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Written in the Stars?

BY MARY JO PUTNEY

Being of a practical nature, I always knew that astrology was rubbish. What possible effect could distant stars have on life on earth? Moreover, whenever I read sun sign descriptions, my sign of Cancer never sounded remotely like me. There were usually references to my maternal nature and love of children. Since I've never had any interest in children except for a polite wish that they prosper at some great distance from me, Q.E.D., astrology was nonsense.

As a contrast, I'll mention my Significant Other's introduction to astrology. A product of 19 years of Catholic education, he is well-prepared to accept matters mystical. He learned about astrology in grade school when a nun said that astrology was a way of predicting events by studying the stars. He thought of the moon and the tides, and decided this sounded reasonable.

She also said that using astrology was wrong. Note that she didn't say that it didn't work, just that kids weren't allowed to mess with it. Naturally, this gave the SO a deep and abiding interest in the subject. But I digress.

Astrology stayed very low on my personal radar until I met Wendell, a pleasant fellow, very straight and short-haired, not at all a space case. He worked for a brokerage firm—and was a knowledgeable believer in astrology. That someone so patently normal (a

good deal more so than I, if the truth be known), believed in astrology caught my attention. He also explained enough about the underlying principles that suddenly, astrology started to make sense.

Bad astrology tends to use details that can be wrong, or are so general as to be meaningless. The core principles were much more subtle and convincing, and they helped me understand where the potted descriptions came from.

For example, the sweeping statement that all Cancers love children made me roll my eyes, but Wendell explained that the underlying principle was nurturing. I couldn't deny that I was the one in the office who generally provided the aspirin, the neck rubs, and the listening ear to tense co-workers. I was Little Miss Fix-It when anyone had a problem, and if you think this shows co-dependent tendencies—well, let's not go there. But nurture I did—I just tended to aim my nurturing at animals and adults rather than kids.

Attention caught, I dived into the study of astrology. It's a fascinating, fiendishly complex structure with a beautiful symmetry that appealed to my left-brained desire to understand what makes things tick. I've heard that it takes seven years to make an astrologer, and certainly the zillion cute little symbols for the planets, signs, and aspects make even baseball statistics look simple by comparison. Given this

complexity, I will now say, "Warning! Generalizations coming!"

I soon learned that the most important elements in astrology are the planets which are like pure, glowing energy, each with its own unique nature.

The zodiac is the "circle of the heavens" that includes the constellations from which the signs get their names. Like all good circles, it's divided into 360 degrees, and since there are 12 signs, each sign is 30 degrees wide. The first sign is named for the constellation Aries the Ram, the second for Taurus the Bull, etc.

These signs are what we see on coffee mugs and tee-shirts and they describe how an energy is expressed. Think of a sign as resembling an adjective.

The houses are the 12 sections of the zodiac and they stand for different arenas of life. For example, the first house is you as an individual, the fourth represents the home, the sixth represents daily work, etc.

The aspects—that is, the angles between planets—describe how planets relate to each other. "Hard" angles, like 90 or 180 degrees, symbolize two energies that will be challenging to integrate; flowing aspects, like 60 or 120 degrees, indicate an easier, more productive energy blend.

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE....

Some Historical Perspective

The summer between my third and fourth grade years, my mother signed me up for the reading program at our local library. I don't remember what you got for reading and reporting on all the books you read, but I *do* remember the excruciating experience of that first oral book report. I had a pile of books, so I started with my favorite, *Bartholomew and the Obleck*. And I started on page one.

Six million four hundred and forty-three hours later, despite frequent, increasingly desperate encouragement to focus on just the "best parts," I staggered to the end of my blow-by-blow account of What Happened Next, dazed, tense, humiliated (I knew what that fixed smile on the librarian's face *really* meant!), and on the verge of tears.

Bartholomew wasn't the last book I read that year, but it was definitely the last one I reported on. No amount of parental threats or cajolery could sway me: I was never, ever going to give another book report in my life, so there!

And then I landed in fourth grade with a brute of a teacher who *loved* oral book reports. I figured there were only two ways out: run away to join the circus (*Toby Tyler* was one of my very favorite books about then), or learn to get through the pain as quickly as possible. Since no circus was obliging enough to visit town that summer, I didn't have much choice: I learned to give the shortest, most concise book reports on record. "*Black Beauty* is about a horse who falls on hard times, is rescued, and lives happily ever after." "*Little Women* is about four sisters growing up." "*The Wizard of Oz* is about a girl who gets blown into a magical world and has to find her way back. The end." My grateful teacher told my mother she hadn't known it was possible to make book reports that short.

I say all this as background for my present dilemma: I have to write a synopsis, and I can't. Obviously, my dislike for writing synopses has deep roots in my psyche—childhood trauma will do that to you. But I figure it's also a reflection of my natural reportorial bent: I can write a book, or I can give you a sentence, but that stuff about hitting the "best parts"... Phooey!

I know, I know. I'm not the only one who suffers. For most writers, "synopsis" is a four-letter word with extra letters, so I don't have any particular claim on misery. (Not all writers feel that way, mind you, but there are queer ducks in every family.) However, I do have to write a column for *NINK* this month, and since all my other ideas fizzled out, I'm going to write about the heartbreak of writing a synopsis (which is, at least, an easier word to spell than "psoriasis," even if they do have some of the same letters).

Anyway, faced with the necessity of writing a synopsis, I did what any other red-blooded professional writer who needed the money would do: I cleaned my toilets, then spent a gazillion hours online researching stuff that had absolutely nothing to do with my...well, you know. That four-letter thing with the extra letters.

Fortunately, I found some cool stuff that proves this insane passion for

condensations hit long before *Readers Digest* started making a buck or two at it.

Here, for example, is the text of a missive found in the archives of the Department of Dead Letters of the British Museum.

10 May, 1763

Mr. Edward Gibbon

Sir:

We are in receipt of your letter of April last regarding your proposed History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. We are intrigued by the idea, but do have some concerns about the project. Firstly, judging by your letter, you propose a work that will run to four or five thick quarto volumes, at least. This seems extreme, not only from the question of what we would need to charge the public for each volume in order to recoup our costs—always a difficult matter, but especially so in these trying economic times—but also from our growing concern that so large a project may simply be too much. The general reading public today is in decline due to the increasing demands on their limited time and attention. Improved roads and transportation are leading people who would otherwise have stayed decently at home to go gallivanting around the country at will. We have tried to make our books more available by encouraging booksellers to set up small shops in the major inns and posting houses around the country, but we find, regrettably, that gentlemen on the road seem to prefer diversions such as Cleland's Memoires etc., to more instructive, literate works. Worse, when these same readers are at home, the effort that formerly they put into reading books which might have improved their minds, they now devote to reading newspapers, a plebian form of communication which can not help but lead to a general decline in the quality of public discourse and the ability of writers, publishers, and booksellers alike to make even the most meagre of livings. It is a sad state of affairs, but one we are powerless to counteract. Beyond those general concerns, however, we find that you failed to include a short account of the high points in your tale. Your title conveys an idea of your theme, but we need more! Given the number of proposals that cross our desk each month, it really is imperative that our editorial board have something to which they can refer during their discussions, something pithy that will yet convey the tone and sweep and content of the book you propose to write so they may judge how it might fit into our publishing schedule. If you can condense your tale into an accessible outline of, say, five pages or less, we would be most happy to reconsider your proposal. Otherwise we must, with regret, decline. Despite these no doubt unwelcome reservations, we remain,

Most humbly yours,

Reed, Hamm and Weip,

publishers of Quality Works for a Discerning Public

Gibbon found another publisher and, unlike many of us, has managed to stay in print ever since. But it was not just 18th Century publishers who felt the pressures of a demanding public. Oxford's Bodleian Library yielded a short note that, somewhat surprisingly, hasn't been much mentioned in the scholarly research into William Shakespeare's life and works. The handwriting on the note has been determined to be that of Philip Henslowe, owner

of the Rose Theatre at Bankside, London. The note itself is crumpled as though someone had once forcefully wadded it up, no doubt intending to toss it away, and splotted by what scholars suspect to be either ale, or tears.

Wil

The Men and me were talking about your Proposal for this new Hamlet play, and we Thot it might help you when you come to Writing It All Out to knowe what we decided. First off, that Ophelia sounds like a Hot Dish. You sure you want to Kill Her Off? Sex sells, Wil! You know It does. I'd hate to see you Floppe when you mighte have had a Hit if you hadn't Killed Her Off. Secondly, a Playe within a Playe? Doesn't that sounde a bit Strange to you? It does to Me. You aren't expecting me to gette a second Troupe of Actors, are you? If so, you've definitely been tipping the Ale pots a bit too enthusiastically and had better Lay Off, quick! Thirdly, you still don't have a Bit With A Dog. If you didn't like that Spotte I found, I could probably get a Poodle. Lastly, we were wondering: Is this Hamlet fellow Mad or isn't He? You didn't make that Clear. Other than That, we like it Just Fine.

Your Friende, Phil

As distressing as Henslowe's note must have been for the playwright, this last item is perhaps the most indicative of the perennial challenges faced by storytellers the world over. It is an English translation of the text of a scroll, written in ancient Aramaic, that was recently discovered in a cave deep in the virtually unexplored Dasht-e Kavir salt desert in central Iran. This particular item is especially intriguing because of the insights it provides into the bureaucratic operations as well as marital relations of the influential early Persian ruler, King Shahryar.

Date: The Four Thousandth and Sixty-Third Day of the Just and Magnificent Reign of His Gloriousness, King Shabryar, Lord of the Persians and the Eastern Lands and Master of the Universe

From: His Gloriousness, Shabryar, King

To: Her Gloriousness, Scheherezade, Queen (For Now, Anyway)

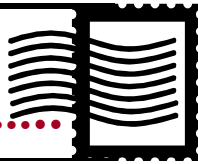
Re: The Evening's Entertainment

My dear wife. It's all very well promising me another story tonight, and another tomorrow night, and another the night after that, and so on, but you know very well that I'm a busy man and not a fan of protracted marriages. I do wish you'd get on with it. I've got a lot of girls lined up to take your place, you know! All right, I'll admit that Ali Baba bit you mentioned you were working on, but enough's enough! Tonight could you please just hit the high points of the rest of these little tales of yours so I can proceed with business? Thanks! Yours, sincerely. "Yar"

And with that, I guess I'd better get on with business, too. I have a synopsis to write, after all.

There are, however, a few spider webs in the attic that require my urgent attention first.

— **Anne Holmberg**



Even in this online age—with Nink link—we still welcome your letters. Submit to the editor via e-mail or old-fashioned snailmail [see masthead on page 2]. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.

Change...with bells on

Everyone hates change, and we especially hate losing our Comely Curmudgen's hilarious takes on the writing life. We are therefore very grateful to our intrepid NINK editor Olivia Rupprecht for softening the blow by offering us the new column by Barbara Samuel. I must thank Barbara for reminding me that I am an artist and that I do own an ankle bracelet with bells. I went through years of denial about the artist part, so I know exactly what she's talking about. I'd forgotten all about the ankle bracelet which makes a lovely and very happy sound when I walk, and I've been wearing it ever since reading her timely column.

I also enjoyed Lawrence Watt Evans' column about finding his true identity, and I had to laugh when I read "I can't think of any fantasy novel except Lloyd Alexander's wonderful children's series about Taran the assistant pig-keeper where the hero is actually a farm-boy who defeats a dark lord." I immediately thought of Luke Skywalker in Star Wars. But of course that wasn't a novel, so you're still right, Lawrence. How about just telling people you're a novelist? I find they usually just ask how many novels you've written, if you write under your own name, and what's your latest title.

— **Victoria Thompson**

Ed. Note: Anne Holmberg was highly instrumental in bringing Barbara on board. Much credit and many thanks are extended Anne's way.

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Continued from page 1



And the *least* important of these elements is the signs—so that Leo on your coffee mug doesn't say a whole lot about you. See the sidebar for a sinfully brief description of the pros and cons of the basic astrological energies.

Note that the good and bad expressions of any energy are generally different sides of the same thing. Positive Gemini energy is lively, curious, mentally and verbally quick. The negative side of this energy is to be superficial, mendacious, and to have the attention span of a fruitfly. And so it goes through the zodiac.

There are numerous systems and schools of astrology, and they tend to reflect the underlying values of the cultures that develop them. Our Western style astrology is solar based, which fits our culture's emphasis on individuality and self-expression. In contrast, Chinese astrology is lunar-based, which makes sense given the intense social and communal consciousness that has traditionally characterized Chinese culture. (Don't ask me how Chinese astrology works, because I don't know. It's hard enough to learn the Western system!)

Western astrology is mostly about the planets of our solar system, taking the earth as the center, and until modern times the system included only those planets visible to the naked eye. As new planets have been discovered, they have been seamlessly incorporated into the existing astrological system after careful study.

There are all kinds of astrological specialties such as personal relationships, public affairs, events, and even theories of gambling. For example, the bottom line on gambling is that some people are born with lucky charts. Most of us don't have that, and are only lucky now and then. If you're lucky and also calculate the periods when your personal luck is at its highest, you can go to a slot machine, play for a few minutes and win, then sit down and wait for the next lucky period. A famous astrologer

once tested this on a layover in the Las Vegas airport, and ended up with a crowd of people around him wanting to know how he was managing to win consistently at the slots.

For me, astrology is first and foremost an ace psychological symbol system that illuminates our potentials and how best to use them. It's also as complicated as people are, or it wouldn't be able to express human nature. What astrology does give us is a code-breaking system for better understanding ourselves and others.

Your personal natal (birth) chart is a snapshot of the heavens taken at the moment when you first drew breath and become a separate individual. In Eastern terms, it's when you draw *chi*, life force energy, into your lungs, and that instant is imprinted on you. Even identical twins don't first draw breath at the same instant, and yes, those slight differences in time do make a difference in the charts.

Think of the universe as a flowing, continuously changing river of energy. Doesn't it make at least theoretical sense that the moment when you became *you* can be studied as a clue to the forces that shape your character and life choices? It was a model that worked for me.

Your chart can be used as a road map to better understanding yourself. The sun sign (inner nature) is important, but so is the moon placement (emotional expression), and the rising sign, which is the degree of the zodiac that was "rising" on the eastern horizon when you were born. This is also called the ascendant, and has to do with the outer aspect that you present to the world.

There is a period when new students of astrology tend to ask everyone around them for birth data so we can run charts and try to puzzle them out. This constant analysis helps sharpen one's psychological perception, and gives greater understanding of the contradictions of human nature. It becomes clear how a person can be confident, yet uncomfortable in the spotlight,

or highly organized professionally but a total mess in her personal life. I found it all to be great fun, like a secret decoder ring.

No one aspect or planetary placement makes you what you are. Important themes in your chart will show up again and again and again in different ways. There are many indicators of writing ability that show up in a writer's chart—it is never, ever, as simple as having a Gemini sun sign, or Sagittarius rising, or the moon in the third house.

We won't talk about asteroids and solstice points and fixed stars and the multitude of other influences on a chart—this is more than you want to know unless you're interested in astrology yourself, in which case you already know this stuff.

Astrology definitely helped me understand my abilities and contradictions better. For example, I'm a double Cancer—sun and ascendant—but I have a pretty brash streak as well: an impulsive, I'm-going-to-knock-down-that-wall-with-my-head, Aries moon. (This combination has been called “the crab that roared.”)

Yes, that Aries moon can be pretty obnoxious (note how I'm trying to distance myself here)—but it sure is useful when it comes to things like getting published and surviving in a crazy business like writing. I can also be seriously lazy, but I have a Venus/Pluto conjunction that makes me obsessive when it comes to creative work—another useful writer trait. (And it's reinforced by a strong Saturn and Mars in Virgo in the Third, etc. As I said, important traits show up in multiple ways.)

I also learned that sudden life changes and problems correlate with powerful outer planets of the solar system making “transits” to the personal planets in my chart. To the ancients, the sky was full of malefic planets, and there were only two that were considered benefic—Jupiter and Venus. The other planets were all trouble in greater or lesser degree. Says a lot about life in the good old days, doesn't it?

In other words, if one of the heavy duty outer planets—Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, or Pluto—moves to the same degree of the zodiac as my sun or moon or ascendant—I'll notice. I'll notice a lot.

All charts contain all the signs and planets, but most of us spend our lives

wrestling with certain recurring issues that can be symbolized by one or more of the greater malefics. In other words, we get whapped upside the head periodically, which is the universe's way of saying, “Change or else. Change *now*.”

I seem to be working mostly on Saturn (structure, duty, limitations, repression, doing things the hard way) and Neptune, which is pretty much the opposite. As lord of the sea mythologically, Neptune rules the subconscious, spirituality, addiction, creativity, hard to diagnose maladies, and mysterious things that go bump in the night.

If you think that these energies tend to conflict, you are right. When Neptune meets Capricorn, the sign of Saturn, structures tend to dissolve. Or, on the plus side—and in astrology, *everything* has a positive and negative side—Saturn may give structure to creativity, which is pretty much what being a writer is all about.

In a more mundane sense, Neptune transits usually mean that my house will develop some new and appalling water problem. This is not a surprise, since Neptune is associated with water, but it's upsetting and expensive. Still, I have learned to cope with water problems. At least I don't get plagues of locusts and other disasters of biblical proportions. For that, see Uranus.

Those heavy duty transits I mentioned above can be really powerful. A friend of mine had a triple transit of Pluto over his sun, and changed his sexual orientation three times, ending as gay. He's fine with it now, but there were some rough times during this period, as the Pluto transit symbolized his wrestling with deeply suppressed and very painful personal issues.

While I can't claim anything so dramatic (and believe me, I'm grateful for that!) when Neptune rolled around so that it was exactly opposite my sun and ascendant, my life changed as I developed a form of chronic fatigue syndrome that made it hard to climb stairs without resting. (Neptune can drain off energy like a short circuit, as well as symbolizing hard to diagnose ailments.)

Some days I could barely get out of bed. If I hadn't been self-employed, I don't know if I would have been able to hold onto a job. Luckily, I was able to husband what energy I had to do enough work to survive, though barely.

Having so little energy I could

barely function pretty much cured me of co-dependent tendencies—I didn't have the energy to fix anyone else's problems. My approach to life became more flowing, and I became much better at accepting people as they are. (Astrology is inherently good at helping one accept that a person isn't deliberately trying to make you nuts, he's simply expressing his inherent energies, and you're not likely to be able to change them. This is useful in all relationships.)

The way I changed during this period is typical of major transits—they tend to be difficult at the beginning, but often flower into something positive. One door closes, and another opens.

A transit of Neptune to one's sun generally lasts about two years. (The planet is so far from the sun that it takes a couple of hundred years to make a complete orbit, which translates to long transits to our personal charts. The transits of a fast planet like Venus are over in a couple of days.) When I finally crawled out from under Neptune, I started to write.

The proximate cause of starting my first book was buying a computer to do billing and copywriting for my freelance (Aries moon—I like working for myself) graphic design business, but maybe Neptune also reprogrammed my subconscious so that stories started to flow out. Whatever the symbolic reason, my time to write had come, and like a lemming over the cliff, I dived into the writing life. I've never looked back. (It's worth noting that the other major reason I bought a computer was to run charts.)

I had spent enough time seriously studying astrology that the symbol system was an inherent part of my characterization. At the beginning, I might consciously think, “He's a Taurus, protective, reliable, romantic, and musical, while she's a Pisces—ethereal, creative, shy, and also musical.”

Pretty soon, I didn't even bother doing that. These days the characters just shape themselves in my mind as I chew on the story. It's the part of writing that comes most easily to me. (The *only* part of writing that comes easily!)

On the other hand, plotting—which would be symbolized by Saturn, the planet that provides structure—is painfully hard work. I ▶▶▶▶

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can Do Saturn when I have to, but I never enjoy it. (If there is anyone in the history of the world who has enjoyed Doing Saturn, it has not been recorded.)

Parenthetically, I'm glad that Uranus and Pluto have largely given me a pass—I've known Uranian people who can blow electronic equipment just by walking into the same room. A strong Uranus transit can symbolize a bolt from the blue like being dropped by your long-term publisher, or other sudden, jarring events. On the positive side, my SO, also with strong Uranian energies, has been known to heal electronics by laying on of the hands.

Pluto is also a handful, energy-wise. While it symbolizes depth and intensity and getting to the bottom of things (think Sherlock Holmes), it's also associated with power struggles and control freaks; with things that take place very far below the surface before suddenly erupting, like volcanoes and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. In personal life, it can be the slow burn of building anger that ends when someone

yells, "That's it! I've had it! It's all over!" and slams out the door, leaving the other person totally baffled about where the anger came from. It's going postal.

I loved the way the rational, left-brained study of astrology helped me understand non-rational issues. It even explains why someone like me, who is usually pragmatic, inclined to make lists, and often boringly literal, nonetheless writes from the right brain. I don't read how-to-write books, I never pay a moment's notice to goal-motivation-conflict (though it sounds perfectly sensible), and when people start talking about antagonists and subtexts and thematic resonance, I just shake my head in country girl admiration. If any of that stuff is in my stories, it hasn't been done consciously.

For me, writing is a non-rational matter of chewing on a chapter, a scene, a sentence, until it "feels" right. Neptune all the way. Yet I can't start writing a book until I have a basic outline pounded out, a skeleton of the story. And what rules skeletons? Saturn, be-

cause the bones give structure to the body—and to a story. This is my process and I'm stuck with it, dammit.

I don't recommend a serious study of astrology unless one finds it enthralling because it's monstrously time-consuming. However, I have friends with only a modest knowledge of the subject who find that paging through astrology books to help them sharpen their focus is very useful when they're developing characters.

The one part of astrology that many people have heard of even if they know nothing else is Mercury retrograde. A planet is retrograde—that is, it appears to be going backwards in respect to earth—when it's on the other side of the sun. All the planets except the moon go retrograde regularly. The slow outer planets are retrograde for almost half a year, so they don't affect us as much. We notice it a lot more when the "personal planets"—Mercury, Venus, and Mars—go retrograde, because they have much more to do with our day to day lives.

Mercury, that light-footed little

Beyond the Coffee Mug

A marvelous astrologer named Dr. Zipporah Dobyns—Zip Dobyns to all who knew her—developed a simple and elegant way of describing astrological energies that she called the 12 Letter Alphabet of Astrology. Each letter of the alphabet, 1 through 12, stands not only for a sign of the zodiac, but also the ruling planet/s and the house associated with that energy because all three share the same characteristics.

Here's a very simplified version of that system. Bear in mind that the good and bad sides of any energy are generally different expressions of the same thing. The ability to probe deep beneath the surface makes Scorpio great at research, but that energy can also manifest as paranoia if a person keeps looking for hidden motives and threats that aren't there.

Everyone has all of these energies somewhere in the natal chart. What matters is how they are placed, connected, and emphasized, and how you use them.

#1—Aries/Mars/First House:

Positive: Pioneering, adventurous, energetic, vital, enthusiastic, good at initiating action, passionate about personal freedom. Negative: Impulsive, "me first," arrogant, selfish, insensitive, and quick-tempered.

#2—Taurus/Venus/Second House:

Positive: Reliable, creative, sensual, patient, hardworking, very appreciative of worldly beauty and pleasure, good at business. Negative: Stubborn, materialistic, possessive, greedy, inflexible, lazy.

#3—Gemini/Mercury/Third House:

Positive: Quick thinking, verbal, curious, witty, lively, versatile, and the first on the block to pick up new jargon. Negative: Superficial, restless, two-faced, volatile, lacking in follow-through, unreliable.

#4—Cancer/Moon/Fourth House:

Positive: Kind, nurturing, protective, sensitive, intuitive, empathic, tenacious, a natural nest-builder. Negative: Moody, so concerned with own feelings that can be insensitive to others, sentimental, changeable, whiny, untidy, afraid to try new things.

#5—Leo/Sun/Fifth House:

Positive: Creative, magnetic, natural leader, generous, enthusiastic, sense of style, a natural performer. Negative: Egomaniac, drama queens (and kings), snobbish, intolerant, stubborn, too proud to soil their paws with menial matters.

#6—Virgo/Mercury/Sixth House:

Positive: Efficient, pragmatic, meticulous, analytical, hardworking, willing to pitch in and do what is necessary without ego, often creative, especially with crafts or repairing

blighter, is the fastest planet, the closest to the sun, and it goes retrograde three times a year for about three weeks each time. Mercury rules business, contracts, daily life, technology, cars, and lots of other mundane things—and when it's retrograde, life gets a *lot* more complicated. Think delays and do overs.

If at all possible, do not have surgery or buy houses, cars, or electronics under a Mercury retrograde. If you are doing paperwork, double and triple check everything. Then check again. And be prepared to adapt if errors—such as a higher interest rate than you agreed to—turn up anyhow.

The only used car I ever bought that turned out to be a lemon was a whited sepulcher of a Datsun station wagon that looked fine and healthy but turned out to be a spawn of Satan. When I started to study astrology, I went back and checked the date I purchased it. Yep, sure enough, I bought it under a retrograde. I assure you that has never happened since, and my cars have been a reliable lot.

I remember an early book contract that was initiated under a retrograde. It went back and forth half a dozen times—and when it came to me for final signing, it had the wrong year

prominently listed on the first page despite the number of people who had gone over it. Later that book was rewritten from a Regency to a historical romance, so it had a renewed life, which is a positive aspect of a retrograde. But don't ask about the molar that fell apart under a Mercury retrograde and had to be capped. And capped again. And again....

As I've mentioned, nothing in astrology is inherently good or bad, even a Mercury retrograde. It's said that a retrograde is a good time to break up with a guy if you want him to come back again. It's also a good time for research, revisions, and maybe sending off a proposal that has been rejected elsewhere. If it's any comfort, something that becomes screwed up under one retrograde will often sort itself out under a later retrograde.

There are schools of astrology that are very deterministic: I'm told that Indian astrologers may say things like, "You don't have to worry about that because you're going to die six months before." This would freak most Westerners, but in a Hindu culture that believes in reincarnation, it makes more sense.

My form of astrology is modern,

humanistic, spiritual, and psychological. I think of a chart as like a hand of cards that shows the energies, abilities, and challenges that a person has been dealt. But the chart doesn't show how we'll play those cards. That's where free will comes in.

Some people with challenging charts live successful, productive lives while others with similar charts do badly. An astrologer who researched the charts of prisoners and prison guards told me the charts tended to have a lot of similarities, but the guards had learned to use those energies in more productive ways.

I've always had a mind that looks for patterns, which is perhaps one of the preeminent signs of a writer. We look at two facts in a newspaper and start imagining ways in which they connect. In the process of writing this article, I looked at the great intellectual passions of my life and realized that they are all about patterns.

My first great passion was design. In college, I dated an industrial design student who seemed to be having a lot more fun than I was, so I switched from being a junior majoring in Eighteenth Century British ▶▶▶▶

things. Negative: Hypercritical and perfectionist, a fussy, worrier, scattered energies, becomes obsessed with trees and misses the forest, doesn't finish projects because they can never be perfect enough.

#7—Libra/Venus/Seventh House:

Positive: Charming, creative, refined, aesthetic, sociable, tactful, works for harmony and partnership, justice, good at negotiating a middle ground. Negative: Indecisive, lazy, frivolous, gullible, easily influenced, manipulative.

#8—Scorpio/Mars and Pluto/Eighth House:

Positive: Passionate intensity, thorough, subtle, tenacious, determined, ability to go into subjects very deeply. Negative: Controlling, jealous, stubborn, obsessive, paranoid, secretive, prone to mind games and manipulation.

#9—Sagittarius/Jupiter/Ninth House:

Positive: Intellectual seeker, jovial, broad-minded, love of learning, travel, sports, expansive personality, enthusiastic, optimistic, philosophical. Negative: Prone to exaggeration, tactless, fickle, boisterous, unreliable, egotistical, "dumb jocks."

#10—Capricorn/Saturn/Tenth house:

Positive: Reliable, hard working, good at building structures and organizations, ambitious, frugal, dry sense of humor, strong sense of responsibility and duty. Negative: Greedy, rigid, bigoted, conventional, afraid of taking risks, pessimistic, miserly.

#11—Aquarius/Saturn and Uranus/Eleventh House:

Positive: Idealistic, tolerant, humanitarian, independent, friendly, intellectual, progressive with new ideas and technologies. Negative: Obsessed with newness, stubborn, eccentric, perverse, rebellious for rebellion's sake, better at loving mankind than achieving intimacy with a single person.

#12—Pisces/Jupiter and Neptune/Twelfth House:

Positive: Intuitive, sensitive, sympathetic, compassionate, mystical, creative, spiritual, humble. Negative: Difficulty with reality, impractical, wishy-washy, depressive, self-pitying, evasive, indecisive, addictive behaviors.

Remember that this is not sun sign astrology: if your sun is in the Twelfth House, you will have a lot of the #12 "Piscean" characteristics even if the sun sign is Gemini. Likewise, if your sun is conjunct (that is, very close) to Mars, you'll have a lot of that #1 "Aries" type energy. A cluster of planets in the Tenth House will make you rather Capricornian (#10), while planets in the Seventh will make you more "Libran (#7)." I warned you that this was complicated!

MJP

Written in the Stars?

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ Literature to a freshman in Industrial Design. The work load was crushing, but I loved it because design is about organizing elements in balanced, harmonious ways that achieve a purpose. Good design is often invisible because it flows so well that you don't even notice it. Bad design can be as painfully obvious as a chair with a badly shaped back.

I was still a practicing designer when I fell in love with astrology. If design helped me understand the outer world, astrology helped me understand the inner world.

The third great passion, which still rules my life, is writing. Oddly enough, design and plotting are very much alike because they are ways of creating powerful, inevitable structures. Good writing, like good design, is usually unobtrusive because it's exactly right, while bad writing is like being whapped repeatedly by a wet fish. (We Cancers, being water signs, sometimes overdo the water imagery.) Design and astrology are part of the personal well from which I draw my stories.

Of course, everything we ever do becomes grist for the writerly mill. We are the world's great recyclers of experience. Who knew when I was a kid and saw one of my cats stick her head in a gas oven when it went "Whoosh!" that noting how her whiskers curled into brittle corkscrews would someday become a useful factoid in a story? (The kitty survived just fine, but she stayed out of dark places until her whiskers grew back. And she stayed out of ovens for the rest of her life.)

Was it written in the stars that I'd become a writer? Well, now that I know what to look for, my chart does look writerly, but like so many things, this is much more obvious in retrospect than it was when I first started studying astrology.

Whatever. I had a lot of fun learning the language of signs and planets and house. I also met my wonderful significant other in a tarot/astrology class, and if that isn't proof that astrology can change your life, I don't know what is!

NINK

Where to find out more:

A pair of good, classic books that are fun to read and hold up well even years later are Linda Goodman's *Sun Signs*, which is about the basic solar energies, and her *Love Signs*, which compares how different signs get along and where their areas of conflict are likely to be. Very useful for romance writers. The fact that both books are still in print (*Sun Signs* first came out in 1968) is an indication of their effectiveness and accessibility.

Another favorite of mine is *Secrets From a Stargazer's Notebook: Making Astrology Work For You* by the very funny Debbi Kempton Smith. According to Amazon, the book has come back into print in an expensive small press edition. (A sample Kempton Smith comment: "Sure they're maniacs, judgmental, seeing issues in black-and-white terms, with no gray areas in between, but they mean well.")

A really good chart reading by a skilled astrologer is not cheap because years of study and practice are involved. A first class astrologer reads a chart holistically, integrating many subtle factors that are beyond the capacity of a computer.

There are many fine astrologers. One I can recommend personally is Mary Shea, whose website at www.maryshea.com describes her astrological services and spiritual courses. I can vouch for her as a personal friend of many years standing, a terrific teacher (which is how I met her), and holder of a Master's degree in psychology.

A bargain at her site is the short form solar return chart for \$20. This is a birthday chart that gives you an idea of what the next year holds. (She is a world authority on solar returns.) Readings can be done over the phone and taped, with a give and take between you and her. A full natal reading will discuss your chart, your issues, and what's going on in your life now.

I have no personal experience with online astrology, but here are several sites I'm told are worth exploring. If you want an accurate chart reading, be ready with the time, preferably to the minute, and place of your birth. The sites generally have sample reports available so you can see what you'll get for your money if you have one done.

I'm told that www.patterns.com does pretty good computer-generated reports. The site sells astrology software and reports on many topics such as personality, relationships, and children. Prices are variable, but not cheap.

Susan Miller's www.astrologyzone.com offers, among other things, a message board, free monthly horoscopes for each sign, and a free daily forecast e-mailed directly to you. A booklet report of your personal horoscope or a solar return costs \$44.95 plus shipping. There are other kinds of reports available. I've looked at her monthly horoscopes for sun signs, and they seem to be pretty good examples of their type.

A bargain online site is www.astrology.com. Their Chart Shop will calculate your chart for free, and give you a very, very, basic reading. If you've gone through the process and are thirsty for more, they'll charge \$14.95 to show you a fuller report. They also have a variety of other charts for fairly modest prices.

Most of these sites have plenty of material to poke around in, so have some fun!

MJP

Mary Jo Putney's most recent contemporary romance, *Twist of Fate*, is about wrongful conviction and justice. This is undoubtedly due to overdeveloped Libra influences.

A Recipe for Survival: Turning Lemons into Lemonade

When Bantam closed their Loveswept line, dozens of authors who were supporting themselves by writing suddenly found themselves out of work. Laura Taylor of the San Diego area was one of that number.

Author of 21 category romances and the mainstream novel *Honorbound*, Laura has a B.S. in Criminology and was one of the 30 founding members of Novelists, Inc. She served as the Recording Secretary to the Board of Directors of Novelists, Inc. during Jasmine Cresswell's term as president.

In 1997 when the ax fell, this gritty, gutsy woman stepped back, took a deep breath, then turned her years of expertise into a viable career as a free-lance editor.

I tracked her down in Rancho Mirage to find out how she did it.

NINK: What was your situation at the time of Loveswept's demise?

Laura Taylor: I was single and writing exclusively for Loveswept...and writing was my sole source of income.

NINK: How did the news affect you, both emotionally and financially?

LT: It left me struggling to catch my breath and scrambling to see how I could make my mortgage and deal with my other financial responsibilities. I had just purchased a home, and suddenly I found myself unemployed.

One of the biggest issues I confronted when Loveswept closed was paralysis caused by shock and the minimal amount of warning we received. The publisher was under the assumption that none of the Loveswept authors could possibly be solely dependent on the advances they paid us. Most of us were. We were writing three or four books a year, and while we weren't earning a

great deal of money, we did earn a living. When that was taken away, not only was the income gone but our identity was taken, as well. That loss can paralyze a writer.

The onus is on the writer to step back, catch her breath and say *okay, fine, how do I turn this lemon of a situation into gallons of lemonade?*

It took me some time to get my legs under me. But I realized that I was going to be what I've always been, someone capable of turning lemons into lemonade. I have a history of doing that, so I fell back on familiar survival patterns.

NINK: How did you turn your situation around?

LT: I did it by listing my skills and the positive aspects of my situation. At the top of the list was my knack for organization. The next asset was obvious: I'm not married so I had no financial responsibilities to other people. My mortgage was daunting, but I knew if I was conservative I could turn a part-time editorial position into something really viable.

Basically, what I did was expand my repertoire based on knowledge and skill that comes from 17 years in the business.

NINK: So, you had already done some freelance editing?

LT: Yes. From the beginning of my career I had been asked to assess, evaluate, and edit novels of aspiring writers. Initially I fell prey to the kindness impulse, and I continued handing out free advice for many years. But it reached a point where the demand was so great I found myself saying, "I'm very expensive. I don't know if you can afford my editorial services." Charging fees thinned the ranks considerably.

Our talent as multi-published writers translates into a level of skill that un-

published writers covet and feel free to prevail upon. When that happens, we're not being treated as professionals. These same people go to doctors and attorneys, and *never* expect free service. Why would anybody expect me to use my skills and talents as a free service? A totally inappropriate presumption, as far as I'm concerned.

NINK: How did you turn your editing expertise into a viable business?

LT: Serious writers who wanted to submit camera-ready manuscripts were willing to pay me, so I pursued that when I wasn't under contract or when I was between contracts. When Loveswept closed in 1998, I came to the conclusion that it would be wise to get the word out that I was available full time for freelance editing.

That's where networking came into play. I made certain all my writing colleagues would refer requests to me. I also informed all the directors of writers' conferences that I was available as a freelance editor. In addition, I called colleagues involved in adult education and asked that they refer clients to me.

As a result I began to see a steady stream of fiction and nonfiction book length manuscripts. Sixty-five to 70 per cent of the manuscripts I've worked with have been published. Privacy issues naturally restrain me from naming names, but my clients are people that many readers and writers would recognize.

In addition to my editing clients, I was approached by a feature film production company that had begun looking at serious dramas for women, written by women. I functioned as a consulting vice president for that company. My job was to screen published

The Buzz in the Biz.....

▶▶▶ novels and screenplays that were submitted. I found it to be a lovely adjunct to my work as consulting editor.

As agents became aware of the diversity of my skills, I also began to receive manuscripts that had already been sold but needed polishing. I was happy that my reputation had penetrated all levels of the industry.

So...how did I do it? I got mad and I got organized. I reclaimed my life and my identity. Now I view myself as a multi-faceted writer/editor. And I'm happy to tell you that I've got people standing in line. I'm booked months in advance.

NINK: Good for you! Tell us about the work you do as freelance editor.

LT: My clients range from Silicon Valley CEOs to published authors who merely need a backup set of eyes and the skill to make certain that their manuscripts maintain a high standard.

I have a lot of unpublished clients as well, but only accept work of those I feel I can help. I screen them in such a way that I am able to pick and choose the ones I want to edit.

That is very rewarding—seeing someone whose work just needs a little polish and tightening, then giving them a leg up on the competition. I like doing that. It is very satisfying.

NINK: Has your perception of editors changed?

LT: I now have an enriched appreciation for the difficulty of the task involved. I've learned how to help authors without violating the integrity of their intent or their writing style. I'm fortunate to be able to do that.

NINK: What are the benefits of taking a hiatus from writing?

LT: I needed a true break from the pressure of back-to-back contracts. It gave me a chance to read again, to listen to audio books, to look at the market on behalf of clients, and as a result for myself.

NINK: Did you retain your agent during your hiatus?

LT: Yes. I retained Andrea Cirillo at the Jane Rotrosen Agency as my literary agent with the understanding that my expectations of her were minimal until I was ready to resume writing. I'm happy to be able to say that we're working together again.

The agent/author relationship needs to be maintained, even when you're not writing, because I am certain that all writers go back to writing.

Once you revitalize you will need an agent, and who could be better than the one who knows your skills as a writer?

NINK: How has your editing career affected you as a writer?

LT: I rediscovered my passion for fiction. Now I'm a more diverse, more sophisticated writer with a tremendous appreciation for language and nuance.

The insights I gave to clients have come back to me tenfold. What I knew instinctively, I now know viscerally.

NINK: When did you start writing again, and what was your first project?

LT: A couple of years ago I challenged myself with nonfiction writing and all the research it entailed. In order to do that I had to give up my home, put my stuff in storage, and hit the road. I spent two years traveling throughout the western United States and researching a book that one day I will write.

Along the way I started feeling another kind of creativity, the creativity you need to feel to write effective fiction. Now I'm writing fiction again.

I'm revitalized from risks I've taken and the challenges I've accepted. In the final analysis I had to trust myself, trust my instincts, and trust my creative core.

NINK: What's next for Laura Taylor?

LT: Both writing and editing. They are complimentary professions.

There was a time when the unknown would have terrified the hell out of me. Now I embrace it because it's part of who I am. **NINK**

Bits'n'Pieces

NEW LITERARY

AGENCY... Formerly of Carlisle & Company, Christy Fletcher and Emma Parry have now established Fletcher & Parry. Fletcher represented *The Nanny Diaries* as well as Daniel Mason's *The Piano Tuner* among others; Parry was once with Gillon Aitken Assoc. in London and led the Carlisle & Co. team in selling US rights for clients of UK agencies.

AND IN OTHER

AGENT NEWS... At the beginning of September, Jake Elwell, partner at Wieser & Wieser, was promoted to president. Co-founder Olga Wieser stays on as chairman. The agency is now known as Wieser & Elwell. **Meanwhile over at the Stuart Agency,** former Harper associate editor Jeffrey Kellogg has joined as an agent. His focus will be on commercial and literary fiction, narrative nonfiction (including memoirs), and popular science.

Filed by Terey daly Ramin



Revitalizing the Writer...

We're Smokin'!

Thank you, Novelists, Inc., for your unequivocal support of the retreat.

When we started planning this venture, we worried that our members wouldn't be interested in a venue where the emphasis was on the power of the writer, on focusing on *us*. We debated whether or not our goal of 75 retreatants was too ambitious. We agonized over room counts and feared we might be over-extending Ninc resources.

We are no longer anxious. We hit our 75 registrants goal *by the end of the first month of registration*.

Such strong support blows us away, and promises great synergy for our retreat.

Is there room for more? You bet! We haven't filled up Bishop's Lodge yet but we're heading in that direction. Eve Gaddy has volunteered to coordinate roommates. Contact her at egaddy@cox-internet.com with your preferences (smoker/nonsmoker, arrival/departure, number of roommates preferred, etc.). Put "Ninc" or "roommate" in the subject line. If we do fill up the Lodge's one hundred and ten rooms, there are other hotels in Santa Fe to handle the overflow. Of course, we have no contract with them so expenses may be higher.

Daisy Maryles to join us! *Publisher's Weekly* Executive Editor and "Behind the Bestsellers" columnist Daisy Maryles will be another of our special guests. Daisy has long been a champion of popular fiction and we look forward to hearing her take on the current fiction landscape. Another honored attendee will be Bear Heart, elder and medicine man of the Muskogee Nation, Creek Tribe. He has agreed to offer a special blessing for our retreat.

Want to volunteer? We're starting to put together our volunteer needs. If you'd like to help with some facet of the retreat, e-mail us at registration@ninc.com.

Don't forget: Tuesday afternoon of the retreat will be free time to provide you with the opportunity to do some exploring of both soul and country. New Mexico is

a feast for the senses. You may want to use this time for writing, a massage, shopping, or to do some sight seeing. We are offering arranged tours to the pueblos, Georgia O'Keefe's hideaway, the holy site of Chimayo, and a walking tour of historic Santa Fe. Detailed information on these tours is posted at www.ninc.com or you can e-mail me at revitalize@ninc.com and I'll fax or mail the info to you.

Again, thank you, Ninc, for your support.

— **Cathy Maxwell, Retreat Coordinator**

Joining Us in Santa Fe? Sign Up for Tuesday, March 9 Optional Tours Registration

Please use this separate registration form for these tours and note the deadline of **February 16**, when the registration must be **received**. Make checks payable to **Novelists Inc** and mail to: **Laura Baker, 12301 Cedar Ridge Dr. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112**. Contact Laura with any questions: registration@ninc.com.

Name:

Address:

E-mail

Phone

Tour:

Bandelier National Monument \$65

Abiquiu Afternoon \$65

High Road to Chimayo \$45

**Walking Tour of the
Santa Fe Historic District** \$10

Please note: We have a cancellation deadline with Cynthia, which is based on a minimum number of people registering for each tour. Your check will be returned to you if we must cancel a tour and, hopefully, you can reschedule for another.



Sticky Notes from the Edge

— Cheryl Anne Porter

Writer's Blog

(Blog: A shortform for weblog. An annoying daily diary. Also spelled "glob" by dyslexics)

Because the world is a very safe place populated by very sane people, we should all feel free to expose, online, our every thought, deed, and action. Yes, thanks to the Internet, the quote "Anyone can write a book...and usually does" can now be amended to "Anyone who can type can blog...and usually does"—much to the outright fright, wincing disgust, or rank boredom of the rest of us who keep reading these things. That said, I submit to you excerpts from my blog:

Feb. 6: It sure is hot in Florida in the winter.

Feb. 17: It sure is hot in Florida in the winter.

Mar. 22: It sure is hot in Florida in the spring.

Mar 28: Today I changed my outside hiding place for my house key. I bought a thing called Hide-A-Key (it says so on the front of it), put the key inside it (Duh!) and hid it under the only terra cotta pot in the flower bed to the right of the front door.

Mar 31: I'm going to the doctor today at 1:30 about that sharp pain I get in my right eye whenever I drink a cup of hot tea. I'll be gone about three hours. As no one else will be home, either, I'm leaving a note taped to the front door for the deliveryman from the ant-farm supply store, telling him if no one answers the bell, he is to leave the ants and the dirt on the porch.

Apr 1: Yesterday, my house was burgled while I was at the doctor's! They took a bunch of stuff—even my ant farm supplies! I'm just thankful I wasn't here when they broke in. Well, they didn't actually break in. They used

the key I keep under the flowerpot. How could they know it was there?! Scary.

The doctor said I shouldn't have any more pain in my eye if I take the spoon out of my teacup before I drink from it. Happy April Fool's Day, everyone!

Apr 15: I didn't have any thoughts today and nothing happened. Except for when the IRS called. As I was busy writing this entry, I hung up on them.

If it's important, they'll call back.

May 4: My son Timmy's school called today. He's the only boy in Miss Spinster's third-grade class—room 232 at Ignorant Elementary on Third and Vine—who has red hair, blue eyes, and freckles. Easy to spot! Anyway, they asked if I would help chaperone his class's field trip to the city zoo tomorrow. I told them I would, except for one thing: I didn't want to.

Jun 18: The IRS called back.

Jun 24: It sure is hot in Florida in the summer. Especially in prison. Here's a surprise: The guy in the next cell (arrested for home burglaries) used to be a deliveryman for the very ant-farm supply store I used! It's such a small world, y'all.

The author would have you know that nothing bad happened to little Timmy because of his mother's idiocy. In fact, he now happily lives with his grandparents down on the farm, where he got head lice and promptly infected the entire dairy herd. His grandpa affectionately calls him "the little bastard."

Bits'n'Pieces

MORE USED BOOKS...An article in the *Boston Globe* pointed up the fact that the used-book world is now full of people who started buying and selling used books via the I'net as a hobby—and now some of them ship 100–200 books/day. According to Bob Ticehurst (who sells primarily through Amazon, as well as his own site), "It's crazy. The past six weeks have been the best I've had, and this should be the slow time of year. It's been like Christmas." However

used-book stores with 200,000 volumes and no web presence have done just fine this summer, too. Why? Possibly because the line between "used" and "bargain" books is collapsing and, as Ticehurst says, "Bookstores that are about to return unsold books to publishers call him to come and have a look." Is that a Queer Eye for the Straight Guy in all of us, or what?

— TdR



Family vs. Work: Can We Talk?

Dear Annette:

I feel guilty. It's my family. When I'm deep in the throes of my latest WIP, I feel like I'm ignoring them... and part of me wants to. There are times when I have a terribly hard time tearing myself away from writing to be a spouse and mother, especially when I feel like all we do is argue. My family says they respect my work, and they certainly appreciate the income, but at the same time my husband and kids send out enough barbed comments to let me know they think I spend way too much time writing. I feel like I'm begin torn in two.

Call Me Crazy

Dear Crazy:

Let me get this right. You find yourself escaping from family tensions back into a fantasy world where people (most of the time) are under your control. A place where you feel the excitement of doing something you're good at, something with a finite end (uh, unlike parenting or laundry). You don't sound crazy to me. You sound human.

And I think there are two issues here. The first is you're having trouble disengaging from your fantasy life. This is not a bad thing for a writer, but it does make real life a little challenging, huh? That topic could fill a couple columns before we're through, though, so I'm going to duck that part today and move onto the second thing I sense in your letter because, well, it's right up my alley.

Family tension. If the tension eased, you'd feel less need to escape into your work, right?

You mentioned squabbling. I've found that the single most difficult thing for us to do is to communicate clearly and succinctly what we actually mean.

Voicing our thoughts, our wishes and desires is risky.

We could get laughed at. We could get turned down or rejected.

Instead, we pick fights. It's amazing. I've seen people pick fights about whose turn it is to take out the garbage, when what they really want to say is, "I'm scared that we're drifting apart."

Fortunately, big, wonderful things begin to happen when people start communicating clearly.

I'm wondering if clearing the air with your husband and kids might not go along way toward making everybody feel better. And at least if they don't feel better, they'll feel listened to, and that's a huge deal. Really.

You mentioned that you think your family believes you spend too much time writing. Have you asked them?

The answer could certainly be yes. But it could also be a lot of other things. Things you very likely can solve, like, "You know, Mom, I feel like your writing is more important than me," or, "I'm afraid you're getting bored with me."

I haven't run into many problems that couldn't be fixed once they were talked out.

Let's say you buy my ideas here. What now?

First, you're going to have to nudge the family toward creating an atmosphere that encourages clear communication, and you're going to have to model it yourself.

A few suggestions for how to start.

1. Take a long, deep breath and state *your* concerns clearly. And, yes, use the "I" word. No matter how gag-inducing it sounds, that old therapy-speak psychobabble about using "I" statements really does work.

2. Stay on message and on topic. If you're angry about the dinner dishes in the sink, don't digress about how no one ever cleans up anything around here *and I'm sick of it*.

3. Pick a time to talk about conflicts. When we're angry, most of us want to talk about it immediately. It's often more productive to give the other person an opportunity to mull the issue over for awhile before you talk.

My next few suggestions are simple things that enhance the atmosphere at home and create a safer atmosphere for people to take the risk of truly communicating.

1. Praise something today. (This works exceedingly well on spouses, boyfriends, and editors as well). You can criticize and whine about the negative all you want, but if you don't praise the positive, you won't see much of it.

2. Say something complimentary. I mean about who the person is, not what they've done. When was the last time you told your child you couldn't wait to see them after school, or called your spouse at work just to say you missed him?

Tiny things go a long way toward creating an atmosphere where people feel more valued and freer to air their concerns. Then those same people find they're getting more of their needs met, and the writer in the family doesn't have to feel so guilty about shutting the office door and scouring the Internet for a new Aragorn screensaver before finishing chapter five.

Annette Carney, Ph.D.

You can "Ask Annette," in strict confidence, at one of these contacts: e-mail: annetecarney@sbcglobal.net, fax: 775-746-4560; phone: 775-323-0445.



The War of Art: *Break through the Blocks and Win* *Your Inner Creative Battles*

REVIEWED BY LAUREN BACH

THE WAR OF ART: BREAK THROUGH THE BLOCKS AND WIN YOUR INNER CREATIVE BATTLES

by Steven Pressfield
Paperback; Warner Books; (April 2003)
ISBN: 0446691437

Gush alert and disclaimer: I flat-out loved this book. And I'm not trained, qualified, or licensed to write reviews. So absolutely no attempt was made to be objective.

Bits'n'Pieces

PIRATING OF A NEGLECTED CHILDREN'S CLASSIC...

...was halted by a *The Economist* reviewer who read *The Great and Terrible Quest* originally written by Margaret Lovett and published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1967. The book was republished without permission in 1998 by Sonlight Curriculum, an obscure Colorado-based publisher that, according to *The Economist* (August 28, 2003), "specializes in providing teaching materials for missionaries wanting to educate their children at home, principally by providing them with cheap editions of improving works of literature." It took the reviewer little effort to find Lovett, who was born in 1910 and is still alive. After repeated prompting by the reviewer (and provision of the author's address, which Sonlight apparently didn't look for as the reviewer had no difficulty finding it) Sonlight, according to the article, "did the right thing." In a press release published in August, Sonlight—which had suspended publication once found out—is once again publishing *The Great and Terrible Quest*. Per *The Economist*, an amicable "retrospective agreement" has been reached with Lovett and a check for \$4,530.04—royalties on the 7,588 copies Sonlight sold—was paid to the author. So those reviewers we love to hate? They're on our side. Really!

— TdR

In *The War of Art*, bestselling novelist Steven Pressfield (*Last of the Amazons*, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*) deftly takes on the subject of internal obstacles: the fuzzy intangible stuff we lay in our own path. The blocks, excuses, and bad habits that stifle our creativity and ultimately our success. Pressfield calls these obstacles *Resistance* and describes it best in the introductory pages:

"Most of us have two lives. The life we live, and the un-lived life within us. Between the two stands Resistance."

In the foreword, Robert McKee (yeah, *that* Robert McKee) claims *The War of Art* was written expressly for him. I disagree. And if you've ever put something off until later, but never quite came back to it...if you've ever experienced the phenomenon of the butt resisting the chair...or known the vague feeling that, damn it, you're capable of better...then you may disagree too.

The War of Art has an unconventional layout, which seems to suit the subject. There is no table of content; no index. After the foreword, there are a few unnumbered introductory pages.

The main text is divided into three books. Within each book are topics ranging anywhere from four sentences to five pages. Most topics are a single page. All are thought-provoking and written in a candid style.

Book One is entitled: RESISTANCE—DEFINING THE ENEMY. It starts with a list of activities that generally elicit resistance. Writing, diet, exercise, activities requiring courage and commitment, are a few. Subsequent pages list the characteristics of resistance and how it keeps us from doing our work.

In Book Two, COMBATING RESISTANCE—TURNING PRO, Pressfield expands on the difference between being an amateur and being a professional.

"To the amateur, the game is his avocation. To the pro, it's his vocation."

Pressfield further elaborates on "the qualities that define us as professionals:

"We show up every day...We show up no matter what...

"We are committed over the long haul...We accept remuneration for our labor...We do not over-identify with

our jobs...We master the technique of our jobs...We have a sense of humor about our jobs...

We receive praise or blame in the real world..."

Book Three, BEYOND RESISTANCE—HIGHER REALM, explores the abstract:

"...those invisible psychic forces that support and sustain us in the journey toward ourselves."

Here Pressfield writes of gods, muses, and angels as allies, asserting that the ultimate source of creativity is divine. In the foreword, McKee states that while he sees some points in Book Three differently from Pressfield, other readers will find this section "profoundly moving." That would be me. I found Pressfield's views in Book Three to be dead-on. But hey, I found the whole bloody book brilliant!

The War of Art challenged me to rise above the mundane, the excuses, the whining. To act, to produce, to be a professional. And to seek a higher level of excellence, competing only with myself.

The final topic, "The Artist's Life," summed it up perfectly:

"...In the end the question can only be answered by action. Do it or don't do it...Creative work is not a selfish act or a bid for attention on the part of the actor. It's a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you've got."

Wow. When I finished *The War of Art* the first time, over half the pages were dog-eared, I had scribbles in the margins, and sticky-notes out the ying-yang. And I couldn't wait to begin reading again with my yellow highlighter in hand.

My criterion for great nonfiction is simple: the book should not be easy to set aside. It should raise questions that make me stop and reflect. *The War of Art* did this and more. If you've read this far, it should be no surprise to learn I highly recommend this book.

The War of Art is also available in hardcover as follows:

THE WAR OF ART: WINNING THE INNER CREATIVE BATTLE
by Steven Pressfield
Hardcover; Rugged Land; (May 2002)
ISBN: 1590710037

Lauren Bach (Slow Hands, Warner Books) writes contemporary romantic suspense. Her first novel, Lone Rider, won the Holt Medallion. Currently, she's working on three books for Kensington. She hates chocolate and fuzzy intangible stuff.

INTRODUCING.....

The following authors have applied for membership in Ninc and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc:

New Applicants:

Wendy Bores (*Wendy Lindstrom*), Allegany NY
Monica Caltabiano (*Monica McLean*),
Maple Grove MN
Cindy Dees, Azle TX
Jane Graves (*Jane Sullivan*), Richardson TX
Alison Hentges (*Georgina Devon*), Tucson AZ
Cindy Holby (*Colby Hodge*), Winston Salem NC
Brenda Novak, Fair Oaks CA
Ann Voss Peterson, Middleton WI
Karen Whiddon, N Richland Hills TX
Rhonda Woodward, Phoenix AZ

New Members:

Susan Grant, Rocklin CA
Susan McBride, Brentwood MO
Cynthia Rutledge, Lincoln NE

Ninc has room to grow...recommend membership to *your* colleagues. Prospective members may apply online at www.ninc.com.

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Moderators: If You Have Questions, E-Mail:

Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrendaHB@aol.com
Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@attbi.com



BY LAWRENCE
WATT-EVANS

There is a famous saying among horror fans—I first encountered it credited to writer and anthologist Douglas Winter, but I don't know if he originated it—to the effect that horror isn't a genre, it's an emotion. The theory is that a horror story doesn't need a particular setting or style or plot. It can be supernatural, science fiction, a mystery, a fantasy, or something else entirely, as long as it's scary.

I used to think that was pretty insightful, but then I realized that a lot of horror *isn't* actually scary. It's not that the author tried to be scary and failed, it's that "being scary" isn't always what horror is about.

But it *is* always about fear. It's just that it may be approaching it in ways other than trying to induce fear in the reader. Sometimes it's just looking at how the characters cope with their fears, or it's exploring the nature of fear, of why we're afraid of what we're afraid of, or it's doing something else entirely.

But it's all about fear. I'm sure of that.

And that's why some people can't stand it, while others crave it. It's all in how we react to fear. It's not that horror fans are sick or bloodthirsty, or that non-fans are wimpy; it's that horror readers are fascinated by fear, and horror non-readers aren't. To cite a somewhat shopworn analogy, some people like roller coasters, while others are terrified, nauseated, or bored by them.

The difference is that nobody thinks roller coaster fans are sick.

I always liked horror stories, but my father didn't, so as a kid I didn't read much horror, didn't go to horror movies, didn't watch them on TV—Dad bought most of the books, there wasn't a theater in town, and our one TV was shared by all eight of us, so I was usually outvoted. Horror comics were driven off the market when I was still in diapers, and I never found the magazines.

When I did finally start really getting into horror as a teenager, I loved it, pretty much right from the start—and that's when it began to sink in that not only did some people not enjoy reading horror themselves, they thought that people who *did* like it had something wrong with them.

I can sort of see their point; after all, these are stories about murder, torture, dismemberment, cannibalism,

Fear Factor

and the like. How can reading about stuff like that be *fun*?

Well, because that's not what horror stories are actually about, and the fun isn't in the ghastly things that happen, it's in the emotional reactions.

After all, mysteries generally involve murders—sometimes gruesome ones—but everyone understands that those aren't about killing, they're about solving crimes. And horror stories aren't about murder and mutilation, they're about the *fear* of murder and mutilation.

Adventure stories feature violence and danger, heroes tested to the physical limit. Horror stories feature violence and danger, people tested to the *emotional* limit.

Some people just don't *get* that. Horror fans are often seen as disreputable, degenerate, possibly dangerous, because they like to read about this stuff—about fear.

Why *do* we (some of us) like to read about fear? Is it just for cheap thrills?

Well, maybe—but it's also about *facing* fear, about courage. After all, if the monsters just run amok and kill everyone, there's not much of a story; the story is about the people who fight back against whatever is terrorizing them. And how can reading about courage be any worse than reading about love, honor, or adventure?

So I decided long ago that people who look down on horror as sick, twisted trash are missing the point, and I ignored them.

But that was when I was just *reading* the stuff.

In 1988 I started writing it.

Okay, I knew some people didn't think much of horror fans, but wow, they *really* don't like horror *writers*.

I started writing horror on a whim, really; at that point I was an established and reasonably successful writer in both fantasy and science fiction, both novels and short stories, and I wanted to continue expanding my repertoire. Horror was very big just then; Stephen King and Dean Koontz dominated the bestseller lists, slasher flicks were in all the theaters, and I decided I wanted a piece of the action.

I began with a short story called "Real Time" that was ostensibly science fiction, but took a horrific twist at the end; then I went on to a novel, *The Nightmare People*, that used ideas I'd had brewing since I was a kid but was set in 1989 and written very much in the style of '80s horror.

It was fun. It was different. I wanted to keep going.

Unfortunately, the market for horror novels crashed about the time *The Nightmare People* came out—horror lines were being cancelled right and left, and it was the next-to-last horror title Onyx ever published. So there was no second novel—but short fiction was still selling, so over the next decade I sold about three dozen horror stories. I joined HWA and got very involved with it, and even wound up getting elected president a couple of times. (Now that was scary!)

And I got to see what it's like being a horror geek.

That's what we called ourselves, in self-defense—horror geeks. The common wisdom in HWA was that if you took offense at the term you weren't cut out to write horror, because you'd inevitably get called a lot worse. You might as well take pride in it.

So we did. For a time, as the horror market came crashing down around us and the “splatter” craze of the 1980s got blamed for every form of moral degeneracy from illiteracy to serial killers, the core membership of HWA became a close social group, hanging out together online and gathering in person at a handful of conventions, sharing stories about the abuse we got from outsiders.

All writers get asked silly questions, but the questions I got as a horror writer were different.

“How do you *think* about this stuff? I mean, doesn't it make you sick?”

“So have you ever wanted to be a serial killer yourself? Have you ever tried to kill anyone?”

“Were you abused as a kid? Is that how you come up with this? It's all working out the anger, right?” (I had a lovely childhood, thanks; there's no anger to work out.)

“Don't you worry that you'll go to Hell for writing this stuff?” (Yes, really, I got asked that.)

“So do you believe in vampires?” (Well, that one's not really any stupider than some of the stuff SF and fantasy writers get—“Do you believe in UFOs?” “Do you believe in fairies?”)

There really did seem to be an assumption that there had to be something *wrong* with you if you wrote horror stories, but actually, I'd say that on average, the horror writers I knew were a lot more sane, normal, and sensible than the science fiction writers. We were a pretty cheerful lot—maybe we really did work out our anxieties on the page.

There were a few people in and around HWA who were a bit creepy—I got to see some stories, either unpublished or in amateur publications, that were genuinely disturbing. Generally, though, these were people on the fringe; they couldn't get published professionally. Most of the people in HWA just wanted to tell weird stories and get paid for it.

You'll notice that I'm using the past tense; that's because I stopped writing horror in 1997, and left the horror community. When my two years as president of HWA ended late in 1996 I needed a break from the organization; I'd intended it to be temporary, but instead

I seem to have drifted away permanently.

And I stopped writing horror because I just didn't have anything left to say on the subject of fear.

I realized, somewhere in there, that while I wasn't working through any childhood memories, I *was* using my horror stories to help me cope with frightening events, both good and bad. Both my parents and one of my sisters died in the period from 1980 through 1990, my kids were born in the '80s and I had all the normal parental fears about terrible things that might happen to them, our house burned down in 1980, my sister went through an ugly divorce and used me as a sympathetic ear, I had surgery in 1993 and 1994—there were a lot of scary things in my life for awhile, and writing horror stories helped me cope with them.

Sometimes the link was direct—the news of my mother's death led directly to a short story called “Stab,” for example, written in a single sitting, in a white-hot rush. It didn't have any obvious connection, it wasn't about losing a parent, I can't explain why I needed to write it then, but I did. Other times I wasn't aware of a story having anything to do with events in my life, but on some level they all probably did.

And by 1997 I had apparently worked my way through it all. My life's been pretty calm in recent years. My last horror story, “The Note Beside the Body,” came to me all at once one afternoon in '97, and I somehow knew it was the last, at least for awhile.

I have a few stories I never finished, and maybe I'll go back to them eventually—one story involving a little girl's ghost got abandoned when my own little girl was hospitalized, for example; that was getting too close to home to be fun. I never came up with a good ending for one called “Hazmat.” A piece called “Slash” got too creepy even for me, and was put aside. Maybe I'll want to write those, or new ones, eventually.

For now, though, I'm all done being a horror geek. I'm not ashamed of it, certainly; I think I wrote some very good horror stories. (One of them, “Grandpa's Head,” is being taught in freshman English classes at a couple of colleges, so I must have done *something* right.) I've just had enough.

And I did get tired of the wary attitudes and strange questions. It was bad enough getting them myself, but my family got them, too.

Fortunately, they knew I was harmless. I once overheard someone ask my wife, “Doesn't it scare you, living with someone who writes about stuff like that? Don't you worry about what he might do, about how he comes up with these things?”

She answered cheerfully, “No, I don't worry.”

But then she paused and said, “I do *wonder* sometimes, though...”

Then she laughed. **NINK**



The Care and Feeding of the Girls in the Basement

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Roberta's Rules For Better Living

One of the “girls” in the basement is Roberta. She is a pigeon-bosomed African-American woman with slim, straight legs and moderate habits. It was she who insisted I begin this series by talking about the most important subject of all: the bodies that house us. She insisted I write first about eating right, getting enough sleep, and taking what used to be called a daily constitutional—a walk.

Now, it's not particularly exciting stuff. One of the other girls in the basement, Hilary, the radical teenager with piercings and too many boyfriends, sat on her rumpled bed in her tight tank top and roared, falling over, laughing in exaggerated helplessness over the idea. “Writers who take care of themselves! Tell me another one!”

Both Roberta and Hilary are right. Writers are not exactly known for their attention to health habits. Commercial fiction writers don't seem to buy into the hard-drinking, hard-living Faulkner-Hemingway model; in fact, I've noticed how little most of us even drink. Our intemperance arrives in more insidious ways—we abuse sugar or caffeine or nicotine or chocolate, or we deprive ourselves of sleep in pursuit of hard writing goals. We don't sleep enough, we eat all the wrong things, and few of us get enough exercise. We tend toward excessiveness and are prone to burning the candle at both ends, fueling the flame with sugar, caffeine, nicotine, salt—whatever it takes to get the job done.

Including me. Hello, my name is Barbara and I'm a caffeine and sugar junkie. I'm also a nicotine addict, off and on.

But as I said in the first article, I was blessed with a family that nourished creativity. One of the cornerstones of it all was a mother who was ahead of her times

nutritionally, and a grandmother who insisted it was shocking for a person to drive when she could walk.

EAT

There is a picture of my mother at 12, taken outside in a hot Texas sun, so she's frowning at the camera, and the planes of her cheekbones and strong square jaw are washed into blurriness, exaggerating her slight, preadolescent plumpness.

Although a photo from five years later shows how that roundness translated into voluptuous loveliness fit for pin-ups the world around, she never forgot how it felt to be a little overweight, and as a result, she was determined that none of her children should suffer in such a way. It's not that she starved us—though my sister insists she truly did—it's just that eating right was her cause. I can remember coming home from school, famished because the lunch offering had been something disgusting, and my mother would say, “Have an orange. We'll eat supper soon.” Which was at least better than “Have a piece of bread,” which is what she said if she happened to be out of fruit.

That might have gotten my taste buds watering during the Great Depression, but this was the '70s. The World O'Cereal was Sugar Pops, Sugar Crisps, Count Chocula, and Lucky Charms. My mother served hot cereal: MaltoMeal, oatmeal, Cream of Wheat (which I still will not touch with a ten-foot pole, unless it is served disguised as grits), so we'd have something hearty in our bellies as we went off to face the world. After years—and I do mean *years*—of agitating as a group, the four of us managed to get her to buy some cold cereal. She would buy Cheerios or Life.

I rib my mother about it, but the truth is, we were not at all deprived. We ate plenty at meals, in great variety. My mother was, and still is, a champion baker (she wins prizes at the state fair every year) and she loves to bake, so there were often lovely desserts, and we were allowed to

have them in small portions once or twice a week. My grandmother loves sweet rolls, and would bring them around some summer mornings. (When I have the blues, a raised, glazed doughnut is my indulgence of choice. But only one, since two was always considered greedy.) My father worked for the Seven-Up Bottling Company for awhile, and he would sometimes bring home a six-pack of Nehi flavors for us.

But that's as far as our less-than-nutritious nibblings and sippings went, and when I moved out at 18, I spent a month gorging myself on Lucky Charms and potato chips. I guzzled Mountain Dew and didn't eat a fruit, vegetable, or piece of bread for weeks.

What I discovered was that my mother's way was better: to feel good, we have to eat right. It's the absolute cornerstone of health. I went back to Cheerios for breakfast, peaches for afternoon snacks, the odd glazed doughnut for a dessert or a Sunday morning treat.

Eating right is critical to feeling good enough to write your best work. Eating for health is different (but only slightly) than eating to control weight, which is what food seems to be all about in America lately. Health comes in all sizes.

Let me repeat that: I'm not talking about weight. Eating for good health is not about how much or how little you eat or how much you'd like to lose weight (wouldn't we all? I mean, it's not easy to be trim when you spend your life at a keyboard), but about the food you put in your body, day in and day out, to keep it going, nourish it.

Forget fads and weird eating plans—the truth is, most of us know what a healthy diet looks like. It's well-balanced. It has many colors (the coating on M&Ms doesn't count). It's full of the freshest foods we can find, in the state as close to nature as possible. It's fairly lean and doesn't have too much of any one thing, especially empty calories. Empty calories create an emptiness in the body, and an empty body can't feed a swirling creativity. It's just that simple.

Since we are also obsessive-compulsive (see above), this is worth saying, too: Don't suddenly make a resolve to Eat Right All The Time and expect a big change. Instead, notice that when you're under deadline, you eat potato chips every hour on the hour because you're tired and hungry and can't stop writing long enough to prepare a proper meal. Maybe instead of chips, you could go for some peanuts—still salty, still fatty, but with a nutritional wallop that will deliver a lot of great chemicals to your overworked brain and body. If your abuse of choice is chocolate, keep some around, but see if you might also enjoy something like a banana dipped in Hershey's chocolate syrup, too (no fat, some fiber, vitamins, minerals, and tons of sweetness for that sugar jones). Respect your habits and realize there are reasons you do what you do, and just make teeny little changes to see if you can give yourself more nutrition. Our bodies tell us

what they want, but it's the job of the brain to interpret that craving for a particular thing into a healthier alternative.

SLEEP

I am the world's champion sleeper. Now, this is something like a great metabolism—you're born with it or not, and I do recognize that it's a tremendous blessing. I love sleeping. I can sleep through anything, too—car horns honking, trains rumbling by across the street, cats sharing the pillow. When my boys were babies, my then-husband would fetch them from their beds to nurse because I never heard them cry (poor dears).

But I was also raised in a world where sleep was placed at a high premium. For optimum health and productivity, one simply had to keep regular hours. To bed by ten (now eleven), up by six (now seven). Perhaps a little nap in the afternoon to freshen the mind and the complexion for the evening hours. There are estimates that sleep deprivation is one of the greatest crises facing the modern world. Nobody is sleeping enough.

If you're sleeping six hours a night or less, you're in the sleep-deprived category. I don't care if you've done it all your life and are doing just fine. It's not enough sleep for the human body. Healing takes place during sleep. Healing for the body and the mind and the amorphous part of us that carries our wounds and joys—the spirit.

If you are in that sleep-deprived category, here's an experiment: try going to bed one hour earlier every night for one week. Try to make it at the same time as much as possible, as well. It doesn't matter whether that time is 7 p.m. or midnight or 4 a.m. (as with food, you have to respect your natural patterns), but the body functions best on regular hours. At the beginning of the week, note your attitude upon awaking. Just a word or two will do: "alert and cheerful" or "cranky and achy."

You might be so sleep deprived that you'll have to add another hour after that first week. It's too much to ask anyone to change their habits as dramatically as adding two hours right away, so be respectful of yourself and try the one hour experiment.

I know, I know. If you go to bed early, something is going to go undone for the day. Oh, well. The truth is, if you are well rested, you'll tend to things with more efficiency and you'll find yourself getting more done in coming weeks. You'll figure out little leaps in your plot more quickly. You'll waste less time meandering through the house, wondering why you got up from the computer and what you're doing in your bedroom.

And getting enough sleep gives you something else: studies have shown that sufficient rest helps regulate the metabolism. You're also far less likely to reach for a sugary/caloric rush to keep you going if you have enough energy because you had a good night's sleep.





A DAILY CONSTITUTIONAL

The final cornerstone in Roberta's triad of moderation is exercise. Again, I hear the slight, annoyed sighs. We all know we are supposed

to eat right, and sleep, and get some exercise, but the exercise brigade in America is still focusing too much on the weight-loss angle of it, and it seems like such an insurmountable thing to do—go to the gym or go buy some weights or find a class. Ugh! Who has time? Who has the energy? And the hopeless feeling comes in—oh, it won't do any good anyway. Why bother?

Forget all that. Forget the weight control aspects. Forget the heart disease that's looming. Forget all of it. I don't care about that right now. I care about helping writers feel healthy and energized so they can write more books so I have enough to read.

My grandmother is a walker. It was never a big health issue or a big discussion point, she just walks as a matter of course because it feels good and keeps you going. Why drive to the post office (one and a half miles) when the day is fine and you can get a nice walk in? Why drive to our house (two miles, one way) when the air is fresh and you need a little stretch?

Over and over and over again lately, the news is very good on walking. It helps lower the risk of nearly every disease. It helps keep the metabolism working correctly. It's easy and nearly anyone at any fitness level can do it. Even 15 minutes a day has been shown to dramatically decrease depression, elevate clarity of thinking, and improve health.

Fifteen minutes walking, outside if you can, or inside a mall or on a treadmill if the weather's awful, is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your muses. It gives you a break from sitting. Gives your girls a chance to gather some details. It stretches out muscles that get too tight from sitting in one position all day long, clears away the cobwebs that collect from our quiet, internal work. It also helps strengthen

the abdominal and lower back muscles, a danger point for many writers, and helps regulate the flow of chemicals like serotonin for the huge numbers of us who have become acquainted at one time or another with antidepressants. It helps prevent phlebitis, helps move excessive water from our systems, makes our lungs work more efficiently so more oxygen is flowing into our brains.

I've been a walker for a lot of years, and I notice acutely when I stop for any length of time. My mood grows darker, I'm less able to tolerate frustration, and I feel restless and don't sleep as well. I've also noticed that any problem, carried along in my pocket as I amble beside the Arkansas River, tends to feel a lot less dramatic and more manageable as I walk. It is the thing I would most like to see more people doing. Just taking a simple "constitutional" every day. If you're not doing this for yourself already, I hope you'll give it a try.

So there are Roberta's Rules for Better Living. Eat more calories that are nutritious and try to leave some of the empty ones alone. Get an extra hour of sleep every night. Take a walk every day, even a short one.

Your body will thank you. And so will The Girls. **NINK**

Bits'n'Pieces

BOOKEXPO SPEAKER CALL...

BookExpo is inviting proposals for authors and speakers for the whole roster of breakfasts, luncheons, buzz forums, and educational sessions for next June's convention in Chicago. For educational programming, e-mail to Mark Dressler at mhdressler@chartermi.net; for all other sessions and events, e-mail to Tina Jordan at tjordan@reedexpo.com. The deadline is December 19.

— TdR

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