



Adventures in Blogging

BY YASMINE GALENORN

Overexposure and Indecision

When I first heard of weblogs (blogs), the idea seemed both intriguing and insane. Granted, a blog might draw in more readers. And the thought of being able to reach those readers on a level outside of my books seemed to make good business sense. However, the thought of plastering my personal journal on the Internet terrified me. That I would willingly expose my innermost thoughts for millions of people to dissect and criticize? Insane! Not one to back down from a challenge, I pushed aside the fear and decided to post a blog.

It wasn't long before my subconscious rebelled. Nasty little thoughts kept whispering in my ear. What would people think of me? Were they out there calling me an idiot? Were they trashing my books? What if my cyberstalker from years past decided to start emailing me again?

Within a few months, I found myself slipping into panic attacks. My website began to reflect my conflicting feelings on the subject. One week, the blog would be up. The next week, down. Then up again. Down. After awhile, some of my regular readers began emailing me asking what was wrong.

I didn't know the answer at that point. Other authors had their blogs on line; it wasn't like I was the only one. So why did it bother me so much?

Finally, after well over a year of indecision, during which time I made a study of other authors' blogs, I realized what my problem was. I felt overexposed. I'd played a little too much peek-a-boo with my private thoughts. I figured out how I could fix things, uploaded my blog again, and haven't had a panic attack of any consequence since then.

While I still feel a bit vulnerable, I've come to accept that as a public figure who has been active on the net since 1998, I'm never again going to be able to claim anonymity. No author really can, in this age of information.

What's a Blog?

By now, I'm assuming that a number of you may be asking, "What exactly is a blog?"

There are on-going debates among the chipheads and techno-geeks about the 'true and proper' definition, but taken at its simplest, a blog is an online diary, organized in chronological order, with the most recent entries on top. After that, it's all gravy.

Blogs contain everything from simple text, to pictures, to links. But the most predominant feature is that the blog must be personal—reflecting the writer or a proxy standing in for the writer. From heart-wrenching trauma to nonsensical ravings to angry rants, the blog has become both a beloved and despised institution on the Internet, and there are thousands of people who have developed a fascination for reading them. Think of the blog as a Seinfeld-like forum—the majority aren't really about anything in particular, and they tend to portray the daily lives of their creators.

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President's Voice

In a Word...Perfect

Last month I made the wrenching decision to switch from Word Perfect, which I've been using since God was a child, to Word, so if I sound funny, don't be surprised. To all of you still clinging to Word Perfect, I apologize. I defected. The lure was being able to email an entire book and have it arrive in one piece.

Maybe the rest of you finish books early and have many sunlit, peaceful days in which to leisurely make your way to the post office. Maybe you stop for coffee and croissants along the way. Maybe you arrive at the post office with a song in your heart and a smile on your virtuous face, because you don't even need to spend money on Priority.

Maybe you don't con someone else into driving you to Mail Boxes, Etc. at 3:45 p.m. (last pickup at 4) the day before the book is due, because you require both hands for stuffing the pages into the envelope and addressing the FedEx packing slip. Maybe you don't worry about whether you remembered to put on real clothes and whether you have taken a shower recently and if so, whether you used deodorant.

I, on the other hand, need every millisecond prior to Deadline Day. So when I discovered the miracle of emailing a book, which could happen at eight in the morning on the *very day of the deadline*, I began to salivate. I tried to make it work in Word Perfect. I totally tried, because I loved my Word Perfect. I'd been there from Version 1, and I was prepared to switch to Version 12. You don't find that kind of loyalty anymore.

But even converting to Rich Text Format didn't work. My book ended up at the publisher single-spaced, which I didn't realize until the line-edit arrived. I wept for the line editor. I wept for me, who had to read that tight little story with no breathing spaces included. I discovered that Word would transmit my documents with breathing spaces. I could email my book, save all that time and postage, and do it without worrying about deodorant. For that I would sell any of your grandmothers into slavery. Sorry about that.

W

hoops. Here I am nearly out of space, and I have something extremely important to impart. It must be that Word has taken over my brain. In any case, please listen up.

The 2006 conference is coming!! *Recapture the Magic* in New Orleans, March 30-April 1 at the Hotel Monteleone, right next to the French Quarter, will be a conference to remember. Once again, we are offering conference scholarships. That will be for the cost of registration only. Hotel, meals and airfare are up to the recipient.

Please take note that there is no litmus test for this. Simply send me an email saying you'd like the scholarship, and your name (anonymously) will go into the hat. We'll give away as many scholarships as the Board thinks we can afford.

Last year we received ONE request for a scholarship. So this year we're suggesting that if you don't want to ask for yourself, ask for a deserving friend. Nominate someone who has been through rough times, someone who could manage to find a roomie and work out the airfare if they could only be sure they wouldn't have to pay the conference fee on top of those expenses.

This is sort of like Send a Friend to Camp. Send a Friend to Ninc in 2006. Trust me, it will feel very good.

*Benevolently yours,
Vicki*

"You must always keep changing your process! Because there are two of you, one who wants to write and one who doesn't. The one who wants to write has to keep fooling the one who doesn't."

**Maria Irene Fornes
Quoted in
From Where You Dream
by Robert Olen Butler**

Stay in Touch with Ninc online.

Visit the website at 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

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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:

Judie Aitken, Indianapolis IN
Andrea Boeshaar, Milwaukee WI
Cathy Clamp, Brady TX
Anna DeStefano, Lawrenceville GA
Mary J. Forbes, Langley, B.C.,
Canada
Denise Koch (Denise Lynn),
Monclova OH

Sherry Lewis (Sammi Carter),
North Salt Lake UT
Lucy Monroe, Hillsboro OR
Beth Pattillo (Bethany Brooks),
Nashville TN
Stobie Piel, Orrs Island ME
Debbie Raleigh (Deborah Raleigh),
Ewing MO
Myretta Robens, Medford MA
Candace Sams (C.S.Chatterly),
Grand Bay AL
Mary Schramski, Henderson NV

New Members:

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
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Adventures in Blogging

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Why the Popularity of Blogs?

Blogs are popular for a number of reasons. One being that anybody who can type can post a blog. No computer expertise needed, no programming skills, you don't even need good grammar, good spelling, or talent. If you can string a few words together, and you have access to the net, you can blog. While no one knows the exact number, there are millions of bloggers worldwide, from the well-known to the unknown, from teenagers to the elderly, from the well-adjusted to those crying out for help.

Another reason for popularity—especially among the blog readers—is that misery truly does love company, especially when somebody else is more miserable than you. For some blog readers, they take comfort in the idea that their lives aren't really so bad compared to so-and-so.

There's also the vicarious thrill factor: it's fun to read about experiences the average person may never otherwise encounter in their own life.

Often families stay in touch through blogs the same way they used to through newsletters, only now the world can see that Aunt Mabel bought a new hat, and cousin Jimmy got drunk and broke his leg.

Bloggng has become a popular form of communication among soldiers deployed overseas. It offers them a way to work through their experiences, to keep some semblance of reality while in a hostile environment. It's a reminder to people at home that they're still alive.

And then we have the celebrity blog—the category which your blog, as an author, will fall under. People like to read about the lives of their favorite movie stars, musicians, and authors. It gives them a sense that they know you, that they can touch

your world just a little bit more. Vicarious? Definitely. Scary at times? Absolutely. A valuable tool for the author? Most assuredly. Do readers really read those entries? Do they really care, if you're not Stephen King or Nora Roberts or one of the other top-of-the-heap writers?

Trust me. They do.

People Really Do Read Blogs

I first began thinking about posting a weblog when I noticed them on some of my own favorite authors' sites. I have always loved reading about other writers, about their work habits, their views on the craft and art of writing, about their lives. I think I'm continually searching for the common threads that link us together, for that part of the psyche that leads us to the written word.

So, I decided to give it a try. *After all, I thought, I doubt that anybody will read the thing, so it doesn't matter if I slip and post my personal rants about politics, or religion, or the screwball readers who send me strange letters.*

My husband obliged by creating a program for me to blog with, and I was off and posting. Well, I learned very quickly that people will read an author's blog. Within a few weeks, I began to get letters referring to my posts. Whoops! People were reading it—and both applauding and taking me to task for what I had said. I realized that I might have just alienated some readers through whining (which I seldom do) or pontificating (which I'm more apt to do).

I decided it best to examine my posts with an unbiased view. I read my log the way I might read a stranger's log, looking for the amount of personal information I could glean through the writing. The million dollar question became: "How much of my life am I exposing for the world to see?"

My site isn't extremely active, but it still has close to sixty thousand

hits on it. If only a fraction of those visitors read my weblog, that still amounts to quite a few people sneaking a glimpse of my private thoughts.

Too Much Information

As I realized that I'd put too much information about myself in my blog posts, I felt like my skirt had been tucked in my pantyhose for weeks, and nobody had bothered to tell me. I went into a full-blown panic attack. My first act was to disable the links to my blog, then I downloaded all the pictures (except of our cats) that I had up on the site. None were particularly 'telling' but my nerves were raw and I felt vulnerable.

After I calmed down, I sat down and thought about the situation. What should I do? Continue and risk revealing something I might regret, or shove the blog and preserve my privacy? I opted to dismantle it, although I kept copies of all the posts I'd written, just in case I changed my mind.

After I regained my equilibrium and decided that I was being reactionary, I sorted through my posts, asking myself, "Can I find a happy medium?" I agonized over every entry. Was it too personal? Not personal enough? Again, did anybody really care? I put the blog back up again with the edited posts and hoped for the best.

Because I have an unnaturally high ability to avoid learning my lessons, a few months later, I began to get lazy. Once again, I found myself spilling out things on line that probably were better off left in my personal life. Nothing too embarrassing, but too close for comfort. The blog came down. Again.

Readers Can Be Fickle

About this time I happened upon the site of an author whom I've read and admired over the years. I

began reading her blog daily. She was candid, very personal in her posts about both her sex life and her feelings about being an author — you know, those realizations about the business that come only after you've reached publication, when you discover that it's not all roses and champagne. The realizations that unpublished authors, and most readers, never hear or think about.

Out of curiosity, I clicked over to her forum boards and got a nasty shock. Readers—disgruntled readers, that is—were not only trashing her work (on her site, yet), but they were dissing her blog entries, using them to ridicule her for being spoiled. Apparently, they didn't think chronic health problems and a full writing schedule were good enough reasons to not answer every email she received on the day she received it. As appalled as I was, I realized that she'd unwittingly handed them ammunition by the personal nature of her blog entries.

It's an unfortunate truth that the Internet brings out the worst in some people because of the anonymity it provides. Often, people forget that there are live human beings behind those IP numbers, humans with feelings who can be hurt by a mean-spirited jeer. I've seen it in chat rooms all too often, and on message boards and guest books. Trolls lurk in the cyber shadows, and public figures must seem especially good targets for their anger.

After seeing what was happening on her site, I conducted a thorough examination of my own. I realized that my forums weren't being used much. While I kept them moderated so there weren't any inflammatory posts, I also realized that the fact that my forums were fairly empty might look bad.

Thinking in promotional terms, if new readers visited my site, would the empty forums lead them to the conclusion that I was a lousy author? I closed them down. At the same time, I decided that my blog

would become 90% focused on my writing —with enough tidbits of my life to make it feel personal, but not enough to expose anything I didn't want used as a weapon.

After once more linking it back to my site, (by now, my husband was saying "Just tell me what you want me to do," and avoiding any commentary whenever I mentioned the blog), I asked a question directly to my readers in one of my posts. "Why do you read my blog? What do you like seeing there? Please email me and let me know."

I got a variety of responses. Some readers said they just wanted a glimpse inside my life. Others were interested in the actual process of writing, they wanted to know what went on during the writing of a book, and when the next book was due out. I also discovered that other authors read my blog, for the same reason I read authors' blogs. To get a feel for their peers.

So far, so good. Ideally, I wanted my blog to be a way to keep in touch with my readers about my writing, and apparently I'd found the right direction.

Still other responses were creepy. One woman said in her email, "I read it to get a vicarious thrill, like I can actually pretend I know you."

I admit, her response unsettled me. Over the years, especially when I was publishing a lot of nonfiction metaphysical work, I received too many letters from people who assumed they knew all about me based on the content of my books. Some of them were very upset when they realized their extrapolations were wrong. With her letter, I realized that this behavior isn't going to stop, and that realization reinforced my decision to keep my personal life out of my blog.

What My Blog Has Become

At this point, I've decided to leave my blog online. In fact, I mir-

rored it on Blogspot (see sidebar) to see if I can reach more readers. However, my blog remains highly edited. This self-censorship is a business decision. If I were to broadcast all my feelings or thoughts on politics, religion, and life on my blog, I'd alienate just about everybody for one reason or another.

My online diary is calculated to offer information about my views on writing, on where I'm at with a book, on the joys and sorrows of the work, and tempered with common sense.

As authors we must consider our audiences. It's one thing to invite somebody to our house and let our hair down; quite another to pull off the mask and offer the reader a close-up of our warts, clogged pores, and earwax. The world doesn't need to know when we have PMS, or that we're so horny we can't think, or that we hate our government for what it's doing in Iraq. The truth is, not everybody wants to know.

I prefer a centrist approach. My thoughts about my life are too important to feed to the sharks. Fans can be nasty when you don't live up to their expectations. So don't give them fodder. Save it for your novels.

Why Should Any Sane Author Blog?

- Blogging is good promotion. When you continuously update your site, people return, and they keep you in their thoughts. Extras like blogs and a few well-chosen personal pictures give the reader the feeling that you care about them, that you aren't after them just to buy your books.

- Readers are apt to buy books when they've followed the journey of their creation.

- When you get besieged with questions about writing, you can just point them to the blog and say, "Read."

- It's fun to chart your ►

Adventures in Blogging

▶ progress on your work. I save my personal life and my thoughts about my career for my private journal. The blog takes the place of a truncated work diary.

- Blogging offers us a chance to balance the personal and public parts of our lives, a calculated closeness, if you will.

I'm leaving my blog up this time, regardless of my current desire to hide my head in the sand, ignore the Internet, and retire from the world in general. My readers enjoy it, and a few read it religiously. I've managed to find a way to allow them a glimpse into my world without totally tearing down my barriers. The best of both worlds, thanks to cyberspace.

[Almost] Everything You Need to Start Your Own Blog:

Terms To Learn:

Blog/Weblog: Online diary/journal consisting of text, and (as desired): links and pictures.

Bloggng: The act of writing/posting in a blog.

Blogger: One who blogs.

FAQs About Blogging:

About Weblogs: <http://weblogs.about.com/> This site will steer you in the right direction, giving you a basic overview of blogging, blogs, where to find blogs, bloggers, and almost any related subject. Consider it a portal into the cyberworld of

online journaling.

I Want To Start A Weblog

While a programmer can create a personalized blog, there are numerous sites that allow the user to create a blog free of charge. Others charge money, or charge for premium services. I suggest you try one of the free ones first to see if you enjoy blogging. Then, if you want something more personalized, you can either pay for premium service or hire a programmer.

- Blogger.Com: <http://www.blogger.com> (originally Blogspot, a privately owned company, Blogger.com was recently purchased by Google. Has an easy-to-use interface).
- Xanga.Com: <http://www.xanga.com>
- Live Journal.Com: <http://www.livejournal.com>
- Blog Harbor.Com: <http://www.blogharbor.com>
- Vortex Host.Com: <http://www.vortexhost.com/>
- Miego.Com: <http://www.miego.com/>

Some Tips On Blogging:

Write your posts in Word and save a copy before posting online.

Consider what the impact on your readers will be. Do you think you'll alienate a lot of readers? If so, weigh your need to be frank with your need for discretion. Sometimes, you will find yourself in a situation where you do need to take an unpopular stance, so plan how to do so with the least amount of reader fallout as possible.

Update your blog at least once a week to keep reader interest.

If you use a blog host rather than having the blog on your own site, make certain you own the rights to anything you post there.

Think about what you'd like to read about in blogs. If you write a series, you may want to post essays or thoughts about themes germane to the series.

A Few Author Blogs/ Online Journals For Your Perusal:

- Susan Wittig Albert: <http://www.mysterypartners.com/>
- Greg Bear: <http://www.gregbear.com/>
- C.J. Cherryh: <http://www.cherryh.com/>
- Johanna Edwards: <http://www.johannaedwards.com>
- Laurell K. Hamilton: <http://www.laurellkhamilton.org/>
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- Dana Stabenow: <http://www.stabenow.com/>
- Jennifer Weiner: <http://www.jenniferweiner.com>

Yasmine Galenorn is the author of the Chintz 'n China Mystery Series, the upcoming India Ink Mystery Series, (both from Berkley Prime Crime) and soon, the Sisters of the Moon Series (Penguin). She is also the author of eight nonfiction metaphysical books, including Totem Magic (Crossing Press), and Embracing The Moon, (Llewellyn Publications).

Yasmine describes her life as a blending of teacups and tattoos. She lives in Bellevue WA, along with her husband Samwise, and their four cats, all of whom are an integral part of the Galenorn household. She may be reached through her web site: Galenorn En/Visions (<http://www.galenorn.com>) and you may read her blog there.



NinCon: New York Redux

The View from the Middle: Four Agents Dish on the Biz

BY NANCY HERKNESS

The NINC conference “Empowering the Writer” brought together a panel of high-powered literary agents whose combined experience includes work as editors, writers, and long-time authors’ representatives. Dominick Abel (Dominick Abel Literary Agency), Richard Curtis (Richard Curtis Associates), Amy Moore-Benson (AMB Literary Management), and Robin Rue (Writers House) answered provocative questions posed by best-selling author Jasmine Cresswell and audience members. The subjects ranged from the future of e-publishing to marketability versus creativity. These publishing industry veterans pulled no punches about the current chaos in the market or the problems facing authors today.

Jasmine Cresswell: What surprises did you find in being an agent? What do you enjoy about the job?

Dominick Abel: Your responsibilities are so singular; they are only to your client. The rewards are clear-cut, simple, and immediate. This is vastly preferable to the corporate environment.

Richard Curtis: A long-time editor who was notorious for being slow to pay authors switched jobs and became an agent. I called to welcome her to my side of the fence and asked if she had any questions I could help her with. Her first question about publishers was “How the hell do you get money out of these people?”

Amy Moore-Benson: I love being able to direct all my energies toward a client, to really focus on them. I like to build a business partner’s relationship with my clients and provide editorial input. Having the ability to choose who I work with is great.

Robin Rue: I like being outside a corporation, being my own boss, representing the people who are the less

powerful players in the publishing business. I love being in the right. Every author’s career is different and interesting. By the way, writing is the hardest work I’ve ever done. [Robin Rue wrote two Y.A. books under a pseudonym.]

JC: What’s the most difficult aspect of being a literary agent?

DA: Passing on bad news. I know the author has put her heart and soul into the work so it’s not pleasant to say no.

RC: Bringing authors into the 21st century. Authors still have a Maxwell Perkins mentality in a Bertelsmann world. There used to be more individual taste in the business; today decisions are made by a committee and are based on extraneous but vital information such as past numbers, the physical beauty of the author, and whether the author owns a chain of health food stores. You cannot compete only on the strength of the writing anymore.

AMB: Believing in a project and an author and not being able to sell it. Leaving behind the book of your heart. However, regrouping can be positive if our relationship is long-term and collaborative.

RR: Telling clients the truth; outlining the work that has to be done to succeed in publishing by addressing the realities of where the market is. Because of that, I like clients who like to work. It’s a numbers-based business now and you have to be able to look at your career as openly as possible [and ask] what has to be done if you want to be published?

JC: Describe your ideal client.

DA: Jasmine Cresswell. She writes well and is really nice. I want to have a frank and honest relationship with my clients. I’ve had some authors for over twenty-five years and that deep and long-term relationship is important to me. We discuss disappointments and share triumphs without worrying about hurting feelings.

RC: An author who makes a million dollars and calls once a year to ask what I want for a Christmas gift. In the office, we have something called the PITA index



► which means the “pain-in-the-ass” factor divided by commissions generated. The higher the PITA index, the sooner we try to get rid of the author. What we hope for is someone hard-working, appreciative, and flexible.

AMB: Harlan Coben, after hearing him speak. He understands his own writing and is willing to take risks with it. Writing is a job, a career, a commitment. I want authors who understand the work involved and use the relationship with their editors and agent to stretch themselves.

RR: The personal relationship is important. At Writers House, even the agents don’t leave very often. An author should be realistic about her writing and try to work with her voice, what’s different and/or special. I’d be incredibly happy to find a first novelist who makes a million dollars and laughs at my jokes.

JC: Editors always claim to want “the book of your heart” and say they don’t follow trends, yet they buy the book of the marketplace. How do you reconcile marketability with creative excitement?

DA: The reality is that ninety percent of those “books of the heart” are by writers who simply can’t write. I advise my clients to write a book you can put your heart into. Don’t go home and write an “underwater basket-weaving” novel just because they are selling. You try to accommodate the market and the editor and agent’s tastes but you have to be able to be proud of the work. Write the best you can; that’s the priority. Think about the advice you’re given about marketability. I’m not good at spotting trends anyway; I think it’s just luck to detect a trend.

RC: Every book should come from some part of your heart. Books can represent different aspects of the writer. Start by writing for money—as Samuel Johnson said, you’d be a fool not to—and in time you’ll find an audience, and editors will tell you when it’s time to jump to the next level.

Or sometimes, like John D. McDonald, your body of work builds until it suddenly gets noticed. He had been writing his Travis Magee novels for years and one day the newest one ended up reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*. Feather your nest, then

lay eggs and hope they hatch.

AMB: There is no formula. Writers should write what they want to write. The agent needs to understand what specific editors like and want. When an editor “gets” a book like an agent does, it’s exciting. The agent has to find the chemistry and connection between a book and an editor. Timing plays a part, having your finger on the pulse of the editors.

RR: You are in the business of being a writer. Take the stories in your heart and develop them in your voice. Blind passion has movement and vigor but you have to combine it with reader enjoyment. The business is learning to evaluate your passion without losing it. The agent’s job is to guide you through the morass.

JC: We keep hearing that the mass market paperback market is in trouble. Is this a long-term problem or a hiccup?

DA: Publishers are having a difficult time and need to come up with answers. The best way to look at this is that there is still clearly an audience for novels. No medium other than a book is as satisfactory or as user-friendly for reading. For some hard-covers, such as Harry Potter, the numbers are extraordinary. There is a displacement from mass market paperbacks to other book forms. This cuts into volume due to the higher price. There will be answers from the publishers to this problem. Stories still fulfill a deep-seated need.

RC: This is no hiccup. The market is deeply embedded in the airport mentality of the mass market paperback. You can no longer learn to write while getting paid (except perhaps in the romance market). You might be interested in reading my article Publishing in the 21st Century which can be found at <http://www.bksp.org/RichardCurtis1.html>.

AMB: Publishing companies are discussing creative solutions and are putting energy into dealing with this problem. The sales forces are being charged to come up with new ways to get books out. It’s very important to the publishers to answer this.

RR: Numbers and distribution drive the marketplace now. Outlets are shrinking. The advent of the trade paperback has changed things. Mass market is still working, but the numbers are down. Dependence on the mass merchants and discount outlets is difficult. Publishers are using different, imaginative ways to get books out to readers, such as special editions for Costco. There’s little space for growth in learning and more dependence on brand names. We pray for little blips in sales. Writers’ groups like RWA—which are the best-educated groups of readers—really help by reading and talking about each other’s books.

From the audience: Why are distributors doing this?

Book Reviews - How Do They Do Those?

BY TERRI BRISBIN

DA: In outlets such as Walmart and Costco, books are not competing with other books for space, they're competing with refrigerators and shirts. There's little margin on books so they'll give that book table to Ipods instead. In recent years, more books are being sold in non-bookstores who sell "stuff," so their rationale is to stock whatever turns inventory quickly.

RC: The book industry is one of the few where merchandise is returnable for full credit. It's stupid, wasteful, dishonest, and insane. But this is not the only outlet we have anymore. There is a new way to deliver directly to consumers without returns. Electronic publishing is growing at a faster rate than any other aspect of the publishing business.

RR: The distributors are looking at the bottom line, especially with all the consolidation in the industry. Barnes and Noble is competing with the publishers. They're putting mass market paperbacks at the back of the store now, not because they're hostile, but because the market for mass market is shrinking. Airports and malls are changing the market which feeds the brand name author issue.

Audience: How do we get our work to the reader in new ways?

DA: There is no better way now. Publishers came into being because writers couldn't distribute their own books. Writers don't have time to take orders, ship merchandise, etc. They need to write. I am less sanguine about a major change happening right now. It may happen in the future.

RC: With Barnes and Noble, the retailer is becoming the publisher and big publishers are becoming retailers. Buyers and sellers are blending, thanks to the Internet. Authors can become retailers by branding themselves through their websites.

RR: Even big name authors don't self-publish when they could sell directly. Editors do help improve books; they can make you go deeper and stretch yourself. The process of growth in writing through editorial input is still a magical process.

Contact information for the speakers:

Dominick Abel: dominick@dalainc.com

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Nancy Herkness is the author of two contemporary romances, A Bridge to Love and Shower of Stars, both published by Berkley Sensation. This was her first NINC conference and she was very impressed by the kindness of people she met just sitting in the bar or waiting for the elevator. If you have questions about the agents' panel, please email her at nancy@nancyherkness.com.

Have you ever wondered how some books get reviewed in *Publishers Weekly* or *Library Journal*? Wondered if you or your publisher needs to send in ARCs—or what the chances are that they'll be read? A panel of book reviewers from *Publishers Weekly* and the *Library Journal* discussed the mysterious process and disclosed several secrets at the recent Ninc Conference.

The panelists were Daisy Maryles, Executive Editor, *PW*; Peter Cannon, *PW* Associate Editor: Mystery and Science Fiction, Fantasy/Horror; Brianna Yamashita, *PW* Associate Forecast Editor, Review Annex, Mass Market and Audio; and Wilda Williams, *Library Journal* Book Review Fiction Editor for popular fiction, Christian fiction, romance, science fiction, and mystery. Barbara Keiler served as moderator for the panel's discussion.

Daisy Maryles opened with some comments about book reviewing in general, including the fact that *PW* and *Library Journal* review over 12,000 books each year! Maryles also announced that *PW* is unveiling a new feature: four bestseller pages with info about six other books on outside columns. Authors can send in information (something new or different about their book: rights, sales, promotion, photos, etc.) starting May 2.

Wilda Williams announced a new feature in *Library Journal*, a new bestseller list for the best circulating books in libraries, and said that popular fiction is in demand by readers. Readership of *LJ* includes about 50% public libraries, 30% educational settings and about 20% legal libraries and others. Staff for *LJ* includes Bette-Lee Fox, who edits romance reviews, and Kristin Ramsdell, who reviews romances, writes the Romance Column, and is interested in educating librarians. Wilda edits SF, mystery, and Christian fiction, but the columns are written by Jackie Casada (science fiction/fantasy), Rex Klett (mystery), and Tamara Butler (Christian fiction).

Galleys for *LJ* are needed 2-3 months in advance. Also of interest to reviewers are first novels and first different novels, (i.e. established authors switching genres). Columnists should not be approached personally about doing reviews; all contact must go through Williams. In genre, they review mass market paper-



► backs, but they do not review anthologies.

Tips from Williams on submitting for review:

If you submit your own books, be as professional as you can. They do look at the quality of galleys. They do not review self-published books. Include a cover letter, and be persistent but not a pest. Also, publishers can develop a relationship with reviewers.

Library Journal sends out an email list to subscribers telling them which books will be reviewed in upcoming issues. To subscribe, send a blank email to: ljreviewalert@readbusiness.com. Type SUBSCRIBE in subject line.

In closing, Williams suggested that authors get to know their local libraries and get involved with local and regional library associations. Some new programs are in development, one aimed at getting authors into libraries. She urged authors to look for more info and demos at BookExpo America in New York in June.

Brianna Yamashita reviews paperback originals at *PW*. She likes genres. She covers more romance than SF and mystery. Since *PW* reviews about 6000 books a year, and Yamashita reviews about 20 paperbacks a month, she is very selective in her choices.

Tips from Yamashita on submitting for review:

Consider timeliness—galleys, ARCs, or manuscript pages should be submitted at least 3-4 months in advance of release. Authors can send them. *PW* would prefer manuscript pages even earlier! Pages/ARCs should not be held together with rubber bands, but should be in a presentable format and include a cover letter with the following information: ISBN, price, and publicity contact information. (FYI: Harlequin only sends four books per month to be reviewed—usually single-title, priority releases.) *PW* also covers non-fiction (as well as some fiction if received too late) in an online annex. Yamashita suggested authors gain their publishers' support, since the publishers give *PW* their priority list to be reviewed each month.

Peter Cannon handles category mystery (vs crime

drama or general fiction), science fiction, and horror. Up until about five years ago, he explained, all materials received were reviewed, but then a limit was placed. Only six per week are reviewed now. Any extra books are mentioned as "Notes." Cannon assigns and edits reviews with 20 freelance reviewers in his pool. He tries to match books with reviewers for a fair look at the work, and edits reviews for accuracy regarding plot and details. Reviews can be anonymous, and he can and does edit them if they are overly enthusiastic or too harsh. Smaller presses are not covered routinely. St. Martin's Press's *Minotaur* imprint accounts for about 40% of all mysteries reviewed. Cannon mentioned that authors from major houses will get at least a "Note," if not a review. With a new chief in place, *PW* is trying to increase the number of SF and mystery reviews.

A Q&A session followed with the following questions being discussed by panelists and the audience:

Q—With book marketing geared toward specific readerships, how does that effect your reviews?

PC: He tries to reach a mix of booksellers, librarians, and to a smaller extent, consumers/readers (authors, too). Sometimes he is not sure, since publishers used to forecast a release's commercial value, etc., but now publishers don't want to give out numbers about specific books.

BY: Since reviews are available and used online for promotional purposes (Amazon, B&N), reviews are slanted to the market—romance to romance, etc.

WW: *LJ* is aimed at trade. Publishers use reviews for marketing so reviews reach readers. For educational/academic markets, that info is shared and directed to their audiences so yes, librarians and patrons are considered when reviewing.

DM: The media looks to *PW* to make their choices for reviews and that is considered when reviewing.

Q - What about charging for reviews?

DM: Since they're more interested in publishers' reactions, *PW* is not even looking at reviewing as a revenue stream.

Q - *Library Journal* received angry messages about Westerns not being reviewed.... What about Westerns?

PC: Westerns were strong, but have declined, or are in mainstream. The occasional submission is reviewed in mainstream, where there's lots of competition for review.

BY: Since books are reviewed according to the publisher's priority—and Westerns are not getting priority—she's had no Westerns in three years.

WW: *LJ* does receive them, but not many, and not many of the reviewers like them. However, some "big names" are coming out with Westerns, so there may be

an expansion of the market and the reviews of them.

Q - Amazon includes PW reviews on a book's page. Do negative reviews hurt sales?

DM: Amazon puts up all the reviews: positive and negative. Neither publishers nor PW can influence or change this.

During the discussion, Isabel Swift, of Harlequin Enterprises, reminded authors that if the publisher does not receive manuscripts on time, they cannot send them out for reviews.

The discussion was informative and allowed atten-

dees a glimpse inside of the mysterious world of book reviewing.

Thanks to the panel and moderator for their words of wisdom and suggestions about how an author can be more proactive in this essential part of publishing.

Terri Brisbin is wife to one, mom to three and dental hygienist to hundreds as well as the author of almost a dozen romance novels. You can visit her website at www.terribrisbin.com for more information about those books and her sometimes somewhat glamorous life as a romance author.

Recapture the Magic...

Setting the Tone

**“Recapture the Magic”
New Orleans
Hotel Monteleone
March 30 - April 1, 2006**

**Optional Fun day:
Wed -March 29**

Airboats on the Bayou, Ghost Walks,
Trolley Tours, spa packages,
cafe au lait at Cafe du Monde

~

**Pre-Conference Creativity
Workshop**

**Thursday – March 30
8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Writing from the
White-Hot Center:**

*Writing as an emotional rather than intellectual process
~ Robert Olen Butler*

During the morning session, Butler will offer participants his insights into the nature of voice and the experience of fiction as a sensual, cinematic series of takes and scenes.

Using the dynamics of desire and method acting sensory strategies for tapping into the unconscious, he reinterprets the traditional tools of the craft and proposes that fiction is the exploration of the human condition with yearning as its compass.

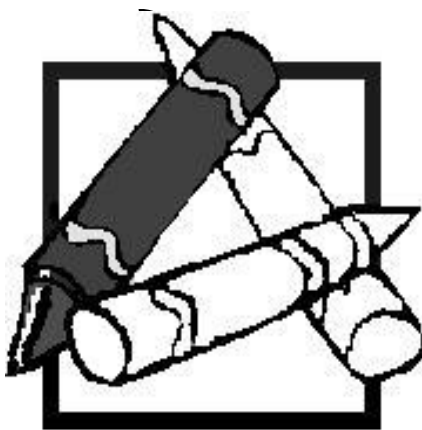
During the afternoon session, he will guide participants in achieving the dreamspace necessary for composing honest, inspired fiction—stories that resonate in our bones.

Robert Olen Butler is a professor of creative writing at Florida State University as well as a Pulitzer Prize winning author of screenplays, novels and short story collections. *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction* (Grove Press, 2005) summarizes his lectures on the creative process.

\$65 - includes Soup & Salad lunch.

Contact Conference Chair Pat Roy with thoughts or questions. patroy1@charter.net

Crayon
on my



Key
board

What Makes Your Muse Purr?

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

Since a two-year case of writer's block eight years ago, I've become a student of creativity. No matter what a writing how-to book is about, if the subtitle says something about enhancing creativity, I'll buy it. I've even learned a few things from all these books. I've learned a lot more from personal experience. So, what does make the Muse purr, or hum, or whatever your Muse does when she's happy?

I can't speak for yours, but here are some of the ideas that work for mine.

Light: lots of light. I can't write in a dim room. I can rarely write after dark. (This will probably change in the near future since my new home is located at a latitude which gets about six hours of daylight out of 24 during the winter months.)

Sleep: lots of sleep. Everyone reading this is probably well aware of my experience with this topic, so I won't belabor the point.

Sunshine: This one is different from the first point. A brightly lit room is wonderful work space, but I'm convinced my Muse is solar powered. From the time the first warm rays poke through in spring until fall's chill drives me back indoors, I spend as much time in the sun as I can. Simply being outdoors isn't good enough. I need to feel the warmth on my skin. On days when there's enough of a breeze to keep me from overheating as I sit in my sunbeam, I can rattle off pages and pages of pretty decent story.

Smells: I've been surprised and delighted to discover how much scented candles help my creative process.

Citrus scents are supposed to stimulate creativity, although for me, the citrus has to be just-barely-there. Heavy scents don't work at all, and faux-kitchen-smells (i.e. Cinnamon Bun, Apple Pie or other such candle scents) are similarly unhelpful, but a light lavender scent works wonders.

Crunching: Yeah, you read that right. Whether it's potato chips (my weakness), celery sticks, or popcorn, munching something crunchy when I'm first getting into my work for the day really helps. After the first half hour or so (you can see why I've explored the effectiveness of celery-crunching, as opposed to thirty minutes of chip-noshing), I find the story groove and forget the food. A good friend of mine chews gumballs as she writes. She even has a gumball machine in her office. I've tried the gum thing, but found it more tiring to my jaws than stimulating to my creativity.

Tea: I love having a teapot full of a hot brew while I work. Green tea with a hint of jasmine works best, though the green tea and ginger blend from Tetley is also great. However, if those aren't available, any herbal tea will work. (Fruit teas don't do it for me, but that's not to say they don't help others.) The added benefit of this is frequent trips to the bathroom, which force me to get up and move periodically rather than sit until my muscles have seized.

Color: I have to have lots of color around me. Colored glass is my favorite, but I'll take flowers, a pretty runner on my filing cabinets, a lovely paint on the walls or just about any other method of bringing color into my space. Usually it's tones of pink or purple, but another of my writing friends painted her office red and

says it's an amazing work space.

Candles: Again, this seems like a repeat of a previous point, but it isn't. I have yet to figure out why this works, but when I'm feeling reluctant about writing, if I light a candle or two (either scented or unscented) on or near my desk, a lot of my anxiety dissipates.

Home decorating shows and magazines: I wasn't conscious of this being a creativity stimulator until one of my writing inspiration books mentioned it. The author says these resources give us ideas for our characters' settings. I supposed they do. For me, though, the real bonus is the way my imagination takes flight as I'm watching. On one of my favorite shows, the makeover team turned a drab, square kitchen space into a Mediterranean dream kitchen, complete with a faux brick grotto around the stove. I can't envision myself in that setting, but the Girls have been telling me a bit about a character (a man) who is completely at home in a kitchen just like that.

Exercise: You notice I didn't put this one at the top of the list. I was hoping to get your reading momentum going so you'd read right through this paragraph as opposed to dumping the column by the third paragraph. I've messed around with exercise routines in the past, mostly because I felt I "should" do it. They didn't last long. However, this past fall, I got a triple injection of motivation. I have two unrelated health conditions which are supposed to be greatly eased by exercise. Besides, the numbers on the scale were approaching the 8-months-pregnant threshold. I managed to find a workout buddy for cardio workouts at least twice a week, and joined a twice weekly yoga class. I haven't been anywhere near consistent, but am I ever feeling better! The health issues really and truly are improved, (I was quite skeptical about this in the beginning) and my clothes are fitting better. But the surprise benefit is that my brain is clearer. Creativity isn't the pulling-teeth venture it's been for way too long. (Are you still reading? If so, I'll reward you with a change of subject now.)

Walking: No, no. This isn't a repeat, either. I "discovered" this one when I had to leave the house for a real estate showing, but didn't have a vehicle to take me to the library. I decided to take the dog for a walk instead. I didn't consciously mull over the story while I was walking. I just noticed the expanse of the sky, enjoyed the sunshine, and laughed at my little dog's antics as she chased smells all over the place. I was gone a mere 20 minutes, but when I returned, my brain felt cleaner, as if the clutter had been swept away.

Hanging laundry: Now you know I'm truly strange, right? This honestly works wonders for me. Maybe it's the rote activity or being outside or something else entirely. I don't really care why it works. I just know that hanging laundry on the clothes line helps me sort

out knotty story problems. The smell of line-dried laundry is one of my favorites, so I get double benefit from this one.

The Little Realities: These two young beings have yet to encounter their inner critic. The elder LR loves to draw and write stories. Her imagination soars into places that leave me both amazed and helpless with laughter. The younger LR prefers more active play: digging in the sand, turning household items into various sports accessories, building scenes for monster trucks to demolish. Letting myself join their worlds rejuvenates my imagination somehow. Even better is when I eavesdrop on their joint play. The SUV slogan "No Boundaries" takes on a whole new meaning.

Comfort: While I used to love getting dressed up for work during my days of office employment, I've found office attire just doesn't do anything for my Muse. In fact, a waistband or cuffs digging in can be enough to drown her out completely. I go for non-binding, soft clothing when I want to write. The more reluctant I feel about facing the page, the more attention I give to what I wear that day. I choose my favorite colors, my coziest sweaters, and my softest pants. Some of my best writing is done in my recliner where the heat soothes my frequently achey back, and my feet can be elevated.

Variety: Every once in a while, I change something in my office or near whatever my writing space is for that day: a new candle, a card from a friend on display, or a rearrangement of the knickknacks on my shelves. The change somehow opens my creativity to a different way of looking at my characters or my plot.

Quiet and solitude: I've discovered that a certain amount of both these items is an absolute must for me. When I don't get it, my brain takes on a frenetic pace. In fact, I've discovered that Monday is usually not my best writing day. Even though both LR's are in school that day, I need the time to shed the busyness of the weekend. I usually like to have music playing while I write, but on Mondays, that's counterproductive. I need the silence to get back in touch with my Muse.

This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it a checklist. With the exception of comfortable clothing, not everything on the list has to be "just right" for me to have a successful day with my imagination. On the other hand, when I'm feeling blocked or even just anxious about beginning, I think about which of these items might be most likely to help me find the joy of creativity once again. They're just little ways of keeping the Girls happy, and when the Girls are happy, the writing is fun.

Janelle Clare Schneider is a reluctant exerciser, but has found a purple work-out suit much more pleasant for the task than boring grey.



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

Who Better to Blog?

I've admitted before that the Internet is a constant challenge for me. It has to rank among the most brilliant and most dangerous inventions that have ever existed for writers. Information junkies, communication mavens, curious and questing and snoopy and nosy as anyone on the planet, the Internet serves all our highest and lowest desires. I've set up a laptop without access so that I have one place to write and another to be online, and it's helping. I know a number of other writers have done the same thing—creating one station for work and another for email/Internet.

That said, the Internet is a constantly evolving, wildly interesting place and we'd all be poorer (intellectually anyway) without it. One of the huge, emerging shifts has to do with blogs, technically "web logs" in case you've been hiding or in Antarctica or deadlining, a place where a person or groups of people write daily or at least regularly, usually about a particular subject or with a particular slant.

The medium has exploded over the past year—recent analysis estimates there are upwards of 60 mil-

lion blogs on the Internet. That's a lot of writing, and I suspect we're only beginning to see how they'll transform the world of newspapers, reading, information delivery, and disbursement of all sorts. Blogs have created, for the first time in history, a genuinely free press, an access to information exchange that's dizzying.

They also raise all sorts of intriguing questions about intellectual property and how to protect it, and how to keep making money as a publisher or royalty-earning writer when the entire distribution network is changing at such a blinding rate.

But those are questions just to be pondered and perhaps discussed among ourselves. I'm interested today in what they offer writers and readers of popular fiction, as artists and as business men and women.

Given my lifelong passion for journals and journaling, I fell in love with reading blogs fairly early. I've written here about my initial addiction, which was to the Julie/Julia Project, one of the most famous blog stories of all. Her blog was so brilliantly written that it became a book, *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny*

Apartment Kitchen: How One Girl Risked Her Marriage, Her Job, and Her Sanity to Master the Art of Living by Julie Powell, which will be released by Little Brown in September. (And yes, I will be buying it. It's funny. It's smart. It's about food and an aspiring writer who makes good. What's not to like?)

At that point, the blogging world was only just getting in motion, and it wasn't difficult to keep track of what I liked. Every so often, I'd wander around and see who had a good blog on some intriguing subject, and if I found a good one, I'd read it now and then. My son and his college girlfriend kept a running blog about debate and I could keep track of things going on in their lives by reading there, which was fun. I discovered the large number of travel blogs, and enjoyed reading a number of them.

But it was all in good fun until last Christmas when Ian, aforementioned child, suggested I try *Bloglines*, a subscription tracker for blogs, to keep track of the ones I liked. It puts a tab at the top of my web browser so if I find one I like, it will subscribe me to that feed, and keep track of when there are new posts. All I do is go to the website, and there are all my favorites, helpfully sorted into the categories I've set up.

Oh, woe is me.

60 million blogs on the Internet, and the girls in the basement love them. It's like entering the most magnificent shopping mall in the world, with a window into any world you care to name and carte blanche on what to buy/read. The reader junkie in me can't get enough of them: the intrepid young couples traveling around the world, the young wife who followed her husband to Ireland and is learning to live in a tiny hamlet where the customs are so different from her New Mexico life, the chefs and restaurateurs—

Name a subject, a place, a country or political situation or issue or avocation you want to know about: running, perhaps. Or women runners, maybe. Or, hey, how about an older woman running? No, no, how about a woman running triathlons in Israel....!?!)

All real. I'm very, very slowly learning how to run, so I went out on the Internet one evening looking for runners at my level. The first place I found was completerunning.com, which has dozens of bloggers writing about their passion. I liked the title of *The Chocolate Runner* (<http://completerunning.com/chocolate-runners-blog/>) and read some of his entries. Then I wanted to find a woman and discovered a plump, 47 year old mother of young twins who is training for triathlons (<http://nancytoby.blogspot.com/>). Which led me to <http://barinirenberg.blogspot.com/>, *Tri-ing in the Holy Land*. After another hour or so wandering pleasantly through boring and smart, well-written and not, I did assemble a list of blogs I think will help me train more effectively.

And what, you rightly ask, does running have to do with writing? Nothing except the very real fact that this job is so wretchedly sedentary I feel obliged to find many different ways to keep the parts moving properly, so exercise is a non-negotiable part of most days, and I somehow discovered I like to run. Well, and nothing except that everything has to do with writing, in the end.

I've also used blogs for actual writing-related research, largely character studies—living in strange cities, engaging in particular professions, avocations, and passions from Formula One racing to gardening orchids. What blogs offer a fiction writer is something that's hard to get unless you have unlimited access to personal interviews, and that's the soul and heart of a thing, the tiny details that can add such a powerful level of verisimilitude.

Which brings us to the next point. Who better to blog than writers, who are bent to the form, and love words, and love communicating? Naturally there are lots and lots of blogs from writers and booksellers, readers and reviewers. Aspiring writers blog about the travails of aspiring, and about books they love reading. Literary writers have formed circles to promote their works, and take turns recommending books. There are circles of crime writers and chick lit writers and romance writers. Publishers Marketplace alone has a list of 37 bloggers, the most popular being the oft-quoted MJ Rose in her blog, *Buzz, Balls, and Hype*, a blog about the book business itself, and the difficulties of marketing our product in an increasingly crowded market. I also enjoy reading *BookAngst 101: Max Perkins, He Dead* (<http://bookangst.blogspot.com>). Much of the discussion on both of those sites has to do with the business itself.

I've seen much discussion about the pros and cons of writers adding blogs to their websites. Given the popularity of the form, it seems like a no-brainer, and writers write, after all. Why not?

There can be benefits. A good blog is highly readable and creates word of mouth and then presumably raises the visibility of the author's books.

But there are also some challenges. First, blogging is not simply writing. It requires a strong personality on some level, and an ability to either create a sense of intimacy with the reader or cause incendiary discussion. Mrs. Giggles has this sort of presence, and was more or less blogging her opinions for quite some time before it became a more formal presence. Love her or hate her, she has the personality required to sustain a presence, and there are a handful of others who use either a strident or confrontational tone to capture public at- ▶



The Girls in the Basement . . .

Blog

► attention. Obviously, there are other ways —the marketing/business of writing blogs are one. MJ Rose (I mention her twice because she has been quite successful) has a second blog devoted to the backstories of novels. Intriguing stuff for some readers.

The second challenge is the frequency of posting required. Blogs feel old and outdated if there is no new material every few days. If you only have to write a paragraph or post a photo, that's fine, but if you're slanting the blog to a particular reader, that paragraph has to be relevant, and that means you'll have to be relevant yourself. It can be a lot of work.

Which is where group blogs have come in. I've been reading two recently created group blogs: *Squawk Radio*, which is the group blog of powerhouses Christina Dodd, Connie Brockway, Elizabeth Bevarly, Eloisa James, Lisa Kleypas, and Teresa Medeiros. The other is *Literary Chicks*, by chick lit authors Alesia Holiday, Lani Diane Rich, and Michelle Cunnah. Both offer a service to readers and visibility to the writers presented without overly burdening any particular person. Both have an identifiable stamp or site "voice" that makes for interesting reading. Check them out.

The world of blogs is expanding wildly—should you have one? Maybe. Should you be reading them? Absolutely.

And we should all be paying attention to the potential ramifications of blogging on our business. What happens if there is an entirely free press? What happens if we can publish what we wish by simply uploading it to a site on the Internet? Who profits from laborious distributions systems currently in place, and how can they survive in their current form if everyone eventually has a computer and access to the Free Press of Blogs?

And how will we each, as writers, profit from our gift if the current structure does crumble? I never need a cookbook anymore, for example, because if I want a recipe, I simply go find the one I need online.

Now, if you'll excuse me, the girls are dragging me off to a recipe of the day blog, where I am learning to cook things like mini chocolate raspberry muffins.

Barbara Samuel is continuing to hide her head in the sand by buying books right at the bookstore and reading them while lying on hammocks in the backyard.

NINK a publication of Novelists, Inc.
An Organization for Writers of Popular Fiction
P.O. Box 1166
Mission KS 66222-0166

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