

# Novelists' Ink Novelists' Ink Novelists' Ink

# Novelists' Ink

June 2005  
Vol. 16, No. 6

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

## Are You Ready to Hire a Publicist?

BY TINA WAINSCOTT

Frankly, I wasn't sure *I* was ready, but I really wanted to boost my sales in a flat market so I was willing to consider it. Nearly two years ago, actually. My then-agent said I wasn't at the place print-run-wise (115,000) to spend the money, and so I set the question aside, both relieved and disappointed. Now, burning with the same desire, I broached the subject with my new agent, who said, "It'd be a great bargaining chip for the next negotiation!"

And then I felt... well, both relieved and disappointed! (Writers are neurotic, after all). I was about to embark on a journey of research and exploration, and I was about to drop a chunk of money. I already knew that part. Whenever I'd asked authors about publicists, that's what they always said. "It's expensive." So I set a budget—nothing exorbitant, but respectable I thought, at about three thousand—and jumped on the task.

I wasn't a complete newbie. I had hired a publicist a few years ago to generate local media interest. I

had a local hook: the book had been inspired by a local news story. She generated two successes (one a TV interview) and my efforts also generated two successes. Overall my \$175 probably bought at least that much in "advertising," so I wasn't displeased. But without a local hook, I didn't go that route again. Besides, local media is great, but for breaking out or moving up, I was thinking national media attention.

Except that I didn't know what to ask a national publicist. Sure, I know what to ask agents. There are a lot of resources on that. But publicists, I couldn't find much. I mean, so I talk to someone. What do I ask, and most important, how do I tell if the answers are right?

I had a target, a publicist whom a friend had recommended (but not actually used). I'd heard about Publicist #1 at conferences. Thankfully my agent sent me some suggested questions, and I came up with a few myself. (I will include those at the end of this article.) I wanted this to be easy. Get a recommendation, have a nice chat, hire, and off we go!

Publicist #1 and I spoke for an

hour, and she had some great ideas. Freebies, I thought (hey, I love a bargain!), though I half expect a bill. See, that's how much I don't know about this end of the business. She brought up things I already did and things I hadn't even thought of. Something I thought sounded neat, a radio satellite tour, was about \$5,500. I'm not exactly sure what a satellite tour is, but I imagined it was me appearing on several different radio stations across the country while sitting at one location. But that was way more than my heretofore-respectable budget.

We talked about two different approaches: targeting national women's magazines by pitching an article that would tie in to my book and be written and researched by her staff; and a media blitz in the area my next book is set in: Miami. It sounded good until I heard the approximate cost—\$6,000-7,000.

*Yikes.*

Here's where the similarity came in with agent hunting, I found. I liked her

*Continued on page 3* ▶

**INSIDE:** *President's Voice: The Cool Crowd...2, Introducing...3, Empower the Writer Redux: Goodman Speech...8, Duo-logue: Promotion—Self...9, Bits'n'Pieces...11, 12, 13, Crayon on my Keyboard: Is Change Really as Good as a Nap?...12, The Girls in the Basement: Sneak Away and Read a Book...14, Ninc 2006 New Orleans...16*

## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

### Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne*	Evan Maxwell
Janice Young Brooks*	Victoria Thompson
Jasmine Cresswell*	Steven Womack
Maggie Osborne*	Barbara Keiler
Marianne Shock*	Pat Rice
Linda Barlow	Anne Holmberg
Georgia Bockoven	Jean Brashear

\* Founder

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

### 2005 Board of Directors

**PRESIDENT:** Vicki Lewis Thompson  
1536 W. Cool Dr.  
Tucson AZ 85704-2141  
(520) 297-9308  
VLTPENPWR@aol.com

**PRESIDENT-ELECT:** Brenda Hiatt Barber  
9241 Castle Knoll Blvd.  
Indianapolis IN 46250-3484  
(317) 849-3356  
brendahb@aol.com

**SECRETARY:** Linda Madl  
1734 King's Road  
Manhattan KS 66503  
(785) 770-9363  
linda@lindamadl.com

**TREASURER:** Deborah Gordon  
1240 Noonan Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95822-2507  
916-448-1964  
DBHGORDON@aol.com

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR:** Annette Carney  
PO Box 33204  
Reno NV 89533  
(775) 746-1680  
annetecarney@sbcglobal.net

**ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:**  
Barbara Keiler  
32 Atkinson Lane  
Sudbury MA 01776-1939  
Phone: (978) 443-0770  
Fax: (978) 443-0775  
b.keiler@juno.com

**CENTRAL COORDINATOR:** David L. Brooks  
Novelists, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1166  
Mission KS 66222-0166  
Fax: (913) 432-3132  
ninc@kc.rr.com

**Website:** <http://www.ninc.com>

Address changes may be made on the website.  
For members without Internet access,  
send changes to the Central Coordinator.

Copyright ©2005 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved.  
No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in  
any manner without written permission.

## President's Voice

# The Cool Crowd

Like most nerds, I've struggled all my life to be cool. Look to your left at the masthead and check out the street I live on. Is that a mandate or what? I thought I was making progress, especially after buying a cool car. Not to brag or anything, but my car is yellow, and I have it on good authority that yellow is the new red, and you know what that means. Coolness, squared. My car.

Just when I thought I'd bought my way into the cool crowd with my yellow car, just when I thought I could throw out savvy phrases that would impress the hell out of everybody, I discovered something. There are people who know what Jumping the Shark really means, and there are people who don't. I would be the person falling into Column B.

We have some cool people in Ninc. You know who you are. The rest of us know who you are, too. You knew about Jumping the Shark, didn't you? You knew it was actually a bad thing to be doing, an extremely desperate, pathetic exercise in futility. Thank you for being kind and not making fun of me. Overly.

For those of you reading this who have no idea what I'm talking about, you obviously missed my April column. What??? You don't instantly devour the precious words of your esteemed president? Fifty points from Slytherin.

In any case, I'm blaming Garry Marshall, who put a totally different spin on Jumping the Shark than the rest of the world gives it. It was his *Happy Days* special, so I guess that was his prerogative. He totally sucked me in, I can tell you that much. But let me assure you that Ninc will never, so long as I am president, Jump the Shark. I promise.

If you attended the conference in NYC in April or you're dipping into the conference recaps that are coming your way in the pages of *NINK*, you can plainly see that we're miles away from Jumping the Shark. *Empower the Writer* was a kick-ass, take-no-prisoners, jam-packed full-of-goodies conference. How about that Harlan Coben? How about that Irene Goodman? I may not be cool, but I recognize cool when I see it.

I was completely awed by the way Ken Casper handled his duties as conference coordinator for NYC, but then I had a chilling thought. Ken's going bye-bye, now. We need another vict— uh, volunteer for next year. And then a Ninc-inspired miracle happened. Someone appeared. Pat Roy raised her hand after falling prey to chocolates, cheap wine, and the can-do spirit that permeates this organization.

Speaking of cheap wine, I got another broad hint that I'm not the coolest cat on the block while watching *Sideways*. Apparently it's uncool to drink Merlot. And here I thought I was doing great because I pronounced it Mer-low instead of Mer-lot. But I digress.

Pat Roy has a passel of dynamite ideas for our *Reclaim the Magic* conference in New Orleans. If you've promised yourself a Ninc conference sometime soon, make this the one. Unlike me, it will be very, very cool.

*Your uncool prez,*  
**Vicki**

# Are You Ready to Hire a Publicist?

*Continued from p. 1* ▶ thinking, appreciated her input, and found her easy to talk with. But something held me back. (Besides the price. I was confident that I could find one or two things that would fit my tiny budget.) There was just that... feeling. So I emailed her clients for references. First, I discovered that all three weren't her clients anymore, and that was because they weren't happy with her services. Darn, I should have known this wasn't going to be easy. Three negatives were enough to make me back off, combined with my hesitation. On to the next one.

Except this time I took a breath

and sent emails to the next agency's clients asking for input. While I waited for responses, I poked around on the Internet. An agency's website is their "face" and considering what they do, I expect it to shine. Publicist #1's site had a few typos and repeated information. Nothing alarming, but still....

Another agency's website was awful, with intrusive ads, and I nearly struck them off my list based on that. Good thing I did another search (I had the web address from my search two years ago) and found their updated site. Much better. The third agency I was considering didn't have a site up at all.

This is the point where I posted a query on the Ninc loop for input, and it occurred to me that this might make a nice article for the newsletter. So I expanded my scope and also learned of a few other agencies through referrals.

If you're reading this, you're obviously at least somewhat interested in the concept of hiring a publicist. Authors generously shared their experiences with me, and in return, I promised to keep both their names and the agencies confidential if they desired.

One author had used two different agencies. "They were both very good at what they do but ▶

---

## 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:*

### **Ninc Note**

Extreme deadline pressures forced Ninc treasurer Ann Josephson to resign her post at the end of April. The Ninc Board appreciates her efforts on the organization's behalf and wishes her the best.

Fortunately we were able to recruit the services of former treasurer Debbie Gordon to finish out the year. We're grateful to Ann for her work and to Debbie for stepping in on short notice. **VLT**

### **New Applicants:**

Jennifer Archer, Amarillo TX  
Ginger Chambers, San Francisco CA  
Kristina Cook, Yonkers NY  
Flo Fitzpatrick, South Amboy NJ  
Joan Garcia (*E. Joan Sims*), Norcross GA  
Candice Hern, San Francisco CA  
Patricia Kay, Houston TX  
Tina Leonard, Richardson TX  
Loree Lough (*Cara McCormack, Aleesha Carter*), Ellicott City MD (returning member)  
Celeste Norfleet, Woodbridge VA  
Marti Robb (*Mariah Stewart*), Lincoln University PA  
Eileen Rendahl, Davis CA  
Linda Sandifer, Iona ID

### **New Members:**

Johanna Asmi (*Susanna Carr*), Redmond WA  
Andrea DaRif (*Andrea Pickens*), Fairfield CT  
Barbara Freethy, Burlingame CA

Donna Hill, Brooklyn NY  
Jenna Kernan, Rye Brook NY  
Julianne Moore (*Jule McBride*), New York NY  
Jacqueline Navin, Bel Air MD  
Jennifer Orf (*Jennifer McKinlay*), Scottsdale AZ  
Linda Palmer, Studio City CA  
Kathleen Pynn (*Kathleen O'Brien*), Maitland FL  
Mauri Stott (*Samantha Hunter*), Syracuse NY  
Lisa Wanttaja (*Lisa McAllister, Catriona MacGregor*), Auburn WA

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

# Are You Ready to Hire a Publicist?

► would I spend that much money again? I don't know. It's impossible to measure their impact on sales (which is what it's all about ultimately). I think you have to have a very specific goal in mind when you hire a publicist."

In one case, an author had a goal and the publicist achieved it. Unfortunately, the author didn't feel that the publicist offered her anything beyond that.

Another author added, "I hired one for my first single title. Blew the entire advance. Evidently the print run was so small there was no way I could recover costs."

One author said, "I wanted to do everything I could to promote my 'breakout book' so I hired a publicist. I also needed someone to take care of things so I could concentrate on writing. Instead I ended up having to make sure things were done, and being more stressed than if I'd just done it myself. It's also impossible to tell what works and what doesn't, so you end up feeling as if you've thrown money out the window. I've come to the conclusion that if the publisher doesn't do it for you, it's probably not worth doing."

For a while I was beginning to wonder if I would hear any positive reports. Of course, we know promotion rarely has any measurable effects. Even if you achieve success, was it the promo, timing, or book? Some authors felt they were doing something, and that seemed to make them feel better. Yeah, I could relate to that.

Most of us have heard about how one publicist managed to get two authors' books into Kelly Ripa's hands for her book club on *Live with Regis and Kelly*—cases where the outcome was definitely tangible. But those kinds of opportunities are very limited. I wanted some realistic success stories.

Then, finally, I got something good.

Shirley Jump hired Nancy Berland's agency. "Though we ended up getting off to a late start with *The Bride Wore Chocolate* because we started together late, she did a great job getting the booksellers 'sold' on the book, and I'm psyched to find out I sold out my print run. I don't know how much of that was Nancy's doing, but I do know I can't be everywhere at all times." She added, "I look at the expenditure as a business one. To me, it's like hiring an outside salesperson—there's someone out there touting my value to my core customer."

## I'LL HAVE SO MUCH TIME TO WRITE!

One important thing to consider, as I read through a list of what a publicist would need from me: We might think we can let the publicist do everything so we can focus on what we really want—our writing. But the reality seems to be much the opposite. First, we must supply the publicist with lots of ammo, i.e., a list of our awards, books, quotes, and reviews; our upcoming schedule; and any other tidbits we think he or she might need to do their job. We have to brainstorm with our publicist, at the least okaying or naying ideas they have.

Shirley Jump learned this the hard way: "I thought once I hired my publicist, I'd have oodles more time. I don't; because she's so active, I have decisions to make all the time on appearances, interviews, promo materials, etc."

Roxanne St. Claire (*Killer Curves*, Pocket) echoed this as well. "Even when you hire an outside publicist, a tremendous amount of work falls on the author's shoulders. Some projects are not cost-effective to out-

source—it just makes more sense to have your ten-year-old sticker postcards. With even the most seasoned publicist, the author should be in a position to drive the bus and not hand over the keys and hope the PR person knows the direction. The author has to know and communicate the key messages, understand each audience, and set/monitor the budget. The author has to manage the project, not walk away and hope for the best."

Many of us have been doing our own promo for some time, and as burdensome as it is, we may have trouble letting go of the creative process. For instance, I would still do my bookseller mailing, write my own letter, and even do the mailing (which is done while watching a chick flick with my mom). I've been designing my own post cards for ten years now; would I want to let that go? Perhaps I'd be happy to just pass it by the publicist for an opinion.

I'd suggest that before you approach a publicist, make a list of the things you do and note what you would still do. I'd rather continue doing what I do so that my publicist can focus his or her time (and my money) on the things I can't do myself.

## HOW THE MONEY WORKS

Publicist #1 had two ways of working with an author, hourly or by retainer. If you're planning to have a long-term plan of action, a monthly retainer might be best. Remember, though, that you're committed to paying that retainer every month. Some months you'll use more time, other months less. You'll have to judge whether that evens out in the end. The nice thing about this arrangement is that you have the publicist on hand for media consultations (interview coaching, for instance).

The other way is hourly. You'll only pay for what you get. But think twice about this if you go crazy looking over your telephone bill. One author I spoke with said she was charged a 15-minute increment for the publicist to answer an email. Taking that a step farther, what if you were emailing the publicist to find out if she'd done her job, and she charged you to advise that she hadn't?

#### WHAT CAN GO WRONG

I can't overemphasize this point: *ask around*. You probably already figured that out with regard to Publicist #1. Someone may have had a good experience years ago or with one small project, but things change. Sometimes not for the better. (For the purposes of this article, I have not included that agency's information here).

One author candidly shared her experience: "I feel that the money I spent with the agency, while it wasn't a whole lot, was completely wasted. A specific example: I got my publisher to give me a ton of extra ARCs for my March release because my publicist had this promo plan to send them to a slew of magazines and newspapers. I sent these to her in late December. Many of the publications we were targeting required six to eight-week lead times. In mid-February, I called and asked if we'd had *any* hits at all from the mailing, because I sure wasn't seeing any buzz. Want to know what she said? 'Oh, I was waiting until after Valentine's Day to send these out. You just can't compete with Valentine's Day.' I sent these to her back in *December!!!*"

I heard other stories about authors having to nag their publicist for updates and status. Frankly, we expect to do that with our in-house publicists. After all, they work for the publisher, not us. And they're usually inundated with titles and lack the staff to promote them. But the person we've paid to look out

for our interests?

Fortunately, the bad experiences I heard about were a lack of follow-through rather than any deceptive practices.

#### BREAKING UP...ISN'T HARD TO DO

I wondered what the procedure was for parting ways with your publicist. This is where it can differ from a literary agent, because publicists often work on a project-by-project basis. I asked three authors who were dissatisfied with their publicists how they parted ways.

"I wrote my publicist a formal letter terminating our agreement," said one author. "In the letter, I expressed my gratitude for all the efforts this publicist made on my behalf and wished her well. It always pays to be polite."

Her mama taught her right, apparently. Another author, though, was a self-professed "weenie" about terminating the relationship. "I didn't sever ties. I simply let the project end." Interestingly, the publicist never contacted the author about doing anything on the book she had coming out three months later.

A third author wrote a letter simply stating that she'd gone over budget and preferred to handle things on her own.

If you have a retainer arrangement, you'll want to write a formal letter of termination before the beginning of the next month to avoid being billed.

#### THINGS TO CONSIDER

As with any type of research, I foraged through the Internet to find articles and websites. Here is an overview of what I found, including tidbits culled from freelance articles, my own thoughts, and advice on publicist websites:

Be very clear about what you want. What would be the ultimate? A write-up in the *New York Times*? Oprah? Dream big, but be realistic. What you want is what the publicist

should focus on. If you don't emphasize that, she will sort her own priorities and you may be disappointed. Have attainable goals as well, things the publicist can aim for with a more assured outcome.

As with any promotion that you do, always clue your editor and in-house publicist in on what you're doing. That you're hiring a publicist should be well known. Naturally, publishers are tickled when you spend your money to promote your book. Work with your publishing team on ideas. Ask your publisher to supply ARCs, cover flats, whatever you might need for your campaign, to your publicist. Perhaps there is some item (pen, notepads) that your publisher will pitch in on financially. My publisher once helped with postage on a special reader campaign I did. If you're supplying the labor and ideas, and especially if you're paying for a publicist, then asking for a little help isn't unreasonable. This kind of request should go through your editor.

Like any good book proposal, you need a hook. Be thinking about that before you talk to a publicist. Is there something in your background that ties into your writing? Obviously, it's better to keep it author-oriented than book-oriented. Then look at the book and pinpoint what could be used there. Issues, professions, setting... have a list ready.

Roxanne St. Claire had a great example of this. "I insisted on a strategic approach, and she completely understood and agreed. We set a strict budget prior to working together (approximately 25% of my advance) and spent a fair amount of time discussing strategy. Here's an example of what I mean by a strategic approach: targeting niche readers. My latest release, *Killer Curves*, is set in the world of NASCAR racing. I firmly believe that the millions of female NASCAR fans are romance readers; therefore, I commissioned a publicist to work ▶

## Are You Ready to Hire a Publicist?

► the female NASCAR fan sites for me. So far, that has resulted in two major hits (reviews and interviews on sites with two million hits per month). I simply didn't have time to make those contacts and pitch those reviews. I've also used the same publicist to do mass mailings of bookmarks with cover letters and review quotes to a select group of booksellers. Again, with the NASCAR book, I had her focus on bookstores in the south—the heart of NASCAR country.

"With my December 2004 release, a chick lit called *Hit Reply*, I knew there was a good news "trend" hook

(Is an online relationship with former lovers really cheating if you're married? And how many people are hooking up online thanks to classmates.com?). I didn't have the time to pitch that story angle and the accompanying book reviews to major metropolitan newspapers, so I hired a publicist to do it. It's resulted in some coverage, mostly in places where a newer author wouldn't normally get noticed, such as *The Seattle Times*.

"Will these projects result in sales? I absolutely don't know yet. They do send a strong message to my publisher about how serious I am, and they alleviate the guilty ex-publicist in me that torments me with, *you really should be doing something to promote this book*. I've definitely seen a spike in my website hits and in reader response mail."

Make sure the publicist will communicate with you. Let him or her know what you want, whether it be weekly updates or progress reports. Just remember that the more time he or she spends on that, the more time gets charged to your bill.

Go into it with ideas of your own. I know, you expect *them* to come up with brilliant ideas. In my opinion, going in with creativity and enthusiasm will generate more of that on their end. Don't make them have to pull your teeth to get information on you and your books. (A great book to help you come up with things about yourself is *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It* by Peggy Klaus.) Look at their client list. One agency's list included only nonfiction. Even though they specialized in books, I didn't consider them because fiction is a different kind of pitch. I wanted someone who had those particular contacts and concepts in hand.

Don't expect to see tangible results. Consider the money you're investing as building up your name, not this particular book. What you're looking for is a building of name and brand.

Again, Roxanne St. Claire summed this up nicely. "I've hired an outside publicist for my last two books. I'm not convinced marketing makes a darn bit of difference in sales—but I am convinced that a smart, strategic, and aggressive publicity campaign can help build a brand. I firmly believe that, over time, a well-known and well-defined brand sells any product. Although I'm not sure that wide-reaching publicity translates directly into the measurable sales we need so much when we're living in the midlist, I do think a strategic and targeted ap-

### QUESTION LIST

#### First intro yourself:

Where I am, sales, position, etc.  
What I do promo-wise  
Past promotions

#### I'd Like to Know:

How do you work?  
To come up with a marketing plan?  
Financially?  
What increments do you bill? (eg. One minute, fifteen minute)  
Will I get a statement each month detailing time and costs?  
What are your hourly rates? (should vary depending on task)  
How many clients are in my position, and how many have broken out?  
I'd like to know where you see the most potential to make an author pop.  
Where do you put your focus? Magazines? Reviews? Booksellers?  
What are some of the things that worked out for your other clients?  
What can you get me that my publisher and I can't?  
What is a minimum budget that's effective?  
What's your ideal budget?  
If I sign on, will I be working with you or an associate?

proach can build a brand and move products.”

### WHAT I TOOK AWAY FROM MY SEARCH

Is spending a gob of money on a publicist worth it? Unfortunately, this remains a mystery. For some, the right campaign and/or a stroke of luck/good timing/the grace of God made it very worthwhile. For others, the outcome wasn't clear or measurable. Many didn't think it was worth the expense.

Do research! Get on the agency's website and start emailing folks on their client list. Obviously it helps if you know the person, even if peripherally. But don't shy away from querying strangers. It's just business.

Think about your budget and expectations. As a mystery author recently said on a marketing panel, if you're going to hire a BIG agency, they'll have BIG ideas, which will translate to spending BIG bucks. Decide if you want to go BIG or smaller and targeted; nail down your goals and dreams.

### DO I WANT A MEDIA TOUR?

Pat Rice (*California Girl*, Ivy) had some input on radio and TV tours (provided by the publisher in this case). "For mass market authors, a tour provided by a publisher has to be part of a larger plan of action to promote a new line or something. It's highly unlikely that a publisher will bother with any author below *New York Times* level, even in hardcover. The TV/radio I've done has all been years ago, back when publishing thought romance would pay the rent forever. I generated my own publicity back then, using the CPA/romance novelist hook. I did local TV and radio at a number of stations. A newspaper article would often generate calls from TV and radio, so press releases are your friend. Getting local recognition is often a key to more sales because people really like buying local authors.

"I was also part of the NAL promo tour for the Topaz line, handled by NAL's publicist. I never heard anyone say, 'Gee, I heard you on the radio this morning and just had to run out and buy your book.' I felt it was totally wasted effort but lots of fun."

I agree with Pat. Even locally, I've never had anyone show up at a signing because they saw me on the news or in the paper. We can hope, though, that lots of folks picked up our books and just didn't bother to let us know.

### IN THE END

Have I decided? Yes. And no. I'm going to take the publicist plunge. I'm keeping my modest budget. But I haven't decided on which publicist I'm going to go with. I've got three in mind, depending on whether I want to go BIG or small. I'll hope for the best without any expectations and feel better that I'm doing something (besides impressing my publisher). In the end, it's all a gamble. But isn't this whole business one big gamble?

*Tina Waincott has had fifteen books published, mostly romantic suspense novels by St. Martin's Press. Her most recent is What She Doesn't Know.*

### PARTIAL LIST OF AGENCIES

(Not an endorsement of any particular agency)

Binnie Braunstein  
7504 Labyrinth Rd, Baltimore MD 21208-4517  
410-486-6178

Over the River Public Relations LLC  
P.O. Box 408, Leonia, NJ 07605  
info@otrpr.com  
<http://overtheriverpr.com/home.html>

Nancy Berland  
Nancy Berland Public Relations  
nberlandpr@nancyberland.com  
800-308-3169

Book Blazers  
PO Box 934322, Margate, FL 33093  
954-729-6819  
diane@bookblazers.net    [www.bookblazers.net](http://www.bookblazers.net)

Power and Associates, Inc.  
24165 IH 10 West, #217-424, San Antonio, TX 78257  
Phone: 830.755.4728 Fax: 830.981.4723  
Email: [info@powerontheweb.com](mailto:info@powerontheweb.com)  
<http://www.powerontheweb.com/>

Note that some of these websites include informative articles. In particular, I recommend you read *Beyond Bookmarks: 10 Magic Tricks of High Image, Low Cost Public Relations* at the Power and Associates site. Also, visit <http://www.bookmarket.com/101pr.html> for a comprehensive list of publicists.



# NinCon: New York Redux

## Irene Goodman's Keynote Speech

BY PAT ROY

"What if you could be the writer you dreamed of being at 14?" Irene Goodman asked us in her keynote speech in New York.

Then she told us how. Break the rules. Raise the bar. Stand up to stand out.

### Break the Rules

We can get so busy following rules that we forget who we are and what we are burning to write.

### Raise the Bar

Clean house of the myths that drag you down. Get rid of stereotypes such as, "a good book will speak for itself," or "men can get you more money than women." Do take care of your own house. The publisher will do more for you when you reach out to partner with them in an intelligent way. You also need to learn how to work the Internet to your best advantage.

### Stand Up to Stand Out

Irene holds "Power Summits" with the key people in an author's professional life—herself, the publisher, the personal publicist, etc. Ask your team for honest feedback to help you move forward. Identify what works in your writing, what patterns emerge. Focus on authenticity.

Keep searching for that one-in-a-billion concept that is immediately recognizable and can be conveyed in a single sentence. Tease out, shape, and refine this brilliant, original concept. Make it yours.

### Authenticity + High Concept = Success

Think of Jean Auel's Neanderthal tales, Colleen McCullough's priest-in-Australia *Thorn Birds*, and Anita

Diamant's biblical women of *The Red Tent*. Could these stories have ever emerged from a tip sheet? When authentic storytelling is matched with wit and social commentary you get novels that stand the test of time. Think Jane Austen and Mark Twain.

During her 25 years as an agent, Irene Goodman has seen trends come and go and come back around again. The current market is over-saturated with chick lit, and historical fiction is making a comeback. But the writers who stick with who they are continue to find success. Though Westerns are out these days, Linda Lael Miller, who grew up on a horse and has an authentic connection to this era, continues to sell Westerns. Debbie Macomber's books are doing quite well despite the increasing sexuality in today's romance novels.

If you are going to RWA in Reno this summer, be sure to check out the Career Doctor workshop, in which Irene Goodman will answer anonymous questions from audience members about their careers. Also come to RWA Idol, in which she will play the role of Simon for writers who want immediate feedback on cold reads. (Miriam Kriss will play Randy, and Lucia Macro will be Paula).

Her website, [www.IreneGoodman.com](http://www.IreneGoodman.com) should be up and running within a month or so and will include a quiz to help you uncover patterns in your writing and identify authenticity.

In a conference filled with gloom and doom—mass market shrinking (down 9% last year), publishers reluctant to stick with authors while they build a base of readers, distributors focusing on name brand authors—Irene Goodman offered us a fascinating, thought-provoking way out. Think quality, originality, passion. Think out of the box.

Think about becoming the writer you dreamed of being at 14.

*Charmed by chocolates and cheap wine, Pat Roy agreed to coordinate our New Orleans conference where we will definitely be talking about uncovering writing patterns, identifying authenticity, and developing high concept, one-sentence synopses.*



# Duo-logue

## Promotion—Self-Hype or Self-Survival?

BY PAT MCLAUGHLIN AND  
ANONYMOUS PUBLISHED AUTHOR

Let any two authors get together and the topic of promotion is almost certain to come up, particularly when the conversation turns to The Great Unknowns of Being a Professional Author. And since Duo-logue is a conversation between two professional authors, promotion is a natural for this column.

But there was a snag in pursuing this topic, as you'll read in a moment.

So, for the first time in a Duo-logue, I will be arguing with myself. Now I'm perfectly capable of arguing with myself on any number of topics (and losing,) but this time there was a particular reason that other folks weren't lining up to dispute and discuss with me, a reason that I found fascinating . . . and revealing.

**Pat:** Let me introduce the other side of this edition of Duo-Logue: Anonymous Professional Author, who writes under his/her pseudonym, AP Author. AP Author is made up of several authors approached about duo-logging on this topic. As a composite, AP has published category romances, various types of mysteries, single title women's fiction, single title romance, single title romantic suspense, and some paranormal and science fiction.

To start, why don't you tell us, AP, why you choose to remain anonymous?

**Anonymous Professional:** Because I'm not stupid. Did you hear the publisher's panel at the NINC Conference in New York?

**Pat:** Yup, I was there. And I heard the representatives of three publishers say with striking unanimity that an author doing promotion could help an author's career.

**AP:** Right, so if it can help an author's career, I worry that coming out in public and saying I don't want to do promotion, that I don't believe in doing promotion, that I'm not going to do promotion, can be bad for my career. There's enough risk in this career without adding to it.

**Pat:** In fairness, the members of the publishing panel did-

n't say that exactly. They were asked if authors should do self-promotion, and they said it could help. The way it could help was by increasing sales. So the mere fact of doing promotion doesn't earn you a whole lot of brownie points. And increasing sales by other means than doing promotion would logically be just as satisfactory to publishers and thus editors as increasing sales by doing promotion. IOW, sales are the bottom line (in more ways than one.)

**AP:** But before you can increase sales, you have to sell. If publishers have reason to believe a specific author is not going to promote (for example because s/he said in a public forum like, say, a *NINK* column, that s/he hated promotion and wasn't going to do it), that could be a point against a certain author with the initials APA.

**Pat:** Okay I can buy that. At least that part about not actually doing promotion. But I can't believe anyone would hold it against an author saying s/he is ambivalent to the bone about promotion. Sure hope not, anyway, because that describes me. Ambivalent to the bone. But still doing it.

**AP:** So why are you ambivalent?

**Pat:** That's a switch—me being asked a question. I'm ambivalent for two reasons. First, because of exactly what the panel members said about promotion. They're all for authors doing self-promotion if it's effective. If it increases sales.

Those are two huge ifs. And I don't know that either factor has ever been proven as a fact, or how you would even go about trying?

Second, because of the drain. Yes, money. But even more, the drain on my time and energy. Especially emotional energy. Reaching out, connecting with people also lets all those other people and voices into my head, and it gets crowded. I've already got enough voices in my head already.

**AP:** So why on earth put effort into something that's so iffy?

**Pat:** You're asking that of an author? We specialize in hoping our efforts pay off—that's the definition ▶

# Duo-logue

## Promotion—Self

▶ of this career.

**AP:** Okay, so our careers require going out on limbs, particularly in the form of proposals or books written on spec, changing genres, switching editors, hiring and firing agents, pushing envelopes. Isn't that enough uncertainty for any one person? Why invite even more in?

**Pat:** In a career with way too little control for this author's taste, there's some sense of influencing my book's fate after it's left my hands. Even if that's a spurious control, it provides a small measure of comfort.

**AP:** What cost comfort? Do you ever wonder if we're being sold a product we don't need by people who make their money providing components of that product—the tchotchke makers, magazines, publicists, web designers, contest runners, etc.

And here's an even better question. If promotion works, if it sells more books and thus brings in more money, why aren't publishers doing it for all the books or at least more than the books by well-known authors who would seem to not need promotion?

**Pat:** Excellent questions. I suspect one aspect of the answer echoes W. Somerset Maugham's quote, "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." There are three surefire avenues to successful promotion. Unfortunately no one knows what they are.

From that stance, it might actually have some logic to having a broader pool of experimenters, and there certainly are more authors than publishers. Besides, we're more creative as a group.

Also, who has more invested in building an author's name—the author who hopes to use it forever or a publisher that author might leave? (And, yes, there's also that word *control* again—if the publisher does the promotion, how much, if any control does the author have? Doing his/her own promotion the author decides what and how to present as his/her public face.)

Plus, this way, publishers don't have to pay for it.

**AP:** (sardonic laughter) And from my experience and reading, they get what they pay for. Old-fashioned word-of-mouth is still the top way readers decided on a book. I've recently heard

and read statistics that only six percent of purchases come from advertising.

And I can cite you many instances in the collective experience of authors when a book receiving big, nationally-scaled advertising has done no better than a book with no promotion.

**Pat:** I'm not surprised. But there are so many factors that influence the sales level of a book—covers, timing, reviews, previous book sales, even (gasp) the story. How do we know that that advertised book wouldn't have done worse without the expenditure on promotion?

Plus, wouldn't you like to increase your sales by six percent? [Note: Math mavens, I know that having six percent of current sales attributed to advertising does not equal a six percent increase, and if you want to write in with the exact figure that would be great, but I was an English Composition major, for Pete's sake!]

**AP:** Still, doesn't it come down to that I'm doing the publisher's job? I thought that's why they kept 94 percent or 92 percent or 90 percent of the cover price—to produce and distribute and *market* the book to those who will sell it to consumers. My job is to write the book. To write the best book I can, and I need all my time and energy to do that.

What it comes down to is that it's not my job to do promotion.

**Pat:** *All your time and energy?* If you knew, absolutely, that a particular kind of promotion improved the sales of your books wouldn't you do it? Wouldn't you find the time and energy to invest in that case?

**AP:** It probably depends on how much time and money, as well as how much improvement, but within reason, yes.

**Pat:** So it's not so much the hating of the promotion itself, despite the drawbacks (time, effort, emotional energy and having to put yourself on stage), it's the fact that we don't know if anything works, and if anything does, what specifically it is that works. It's the unknown-ness of promotion's effectiveness that stops you from doing promotion. (Not saying you'd stop hating it, but you would stop not doing it.)

**AP:** Probably. But are you saying we're likely to ever know that for sure—If it works at all and then what specifically works?

**Pat:** Heck, no. I'm saying that the same reason you find for not doing it is the reason I find myself doing it. It *might* work.

**AP:** Sort of a glass half-full/glass half-empty situation? I say it might not work and you say it might?

**Pat:** More like someone with a fatal disease who's doing all the things conventional medicine says to do, but is still looking for an edge, and someone says, hey, this treatment

might help. We—the patient—know it might *not* help, too. And, yes, the treatment costs money and takes time and effort.

Some patients are going to snap up even the most outlandish treatment. Most of us who have sold at least a couple books are more likely to dismiss the oiliest of the snake-oil treatments. Some on the other end will view any treatment that isn't vetted ten times over by the AMA as snake-oil. But most of us would likely fall in the vast middle ground, our willingness to try treatments varying with our other resources, including time, money, endurance, emotional strength ... and varying with how close to dying we might think we are.

**AP:** Well, I've heard Big-Name Author Bob (aka BNAB) whose career I would die for say he's never done any promotion. Ever. That he simply wrote his book, the readers found him, his readership grew, and then his publisher promoted him. And that's the way it should be. That he's seen far too many authors starting out putting their best energy and creativity into promoting instead of into their next books. Authors should write. Publishers should promote.

**Pat:** Bob makes at least one very valid point. That if an author finds the Holy Grail in book promotion and draws all sorts of readers, but those readers hate the book, that won't do the author much good in building a career. (But will boost that one book.) Or, if there's no follow-up book or a huge gap between books because the author has spent all his/her time on promotion, that's not a good career situation, either. (On the other hand, we also know no follow-up book or a huge gap can happen despite the author writing and submitting good proposals and/or books.)

But there are also some holes in Bob's argument. Just as there are as many ways to write as there are authors, there are as many ways to a career. Plus, BNAB was establishing his career at a different time, in a different atmosphere from today's. Plus No. 2, there are people who have fared well who *did* do extensive and/or deep promotion. One author's experience a law does not make.

Finally, don't you wonder if there were other authors who started out contemporaneously with BNAB, whose books' readership didn't gain the breadth of Bob's in the early going? Who didn't gain the word of mouth momentum BNAB did?

Maybe No Name Author Ned (NNAN) had lousy covers early, maybe his books were caught in snowstorms, maybe he had 27 editor changes in the first three books, maybe a hundred and forty-two factors too many of us know up close and personal happened. Even say that Ned's writing and story-telling wasn't quite as strong as BNAB's. Well, don't we know books that have succeeded without having the best writing or story-telling?

For whatever reason, Ned's early books didn't gain

traction. His publisher cut him because his numbers weren't growing enough. He found another publisher, but they would only publish a book every other year. His numbers dropped. He's no longer writing.

What if Ned had promoted? What if he'd given his first and second—or second and fifth or whatever—books a nudge? Might that have given his books a velocity that would have kept him in the business instead of (horrors) becoming a lobbyist on Capitol Hill for used-book stores?

**AP:** Promoting might not have made a bit of difference for Ned. He'd just be out the money spent on promotion with no change in the outcome.

**Pat:** True. So again, it comes back to what cost comfort—in this case, the comfort of feeling you've done your damndest, when only you can know what *your* damndest is.

*Pat McLaughlin, who writes as Patricia McLinn, remains deeply ambivalent about promotion, yet has trained her relatives to turn McLinn books face out in every store they go into, and won't object if any Ninc members would like to join in that pursuit with her most recent Special Edition, Baby Blues and Wedding Bells, her 22nd book with Harlequin/Silhouette.*

*Anonymous Professional Author's conviction that s/he/they will not promote is soon to be put to the test with many sales to many people. (And Pat promises to turn those books face out, too.)*

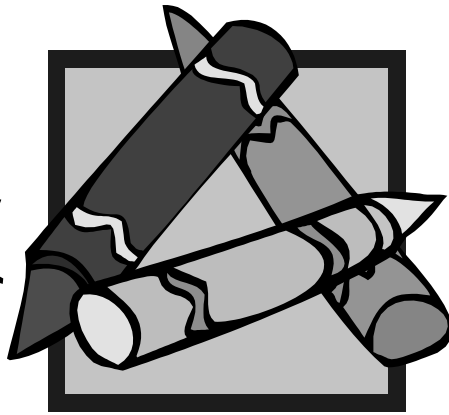
## Bits'n'Pieces

### Scene a Faire at the Movies

**Who is Suzanne Glass, and why is there a screen credit on the latest Nicole Kidman movie that reads "[for] the help of *The Interpreter* by Suzanne Glass"? She is a British journalist who wrote a book about a U.N. translator who overhears a conversation through a microphone, but her character hears the secret to curing AIDS. Though the Glass novel made the rounds and roused some interest, the book was never optioned. When the buzz began about a film about an interpreter distributed by Universal, Working Title, and Masher Films, the author hired a lawyer. After a long legal battle, Glass secured the credit, and perhaps a monetary settlement, and due to the lack of response there is speculation that a non-disclosure agreement is involved. Ballantine has the book in stock, but doesn't plan any new promotions.**

*Compiled by Sally Hawkes*

**Crayon  
on my**



**Key  
board**

## *Is Change Really as Good as a Nap?*

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

Near the beginning of March, I managed to get two proposals out the door to my agent, who had been waiting for them since November. It felt good. Better than good. In some ways, better than . . . well, you get the point.

Since my mother died 22 months ago, writing has been more challenging than usual. The ideas have been there, but the ability to focus has not. Since focus is a critical component when trying to fit writing around the needs of a young family, the writing has suffered.

In the early fall, I did manage to complete my first proposal since Mom announced her remission had gone into remission. Some of you may remember my ecstatic announcement on NinLink. That proposal died an unnatural death the day before Christmas Eve with a rejection letter.

So, you can understand why completing these two proposals was so monumental. One of them was even a rewrite of *The Rejected One*.

On top of my writing challenges, my husband and I have been dealing with “interesting” life events. Well, more like life “suggestions.” His career is guided by a Career Manager. Each fall, the Career Manager makes a tour of all the bases, talking with the various military members under his supervision. Based on these conversations, he/she comes up with a list of positions which need to be filled, and people for whom those positions would be a good career move. She/He then informs the individuals what their next posting will be, effective the following summer; or roughly 10 months from the time in question.

So, our first piece of information from Mark’s Career Manager was that we would be posted to a base almost as far west from our current location as one can get without falling into the Pacific. Okay. Not my favorite place to go, but there were positive aspects to it, and we

began looking our house over to see what would need to be changed/updated/improved to enhance its saleability.

Six weeks later, it seemed we would not be moving, after all. Not such a bad thing, either. I like our house and our neighborhood. The children are in a good school, and after a tumultuous first three years here, I was finally beginning to feel like I had friends around me.

Two months after that, the Career Manager said he “might” need Mark to fill a posting as far east from here as one can go without falling into the Atlantic. Well! That was awesome news. I have three friends each within driving distance of our new proposed location. I’d love to live beside the Atlantic again. There was even a strong possibility of Mark’s being able to get his Master’s degree while we were there.

That brings us to Christmas. The day before Christmas Leave began, Mark’s boss told him he would be promoted in the spring. Since Mark has repeatedly been told he’s “too quiet” to make it very far up the promotion ladder, this was good news indeed. Three weeks later, a more reliable source informed Mark that the boss had been distributing misinformation. No promotion yet.

Seeing a pattern here yet? It gets better.

A week after that, the Career Manager asked Mark if he’d be willing to consider the westward option again . . . with a promotion tied into the deal.

You’d think I would quit riding the roller coaster of emotions by this point. But no. Being the sensitive soul I am, I get excited by each proposed change, begin planning the move, figure out how and when to tell the children, start dreaming of a new office, and on it goes.

This time, the last communication turned out to be the official one. We spent two months painting, cleaning, sorting and throwing out. Somehow in all of that, I managed to get those two proposals finished.

I’m sure no one reading this is surprised by my

subsequent decision to put the writing aside for a couple of months. I felt like I needed downtime, or at least as much downtime as is possible while keeping a house show-ready, and dealing with a small person's anxieties about leaving the familiar.

I've devoured a mountain of fiction. I've read several writing inspirational or how-to books. I've even found new magazines to read. Oh, I've also done some sewing.

Then came what is for me truly the worst part of this transition—the House Hunting Trip. We're given five days to find a house, complete the real estate transaction, and get the children registered in new schools. This trip was the one from *The Very Bad Place*. I'll spare you the gory details, but suffice to say, by our last day there, I was envisioning family life in a khaki green army tent.

Thanks to Mark's persistence, steady influence, and superb negotiating skills, we managed to sign for an incredibly beautiful house, complete with a large dining room which will be perfect for my office, and a mortgage that still scares the socks off me.

But here's the real surprise—in the middle of the turmoil of the House Hunting Trip, story ideas started to bubble to the surface. Not just passing fancy type ideas. Real, honest, I-think-I-want-to-write-that type ideas. Of course I didn't have the time, or my computer, to put the ideas into writing, so I just made a couple of notes, and let the ideas simmer.

I haven't tried to do much with the ideas in the two weeks since I got home. My self-declared holiday wasn't due to expire until April 30, and I'm wringing every last carefree moment from it.

However, last week, a friend was delayed in meeting me for coffee. I found myself digging in my purse for a notebook so I could record the ideas which wouldn't leave me alone. I can't remember the last time the Girls have tossed such wealth at me, as opposed to my standing at the top of the basement stairs yelling for help. It was awesome! The process is fun. Best of all, I'm not terrified the richness will dry up at any moment.

My logical brain says the Girls can't possibly do anything amid all this turmoil. The Girls proved my logical brain completely, utterly wrong.

I realized it's not the outward circumstances of my

life so much as it is the quality of what I send down to the Girls for their nourishment. When fed a steady diet of stress or grief or negativity, they do fall silent. But without conscious intent, this time, I managed to send them exactly what they like best—images, good stories, and plenty of wandering-brain-time.

I'm sure the prospect of our new writing digs will be dessert for them for a couple of weeks, at least. Hardwood floors, a huge picture window at one end and a view through the living room and over the lake at the other, the promise of matching sturdy bookshelves instead of the present mishmash of storage spaces, and even a new writing desk (my "posting present" from my Hero—the rolltop secretary's desk I've wanted since I was a teenager).

What a relief to realize that the Girls don't need the "perfect" circumstances in order to do their thing. All they need is some TLC. When they feel tired, they don't need me barking like a taskmaster, demanding they turn straw into bricks. Sometimes all they need is a change in scenery.

*Janelle Clare Schneider writes women's fiction from Canada. At present, she's in Kingston, Ontario, at the most northeastern tip of Lake Ontario, almost straight north of Syracuse, NY. In the middle of June, she, the Girls, the dog, the Little Realities and her own personal Hero will relocate to Cold Lake, Alberta, three hours from anything but a lake, an Air Force base, and lots of mosquitoes.*

Bits'n'Pieces

**BUY X Get Y  
or BXGY**

Amazon has a new way to get money for books - from the authors this time. Want to be up there with the Big Guns? For a mere \$750 per month you can have your book paired with one by one of Amazon's bestselling authors for special discount offers that are only available by pairing the two books. If you use Amazon, check to see which books are a paired with Dan Brown or Michael Crichton.

## **Stay in Touch with Ninc online.**

Visit the website at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com). Join the neverending e-conversation—for members only—by joining Ninclink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at [BrendaHB@aol.com](mailto:BrendaHB@aol.com)

### **Controlling Your Listserve Preferences through Email:**

Subscribe	<a href="mailto:NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com">NINCLINK-subscribe@yahoogroups.com</a>
Unsubscribe	<a href="mailto:NINCLINK-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com">NINCLINK-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com</a>
Switch to Digest	<a href="mailto:NINCLINK-digest@yahoogroups.com">NINCLINK-digest@yahoogroups.com</a>
Switch to Individual Mail	<a href="mailto:NINCLINK-normal@yahoogroups.com">NINCLINK-normal@yahoogroups.com</a>
No-Mail	<a href="mailto:NINCLINK-nomail@yahoogroups.com">NINCLINK-nomail@yahoogroups.com</a>



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## *Sneak Away and Read a Book*

Recently, a group of contemporary authors of all sorts got together and wrote Oprah a letter asking her to reinstate her book club. (Read it online at: <http://www.wordofmouthwriters.org/index.html>.) Now, I know a lot of commercial fiction writers complained about Oprah's books as too dark, too litfic-y, too whatever and couldn't care less whether the book club goes or not, but that book club was damned good for books, for authors, for readers. It took readers into stores to look for that Oprah sticker, got them down the aisle, and made reading a social activity. Book clubs became all the rage. Authors who might have languished in obscurity were catapulted to the top of bestseller lists, and celebrated as minor celebrities.

Anything that does that for writers is okay with me.

Oprah, love her or hate her, was great for the contemporary novel. (And don't even get me started on the arrogance of Jonathan Franzen, who thought himself too good for her, and humiliated a national icon in a very public way. Ill-mannered at the very least. (And

how much has he cost the writers of the sort of novel Oprah loves?)

In spite of the fact that I know she'll never pick one of my books, I want the club back. I want her to point out novels like Janet Fitch's *White Oleander*, and Elizabeth Berg's *Open House* and the many others I picked up because they were printed—thanks to the book club—in big enough numbers they actually caught my attention.

Oh, sorry. The reader over my shoulder just pointed out that she still has a book club. She's reading books and recommending them. Classics. Many of which I've read and are wonderful, and all that. Blah blah blah. But, as the writers of the letter say plainly, by recommending the work of dead writers, everyone but writers make money. If you must recommend classics, can't you do it every other month or something?

Other shows have attempted to recommend novels, and some have given specific books a nice boost, but no one has come close to Oprah's influence (surprise surprise—nothing touches Oprah's influence

in many arenas). I hope they'll all continue to make recommendations.

And in the meantime, I propose we all do our best to have our own little book clubs.

We don't talk about books enough, not publicly. I'm not sure why. I think we're afraid of hurting other writers' feelings, or conversely, being accused of being influenced by other writers' novels. We're afraid of getting some angle of it wrong, and so just opt out of the process of recommendations. I know sometimes I'm afraid my tastes won't please others, or I worry that I'm reading too much genre fiction or not enough, or not enough fiction, or things that are too weird, or—well, I just worry.

I think the book business would be healthier if we talked more. Not about books you think you should be reading (whether that's more classics or more romances or more whatever), but what you're really reading.

Something terrible happens to our reading when we become writers, especially if we have any visibility at all. You start out wanting to read everything in the genre, so you can learn it, and that's fine. We all do it, read and read and read and read and read. We became experts in category romance or speculative fiction or historicals or mysteries. We learned the requirements of the genre, learned who were masters and who were not, set standards for ourselves, and started writing.

At that point, reading, which has been our lifeline forever and ever, becomes somewhat corrupted. Suddenly, we're critiquing novels instead of falling into them. Suddenly, too, our to-be-read stacks are populated with novels we bought for various reasons, a friend's newest, a fellow writer at a signing who bought a copy of *your* book, so you bought a copy of *his*; books you think you should read because they've had good buzz; books by enemies you think you should study.

Reading, that bastion of escape, becomes a Duty. And Dreaded.

I'd like us to take a solemn oath to never read anything again because A Friend Wrote It, or Because You Should. I'd like us to claim reading again, allow it to be the sacred escape it always was for most of us. (Of course friends write books we'd like to read, even books we'd love to read, but there are only so many hours in a day, so many years in a life and only books you are *dying* to read should make it to the top of the pile. Which means you don't get to feel miffed if someone doesn't read your books (and I don't get to feel miffed over mine).

Go ahead, read. And then I want us to talk about the books we've read and loved. I'm not all that interested in books you didn't love, frankly. Books fail for many reasons that have nothing to do with the work itself, and it's very personal. I want to know which once excited you, made you rush through your chores and

work so you could get back outside and read.

Since I teathed on the old saw, "if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem," after reading the letter from those contemporary novelists to Oprah, I thought a lot about what I could do to made the world a friendly place for readers and books.

So, I decided I'm going to have Barbara's Book Club. Why not me? Hey, I love to read! I love to talk about books and maybe some other readers will like my recommendations and go find them. I'm pretty sure I will not have to notify publishers ahead of time so they can be sure to print enough copies, but you know, you do what you can.

I'm not going to get anal about the whole thing, with all sorts of rules and regulations that will steal the pleasure out of it. I'm just going to make a simple, strong commitment to talk about the books I enjoy reading. I'm going to post reviews on *Amazon* and *Barnes and Noble* book club sites. I'm going to commit to writing about books once or twice a quarter on my web pages. I'm going to just look for chances to talk about books, whatever books I'm reading, and hope that might make a difference for all our books.

Let us begin:

I've just finished reading a lovely book. It was small and quiet and domestic. Nothing big or dramatic happens. I read it in an afternoon, and it has spoiled me for days on anything else. It had a lovely British feel, and a clearheadedness that's somehow reassuring. My uncle came upon an ARC of it, and knowing I'd like it, arranged to have a copy sent to me. It was *Knitting*, by Anne Bartlett, a first novel by an Australian.

This morning, I went to Amazon and posted a review. Later, I'll post a note to my web page about it and hope some of my other readers will enjoy it. For a long time, I worried about that—worried that my tastes would be too dark or not romancy enough or too romancy for the women's fiction readers, or too fluffy for others. I tend to like books from all over the place—litfic and chick lit and Serious Women's Fiction published in Trade (most would qualify for Opah's old book club) and fantasy (especially Robin McKinley) and travel essays.

Another I've loved recently is *The Singular Pilgrim, Travels on Sacred Ground*, by Rosemary Mahoney, a collection of essays. I purchased it in Vancouver on a drizzly gray day when I'd walked at least ten miles, on my own. Exquisite writing, refreshing turn of phrase, and an intriguing exploration of faith.

There are quite a few of our number who talk about books on their web pages and I would be remiss not to mention them here. One is the very generous Teresa Medeiros, who often talks about books she loves on her website. Julia Quinn, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, and many others also regularly recommend books. ▶



## *The Girls in the Basement . . . Sneak Away*

► Why not you, too? Shirley's Book Club and Renee's Book Club and Jacob's Book Club will all find their devotees. We'll be celebrating our passion, sending out a positive vibe, and who knows, maybe selling a few books.

*Barbara Samuel reads way more than she'd like her editors and agent to know about, and without even turning her head much can see seven books.*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Schmooze the Sellers

Want to get readers to pick up your books instead of Grisham or Brown's? Just hit the road a few months before your book is out and pitch your little heart out to the booksellers over dinner. Apparently the traditional author tour of making contact with the actual readers has become passé. Now you schmooze the sellers. The first tour of this type, the PreSell, is attributed to *Cold Mountain* in the 1990s and has grown since then.

### Authors+ added to Publishing+

A new feature of Publishing+ from HarperCollins is Authors+, a service for authors. The new project will include a speaker's bureau that will arrange paid appearances for HC authors. The bureau will be headed by Gary Resin and will work with new titles as well as backlists.

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR NINC 2006 CONFERENCE IN NEW ORLEANS!

March 29 through April 1  
Hotel Monteleone  
[www.hotelmonteleone.com](http://www.hotelmonteleone.com)  
Literary landmark hotel  
in the French Quarter.

Conference goal—A meeting of the minds focused on *Recapturing the Magic*. To support this sharing of observations and insights:

- There will be one track of sessions, where

chairs will be arranged in a circle, with members stacked three and four deep.

- Outside the session room will be tables and coffee, tea, and cafe au lait to encourage casual gatherings.
- Business panels will be mixed up. Editors & Agents. Publishers & Attorneys. Publicists & Authors. No stage or podiums.
- Reception on Friday night. Hors d'oeuvres, mint juleps, maybe even Tarot card readers.

Contact Pat with any thoughts or questions. Now's the time! [patroy1@charter.net](mailto:patroy1@charter.net)

**Pat Roy, Conference Coordinator**

# NINK

a publication of Novelists, Inc.

An Organization for Writers of Popular Fiction

P.O. Box 1166

Mission KS 66222-0166

*Publishing Services by Huseby Agency, Ltd.*

FIRST CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
FARGO ND  
PERMIT #281