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FOUNDED IN 1989

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## In Memory

# Linda Kay West

On March 1, 2004, former Ninc treasurer Linda Kay West died of cancer.

I got to know Linda more than ten years ago, when we both subscribed to the GENie online writers' network. All of us on GENie were in awe of Linda; not only was she a writer, but she was an attorney with the Internal Revenue Service. An enthusiastic participant in the writing discussions, Linda also generously answered our questions about taxes, and her replies were invariably more lucid and useful than anything the folks manning the I.R.S. help-line might have told us. Before joining the I.R.S. and settling in New Orleans, Linda served in the Peace Corps and worked as an aide in the Texas Legislature, as a prosecutor for the Pennsylvania Attorney General, and as a public defender in Cook County, Illinois.

Given her legal and financial expertise, Ninc asked Linda to perform its annual audit several times before persuading her to accept the Board position of treasurer. Her first term coincided with my presidency, in 2001, and she handled the job, as she did all things, with equanimity and humor. One of her most important accomplishments was to help smooth out the wrinkles in our still somewhat new system of accepting credit card payments. Linda agreed to remain on the Board as treasurer for a second year, during Pat Rice's presidency.

Always an avid reader, Linda started writing in 1988 and sold her first book to Silhouette six years later. She published her Silhouette books under the pen name Linda Lewis, two time-travel romances for Kensington under the pen name Linda Kay, and three single-title romantic comedies, also for Kensington, under the pen name Dixie Kane. According to Linda's sister, this last pen name was inspired by a package of Dixie brand cane sugar in Linda's pantry.

By the time Linda was diagnosed last summer, her cancer had already reached an advanced stage. Despite this, she accepted the challenge with her trademark determination and humor. She celebrated each triumph: being able to move back into her own house, finding portable oxygen tanks that gave her greater mobility, spending time at her computer, writing. When her hair started to grow in after chemotherapy had caused it to fall out, she proudly downloaded a photo of herself with her peach-fuzz hairdo to an e-mail loop of friends. She titled the photo "Fuzzy Linda."

Linda died just days before the Ninc retreat in Santa Fe. At the conference's opening session, Bear Heart, a spiritual leader, offered a special blessing in memory of Linda and Cathy Maxwell's husband, Kevin, who had died in a skiing accident a month earlier, and in honor of Cheryl Anne Porter, a Ninc member currently fighting cancer. Several people have told me they felt Linda's presence in the room during the blessing; they say she was smiling and glowing.

Linda is survived by her sister, Candace Diano, her half-sister, Mary Jane Reinach, her aunt and surrogate mother, Opal West, and many friends and fans.

**Barbara Keiler**

In honor of Linda Kay West, the Ninc Benevolency Fund has been renamed the Linda Kay West Memorial Fund. This fund exists to help Ninc members maintain their membership benefits during times of financial difficulty. Contributions are always welcome and should be made out to Novelists, Inc. and sent c/o David L. Brooks, Central Coordinator, at the address listed on the masthead. Please indicate that the donation is for the Linda Kay West Memorial Fund.

## It's not too early to volunteer!

Yes, yes, I know we're not even halfway through 2004 yet, but...

The 2004 Nominating Committee is looking for smart, dedicated people interested in helping shape Ninc's future by serving on the 2005 Board of Directors or the 2005 Nominating Committee. Of course, you have to be elected, first!

We need good people to run for the following positions: president-elect (a two-year term, with the lucky winner serving as president in year two); secretary; treasurer; and five slots with the Nominating Committee (for which we need nine candidates). Benefits include a little hard work, a lot of great friendships, and a chance to make a difference.

This year's Committee has already begun its work of identifying possible candidates, but we always welcome eager volunteers. If you are interested in running for any of these positions, or might be interested but want to learn more, please feel free to contact me ([anneavery1@earthlink.net](mailto:anneavery1@earthlink.net), 808-959-6346) or any of the other committee members: Laura Baker, Kathy Lynn Emerson, Pat Gaffney, Merline Lovelace, and Terey daly Ramin. I'm sure this year's Board members would be happy to answer any questions about the nature of their jobs, too. The deadline for volunteering is May 15. We look forward to hearing from you!

*Anne Holmberg, Chairman, 2004 Nominating Committee*

## Goodman: Say Good-bye

*Continued from p. 1* ▶▶▶

probably going to run into that agent at some conference, and he or she will still be handling your backlist and possibly your money. You need to keep the lines of communication open.

Bear in mind that while the introduction of the topic of this conversation may be difficult, if the agent is smart, the rest of the conversation will not be difficult at all. They want to maintain a good relationship with you, and they know they can't do that by making you uncomfortable or creating a scene.

Agents have to be good on their feet, so use this occasion as an opportunity to see how your agent reacts to your news and how he or she handles it. You may learn things about this person you never knew before, because you were never before in a position to call upon this

particular set of strengths and skills. For example, if you think your agent hasn't been aggressive enough, this is a great chance to find out what brand of aggressive persuasive you may now get to see. It may be that your agent has been very aggressive with publishers, but not with you, because you have never been the target.

It is also possible that a very good agent has simply lost the vision for you and become stale. He or she may be stuck in a rut and can't come up with any new ideas or solutions and doesn't agree with what you want to do. For example, you may want to try another genre and the agent thinks you should stay where you are. This may be an honest difference of opinion and should be discussed, but if it's important enough to you and you realize that you and your agent are in very dif-

ferent places, a natural parting of the ways may occur. Sometimes you need a fresh face and a new perspective.

Of course, if you don't have a good relationship with your agent and are genuinely unhappy, you have every right to leave without jumping through hoops. A conversation may still take place, but if you have stated your concerns simply and directly, you have no more obligations and no more reason to stay involved.

Sometimes authors want to leave simply because they are bored or tired. Be careful with this one. It's easy to be dazzled and to think the grass is greener when you look elsewhere. And then you make the move, and you find that it may be different, but it isn't really better. You read about a big deal, or your friends tell you about their agent's latest exploits, and you think maybe your own agent is getting a little dull. Maybe he or she ▶▶▶

# Goodman: Say Good-Bye

▶ ▶ ▶ doesn't have the clout or the energy or the vision that will propel you to the next level.

You may be right. Be prepared with a lot of questions and concerns, and if the answers are not satisfactory, don't be afraid to say so. Sometimes your fears and doubts are exactly on target. There are some agents who don't know as much as they should, who don't fight hard enough for you, and who don't follow through. If you have determined beyond reasonable doubt that your agent is one of those, you are quite right in ending the relationship. If you have communicated this, and the agent understands where you are coming from and has had a chance to respond, then the parting may be bittersweet, but it won't be unprofessional and you will have nothing to regret.

Or you could be wrong. It's possible that your current agent has the vision and clout you feel you've been missing, but hasn't communicated it lately. Your current agent knows far more about you (or should) than anyone else and is, therefore, better equipped to use all that information in a positive way.

Detailed sales figures and sales

patterns, velocity, specific feedback from the publisher, and any other useful tidbits add up to unique knowledge, and knowledge is powerful. If you leave all that behind, your new agent may not be able to acquire that knowledge and may never understand your backlist and your growth as well as you do. It's also possible that you are doing a grass is greener routine with another agent who isn't really as marvelous as you thought. It's easy to be dazzled from afar, especially when you are at a crossroads or are feeling doubtful about your career.

But the fact is that most authors have more than one agent throughout their careers. Quite often the first agent is less than wonderful, and as the career starts to take off, the author realizes that she needs someone who is simply better at the job. There are exceptions, of course. Nora Roberts has had one agent from the beginning, and the two of them grew together and have enhanced each other immeasurably. There is dignity and grace in that kind of long-term mutual commitment. Nora's loyalty and dedication to the long haul have contributed to her great success. There are also very successful authors who have

changed agents several times. This tends to raise eyebrows, but while these authors are no less successful because of this behavior, I don't believe that they are more successful because of it.

While it's true that some agents have more clout, it is not true that clout comes from blustery behavior or big talk. It comes from smarts, knowledge, commitment, and passion. It also comes from nerve, which, as I said, is not something you may have had a chance to see up close.

Agents with a lot of experience can have more clout, but not if you're not important enough to them. If they have no real vision for you and merely want to cash in on your success, you are jumping onto a pretty cynical bandwagon. Brand new agents can have clout if they know their stuff, have a strong belief in you, and refuse to take no. It is also true that some agents are classier than others. That's probably a matter of personal taste, but some agents who make big deals are not particularly respected. There is one notable case in which the publisher refused to deal with a prominent agent in a seven-figure deal because the agent's behavior was so obnoxious.

So if you think you're moving "up," consider all the angles. Look backward as well as forward and feel good about your decision. Your agent is one of the most important players in your professional life. It's a relationship you want to get right. There should be no sense of having settled for second best, of being ignored or taken for granted, or of struggling to get your agent's full attention. You are entitled to the very best.

*Irene Goodman is an agent in New York who represents bestselling commercial fiction and specializes in career planning. Yes, she is open to new clients, from brilliant beginners to seasoned authors who need a change.*

## A Note About the Ninc Roster

A printed edition of the Ninc roster was mailed out with the April *NINK*. Because we are limited by printing and mailing costs, the font is smaller than some members would prefer. Therefore, a pdf version of the roster with a larger font is downloadable from the Ninc website, [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com). In June, we will update the online roster to include any new members and any contact information corrections. Please send your corrections to David Brooks, our Central Coordinator, at [ninc@kc.rr.com](mailto:ninc@kc.rr.com) or to the postal address shown in the masthead by May 31.

# Ideas....

continued from page 1 ▶▶▶

Angela Elwell Hunt has written extensively in the inspiration market in a variety of genres.

Barbara Samuel has written historical romance, contemporary romance, and women's fiction.

When I asked about ideas, Angela Hunt made this distinction—"Good ideas come all the time. Great ideas come more rarely." She says great ideas have four characteristics.

The first of these is **"Great ideas stick with me."**

As Pam Browning puts it, "It's like a friendly dog. It keeps jumping on me and won't stop. When I try to leave it someplace, it won't stay. The only way to make it behave is to write the book."

Such ideas don't always cooperate with market expectations. Ruth Glick's first werewolf paranormal romantic suspense came to her about six years before she actually wrote it. "I kept thinking nobody would buy this story from me...since paranormal was 'out'," she says. "Finally, a friend said, 'I'm tired of hearing about it. Either write it or shut up.' So I wrote it while doing my day job which was Harlequin Intrigue."

Second, Hunt says, **"Great ideas have a certain sparkle that good ideas lack."** Barbara Samuel says, "(The idea) has weight or heft." Jo Beverley describes it this way, "it feels alive. It has immediate interest and inherent complexity."

All of the writers with whom I consulted agree with Hunt's third point. **"Great ideas arouse my passion.** I feel honest excitement about the coming work involved." Toni Blake says, "It must instantly speak to me. It must feel like something I'm already burning to write." Ruth Glick's version of this is "the idea pulls me toward it."

Hunt also says, "It doesn't matter if no one else is passionate (about the idea). A great idea is something I can translate into a story that will excite people even though the idea may seem far-fetched at the outset."

The fourth characteristic is, **"Great ideas are unique."** They may

have elements in common with other published works, but "the presentation is entirely different."

Finally, Hunt says, "Great ideas need not be complete. Sometimes the 'seed' is a unique setting, a unique character/vocation, sometimes a thought or a situation. If the seed has potential greatness, I know the plot and characters and setting (or whatever elements are lacking) will eventually come together."

Toni Herzog also gets ideas in nugget form and uses a series of questions to determine if the idea has what it needs to fill up an entire book. What's the conflict? Is it strong enough? What makes these characters belong together? What makes these characters special enough that they're worthy of the reader's care and attention. "If the answers I come up with aren't good enough," she explains, "I simply try to come up with new and better ones."

So how is a writer to tell when an idea just isn't workable?

The briefest answer comes from Barbara Samuel, who says, "I don't believe there are bad ideas, only bad execution." She says she's had stories which "act like out of control teenagers" but none which have proved impossible.

Ann Schuessler describes the process in more detail. "I'll realize the plot has too many holes, or the characters aren't working, or something is wrong. Or I don't realize any of these things, but find myself unable to write more...I take time to think about the story and maybe play around with it, changing this and that."

Ruth Glick also says that she has yet to encounter an idea that won't work. "If I like it and start thinking about it, I can make it work." However, she adds, "I may find execution difficult. I'm really attracted to the idea of amnesia—of writing about a person in the terrifying position of being in danger and not knowing who he or she is. But once I get into an amnesia story, I always remember how hard it is to write about a character when you can't give his or her background."

This making an idea work is one of the things Pam Browning most enjoys about writing fiction. "Unlike in real life," she says, "we have it in our power to make unworkable ideas

work. That's part of the challenge. If something about the book is not working, I probably haven't done my homework."

For some, the realization that the idea hasn't revealed its best secrets comes well into the writing process. Ann Schuessler describes her experience. "I've been working on a single title idea. I love the characters, love the set-up...except for one teensy problem. The plot has one huge, stinkin' hole that I can't seem to fill in. I've tried, really I have, but after writing 150 pages, I had to stop. Now it's either totally revamp the story and keep the characters, or toss the thing."

Sherry Anne Jacobs explains, "You need to go back and find out where it stopped working, then change the action/scene/plot...Some of what (has) seemed like unworkable ideas were just too placid and bland. As soon as I deepen the impact of events on the characters, things get going again."

Toni Herzog made her discovery after the story was completely written. "As soon as I finished writing the novel, I realized the hero was perhaps too Alpha and that his story was extremely dark...but I loved the story too much to try changing it."

Her agent shopped the book around, collecting an impressive pile of rejection slips. "Seeing my fears realized in the form of rejection letters is what it took to make me understand...that I had to make some changes," she explains. "Not only that, but to make the changes work, I had to truly embrace those changes and not rewrite the book grudgingly." The resulting story will be published by Warner Books this fall.

"I believe many unworkable ideas can be turned around," Herzog says. "The answers on how to do that are individual to each story and each writer's vision for their story, as well as what genre or sub-genre the story is being marketed to...Success at this is often as simple as the author letting go of her personal attachment to the parts that don't work."

This is why many writers find it difficult to begin the actual writing of an idea. "The hard thing about finally beginning," explains Angela Hunt, "is facing the fear that the final work won't measure up to the

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## Ideas....

▶ ▶ ▶ sparkle of your great idea!"

Still the pull of those ideas brings us back to the keyboard over and over, and the discovery of our own "way with words" keeps us listening to the characters no one else can hear,

and playing with the scenes no one else can see. "When I began writing," Hunt says, "I wrote for the market—whatever I thought the publishers wanted to buy. But once an editor told me they wanted what I 'really wanted to write', I began to discover my true identity as a writer. I don't write for everyone, but none of us do. Your passion will drive your story, your story will reflect your voice, your

unique perspective will endear you to the readers who appreciate what you are and what you do."

*Janelle Clare Schneider gets some of her best ideas in the shower, but doesn't have nearly enough time to put them into writing. She lives with her husband, two young children and three dogs in Ontario, Canada.*



## Sticky Notes from the Edge

Cheryl Anne Porter

### Words to Live By

Some, if not all of you, know by now that I have contracted a particularly aggressive form of cancer that has attacked my liver. By God, we're having fun now!!! It's not funny in the least. But it doesn't have to be all that grim, either. Seriously. You ought to see me now! I am smokin'!! I've lost 51 pounds; my hair—which thinned but did not come out—is coming in thick and dark and curly. A pretty easy thing for a Cherokee to accomplish. I tell you I've never looked better! In fact, some people who see me after a time just think I've been dieting and exercising and tanning.

Oh, yeah, chemo makes one's skin darker, too. I'm dark enough now to be Whoopi Goldberg. I just tell people I've been on the Chemo Diet. You'd be shocked by the number of young girls (seriously) who ask about going in just for a few treatments so they can tan and lose weight. I have hit these chickies with my handbag.

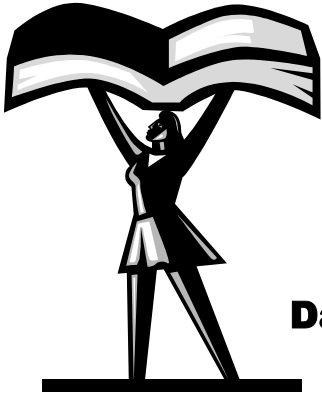
So, anyway, here's the point: I take a nap every afternoon (the chemo does not relieve the fatigue but the excuse for sleep works really well). I have a sack of those decorative stones you put in plant holders, which say things like joy, love, laughter. Very uplifting. For inspiration, I keep a couple of the stones on the coffee table next to the couch where I nap. Well this day, I don't know what happened; maybe it was my contacts or maybe my fuzzy mind.

But, y'all, to my just-awakened eyes the mysterious rocks appeared to say: Crust and Fart. Crust on one; fart on the other. Swear to God. I couldn't even find a way to blame my mother's fruitcake for these. I took them in my hand and cautiously studied them. Yep. After another glance without contacts or glasses, I thought, "Well, hmmm," and tried to imagine some way these stones could be words to live by. Crust came, as you'd figure, closest to a meaning. You know, surround your heart with love like a crust does a pie and keeps it all together?

OK, but FART? Well, a lot of things came to mind—oh, like you don't have kids and a butt, too. Talk about the wind come sweeping down the plains and stinking up everything in its way. We Okies call it the natural gas smell and keep the hound dog close by.

But anyway, this month is May. That means Mother's Day, and I can eat all the chocolate I want. Remember those 51-or-so pounds I lost? Well, it's because right now I hate food. Everything tastes bitter. But that doesn't mean I'm foregoing holiday celebrations. Afterward, I'll just tread merrily off to crust and fart.

OK, I can't do it to you. The stones actually said Trust and Faith. Makes more sense, huh? But then maybe not. ♦



# Revitalizing the Writer...

Here are further recaps of individual sessions from this year's Ninc retreat ED.

## Daisy Maryles: Inside Publishing and *Publishers Weekly*

BY JULIE KENNER

With almost 39 years of experience at *Publishers Weekly*, it's fair to say that Daisy Maryles (now Executive Editor) knows of what she speaks. Even more, her affection for writers is clear. We are, she says, "obsessed and a little bit crazy." Obviously, the woman understands us as a group (well, she understands me, anyway). And when she noted that writers write because we have to, I know that I had to stifle the urge to raise my hand and wave in acknowledgement.

As the first speaker at the retreat to address the book business generally, Maryles came to the table armed with a unique perspective derived from many years in the business. Not only has she observed this industry for over three decades, but she launched the magazine's weekly paperback bestseller lists and compiles bestseller charts for *PW*. She also writes the weekly column "Behind the Bestsellers" and coordinates and edits several features, including the bi-annual spotlight on romance.

As Maryles noted, there is no doubt that our industry is growing, at least in terms of unit sales for bestselling books. The number one fiction book for 2003, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, had sales in excess of 5.7 million copies, while the top nonfiction book, Rick Warren's *A Purpose Driven Life*, exceeded eleven million.

To throw some perspective on the matter, Maryles went back and

reviewed her statistics from 1974. That year, the fiction leader was James Michener's *Centennial*, which sold 330,289 copies. During the course of the year, the publisher upped the price from \$10.95 to an "astounding" \$12.50 (as *PW* commented at the time). In that year, less than ten novels had unit sales of over 100,000.

My, how things change. In 2003, for example, 128 novels exceeded that figure. In fact, in the last 25 years, there has been such a dramatic increase in the unit sales for bestselling books, that a new term has been coined: "megaseller" now defines a book that sells a million or more copies in the first year. The current record was set in 1994 with 17 such hardcover megasellers. In 2003, there were 14 such titles (although the number of units for each of those chart toppers was higher than their 1994 counterparts). By the end of this decade, Maryles anticipates that the number of megasellers will top 75.

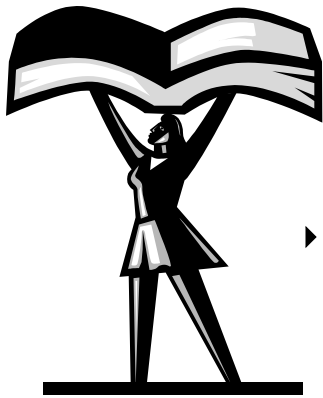
Good news, especially for the authors and publishers of those megasellers. But like all good news, it must be tempered with bad. And the bad that Maryles pointed out came as no surprise to the savvy audience at the retreat—consolidation. As Maryles said, this trend toward consolidating the various aspects of publishing and bookselling has had a huge impact on our industry. Currently, five publishing conglomerates control 80% of all books that make the bestseller charts. This statistic alone has changed the power balance within the publishing

houses. Now the *marketing* department rather than editorial has the most influence over the amount of publisher backing a particular book will receive. As a corollary, more books are being published with little or no publisher support. (A factoid with which most, if not all midlist, authors are intimately familiar.)

All is not doom and gloom, however. Recent trends also include an increase in sales outlets, including online stores, discount sellers, and wholesale outlets. Even so, consolidation within the retail and wholesaling arms of the industry has resulted in a shorter shelf life for books, putting a huge burden on **p u b l i s h e r s** and authors to get readers quickly. So what does that mean for authors? Well, as Maryles said, authors need to be very proactive with regard to promotion, something that genre authors have already learned.

Also on the bad news side of the equation, the consolidation in wholesaling has had a significant impact on mass market paperbacks. Unit sales have declined, though genre fiction (like romance) and hard cover reprints are doing well overall.

The hard truth in today's world is that celebrity sells. And technology and the clout of the media can carry a book to bestsellerdom, a truism that we've seen demonstrated by Oprah and Kelly Ripa (to the benefit of our own Ninc members!). Even absent that level of celebrity, though, authors can utilize the power of technology to communicate with their fans and ▶▶▶



# Revitalizing the Writer...

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promote,  
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Websites,  
according

to Maryles, can have a big impact on sales. When Jennifer Crusie's hard-cover release *Bet Me* became a *New York Times* bestseller, her publisher wasn't surprised—the publisher had been tracking the hits to Crusie's website. And Janet Evanovich? 800,000 hits per month. You do the math...

The bottom line from Maryles's point of view? "Whatever you're doing on your website, it's probably not enough."

Them's fightin' words, especially to those of us who may have little time to update a website or who are technologically challenged. But it's not a comment Maryles makes lightly. She backs it up with facts (scary ones, at that!). According to the Association of American Publishers, more per person hours are now spent doing things electronically than reading (and no, we're not talking ebooks). Over the last 20 years, the annual time spent watching videos has increased from 100 hours to 500, from 500 to 1000 watching television, from 0 to 2000 talking on cell phones, from 0 to 1500 e-mails sent, and *dropped* from 500 to 250 hours reading books.

Again, though, there is a bit of

good news: households buying books are actually increasing the number of books they buy. The moral? Publishers and authors need to get closer to their fans. (Ties in nicely with the "you're not doing enough with your website" wisdom, doesn't it?)

As for *Publishers Weekly* itself, as Maryles described the magazine, its original mission when founded in 1872 was as an international news weekly for publishers and booksellers. The focus was on the sell-in of the book. As the industry has grown and changed, however, so has the market, and now *PW* also has a key role in a book's sell-through. As a brand name, for example, a *PW* review can have a significant impact (and is, in fact, placed first on amazon.com's list of reviews).

As for reviews, the magazine reviews over 6,000 books per year, which is probably the highest of any media source, but still not enough. The magazine has recently launched a website, and a review annex has been added, which will include reviews (primarily nonfiction) not published in the paper edition. The magazine is also ramping up technologically with the launch of a newsletter, databases, and website areas only for subscribers. For keeping your finger on the pulse of the industry, these features are definitely worth checking out.

As for getting that coveted re-

view, while the magazine appreciates receiving material from authors, for the most part, it is the books selected by the publishers that are reviewed. Some publishers do a good job of sending selected books with the requisite information; others simply send everything. (The moral here seems to be talk with your publisher if you're looking to be reviewed in *PW*.) With regard to small press books, in order to be eligible for review, the publisher must have a national distribution system in place, and the book must not be too regional in tone.

So what, if anything, would Maryles change about this industry of ours if she could? Barring an ability to lower the price point (inflation apparently stops for no woman) she'd like to get more people actually reading. Publishers are excited about selling 100,000 copies of a book, but in a country this size, that's not really a large number.

*More readers, huh?* You know, I think I'll second that wish.

*USA Today* bestselling author Julie Kenner writes romance and women's fiction. She has a lot of cool things in the works for 2004 and 2005, and sincerely hopes some of it is mentioned in *PW*—not only for the sell-in and sell-through benefit, but because her mom would think it's cool.

## Bits'n'Pieces

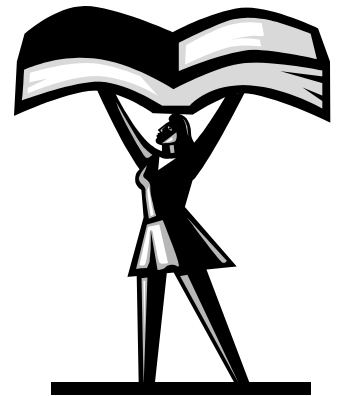
### Award for Romance from Dog Writers . . .

Ann Bouricious Smith aka Annie Smith reports: "My book *Home Again* (published in 2002 by Zebra) was just awarded the Maxwell Award for Fiction presented by the Dog Writers Association of America. I'm pretty sure it's the first romance to win this award, though a previous book of mine, *Romeo and Julia* was a finalist..."

**"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes**



# Revitalizing the Writer...



## Three Sessions with Publishing Pros Highlight Market Opportunities and Challenges

BY JUDY MYERS

### **Donna Hayes: The Publishing Industry and Harlequin's Revitalization**

To move from "good" to "great," you must first confront the brutal facts of your current reality. Then persevere, keeping faith that you'll prevail in the end.

Donna Hayes, CEO and Publisher of Harlequin Enterprises, used this paradigm as a lens through which to view the changes and innovations Harlequin has undertaken in its bid to escalate from its role as primary publisher of category romance to a place as the premiere publisher of women's fiction.

**The "Essential Three" questions:  
What are you passionate about?  
What are you best in the world at?  
What drives the economic engine  
— can you live on this?**

In the 1980s, Harlequin found itself prospering as the preeminent publisher of category romance, but it was losing many of its best authors when they decided to tackle books that were beyond Harlequin's scope. As a result, Harlequin launched Worldwide Library... which flopped. In the 1990's, the company tried again, but this time they focused more tightly on their core audience of romance and women's fiction, and MIRA was born. Ten years later, it is still growing and diversifying.

The past two decades in the publishing industry have been

marked by significant upheavals, including the consolidation of what once was a small army of wholesalers down to the current two powerhouses: Anderson News and Levi Home Entertainment.

**Hardcover Sales: Down  
Trade Sales: Down  
Mass Market Sales: Up 3.6%**

In today's changing marketplace, Harlequin has kept an uncanny finger on the pulse of what readers want by employing research, analysis, and online discussion boards. They currently offer more authors in more different ways than ever before, including recent innovations such as Bombshell and the upcoming HQN imprint. They have successfully employed branding with such ventures as Red Dress Ink and LUNA, showcasing new authors while retaining faithful readers. After 55 years, Harlequin is stronger and more diverse than ever.

### **Irene Goodman and Dianne Moggy: Moving Out of the Comfort Zone**

In an industry where writers often feel that their agents and editors would prefer that they not rock the boat by exploring new writing territory, this panel explored the need for authors to experiment in order to challenge themselves and keep their work fresh and vibrant.

"Stretch your strengths," counseled Dianne Moggy, Editorial Director for MIRA, while stressing

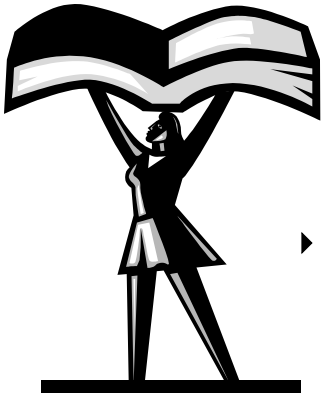
the importance of bringing your audience along as you do so.

"Be extreme. Don't pussyfoot." This was the core advice offered by literary agent Irene Goodman. She talked about the importance of thinking outside the box when plotting, recommending that characters be depicted as larger than life in situations where the stakes are huge. She also made reference to Linda Lael Miller's tactic of "making a list of twenty." By brainstorming twenty different alternatives to a major plot choice, the author virtually guarantees that a fair percentage of those alternatives will be far off the beaten path. Even if the author selects one of the more traditional solutions, there is a real benefit to exploring the problem from all sides. "You have permission to be wacky."

### **Isabel Swift, Leslie Wainger, and Marsha Zinberg: The Wide World of Women's Fiction**

A triumvirate from Harlequin Enterprises, Ltd. — Isabel Swift (Vice President/Editorial), Leslie Wainger (Executive Editor), and Marsha Zinberg (Executive Editor/Promotion, Backlist, and Custom Publishing) — offered retreat attendees an inside glimpse of the publishing giant's recent developments and upcoming innovations.

**Currently:** A new line of fantasy novels is appearing under the LUNA imprint. Early books in this line of trade paperback ▶▶▶



# Revitalizing the Writer...



fantasies have been authored by such well-known sf/f writers as Mercedes Lackey and Catherine Asaro. The length of these books is 100,000 to 150,000 words, and they are "compelling, female-focused fantasy that highlight the inner female power." The line is headed-up by Executive Editor Mary-Theresa Hussey in New York and Editor Kate Paice in England.

**July 2004** will mark the premiere of Silhouette BOMBSHELL. The heroines in this line will be empowered women who take charge in high-stakes situations. Romance is definitely not the primary element in these books. They are not "courtship novels," nor are they necessarily one woman/one man stories. The focus here is on saving the world and learning about yourself on the journey. BOMBSHELLS are targeted to be 80,000 to 90,000 words long. Four titles per month are planned by Associate Senior

Editor Natashya Wilson.

**August 2004** will be marked by the first appearance of the new HQN imprint. These single-title books will include both contemporaries and historicals, and the split between romance and other story elements will be a 50/50 balance. Tracy Farrell in New York will be the Senior Editor for HQN.

**January 2005** is the scheduled premiere date for SIGNATURE, an imprint of branded promotional titles and bonus editions, where selected books may include such extras as author letters and interviews or an extra novella. Under Executive Editor Marsha Zinberg's guidance, five sub-brands are currently planned:

**SIGNATURE SPOTLIGHT:**

Author-driven series with unique voices.

**SIGNATURE COLLECTIONS:**

3-in-1 novellas.

**SIGNATURE SELECT:**

Reissues.

**SIGNATURE SAGA:**

Big generational family sagas.

**SIGNATURE MINI-SERIES:**

Reissues of connected stories.

**Upcoming:** Although no launch date has yet been announced, Harlequin is also planning a new line, PRIME TIME, which will feature heroines in their 40s and 50s. These will be aspirational books about heroines who are assertive and mature, figuring out what they truly want. Romance need not be the central element. The length will be 80,000 to 85,000 words, and Harlequin is planning four titles per month, under the guidance of Editorial Director Tara Gavin.

In addition, MIRA Senior Editor Amy Moore-Benson is considering adding erotica to MIRA's offerings, first on a single title basis, then possibly as a one-book-a-month imprint.

*Judy Myers thanks the Ninc Retreat attendees who allowed themselves to be used as a test audience for her latest project – a CD of humorous songs about the woes of menopause!*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Changes in Publishing

North Point editorial director Rebecca Saletan has moved to Harcourt, where she'll become editor-in-chief of adult trade, starting June 1.

### B&N offering more than just coffee and books

Barnes and Noble is signing with Cometa for Wi-Fi services (wireless Internet), joining Borders as an Internet site. Service is scheduled to begin in September 2004. Customers will use Cometa Hotspot. Currently Cometa services cost \$11.95 per month.

### How to do it?

Those writing mysteries or interested in the genre can now sign up for a separate list. To join the mystery-oriented discussions send a blank e-mail to [NINCmystery-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:NINCmystery-subscribe@yahoo.com)

## Constant Reader: I want to be satisfied....

This month's column is our final look at what readers buy and what readers want. I've chosen three readers from across the country.

Cindy Muscatel lives in Rancho Mirage, California, where she writes feature articles for *Desert Sun* magazine. A former middle school English teacher with a master's degree in English Literature from Seattle University, she's a veteran columnist with 20 years experience. Cindy writes humor and travel under the name Cyndy Muscatel. She has also had a number of short stories published in literary magazines.

Marte Bock, of Columbia, Missouri, has a doctorate in education. A former elementary school principal, she is currently the coordinator of gifted programs for the Columbia School District. She also teaches assessment and evaluation in gifted programs online for the University of Missouri.

Terry Estes, wife of landscape architect Lawrence Estes, Jr. and mother of two sons, lives in Houston, Texas. She has taught kindergarten and third grade, as well as computer skills to around 800 elementary students, a job she describes as "one that needs Superwoman." She and her husband frequently participate on mission trips to Costa Rica, under the auspices of Memorial Drive Methodist Church, and to Guatemala where they serve as assistants to a medical team from the U.S.

Articulate and straightforward, these three readers were delighted to share their thoughts about books.

**NINK: What kinds of books do you read?**

**Cindy Muscatel:** I read every type of book in existence. (In 1996, when my husband and I rented an apartment in the south of France for a month, I even read an old French dictionary left there. It started because I'd read a road sign and wanted to know what it meant. One word would lead to another.)

I adore well-written romance novels that have interesting plots, locations, but especially characters that are so well drawn you feel you know them. Being an eternal optimist, I like happy endings and growth in the characters' lives—a resolution to problems plaguing them.

I also love mysteries and read several authors who have long-standing series. I love Martha Grimes, Elizabeth George, the Kellermans, and I just recently discovered Robert Parker, Donna Leon, and believe it or not, Agatha Christie. Being an Anglophile, I love books set in England, present day or past.

I also enjoy books like Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*. After I read it, I re-read *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. That was an enriching experience.

I'm a fan of biographies, as well. I have recently been listening to them on tape. I especially get a kick out of it when the author reads the book. You get such a sense of the person's essence. My first book on tape was Carol Burnett's autobiography. In part of it, she walks through her childhood home, giving her impressions on tape. That was really gripping. I am a better listener of nonfiction on tape. I enjoyed *Endurance*, but I think I'm too ADD to sit and read it. I needed to

keep moving—on a walk, on the treadmill, or in the car. Right now I'm listening to Simon Winchester's *The Meaning of Everything* about the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary. I'm fascinated about what I'm learning, but I probably wouldn't have the patience to sit in one place and read it.

Fiction transports me to another world, much like a movie in a theatre can. I am an inhabitant for that time in India, Japan, New York, or a small town in Mississippi. After saying that, nonfiction books such as *The Legacy of Luna* by Julia Butterfly Hill are so engrossing that you feel you are living up in the thousand-year-old redwood tree with her.

**Marte Bock:** Primarily, I read literary novels.

**Terry Estes:** I read all types of books. I'm constantly searching for new ones to try.

**NINK: What do you notice first about a book?**

**CM:** Titles of books don't really catch my interest. The first thing I notice about a book is probably its cover. There are certain styles that appeal to me. (The marketing department people in publishing houses are probably psychology majors.) Then I turn it over and look at the jacket information. Finally, I read the first few pages to see if I like the author's writing style.

**MB:** An intriguing title can always capture my interest, although I often go straight to the books written by authors I like.

**TE:** I am influenced by the title first. If it's creative, then I look at the inside cover to get an idea about the storyline.



# The Buzz in the Biz.....



**NINK:** How do you decide which books you will buy?

**CM:** One of the places I feel the safest and the happiest is in a library or a book store. It's like a walking meditation for me. I like to stroll down the aisles, stopping at a book that looks interesting. I choose different kinds of books by different methods.

I rarely read reviews, but I am beginning to do so more. That's because I am basically running the book club I started twelve years ago. We look for books that are good for discussion and which will challenge our reading parameters. A sample of our books: *Bel Canto*, *The Emperor of Ocean Park*, Wallace Stegner's *Angle of Repose*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Desert Queen*, a biography about Gertrude Bell who was a colleague of Lawrence of Arabia, *The Death of Vishnu*, *Tortilla Curtain*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *A Thousand Acres*.

Book club members or other friends, whose taste in books I admire, recommend some books I read. I may find a review of a book tempting. There are also certain authors whose health I pray for...I wait eagerly for their next book just as I close the last page of their current one. If it's a continuing series, I also pray that they don't get tired or burned out about a character I love and want to read about again.

**MB:** If I'm looking for a book that I want to read but I know I won't keep, I check it out of the library or borrow it. The books I buy are literature that I think I will want to keep and read again. Sometimes I order from amazon.com, but I always order in paperback, and then donate the books to the library after I've finished reading.

**TE:** I definitely buy books by

my favorite authors. However, many of the books I read are suggested by friends. I suggest books to them, as well. We like to meet for coffee and discuss the books that we read.

**NINK:** Are you influenced by the bestseller lists? If so, which ones wield the most influence for you?

**CM:** The only time I am influenced by the bestseller list is when my friends hand me books that they tell me I must read. In college I was an English literature major, and I literally didn't read a current bestseller until I was 21. I never had time, and I was happy in Jane Austen's world and learning about what was important in life from Harper Lee.

**MB:** I hardly ever look at a bestseller list. I'm more likely to read a book because I heard someone talk about it or because I read a review. If I've already read a book that appears on the list, I'll notice that, but I hardly ever search the list for something to read.

I sometimes hear someone being interviewed about a book they've written. It seems like everybody in the world has written a book except me. And I have read books recommended by Oprah. Generally, I'm pleased with her selections. I'd say the majority of books I've read over the last six years have been ones recommended by my book club.

**TE:** I occasionally look at the bestseller lists when I am in bookstores, but I tend to buy books that interest me rather than letting the lists influence me.

**NINK:** Do you buy books in hardcover or wait for the paperback?

**TE:** I buy both. In my family, we give books for gifts. They could be for birthdays, any holiday, or simply for a friend who needs a small kindness. I've always bought books for my sons. I just felt that it was money well spent.

One of my most cherished memories is the lively family discussions about a book we'd all read when my sons were in their teens.

**NINK:** Do you read books more than once. If so, what makes you want to read a particular novel again?

**CM:** I rarely read books more than once. I used to, but I don't have that much time anymore. I do have a few books I save to re-read because I have enjoyed the characters so much I want to "be with them again."

**MB:** Rarely. *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is an exception. I think of it as a little jewel of a book. Every time I read it, I see something different.

**TE:** I don't read a book more than once. There are so many good books I want to discover that I just never want to re-read the ones already on my shelves.

**NINK:** Do you always finish reading the books you start? If not, what makes you put a novel down?

**CM:** I almost always finish what I am reading—it's sort of an obsessive-compulsive part of me. However, I may start skipping pages or do an Evelyn Wood approach to reading it.

Nonfiction I approach differently. I may read only a few pages at a time. Right now I am doing that with two nonfiction books my husband gave me to read. Usually our tastes don't match, but in the interest of harmony, I give his sugges-

tions a try. Both books are excellent. The Sammy Davis, Jr. biography, *In Black and White*, has a lot of history of the turbulence of the 1960s. *The Greatest Game Ever Played* is a history of golf that revolves around two of the greatest golfers at the beginning of the game.

**MB:** No, I don't always finish reading a book I start. Sometimes I put one down thinking I'll pick it up later. If I let too much time elapse, my incentive vanishes. Even when I'm reading for the book club, I'll occasionally find one that doesn't hold my interest. I figure there are too many other books I would enjoy to waste my time reading one I don't like.

**TE:** There have been only a couple of books that I didn't finish. I honestly don't know if I became bored with the details of the book or if personal considerations, such as raising my sons, interfered with my concentration.

**NINK:** **Approximately how many books do you read in a month?**

**CM:** Truly, I read 25 books a month—I read every night instead of watching television. It's a way for me to wind down. I read a lot of romance novels of every kind and anything from a bestseller to a literary piece. I also listen to books on tape. Sometimes I go through three a week.

**MB:** One or two.

**TE:** On average, I read about three.

**NINK:** **What elements do you love in a book?**

**MB:** Vivid, true-to-life characters. I like plots with lots of twists, turns, and surprises. I want a book that makes me think. If a book is well-written and believable with

great characters that seem like real people, it will hold my interest.

**TE:** I appreciate the authors who create characters so real that I become part of their family. Books with wonderful characters are the ones I don't want to end, and yet I keep on reading because I want to see what happens. I always miss the characters when I finish the book. Authors don't realize the power they have to influence us.

**NINK:** **Name some of your all-time favorite books and tell why they are memorable to you.**

**CM:** I love all of Jane Austen's books and will re-read them. I love the time period and her deft use of characterization to bring the time alive. I also love Eleanor Hodgeman Porter's, *Pollyanna*, published in 1912. It's a great story. People should re-read it, and they would admire Pollyanna instead of using her name as a derogative. I had my eighth grade English students read it. We saw that she was no naïve ditz—she'd learned how to handle the hard knocks of life by being positive. I always loved *Little Women*. As a teenager, I'd read it every Christmas vacation. Other favorites are *Siddhartha*, *War and Peace*, *Tortilla Curtain*, and *To Kill A Mockingbird*. I've read that twice as an adult, and I appreciate it more each time—what endearing and enduring characters.

The book *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* brings up an interesting idea. What if you could only have one or two books to ever read? Which would you choose? Or, if you could have just one author to read? Who would you choose?

**MB:** *The Great Gatsby*, of course. I loved the *Little House* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I grew up with those books, and when they

were made into a television series, it became my favorite show. And I can't forget *Of Mice and Men*. I think John Steinbeck is a fantastic story teller. The book never fails to move me to tears. Every time I see it in movie or stage version, the story has the same effect.

**TE:** How can I possibly list only a few? Frances Mayes took me straight to Italy in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. It was beautifully written, and the book was filled with her passion in remodeling her villa. Lorenzo Carcaterra wrote a heartbreaking and unforgettable book about a group of street children who tried to save their city. It was based on a true story. *Street Boys* is a book everyone should read. I am now reading the Alexander McCall Smith series. The first book is *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. It was a laugh-out-loud book filled with lots of twists and turns. And then there's nothing like being snuggled under the covers reading romance on a rainy day. Some of them are filled with such tenderness, and some of the characters still live in my heart.

**NINK:** **Why do you read?**

**CM:** Reading has always been a way for me to escape from the everyday world into one of someone else's experience or imagination.

**MB:** It's my favorite form of entertainment. I read for information, also.

**TE:** Reading is one of my greatest pleasures. If I am not reading a book, I'm like a baby without a bottle. I always keep several books on hand to read, and sometimes I have two going at the same time. They are a wonderful means of escape. If I didn't have books, I guess I'd run away, change my name, and become a virgin. ♦



BY LAWRENCE  
WATT-EVANS

# The Past Is Another Country

A couple of columns back I mentioned getting a new computer last year and went off on a tangent about how essential computers have become for writers. What I'd originally intended to say, though, was that getting the new computer prompted me to go through all my old files as I transferred them to the new machine, and this was an interesting experience.

I'm not the same person who wrote a lot of that stuff, and I don't live in the same world. I'm coming up on the 25th anniversary of the sale of my first novel and the 20th anniversary of switching from typewriter to computer, and everything has changed in that time. Reading an article I wrote in 1984 advising would-be fantasy writers on how to break in is slightly horrifying—anyone who tried to follow that advice now would be making a fool of himself. The suggested word counts are wrong, the typical advances and royalties I talk about are wrong, the advice on agents is all wrong, even some of the formatting stuff is out of date!

As recently as 1994 I wrote a novel set in contemporary Maryland where *no one* in the story had cell phones—not even federal agents—and the acquiring editor saw nothing wrong with this. And about the same time I sold *NINK* a piece explaining what the Internet is—not how it works or how to use it effectively, but what it *is*, because even that recently lots of intelligent, educated people genuinely didn't know. I talked breathlessly about how the World Wide Web had *thousands* of sites to browse; Google currently reports on over four *billion*.

We all know the world changes, but sometimes we forget how *fast* it changes.

Historical novelists have always known how important it is to get the details right for the particular period where a story is set and regularly do extensive research, but how many of us would bother doing research for a story set ten years ago? After all, we were *there*, we remember what the world was like then—don't we?

After looking through some of these files, I have my doubts.

Consider a science fiction novel I wrote in the late

'80s, set in a 25<sup>th</sup> century dominated by the Japanese. In 1988 that looked perfectly reasonable; now it looks, well...kinda stupid. The Japanese economy crashed and hasn't really recovered, and there's no sign it's ever again going to be the threat it was in 1988—especially since the Japanese population is dropping.

So a story set in 2366 where the Japanese own everything looks silly now—but if I were writing a story set in 1988, would I remember that *at that time*, the Japanese economy was seen as an unstoppable juggernaut? Would I have my characters think that?

It really was seen that way, you know. It wasn't just me. I edited an anthology called *Newer York* in 1989, and I've just gone through all the files for that and been reminded how many of the submitted stories involved a Japanese-run future. There were dozens of them.

In 1988 the Berlin Wall was still standing, the Soviet Union was still intact—I think everyone would remember those details. But fear of the Japanese? Just five years later the world looked completely different, and of course it's changed even more since then, and we've forgotten about the old fears, forgotten how much has changed and how quickly.

I got caught in the rush of change, actually. Back in 1986 a friend and I started working on a collaborative SF novel set in the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because it was a side-project for both of us it went slowly, and we didn't finish it for years. And because my collaborator was a complete unknown and the novel is short and quirky, it was hard to sell.

And once we did finish it, it wasn't as finished as we thought, because the world around us kept changing. Every time it came back from another publisher we had to rewrite it because something obvious had changed while we were waiting for the editor to read it, making our near-future setting impossible.

We had to write out references to the Soviet Union. We had to write *in* references to the World Wide Web—when we first wrote it the Web hadn't been invented yet and the computer networks we described, based on the old BBS systems, were suddenly obsolete when the Web first went public. We had to add cell phones and take out pay phones, change videotapes to DVDs, and rework the scene at a construction site because construction methods changed in the '90s...

And in 2001 we withdrew it entirely for awhile, because at one point in the story our hero joins a terrorist cell. Yes, he does so for good reasons and winds up turning the terrorist organization into a non-violent political group, but in the fall of 2001 we still didn't think that would go over well with readers.

(Incidentally, late in 2002 we did finally sell the thing—but it's been delayed in production, it isn't out yet, and I'm dreading the possibility that something else will happen to render it obsolete again.)

Admittedly, science fiction is a special case and has always had problems when the future didn't match the predictions, but it seems as if we're getting to the point that even writing stories in contemporary settings, you risk getting the everyday world wrong because it will have changed while you were writing and selling the book!

And setting things in the recent past—it's amazing how easy it is to misremember our own lifetimes!

Historical novelists have always had to worry about the obsessive fans pointing out that this wasn't invented yet and that person was out of the country that year and so on—but now it's beginning to seem as if *all* of us need to worry.

Especially since publishing is such a slow business. We all know how it works—you spend months or years writing a novel, send it to your editor, who takes months to read it, and then it goes to production, and they take months, and so on. It's not the least bit unusual for it to be two years from when a novel was written to when it appears in the bookstores.

And nowadays the whole world can change in two years. In a way we're all writing historicals, whether we want to or not.

Well—except those of us who write fantasy, of course. Once again, my choice of genre has made my life easier. If I made up the entire world, no one can tell me I got any of it wrong.

Although even there—you know, the world has always been changing, never static; you can find complaints by first-century Roman writers about how the world's going to hell in a handbasket, it's not like the good old days, and who can keep up with it all. In ancient China, too, Confucius berated his readers for not doing things the way their noble ancestors did and for listening to trashy modern music instead of the traditional stuff. (No, really, he did, I'm not making this up.)

But in fantasy and science fiction it's not unusual to find kingdoms or empires or civilizations that have been static for millennia. In Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*, for example, the Galactic Empire has ruled the galaxy for 12,000 years and its technology has been essentially unchanged for all that time—which is absurd.

Or in *The Lord of the Rings*, which is actually better than most fantasies about being set in a world that has changed over time, Aragorn is the heir of Isildur, and this is seen as very important—but Isildur has been dead for 1,400 years.

In other words, this is like being the heir of Charlemagne. It sounds cool, but does it really matter? It's just so easy to throw hundreds or thousands of years around when you're making it all up!

Add in time travel, as many stories do, and it gets ridiculous—people who speak the same language centuries apart, who have no trouble communicating across gaps of hundreds of years of cultural change. Really, how likely is that? How well can *you* communicate with your teenage kids? And that's just a couple of decades' difference!

As John Wyndham said, life is change. The world is constantly changing around us, and when we write a story set in the world we see, we're freezing that one particular moment in time, saving it to disk—and in a few years, perhaps even before it's published, the real world will have moved on and left it behind.

And going through the old files on my computer, I realized, wasn't so much maintenance as archeology. ♦

## Bits 'n' Pieces

### Bookstore Fluctuation –

#### Closing and Openings

Victor Hugo Bookshop will close early in May 2004 after 28 years. Visit the site for an interesting look at the reasons that independent bookstores are closing and the irony of the bookstore openings below: <http://www.avenuevictorhugobooks.com/>

Barnes & Noble plans to open 30 to 35 superstores in 2004 but will close approximately a dozen according to CEO Steve Riggio. The company will also be more than halfway toward having the B&N publishing unit generating 10% of sales by the end of 2004.

Books-A-Million plans to open 10 new stores and remodel 20-25 stores.

#### New Agency Forms

Arthur Pine Associates, Witherspoon Associates, and Carlisle & Company are merging into a new "literary management company," to be called InkWell Management.

The agency plans to focus on "intellectual property licensing, brand-building, and lectures" in addition to traditional agent services. Clients include the following:

Dr. Arthur Agatston of South Beach Diet fame, Andrew Weil and Wayne Dyer to Rebecca Wells, Susan Orlean, Robert Harris, and Dava Sobel.



## Anxiety About Having Anxiety: *Anxiety Disorders*

### DEAR ANNETTE:

I've always been a worrier, but lately things have been getting out of hand. Over the past year I've noticed that I'm often keyed up over small things. I don't think I have more than the average amount of stress in my life, but there are times I can't sleep for worrying. I can't seem to shut off the thoughts. It's beginning to affect my writing. The other day I spent three hours of my writing time stressing over what dish I was going to bring to a potluck dinner! By the time I shook the thoughts, my heart was pounding and I had a dandy tension headache. I seem to catastrophize everything. Am I going crazy?

*Signed: Worried About Being Worried*

### DEAR WORRIED:

I doubt that you're any crazier than the rest of us. But clearly something's not right for you to be experiencing so much anxiety so frequently and over what you're aware are minor issues. My first suggestion would be to have a thorough physical exam. It is possible a thyroid problem or other hormonal imbalance could be causing your symptoms. Those things are generally pretty easy for physicians to pinpoint.

If all checks out okay, my guess is that you may have developed an anxiety disorder.

Everybody knows what it's like to feel anxious—the butterflies in your stomach before you have to address a group, the way your heart pounds when a car swerves in front of you. This sort of anxiety puts us on extra-alert. It actually helps sharpen our senses, etc.

When anxiety runs amuck, though, it does the opposite: instead of helping to generate extra muscle or mental alertness, it immobilizes us. Anxiety disorders are

real. Although many (heck, maybe the majority) of people believe panic attacks, excessive anxiety, phobias, etc. are all “in your head,” they're not. Well, okay actually, they are, but...you know what I mean.

Although we don't know exactly what causes them, there is plenty of research to suggest that anxiety disorders are not simply the figment of an overactive imagination or the result of a worrying personality type. Research, in fact, is currently focused on several key areas of the brain that appear to be involved in the production of anxiety and stress. To simplify the issue hugely for a moment—for reasons we don't yet understand—some people's brains and/or other parts of their nervous systems either don't “turn off” after exposure to outside stressors or “turn on” too quickly.

Either way, anxiety disorders are real, physical and emotional manifestations of stress and anxiety just—to put it simply—occurring at the wrong times.

Anxiety disorders are actually the most common forms of mental health disorders, more prevalent even than depression. The good news is that they are among the most treatable as well.

There are several forms anxiety disorders can take.

**Panic Disorder** is one of the most recognized. People with panic disorder experience feelings of terror that strike suddenly and repeatedly with no warning. They can't predict when an anxiety attack will occur.

**Social Phobia**, or social anxiety disorder, involves overwhelming anxiety and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** results from the experience of a life-threatening event. Sufferers often experience flashbacks, intense nightmares, and panic attacks that are associated with triggers that remind them of the event.

From your description, it's possible that **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** is the culprit here. People suffering from GAD can find themselves feeling anxious much of the time for no apparent reason. They experience an exaggerated amount of tension even though there is little or nothing to worry about, and they can't seem to shake their concerns, even though they realize their anxiety is more intense than the situation warrants. Their worries are often accompanied by physical symptoms associated with prolonged stress, especially fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, difficulty swallowing, trembling, twitching, and irritability. People with GAD may feel lightheaded or out of breath. They also have a tremendously hard time relaxing, and they may startle more easily than other people.

Although GAD is the most common anxiety disorder, it's probably the least recognized. It's easier for people



suffering from heart attack-like panic attacks or the intense flashbacks common with post traumatic stress to believe there's something wrong. Often people suffering from GAD simply believe they worry too much and too intensely.

**Treating Anxiety Disorders:**

The good news about GAD is that it's usually very treatable. In my practice, I would have to say that it's the most easily and effectively treatable disorder I deal with.

Medication is generally quite useful in treating anxiety disorders. Antidepressants are often the first line of defense. Beyond that, there are a number of other drugs such as azaspirones and benzodiazepines that can be quite effective for different people who haven't responded to antidepressant treatment.

When looking for a psychotherapist to treat GAD, it's important to find a therapist trained in cognitive-behavioral therapy. Cognitive-behavioral therapists focus on teasing out specific thoughts and behaviors that contribute to bouts of anxiety. They also help their anxiety-prone clients to find new, highly specific thoughts and behaviors that will help head off bouts of worrying. Unless someone suffers from a phobia or post traumatic stress due to specific past incidents, lengthy dissection of childhood family dynamics hasn't been proven to alleviate anxiety disorders.

Stress management techniques and meditation have also been shown to be very beneficial. There's also evidence that consistent aerobic exercise can help alleviate the severity and duration of anxiety episodes.

And take care with caffeine, and even some over the counter cold meds. They often aggravate the symptoms of an anxiety disorder.

If your symptoms don't subside soon, I would urge you to talk to your physician. You're not crazy, and you're not alone. And there's no need to keep suffering. Left untreated, anxiety disorders are more likely than not to grow stronger over time.

*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.*

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**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:**

Reon Laudat, Oak Park MI

**New Members:**

- Judy Duarte, San Luis Rey CA
- Jolie Kramer (*Jo Leigh*), Beaver UT
- Felicia L. Mason, Yorktown VA
- Deborah A. Rather (*Arlene James*), Mansfield TX
- Roxanne St. Claire, Satellite Beach FL

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

**Bits'n'Pieces**

**Books and Personal Privacy**

*Girl, Interrupted* author Susana Kaysen had an invasion of privacy suit filed by a former companion dismissed by Massachusetts Superior Court. The court found that legitimate public interest existed in the case. The named person's actions pertain to Kaysen's condition in the book and were essential to the plot. Random House lawyers feel this could establish a precedent that goes beyond Kaysen suit and would protect other revealing memoirs from similar lawsuits.



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## *Sunday Books*

When I was a child, there was always an afternoon that arrived in early spring, a sudden gold in the long afternoon light that announced barefoot season was on its way. It would be a taste in the wind, and an almost unbearable beckoning from the summer spirits to detour on the way home from school and dash down the grassy bank to the creek below the old bridge. I was forbidden to go there, likely more due to its isolation than any danger of drowning, but there was always that one day that I had to go. I'd sit on the bank and strip off my heavy shoes, and the socks, ironed flat to my arches, and then—oh, bliss.

There was nothing, nothing like that first spring nakedness, bare toes breathing the air, drinking the crystal pleasure of the ice cold creek, fed by snow-melt rolling into town from the Rockies. I would dream and scribble, knowing I was stealing time away from other things, from the chores waiting for me at home, the spelling homework I had to do. I knew there would be a scolding. It was worth it.

Here in Colorado in the present, it is not yet spring. Winter clings to the dark trees. It's a cool damp Sunday morning. The house is asleep—boy in his vampire den, cats curled in furry lumps, dogs sprawled in the most inconvenient places they can possibly find (the rule is to see how often I will trip and thus nearly kill myself in a single day). There is snow in the air.

I don't work on Sundays. It started as a way of always having a day that was devoted entirely to my family, and I've kept up with the practice so that I have a

day that's entirely mine, one I can use to go to movies or putter with an art project or cook something elaborate or see friends. This Sunday is particularly quiet, at the end of a holiday period when finally all the hard work is finished and it's nearly time to put it all away.

And what I feel is a whisper of a story. It's one that's been nudging me lately, coming in wisps out of foggy days, whispering around on cold dark winter afternoons. It's a ghost story. A *real* ghost story, one that's frightening but romantic, with a tragic tale that needs redemption. At the moment, it's a collection of snippets and whispers, scribbled notes in the notebook I carry on my travels or send to myself in email from a friend's house. I'm seeing an island in a Scottish loch, high on the northwest side of the land. A visitor's center, a town I liked, and a pub that overlooks a place where swans gather...

It's a Sunday book, this one. Which means it's a book I am writing purely for my own pleasure. I am not worrying about what name I'd write under or who would buy a ghost story or how this material fits into the rest of my career. It's for me. For fun. It's a ghost story particularly because I am devoted to them and have been since I was a young girl, and the truth is, most ghost stories these days are either too gory or too silly. I'm very specific about what I want in this arena, what flavor I'm yearning to taste. I want smoky dusks falling over lonely landscapes and a painfully romantic and tragic story in the past and lamplight that doesn't chase it all away but offers comfort on a damp winter twilight.

I've read all the ones that have been written and I'm out of material, so what's a writer to do?

Gosh—write one! How cool is that?

The girls love this practice. It feels wicked and rich, like stripping off our shoes those long ago spring days by the creek. In our Sunday books, we can be baroque or tragic or brooding or whatever else suits us. We can scare ourselves to pieces or write something erotically over the top and use whatever we like. We are pleasing no market, no editor, no critique group. We're just pleasing ourselves.

I nearly always have a Sunday book in progress, some little something I'm playing with on the side. Some of them have worked their way into saleable projects and some have not. Some have been books so big or challenging that I wanted to grapple with them privately before revealing anything to the world, or maybe I wanted to fool myself into thinking I wasn't writing them for real. Some have been frothy or just for fun. Jo Beverly writes science fiction and high fantasy for her play projects. A lot of us use novellas as play projects—they're short and can be a departure, a way to experiment without committing too much to a different sub-genre.

Sunday books can also be a way to tackle challenges. Category authors, for example, who are looking to try their hands at suspense or historical romances but don't want to jeopardize their regular incomes might try the Sunday book approach. A few pages written every week over the course of time can be a way to see if a project might be viable. I had been writing category for several years when I realized that the length and comfort zone could prove dangerous for me over time. I was afraid I'd end up writing by rote—kiss by page 62, dark moment at 314—following my own pattern book after book until they were as lifeless as Twinkies. Interestingly, it was a book that is one of my own favorites and still think is one of my better categories that made me start to worry (*Jezebel's Blues*, a book that sold phenomenally badly thanks to a truly wretched cover—but has sustained life over the years in that weird way that books can sometimes). I wanted to keep a fresh edge in category, to keep striving for excellence, and it seemed to me that writing something completely different in between would be a good way to do that. Since I'd always loved medievals, I thought I'd try that.

I remember the winter I wrote my first historical. Snowy Sundays framed by family meals, me sitting somewhere in the middle of the house so I wasn't isolated from them, a research book or a notebook in my lap. I had no idea it would be so much fun! And I did feel refreshed, more able to come back to my next category with a renewed sense of purpose.

It is said that writers are never so free as before

they sell their first novel, and as we've all discovered, there is truth in it. We become bound by certain external realities and strive toward the branding and name recognition that drives a successful writing career over a period of decades. We do become experts at a certain sort of novel, a high fantasy or a historical comedy or dark journeys, and there is much to be said for the pleasure of excellence that can arise from being so adept. Each writer, taking her own form into its highest realm, gives us all a rush.

But it often means engaging in a constant quest to better our own performance, learn more, go deeper, explore our own particular areas of expertise with greater and greater attention. And it can feel stale, just as our own homes, no matter how comfortable or well-appointed or delightful to us, can feel stifling if we haven't had a vacation for awhile.

Play projects let the artist child out for a sunny afternoon of play. (Or foggy, as the case may be.) Play books provide a chance to take a break from the real world and remember why we started writing in the first place—not for some Other, but for ourselves and the girls in the basement who are cutting out paper dolls and dancing them around on a cardboard stage. They're not worried at the moment that the hair is only glued-on yellow yarn or that the "trees" are just sticks poked into the cardboard. This isn't for public consumption. It's for them.

For you. Give it a try.

Now, if you'll excuse me, there is a ruined castle and a moody Scottish ghost that Guinevere is dying to write about. See you next time. ♦

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## Bits'n'Pieces

### Fantasy House Goes YA

Wizards of the Coast is launching a new imprint, Mirrorstone, this summer for kids between 8-14.

Two fantasy series will be featured: *Dragonlance: The New Adventures* and *Knights of the Silver Dragon*. The juvenile *Dragonlance* will have an original storyline developed specifically for the younger readers. The books will be mass market and released one book per month in each series in alternating months through 2005.

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## Yet another means to latch on to Da Vinci Code success

*Breaking the Breaks in the Broken Da Vinci Code* is being called the refutational handbook to refutational handbooks.

### What if publishers created a subgenre and nobody read it?

This question is posed in Natalie Danford's article *Lad Lit Hits the Skids* in the 3/29/04 PW. She reports that sales are down, but that isn't stopping the publishers from bringing out more books. Despite good media coverage for "lad lit," chick lit still outsells it. Nick Hornby didn't hit two million copies until he sold six titles in trade editions. This is compared to Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* that sold two million in hardback and paper for the one title.

Michael Weinreb will be Red Ink's first male author with *Girl Boy Etc.* coming out in May in hardback.

Current and forthcoming "lad lit" books mentioned in the article:

Kyle Smith—*Love Monkey*

Mil Millington—*Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About*

Mike Gayle—*Dinner for Two*

John Scott Shepard—*The Dead Father's Guide to Sex and Marriage*

Simon Brooke—*Upgrading*

*The Bastard on the Couch: 27 Men Try Really Hard to Explain Their Feelings About Love, Loss, Fatherhood, and Freedom*, edited by Daniel Jones

Note: When did it change to "lad lit" from its earlier genre title "dick lit"?

## What's Been Selling? Finalists for the ABA's 2004 Book Sense Book of the Year Awards

The titles are nominated by the ABA bookseller members from titles that appeared on the Book Sense list in 2003. Winners will be announced at the Celebration of Bookselling on Friday, June 4, at BookExpo America in Chicago.

### Adult Fiction

- \* *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (Doubleday)
- \* *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (Doubleday)
- \* *The Master Butchers Singing Club* by Louise Erdrich (HarperCollins)
- \* *Mrs. Kimble* by Jennifer Haigh (Morrow)
- \* *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger (MacAdam/Cage)

### Paperback

- \* *Atonement* by Ian McEwan (Anchor)
- \* *The Dive From Clausen's Pier* by Ann Packer (Vintage)
- \* *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal* by Christopher Moore (Perennial)
- \* *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (Harvest)
- \* *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (Penguin)

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