

# NINK

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## ***“Buy New”: The Internet, Used Books, and the End of the World as We Know It***

BY JAMES GRIPPANDO

**E**lbert Hubbard, a prolific American author who published more than seven million words before his death on the *Lusitania* in 1915, once said that, “This will never be a civilized country until we expend more money for books than for chewing gum.” If that is so, we are well on our way to becoming the most uncivilized nation on earth.

If you have logged onto [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) lately, you probably know that a “new” hardcover can be purchased from a “used” bookseller for as little as one cent. Yes, that would be \$00.01 (plus shipping, of course) for a book that has yet to be remaindered. Cool, right? Wrong.

Here is the problem. Ask just about anyone in the industry these days, and you will hear the same sad story: mass market is in the toilet. Some of the most knowledgeable players in the industry have traced the

cause of this downturn back to the fateful summer of 1996, when paperback distributors eviscerated the wholesale distribution workforce and began shipping books directly to retailers. This shift in distribution patterns streamlined the way retailers ordered books from publishers, transforming mass market into another arm of blockbuster publishing—the brave new world of fewer titles and branded authors.

It’s not clear that mass market will ever recover from this blow, but one thing is clear; the ready availability of cheap hardcover books over the internet certainly isn’t breathing new life into dead pulp. Readers who watch their pennies—and there are many of them—used to say, “Gee, I’d really like to have a hardcover, but I think I’ll wait for the paperback.” Now, they don’t have to wait. Buyer No. 1 purchases the new hardcover for \$25, reads it, and then posts it for sale on the Internet for \$13.00. Buyer No. 2 reads the same book and resells it on the Internet for \$6.00. The cycle goes on, until the reader who used to buy a new paperback now gets a “used” hardcover in virtually new condition for less than

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## President's Voice

# I really want to know!

**I**t's that time again—renewal time. If you don't have it already, you should be receiving your annual dues statement and Author Coalition Survey any day now. Please, please, don't set them aside and forget about them!

Every year we have a significant number of members who don't renew by the deadline of January 15, so we follow up with emails, and eventually phone calls, to find out why. In most cases, the member simply forgot and does renew once reminded. A few members don't renew because of financial hardship, and many of those also do renew once we remind them about the Linda Kay West Memorial Fund, which any member can tap into once every four years if they can't afford to pay their dues. Some members choose not to renew because they're no longer writing.

But then there are those members who don't renew because they don't feel they're getting their money's worth out of Ninc. In some cases we can only infer that, when they don't respond at all to emails and calls. Others, though, come right out and say so. That's absolutely their right—we can't be all things to all authors, though we do our darnedest. All I'm asking this year is, if you've made the decision not to renew, please, please, tell me.

I really want to know.

I want to know why, of course, since that will help me and future Boards figure out what we can do to better serve members' needs. If something's broken, we want to fix it, if at all possible. But I also just want to know upfront if you're not renewing, with or without a reason, because that will save Ninc the resources (and you the aggravation) of having someone contact you later on to make sure you didn't just forget.

If you're on the fence, weighing the cost of Ninc dues against all of the many other expenses of being an author, take a peek at the "Top Ten Reasons to Join Ninc" on the front page of our website. Maybe one or more of those reasons will convince you to stick around for another year. (If you subscribe to *Publishers Weekly*, it should be a no-brainer, since our \$90 discount will more than cover your dues!) If those reasons don't persuade you, feel free to email me or any other Board member or post on NINCLINK to ask questions about just why Ninc is worth \$65 of your hard-earned money.

Or course, if you're one of our fabulous, faithful members who do renew every year (or a new member who is finding Ninc valuable enough to stick with for another year), I'd still like to hear from you, if you have any suggestions on what we can do better. I also want to extend my thanks for your ongoing support, and encourage you to please fill out the Author Coalition Survey (yes, again) when you renew. The higher the response rate on those surveys, the more money Ninc will receive for programs that benefit the entire membership and novelists as a whole.

We've done our best to make renewing and filling out those surveys as

easy and convenient as possible. You can send a check with the paper notice you receive, or you can pay online with a credit card through our secure server. You can also fill out your Author Coalition Survey online and update your Member Profile. One item we've added this year, both to the paper renewals and to the website Profile, is the line for publishing houses you've written for. We're hoping once that information is in the database, members who'd like information on a particular publisher will be able to search for and contact other members who have written for that publisher, currently or in the past. This is one way we're trying to increase the networking value of Ninc, in response to member suggestions. See, we do listen!

While you're online (if you choose to renew that way), you can check out the latest updates to our 2007 Conference schedule, and register for the conference, if you haven't yet. Spend a little time just poking around the website, too, if you haven't visited for a while. Lots of stuff has been added over the past year that we're hoping you'll find useful for your writing career. If, while poking around, you think of things you'd like to see on the website that aren't there . . . tell me!

I really, really want to know.

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber** :)

## ***Dues Statement Update....***

### **Dear Fellow NINC Members—**

You will see a new line on the Dues Statement you receive this year that we hope will help provide a useful resource for all of us.

It says:

Your Publishers/Imprints: \_\_\_\_\_

Just as with listing your agent, it then asks if you're willing to have fellow NINC members contact you about your publishers.

This will allow NINC members who sign into the website to search the secure membership roster by a publisher/imprint and see members who have published there. That could be a resource for members submitting to or receiving offers from a particular publisher. It also would allow members published with a house in one genre to connect with members publishing with the same house in another genre.

— **The Board.**

## ***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:***

Elaine Isaak, Lee, NH  
Kelley St. John, Gadsden, AL  
Judith Stanton (Fiona Carr), Pittsboro, NC

### ***New Members:***

Melissa Benyon (*Lilian Darcy*) Macquarie ACT, Australia  
Alyson Velazquez (*Alyson Noel*), Monarch Beach, CA  
Janet Wellington, Florence, OR

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

# “Buy New”

Continued from page 1



half the price of a mass market. Toss a few thousand shiny new cloth remainders into the internet pool, and why on earth would anyone plunk down \$7.50 for a paperback? The sole remaining mass market demographic is the poor slob who is stuck in the airport with absolutely nothing to read. Of course mass market is in the toilet!

Obviously this used book cycle has some benefits. Consumers get new or nearly new books for considerably less than retail price. They read more, presumably, which helps to grow an author’s fan base. There is a downside, however. Sooner or later, the only people who will pay retail price for a new hardcover book are those die-hard fans who simply must get their hands on the next book by their most beloved author as soon as it hits the bookstores. The rest of the world will wait for the used books to flood the market. And they are waiting in ever-increasing numbers. A recent report from the American Association of Publishers estimates that in the trade publishing market alone, annual used book sales are already at \$700 million—roughly ten percent of the market. The number is only growing.

Is this really a bad thing? You bet it is. If this trend continues, publishers may well be able to publish only those authors who can earn out the bulk of their advance in the first few weeks of hardcover publication. That means fewer authors will get published. In turn, that means fewer choices for readers. To anyone who reads beyond the bestseller list, that is surely a bad thing. It also hits bookstores right in the pocketbook, at least the ones that sell new books. It’s hard enough for the independents to survive in today’s market without the added stress of a used book craze.

So, what can be done about it? First, publishers should rethink remainders. Does it make economic sense to dump all those books into the used book pool? A remainder is sold at dead cost, which means that it earns no profit to the author or publisher. The publisher recoups its cost—in theory. With the Internet, however, a remainder can be sold several times over. Each hardcover resale eliminates another potential sale of a new paperback. It doesn’t take Milton Friedman to figure out that the short-term benefit of recouping the hardcover cost will eventually be outweighed by lost

profits on mass market sales. Try telling the folks in Disney that, before putting Bambi and Snow White in the vault every six years, they should unload every last DVD and videocassette at dead cost. Books are different, to be sure, but unless a book is truly going out of print, never to be reintroduced into the market in any form, the economics aren’t totally different.

At the very least, publishers should make sure that remaindered books are in fact sold with the remainder mark (usually a black magic marker along the outer edge of the pages). To take it a step further, they might even want to consider selling remaindered books without a dust jacket, in effect turning all remaindered books into “hurt” books that are perfectly fine to read, but that won’t be sold again and again over the internet.

Second, authors, agents, publishers, and booksellers should do more to encourage the purchase of new books. A serious campaign to educate the book buying public may be in order. Though the purchase of used books is not even the remote equivalent of pirating music off the Internet, it is at least noteworthy that the music industry did quite successfully convince fans that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be paid for one’s efforts as an artist. Our message should be this: Hey, it’s perfectly legal to buy used books, but people who do it should know two things. One, the author, publisher, and local bookstore make nothing on the resale of books. Two, diminished profits for the people—yes, we are talking about people, not just corporations—who write, publish, and hand-sell books leads to one inevitable consequence: fewer choices for consumers.

Sure, we all love a bargain. But before you log onto your computer in search of yet another hand-me-down hardcover, ask yourself when was the last time you bought a new book.

If it’s been a while, why don’t you do all book lovers a favor? Drop into a real bookstore, bring your credit card, and have yourself a ball. And instead of bringing a bottle of wine to that next dinner party you’re invited to, how about bringing a book?

Oh, and you can skip the chewing gum.

*James Grippando is the author of eleven suspenseful thrillers, including two releases this year: Got The Look, No. 5 in the Jack Swyteck series; and Lying with Strangers. “Buy New” first appeared on MJ Rose’s site, “Buzz, Balls and Hype.”*

# “Main Selection” Is a Very Good Thing.

BY TESS GERRITSEN

Some of you may have noticed this phrase printed in an ad for a new book, or on the book's back cover:

“A Main Selection of the Doubleday Book Club” (or the Literary Guild or the Book of the Month Club.)

Maybe you don't know exactly what that means, or whether you should even care. I once overheard a writer say sneeringly, about another author: “So she sold book club rights. Big deal. All it means is they'll print up cheap copies of her book, and she won't get royalties for them.”

That sneering author was *clueless*. Because selling book club rights is a Big Deal. And being chosen as a “Main Selection” at a major book club is a Very Big Deal.

Book clubs promote and sell books directly to their members, through the mail. They can offer books at much lower prices because the copies they ship are printed on thinner paper, in a slightly smaller hardcover format. These are not condensed books; they have exactly the same text you'll find in a regular book, but the books are produced more cheaply. Also, the title selection is limited to what the club offers in its catalogue, but they do carry

thousands of titles. About 17 times a year, a catalogue gets mailed out to members, who can choose from the latest selections. The book clubs offer books they believe are most likely to have a substantial readership, so the selections include a lot of blockbusters and popular authors. But they'll sometimes also offer a worthy literary novel, or a new and unknown author whom they believe has the potential to grow.

So what's it mean for the author, when her book is chosen by a book club?

First: money. Sometimes, a lot of it. It may be upwards of six figures, if your book is chosen as a main selection. True, the money is most likely paid directly to your publisher (who probably retains book club rights) but that money is credited toward your advance, so you start earning royalties sooner. That's one reason the Sneering Author was clueless; six figures isn't something to sneer at.

Second: readership. Just look at the sizes of the major book clubs. The largest, Doubleday Book Club, has 1.2 million members. Literary Guild has 1 million members. Book of the Month Club has 400,000 members. If your book is a Main Selection, that means it's the club's default choice for the month. If the member

doesn't mail in the selection card in time, then that member automatically gets sent the Main Selection. Your book will get shipped to thousands and thousands of households, exposing your name to readers who may never before have heard of you.

This is a really good thing. Countless readers have told me that they discovered me only because they'd forgotten to send in their monthly selection card. And so my book turned up in their mailbox.

Finally, there's the prestige. The book clubs have selection committees who must choose from all the new releases the publishers send them. But the committee chooses only one or two Main Selections each month. Think about that. Think about how many books are published every month. Then think about being selected as THE BOOK, above all those other titles.

Since the book clubs go for titles they think will be popular with their members, naturally you'll see a lot of familiar authors turn up as Main Selections. John Grisham and Patricia Cornwell are guaranteed their month's slots. But every so often, the selection committee will choose someone you've never heard of, someone who's brand new to the publishing world. It's their way of ▶

## “Main Selection”

▶ saying: “this is an important book.”

That’s what happened to *The Lovely Bones*. When Book of the Month Club selected it, it was a signal to the publishing world: “Pay attention. This one’s special.”

It’s what happened to me, back in 1996, when my very first hardcover, *Harvest*, was a Literary Guild Main Selection. Back then, I was unknown to booksellers, just a former paperback romance author. But when the Literary Guild

chooses your novel as a Main Selection, the publishing world takes notice. Suddenly, you’re not just another new hardcover author; you’re the writer of that month’s Big Book.

So, what’s the down side to being a book club pick? Well, there is the possibility that it may dent your sales in the brick-and-mortar stores, because so many readers are receiving your book in the mail instead. And book club sales aren’t applied to any bestseller lists. A million book club read-

ers may have chosen to receive your book, but it won’t get you on the *New York Times* list.

Still, the real secret to building a bestselling career is word of mouth. And when hundreds of thousands of book club members are reading your book and talking about it, you can bet that will boost your sales in bookstores as well.

*Tess Gerritsen’s latest book is The Mephisto Club. Her book club advice was first published in her blog, which can be found at: [www.tessgerritsen.com](http://www.tessgerritsen.com)*

## Authors Coalition Survey Update....

**Help Ninc  
without spending  
more than  
a few minutes  
of your time!**

### Fill Out The Authors Coalition Survey

Do it online at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com); or fill out and mail in the form that comes with your dues renewal; or print out, fill in, and mail the pdf form at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).

The higher the percentage of our members filling this

survey out, the more Ninc benefits. (In fact, if not enough members fill it out, we could lose out entirely.)

The more categories our members qualify in, the more Ninc benefits.

**Remember, by definition, every Ninc member qualifies to check off the category that lists author or translator of fiction.**

Remember, you can fill out the form for as many writers groups as you belong to who send you the form – it helps each of them.

How many surveys we have filled out makes a major difference to our bottom line, and that makes a major difference in the projects we can pursue.

All you have to do is:

**Fill Out The Authors Coalition Survey!  
Check Off Everything You Qualify Under!**



# San Diego ~ 2007

March 15, 16, & 17 — The US GRANT Hotel

Imagine spending a whole day with Eric Maisel, the world's foremost creativity coach. He'll talk about getting a grip on your mind, creating in the midst of life, appreciating the Tao of anxiety, sleep thinking, and all that that goes into maintaining a vital, authentic, creative life.

Envision the conversation Kate McCallum, media developer and futurist, will spark with publishing professionals and Ninc members on the opportunities and possibilities ahead in the world of fiction.

Picture yourself working with Kim Dower, literary publicist and media trainer, practicing the skills you need to promote your books with clarity and passion.

Pretend your neck and shoulders are already loosening up from the exercises, stretches, and tools you learned about from Julia Ross, an author who has experienced first hand the benefits of paying attention to your body.

Visualize negotiating the clauses in your next contract with the skills and strategies you picked up from Anita Fore, attorney and Director of the Authors Guild legal department.

Make believe you are creating

compelling characters using the sensory and memory techniques of method acting learned from Lynn Miller, actress, writer, director, and producer, and Laura Resnick, novelist, journalist, and world traveler.

Dream about the stories you are going to create in the collaging room. Maybe one will emerge about Mike Unzueta, a federal agent who will answer all our questions about what it's like working undercover.

Anticipate the cut-to-the-chase professional exchanges of the Ninc@Night sessions which, as we all know, are the heart of our conference.

Your registration fee includes all the above plus coffee and tea throughout the conference, dinner and the traditional Dessert Buffet on Thursday, breakfast and afternoon tea on Friday, and breakfast and luncheon on Saturday.

You can wait to register until March 7 (late fees start March 1), but once our room block at the US GRANT is filled, you may be stuck paying their rack rate which is more than twice our incredible deal of \$180/night.

Our \$180/night rate at this landmark luxury hotel is good three days before and three days after for those who want to add a writing retreat or a getaway in the

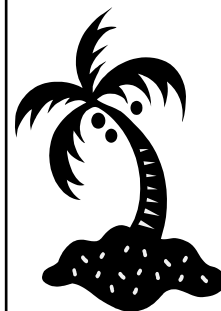
sun onto their conference. Check out what the area offers at our Conference Center at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com)

The US GRANT is even offering us complimentary airport transportation. The Amtrak station is only eight blocks away, and Judy Gill ([judyashore@racs.co.cr](mailto:judyashore@racs.co.cr) or [judyashore@gmail.com](mailto:judyashore@gmail.com)) will be glad to match up roommates.

There is no other writers' conference like Ninc's. The level of professional exchange and the focus on both the business and the creative side of writing is unique in all the world. We so hope you will join us.

**Pat Roy, Pat McLinn, and  
the entire Conference Committee**

P.S. A heartfelt thank you to all who have signed up already. We appreciate it. See you in San Diego.



## Registration Fee \$325

The registration form is available online or within your September issue of *NINK*.

# Peggy Webb

Commercial writers dream of Edgars, RITAS, and Nebulas, but a Pulitzer? It seems beyond our reach. Yet Ninc member Peggy Webb's *Driving Me Crazy*, written for the Harlequin Next imprint and published in January, 2006, has been nominated for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in fiction.

A former colleague of Peggy's at Mississippi State University nominated the book, calling it "a deft blend of lyricism, wisdom and laughter-through-tears comedy. Peggy Webb has penned a humble little novel that superbly addresses the issues of aging in America. Everyone who has a mother should read *Driving Me Crazy*. This book is, quite simply, a triumph of the human spirit."

*Nink* caught up with Peggy at her home in Mississippi which she shares with the perfect male, a chocolate lab named Jefferson.

**NINK:** Peggy, congratulations! All of us in Ninc are basking in your reflected glory.

**PW:** Thank you! It's the biggest honor of my career. I can't imagine anything more wonderful. I'm a phoenix who has arisen from the ashes yet again.

**NINK:** How does it feel to be in the running for a Pulitzer?

**PW:** It feels good. I think my nomination validates all of us who have slaved in the trenches for years.

**NINK:** How many years have

you slaved, personally?

**PW:** I've been writing for 21 years, and I just finished book number 60.

**NINK:** Most of us have wish lists, what we dream might happen during our career. Was a Pulitzer on your wish list?

**PW:** Yes. I often write out goals and wish lists, but that was such an unattainable goal I never wrote it down. With *Driving Me Crazy*, I had no idea I was moving into Pulitzer territory. Often genre writers, especially in romance, aren't viewed with the same respect as literary writers. This experience has validated all of us, and I'm deeply grateful that someone looked beyond the cover.

**NINK:** What happens next? Tell us about the process.

**PW:** I know very little of the process. There's a large committee that meets in the spring. The awards ceremony is very low-key, so there's no big TV extravaganza. My heart's wish is that everyone on that committee will also look beyond the cover. Think of all those other books, and here comes this little paperback!

**NINK:** Prior to this nomination, were there any other indications that this book was special?

**PW:** It sold out quickly, and it was picked up by both Audible.com for audio and Thorndike Press for a hard cover, large print edition. Also, it's being used in a course on Images

of Southern Women at the University of Northern Alabama in Florence.

**NINK:** Can you describe the genesis of the story?

**PW:** I was burned out when my mama got sick. She was diagnosed with congestive heart failure in 2002, and I'd just lost my editor. I thought it was time to walk away. Mama was devastated because she was my biggest fan and she knew I loved writing.

She also knew I had a long-time relationship with Tara Gavin at Harlequin, and she kept telling me I should call Tara. In September of 2004, Mama died. In March of 2005, I did what she's been cajoling me to do all along: I called Tara and told her I'd put together the synopsis for *Driving Me Crazy*. Two weeks later Tara called to say she adored the Mama character.

The book sold on April 7, Mama's birthday. I gathered daffodils from my garden then went to the cemetery and told her "Mama, you didn't have to die to get me to do what you wanted me to."

**NINK:** What a memorial.

**PW:** Oh, yeah, and she knows. Mama is up in heaven taking names and kicking butt. I don't believe in coincidence. The book was sprinkled with fairy dust from the beginning.

**NINK:** Tell us about your mother's influence on the book.

**PW:** I've never had a novel suck me in like that. I felt I wasn't writing



it: my mother was. I quoted her liberally, and Mama just ran away with the book!

**NINK:** Have you always been a writer? What inspired you to pick up a pen?

**PW:** I've always been a writer. I grew up on a small farm in north-eastern Mississippi with parents who revered books, music and education. Our house was the stop for the bookmobile, and my job was to pick out books and be the librarian for the neighborhood. Reading was the only way I could get out of shelling peas. That and piano practice. I hated shelling peas!

**NINK:** So you passed out books to the neighborhood?

**PW:** Only after I was done with them. I was very selfish about it. My parents nurtured my love of reading and writing. I was not required to go into the cotton patches because they wanted more for me. That was hard on them, because this was a working farm. I can remember sitting in the hayloft where I'd write and write and write . . . and eavesdrop on my older sister.

**NINK:** You're a musician as well as a writer. How do these talents intertwine in your life?

**PW:** There're irrevocably bound. I hear the music of the words. There's a beautiful ebb and flow to language, a rhythm, and each book is a symphony to me. Sometimes when I read a galley where the editor has changed a phrase or a word, I feel as if a wrong chord has been played. I started piano at age eight, also to get out of shelling peas!

My older sister was pianist for Andrews Chapel Methodist Church, our community's little chapel built on land donated by my Grandfather Hussey. There has always been a Hussey on the piano bench. I was only 13 when my sister got married and moved away, but I was expected to take her place. I knew two

hymns, *Bringing in the Sheaves* and *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. I played them every Sunday until I finally learned another one.

**NINK:** When did you officially become a published writer?

**PW:** In 1968. My husband belonged to the Mississippi Water Well Association, and part of his job was to publish a newsletter. He didn't know how to do that, but I did. I wrote a humor column that was picked up by some of the industry magazines.

**NINK:** And now you could be looking at a Pulitzer. How has this affected you personally?

**PW:** I've been too busy for champagne! These days excitement for me is a cup of green tea chai. When I received word of the nomination, I sat out on the porch with my dog and had a cup of tea.

**NINK:** So your feet are still solidly on the ground. How has the news impacted your professional life?

**PW:** I've received wonderful email and phone calls from my fellow writers and my editors. And I got a nice note from Donna Hayes, CEO at Harlequin. I'm also in the process of changing agents, and this news has had an impact on the responses I've been getting.

**NINK:** *Driving Me Crazy* would make a great movie along the lines of *An American Quilt* or *The Ya-Ya Sisterhood*.

**PW:** I would love to see that happen!

**NINK:** Don't you already have a movie in the works for another book?

**PW:** Yes. *Where Dolphins Go* has been optioned by an independent film company, Hopeful Romantics. I co-wrote the screenplay with Charlene Keel, former senior script writer for *Days of Our Lives* and one of the producers of Hopeful Romantics.

Two of the producers scouted locations in Mississippi the summer before Katrina. Funding has been a major problem, but they're totally committed. I picture my children accepting my Academy Award posthumously! Philece Sampler of Hopeful Romantics has said that the minute she gets funding she wants to option *Driving Me Crazy*.

**NINK:** The subject, aging in America, is extraordinarily topical.

**PW:** It is. Recently I saw a documentary titled *The Graying of America*. There are more and more of us in that category.

**NINK:** Would you describe *Driving Me Crazy* as a romance?

**PW:** No, it's not a romance, not at all. The book celebrates the courage and resilience of women, which is a common theme in my books. I couldn't have made this journey without the love and support of my female friends.

**NINK:** You had a mother with a heart condition who had to be moved to a nursing home, but you have two sisters, unlike your heroine Maggie who has only one. How autobiographical is the book?

**PW:** It's the most strongly autobiographical book I have written. My sisters and I knew Mama couldn't continue to live alone, and we agonized over putting her in a nursing home. Mama made it easy. She said "If it has to be, it has to be." She had such grace and courage. But most of all, it was the laughter that helped us get through. And Mama laughed loudest of all.

**NINK:** Speaking of laughter, I'm sure readers look forward to more of it courtesy of your books. Anything else coming out soon?

**PW:** *Confessions of a Not-So-Dead Libido* will be on the shelves in November. When I edited it, I nearly fell off the sofa laughing.

**NINK:** Sounds like fun. ▶

### Peggy Webb

► Peggy, you've had a long career, and, like most of us, you've lived by your wits. What words of wisdom would you give to those just embarking on a career in fiction?

**PW:** I'm not very wise! But I would say follow your instincts. Writers are bombarded with advice—some of it very good—but when you sit down at the computer, just you and your story, you need to slide into that subconscious level where the great writing takes place and let the story take over.

**NINK:** That sounds very wise, indeed. How would you like to be remembered, as a person and as a writer?

**PW:** I'd like to be remembered as a kindhearted person, a woman who laughs a lot. I'd like to be remembered as a writer who told really good stories.

**NINK:** And you will be, on both counts. Thank you, Peggy, for taking the time to talk with *NINK*!

**Ed. Note:** And thank you to Vicki Lewis Thompson for being our *NINK* "stand-in."

## Bits'n'Pieces

### 2006 Quill Award Winners

**General Fiction:** Christopher Moore, *A Dirty Job*  
**Mystery/Suspense:** Janet Evanovich, *Twelve Sharp*  
**Romance:** Nora Roberts, *Blue Smoke*  
**Science Fiction/Fantasy:** Diana Gabaldon, *A Breath of Snow and Ashes*  
**Young Adult/Teen:** Christopher Paolini, *Eldest*

### Quote from the Industry

Gerry Byrne, chairman of The Quill Awards, said: "Books ignite the imaginations of filmmakers to create living art, and the *Variety* Blockbuster Book to Film Award honors that craft." (This in connection with the newly minted *Variety* Blockbuster Book to Film Award to *The Devil Wears Prada*.)

### Blogs R Us

From Vicki Hinze, we have the ultimate Master Blog List on books <http://itgirlsseries.com/BookBloggers.htm>

### Harper Targets Avon to Inspire

Due in spring 2007: Avon Inspire, a new trade-size imprint. Liate Stehlik, Avon publisher, will head production, marketing, and all PR, with Harper editor Cynthia DiTiberio handling acquisition and editing. The line will have both contemporary and historical, with 10 titles each year. Initial offerings include *Defiant Heart* by Tracey Bateman, the first in her Westward Hearts series in May, and *Wedding Bell Blues* by Linda Windsor to start the Piper Cove Chronicles in June.

### Torstar Cuts Jobs at Harlequin

In response to a profit decline from Harlequin, Torstar announced it will reduce its workforce by approximately 40 positions. It expects to save \$3 million (Canadian) annually by reorganizing. They did not comment on where the cuts will come from. Operating profit for Harlequin was down 47% in the first quarter of 2006, with 6% decline in sales.

*"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes*

### 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 Ninlink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at [BrendaHB@aol.com](mailto:BrendaHB@aol.com)

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# Miller's Musings

## *The Theory of Oops and Uh Oh!*

For the past few years this theory has been part of my writing career...who am I kidding, a part of my life. You may not realize it, but there is a fine difference between the two words. Yes, both of them deal with mistakes or accidents, but used correctly they illustrate the magnitude of the issue. Please allow me to illustrate the initial concept in action.

I was writing and producing a documentary videotape and we were working in the information center of a major corporation surrounded by computers and other essential items. Two of my crewmembers were the "Frick and Frack" of production and they were setting up the lighting for a shot. After crawling under employees' feet looking for 220 outlets—and it was amazing how much longer it took them to crawl under a woman's desk than a man's—they finally had the lights powered and ready to turn on. No problem! However, it was 6:00 AM and the two of them were doing this while trying to hang onto their coffee containers. I was off explaining the scene to the actor when I heard Frick say,

"Oops." The room lit up like the sun reached high noon.

Attention caught, I walked over and asked in a quiet voice, "What's wrong?"

Frick reached for his coffee and took a nervous sip as Frack rushed to the rescue. "Wrong size bulb and it blew. Just take a minute to unstick."

"Okay." I went back to the actor.

A few moments later I heard another "oops," but an "uh oh" followed this one!

Before I could move, the room lit up like the

Fourth of July. Sparks were shooting everywhere and the lights on the ceiling dimmed as I heard, "Uh oh squared!" Then the computers flickered and blinked off and I heard:

"Spilled my coffee..." Frick said.

"In the light," Frack added before the two voices yelled, "UH OH to the NINTH!" as the room plunged into total darkness taking a good part of this major global corporation with it.

I know, by now you're wondering what the hell this has to do with writing. Simple. It has to do with "degree and response." Working writers realize that there are "oops" periods and "uh oh" periods in every career. Being major goal driven, my problem is I've lately been making my oopses into uh ohs...

E.G. "A rejection means I have no talent." Or, "My contract was canceled; I'll never work again."

Oopses and uh ohs are actually ways to change your response to a situation. They are chances to seek new opportunities. They are the moments in life when we stretch and grow, when we improvise and learn to adapt to new pressures and new situations. Any professional writer needs to do that. But it's a never-ending battle that I'm still working on. For every one of my oops and uh oh moments, very few of them have really been the huge disasters I first imagined.

Oh, in case you are curious, Frick and Frack did continue to work for me. Mainly because accidents can happen to anyone, but mostly because they were so damn much fun to be around.

Another lesson learned—don't take it all too seriously. I'm still learning that one, too.

*Lynn Miller*

# Our Furry Muses

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

One topic on Ninlink sure to generate a flurry of posts is that of pets. Newly arrived pets, sick pets, funny pets, dying pets, long-gone pets – they all bring the lurkers out of hiding. I decided to ask some questions and see if I could get more details about the part our pets play in our lives, particularly our writing lives.

Mary Jo Putney “cohabits with Grady and Lacey, two rescue cats” and has this to say, “Personally, I think that cats channel creativity from the astral plane, so having one or two of them lounging around the office is a very good thing. Not so good is when they stand between writer and monitor, or hit the trackball. Given all the hours writers spend communing with the muse in front of a computer, having a pet around is for good for keeping us socialized.”

Edith Layton’s experience goes one step further. “If it weren’t for my dog, I would be growing moss on my north side. I am by nature indolent and by occupation, sedentary.” She has a 36-pound mixed pointer/foxhound rescue dog named Miss Daisy who is, apparently, most proficient at keeping her author active.

“She knows when it’s time to have lunch, go for a nice bracing walk in the rain, a quick trip out in the backyard for a supposedly desperately needed whiz, play with a jingly toy at my feet, bark hysterically at the monster who has come to the door so that I have to go see which it is (it usually isn’t) and paw at me until I let her up in my lap so she can look out my window,” Edith says. “All these things make me move.”

She doesn’t mind Edith reading, only sitting still for more than five minutes. She’s apparently quite good at stealing glasses, shoes, books or whatever is needed to make her author give chase.

Sue-Ellen Welfonder (w/a Allie Mackay) gets “helped” in a very different way. She’s owned by Em, a seven year old Jack Russell Terrier who has a need to touch his author. Thus, while she’s working, he likes to sit on her lap. “After awhile,” she says, “he slides off my lap and scoots around behind me in the chair. When he does this, he sprawls across the back of the chair seat and soon falls asleep. Only the deeper he sleeps, the more comfortable he gets, which means his little legs

stick straight out and he then starts ‘pushing’ me forward until I am quite literally perched on the very edge of my desk chair.

“He also often snores these sweet little dog-snores when he sleeps like this, and big softie that I am, I can’t bear the thought of disturbing him. So I keep on pecking away on my deadline book, sitting on about 1.5 inches of this chair.” Apparently she was in this position at the time of writing her email about Em.

She also says, “He is the only person allowed by me during deadline-end-crunch mania. He always lets me know what he wants and if it is a walk or he feels it is fetch-the-tennis-ball play time, well, I drop everything and give the little guy what he desires.”

Jamie Denton’s purebred Somali, Cookie, likes to snooze on the shelf above Jamie’s desk, curled around the lamp. During the past year, as Jamie was recovering from cancer surgery as well as chemo, and radiation treatments, Cookie was at her side constantly. In the beginning when Jamie had a little bit of energy for more than recovering in bed, Cookie would immediately run to the office and hop on the desk, then meow loudly until Jamie came to investigate. “If I walked away,” Jamie says, “she’d follow me around the house mewling until I’d go back and power up the laptop. Luckily she can’t tell the difference between email and the word processing program.” When Jamie’s energy level sank to the point that she did little other than sleep, Cookie stayed curled up right beside her, sleeping along with her.

Melanie Jackson has a cat who likes to “help” also. Apparently her favorite trick is to get behind Melanie’s very heavy desk pushed up against the wall and turn off the power bar to the computer/monitor/printer. The last time Melanie complained, Kitty told her that Kitty didn’t want Melanie to get blood clots in her legs from sitting too long . . . and could Melanie fetch a snack while she was up.

Yasmine Galenorn has a kitty helper, as well. Tara is an 18-year-old rescue kitty who is allowed in Yasmine’s office only because one of the other kitty residents likes to play on Tara’s passive-aggressive nature. “It took me a little while to get used to working around her because I’d always had my office off limits to the girls before,” Yasmine explains, “but now I don’t know what I’d do

without my helper girl. She'll stand over my keyboard, staring at my hands until I either pet her, or she gets impatient, at which point she'll start chin-butting my fingers to get me to pay attention to her. She knows all my triggers: lick the manuscript when she wants attention because it drives me nuts, lick the keyboard, lay on the keyboard, walk on the keyboard. Since we had to have most of her teeth removed when I first got her (she was a rescue kitty who wasn't treated very well at her old home) she drools when she's happy. She's like a water faucet and my monitor would not be complete without kitty spit on it from when she shakes her head."

Yasmine has three other senior "girls," as well. Two of them got out by accident a couple of years ago at the same time that Yasmine was fleshing out the synopsis of a new book. Their disappearance and homecoming became the basis for a major subplot in *A Harvest of Bones*, and she eventually wrote up the backstory for MJ Rose's blog on the genesis of that book. [http://mjroseblog.typepad.com/backstory/2005/12/yasmine\\_galenor.html](http://mjroseblog.typepad.com/backstory/2005/12/yasmine_galenor.html)

Sue-Ellen says her Em has been the role model for most of the dog characters in her stories, especially little Bodo in *Knight in my Bed*, and wee Leo in *Bride of the Beast*. She's also written about Mauger in *Devil in a Kilt*, based on a wonderful stray mongrel who adopted Sue-Ellen's family when Sue-Ellen was a little girl. Boiny, in *Wedding for a Knight*, was based on a beautiful aged yellow lab who attached himself to Sue-Ellen during a day of hill and moor walking in a remote area of the Highlands.

Melanie Jackson is currently working on a story about a heroine who has been struck by lightning and now hears cats when they talk to her. She says she likes using animals in stories "because it is a way to shift perspective, to show the world in a different way."

Miss Daisy has been taking care of Edith Layton for only a year, so she hasn't shown up in any stories yet. However, her predecessor, Georgie Girl, a Bernese Mountain Dog, has appeared in two novellas, "The Hounds of Heaven" and "Dogstar." "I find dogs either have to be featured in a story, or a left out," Edith comments. "You can't just mention them because they are brilliant scene stealers."

My favourite "furry muse" story happened to a non-Ninc writer friend of mine, Deb Raney, who has given permission for me to tell the story here. A few months ago, she acquired a kitten, Cleo. In the initial weeks of his residence in the Raney household, he really missed his mama, and felt Deb's laptop made a good substitute since it's warm and it purrs.

However, one morning while she was in the shower, Cleo managed to delete three pages of her manuscript and then shut the computer down, effectively saving his "changes." She was days away from deadline, with

thousands of words to go, and felt certain those three pages were the most brilliant of her career.

She called her husband at work to tell him her plight, and ended with "is there any way I can get it back?" He said, "What? The cat?"

"Like he thought I'd killed the sweet little rodent," Deb now says indignantly.

She wasn't able to retrieve her original work, but she does now have a new policy. Close laptop before leaving the room. ▲

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Man Booker Award Short List

**Winner:** Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*  
(Hamish Hamilton)

#### Finalists:

Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (Canongate)

M J Hyland, *Carry Me Down* (Canongate)

Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (Viking)

Edward St Aubyn, *Mother's Milk* (Picador)

Sarah Waters, *The Night Watch* (Virago)

### Are You a Midwest Favorite?

Authors in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, or Wisconsin are your publishers working with The Midwest Booksellers Association to get you noticed? Check out the MBA web site, especially the Mission Statement for Midwest Connections. [http://www.midwestbooksellers.org/pdfs/Mission\\_statement\\_06pubs.pdf](http://www.midwestbooksellers.org/pdfs/Mission_statement_06pubs.pdf)

### Borders Takes on Book Clubs...

Not satisfied with just selling the books, Borders begins a new online service to help book clubs' formation and contents. Borders Book Club will provide videotaped author discussion and other resources for customers wanting to start or join a discussion group, including info on how to utilize local Borders stores to host and support groups. The service at <http://bordersmedia.com/bookclubs> will start with Mitch Albom discussing *One More Day*.

### ...Borders Takes "Manhattan"

The newest Borders Group store opens at LaGuardia's Central Terminal Marketplace this month. The 2,850 sq. ft. facility will be its first in a New York airport, and will stock 10,000 book titles, as well as audiobooks, some magazines, health and beauty aids, DVDs, and CDs. Borders already have space in Baltimore, Phoenix, Orlando, Seattle, Newark, Boston, Houston, Las Vegas, Miami, North Carolina, as well as in Washington, D.C. and Cincinnati. ▲



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

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## Blogging – Entering the Egalitarian Age

**L**et me begin by announcing that I will only be writing this column for a couple more months. It's time for me to explore some other realms, and time for *NINK* to have a new voice in this space. I've been struggling a little to come up with new topics that still fit the idea of nourishing the girls in the basement, and this month is a great example. What I'd like to talk about is blogging. I'm not sure it is a nourishing topic, but it's something just about every writer I know is struggling with, and as it happens, I have some credentials that lend some credibility to my views on the subject.

The truth is, the writer's life is a mix of the practical and ethereal, and what I most want to write about on a given column day is whatever is most pressing to me at that moment. Today, blogging wins.

I've just come from a small conference in the Midwest and blogging was on everyone's mind. Over the past year, the number of individual and group blogs has been steadily growing, but since the RWA conference in Atlanta, that number has exploded. Some are excellent. A great many more are forgettable, mainly because the participants have not yet grasped the concept of blogging.

While I do not presume to offer my thoughts as an expert, I believe there are some basic concepts that may

help some of you who feel at a loss over the purpose and direction of a blog. It's helpful, in this discussion, to remember how fast and far the internet has brought us in a very short time. It's changing the very fabric of our world and the ways we think and communicate in profound ways.

For those who might not know me or my background, I am not one of the writers who came late to the internet, dragged kicking and screaming into the cyber-age. The first time I heard two modems talking to each other over a computer speaker—I just calculated that it must have been more than fifteen years ago! How is that possible?—I fell instantly, completely in love. A medium that allowed me to sit in my world in my shorts and bare feet and talk to the entire world via "letters" was (and remains) my idea of heaven. It's a writer's world, after all. We're the champions of communication. It's easy and fast and exciting. When the internet came along and connected Prodigy and American Online and Genie and all the others, one to the other, and our worlds expanded exponentially, we still had no idea how deep the changes would take us, from libraries online to connecting to virtually anything or anyone in seconds, all the way around the world. We began, slowly, to build web pages, simply to create a presence. I fondly remember my first site—a jazzy background with rainbow dividers, and funny little scrolling things. Oh, it was a

joy, and I'm sure I'd be embarrassed by its primitive design now. (I'm sure my web designer was probably still in junior high school at the time I created it.)

The changes continued, a little at time. We linked to each other through email groups and lists and bulletin boards. The sites became more sophisticated and more polished. The medium began to flex its muscles, and that's when blogging began to come into its own.

My degree is in Mass Communications, which requires a study of all mass media—radio, television, newspapers, and now, I'm sure, the internet is also studied. Each medium boasts its own power. Newspapers and magazines offer in-depth coverage of events and ideas. Radio and television are fast.

The internet is both fast and in-depth. It is both faster and deeper than any previous media have had the ability to be. Right this very instant, I can turn on my computer and get news from any of a thousand newspapers around the world, listen to music from hundreds of radio stations, access more information from a magazine article that intrigued me.

The reasons we go to newspapers, radio, television, and the internet seem to be vast and varied, but they mainly fall into three categories: information, entertainment, and discourse, or exchange of ideas. Print media, primarily newspapers and magazines, have always excelled in the arena of delivering information. If you needed to understand any subject or current event, the place to go was to print sources, which had plenty of room to offer detail in a format that was more serious and more easily checked than other sources. In college, the print people—the journalists—were always higher on the respectability food chain than the broadcast folks.

Television and, in a different way, radio, have always excelled at entertainment.

What none of those media could do very well was offer equality of discourse. Oh, there was talk radio and letters to the editor and the little weekly rags that litter every independent bookstore in the country, but mainly all of our media was dominated by “experts” who lectured to the masses. Academics debated one another in journals and on PBS; advice columnists lectured us on proper behavior; reviewers told us what was worthy of reading and watching; politicians lectured us. The entire system was built on the power of a few to provide gatekeeping for the many.

The internet has shattered that model. It's a change so profound that we're still grappling with it, misunderstanding it, trying to fit the old shoes on brand new, very mobile feet, and yet, it's very, very simple.

The internet meets the need for discourse. Discussion. Egalitarian discourse, where there are no experts, no gatekeepers, and each opinion is as valid as any other.

As with any freedom, there is no going back. The gatekeepers are dead.

There are still experts, of course, and we welcome them when they stand for something important and we sense that they have deep integrity and—most importantly—offer us something we don't have. It's the most egalitarian way of dispersing information that has ever been available, and the blog is a direct expression of that value. Anyone can post one. Anyone has access to the tools and a possible audience of millions with an opinion, a point of view. Discourse, not lecture. Opinion, not authority.

While the other forms of mass media are essentially static, the internet is an organic, living being. That means you can't sit on the edges and expect to understand it. You have to plunge in and explore and participate.

And let me say that it's been a slow learning curve for me. I've been writing columns in various forms for more than twenty years. I began with local political and social commentary in the college rag, and continued with entertainment and reviews for a local magazine, and on to various writing columns and life musings in a number of publications including this one. When I needed content for my toddler web page, a column seemed like a good plan. At the time, there wasn't much editorial content on the web, honestly, but I didn't have much money for promotion and my computer geek son talked me into doing more with the web page than was common.

I've been a fan of blogs as a reader for a long time, which I wrote about in another column here, but despite my pleasure in reading them, I felt that I—along with most of the book community—was not quite understanding how I could connect to the blogging community. I turned to geek child, who had been nagging me for more than two years to get a blog going, for advice. He and his entire network of friends, have been blogging regularly for literally years. How did he find material? I asked. How did he connect to the rest of his world? More to the point, what advice did he have for me? I respect his opinion very much.

It was very simple advice: go out into the book and romance community and read what was there, what smart or foolish things were being said, and then see if there was anything I had to say about it.

Ah. Discourse!

So, that's what I did. For many months, actually, I looked around and made loops and read. I studied what was working and what was not. I noticed what I liked about various blogs and what I thought failed and where we, as a community, were making mistakes. Here are some things I noticed:

#### **Rule #1 – A blog must have a point of view.**

Not just “a slice of life,” or the slices of lives of five writers. If you have called it “musings” or “ramblings” or “a writer's life,” rethink it. You must have a genuine tone and voice. One great example is Smart Bitches ▶



## ***The Girls in the Basement . . . Blog***

▶ Who Love Trashy Romance Novels. Frank, straightforward, extremely intelligent. Here is a website where all elements of romances, pro and con, are discussed. And it is the place where I discovered my Nice Gene, which I suspect I share with a lot of other romance and women's fiction writers. We've been taught not to rock the boat, not to make people mad, to live and let live.

It doesn't work on the internet.

You have to stand for something. You have to have an opinion. You can't sit on the sidelines and be super-nice unless, like Lisa Kleypas on SquawkRadio, that's really who you are.

If you figure out your shtick, your position, your attitude, you'll find your audience. Imagine your blog is a magazine with a particular target audience. What do you offer? What do you do better than anyone else? What is your magic?

### **Rule #2 It's not about you**

Your blog is an offering, a contribution to the living organism of our commercial fiction world. A diary entry is not enough. Who cares, really? Do you know

how many writers are out there? Do you know how many people are writing about their books? It's okay to write about your books and page counts and the progress you're writing, of course, but again—what's your point of view? Why would a reader care about your post? If your answer is, "because I am Author X," start over.

He Said/She Said, the Jenny Crusie/Bob Mayer blog, is about the process of writing when it is a man and a woman doing it in combination. I read a young writer's blog because she's interesting in her quest, and an aspiring author's blog because she's living in Paris.

### **Rule #3 It's not a diary**

A blog, as with all good writing, must give the appearance of intimacy without erring on the side of too much information. Unless, of course, that's your shtick.

### **Rule #4 It needs to be well written**

A blog entry meant to contribute to your reader base or even just to the blogosphere, is not an email to a buddy. It's not necessarily a formal essay, either, but it should capture something about your writing, offer something to the world.

### **Rule #4 You must participate with your commenters**

Simple stuff. Reply when they ask questions. If you solicit input, acknowledge it.

That's all I have time for. It's quite possible you'll disagree with me, and that's all to the good—let's all blog about the purpose of blogs. What do you see? What did I miss? What is your point of view?

*Barbara Samuel's current book is Juliet's Law, under her pseudonym Ruth Wind. She has a blog at awriterafoot.com.*

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