends who won't recommend books that they haven't at least reread recently, ensuring that they won't be foisting

a moldering “classic” on an unexpected reader.

It also explains why we as writers have to change with the times, too. I’m almost the age of the parents of the kids I write about in my middle-grade novels, and my romance heroines were born the year I headed off to college. I must acknowledge that they have a different world view than I do.

Plots or characters that might have flown in the last decade are now going to seem as dated as the baggy hunter-green turtleneck and other mid-90s fashion disasters that Annette Bening wore in *The American President*.

Your audience has deal breakers, and you ignore them at your peril.

Back to those two rascals in *You’ve Got Mail*. My Facebook wall is rife with complaints about the rampant use of cheating as a plot device in turn-of-the-millennium rom-coms.

The Wedding Singer, *Sweet Home Alabama*, *Notting Hill*, *Serendipity*, *Made of Honor*, *13 Going on Thirty*, and a special dishonorable mention for *Love Actually* (which might just be the most depressing romantic comedy of all time)—all were popular films where a large romantic conflict arose from the fact that one of the leads was—oops—taken.

People do not have mild feelings about this, by the way. I’ve published a romance novel where the main characters do a bit of sneaking around, and was told in no uncertain terms that a sizable segment of the readership wouldn’t touch a “cheating” book with a ten-foot pole.

I respect this deal-breaker—I have ick factors of my own (I’m looking at you, *Rumor Has It*, and your nasty triple-generation love affair, which also, unsurprisingly, involves cheating).

It behooves us as writers to know if we’re accidentally stepping into a minefield. There’s a reason there’s a website called doesthedogdie.com: enough people seriously won’t consume art without knowing for sure if Fido makes it to the end credits.

I had to explain to my five-year-old what a dog shelter was and what happened in the “back room” during the close call in *27 Dresses*.

Of course, one person’s deal-breaker is another’s one-click. If you know your audience and you can reach them, then feel free to write the taboo topics. One of my favorite romantic comedies is the dark and twisted *Secretary*, which sold dominance and submission as a romance plot long before we started counting shades of gray.

Characters matter.

Even the most hoary, silly, or convoluted plotline can be elevated if we are rooting for the characters to succeed. In movies, that often comes down to casting—a charismatic or beloved actor can sell a bad script or unlikeable rogue.

We’d probably be bothered more by what a creepy stalker Meg Ryan is in *Sleepless in Seattle* if she weren’t, you know, Meg Ryan. Sandra Bullock wins us over with her prickly boss in *The Proposal*, and judging from my Facebook page, a lot of people only got through *Leap Year* because Matthew Goode is so dreamy.

The best characters become immortal archetypes: Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Darcy, Scarlett O’Hara, Anne Shirley. We say we’d watch our favorite actors read the phone book? Well, when it’s characters we love to hang out with, even the most mundane happenings can be filled with

enchantment.

I tend to follow my characters' leads in my books. Poe of the Secret Society Girl series was supposed to be a minor player, but all of his scenes with Amy, my lead, were so electric I knew I should have him stick around. Ten years later, he's still a fan favorite.

The parts can be greater than the whole.

The aforementioned *Leap Year* is kind of a dud, but the breathtaking Irish scenery makes up for a lot of sloppy storytelling. I never quite bought into the flaky premise of *How To Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, but I wanted Kate Hudson's gorgeous wardrobe (especially her iconic yellow gown).

The soundtrack (and the spot-on skewering of both modern and vintage pop-stardom) is the best part of the underrated *Music & Lyrics*. Judy Davis's delightfully sexy and sarcastic sidekick steals the show in *27 Dresses*. And who hasn't coveted one of the lavishly appointed homes of characters in Nancy Meyers' movies from *Something's Gotta Give* to *The Holiday*?

Settings are often a character unto themselves in my books—from a centuries-old Roman nunnery strewn with magic and unicorn bones to a lost underground bunker city hidden beneath the hills of rural Maryland.

I know my readers come to my book hoping to be immersed in a strange new world, and construct elaborate set pieces that take advantage of my fictional nooks and crannies. There's a lot to be said for those devilish details, especially if you find an audience that craves them.

The market fluctuates, but there's still room for a good story.

Man, Meg Ryan did a lot of romantic comedies in the eighties and nineties, didn't she? Some are beloved, like *When Harry Met Sally* and *Sleepless in Seattle*. Of others, the less said, the better (I'm looking at you, *I.Q.*).

You could tell she was getting tired of the grind by *Kate and Leopold*, in which the mega-star, who must have had wardrobe approval, chose to spend the film dressed in a series of aggressively frumpy clothes (even the dingy, wrinkled gray-green ball gown of the climax) and an appalling, stringy haircut styled carefully to cover her face through most scenes.

After Meg moved on from the genre, it never really bounced back. Sandra Bullock played along for a bit, and Reese Witherspoon dabbled, but by the time Katherine Heigl started churning them out, the rom-com had floundered in the market. This decade has seen more indies and made-for-TV productions than big studio films, with B-list actors making kissy faces at each other instead of huge stars.

But is the romantic comedy movie dead? Well, that depends on how you look at it. I adored the low-budget *Safety Not Guaranteed*, which mixes up wacky rom-com hijinks (including the classic deception plot) with a sci-fi twist, when the heroine, a disaffected journalism intern on the hunt for a crazy story answers a classified ad looking for a partner ... in time travel.

Another affecting and hilarious love story came in unexpected packaging: the animated robots in *WALL·E*. And rom-com went high brow with the outcast romance of Oscar winner Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper in *Silver Linings Playbook*.

There have been a spate of winning rom-coms in the television field, from dating-oriented sitcoms like *How I Met Your Mother* to my personal favorite—the multi-season arc of Ben and

Leslie's office romance on *Parks and Recreation*.

I got my start in chick lit, a genre that promptly crashed—or did it? The snarky first person tone and freewheeling postmodern feminist plotlines are all over the romance field these days.

Author Gemma Halliday has been so successful with her indie chick lits that she now publishes her own line of books. And many other chick lit writers are doing their thing for the younger set in YA.

Genres don't die, they evolve.

We just have to evolve along with them.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to have a quick but epic makeover and run through an airport before my one true love leaves town.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana". The letter "D" is large and circular, with the rest of the name written in a cursive, flowing script.

Diana Peterfreund is NINC's 2016 president. She writes YA and middle grade novels as Diana and new adult romance as Viv Daniels.

The Power of Free

How authors are using free books to propel their backlist and subscriber base

By Sasha White



When was the last time that an item ended up in your grocery cart not because it was on your list, but because the store was offering a free sample?

That's the power of free.

With the explosion of e-books, the game has changed because it's become harder to find new readers in a glutted market. We all know that the best way to distinguish ourselves as authors and earn lifelong readers is to produce a top-quality, product—good story with great characters and professional packaging. But that doesn't help us if readers can't *find* that product.

Discoverability is key to growing your readership, and offering future readers a free sample with no risk might just be the way to do that.

How free books generate ROI

Because indie authors invest months of effort and hundreds or even thousands of dollars in creating each book, it can be painful to make a book free, and even more painful to pay for advertising to shout the freebie from the rooftops.

However, [BookBub reports](#) that 85 percent of authors say sales of their books were higher in the days following their BookBub freebie, with an average increase of more than 65 percent—even when the book went back up to full price right away.

Making a book free for a few days boosts rankings and visibility, increases reviews, and increases sales when the price goes back up to full. The money earned from these sales at full price makes the return on investment (ROI) worth it.

Still, there is much debate about whether free helps you sell more books *continuously*, because authors are reporting sales for only a few days or weeks after it's free.

What happens months later? With this debate in mind, we decided to ask some best-selling authors to share their thoughts on why free is such a great marketing tool, and how it helped them.

“I was very reluctant to offer the first book in my best-selling series free,” said Susan Stoker, a NINC member and *New York Times* best-selling author. “It was still selling fairly well and it was hard for me to give up that income. I didn’t make that book free until 14 months after it was first published and the entire eight-book series was out.”

What happened when Stoker’s first book went free?

“My income immediately doubled because people who downloaded book one for free then bought the other books in the series. Not only that, but my visibility and sales increased across Barnes & Noble, iBooks, and Kobo as well. Yes, I did give up the income from that first book, but more than made up for it with the follow-on sales for the rest of the books in the series.”

Making free books more discoverable

The most popular—and profitable—option for freebies is to make the first book in a series free, and promote it with various ads and mailing lists such as Robin’s Reads or BookBub.

A spokesperson for BookBub said free books featured with them yield 10 times more downloads than \$0.99 books, and the later books in the series will sell eight times more copies when the first book is free vs. \$0.99 or higher.

That’s a fabulous ROI.

Another great way to use free books as a marketing tool is as a giveaway for those who sign up for your newsletter. Having a large mailing list filled with readers who are just waiting for your next release is one of the best sales tools an author can have.

Kristin Painter ran a Facebook campaign before her Nocturne Falls series came out, offering a free book to anyone who subscribed to her newsletter.

“Once the series launched, I stopped those ads (although I still offer the free book) and let the list build organically.” How has the free book influenced Painter’s career? “It’s helped increase my income tremendously. When I got a BookBub ad for that free book, my income rose dramatically.”

Erica Ridley has a twist on this in her marketing plan. She does have a first-in-series free, but she uses a not-in-series standalone that she has not made free in stores, as a free giveaway to newsletter subscribers.

Ridley has another innovative way to give away free books as well: “I have trading cards for the first two books in my series that have a QR code and a Bitly link to download the e-book for free. Anytime I see a call for swag, I donate those babies by the truckload. If readers like the first two books in the series, there’s five more where that came from.”

My own experience with free has been drastically different than these ladies. I made the first book in a new series free, and it really did nothing for sales—which is one of the reasons I was so eager to research and write this article.

Of course, in doing so I learned what I did wrong ... and I hope to save some of you from making the same mistakes. When asked what would they recommend as a best free strategy, two out of three authors said “Don’t make that first in series free too soon.” The third said, “Have your free book front and center everywhere. My email signature, my website, my Facebook banner, *everywhere*. I’m saying, ‘Cooommee to meeee, readers! I promise you’ll like it!’”

One thing everyone agrees on: make sure that the loss of income for the free book is worthwhile. For the best return on your investment, use the back matter from the first free book to link to following books. These books must be already available so readers who enjoy that first free book can jump directly into the next one, and the next, and so on.

Free also works as a tool for those who write standalones. Just be sure that the free title is a great example of what you offer readers, and that you have a clear and easy path to another available title in the back matter.

Though it might be hard to stand out in a crowded marketplace, you can be sure readers are finding it equally hard to find 'keeper' authors amongst the crowd.

Best-selling author Sasha White writes modern erotic fiction with an edge of kink with the occasional foray into paranormal and science fiction. Before going indie, White published over thirty stories with publishers such as Kensington Aphrodisia, Berkley Heat, Avon, Black Lace, and Samhain Publishing, and is recognized as one the top authors of the genre. Reach her through [her website](#).

All About Audiobooks

Reach new readers and dodge the most common pitfalls

By Patricia Burroughs



One of the hottest topics amongst authors these days is audiobooks. According to the latest member survey, 43 percent of NINC members are publishing audiobooks. One-fifth of these folks earn more than 10 percent of their overall revenue from this format.

The creation of an audiobook used to cost tens of thousands of dollars and was the realm of publishers. Today, because of Audible, it is an exciting and potentially lucrative opportunity for all authors.

With ACX, Audible has created a system in which authors and narrators can find each other and create audiobooks. The system works well for most people. Others have issues, many of which result from making uninformed decisions when starting out.

This article explores a few crucial choices in the audiobook production and publishing process that have the biggest impact on the author's ACX experience and success.

Understand your contract

Most unhappy authors I heard from while writing this article said they would have made different choices if they had better understood the terms of the contract. Sometimes, these mistakes are expensive.

Everything you need to know is spelled out on the [ACX website](#), and help is available at support@acx.com. If you can't find the specific answer you need, ask.

Also, as always, learn from other authors. A notable piece of advice shared by the Audible folks was simply this: "Take your time. It's not a race."

Choose the right narrator

This is an author's most critical choice. It's completely in your hands, but it involves doing your due diligence. Narrators, who are often actresses and actors, put samples up on ACX for you to review.

You can spend weeks listening to samples. Take as long as you need to find those who seem like a good match for your budget and story. A few things to take into consideration:

- Choose an experienced narrator who has other audiobooks you can listen to. Check their reviews on Audible, and contact authors they've worked with for feedback.
- Pay attention to how quickly potential narrators respond to your requests and emails.
- Only choose narrators who consider the author's continuing involvement crucial, especially by sharing each chapter and getting authorial feedback throughout the entire recording process.
- Learn from ACX authors who have chosen narrators that they—and listeners—like by asking about their selection process.

When you select the five-minute excerpt of your novel for narrators to read as an audition:

- It should have your main character or characters speaking.
- It should capture the overall tone of your book, whether it is light-hearted romance, intense horror, or swashbuckling adventure.
- Give the potential narrators enough information and direction to help them find the right mood, voices, personalities, and accents.
- Give them notes on how to pronounce unusual names or words.

If you have never listened to an audiobook or don't feel confident choosing a narrator, enlist help. Find friends who do listen to and enjoy audiobooks—Audible members who listen to at least one or two books per month are often the best resource—and share the auditions with them.

After narrowing down their search, some authors have crowd-sourced their final selection by posting several audition samples and letting their readers chime in on their preferences.

A word of caution: finding good narrators who will agree to royalty share can be a challenge. Most experienced narrators insist on being paid up front so that they don't have to depend on the sales of the audiobook to get paid.

You have all the power. The choice of narrator can make or break your audiobook. Choose well.

Don't approve the finished audiobook without listening to every single word

The author signs off that the audiobook is complete and submits it for publication. Do not do this until you have listened to the entire book.

Once the book is submitted and distributed, it is out of your hands and it's too late to make changes or corrections. Don't skip this step and find out there are problems only when people complain in their Audible reviews.

This is an expensive mistake to make, and it's totally avoidable.

You are in a stronger position, less likely to have problems, and most likely to end up among the vast majority of pleased ACX authors if you take your time and review the final recordings diligently.

To Whispersync or not?

Whispersync is a service that allows people who purchase the print book to buy the audiobook for a lower price, often only \$1.99.

Some authors think it is great. Some think it hurts their bottom line. Research this and know what you plan to do when the time comes to sign your contract.

Paying for production vs. royalty sharing

There are three approaches to an ACX deal:

- Pay for Production (PFP): The author pays the narrator a flat fee and then receives all the royalties. The author retains control.
- Royalty Sharing (RS): The author pays nothing up front and agrees to split the royalties 50/50 for seven years. The author and the narrator share control.
- Existing Audiobook: The author brings a completed audiobook to ACX and receives all of the royalties. (This is uncommon, and I'm listing it solely for the sake of completeness.)

There is little debate about it. If an author can afford to pay up front, it is the best choice. While the author is shouldering all the risk—what if the book doesn't sell well?—the author keeps all the profits and retains all the control. Other PFP advantages may become obvious as we learn about royalty sharing.

The first benefit of RS is obvious. The author gets their audiobook made, and even if they share the royalties, these are royalties that would not exist without the narrator agreeing to the split. In this case, the author and narrator share the risks and rewards equally.

The narrator risks doing a lot of work and the project not earning enough to cover recording expenses. The author risks the book selling so well that the narrator's half of the money swells to a number that the author finds horrifying.

A more significant risk that anyone who has fought a rights-reversion battle can relate to is this: if the book does poorly, or if the author wants to take the audiobook in a new direction with a new narrator, they can't because they're locked into a seven-year contract with the current narrator.

Remember what I said about understanding your contract? This is one of those places where it is vital.

After due consideration, you might decide to save money until you can pay the narrator up front. Many authors do and are happy they did.

Or, you might decide you want to start earning now, even if that means sharing half the royalties with a business partner and being locked into that relationship for seven years. Many people do and are happy they did.

What happens next?

According to the folks at Audible, at the end of your seven-year contract, the narrator is considered paid in full. The author can choose not to renew the contract and continue to sell the

book and receive the full royalty.

However, *this will not happen automatically.*

The royalty-share contract will automatically renew every year after the initial seven-year period unless the author uses the correct procedure to end it. There is a sixty-day period each year in which the author can do so.

Royalty-sharing works well for authors who need to take that route. I've heard from many happy royalty-sharing authors. Are they making less money through sharing? Yes. But many of them have found narrators they like, often forming partnerships that extend beyond a single book or series. They were comfortable with the sharing aspect before signing.

Exclusivity, yea or nay?

If you pay up front, you will get to choose whether you stay exclusive within the Audible/ACX family, which now includes iTunes, or whether you want to be able to sell anywhere and everywhere possible.

The difference? If you're exclusive, you get 40 percent royalty. If you're not exclusive, you get only 25 percent.

When royalty-sharing, exclusivity is required by ACX, and you and your narrator will split the 40 percent royalty, each getting 20 percent, during the seven-year contract period.

When you have chosen a narrator and agreed to the terms of your deal, you will give those details to ACX and a contract will be generated. By clicking to send the offered contract to the narrator, you agree to all the terms discussed here and more.

Familiarize yourself with your options, your rights, and your commitments before signing. By the time you are ready to submit that offer to the narrator, you will be empowered to make the choices that are best for you. And by the time you approve your complete audiobook and hit *submit for publication*, you'll be ready to do it again.

Good luck!

Patricia Burroughs is not a lawyer. She writes [fiction](#) for a living (and you can [find her on Twitter](#)). Thus, she thanks the many authors who shared their expertise, experiences, concerns, and questions through phone calls, emails, and online discussions. She also thanks Audible executive vice president and publisher, Beth Anderson; ACX director of marketing, Hannah Wall; and Audible manager of public relations, Esther Bochner, for their generous assistance.

Essential Elements of an Author Website

Build your online presence for sales and branding

By Jeanna Barrett



One of the most powerful things in an author's toolkit is a website. With complete control over design, content and functionality, you can use it as part of your overall marketing plan to drive sales and subscribers.

But how do you build a better website? Even if you're not digitally savvy, this article explains how to easily set up or revamp a website that will wow by using best practices from both inside and outside the publishing industry.

Professionally host your website

The first step to a killer website is choosing a hosting platform and modern design theme. [SquareSpace](#) and [WordPress](#) are the two best platform options to host your website.

Currently, [60% of all of the websites](#) on the web with known content management systems are hosted with WordPress. It's a popular option because it's deeply customizable and performs really well with search engine optimization (SEO). That equals greater discoverability for you and your books.

Large-scale sites such as [Time.com](#) and [TheWaltDisneyCompany.com](#) are hosted on WordPress, but it's also a great option for personal blogs and author websites.

However, WordPress can be a bit of a steep learning curve for people who aren't savvy about technology, and it's best to have a WordPress designer assist in setting up a WordPress-hosted website.

[SquareSpace](#) is a recent addition to the "one-click setup" platform options, superior to the other similar tools such as Wix and Weebly. SquareSpace offers an easy content management system that allows you to drag and drop widgets and build an impressive site with zero website design skills.

Its templates are at the top of the online web design game, and they have awesome integrations with social media and MailChimp to create and manage a newsletter list. If you're willing to take a bit of time to teach yourself the platform, you can set up a very impressive

author website for \$200 to \$400, depending on how much you spend on stock photography.

Check out [Martha Brockenbrough](#) and [Cecily Paterson](#) for examples of two authors who built their sites on SquareSpace.

The screenshot shows the top portion of Martha Brockenbrough's website. At the top is a red banner with the author's name "MARTHA BROCKENBROUGH" in white. Below this is the text "AUTHOR of BOOKS FOR smart KIDS AND Juvenile ADULTS". A navigation menu includes links for HOME, BOOKS, BIO, EVENTS, SCHOOL & LIBRARY VISITS, BLOG, CONTACT, and FOR WRITERS. The main content area features three award highlights: "KIRKUS PRIZE FINALIST" with a quote from Kirkus Reviews, "ALA BOOKLIST TOP 10 ROMANCE FOR YOUTH" featuring the book cover for "The Game of Love and Death" by Martha Brockenbrough, and "YALSA NOMINEE 2016 BEST FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS" with quotes from Elizabeth Wein and Judy Blundell.





MY GIFT TO YOU

For a limited time I'm offering my readers a free copy of my award-nominated novel. Just tell me where to send it.

★★★★★ Perfection
Amazon Reader

'Lovely... sensitive, hopeful,
empowering.'
Cathy Cassidy, Author

'...an exquisitely written story...
...a stunning account of the
reinvention of a compelling and
sympathetic character.'
Publishers Weekly

2014 Amazon
Breakthrough
Novel Award
Semifinalist

YES! SEND MY FREE BOOK

Pick a theme that matches your brand and wows

Many pre-made themes are available for free or low cost for both SquareSpace and WordPress sites.

When picking a theme, you want to make sure it has the right structural elements. For example, do you want your site to have a top slider? Do you want your logo centered at the top of the page? Do you want sidebars and a footer, or just a footer?

Take a peek at author websites out there to get an idea of the different ways you can structure your website, then pick a theme based on these structural pieces—*not* the design colors or elements, because those can be easily altered.

When designing your website, choose colors that match either your overall author brand or your latest book design. A lot of authors choose to skin their website each time a new release comes out.

Two authors with websites built around their cover design are [Kristin Hannah](#), author of *The Nightingale* and [Garth Risk Hallberg](#), author of *City on Fire*.



The Nightingale

In love we find out who we want to be.
In war we find out who we are.

[Read an Excerpt](#)

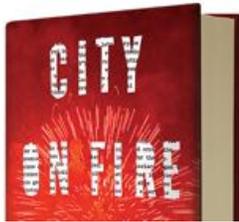
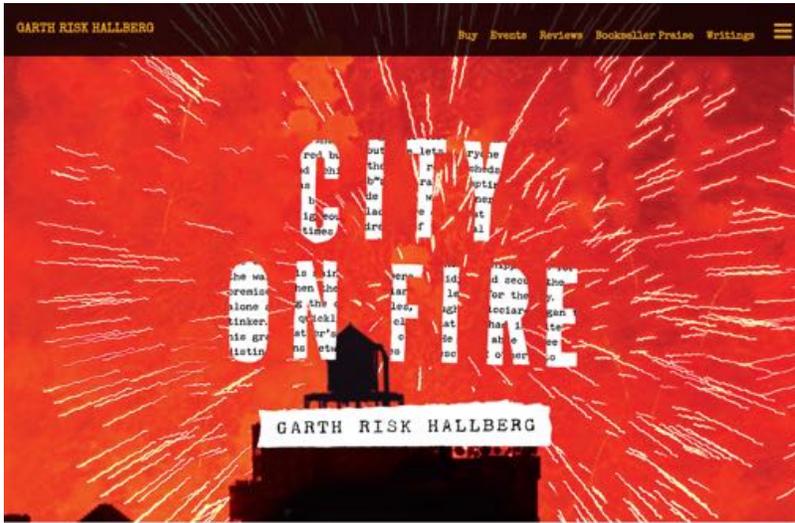
[Photos That Inspired the Book](#)

[Read the Story Behind the Book](#)

[A Year Later: Reflections From Kristin](#)

[Watch Kristin Discuss the Book](#)

[Beyond *The Nightingale*: What to Read](#)

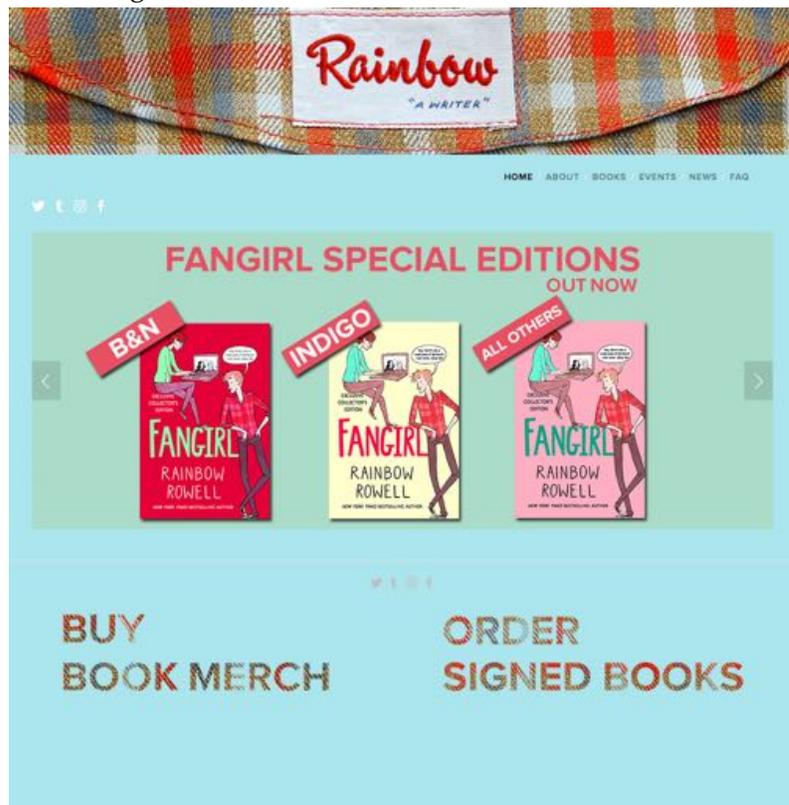


City on Fire

An immersive, exuberant, boundary-vaulting novel

New York City, 1978. Meet Regan and William Hamilton-Sweeney, estranged heirs to one of the city's great fortunes; Keith and Mercer, the men who, for better or worse, love them; Charlie and Samantha, two suburban teenagers seduced by downtown's punk scene; an obsessive magazine reporter and his idealistic neighbor — and the detective trying to figure out what any of them have to do with a shooting in Central Park on New Year's Eve.

Rainbow Rowell, however, chose a branded website design that stays consistent, no matter the cover design of her latest book.



Whichever style you choose, you should have a set of no more than three to four brand colors and two to three fonts that are consistent on every page throughout the website, weaving together a cohesive visual story.

Don't forget to use high-quality photographs by uploading either stock photography that doesn't feel generic, or the better option—your own photographs from a professional custom shoot.

Include essential author website elements

The most important component of your author website is the content—the right content will keep visitors engaged and will send Google search visitors your way.

Make sure your website has clear navigation and separate pages that people can visit, which Google can crawl and index. Two common navigation elements are an About page, where an author bio would live, and a Contact page, where a form would be located if visitors want to reach you directly from your site.

Beyond these standard pages, you should also include the following navigational elements:

- **Books:** Include a thumbnail imagery list of all of your published books, highlighting your latest release and any new releases coming up. Featuring your books in a nice slider is popular with authors, or you can build separate pages around each of your books. Separate pages are better for SEO.
- **Reviews:** Be sure to link to your book reviews on Goodreads and Amazon, and

encourage your site visitors to read your reviews and your book readers to write reviews. This is important since [77 percent of people read reviews before making an online purchase](#). For authors, this is even more important since book reviews are such a huge part of the reading community and are shared are often by readers. More than 85 percent of Kindle readers say they rely heavily on book reviews.

- **Blog:** A blog is a great tool to showcase updates and insight into your process or personality. Fresh content is the most important thing for Google's search algorithm, so including regularly updated blog posts helps drive more traffic to your website.
- **Events:** Feature any upcoming events or book signings you might have, so people know where and when to find you.
- **Shop:** To focus on sales, be sure to include a shopping cart or buttons linked to where visitors can purchase your books. SquareSpace has a nice shopping cart integration in their website building platform, and Shopify—one of the most widely used e-commerce tools—[recently released a great WordPress plugin and theme integration](#).

Avoid common website mistakes

If you're spending time and money on your author website, it's important to not only have the right pieces in place, but also to avoid common website pitfalls:

- **Lacking a Call to Action (CTA):** A website should instruct your visitor to take an action. Actions include instructing signing up for your newsletter, clicking to read an excerpt, downloading a free e-book, or purchasing or preordering your new book. You can include more than one call to action, but you should have your most important CTA prominently displayed on a button above the fold (at the top of the page, visible before they scroll down into your website).
- **Broken Links or Forms:** You don't want your visitors to visit your website, click a button that says, "Order the Book," and the button doesn't work. Oftentimes people will get frustrated and leave, and then you've lost a sale. After building your website, triple check that all links, navigational elements and forms work properly and lead to the right place.
- **Missing Analytics:** Don't launch a website without installing analytics. Google Analytics is the gold standard on the web, and it's free and easy to install. Google even offers an online course so you can understand the analytics platform, and there are lots of tutorials online. Analytics will help you understand what pages people visit, where they drop off your website, where they're clicking, and the number of visits to pages. With analytics, you'll be able to make informed decisions on how to improve your website and how to increase sales.
- **No Mobile Optimization:** According to [Comscore](#), the number of mobile-only online users in the U.S. exceeds the number of desktop users. This means it's critical to have a responsive, mobile-optimized website design in 2016. Usually, website themes include a responsive mobile theme in addition to a desktop theme, but be sure to test that your website appears OK and functions well on your phone.
- **Forgotten Social Integration:** Make sure social media is integrated everywhere on your

site that makes sense. Include icon links to your social media sites such as share buttons on your book pages and your blog posts. Include an Instagram or a Twitter feed, if you're active and want to showcase images and news you post.

Making the most of newsletter signups

It's critical to ask site visitors to sign up for your newsletter, so you can market to them later and let them know when your next book is coming out.

You should include CTA buttons or banners on your homepage that prompt them to sign up, and offer these at the bottom of each blog post and/or in the blog sidebar.

There are many tools to add "welcome mats" or timed pop-ups to your site, encouraging visitors to sign up for the newsletter. A great option for WordPress is [SumoMe](#). SquareSpace has newsletter signup widgets and an integration with MailChimp, which is a best-in-class email service provider that makes it easy to manage and send beautiful author newsletters.

With these easy author website guidelines, you should be steps away from having a site you'd be proud to have prospective readers and fans visit.

Jeanna Barrett is the founder of [First Page](#), a content strategy agency that works with startups and businesses to drive brand awareness and growth through content, social media, and SEO. She has a combined 12 years of social media and content marketing experience at venture-backed startups, digital agencies and Fortune 500 companies, with an expertise focus on small business and technology. Barrett's been named "Top 40 Under 40" of brand marketers and "Best in the West" for financial technology marketing.

Pinterest for Authors

Use the virtual pinboard for world-building and driving reader clicks

By Cheré Coen



Although authors trade on the written word, readers are gravitating toward author-inspired visuals on the social media site Pinterest.

Pinterest is a virtual bulletin board, a social medium to “pin” items found on websites. Users arrange their “pins” in groups called “boards.” You can scroll through boards with anchor images that link to their original websites and more content.

Many people use Pinterest to save a key piece of information they might want to reference later, such as a color scheme for a renovated living room or a recipe from *Southern Living*.

A person might pin an image or video to a board called “Books to Read” and return later when it’s time to head to the beach. That’s one of the reasons why authors are paying a lot more attention to Pinterest.

If you want to transform your naked backyard or build a “she shed” as your writing office, you can follow people who have pinned such ideas to their boards. When they update their Pinterest boards, your feed will showcase their pins and you’re free to pin them to your boards. Likewise, people who follow you will view your pins on their feed and are able to share them as well.

Pinterest can drive clicks to your website

This last point is a great reason to create Pinterest boards for novels. In addition to book covers, which can be linked back to your website or an online bookstore, your Pinterest board can include everything related to your book’s world, from the shoes and clothes your characters wear to recipes of foods they like to eat.

Historical romance author Lauren Royal pins photos of English castles and locations she used as inspiration for her novels.

Janet Evanovich elicits reader participation by asking how they envision her characters, such as “Readers’ Choices for Morelli” board relating to Joe Morelli in her Stephanie Plum mystery series.

Lucinda Brant believes that authors should create Pinterest boards for every novel they write.

“Every book should have its own board,” Brant explained. “I would also recommend having a general author board, one dedicated to audiobooks, another to articles and interviews I’ve written or been quoted in, one for translations, and I also have one dedicated to my research resources. As well, I have 100-plus boards dedicated to the 18th Century.”



Brant's book-specific pinboard for Deadly Peril.

“I have Pinterest boards for my books, plus one with actors whom I’d like for the role (as characters),” said Nancy J. Cohen. “It’s fun, like doing a collage. You can focus on story theme, or locale, or the characters. I get photos either from my own stock or the royalty-free sites, and also use them in DIY book trailers.”



Cohen's board for Warrior Prince.

Use a long-term, genre-specific strategy

Pinterest differs from other social media in that it's more about sharing information than interaction. Whereas authors aim for engagement when posting to Facebook and Twitter, Pinterest is more like an electronic bulletin board.

"Pinterest is different from Facebook and Twitter in that you're not really looking for immediate feedback from other pinners, or those who follow you," Brant said. "I get most feedback from readers who, after having read my books, will then search out the accompanying Pinterest board for a behind-the-scenes peek, and they love it."

Kirsten Oliphant, who teaches social media to writers, sees Pinterest as the social medium for the long haul, one that will provide readers with information on your books as opposed to the sudden rise and fall of Facebook and Twitter posts.

"The residual effect of Pinterest traffic can beat out any other platform and send your readers on autopilot," she wrote as a guest blogger on Jane Friedman's publishing blog. "When I look at my page views from the last year on my lifestyle blog, Pinterest is by far my top referrer, sending me hundreds of page views a day on posts I wrote (and pinned) months before."

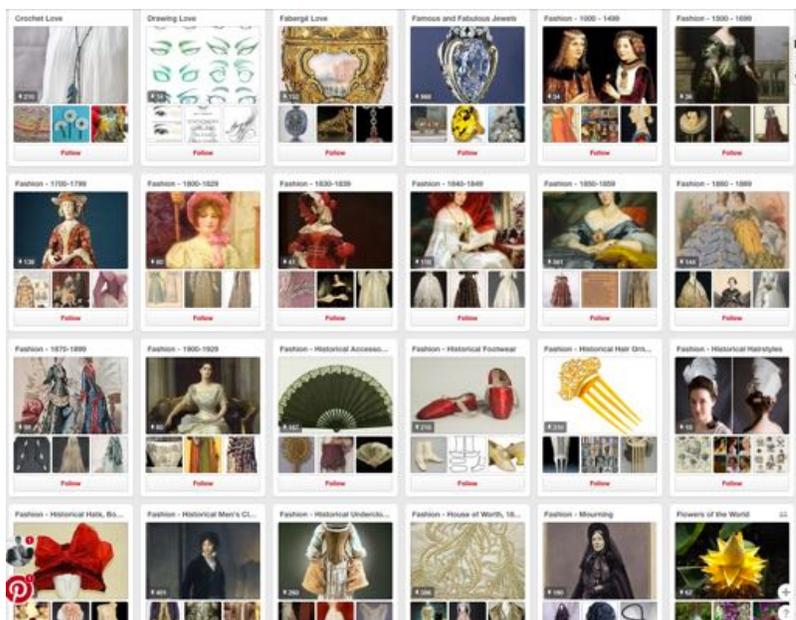
Best practices: focus, quality, and a bit of caution

Be focused, Brant insists, and know why you're using Pinterest.

"As an author, focus on your brand," she said. "Create a board for each of your books. This gives readers a 'behind the scenes' peek at people, places, objects, events—anything relevant that you've mentioned in your story. Not only does this provide a visual reference for your readers, it allows them to delve deeper into the subject by following the image links."

Images are everything. "Pinterest is a treasure house of images for writers," explained Patricia Maxwell, who writes as Jennifer Blake. "Want to describe a medieval castle, an English manor house, or an antebellum plantation? Examples are easily available."

She added that you can access images from fashion plates, famous paintings or the costume departments of illustrious museums. "Need to know the difference between a spencer and a redingote? Mourning gowns during the Civil War? Marie Antoinette's infamous diamond necklace? A pre-Civil War map of New Orleans? The original recipe for Oysters Rockefeller? The movie poster for Breakfast at Tiffany's? It's all there, all wonderful fun to collect and save."



Maxwell's extensive, catalogued fashion boards (from jewelry to mourning garb).



One of Maxwell's period dress fashion boards.

Be selective, however. Use quality images, at least 100 by 200 pixels.

“Don’t pin everything and anything (which comes back to being focused),” Brant added. “Each book board should be well thought out and curated before you make it public. That takes time and planning, but it will be worth it for you and your readership. You want readers to anticipate a release. And when you release your book, you can also release your Pinterest book board full of interesting pins, too, thus doubling the fun and the anticipation. It also gives you more opportunity to advertise your book—with an unveiling of the behind-the-scenes Pinterest book board.”

Be professional and create a business account. This ties your pin to your site and its logo.

Add the “save” button to your website, so that when readers hover over images, they will be able to easily pin them to their boards.

If you sign up for Pinterest analytics and notifications, you will receive information on who pinned which of your pins or follows your board.

Finally, be careful.

“I have three caveats for those new to Pinterest,” Maxwell said. “One, the site is addictive; you can easily become lost in the search for beautiful and useful things so the day vanishes without a word being written. Two, if you’re using the site for book promotion, your boards should reflect your genre and nothing more. For instance, a writer of Christian romance probably shouldn’t post images of naked men or horror movies. Three, the boards you create are indicators of all the things that are of special interest to you, things you enjoy, admire, appreciate and love. Anyone scanning them is going to gain a fairly intimate glimpse of what you’re like as both a writer and a person. Be careful what you post.”

Thanks to [Lucinda Brant](#), [Patricia Maxwell](#) and [Nancy J. Cohen](#) for help in writing this article. Click their names to visit their pin boards. You can also read [Oliphant’s take on Pinterest](#) on Jane Friedman’s website.

Cheré Coen is a food and travel writer who writes novels under the pen name of Cherie Claire. She has Pinterest boards under both names.

Redeeming the Antagonist

From zero to hero in seven painful steps

By Heidi Joy Tretheway



One of the most compelling aspects of character development—the kind that keeps me eagerly turning pages—is the transformation of a bad guy into a good guy. It’s redemption, and it’s delicious.

Just as a romantic arc that starts at happy and ends at happily ever after equals a thoroughly unsatisfying plot, a character who starts off good and just gets better is a thoroughly unsatisfying player. Instead of this one-note recipe for a flop, we most often see flawed characters with a wound and a quest.

But on a quest for redemption, we need more than a character flaw.

We need *bad*. We need betrayal or violence, or even a bit of evil. And once our bad guy has committed his sins, the author must navigate perilous waters to convince us that he *must* be forgiven and eventually cheered on to victory.

As far as character arcs go, there are none greater than this. That’s what makes redeeming an antagonist such compelling fodder for a story. But it’s the longest uphill climb for a reader, so the author needs to offer a process of redemption, or else risk losing that reader.

Here are my seven steps toward redemption.

Own the sin.

While some characters commit a bad act against a specific person, others are bad to everyone. Whether lying, cheating, or stealing, their sins (and the people they’ve injured) are often too numerous to count.

To begin the process of redemption, the antagonist must identify with the injured party in a personal way. For example, in a high school clique system, the queen bee/bitch who has systematically tormented and belittled every misfit at school will be confronted with her sin when one of the people she’s tormented snaps and commits suicide.

Although the queen bee has hurt other people before, the narrative focuses on this specific sin as the turning point for the character. It’s when the antagonist begins to see herself

differently.

Political speech writers will tell you that one story can beat 1,000 stats. In this case, one victim stands for a thousand others who have been harmed by the antagonist.

Set up a one-to-one relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, and then make the perpetrator own that sin—acknowledge that they *chose* to take action and harmed another person in the process. The victim should be sympathetic both to the reader and eventually to the antagonist.

In the high school scenario, perhaps the victim tutored the antagonist, patiently helping her during tutoring sessions even though the antagonist tormented the victim when other classmates were around.

The greater the development of your victim through your antagonist's eyes, the greater emotional impact on your antagonist and your reader when the sin is finally owned.

Be punished.

A bad guy can't just decide to change and expect that all of his past sins are washed away. He must be punished for his transgressions and lose something that he cares about, or even lose something of himself.

On *Game of Thrones*, Jaime Lannister manages to sin more in season one than most of us do in our lifetimes, from bedding his sister Cersei to pushing eight-year-old Bran out a window to keep that affair secret. Jaime's punishment—the loss of his sword hand—and associated humiliations begin the process of atonement.

The opportunity to punish your character is a hall pass for an author. Go big! Make it hurt. Show the reader that your antagonist is suffering every bit as much as his victims (or more) to ensure that the reader is fully willing to move him from the "bad guys" column to the "good guys."

Confess.

The first step, owning the sin (in other words, confessing a sin to one's self) must happen before punishment, or else the punishment doesn't support sufficient remorse in the antagonist—it just makes him angrier.

Likewise, punishment comes before confession, because often the confession includes showing the victim how they have been humbled through punishment.

Confession must be directed at the victim, if they are still alive. Confession must also humble the antagonist in the eyes of their world. Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "every villain is a hero in his own eyes." This is the turning point where the antagonist lets go of self-assigned hero status.

Apologize.

An apology logically follows a confession, but you can create greater dramatic tension by stretching the time between them, creating uncertainty between these two steps. Although the antagonist has been humbled, it would be too easy for her to immediately win the victim's

forgiveness.

This is often done brilliantly in a second-chance romance. The bad acts that caused the couple to break up in the first place can haunt one or both characters on their second try. The victim (and they might both believe themselves to be victims, wronged by the other party) needs time to debate whether to believe that the apology is sincere, accept it as a cure for the past wrong, and forgive it before they can move on.

Give him a reason.

A forgivable antagonist can't just commit a terrible act for fun. To be relatable, they must have an innate sense of right and wrong, even if their moral code doesn't precisely match the reader's.

Dexter, the title character from the TV show, is a murderer, yet he targets even worse criminals. This appeals to the audience's sense that crimes must be punished; they relate to him because he's working toward a brand of vigilante justice.

In *Game of Thrones*, Jaime Lannister is correctly labeled Kingslayer, a crime against the crown and his sworn oath as a member of the king's guard. Yet he still has a sense of right and wrong. He notes being faithful to Cersei even when she was not faithful to him, and although the knight Brienne of Tarth was his sometime captor, once they were captured by others, he lied to prevent her from being raped, and later rescued her from certain death in a bear pit.

In the Batman movie *The Dark Knight*, the Joker gives us several reasons for why he's a villain—stories that might be lies about how his face was disfigured. He isn't redeemed in the movie because he doesn't have a relatable reason for his crimes. He says, "Some people just want to watch the world burn."

A traumatic childhood isn't enough of a reason for a bad guy to be bad. Plenty of folks can survive bad situations and still be good people. As you develop an antagonist who must be redeemed through your story, consider how their history or circumstances propel them to do something morally repugnant yet completely rational.

Sacrifice.

This is the opportunity for the antagonist to atone for his or her sins. While being punished is the stage where external forces inflict pain on the antagonist, the sacrifice is the opportunity for your antagonist to offer himself up for the good of the victim or their cause.

The fact that the antagonist takes something he holds dear and willingly destroys it (or allows it to be destroyed) demonstrates that he's come full-circle in his quest for atonement.

Put another way, in the punishment stage, someone throws the unwilling antagonist under the bus. In the sacrifice stage, the antagonist willingly throws himself under the bus to protect or benefit the victim.

Get a new world view.

We all know that a strong character arc starts from one world view and ends with a completely different perspective. Virtually every compelling character changes significantly in

the course of a story.

The same is critical—perhaps even more so—for an antagonist’s transformation and redemption. Their perspective must be irrevocably altered, their actions *and* their heart changed by the process of atonement.

Not only are they humbled, but we’re likely to see that now they yearn for something different than what drove them at the beginning of the story. It’s likely that their quest is now for something that doesn’t benefit them directly.

When I broke down these stages in a conversation at a writing conference, we were able to peg Jaime Lannister at each of these points (and I use him as an example not only because of his stunning character arc, but also because *Game of Thrones* is so widely watched and read).

Sansa Stark charts a similar character arc from antagonist to heroine, starting season one as petty, stuck up, and unkind to her siblings. It isn’t until after she’s punished, makes major sacrifices, and wades through the other items on this list that the audience starts to root for her to *win*.

In my book *Tattoo Thief*, the heroine’s best friend Stella was the antagonist—a self-centered drunk who betrays the heroine twice, including taking a private video of a song made for her best friend and making that song public to further her fledgling journalism career.

In the second book in the series, Stella becomes the heroine, and it was an uphill battle to take readers along for the ride. How could they root for Stella after what she did to her best friend?

I plotted the book *Tyler & Stella* based on this process of redemption. Stella owns the sin and feels despicable (the first line is “I’ve never hated myself as much as I do now.”). She is punished (loses her job as a music journalist), and confesses to her best friend and apologizes, supplying good reasons for committing the betrayal while still not excusing it. Later in the book, she shows she’s changed her self-centered ways by throwing herself to the wolves (well, the media) to protect others. Through this sacrifice and the process of redemption, she achieves a new world view that transforms her original goals.

We’ve seen an explosion of morally fraught antagonists in media and fiction, from *House of Cards* to *Scandal*, from SEALs who make their own rules to bad boy motorcycle club leaders who never had any rules to begin with.

They all have potential to be the next hero. It’s just a matter of redemption.

Heidi Joy Tretheway is the Nink newsletter editor and a member of the NINC board of directors. She lives a double life—part tech marketer, part racy romance author—and the other soccer moms aren’t sure what to make of either one. A recovering journalist and frequent traveler, Tretheway is working on her ninth book from her home near Portland, Oregon.

Using the Alphasmart

Go retro and distraction-free with this stripped-down keyboard

By Magan Vernon



In a world of technology that we can hold in the palm of our hands, scores of authors are going back to the '90s and using Alphasmart word processors.

Yes, we've started an Alphasmart cult, and we're recruiting anyone willing to log off Facebook and join us.

The Alphasmart is a word processor that looks like a keyboard with a small screen attached. It reminds me of an old plastic toy computer for playing hangman.



I first saw the Alphasmart on author Kate Roth's snapchat, and then again when author Melanie Marchande posted a picture of her writing outside with this crazy device.

It was then and there that I knew it was what I needed to cut down on social media time and get more writing done. And as more authors post about this product, more join the cult following for this just-the-facts-ma'am word processor.

Vital statistics on the Alphasmart

The screen is about an inch tall, so you can only see a sentence or two as you're typing. Newer versions of the Alphasmart, such as the Neo 2, show about a paragraph.

The device is about twelve inches long and a little less than 2.5 inches tall at its thickest point—the screen—tapering down to the size and height of a typical keyboard.



It weighs less than a normal computer so it's easy to carry around, and it runs on three double-A batteries that you can replace or recharge. You can save up to eight files at a time and up to 200 pages total.

You won't need any special software. Directions for use are printed directly on the back of the device. This makes it simple for anyone to use, no matter how limited your tech skills.

Plus, if you have small children, you probably won't feel bad letting them type a few words on it, instead of letting them get their sticky fingers on your expensive laptop.

You can type all you want on the Alphasmart. It's not connected to the Internet and, with such a small screen, it's hard to scroll up. These limitations make it perfect for authors who want distraction-free writing.

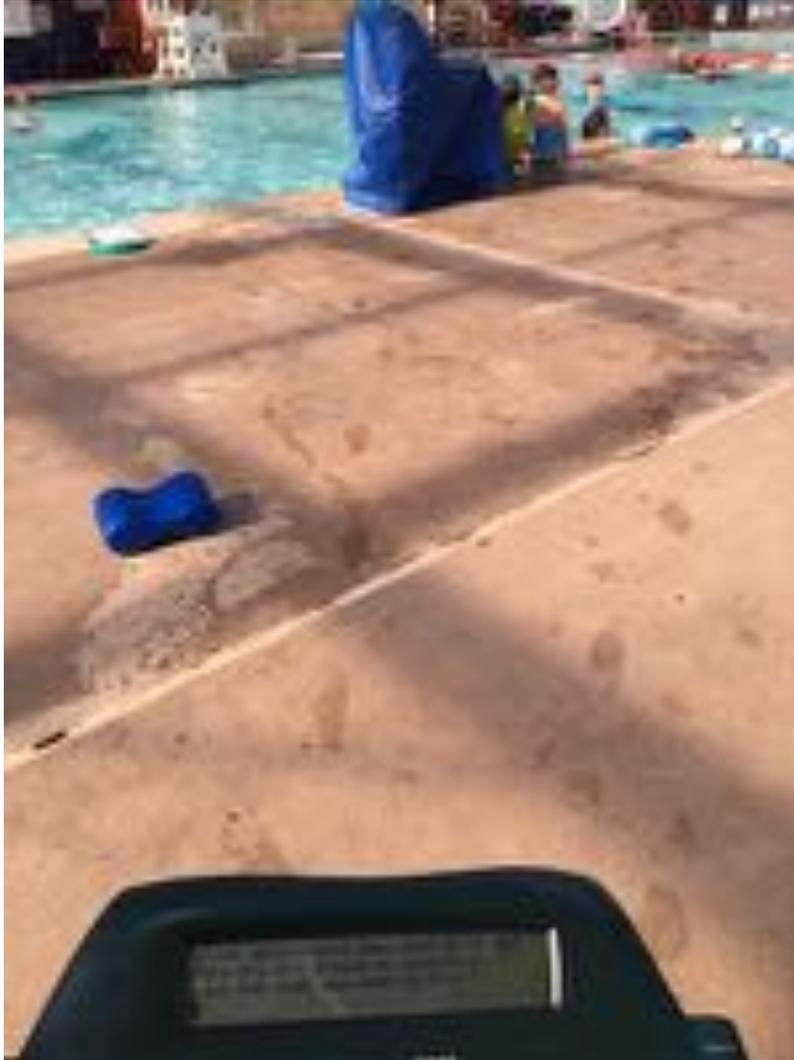
Some authors say they aren't a fan of the bulkier keyboard on older versions of the Alphasmart. On newer versions including the Neo 2, the keyboard feels more like a regular computer keyboard, and authors with wrist problems prefer it over the older versions.

This device was last manufactured in 2006, so the only way to buy one as your word processor is to purchase used from eBay, Amazon, or the like.

Renaissance Learning discontinued manufacturing in 2013, but they still offer user support for these products. But, just like when you buy anything used, you likely won't have a warranty.

Alphasmarts are typically priced between \$15 and \$40, so if something happens to yours, it won't cost a fortune to buy another. Easy replacement is another reason why it's perfect for people who are on the go.

I especially like mine during summer months—I can take it outside and the screen doesn't glare like a normal computer. If it gets wet when I'm by the pool, it's not a disaster (soaking my laptop would be). My Alphasmart actually has been splashed and squirted with toy squirt guns and it still runs just fine.



Fewer functions equal more words written

The boost an Alphasmart gives an author's productivity is the most compelling reason to use one. Since you can only see a few sentences at a time, these devices are preferred for just for writing instead of editing.

Author CC Wood said that she can get 2,000 words written in an hour on her Neo compared the 2,000 words she's likely to log as her entire daily word count when writing on the computer. She likes the distraction-free writing and that she can work without worrying about her young daughter grabbing the computer or pressing buttons.

Transferring files is a snap. Once you've written everything you want to for the day, attach the device to your computer with a USB cord. Open up a notepad doc, then press "send" on the Alphasmart.

The words will start appearing in the notepad. The more words you write, the longer it will take, which is why I only write a few chapters at a time, then transfer.

After your words are all on the notepad, select all, then cut and paste into your Word or

Scrivener doc. Pasting directly into Word preserves the formatting you have set up in Word.

Alphasmarts are great for authors who travel a lot, want to write outside, or want to make their writing more portable. I take mine to my kids' sports practice so I can write without screen glare. I'm also more likely to bring it along because a \$30 Alphasmart is a far better gamble than traveling with my expensive computer.



For more info on how the Alphasmart works, [watch my YouTube video with step-by-step instructions](#).

Now, are you ready to join the Alphacult?

Magan Vernon has been living off of reader tears since she wrote her first short story in 2004. She now spends her time killing off fictional characters, pretending to plot while she really just watches Netflix, and she tries to do this all while her two young children run amok around her Texas ranch.

Get the Indie Mindset

Authors should be seen as creative directors of their books and careers

By Orna Ross



I am not a fan of the term “hybrid author” to describe a writer who publishes books both through trade and self-publishing platforms. I believe the term “indie author” adequately—and best—describes such a writer and using the “hybrid” word distracts authors from the mindset they need to have to succeed today.

We are indie, not just because it allows us to borrow some secondhand cool from the worlds of film and music, but also because the indie attitude of mind is core to what we do: our most defining feature, and our most essential tool.

So what is the indie author mindset?

We value publication over validation

An indie author recognizes that publication is not somebody in a publishing house deciding that your book is “good enough” to invest in.

Publication is seven processes that every publisher needs to get right: editorial, design, production, distribution, marketing and promotion, accounting and rights licensing.

Thanks to technology, there more ways than ever to approach these publishing tasks.

We choose digital first

The business model of print books selling in bookstores is not commercially viable for most indie authors. Economies of scale means we currently can’t compete with trade publishing in print.

But digital—e-books and POD (print on demand)—delivers a global audience, relatively inexpensive production costs, a point-of purchase at the moment of discovery, the end to “out-of-print”, and a level playing field.

Selling digital products in online bookstores, indies can compete on price and the reader doesn’t know, and doesn’t care, who published the book.

We think global *and* territorial

We know titles that might struggle to sell enough numbers at territory level become viable with a global readership. The big self-publishing platforms like Createspace, iBooks, KDP, Kobo, Ingram Spark and Nook are all global platforms, and are all investing in expanding their global presence, as are distributors like Smashwords, Draft2Digital and PublishDrive.

All great news for indies. Then we work with partners to license our publishing rights.

We collaborate rather than compete

The indie author community is distinguished by its outstanding sense of collaboration and cooperation, as is so well evidenced in NINC and ALLi.

We are showing each other how to do the tasks we need to do, with minimum outlay of time and money, and sharing the techniques and tools, the news and views, that empower each of us to write and publish well.

We are telling each other about good services that help us sell good books and how they differ from vanity outfits that sell shoddy author services.

Indie authors are sometimes criticized for being too supportive and not critical enough. It's not that we don't see each other's mistakes. We know that nitpicking over errors is not half as useful as finding and offering the advice and motivation and support that's needed to create a good book, finish it off, and publish it well.

Actually, we love the mistakes. We know that mistakes are how we learn. We're in a creative environment, learning by doing. So we try, we fail, we try again and next time, as Beckett said, fail better.

We work with partners to license our publishing rights

Collaboration and partnership extends to publishing services, both paid and trade. We understand that a good book can be sold on many platforms, in many territories and languages, and turned into various formats.

When you are prepared to do what it takes to succeed in doing that, it's an empowering moment. The savvy indie author knows that to take advantage of our publishing rights requires partnership and cooperation with author services, publishers, online licensing platforms and literary agents. Indies enter into agreements with such partners in a spirit of negotiation and collaboration for mutual benefit.

We see trade publishing as an author service

For an indie author, trade publishing is an author service, not the other way around. When that sector wants to attract indies, it needs to offer terms that are far better than the typical publishing contract, which fails to acknowledge their platform and readership and the need to split print, e-book and audio rights.

Restrictions around format and pricing and overly long publication lead times are also off-putting when compared to the far more favorable terms and conditions offered by the Big Five self-publishing services: Amazon, Apple iBooks, Kobo, Ingram Spark and Nook, as well as

distributors including Draft2Digital, Smashwords and PublishDrive.

I have personally met only one author, out of the many thousands I've worked with, who was so politically motivated by self-publishing that they turned down a good offer from a trade publisher.

Most of us are open to a good deal, especially one that allows us to hold our e-book rights, while collaborating on print books or audio, both of which are expensive and awkward for indies to manage.

We value non-exclusivity

We know the more retailers, and regions, and formats we are free to use, the stronger the foundation for consistent, long-term income.

We welcome abundance over scarcity

Abundance is how nature, the fundamental model for all creativity, operates. An oak tree throws a lot of acorns to get one baby oak. What's important in an abundance model is not how many bad books are enabled. They don't, as some commentators suggest, "clog up the system." They quickly fall into the invisible nether regions of the online retailers.

What matters is how many good books are enabled.

As every author knows, you turn out a lot of words to get a book that's good enough to put out there. Yes, there are exceptions, those few books that arrive and write themselves, but generally speaking, the more pages that have hit the trash can in the making, the better the book.

It's the same with publishing (with everything, actually). The more, the merrier.

The author who publishes a "bad" book today may well be on the way to writing a better one next time. Writing and publishing are both creative skills, learned by doing. Practice can and does make ... if not perfect, then certainly better and better.

We are proud of our indie status

We recognize that we are central to a revolutionary shift in publishing, which needs to move from seeing the author purely as a resource (in the new parlance, a "content provider") to respecting the author as a creative director with much to offer in each step of the publishing process.

We are proud of our indie status and carry that self-respect into all our ventures, negotiations and collaborations for our own benefit and that of other writers.

So I think it's time to say goodbye to the word *hybrid* and embrace the indie mindset.

"I am a hybrid?" Um ... no. Sounds rather weird.

"I am an indie." Hell, yes. Sounds rather wonderful.

Irish author and [creativist](#) Orna Ross inspires people to apply the creative process to everything in life, through her fiction, poetry, and her [Go Creative!](#) books and blog. She is also founder-director of the non-profit association for self-publishers, the [Alliance of Independent Authors](#) (ALLi) and the online author conference, the [Indie Author Fringe](#).

She's also a huge fan of NINC. Each year since 2013, Orna has been named one of 100 most influential people in publishing by the UK publishing trade magazine, The Bookseller. Tweet her [@ornaross](#).

Forensic Files

How was breast cancer treated in the 16th century?

By D.P. Lyle, MD



Question: I am currently writing a novel set in the 16th century. Can you tell me what symptoms a woman in her mid to late 20s with breast cancer would have experienced in this era where modern treatments were unknown? Also, if you know of anything that might have been done to ease her pain, that would be helpful.

Answer: Breast cancer then is exactly as it is now. The difference is that we now have treatments and we understand what it is and how it works. Back then, they were aware of it but there was no real way of diagnosing it early and no way of treating it.

The symptoms that your young lady might have include a painful lump in one breast, a discharge from the nipple that could be clear, milky, or blood tinged, and painful enlargement of the lymph nodes in the axillary area (armpit) on the same side.

If the disease had spread to the lungs, she could be short of breath, have sharp chest pains in the area where the metastatic lesions were, and a cough that could be dry or could produce sputum, even bloody sputum.

If the disease spread to the liver, she could have abdominal pain in the right upper side and could also be jaundiced, which is a yellow hue to the skin.

If it metastasized to the bones, these metastatic lesions can be very painful. This type of cancer can metastasize to the ribs, the spine, the shoulder blades, the hips, and almost anywhere. There could be deep, burning pain in these areas.

If it metastasized to the brain, she could have severe headaches, intolerance to light, paralysis on one side, difficulty with speech or hearing, seizures, and finally coma and death.

Which exact symptoms she had would depend upon exactly what part of the brain the metastatic lesions settled in. As with most forms of cancer, loss of appetite, nausea, weakness, fatigue, and weight loss are common.

She could have any or all of the above symptoms and each symptom could come in any degree of severity. This gives you a great deal of leeway in how you plot your story.

Since in the 16th century no one understood cancer and there were no specific treatments, physicians fell back on pain management as best they could. A common analgesic at that time would have been opium, a drug whose use dates back to 4000 BC.

It's a white powder that could be ingested, though it has a bitter taste. Sometimes it was mixed with alcohol to make an elixir that was then taken orally. As a narcotic, it is highly effective at reducing pain, though the pain of bone lesions is extremely severe and often resistant to even this form of therapy. It also makes the victim lethargic and sleepy.

It can make some people have bizarre nightmares and even develop delusions and hallucinations. You might be able to use these in your story.

Another option that also dates back to 4000 BC or so is alcohol. This was a staple for pain management and even for surgical anesthesia for thousands of years.

These would have been the two most common and readily available analgesics at that time. When used in combination they are even more powerful as far as controlling pain and sedating the patient.

D.P. Lyle is the Macavity and Benjamin Franklin Silver Award-winning and Edgar, Agatha, Anthony, Scribe, Silver Falchion, and USA Best Book Award-nominated author of many nonfiction books, including Murder & Mayhem, Forensics for Dummies, Forensics & Fiction, More Forensics & Fiction, Howdunnit: Forensics, and ABA Fundamentals: Understanding Forensic Science. He is also author of numerous works of fiction, including the Samantha Cody thriller series; the Dub Walker thriller series; the Jake Longly thriller series; and the Royal Pains media tie-in novels. His essay on Jules Verne's The Mysterious Island appears in Thrillers: 100 Must-Reads and his short story "Even Steven" in ITW's anthology Thriller 3: Love is Murder. Along with Jan Burke, he is the co-host of [Crime and Science Radio](#). He has worked with many novelists and with the writers of popular television shows such as Law & Order, CSI: Miami, Diagnosis Murder, Monk, Judging Amy, Peacemakers, Cold Case, House, Medium, Women's Murder Club, 1-800-Missing, The Glades, and Pretty Little Liars. Learn more about his work on his [website](#) and [blog](#).

The Mad Scribbler

If I may make a suggestion

By Laura Resnick



“Writing a book is not as tough as it is to haul thirty-five people around the country and sweat like a horse five nights a week.”
—Bette Midler

With a nod to Ms. Midler, quoted above, experience has taught me that writing a book is not as tough as trying to organize authors—or herd cats.

I spent two years on NINC’s Board of Directors (2007-2008) serving as president-elect and president. And although I know there are people who’ve really enjoyed that job (such as the tragically demented Victoria Thompson, who chose to serve as NINC president twice), I really hated it.

For one thing—and this may shock you to your core—I am not a people person. There are good reasons that I wound up in a career that lets me spend long hours sitting alone in a room with only imaginary characters as my companions.

And this was perpetually problematic for me, since leading a writer’s organization involves more than just writing and implementing policies and fiscal plans. Alas, the position also requires building consensus among the board members; negotiating with various individuals inside and outside the organization; managing volunteers and committee chairpersons; dealing with paid staff, consultants, and contractors; and fielding questions, suggestions, and complaints (especially complaints) from members.

Most of these encounters are pleasant or unremarkable, but a percentage of them do fray the nerves—I thought it seemed like an unusually large percentage when I was NINC president, but that may be because (brace yourself for another shock) I am not a patient person.

Indeed, it has been suggested to me more than once that Attila the Hun probably had more patience than I possess. Consequently, tact was usually an early casualty of my human interactions while serving on the board. Many was the occasion when I thought I had expressed

myself with admirable restraint, only to learn later that I had offended someone—or, indeed, everyone.

Being so unsuited to the whole “people” portion of the job, I am probably the only NINC president who routinely said to the board, when the rest of them were engaged in civil and reasoned discussions about how to address a member’s complaint, “Why can’t we just kill this person?”

Most NINC presidents, I believe, have been much more nuanced in their approach to complaints from members.

Another typical aspect of the job that often grated on me was when members made suggestions. This is not to say that offering suggestions is unappreciated—in fact, most NINC boards (including mine) have solicited suggestions, have appreciated members’ engagement in proposing them, and have implemented many of them over the years.

But suggestions are very much like book ideas: lots of people have one (or a dozen) that they’re very enthused about—and which they’d like *you* to do the work of actually implementing.

This is an area of minor friction which has arisen many times over the years in NINC. Members make suggestions about projects or services they’d like to see NINC pursue—and then sometimes express resentment or exasperation when told that if they aren’t volunteering to do the work, then their suggestion probably won’t get implemented.

People have sometimes said that they feel frustrated by seeing good ideas dismissed in NINC because of that, and that they feel discouraged from proposing ideas to NINC unless they themselves have time to work on them.

Meanwhile, people who are already donating hours of their time every week (or every day) to NINC feel exasperation at being criticized for not giving still more of their time to work on an idea of yours which you yourself decline to work on.

Since both positions are common to human nature and to organizational experience, it’s a conundrum that will probably always be part of our interactions in NINC.

I think that if you have a suggestion for NINC that you don’t have the time to work on yourself, you should nonetheless make that suggestion. It’s never a bad thing to offer good ideas. I would just recommend that you keep in mind, when doing so, that it’s a lot like saying, “I have this great idea that I’m giving you, so that you can turn it into a book.”

With all of that said, I will now recklessly make a suggestion that I’d like NINC to consider implementing.

I would love to see NINC secure its own Amazon representative, someone within that massive company who is the specific author contact for NINC members. I have heard very successful NINCers refer to “my Amazon rep,” so I gather that someone making substantial sums of money on Amazon gets to communicate with an in-house human being about their business there.

But I know from our discussions that many NINC members’ experiences with Amazon are similar to my own—a repetitiously frustrating, anonymous, and counterproductive absence of effective communication or follow-through.

For example, a couple of years ago, a publisher mistakenly told Amazon that my e-book

edition of an old out-of-print novel they had released was a violation of their licensing rights, and Amazon removed the book and sent me a threatening letter.

The publisher was wrong, and I had the reversion document to prove it—and the publisher agreed with me when I contacted their legal department. But my calls and emails to Amazon kept getting randomly distributed to one hourly-wage employee after another after another, none of whom knew what I was talking about (since I never dealt with the same person twice).

None of these employees even knew what “reversion” meant, and none of them had the authority to reinstate my e-book. My title was unavailable for weeks because of this nonsense. Surely this could have been resolved much more quickly (and sanely) if I’d dealt with one person consistently—and if that person had known something about publishing and rights.

On a broader canvas, how inexcusably ludicrous is it that the way most of us make a book available as a free promo on Amazon, if it’s not enrolled in the problematic Kindle Unlimited program, is to lower the price to \$0 on other vendors and then go through days of contortions trying to ensure that Amazon’s automated systems notice that and, in reaction, lower their own price to \$0, too? With the additional stress of trying to ensure this occurs in time for an expensive BookBub ad or other carefully timed promotion? I put it to you that this is an utterly idiotic way for professionals to function.

Wouldn’t it make so much more sense if everyone in NINC had one person—a human being with a name and a pulse—whom we could contact to say, “I am a NINC member, and I want to make this book available free on the following dates.”

How about when you get one of those letters from Amazon claiming you’ve violated their new review policy—and you can’t figure out which review of your book has offended them or why? Or what if, as has been happening too often in the science fiction/fantasy community lately, an organized group of trolls who’ve never read your work leave fifty negative reviews on your book in one day because they’re angry about something you said on Twitter?

It would be a huge boon to NINC members if there was someone specific at the biggest e-book vendor in North America whom we could contact about our business there.

I think it would be a great idea for NINC to have a members’ rep at the other vendors, too. When Kobo’s system keeps saying your perfectly valid bank account information is “invalid,” or several of your books disappear from BN.com without explanation, or your pricing goes haywire on iBooks, wouldn’t it be great to contact someone specific, say to them, “I’m a member of Novelists, Inc.,” and get prompt professional help for a professional problem?

Since one of the other common irritants of members making well-intentioned suggestions is that they sometimes propose a service that NINC already offers, I searched Ninc.com before writing this, but I saw nothing about such a service.

The Members Only area of our website would be the obvious place to list contact info for NINC’s in-house reps at these companies, as well as explaining how the service works. (It will not run smoothly, for example, if you keep phoning the Amazon rep to ask to have bad reviews removed from a book of yours that genuine readers genuinely disliked.)

Our conference will take place in a few weeks, and a number of the big e-books vendors will have reps there—as well as other companies that NINC members regularly deal with, such as ACX/Audible, BookBub, and Reedsy.

If I may make a suggestion, perhaps this year's conference would be a good time to discuss the possibility of establishing NINC members' reps at the relevant companies, if they have people on site.

If you're looking for Laura Resnick at this year's conference, the bar is usually a good place to start.

Not Your Usual Writing Advice

Harnessing Inspiration

By JoAnn Grote



It is important to have a container for all that we sense and hear from the wild nature.
—Clarissa Pinkola Estes

I've taught a number of writing classes on how to turn an idea into a book. The class usually meets eight to ten times depending upon the group's progress.

Seldom have I had a student who has already written a book. All have an idea for a book and most have a collection of notes. A few have actually written a scene or two of a novel. The students' creative sides have been busy playing with ideas, but the students have seldom known how to combine their logical, analytical sides with their creative sides to turn the ideas into completed books.

The first assignment I give them is to buy a three-ring notebook and divide it into sections: notes, questions, outline, chapters, research, possible titles, and publishers. The second part of the assignment is to file all their notes and scenes in the notebook.

When they return for the second class, they bring the notebooks filled with the smattering of ideas caught on napkins or stray pieces of paper or in a computer file. Some have filled their notebooks with 8.5x11-inch typing or lined paper covered with sticky notes or other snatches of writing stapled, glued, or paper clipped to the larger papers to prevent the notes from falling out.

Some have taken time to write all their bits and pieces of notes on lined paper. Others have typed their notes out. Often students become so creatively energized by the exercise that they've tentatively started the process of actually writing the story between the first and second classes.

Every one of them shows up at the second class with excitement shining from their eyes. Even those whose notebooks have only a few pages appear to have new hope and a confidence they did not show at the first class.

"For the first time, I feel it's really a book," is a statement I hear a lot. "I hadn't realized how many ideas I already have for the story or how much I've already written," is another common

theme.

The process of creating a container for their thoughts and current or future manuscript, a specific place to put each idea or question or possibility related to that story, is the first step in helping them use their logic to connect the dots that will result in a completed manuscript.

In providing one place to collect everything related to the manuscript, they have also created a place to be sure the inspirations they receive are not lost.

This is a process I have used myself for every book I've written. It's an idea I read about in a book by Phyllis Whitney before I was published. I spent a number of years as an accountant, and this practical method appeals to the left-side of my brain.

I keep manila folders for fledgling ideas. When an idea has grown to a place that I know it has enough girth to carry an entire manuscript, I transfer it to a divided notebook, even if I'm not ready to write the manuscript. I want that place to keep my ideas and keep them straight.

I do also keep computer files for anything I've typed up; however, I always print off my computer jottings. Yes, I am definitely old fashioned in this regard. I am a visual person and for me a computer file can easily become out of sight, out of mind.

As addicted as I am to jotting down story ideas, it took Julia Cameron's practice of morning pages for me to begin to write down real life events. If you are not familiar with morning pages, it is the daily practice of setting down in longhand three pages of stream-of-consciousness writing. The primary idea is to get all the things playing tag in your brain onto paper so you can focus on your creative project.

The process has added benefits, such as learning to write without worry whether the grammar is correct blocking the story, and gaining insight over days, weeks, or months into problems in your life, or using morning pages to double as a dream journal.

Another benefit is that inspiration seems to realize you've set aside a daily time with paper and pen, a perfect time and place to capture new story ideas or answers to plot or character issues in your work in process, and inspiration takes advantage of the fact.

Often I will set aside my morning pages journal and reach for another notebook or the keyboard to write down story ideas and solutions.

But sometimes I want to keep the ideas in my morning pages journal. Morning pages have morphed into regular journaling and dream keepers for me. If an idea that relates to a story also relates to my life, I want to keep it in the journal where I can later read it in context with what was happening in my life when I received it.

I've lost story ideas to my morning pages/journals that way, with the illusion of the journals as containers for story ideas.

For instance, I had a lovely short snatch of a dream with a Civil War soldier dying after battle and the woman he loved showing up unexpectedly at his side just in time for them to say goodbye. In the manner of dreams, there was a lot of back story that didn't show itself in the dream, but that as the dreamer I knew.

The woman was me and the soldier was a man I once loved in this life. I knew immediately I wanted to write a story about the two people in the dream, and wrote the dream down in my morning pages journal.

The back story spoke to a major issue the man in my life and I had dealt with in our

relationship, and so it was important to me to keep the dream in my journal—not only in a manila folder while it awaited the right time to become a manuscript.

This is a story idea I almost lost. It's as if my brain was content knowing I'd written the idea down somewhere; it didn't care where.

A book a friend recommended triggered my memory of the dream. I hunted through my journals (which now fill about six feet of bookshelf space) and found the dream. I'm now working on a draft of a short story from that dream, as well as using part of the dream back story in the manuscript of my current novel-in-process.

The experience taught me a valuable lesson. Now when I write an idea or dream in my morning pages journal that I also want to use for a story, I make a copy of it for the appropriate file or notebook.

Yes, I could just type the information up from my morning pages journal, but I seldom do that in the interest of time. There will be time enough to type it up when I've started to work on the story, or on the scene where the idea fits into a manuscript. At least it will be available to me when I need it, because it's been placed in a "container" where it is easy to find and which relates to the appropriate story.

Nink editor Heidi Joy Tretheway says, "Inspiration can find you anywhere (especially in the shower or at 2 a.m.). But you can't harness its power unless you're ready for it, keyboard at hand."

I agree. Harness the power of the inspirations you receive by first capturing them with keyboard or pen and then placing them in just the right container.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 40 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children's nonfiction. Contact her by [email](#).



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.

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

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