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# NINK

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

## COPY EDITING with the RIGHT TOUCH

BY PAT MCLAUGHLIN

*We all have them, but we never see them. What are they?  
No, not bed mites.  
Copy editors.*

A feature-writing instructor posed that riddle to my graduate journalism class mumble-mumble years ago. It's not much of a riddle, and it's not accurate for most newsrooms, where reporters and editors mingle. But does it fit what happens with our books?

Let's see...someone whose name we never know receives our manuscript in an undisclosed location and writes all over it, never to hear our howls of outrage.

Surely there's more than that to copy editing? For a closer look, I talked to publishing pros involved with copy editing.

But first, a disclosure: I am an editor. Have been for many of the mumble-mumble years since that graduate journalism course. I continue to edit part-time for the *Washington Post*.

When I was full-time I was often asked to train newcomers.

Here's what I told those trainees a copy editor should be:

**Selfless** - Aim for perfection with no right of proprietorship to that work.

**A chameleon** - Make necessary changes appear seamless by putting aside personal style in order to work within this story's voice and within this writer's voice. (Then switch for the next story and the next writer.)

**Objective** - Recognize that grammar rules are tools, not the stuff that holds the universe together. And, in the end, all ties go to the writer.

**A cold eye** - Read the work outside the heat of creation; detach from the work, as the writer never truly can.

**The reader's champion** - Constantly ask if this is going to be clear to the reader.

**A challenger** - Cover the writer's back by checking each fact.

"What a good copy editor is doing should be an extension of what you're doing if you had time. An extension of what you're thinking," said Bob Castillo, Managing Editor of Warner Books in New York.

"It's amazing what a good copy editor can find," said Fiorella deLima, who was Manager of Production-Editorial at Tor Books before becoming Production Manager at Reed Press "It's a way of looking at the (manuscript) without actually reading it, and then reading it and still finding more."

### What Goes Wrong?

But wait. This sounds like Utopia, yet this article grew out of a discussion on NINCLINK of authors' tales of copy-editing woe. Of words edited to correct the Spanish spelling...except the author was using Italian. Of contractions changed in dialogue, altering characters' voices. Of phrases moved and word-choices replaced with no regard to rhythm or reason. Of regional terms and facts challenged or simply changed. Of—No, I won't go on. Because it seems every author has a similar tale. Take this moment to fill in your own.

So, what goes wrong with copy editing?

That's easy. All of the above.

Continued on page 5 ▶ ▶ ▶

**INSIDE:** *President's Voice: A Remarkable Fellowship...2, Letters to NINK...3, 4, Breaking News...4, Bits...8, 10, 12, Rayguns, Elves/The Machines are Taking Over...9, Ask Annette: Death by Deadline...11, Introducing: New Applicants...12, Girls in the Basement: The Telescope of Travel...13, Sticky Notes: Pithy Statements...16*

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"Deepest condolences to Cathy Maxwell and her children on the loss of husband and father Kevin Maxwell. Cathy has long been a valued and active member of Ninc and, as 2004 conference coordinator, has poured countless hours of hard work into making the Santa Fe retreat a remarkable experience. Our thoughts, prayers, and love go out to the Maxwell family in this time of great sorrow."

## The President's Voice

# A Remarkable Fellowship

*This column is dedicated to Cathy Maxwell, comrade extraordinaire, who took the seedling that was this retreat idea and nurtured it into full and glorious bloom. You are much in our thoughts, dear friend.*

In the spirit of our retreat, where we hope to tap the wisdom across a spectrum of experienced writers and those whose passion is restoring the spirit, I'd like to share some thoughts gleaned from a book of essays by novelists called *Why I Write*:

A novel is the greatest act of passion and intellect, carpentry and largess, that a human being can pull off in one lifetime...Stories are the vessels I use to interpret the world to myself. I am often called a "storyteller" by flippant and unadmiring critics. I revel in the title. I bathe in the lotions and unguents of that sweet word.  
— Pat Conroy

We write fiction, I think, for very nearly the same reasons that we read it: to sharpen our senses and to regenerate those dead or dying places and parts within us where the imagination has been lost or is trying to be lost.

...I believe fiction can heal things, and I think we would all agree, now more than ever, that we can use some healing, and that we need it daily. — Rick Bass

Writing is also my addiction, for the moment when I am writing fiction is that moment when I am most intensely alive...Especially during the prewriting phase, when I am simply making up the story and imagining its characters, and during the first couple of drafts, I feel a dangerous, exhilarating sense that anything can happen.

It reminds me of a woman I interviewed in eastern Kentucky several years ago when I was writing a novel about serpent-handling believers. An hour earlier, I had seen her lift a double handful of copperheads high in the air during a religious service. I asked the obvious: "Why do you do this, when it's so dangerous? You could die any time." She merely smiled at me, a beautiful, generous smile without a trace of irony. "Honey," she began, "I do it out of an intense desire for holiness." She smiled at me again while that sank in. "And I'll tell you something else, too. When you've held the serpent in your hands, the whole world kind of takes on an edge for you."  
— Lee Smith

The best metaphor I know of for being a fiction writer is in Don DeLillo's *Mao II*, where he describes a book-in-progress as a kind of hideously damaged

infant that follows the writer around, forever crawling after the writer (dragging itself across the floors of restaurants where the writer's trying to eat, appearing at the foot of the bed first thing in the morning, etc.), hideously defective, hydrocephalic and noseless and flipper-armed and incontinent and retarded and dribbling cerebro-spinal fluid out of its mouth as it mewls and blurbles and cries out to the writer, wanting love, wanting the very thing its hideousness guarantees it'll get: the writer's complete attention.

—David Foster Wallace

I always experience a mild depression whenever I type up what I have written. This act seems redundant. The work has already been done. I adore the praise of the public, no mistake. But the primary motive must be unpublic. Much more, I'd guess, the inner journey of the imagination itself. There is the ecstasy. The rest is simply good. Some money, a little fame. Not to be rolled over like scuttling claws by the sands of time. Et cetera.

—Barry Hannah

You discover a tricky thing about fiction writing: a certain amount of vanity is necessary to be able to do it at all, but any vanity above that certain amount is lethal.

—David Foster Wallace

This writing stuff saved me...Writing is my shelter. I don't hide behind the words; I use them to dig inside my heart to find the truth.

—Terry McMillan

I do not mean to say there is no suffering; everyone knows about that. There is suffering in every life. There is more, perhaps, when it is your business to see it. But there can also be great beauty. If that's the way you want to play

the cards, all of the struggle and loneliness of the job can be made into joy. We chose this, after all, we write because we wanted to do it more than anything else, and even when we hate it, there is nothing better.

—Ann Patchett

We all understand about doubt and suffering, about vanity both inflated and crushed, about how stories haunt us and taunt us and generally make life hell at least once (once, that is, only if we're exceedingly lucky) during the writing of each one.

But we also know the exquisite terror and exhilaration of standing on the edge of the cliff, of live serpents squirming in our fingers while we try to hang on. Try to keep the faith.

We commit acts of passion every day. We dig beneath the surface of ordinary life to find and share with others the gems we uncover. To inspire, to soothe, to excite, to puzzle...to grant the succor of escape to a weary world.

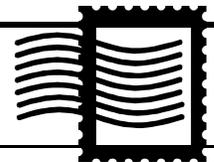
And as writers of commercial fiction, we find our artist's souls often in mortal danger from the business realities under which we must—and have chosen to—operate. It's an uneasy dance on the gleaming edge of a sword, and no one understands that terrifying tango but another writer. That's why Ninc exists.

Our retreat in Santa Fe is a journey back to why we began writing, what we love about it, how we deal with the many ways in which the business can suck the juice from that once-innocent joy. It's my fondest wish that every one of you could be there with us, but for those who will not, we'll endeavor to cup our hands around the flame of gathered wisdom, protect it on the journey home, and bring it back to share among this remarkable fellowship that is Ninc.

—Jean Brashear

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## LETTERS TO NINK.....



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*Even in this online age—with Ninclink—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.*

**Yes, we want to hear from you, too, this year.**

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### Samuels & The Girls Really Cook

Never has a column struck me more than Barbara Samuel's "Cooking Up A Life." While I've always had a passion for cooking, (inherited from both grandmothers, bless their souls), I never realized that during certain parts of each novel, cooking becomes an inseparable part of the process.

At or around page 200 on my first draft, the call of the oven gets too strong to ignore and I have to start baking. Brownies, cakes, cookies, breads, you name it. The pause in the book comes at a point where I finally start to know the characters completely, and I think the cooking helps me stop to savor their secrets for a bit before I delve headlong into the final dash for the end of the book.

Now while my husband may not understand why John Mellencamp played at full blast helps me write Regency romances, at least now I can explain the manic baking in terms his engineering logic will understand. Thanks, Barbara, for making the odd life of creativity seem so . . . well, normal.

—Elizabeth Boyle

The Board of Directors voted in its January meeting to distribute a position paper to members regarding a clause being inserted by a major literary agency into publisher/author contracts which we feel could be detrimental to authors. Other writers organizations such as RWA, SFWA, and Sisters in Crime will be sending similar alerts to their members.

Additionally, we are participating in a joint effort to express our concern about this practice to the agency in question.

The position paper is printed in its entirety below and at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).

*Jean Brashear, 2004 President*

### Statement to Members

Novelists Inc. has recently learned that at least one major literary agency has inserted in publisher/author contracts negotiated by the agency a clause which we feel could be detrimental to authors.

This clause is a deviation from agency norms. It appoints the agency "as the author's sole and exclusive agent with respect to the work for the life of the copyright (and all renewals and extensions thereof) and authorizes and directs the publisher to make all payments due or to become due to the author."

It additionally states that as sole and exclusive agent, the agent is "hereby irrevocably authorized and empowered by the author to act on the author's behalf in all matters arising from and pertaining to this agreement..."

Traditionally, this clause has appointed agencies/agent as the sole and exclusive agent for the life of the agreement, not the life of the copyright.

What does it mean to the author?

It means that even if you leave that particular agent, and the rights to your book revert back to you from the publisher, you will still be obligated to pay that agent a commission for as long as the copyright lasts (copyright of a work generally lasts for the life of the author plus an additional seventy years). This includes foreign sales, movie sales, or resale of the book, even if the agency does nothing to cause that sale. It could mean you will be paying two agency commissions, which could amount to thirty percent or more. This also would apply to the author's heirs.

We have been informed that this clause is being inserted into some contracts without notification to the authors with whom the agency has established fiduciary relationships.

This situation highlights just how important it is for authors to scrutinize their contracts, particularly the agency clauses.

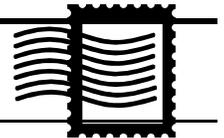
It seems particularly ironic that while many publishers are moving toward more author-friendly agreements, an agency, which should be protecting its authors, would move in the opposite direction.

We are contacting the agency at issue and requesting that they remove this clause in contracts they negotiate or, at least, that the implications be explained to their authors (that even if they leave the agency, and rights from the publisher are reverted back to the author, they must still pay this agency a commission for up to seventy years or more for resale of the book, foreign sales, movie sales, etc.)

While we want to alert our authors about the clause, we also wish to emphasize that we are not advocating action on the author's part. Every writer should have the freedom to negotiate in his or her own best interests and make their own individual determination and evaluation regarding this clause and all other provisions of contracts being negotiated. ♦

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## LETTERS TO NINK.....



### Not-Quite-Eternal Reserve, After All

I'm pleased to report a positive response to my recent *NINK* article "Eternal Reserve."

An executive from a publishing company called me to report that my article engendered some fresh thinking and some policy changes at this particular house.

Two new policies were reported to me that stand out as having lasting impact on the royalty income of all the authors who write books for this house.

The first change was a change in their standard contract eliminating contract language that entitled this house to keep a fixed reserve with no termination date. This means that this house no longer claims a contractu-

ally based right to keep a permanent fixed reserve, regardless of the size of the reserve.

The second policy change reported to me was that this house will eliminate the reserve for returns completely four years after first publication.

Properly implemented, this will eliminate practices that I believe are unfair and as a practical matter, will put more royalty income in all the authors' pockets who write for this house.

I'd like to thank *NINK* for offering a platform for my article, and I'm pleased that we can both point to what I believe is a beneficial and concrete result.

— *Ethan Ellenberg*

# Copy Editing

Cont. from p. 1 ▶▶▶

**Selfless** – Instead try to take over the book and rewrite.

**A chameleon** – Instead impose their own style, or a style different from the author's/character's.

**Objective** – Instead follow knee-jerk adherence to grammar rules without looking for a reason behind what the author did; fail to recognize their changes are gratuitous.

**A cold eye** – Instead become a passionate advocate for their changes.

**The reader's champion** – Instead back off and let through fuzzy, multi-interpretible, sometimes indecipherable language.

**A challenger** – Instead assume the author doesn't know the subject/must be wrong and make changes based on that assumption.

Before you adopt that second list as a definition of copy editing, let's hear from the copy editor's side.

First, consider that the job description calls for catching *every* error, correcting *every* goof.

"Copy editing's only noticeable when there's an error. And that single error can undo a lot of very fine work," said John Gusino, Manager of Production Editorial for Harper-Collins. He also teaches copy-editing courses.

If the copy editor is perfect, absolutely, 100 percent, pristine perfect, she is simply doing her job. Those are tough standards.

"There's a huge set of responsibilities the copy editor is responsible for," Gusino said. "While approaching (a manuscript) as a reader, copy editors also have to try to get into the author's head. How do you do that when you don't know the author?... Very often the copy editor is stuck between a rock and a hard place because you realize (the meaning of) something can go one way or another."

Copy editing is, he summed up, "The most under-appreciated aspect

of the production process."

So, why would anyone become a copy editor?

It takes a passion for the language. That was the core answer from the professionals.

"I feel like I'm fighting a rear guard action all the time," Harlequin copy editor Val Francis said with a heartfelt sigh. The topic? Lie and lay. (Francis also asked for a ruling on the punctuation in the title of this organization. Did I mention attention to detail being important?)

"It's a big game, it's a puzzle. I love it," said Stacy Guest, a freelance copy editor for NAL. "I always learn something."

**"Copy editings' only noticeable when there's an error. And that single error can undo a lot of very fine work."**

**John Gusino**

These language-loving people aren't as rare as you might think.

"It isn't really difficult to find them," Castillo said of keeping a roster of copy editors. "Most are willing to work on almost anything...A good number of them are retired full-time copy editors, production editors. It's a good thing to do from home."

Patricia Muir-Rand, Manager of Composition Services for Harlequin, said, "We have a loyal and hardworking group of freelancers, many of whom work for other publishers as well...There are many factors involved in determining an applicant's suitability. Among them is a series of copy-editing tests administered to all candi-

dates under the same conditions."

DeLima, who has experience hiring freelance copy editors as well as freelancing herself, says most copy editors have been with her for about six years. Such limited turnover doesn't leave a lot of openings.

Guest, who also works as a musician, recognized an affinity for copy editing, took a course at NYU, then queried 50 publishers before one "was willing even to give me a test. It was a fifty-page excerpt from a pharmaceutical textbook. I cried when I got it. And then I thought, *No, this is part of the test.*" Once she started getting jobs, her name was in the referral bin that many publishers draw from.

Castillo uses "mostly references, someone referred by someone else I can trust." That includes some copy-editing teachers, though a course alone on a resume is "generally not enough. I'm looking for a little wider range of training.

"You can always learn about copy editing, but when you actually do it there's a big difference."

Francis, who has been copy editing for 24 years total and the past nine full-time with Harlequin, learned by doing. She had worked in libraries and bookstores when her husband, who worked for a publisher, needed galleys read. The publisher liked her work, and asked her to copy edit for them.

"Be flexible, that's my main" rule, Francis said. "You have to remember whose book that it is. Keep that in mind all the time...You have to say to yourself: Is that wrong, or is it just because that's not how I would say it?... Not being dogmatic" is vital.

Guest has a similar take: "In my opinion, you don't set out to change things, you set out to leave as much as possible. Only change for clarity, inconsistency, and errors."

She added that, "We are told not to rewrite...We're not supposed to make the writer's writing better. We're only basically supposed to correct blatant errors, because the publisher has a reputation to

▶▶▶▶

# Copy Editing

▶▶▶▶ uphold.”

DeLima suggested copy editors who find themselves making a lot of changes should “make the phone call to the editor. Tell them, this is what I’m doing, this is what I’m finding.” And let the editor rule on whether the changes are correcting errors or altering style. Doing that can save everyone “a lot of time, save a lot of trouble.”

How does a copy editor approach your manuscript when it arrives? Several sources said some copy editors start right in marking changes, but that was not recommended.

“I just sit down and look at it,” said Francis. “I have to page it (make sure paging is right), then code it. I go through quite quickly once. Just to get the idea of the story. I really don’t want to read ahead.” There’s danger in pushing through the story too fast to find out what happens, she said. “I don’t want to do that, because I might miss some timeline problem.”

“Then, the second time through I can catch a lot of stuff. I’ll have that feeling of, *Oh, I don’t remember that from the first time.*”

The first go-through is vital to get “the whole context.”

“As you’re going through it, you don’t know the whole story, so you don’t know that so-and-so was someone’s adopted daughter...Because you didn’t know she was adopted, you didn’t know (an earlier reference) was wrong.”

Guest cites another reason for a quick overview. “The number one thing to figure out is what is the author’s style before you delve into it. If you start out correcting things and then realize it’s their style...You have to choose, is this their style or do they not know?”

The quick overview also helps Guest “figure out if there’s anything I have to look up...For settings, I pull out my maps. I check if it involves real people, streets, shop names, dates...”

Ah, yes, fact-checking. That’s where that annoying assumption that the author doesn’t know the subject can creep in, right?

“It’s not the assumption that you’re wrong,” Francis said. “It’s just the assumption that everything in there has to be checked. We don’t know if the author checked or not. And we find mistakes often enough that it’s worthwhile to check everything.”

Working in-house, Francis also edits covers, back page ads, bios, front matter and back matter as well as public relations material. So she is

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usually limited to editing books that have long deadlines. That scheduling can make it difficult for her to get the same author or books within a series, although Harlequin tries. “When we assign a manuscript to a copy editor, we give every consideration to availability, scheduling deadlines, and experience,” said Muir-Rand.

Guest said she generally gets books in a series, and often will do several books by an author.

St. Martin’s Press “absolutely” matches up authors and copy editors who have worked well together “when we can,” said Amelie Littell, Executive Managing Editor Trade Division, and a 25-year veteran of the business. But “sometimes, especially when a book is running late, which more often than not is how things seem to go, our hands are tied...But there are certain authors who can have the same copy editor for years and years and years,” she said. “When

someone works out for (an author) we try to keep that same person.”

## Rewrite-Not!

That’s a look at the ideal. But that what-goes-wrong list still exists.

Northwestern University instructor Paul Wagner trains copy editors for journalism rather than book publishing, but the former *Chicago Sun-Times* copy chief had an interesting take on seeking job applicants with a certain *absence*. “I usually would not hire anyone who indicated the main interest was writing,” he said. “I do think it’s two different skills.”

Supervisors of copy editors are well aware of the potential dangers of rewriters.

“There are copy editors who try to rewrite fiction, which is a big problem and should not happen,” said Littell. “A good copy editor should suggest changes and not just make them... A good copy editor should not rewrite sentences and change the word stone to rock.”

“That’s why I try to tell them ahead of time: Take it easy,” deLima said. “Don’t you dare change anything unless it’s wrong. If you do want to change something do it as a query.”

Then she laughed, because it doesn’t stop there. “Then, you find with proofreaders that they’re closet wannabe copy editors. Everybody wants to get into the act.”

Rewriting or extensive changes can come not only from a copy editor’s desire to be a writer, but from an excess of zeal. Castillo calls this the “most common problem.”

“I’m not that strict in terms of style and dictionary spelling,” he said. “I’m more interested in authors being able to convey what they’re saying.” But he finds some copy editors are “splitting hairs, insisting on the first spelling in Webster’s or whatever rule *Chicago (Chicago Manual of Style)* has... Basically trying to tell me or the author how much they know...But (copy editing) isn’t an instruction, it’s more of a sort of polish.”

DeLima experienced that problem at Tor with a few copy editors who were “very intellectual, and they went off on a rampage with these poor authors, to the point that we had to really ease up...It’s hard to find the balance. Give one copy editor two jobs and one author will absolutely love it and another will complain.”

Wagner finds with his students that “maybe a third come in with some of these notions...You can never, ever disabuse them of making gratuitous changes. It’s just in their blood. You have to throw up your hands and hope they do well in another part of the course.”

And hope they don’t try their hand at copy editing books.

As disruptive of a book’s rhythm as an over-stringent copy editor can be, the opposite is also a problem.

DeLima said authors complain if a copy edit is too light and misses problems. “I get it a lot—get it a *lot*,” she said. “If it’s a constant problem, I’m going to stop feeding that copy editor.”

Before it comes to that, what happens?

Castillo said he gives copy editors feedback, both to correct them and to ensure they continue “doing what they’re doing right.”

At Harlequin, “feedback is regularly given and solicited throughout the process and as a result copy editors often maintain files on editor and author preferences,” said Muir-Rand.

And then there’s the flip side.

“Sometimes you get the situation when the copy editor is one-hundred percent right and the author is pig-headed,” deLima said. “I will fight them, but in the end we let the author have his way.”

Does that make copy editors crazy? Guest says no: “I’m involved with the words. I’m not involved with the author. I have no animosity at all for the authors.”

“There are problems coming from both directions,” Littell said. “Particularly in fiction, the author’s style needs to be respected. But the author also needs to understand that things will be standardized to a

certain extent.”

Castillo sees ways for copy editors to avoid bad feelings. “It shouldn’t be an adversarial relationship, it should be more of a partnership...The query is my chance to communicate with the author. *I like that scene. I really like the way you drew in this or that, or made this reference...*To make a sort of connection with the author, so he or she knows I’m not merely going over it the way a third-grade teacher would, but that I’m a committed reader...If you establish that sort of partnership relationship at the start, generally (authors) become amenable to what you’re trying to do.”

Littell said, “Often there are hurt feelings, and a lot because of miscom-

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**John Gusino**

munication or little communication.” That can stem from both author and copy editor “and I’m stuck in the middle a lot.”

Gusino goes back to the copy editor’s intrinsic role. “Part of why it is adversarial is because of what the copy editor does...While the author has lived with this child for however long it takes to birth it, the copy editor just comes to it blindly. The copy editor doesn’t have the luxury of having it described by the agent, and the two or three versions (an editor might see)...

“It takes a really skilled person to approach something like that, and try to do all the manner of functions the copy editor is asked to do. Syntax, fact-checking, character- and story-chronology...” When the copy editor encounters a glitch, he does so “not knowing if it’s a quirk (of the author), a preference, or an inconsistency.”

“And remember, they always have the option of using the stet button,” deLima said. “I’ve seen authors get very angry when all they had to do was use that stet button.”

True. However, stetting is time consuming at best. Some authors (at least those who are also copy editors) stop at each change and chew over it, wondering if *this* is a tie that can be/should be given to the copy editor.

And how do the rare copy editors who see the manuscript again react to stets?

“I don’t mind,” Francis said. “The things that you’re doing are mostly suggestions. And if the author wants it the other way, that’s fine. Sometimes I think, *Awww, too bad*. But, no, it’s the author’s book.”

What Guest wants authors to remember is, “It’s not possible to edit your own work, and no author should get insulted. It’s a throwback to school—whenever there’s a red mark you think your grade went down. Honestly, the objective is to make the author look better than they are.”

She adds that “the authors who are most annoyed with copy editors usually don’t have that great a grasp of the language. I’ve noticed that the better authors are grateful for what the copy editors do, because it makes them look better...(With) less secure authors, it’s their baby and they don’t want one word changed.”

DeLima has another reminder for authors: “The copy editor is there for the reader. Remember where the copy editor is coming from. You’re getting an objective opinion.”

And, finally, remember the copy editor’s plight.

As Gusino said, “A reader doesn’t think when it’s perfect, *Wow, what a great job the copy editor did.*”

*Pat McLaughlin w/a Patricia McLinn has had 20 books published with Harlequin/Silhouette, with two more to be released in 2005. She is sorry to say that her most recent book, The Unexpected Wedding Guest, was not copy edited by Val Francis.*

**More ▶▶▶▶**

## What would copy editors like authors to watch?

Timelines, says Harlequin copy editor Val Francis. This is especially vital if the premise relies on a specific timeline.

She prefers when "authors are less specific rather than more. *Big gun* rather than a model number where you have to check it...When you are very specific, where you found the information might be helpful...*I checked this on such-and-such.*" However, she recognizes "that might raise a question of how much material you can send through your editor."

Amelie Littell of St. Martin's Press has two words for authors: "Plot inconsistencies."

"One of the biggest problems for me is in mysteries, but it also happens in other kinds of fiction," she says, "when there are 39 hours in one day or a murder method is described one way, then two chapters later it's something else."

For freelance copy editor Stacy Guest "the most common problem is pronouns, and you can't tell who the pronoun is. Or (authors are) using different tenses."

Authors "should know their own weaknesses," says Fiorella deLima, who supervises copy editors and freelances herself. She hopes authors will "be open to the copy editor's suggestions, not go on the defensive right away.

Treat the copy editor as someone who's working with you."

And as a practical matter, she adds, "I have authors who write a letter to the copy editor, saying watch for this, this is the mood I'm going for."

Littell agrees. "If the author has very particular reasons for using unusual spelling, or capitalization or punctuation, send along a note saying I'm capitalizing these words for this reason, or this book is set in the 1880s and I'm using this punctuation to create a flavor...A note saying, this is absolutely deliberate."

Littell also suggests that "If an author finds a copy editor that he or she is simpatico (with)...certainly tell the acquiring editor, and try to find out that name and phone number and keep it for future reference." She knows of authors who have requested and kept the same copy editor "as the author moves from company to company."

John Gusino of HarperCollins, says, "My best experiences are with an editor who transmits his or her editorial notes with the manuscript."

Warner's Bob Castillo has a simple request of authors: "Double space. Some are still working on line and a half (spacing). And can't seem to shell out for a real printer."

But overall, he's not complaining. "The way I see the job is we're really providing a service for the authors. I might tell a particular author something, but as for a general instruction for authors? Nah." **PM**

## Bits 'n' Pieces

### Meets and Greet

#### Nebraska Library Supporting Romance

Join in the joint effort between the Omaha Public Library and the Lincoln City Libraries in Nebraska to celebrate romance on April 17, 2004 (during National Library Week). The anticipated 100 avid romance readers who will attend would love to get to know Ninc members and their books. (Note: Materials will be used at the discretion of the Planning Coordinator/subject to space and suitability to Public Libraries.) Send promotional items (including books) by

March 15 to:

Rebecca Lee  
Bess Dodson Walt Library  
6701 South 14th Street  
Lincoln NE 68512

#### Mystery Conference to Honor Manhattan Public Library Conference in Kansas

Manhattan Mystery Conclave will take place October 1-3, 2004 with a program for authors and fans. Headliners include Margaret Maron, Jeanne Dams, and Nancy Pickard. The Conclave will celebrate the small town mystery and will include workshops, book signings, receptions, and a small town marketplace. Registration is \$150.00 if postmarked by March 31, 2004.

The Conclave will also sponsor a contest. Participants, published or unpublished, have

three months following the gathering to write a 5,000-word "small town" mystery. The winning stories will be published in an anthology. The registration fee includes a copy of the anthology and most meals. The limited edition anthology will go to Conclave participants and be sold during the Manhattan, Kansas Sesquicentennial in 2005, and through online bookstores and mystery publications.

For more information, contact Marolyn Caldwell at marolync@flintheills.com (785-776-4862), write to The Great Manhattan Mystery Conclave, P. O. Box 782, Manhattan, Kansas 66505-0782, or visit [www.manhattanmysteries.com](http://www.manhattanmysteries.com)

Bits Compiled by Sally Hawkes



BY LAWRENCE  
WATT-EVANS

# The Machines are Taking Over

Last May I got a new computer—either the fourth or fifth for my home office, depending on how you look at it. (The third one got rebuilt so completely at one point it was effectively a new machine.)

I'd originally intended this column to be about something else entirely, but after I wrote that opening sentence I reconsidered and decided to write about the relationship between writers and computers. I think just about all of us work on computers now, don't we? Editors often expect to have our work available in electronic form, suitable for e-mailing; they generally treat the printed-out manuscript as disposable.

I got a letter today from a friend, a fellow novelist, who is irate (to say the least) because an editor lost the manuscript of a rejected novel, rather than returning it. To him, this is a major problem—replacing it involves a trip to Kinko's and paying about 80 bucks for a new photocopy.

For me, as for most of us, replacing a lost manuscript just means the cost of the paper and letting my printer run for an hour. It probably never occurred to that editor that my friend couldn't just run off another copy, but he can't. He doesn't have a computer.

Twenty-five years ago, when I sold my first novel, almost no one had a home computer; I certainly didn't. I had an IBM Correcting Selectric III typewriter, top of the line equipment for any writer. I loved it. I'd learned to type on a beat-up Royal manual, and the Selectric was *so* much better than that! It could change typefaces, it had built-in correcting tape, it was fast and easy to use...

It was 1984, and I was in the middle of writing my seventh novel, when my wife and I decided that I should get a computer for my 30th birthday. She worked for IBM back then, so we could get an employee discount; even so, it cost \$1,800, which was a lot of money, and that didn't include any software except DOS. I had to trade some books for a techie friend's never-used review copy of *Leading Edge Word Processing* before I could actually write anything on the new machine.

It didn't have a modem or even a hard drive; everything ran off floppies. The monitor was green-on-black monochrome. The printer was sprocket-drive dot

matrix, where each finished page of fan-fold computer paper had to be separated from the others and have the side-strips torn off by hand.

And it was so much better than any typewriter that I spent the next few months in a euphoric daze. I could rewrite a sentence half a dozen times right there on the screen! The keyboard was so much faster than the Selectric I had trouble believing it at first—the keys never jammed, no matter how fast I typed. And I realized I'd never need carbon paper again.

I was a complete and instant convert. I've loved computers ever since. We have five at the moment, one of which I built myself from spare parts.

I wasn't the first writer I knew to computerize, but I was far from the last; in 1984 computers were still seen as something of a luxury for a writer. They spread quickly, though. In the late 1980s SFWA had a special interest group with its own newsletter, "Spacechips," for newly computerized writers, to help them make the transition from typewriter to computer smoothly; members could swap advice and help each other troubleshoot these exotic new machines.

"Spacechips" and the group dwindled away to nothing some time in the early 1990s—pretty much everyone *had* a computer by then, and knew how to use it.

And nowadays a writer without a computer is as rare as a writer without a typewriter was when I was a kid—or at least, so it often seems. A good many publishers ask for manuscripts on diskette, or in e-mail, now. Computers are part of the writer's landscape. They're part of *everyone's* landscape. My kids' teachers expect homework to be done on the computer.

But not everyone uses them, even now. Sometimes those of us who do use them forget that.

A few years ago I was president of the Horror Writers Association, and as a result my home address got listed in a couple of reference books as HWA's address. This means that every so often I still get letters from people trying to contact HWA, most of them people who want to be writers and are looking for whatever help they can get.

It's astonishing how many of these letters are handwritten.

You would think that anyone who wants to be a professional writer would know that they'll need to type their stories, and would type business letters as ►►►►



▶ ▶ ▶ well, but the *majority* of the misdirected HWA letters are handwritten. Some of them are from prisoners, who aren't likely to have access to computers or typewriters (though some do), but most are from ordinary folks who want to write horror—and who don't have computers. Or even typewriters.

(It's gotten difficult to buy a new typewriter these days; I'm not sure anyone's still making them. Finding old ones cheap is easy, though—they turn up at auctions and estate sales all the time.)

I find myself wondering what these people plan to do when it comes time to mail their manuscripts off; will they send the handwritten text? Photocopy it, perhaps? Or will they pay someone to type it up?

Both my parents earned money in college by typing term papers for other students; my mother continued to take on occasional typing jobs for most of her life, as well as typing up clean copies of some of my father's work for him. I assume there are still people who do this—but surely they aren't as common as they were 20 years ago! Computers seem more plentiful than typewriters ever were, and generally they're far easier to use, as well as infinitely more versatile.

It's easy to assume that everyone has a computer, or at least that every writer or would-be writer has a computer—but my friend with his lost manuscript and the people sending HWA those handwritten letters demonstrate that this isn't the case. There are writers out there who can't afford computers, or who are so technophobic they won't use them.

I can't imagine trying to deal with the publishing business as it now is without a computer.

## Bits 'n' Pieces

### Historical Novel Society's First North American Conference

<http://www.historicalnovelsociety.org/USA-conference.htm>

April 15-16, 2005 in Salt Lake City, Utah

Panelists, speakers, emcees, and registration helpers are needed for this conference. Submit information by October 1, 2004. Authors/publishers unable to attend will have the chance to contribute publicity material for attendees. Subgenre panel topics include historical mystery, historical romance, historical action/adventure, young adult/children's historicals, inspirational historical fiction, alternate history/time travel/fantasy. Favorite time periods listed are Prehistory/Classical (Greece and Rome); Medieval; Renaissance/Early Modern 19th Century including Regency, Napoleonic and American Civil Wars; US Western History; and Non-European/other.

For more information, please fill out the online questionnaire, or snail mail with an SASE:

The Historical Novel Society  
North American Conference  
PO Box 711114 / Salt Lake City, UT 84171-1114

I know people who hate computers, who know nothing about how they work, who gripe constantly about them—but who use them to write on because not doing so just doesn't make sense anymore. The ease of correcting and rewriting, the convenience of printing out new copies as needed, the speed of e-mail—how could a writer function without that?

But some writers do—and I worry that we may be shutting out some would-be writers by making the business so computer-dependent. Writing has traditionally been a business that may be difficult to break into, but which doesn't require any real financial investment—a few pens, a ream or two of paper, a second-hand typewriter, and stamps and envelopes were all you needed for most of the 20th Century. Asking every beginner to have a computer may shut out some potentially interesting voices.

Or perhaps we're just in a transitional period. Computers are still getting cheaper; I'm typing this on a machine that cost half what my first PC did, without adjusting for 20 years of moderate inflation, and that can do much, much more—it's got 2,000 times the main memory, and is 500 times as fast. And you can get a basic computer for a lot less than I paid for this one. Maybe in a few years computers will be so cheap that *anyone* can afford one.

I hope so. Because I love my computer, and I think everyone should have one. It makes writing so much easier...

But that may be a drawback to the computerization of writing. Not only might we be shutting out some good potential writers who can't or won't use a computer, but we've made it much easier for a lot of really *bad* would-be writers to make things difficult.

Once upon a time being a writer took some real effort. You had to write a complete story, then mark it up, then type up a clean copy (with carbon, of course) on your typewriter, and send it out to market. You couldn't make multiple submissions unless you retyped it again, or got it photocopied, which was an expensive nuisance. Every rewrite meant retyping the whole thing.

And agents and editors could take one look at some submissions and dismiss them—the ones that were full of misspellings and ghastly grammar right from the start. You didn't need to read very far to reject those.

Now, though, you type your story once, on that fast computer keyboard, and then your software corrects the spelling and grammar for you; you print a dozen copies and send them to a dozen agents or editors at once. It's much faster and easier.

And the result is that much more slush for agents and editors to read, making them ever less eager to wade through the endless flood. It's harder to spot the real crap—even a kid can turn out a professional-looking manuscript.

We won't even mention web publishing or print-on-demand.

So it hasn't all been good—but I love my computer, and can't imagine writing without it! ♦



## Death by Deadline

### Dear Annette:

Can you specifically address a bane of my existence? Deadlines. I am currently about six months over a deadline, three of those because my last book was three months overdue. Yes, I was sick and had to recover; however, now I am healthy and still struggling with the pressure.

Like a double-edged sword, the deadline motivates, yet freezes me. When I told myself to give up worrying over it, I began to make headway, but now missing the deadline in an enormous fashion has proven a sense of shame and that steals my energy.

### *Driven to Deadline Distraction*

### Dear Driven:

It sounds like you have a lot of good reasons to have deadline anxiety. Which, as you discovered, morphs unerringly into a nasty case of procrastination. Ah, the Big P: nature's way of helping us escape reality (or at least delude ourselves into believing we're escaping for awhile).

The key to solving this kind of stress involves identifying the emotions underlying your avoidance and coming up with coping strategies.

In my view, procrastination itself isn't the problem. It masquerades as the problem, sure. It may *look* like we're not getting the important work done because we'd rather burnish the grout around the base of the toilet or re-alphabetize the canned food in the pantry. But the truth is, we know we'd feel better reaching our page limit for the day first...it's just that, well, we're too afraid.

- Afraid we won't live up to the imaginary standard we set for this WIP.
- Afraid someone will find out what a truly awful writer we are.

- Afraid we'll be too bored or too buried by the ridiculously huge and overwhelming project we imagine this to be.

Procrastination is an attempted cure for anxiety, self-doubts, or even sometimes simply dislike of the work we're doing. It can also serve as a dandy excuse when the finished product we mail off isn't quite up to snuff. It's not that I'm a bad writer, you see, it's just, well, I have this procrastination problem. If only I could get a handle on it...If only I had more time, the whole second half of the book would have been much better...

My old tennis coach called this building in an excuse to lose. It's a powerful option for some of us, unfortunately.

Most well-intentioned fixes for procrastination fail because they ignore the root causes. Simple time management or organizational strategies rarely help most accomplished professionals I work with. Sheesh, if time management were such a huge problem, how would they have finished law school or completed even one book? Many procrastinators I know could design time management systems that would put Franklin Covey to shame. They just fail to follow those tri-colored time flow charts they so laboriously created.

The truth is, if we're avoiding our most important work, there's a good psychological reason behind it. (Or at least there's what seems like a darn good reason to our quirky, defense-ridden, semi-neurotic brains.)

You mentioned feeling shameful about missing the first deadline. I'd call that a big breakthrough. It makes perfect sense that you might want to avoid tasks that have feelings of shame or embarrassment attached to them.

For years I avoided balancing my checkbook and even, at times, paying bills on time even though I had the money in my checking account. It wasn't until years after grad school that I realized I was procrastinating because of old fears I developed while living through those hand-to-mouth years where I often had to decide whether to pay a bill or eat. Those days are gone (Hallelujah!!) but for years afterwards I operated as if that were still my reality.

If you're not sure you've uncovered all the reasons for your avoidance, keeping a quick thought-journal where you jot down the little monologues that run through your mind when you think about sitting down to attack your WIP might be very insightful.

We can't fight what we can't see. Dragging these nasty little bugaboos out into the daylight often makes them simply fizzle away. If your anxieties are more stubborn than that, at least becoming conscious of them will make them easier to argue with. Bouncing your thoughts off of a close friend, therapist, or coach can be extremely helpful in identifying and changing emotions, too.

If you've got a handle on the thoughts or fears that seem to be driving you away from the keyboard, and you're still avoiding work, I've got a couple of suggestions.

1. Do the thing you're dreading most each day first. You may not fully understand why you're dreading ▶▶▶▶



▶ ▶ ▶ it, but get it out of the way if you can. If it's getting your daily scene, chapter, or page count out of the way, so much the better. If it's something non-writing related, that's ok, too. Whatever you're dreading, be it a difficult phone call or the pile of

clean clothes threatening to outgrow the confines of your bedroom, it might just be holding you back while you are sitting at the keyboard.

2. Envision the worst outcome. Envision it, and imagine how you would live through it. Facing fears takes the power out of them. Sure, I don't exactly want to hand my editor a manuscript that's a pile of steaming caca, but if I did, in my worst nightmare do that, I would likely go on breathing. I'd go on writing, too.

*Annette Carney, Ph.D is a Marriage and Family Therapist with 15 years experience. You can "Ask Annette" in strict confidence, at one of these contacts: e-mail: annettecarney@sbcglobal.net, fax: 775-746-4560; phone: 775-323-0445.*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Fantasy and Paranormal Renaissance

Recent discussions of new paranormal lines on the Ninlink began with Mary Jo Putney announcing a "new name," M.J. Putney, for her Guardian fantasy series at Del Rey.

Tor's previously announced paranormal romance line is now projected to launch in October 2004 and publish one book a month. <http://www.tor.com/paranormalromance.html>

Imajinnbooks has guidelines posted for both paranormal romances and erotica novels and stories with paranormal elements. [http://imajinnbooks.com/Romance\\_tip\\_Sheet.htm](http://imajinnbooks.com/Romance_tip_Sheet.htm) "We are looking for fast-paced, action-packed stories involving ghosts, psychics, or psychic phenomena, witches, vampires, werewolves, shapeshifters, futuristic in space or on other planets, and any other story line that will fall into the 'new-age' genre."

Silk & Magic [http://imajinnbooks.com/silk&magic\\_guidelines.htm](http://imajinnbooks.com/silk&magic_guidelines.htm) are erotica novels and stories with "a paranormal element that is well-integrated with the main plot. At this time, we're looking for stories about vampires, werewolves, shapeshifters, futuristic (both on and off this planet), paranormal (ESP type elements), witches, and fantasy."

### Did You Miss Romance Authors Roundtable?

<http://www.authorsontheweb.com/features/0402-romance/romance.asp>

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<b>Moderators: If You Have Questions,</b>	
Brenda Hiatt-Barber	BrendaHB@aol.com
Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@comcast.net

## 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:

Karen Alarie (*Karen Anders*), Centreville VA  
Emilie Rose Cunningham (*Emilie Rose*), Durham NC  
Dianne Despain (*Dianne Drake*), Indianapolis IN  
Doreen Roberts Hight (*Kate Kingsbury, Doreen Roberts*), Tigard OR  
Gail Martin (*Gail Gaymer Martin*) Lathrup Village MI  
Suzanne McMinn, Granbury TX  
Joanna Novins, Stamford CT  
Gail G. Ranstrom, St. Augustine FL  
Lilles Slawik (*Lucy Monroe*), Olympia WA  
Laurin Wittig, Williamsburg VA

### New Members:

Celeste Bradley, Spring Hill TN  
Nina Bruhns (*Nikita Black*), Summerville SC  
Donna Jean (*Donna Kauffman*), Sterling VA  
Krista Turner (*Krista Thoren*), Normal IL

**Ninc has room to grow...recommend membership to *your* colleagues. Prospective members may apply online at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).**



# *The Care and Feeding of the Girls in the Basement . . .*

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## *The Telescope of Travel*

I know exactly when I fell in love with travel: the spring break I was a sophomore in high school. My grandmother threw me in the passenger seat of her yacht-like Lincoln Continental, and we set off during spring break to see my uncle in Seattle. I had a paper bag full of Harlequin romances (all set in exotic locales like Spain and South Africa and the outback), my clodhopper boots, and a tidy purse saved up from babysitting jobs. What else did I need?

It turned out to be quite an adventure. We were caught in a blizzard crossing the wilds of Wyoming, and were finally rescued by a kindly trucker who left his rig on the road and drove us into a nearby town. Grandma and I spent an unscheduled night in a theme motel (the buildings were all shaped like Alpine cottages), but after a day, we were off again. Across Idaho and into Oregon through the Columbia River Valley, which stole my heart with its lush green softness, up to the density of forest that was Washington, and finally to Seattle. We stayed a week, then made our way back home.

We could not have been gone more than eight or 10 days. And yet, I remember standing outside on the grass of the smoking area (in high school!), amid all the familiarity, and feeling somehow taller than I had been. My friends, who had either been all over the world with the military, or nowhere at all, like me, seemed transformed, too. I saw myself differently—I was a girl who traveled. Who had scary adventures and lived through them. Who had sailed on a ferry in Puget Sound and slept in motels shaped like Alpine hideaways, and had—as if that were not enough!—read 30 or 40 novels of far away climes—so my friends were different to me, too, according to this slide rule of reality.

I loved the differences I felt. I liked holding the pale

green hills of Oregon in memory, like an exotic jade in my pocket, a possession no one could ever take from me. I liked the slight shift I felt in my body, my mind, my relations to others.

But the most profound difference was the way my travel helped me to see my own world more clearly. How blue the sky in Colorado was after those days elsewhere! How thin the air! How fine the sun after days of damp!

It changed me, made me a wanderer, that trip. And perhaps it is because I'm trapped at my computer, forbidden to so much as plan a walk with a friend until I finish my book, that my thoughts the past few weeks have all been about travel. It is the time of year when I begin to think of where I might go, what places might be calling me. I'm considering Poland and Greece—and oddly, I have been dreaming of India. Literally dreaming, as in adventures when I am asleep. I'm not sure why it has captured my imagination at exactly this moment; I read a lovely novel about historic India, and a woman I know took a trip there, and I've always wanted to go, and I've been testing myself with thoughts of a new adventure somewhere far away. Who knows why? It's just there, in my consciousness. One of the girls in the basement likely has something up her sleeves. It seems a place Guinevere, the romantic, might want to visit, if only so we could stock up on scarves and trinkets.

India, Poland, Crete. Stuck as I am in the cold dark of January, I spend the blustery evenings, leafing through the glossy travel guides that come through snail mail (Explore Tours is my favorite), and cruising Internet travel sites and companies, daring myself, giving the girls things to talk about in the winter dullness. It gives us all something to look forward to.

Travel ranks as one of the very best things we can do for the girls in the basement. There are things to be found while on the road that simply cannot be gathered any other way.

Now, I admit I am a passionate wanderer, and I believe strongly in the gifts to be found by ▶▶▶▶



▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ venturing into the world—the whole wide world. I genuinely love being plunged into a new culture and trying to figure it out as long as the danger quotient isn't too high (not for me the intrepid Laura Resnick's

lengthy exploration of Africa! If you have not read *A Blond In Africa*, I highly recommend it.). Most writers seem to enjoy, even seek out, the pleasure of travels, at home and abroad. It's a passion that links us.

Not all of us, however—and that's fine, too. I am the daughter of a man who was born 64 years ago exactly thirty miles from where he now lives and although he has sometimes been forced to travel now and again, he absolutely loathes it. He'd rather have a root canal than spend the night in a bed that is not his own. Instead, he rides his motorcycle into the mountains and up to the cities he knows, places close enough he can get home at night. If he were a writer, those trips would count. The point is to take a deep breath of a new sort of oxygen, get the brain and the creative centers turning in different ways. A trip to your grandmother's house or to a city down the road where you might meet a friend for lunch or do some shopping in a different store is every bit as valuable as a trip to a foreign land.

There are two pitfalls to the business of travel for writers. The first is a tendency to say, "What is this going to give my writing? Why am I traveling to X or Y, when all my books are about Z?" There is a tendency to want to *use* travel rather than *experience* it. Travel is more like yoga breathing. It's the doing, the experiencing that delivers results. The second is tied to the first: we apologize for our need to do it. Not everyone is as free as we are to plan a trip, take it whenever, come back whenever. It can cause resentments. So, rather than claiming travel as a necessary element of the need to keep filling the well, we resort to mistake #1: what is this going to give my writing? How can I *use* it?

This morning the weather in Colorado was brilliant in a particularly Rocky Mountain West kind of way: sky blue as balloons, snow pristine and sparkling, the sun shining in its warming, high altitude way. It's so bright not even sunglasses quite take care of the glare.

My dog and I were both stir crazy after a week of me being chained to my desk by work and weather. He gave a soft, plaintive whine this morning when I opened the door to get the paper, and it was enough to penetrate my fogged brain. After breakfast, I bribed Sasha the terrier mutt (who keeps blowing out her knee and thus is not allowed to go on walks with us) with a big chunk of her favorite cheese, and Jack and I lit out.

It was that period of mid-morning when all the traffic has dropped off, schoolchildren are at their desks doing

fractions, and the only other people we saw were a homeless man smoking a cigarette with huge enjoyment on the curb and a guy with a stocking cap riding his bike. A woman wearing a jean jacket and square-heeled boots carried groceries from her mud-spattered SUV into the house.

I wore my green coat on the walk. I am particular about coats and jackets and I haven't had one I loved for quite some time. This one is a dark olive green, silk or silk-like, with a button-in lining of soft cotton plaid that makes it exactly the right weight for the usual weather in Colorado through the fall, winter, and spring—that means I can layer a little more or a little less according to the temperature, add some gloves and a hat most days. (I do own a Columbia jacket suitable for temperatures even below zero, but I only wear it when I absolutely must. Too bulky.)

I think this olive green coat of mine is called a raincoat. Don't laugh. It's a regional ignorance, like the fact that I have absolutely no idea what to eat in seafood restaurants. I grew up in the lap of Pikes Peak, where there are only about 12 or 14 inches of rain per year, and most of that falls in giant bucketfuls during violent, late afternoon thunderstorms. No need for raincoats or knowing what they look like.

Ditto the seafood angle: Colorado is also a long way from any ocean, and when I was a kid, the seafood was not flown in fresh every day. Most of it was frozen and bland and it all tasted like fishy rubber or fishy flakes and unless you buried it in a pound of tartar sauce, it was barely edible. I mean, really, why bother?

As an adult, I am trying to remedy the gap in my culinary education, but it's slow going. The sound of some fish dishes is alluring, and I know it's good for you, and... well, it's hard to appear to be the sophisticate when you must lean over to your neighbor and ask, "How should I order my salmon cooked?" And please don't ask me to chew one of those shellfish things like mussels (especially—ew! something called green-lipped mussels). I'll take your word for it that they're delicious. The flavor isn't so terrible, it's just that texture—like chewing on rubber. (Actually there's a whole other argument that can be brought to bear here, that fish look like themselves when you're going to put them in your mouth. Shrimp and lobsters particularly. I cannot face a lobster, and shrimp only when they have their heads already lopped off.)

So, I don't know fish. But if you ever need to know about tamales, various enchiladas, green chiles, Mexican food as perfected on the New Mexico plateau, honey, I'm your girl.

*Anyway*, I'm pretty sure Frances Housden calls her coat, which matches mine exactly, a raincoat. She lives in New Zealand by way of Scotland—a raincoat would seem a most natural accoutrement. And mine matches it exactly—if we lived closer, we'd have to call ahead and

coordinate who would get to wear it on a given occasion. If you ever see us looking like twins, though, blame me. She was wearing that coat one morning when I visited her in New Zealand. I admired it massively and when we happened to see the exact same coat on a rack for the equivalent of about \$40 American, I wasn't about to let it go by.

The point, in case you're wondering, is that it is the kind of thing that it's very good to buy when you're traveling. It freshens the memories in a most satisfactory way, keeps things moving and fresh in the subconscious pool of experiences.

Every time I wear this raincoat, I remember that I bought it after lunch in Whangarei (W's pronounced as F—so interesting!) at what Frances called the "yacht basin." (Because I also know very little of boats and the sailing life, I am at a loss over whether this is a New Zealand phrase for what I would call a marina, or if my idea of a marina is not quite right.) The lunch was excellent sandwiches on very good bread in a warm, woodsy-feeling shop along the docks. I drank a flat-white coffee, which is very much like my beloved latte, and most like a French café crème. Outside, it was drizzly and gray and my drought-starved body thought it the most delicious of climates.

The coat was on sale in several colors in several shops. I could have purchased one in dark blue or a lighter cream, but nothing would do but that I had to have the olive green because it was so fine on Frances. She did not seem to mind too much. I promised her I'd never wear it around her. After that day. But for one day, we would be twins.

Now, every time I put my arms into those sleeves, I think of the hills around the marina there, where neat-looking bungalows nestled deep amid the exotic greenery of manuka trees and calla lilies. I think of the drizzle on my face making my desert-weathered skin feel youthful and supple for a change. I think of the quiet, the W names along that highway, the blue and emerald feeling of the mountains and greenery.

This morning, I tucked my hand into my pocket to take out a dog treat as we walked along a bright winter side street in Colorado in January, and thought of the first time I tucked my hands in the pockets, when on a boat in the Bay of Islands, where I discovered I am not as seasick-prone as I had thought. A wisp of those wild, exhilarating seas dances through my imagination. The dog takes the treat from my fingers and I'm back in Colorado.

I knew to buy the coat in New Zealand because once I bought a sweater in Paris. It's a very simple thing, probably not all that flattering—it's black with a zipper up the front, and a nice collar. I bought it in the men's department of a French department store because it had grown freezing cold and we were going on a boat trip down the Seine and my friend knew I'd freeze to death without it. Every time I wear it, I think of that beautiful sky that night and my friend saying as we passed Notre Dame on the water, "Now, imagine we are medieval peasants from the country and this

is the first thing we see in the city." Ah—I have written a number of medievales and absolutely adore the period, but that one sentence, uttered as I gazed up at the magnificence of the cathedral, gave me an understanding of peasant life I'd never grasped until then. I have a red sweater from Scotland, which I wore in New Zealand, and am in fact wearing this very moment as I type away in my drafty Colorado house.

My son keeps an Irish five pound note in his wallet to remind him—each and every time that he reaches in to pay for a bar of soap or a hot dog or a textbook—that he is a boy who has traveled. I thought it a fine habit and now have a New Zealand five dollar note in my own wallet. My mother buys earrings and she loves it when people remark on them, so she can say, "I bought these in Barcelona." Not to lord it over anyone else, but to then hold that secret rock of things no one can take, the sound of Spanish in the air, in her mouth for a moment.

My mementos keep me company when I'm forced—as now—to leave my wanderings and sit in my chair and actually write. If I had my way, I'd travel more and write more while on the road—the two seem to fuel each other. Travel freshens the metaphorical pools, opens musty corners of the mind. I noticed twice in recent days that I drew a metaphorical idea from my trip to New Zealand. One was in writing—the sound of palms clacking together. The other was as I was driving down the highway to my house and noticed that the indentations on the side of the road made me think of Maori tattoos engraved on a face.

The memories and souvenirs also remind me, as my early trip did, that *my* places are specific, too. These are my own details: this bright southwestern sky that arches over the characters in my current book (as it does most of them, actually). The dry air, the dazzling sun, the dripping brilliance of snow melting in icicles from the eaves of my house. The sound of the car wheels on the road as I drove home this morning.

In seeing the world, I see my own tiny piece of it more clearly. In puzzling over the cultures of others, I see mine is a particular entity, too. In hearing the accents and eating the foods that are similar and not similar, I learn what my own world values.

I become particular. I notice the clacking of the palms in the wind in New Zealand on a cold spring day. I write the sound into a novel six months later, finding it there, a detail the girls picked up one day when I wasn't noticing. In travel, the task for me is to go wherever I'm nudged or invited to visit and see what happens. The girls will take care of the rest. They'll take notes, do the cataloguing. My task is to open my heart, my eyes, my curiosity, let it all in.

Like life, I suppose.

*Barbara Samuel writes for Ballantine Books. Her current book, The Goddesses of Kitchen Avenue, is in bookstores everywhere.*



# Sticky Notes from the Edge

Cheryl Anne Porter

## **Pithy Statements by World-renowned Authors That Reassure Us We Must Be Doing Everything Right Because We Think and Feel Just Like They Do.**

Now, when I say "pithy," it's not because I have a lithp. These sayings are definitely pithy. My favorite reading is other writers on writing, the ups and downs, the glory and wonder, the horridness of the entire process. I thought I'd offer up a few examples to let you see what I mean.

Ah. Here's one now. *Virginia Woolf*: "The truth is that writing is the profound pleasure and being read the superficial." I said this once to my publisher about my sell-through (low ones are always totally their fault; like I have my own sales and distribution force, right?). Wasn't amused (me or him).

*Colin Walters*: "The best part about writing is stopping." *William Goldman*: "The easiest thing to do on earth is not write." Told ya.

*W. S. Maugham*: "Only a mediocre writer is always at his best." I always suspected this.

*Harlan Ellison*: "Anybody can become a writer, but the trick is to STAY a writer." Boy, no kidding.

*Iris Murdoch*: "Every book is the wreck of a perfect idea." So, she was a critic, right?

*Tom Stoppard*: "The hard part is getting to the top of page one." Ain't that the truth?!

Here's me: *Dorothy Parker*: "The writer's way is rough and lonely and who would choose it while there are vacancies in more gracious professions, such as, say, cleaning ferryboats."

Now, here's me and *Papa Hemingway*: "A man's got to take a lot of punishment to write a really funny book." I could have told him that, saved him all those words...

My all-time favorite saying! *Jules Renard*: "Literature is an occupation in which you have to keep proving your talent to people who have none." Amen, sister.

*Anonymous (near as I can tell, an ancient Greek philosopher)*: "A blank page is God's way of showing you how hard it is to be God."

Here's how to get the kids to never, ever want to be a writer: *Lawrence Kasdan*: "Being a writer means you have homework for the rest of your life."

Me and *Mark Twain*: "I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead." (ASIDE: My mom calls me to tell me she doesn't have the time or money to call me this month—and then talks for thirty minutes.)

And me again: *Dorothy Parker*: "I can't write five words but that I can change seven." It's so dang true!

*Oscar Wilde*: (Ever had this kind of day?) "I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back in again."

How about this rejection, y'all? *Anonymous English Professor, Ohio University*. "I am returning to you this otherwise good typing paper because someone has printed gibberish all over it and put your name at the top."

TOTALLY ME: *Katherine Paterson*: "There are few things, apparently, more helpful to the writer than having once been a weird little kid." Makes me laugh out loud! I'm still a weird little kid inside!! She's my favorite person in the whole world!

*The author would have you know she is doing worse and better, all on the same day. Amazing.*

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