

Novelists' INK

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

I Was a Burned-Out, Middle-Aged Romance Writer

or

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Process

By BARBARA BRETTON

Before I burned out in February 1992, I'd labored under many assumptions about the reality of work and writing and self-discipline. I believed that showing up was half the battle, that inspiration and artistic temperament were both highly overrated, that I could conquer outside forces by the sheer force of my will—and I believed burnout could never happen to me.

I was wrong.

Burnout is real, it's powerful, and it can sneak up on you when you least expect it. Burnout is the flip side of creativity and yet it's the least-talked-about phenomenon in publishing. You'll find it easier to get a rock star to expound on impotence than to convince a working writer to admit to being burned out.

Two years ago, I felt the same way. Burnout was what happened to other writers, writers who weren't as dedicated as I was. Writers who didn't love the process as much as I did. Writers who weren't as creative, as disciplined (creative discipline—there's an oxymoron for you), as clever.

Now I know better.

I had managed to work through the deaths of two grandparents, the hospitalization of a third, a broken right hand, and having my parents move one mile away from me without missing a beat. Yet after bringing in an important book on deadline, I found myself suddenly and unexpectedly stopped cold.

A week without writing became two weeks. Two weeks became a month, and after two months I finally realized that the only thing I was doing at the computer was playing gin rummy with the Bull Dog in the Hoyle program. This was more than taking a break between books, more than your run-of-the-mill procrastination. No matter how hard I tried to put a good face on it, the facts were impossible to ignore. I wasn't writing and I had no idea when—or if—I would write again.

And that's when I made the smartest decision of my life. I decided to do the unthinkable: I told the truth. I told my agent and my editors exactly what was happening and discovered that there is more professional support out there than you could imagine. My agent was my staunchest ally during my struggle to regain my professional footing; that came as no surprise. What did surprise me was the depth of understanding and kindness I encountered from my publishers. Their patience and support remained constant.

There are those who maintain that acknowledging burnout, dragging it kicking and screaming from the closet, is tantamount to signing your professional death warrant. I disagree. At the first sign of trouble, gird your loins and make that telephone call. Pub dates can be shifted; schedules can be changed. But there's nothing an editor can do for you if you wait until the last minute to break the bad news.

Burnout feeds on anxiety. The same anxiety over deadlines and family demands and high expectations that got you into this mess in the first place. Demystify it. Expose it to the light of day. Don't grant burnout any more importance over your life than it already has.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

A War in the Lists

Just what writers need, another best-seller list. That's right, friends, this one the handiwork of the technicolor newspaper for airline fliers and motel-dwellers, *USA Today*. Since last fall, the paper has been publishing "Best-Selling Books: What People Across the USA are Reading." It is a compilation of what are purported to be the fifty best-selling volumes—hard-back, trade-size, or paperback—around the country.

The list is a bit of a hodge-podge. It lumps Rush Limbaugh with Howard Stern, Robert James Waller, Maya Angelou, and cartoonist Bill Watterson. The undigested melange of titles, genres, and formats gets thick and chunky real quick.

I don't care much for best-seller lists. They are a little too much like beauty pageants. But I welcome this new list. Let me try to explain why.

We work in a business where performance is difficult to measure, where success may not be recognized until weeks, months, years, or even generations have passed. But we are captive to the concept of "best-sellers," even if nobody knows how to define them.

Never mind that the Bible is the biggest, most reliable seller among all books all the time, world without end, amen.

Never mind that slots on the "best-seller" lists at your local supermarket or drug store are for sale almost outright through what publishers and distributors call "incentivization plans."

Never mind that all best-seller lists are skewed. Never mind that everyone knows all lists are skewed. Never mind that everybody pores over them avidly, anyway, rushing out to buy bulldog editions of newspapers or calling 900 numbers at \$1.50 a minute to get the good or bad news ten days before it appears in print.

Never mind any of these things. The lists rule publishing and, so far as I'm concerned, that's one of the biggest travesties since somebody started rigging World Wrestling Federation matches.

As a personal matter, I've been skeptical about best-seller lists ever since I covered a

news story in Los Angeles several years ago. A second-rate Hollywood celebrity whose autobiography had been on the best-seller lists had died at home and the authorities went to investigate.

The death turned out to be accidental, but the cops found something very interesting—hundreds of copies of the late celeb's book, stacked in spare bedrooms, tossed in the attic, stuffed in every imaginable space.

Sales slips with the books made it clear that the poor devil had toured book stores all over the country, buying up multiple copies. Talk about buying your way onto the list.

My skepticism about best-sellers increased when I discovered that a book with fewer than 7,500 hardback copies in print, most of them unshipped, had somehow managed to get onto the *New York Times* list.

The book was Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. Its chief claims to fame were glowing daily and Sunday *New York Times* reviews, which apparently had generated a run at the New York bookstore whose sales are heavily weighted in the *Times*'s sampling.

Then, a year or two later, an executive of a national chain of newspapers managed to get his memoirs on the *Times* list for several weeks by ordering his minions all over the country to go out to their local book stores and buy the slim tome.

Ironically, that best-selling author was the man who created *USA Today*, a Gannett Co. publication.

Let I be accused of sour grapes in this matter, my personal interest in best-sellers is limited. I have never written a book that had the slightest chance in hell of making a list, and I doubt that I will. My wife and collaborator has appeared on such lists, but I must say that experience has done nothing to temper my view of them.

What I have learned over 20 years of writing is that the lists are imperfect attempts to quantify a selling universe that is vast and chaotic. There may have been a time when they had validity. Bookstores used to account for the majority of sales, particularly in hardback. But nowadays, hardbacks show up

all over the retail marketplace, in grocery stores, smoke shops, and warehouse shopping clubs.

Paperbacks are even more widely distributed. Books are peddled by chain stores, superstores, independent bookstores, independent distributors, rack jobbers, wholesalers, and beetle-browed teamsters who service smoke shops and news stands. All those sales have to be counted, directly or indirectly, to compile an accurate picture of best-sellers.

Some sales reports that go to make up the lists are quite accurate. The chain stores are particularly good because they can track actual sales by computers tied directly to cash registers in stores.

But other components of the best-sellers lists are, at best, guesses. A rack jobber who stocks airports, drug stores, supermarkets, and smoke shops knows how many books he puts into his retail outlets. But he may not know actual sales until weeks or months later.

USA Today's list is interesting in that it actually does what the rest of the lists only claim to do. It reports actual, over-the-counter sales; it does not report wholesale buys, which may be as much a function of deep discounts as they are of consumer demand.

The *USA Today* list also reports the names of book stores and chains that comprise its sample. Such candor might tempt authors eager to do a little selective shopping, but there's a refreshing directness about it.

The *New York Times*, on the other hand, steadfastly refuses to discuss the methods used to compile what is undoubtedly the most powerful list in the country. It merely offers the explanation that the numbers reflect sales "at 3,050 bookstores plus wholesalers serving 38,000 other retailers."

That sounds like a very substantial sampling, until you factor in the disclaimer that the *Times's* numbers are "statistically weighted to represent sales in all such outlets nationwide."

The disclaimer really means that the *Times's* best-seller list is skewed by according exceptional importance to sales in a select group of independent bookstores. Little is known about these prepotent literary taste-setters, although the conventional wisdom outside the *Times* is that there are only seven of them, all in urban centers.

However small the weighted sample really is, it seems pretty clear that these weighted stores care more about literary fiction than they do about genre or popular fiction. Otherwise, genre books would dominate the lists even more than they already do.

Weighting was almost certainly the reason Allan Bloom's turgid and obtuse book skyrocketed to national prominence despite the fact that much of its small first printing was still in the warehouse. Weighting is certainly why a number of postmodern literary tomes which have placed well on the 15-place *NYT* list didn't even make the top 50 list in *USA Today*.

(A *USA Today* executive told me that some such "best-sellers" don't even show up on the larger, 250-book list that the paper tracks in compiling its weekly report. "The first five places often agree to a large extent, but after that, everything gets jumbled," he said.)

Weighting isn't the only way the *Times* list is skewed. It doesn't track all books, at least not with equal care. Each week, the *Times* sends its contributors a "watch list" of books that it

thinks might become best-sellers on the basis of past performance or print run.

The watch list becomes a kind of prompt sheet. If a book isn't included, its chances of becoming a best-seller are considerably diminished, just as a write-in candidate would face an uphill fight running against Bill Clinton.

Then there are the books which couldn't make the *Times* list on a bet. Religious books, many of which outsell trade titles regularly, aren't eligible. Neither are category romance books, although there was a time when they sold in large enough numbers during the first week of their release to humble the Grishams and Crichtons of the world.

I don't mean to suggest that the *New York Times* list is more deeply flawed than any other. It isn't. In fact, it may be the most scrupulous of them all. But it is flawed; it cannot claim to be anything but an imperfect reflection of a terribly complex universe, sort of a Hubble Telescope before the corrections.

As writers, we ought to remember that. From a writer's point of view, and from a reader's, best-seller lists mislead, they misdirect, they exclude rather than expand.

In a world that operates on the sound-bite, best-seller lists give an inordinate amount of attention to a relatively few books and writers. They are dangerous because they are incomplete and because they can be so easily skewed by prejudice or chance. Lists are blinders. They tend to narrow our view at a time when we need to keep our eyes wide open. They stifle voices of all kinds at a time we all should be listening.

In an odd way, that's exactly why I am glad to see *USA Today's* new list. Any new list helps to dilute the tyranny of the existing ones. As a writer and a hard-head, something about that appeals to me.

Besides, the *USA Today* list has 50 spots. That's 50 more slots for writers to aspire to, 50 more writers who can call themselves "Best-Sellers." The more, the merrier, so far as I'm concerned.

Maybe what we ought to do as writers is to compile a bunch of best-seller lists of our own. The lists could be hundreds, thousands of titles long. Maybe every book that's published could be included on one list or another.

Such lists would serve a simple, insidious purpose. They would allow every writer included to be called a "best-seller." They would destroy what little meaning there still is in that loose and slippery term.

The anarchist in me likes that.

— Evan Maxwell

NINK NOTE

Keep *NINK* coming to you! Don't miss a single issue. Send in your 1994 dues renewal form now. Novelists, Inc. needs you to keep building and expanding our knowledge and opportunities as writers.

To obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting, send \$2.00 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2.00 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer's Report, send \$1.00 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.

LETTERS to the editor

LETTERS to the editor is the most important column in our newsletter, since it is the monthly forum in which we can all share our views and express our opinions. Anonymous letters will NEVER be published in NINK. Upon the author's request, signed letters may be published as "Name Withheld." Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.

Author Performance Reviews

One of the Novelists, Inc. conference issues discussed in the December NINK was the idea of author performance reviews—i.e. "an objective appraisal by an editor would be . . . helpful in allowing an author to judge where she stood with her house."

Several years ago I approached my editor (Lucia Macro) with exactly this problem. I told her that I understood she couldn't share other authors' figures with me—nor did I expect her to—but that my sales figures alone didn't help me know how I was doing in the bigger picture. Were they happy with me? How were my books doing compared to others with my similar experience? Was there anything she saw I could do to increase my sales?

My editor's response was so positive—and enthusiastic—that I wish I'd done this before. She put a great deal of work and time into the discussion we had, and since then, we've made it an annual talk between us. I don't think it occurred to me before that many editors are not only willing, but appreciative of the chance to be part of our career planning process.

However, the idea of standardized forms concerns me—especially a form with a ranking of authors' sales ("e.g. bottom third, middle third, top third.") Ranks like this have a tendency to pigeonhole an author. Also, anything "standardized" has some pitfalls. An author may not want to have this discussion at contract time. She also may simply NOT want to draw attention to her sales.

I'm totally "pro" the need for performance feedback from our publishing houses, but just believe that anything "standardized" should be left out of it. When an author pursues a one-on-one discussion with her editor, she can choose the timing, the specific questions, and direct what feedback would be specifically helpful to her. I understand that this review process would be voluntary—but it's also true that an author having sales/career problems has the most reason to pursue it. She needs help. Tact and timing can work for her benefit, where some standardized form method of evaluation could easily make the problem worse. (My two cents, anyway.)

— Allison Hart

Help Needed

Help! I am in desperate need of a reference book for a novel I am writing. The book is *Twenty Years on the Trap Line* by Joseph Taylor. It was published in 1891. My library doesn't have it, and I can't get it through inter-library loan because the library that does have it won't lend it out—it's too old and fragile. Does anyone have any suggestions about rare book dealers who might be able to locate a copy for me? Drop me a line or call me collect. 563 56th Street, Altoona PA 16602, (814) 942-2268.

— Victoria Thompson

P.S. Would the person at the San Antonio conference who gave me a great idea for a conference discussion group topic for next

year please remind me what it was? As I believe I predicted, I completely forgot not only the idea but who I was talking to at the time!

Agents' Guide Has a Shortcoming

This letter is a commentary on NINC's *Guide to Agents*, which I recently received. On the whole it is a well-organized and highly professional guide which will be of great assistance to authors. However, I see a major flaw.

While I understand NINC's decision to present detailed reports only on the agents representing a greater proportion of the membership, this could, in effect, be detrimental to the authors and agents. Authors investigating agencies with an eye toward retaining or changing representation will naturally gravitate toward those fully documented in the *Guide*; it's convenient, and the pertinent information is at their fingertips. Most authors will probably overlook agents listed by name and address only, or will relegate them to the "B" list, thereby depriving themselves, in some cases, of the representation that may be best for them.

My own agent has impeccable career-building, subrights, and royalty income credits. Clients include Marion Zimmer Bradley, whose *Mists of Avalon* has earned \$6 million in worldwide royalties, Arthur C. Clarke of 2001 fame, and Betty Eadie, for whom he garnered a \$2 million paperback deal for her debut book, *Embraced by the Light*. He is a generalist, but his firm is also the top agency in the fantasy/science fiction field. Yet because I am his only NINC client he rated no more than name, address, and phone—despite the fact I spent quite a bit of time detailing his interpersonal skills, expertise, and methodology.

At first blush it makes sense to limit the *Guide*. But by failing to report in-depth information on all NINC-member agents, NINC may actually unconsciously influence authors against investigating the agents who may, in fact, be most appropriate for their needs.

— Jennifer Roberson

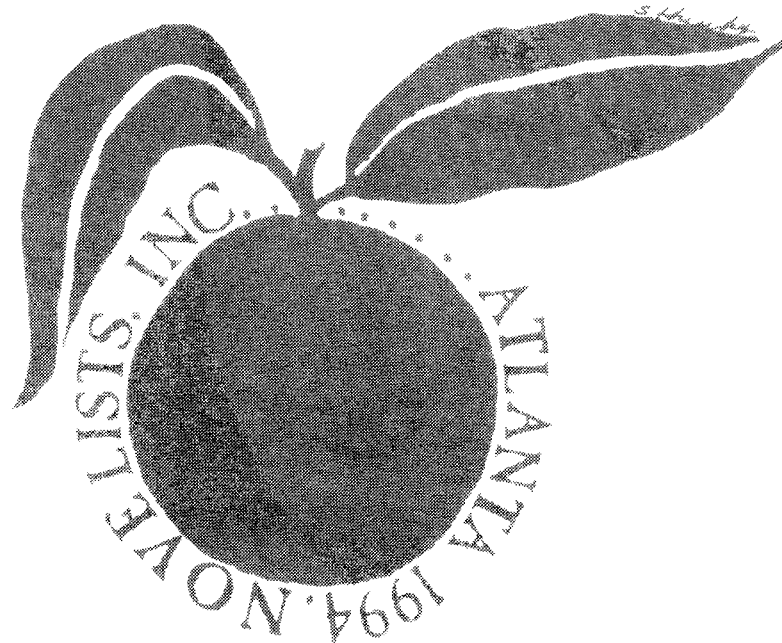
INTROducing

The following authors have made application for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

Brenda Joyce, New York NY
Carol S. Duncan, Tacoma WA
Nancy Springer, Dallastown PA
Terry Gerritsen, Camden ME

Returning Member:

Elda Minger, Tustin CA



Novelists, Inc.'s Fifth Annual Conference

The Novelists, Inc. Board of Directors would like to invite you to attend our fifth annual conference.

WHEN?

October 13-16, 1994

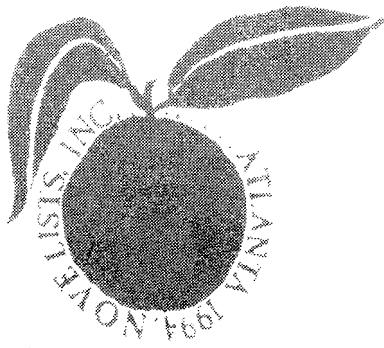
WHERE?

**The Terrace Garden Hotel
3405 Lenox Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30326
800-866-ROOM or 404-848-7333
FAX 404-848-7301**

The Terrace Garden is located in the heart of "Buckhead," Atlanta's prestigious business and entertainment district. Lenox Square and Phipps Plaza, the city's most exclusive shopping centers (containing such stores as Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Lord and Taylor), are just a quick walk away. MARTA, Atlanta's transit system, only two blocks away, also allows guests easy access to downtown Atlanta.

The hotel's restaurant is excellent, and Lenox Square Mall, directly across the street from the hotel, contains an enormous fast-food market for those who want to eat quickly or cheaply. The hotel is also surrounded by Atlanta's finest restaurants and night clubs for more formal dining.

The hotel boasts a Health and Racquet Center, including an indoor tennis court, two racquetball courts, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, sauna, steam rooms, and fully equipped Nautilus weight room.



Novelists, Inc. is the only conference where I attend sessions, and I love them. It's stimulating to share information with colleagues, and I always learn something or come away with a fresh perspective. I think of our conferences as a working retreat: relaxing, fun, and informative.

— Maggie Osborne

What Happens at a Novelists, Inc. Conference?

Novelists, Inc.'s Conferences are unique in that they cater strictly to the needs of published authors. Special features of the conference include:

NIGHT OWL SESSIONS: In keeping with our policy of meeting *all* our members' needs, these are "make your own" conference sessions. Members suggest topics that the committee either didn't know the members wanted, that we didn't have room in the schedule to provide, that didn't appeal to a broad enough portion of the membership, or which were too controversial for the regular sessions. A list of discussion topics will be posted at the conference. (Open to NINC members only.)

AUTHOR DISCUSSION GROUPS: Informal, round table discussion groups moderated by NINC members. Topics of discussion center on a particular area of concern to writers in general, and everyone may participate, either by asking questions or offering comments. (Open to NINC members only.)

PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION GROUPS: Candid, informal, round table discussions between authors and related industry professionals on topics of interest to both groups. (Open to NINC members and guests.)

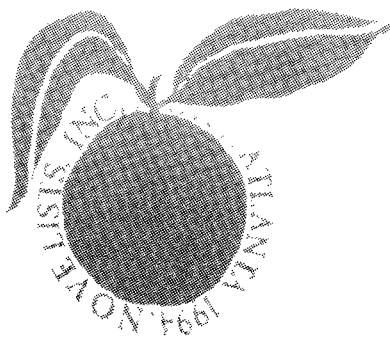
SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS: Outside speakers address topics of special interest to writers. (Open to NINC members and guests.)

OPTIONAL FIELD TRIPS: *New this year!* In response to members' requests, we will be offering trips to various local points of interest to authors. Those who wish may participate, while others may choose to go shopping or sightseeing or meet with editors and/or agents instead. (Open to NINC members and guests.)

PUBLISHER FORUMS: Publisher-led discussions at which publishers discuss what they are looking for, any special projects being planned, and answer questions. (Open to NINC members and guests.)

We hope you will plan to attend NINC's fifth annual conference. You will be receiving more detailed information and registration materials in the official conference brochure, which will be mailed to you in July. Meanwhile, please feel free to send us your ideas for Discussion Group and Night Owl Session topics. And if you'd like to serve as a moderator for any of the sessions, please let us know that, too. You may write to us c/o NINC Annual Conference, Box 1166, Mission, KS 66222, or contact us directly. We're looking forward to seeing you in Atlanta!

The 1994 Conference Committee:
Victoria Thompson, Conference Coordinator
Carla Neggars, Assistant Conference Coordinator



The 1993 San Antonio Novelists, Inc. conference was the best gathering I've ever attended. Salute!

— Lass Small

SCHEDULE of EVENTS

(Schedule subject to change)

As you can see, we have shortened the conference by one day, in response to the requests of many members, while shortening the actual meeting time by only one hour. We have also lowered the cost of both the conference itself and of the hotel.

Thursday, October 13

10:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.	Registration
2:00 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.	Business Sessions - meetings in which we discuss the business of Novelists, Inc.
4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Annual Business Meeting
5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Dinner Break
7:00 p.m. - 10:30 p.m.	Night Owl Sessions
10:30 p.m. -	Snack Break

Friday, October 14

8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Author Discussion Groups
12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Lunch with Guest Speaker Ed Turner of CNN
2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Special Presentation / Optional Field Trip
5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Break
6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Cocktail Party
7:00 p.m. -	Free Evening - Dinner on your own

Saturday, October 15

8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Professional Discussion Groups
12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Break - Lunch on your own
2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Special Presentation / Optional Field Trip
7:30 p.m. -	Dinner with Guest Speaker

Sunday, October 16

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Publisher Forums
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For Novelists, Inc. membership information and application, send your request to:

Novelists, Inc.

P.O. Box 1166, Mission, KS 66288

For a one-year subscription to NOVELISTS' INK, send your request and \$50.00 to the same address.

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKERS

FRIDAY LUNCHEON SPEAKER: Ed Turner, CNN's Executive Vice President of News Gathering, will talk to us about Global Media and Popular Culture. He will be accompanied by his wife, Susan Rook, who is an anchor-woman for Primetime News on CNN and who also happens to be an aspiring romance writer.

SATURDAY DINNER SPEAKER: To Be Announced

Conference Fees:

Member, received by Sept. 13 \$175

Member, received after Sept. 13 \$200

Spouse \$125

REGISTRATION FEE INCLUDES all catered functions and admission to all conference events.

SPOUSE FEE INCLUDES all catered functions and admittance to all conference events open to guests.

EDITORS, AGENTS, AND RELATED PROFESSIONALS will be invited to attend the conference beginning with the Welcome Cocktail Party on Friday evening through the Sunday morning sessions.

HOTEL INFORMATION: We have reserved rooms at the Terrace Garden Hotel at the special conference rate of:

\$85	Single
\$95	Double (\$10 extra person)
\$170	1-Bedroom Executive Suite
\$195	1-Bedroom Hospitality Suite
\$255	2-Bedroom Executive Suite
\$280	2-Bedroom Hospitality Suite

The Terrace Garden is a twenty-mile shuttle ride (\$13 one way) from the airport. Taxi service is also available, and Atlanta's rapid transit system, MARTA, also serves the airport and the hotel (MARTA entrance is two blocks from the hotel).

SIGHTSEEING OPPORTUNITIES: Atlanta has a rich history and a vital present. Home to CNN, the Centers for Disease Control, and Coca Cola and the birthplace of the modern Civil Rights Movement, the city also has many historical sites open to the public. Tours of the Governor's Mansion and other historic sites and museums are available. Members may want to take an extra day for a trip to Stone Mountain Park for hiking, historical tours of antebellum plantations, museums, train rides, and fishing.

Burned-Out . . .

(Continued from page 1)

Burnout isn't some dark and mysterious malady that swoops down on a creative individual in the middle of the night and wreaks havoc on you. While you might not be able to see it coming, you will be able one day to look back and determine the chain of events that led up to it.

And that's not to say you need to beat yourself up for your mistakes, both real and imagined. Far from it. You have nothing to feel guilty about. Maybe you could have avoided burnout and maybe you couldn't have. What difference does it make? The fact is you're in it, and you need to turn all of your energies into regaining your creative balance.

I didn't deliberately kill off relatives, break my hand, and set out to roadblock my career. Yet all of those things happened, and, no matter how hard I tried to pretend they hadn't, ultimately their effect was cumulative.

Let's remember that we're not just writers. We're spouses and parents, we're best friends and co-workers and a hundred other things, and when we lose sight of all the disparate parts of the whole, we lose what makes us good writers in the first place. You can't stop life from happening. God knows I'd tried my damndest to control the people and events around me, but I couldn't, and when I found myself asking my father to postpone his angiogram until after my deadline, I knew I was headed for trouble.

That's not the kind of person I wanted to be. Self-absorption has never held a great deal of interest for me, yet when it came to my writing I was a prime offender. I'd be the first to tell you that there's nothing more important than the people you love, yet there I was playing God with my dad's health just so I could make sure nothing interfered with making my deadline.

Be careful what you wish for. Years ago I wished I had the time to do nothing but write.

Eleven years later I found I had all the time in the world and nothing left to say.

It's an insidious process. The need to write, the love of it, is so intense, so all-encompassing that we're willing and eager to keep those creative fires

burning, no matter the cost. Friends and hobbies fall by the wayside. Music, painting, the joys to be found in doing absolutely nothing—all of it sacrificed to the greater goal.

Not that it felt like a sacrifice. Most of us would gladly give up just about anything for the love of the written word.

At the lowest point in my burnout, I found myself at a writers' conference, feeling as out of place as Mr. Spock at a weekend retreat with Robert Bly. All around me writers talked about how much they loved their craft, how lucky they were to be able to make a living doing what they enjoyed most in the world. I heard their words. I recognized them as being in my native tongue. But those writers might as well have been speaking Greek because their meaning eluded me. I had no memory of ever loving the process. In truth I couldn't even remember how it felt to create worlds with only the power of my imagination.

I went home wondering if I'd ever publish another book, and wondering why I didn't care.

What I finally discovered was the fact that writing can't be everything for me. By identifying myself solely as a writer, I had effectively cut myself off from new experiences and old pleasures, and as a result the creative well had run dry. For years I had done nothing but write, talk about writing, think about writing. I'd mastered the art of saying no to invitations from friends and after awhile those invitations stopped coming . . . and I never even noticed.

In the name of professional responsibility, I'd narrowed my world down to the point where there was nothing but me and my computer and a never-ending banner of deadlines waving in the breeze. (I might add that I do have a husband, but he was going for his Master's degree at the time which allowed me ample opportunity to bury myself even deeper in my work.)

Is it any wonder I finally crashed and burned?

Creativity is a capricious gift, and I had done everything possible to force it into predictable—and boring—patterns.

Let's acknowledge that while we're seasoned professionals, we're not part of the mainstream of 9-5, with

Are You Writing More & Enjoying It Less?

While no one has all the answers when it comes to stress and burnout, the following books may be helpful in re-igniting the creative fires and/or soothing the artistic soul:

1. *Writing Down The Bones / Freeing the Writer Within*

Author: Natalie Goldberg / Publisher: Shambhala Publications

Wild Mind / Living the Writer's Life

Author: Natalie Goldberg / Publisher: Shambhala Publications

Goldberg's approach is both practical and metaphysical. Even if you're not a fan of New Age thinking, Goldberg manages to integrate the two approaches in a way that might prove particularly helpful to novelists who are expected to convince their Muse to conform to publishers' deadlines. (Note: The two books are offered in one soft-cover volume through Quality Paperback Book Club.)

2. *The Book of Questions*

Author: Gregory Stock, Ph.D. / Publisher: Workman Publishing

This slender volume has no plot and offers no advice, yet it may prove more useful than a book twice its size. Stock asks questions that are thought-provoking and might trigger plot ideas. Others lead to introspection and may even make you come face to face with your personal career goals. A great help to writers looking to spark new life and dimension into their characters—or into themselves.

3. *Breathing Space / Living & Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society*

Author: Jeff Davidson / Publisher: MasterMedia Limited

Type-A authors, beware! Author Davidson challenges most, if not all, of your most dearly held beliefs. Yes, life is moving at a more rapid pace than at any time in recorded history. If you think you're falling behind, it's not your imagination. And if you think you're going to catch up, it's time for a reality check. Davidson believes breathing space is necessary to stress management and recommends a ruthless pruning of all branches of your life.

This material was compiled by Barbara Bretton, Sandra Marton, and Dallas Schulze.

Burned-Out . . .

(Continued from page 9)

paid holidays, and three weeks' vacation every year.

Being creative on demand is tougher than digging ditches for a living, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. We're incredibly lucky to be able to earn a good living doing what we love most in this world, but being creative on demand takes its toll.

What we're actually doing is imposing left brain restrictions on right brain activities, the psychological equivalent of patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time. In an ideal world, the writing of a novel would determine its own schedule, the characters and plot would set their own pace.

Unfortunately we don't live in a perfect world. We live in a world of deadlines and due dates and expectations, and if we want to carve a place for ourselves in publishing, a place that will last, we have to learn to make the creative side of ourselves coexist with the professional. The secret to longevity as a writer is found in the balance between the two.

Things won't always turn out the way you hope. The book you loved most may not do well in the marketplace. The *New York Times* list might remain a dream unfulfilled. Your brilliance might go unrewarded except by family, friends, and three hundred devoted readers scattered throughout the country. Disappointment coupled with overwork is a surefire formula for trouble.

If the time comes when you feel you've burned out, remember this one important thing: your creativity is intact. You won't believe it at the time, but trust me, it's true. What you are is tired. You need to step back and replenish the wellspring that feeds your creativity. Read for pleasure. Go to the movies. Wander through museums or stretch out in the grass and look up at the clouds. Crystals, racewalking, talking to plants—it doesn't matter much what you do. What matters is that you're doing *something* besides staring at the blinking cursor and growing more afraid by the second.

I admit there's nothing glamorous about pacing yourself, nothing earthshaking about building time for fun into your schedule. Taking art classes and learning to play the piano didn't merit a sentence in the annual Christmas letter,

but they brought about a sea change for me.

Creativity doesn't vanish simply because you need time to rediscover yourself as a human being, even if that means more time between books.

Which brings me to another important point: seeing your name in print is more addictive than caffeine, tobacco, or chocolate.

Somewhere it is written that Writer A will write two books each year . . . and this is good.

Somewhere it is written that Writer B will write eight books each year . . . and this is also good.

And somewhere it is also written that Writer C will write one book every three years . . . and feel guilty as hell about it.

That's when the trouble begins. We want to believe that if two books a year is good, then four books a year is better, and six is damn close to Nirvana.

Romance writers, in particular, understand that publishing is a business that prides itself on productivity. Our readers are voracious, and it follows that publishers reward writers who can produce good books quickly and often. How many of us have juggled family obligations or scrimped on sleep, in order to squeeze another book into our yearly schedule?

And how many of us have paid the price?

You know what's right for you. You've probably always known. By the time you've written your second or third book, you have a pretty clear idea of how quickly you can write and still maintain the quality of your work.

Your natural rhythm is as much a part of you as your fingerprints. Respect it. Nurture it. Accept it. This isn't a race. There are no prizes for land speed. When all is said and done, no one remembers how quickly your book was written. They remember how *well* it was written.

Take away the contracts, the deadlines, the royalty statements. Take away the autographings, the conferences, and the long distance phone bills. Take away everything but the act of sitting down each morning in front of a blank screen and what do you have?

You have a writer.

Burnout doesn't change that fact, and I'm the living proof. My career didn't come to an end because I hit a roadblock. My publishers didn't turn away from me, my friends didn't

Coping Resources

For information about stress, write a letter explaining your sources of stress (family, job, etc.) to:

American Institute of Stress, Dept. U
124 Park Ave
Yonkers NY 10703
Or call 1-800/947-9191

For a two-page guide from the National Institute of Mental Health on handling stress, write:

NIMH
Information Center, Dept 563Z
Pueblo CO 81009

For information about certified biofeedback professionals in your area, send a letter and sase to:

Biofeedback Certification Institute of America
10200 W 44th Avenue - Suite 304
Wheat Ridge CO 80033

For brochures on how to handle tension and depression, call:

The National Mental Health Association
Alexandria VA
1-800-969-6642

Additional books on Stress:

The Doctor's Guide to Instant Stress Relief, Ronald G. Nathan, et. al., Ballantine

Stress Management, Dorothy H. Cotton, Brunner/Mazel \$31.95

A Clinical Guide to the Treatment of the Human Stress Response, G.S. Everly, Jr., Plenum Press \$32.50

Principles and Practices of Stress Management, Robert I. Woolfolk and Paul M. Lehrer
Guildford Press \$35

Comprehensive Stress Management, Jerrold S. Greenberg, William C. Brown Communications \$29

Editor's Corner . . .

NINK hopes to run an interview article regarding writing with a chronic or debilitating illness. If you would be willing to take part in this project, please contact the editor. Anonymity will be respected, if desired.

Coming in April . . . *Are you a candidate for burnout?* Take our test and see where you stand on the "stressed out" scale.

Quote of the Month: "*Publishing has been ruled for years by trust-fund babies who could afford to live in New York City on these ridiculously meager salaries and produce serious books. . . . People are interested in dramatic stories about other people.*" — Judith Regan, Simon and Schuster Editor whose stable of writers includes best-sellers Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, Kathy Lee Gifford, and Beavis and Butt-Head, in *The Arizona Republic*.

Kensington Publishing (Zebra/Pinnacle) will be moving on February 15 to 850 Third Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10017.

Harlequin's Karin Stoecker is transferring to London where she will be editorial director of Mills & Boon for one year.

shun me, my computer didn't turn to stone. Maybe it takes hitting rock bottom to appreciate all that you've been given in life—and to learn how to make the best use of it.

Two years ago I thought I would never write again.

Today I can honestly say I feel the same sense of excitement, the same joy, that I felt when I sat down to begin my first book eleven years ago.

You say you're burned out? Maybe you are.

You think you're washed up? Not on your life.

Regroup, refresh, renew. Your creativity and discipline will be there waiting for you.

I guarantee it. 

Barbara Bretton's first hardcover, Tomorrow and Always, (sequel to the best-selling Somewhere in Time) will be released in February 1994 by Harlequin Books. The softcover edition will be released in November 1994. One and Only, her first mainstream contemporary for Berkley, will be released in September 1994. Her second Berkley, The Long Way Home, will be released in May 1995.

THIS WORKED for me

THIS WORKED for me is intended to benefit NINK readers. Solutions to professional dilemmas, hints on how to maintain good relations with your publisher, advice on making the work of writing easier, surviving a move across the country, or other major disruptions in the work schedule—all are topics we hope to address. Article length may vary from 250-800 words. Please send contributions to the Novelists' INK editor.

Coping with Burnout: Top Ten List of Suggestions

1. Don't fight it. Burnout feeds on anxiety. Recognize that burnout is a temporary condition. There are enough things in life to feel guilty about. Burnout isn't one of them.

2. If you see you're in serious trouble with a deadline, CALL YOUR EDITOR IMMEDIATELY! Better to face embarrassment asking for an extension than to find yourself with 400 pages to write and 24 hours in which to do it.

3. Vary your routine. Nothing deadens creativity like boredom. Try writing outdoors, in a room other than your office, in front of a crackling fireplace. (Laptops are a boon to restless writers, but a notebook and pen will do just fine.) Try writing something different: a mainstream novel, a mystery, the book you've always dreamed of doing. Promise yourself some time each day (whatever you can spare) to work on it, and then relax and enjoy it!

4. Guard against isolationism. Even the most fertile imagination needs a boost from time to time. Catch up on all the movies you've missed; listen to your favorite old records; go to lunch with the non-writing friends you've shamefully ignored. Refill the well against another drought.

5. Remember, you can burn out without ever damaging your

ability to think up terrific plots and wonderful characters.

6. Everything and everyone that puts pressure on you is a source of burnout, but pressure isn't all bad. Some people do better under pressure.

7. If you're burning out because you're constantly pushing to meet impossible deadlines, you may be over-committed. Only you know the answer.

8. Can you control burnout? Yes, within reason. All the stuff you learned in health class a million years ago is valid. Get regular exercise. Get enough sleep. Eat properly. Remember that you do have another life; get away from your desk and live it. Learn to "read" your psyche and body for signs of impending trouble before it clobbers you.

9. The most effective way to avoid burnout is also the most difficult. Determine as cold-bloodedly as possible whether your current career goals are realistic and/or good for you creatively. If they're not, change them.

10. Can you prevent burnout? Absolutely. Just give up writing and take up something less stressful, like brain surgery.

— B. Bretton

Editors Complain About Conference . . . Again!

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Conference Coordinator

As you probably know, every year the editors who attend our conference have some complaints. The first three years they felt we didn't use them enough or take advantage of their expertise. We agreed, so in 1993 we devised a new type of conference session: Professional Discussion Groups. For the first time ever, editors, publishers, agents, and authors sat down in one room and talked openly about the issues that really affect us. But the editors still aren't happy. They want even more, and the complaint they voiced this year happens to be one that makes us extremely happy: the editors were distressed because *not enough authors approached them to pitch book ideas at the conference!*

For years, articles have appeared in the newsletters of various writers' organizations cautioning writers against "bothering" editors at conferences. These articles were intended to protect the editors from being overwhelmed by over-eager aspiring writers, but those of us who are multi-published have somehow come to believe the rules applied to us, too. Not so! In fact, the editors tell us the main reason they come to Novelists, Inc. is to make themselves available to authors who may want to write for them and to authors who already write for them but who might have some new ideas for projects that would be best discussed face to face.

Of course, editors could theoretically speak to published authors at other conferences, too, except that they're usually too

busy meeting with the hundreds of aspiring writers who also attend those conferences. At Novelists, Inc. it's just us published folk, and virtually every major publisher attends, which makes the ratio of authors to editors less than ten to one! Imagine all those editors walking around all weekend with nothing to do but listen to your ideas!

So ask yourself what your *real* motivation is for attending a writers' conference. If you want a conference where you can discuss the business of writing with your peers and with industry professionals and where you can actually *do* business face to face with editors and agents in a relaxing atmosphere, Novelists, Inc. is the place for you.

In the months to come, you'll be reading in *NINK* about authors who actually made deals at the 1993 conference or as a direct result of their attendance there. If you want to be one of those with something to report this time *next* year, you should plan to attend Novelists, Inc.'s 1994 conference in Atlanta. The conference site is the Terrace Garden Hotel in the Buckhead district. Mark your calendar now: October 13-16, 1994. **NINK**

For a "sneak preview" of the 1994 Conference, see the center pages in this issue.

the NEXT PAGE

At least two months preceding publication, please send publication information to JoAnn Ross, 43 E. Boca Raton, Phoenix, AZ 85022-4713. You're welcome to submit this information as soon as your publication date has been confirmed.

Baer, Judy: *Dear Judy, What's it Like at Your House?*,
Bethany House Publishing (YA nonfiction)

Banks, Leanne: *More Than a Mistress*, Bantam Loveswept
Angels and Outlaws

Berberick, Nancy Varian: *The Panther's Hoard*, Ace Fantasy

Bretton, Barbara: *Tomorrow and Always*, Harlequin
(hardcover)

Douglas, Carole Nelson: *Irene's Last Waltz*, TOR (hardcover)

Eagle, Kathleen: *Fire and Rain*, Avon

Evans, Patricia Gardner: *Whatever It Takes*, Silhouette By
Request, *Lover Come Back* (reissue)

Ross, JoAnn: *Angel of Desire*, Harlequin Temptation

Siegenthal, Deborah w/a Deborah Simmons: *The Squire's
Daughter*, Harlequin Historical

Stone, Katherine: *Illusions*, Kensington Publishing (hardcover)

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