

N I N K

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The Authors Coalition and Ninc

BY DEBORAH GORDON

So you may have wondered: Exactly what is the “Authors Coalition Survey” form you’re asked to fill out when you pay your dues? Something to do with money, but money from where, and why does Novelists, Inc. qualify for it? Why do we care what you’ve published—beyond the two novels that qualified you for Ninc membership in the first place?

Here are some (simplified) answers.

Q: Where does the money come from?

A: Most first-world countries—in particular, the nations of Europe and the former British Commonwealth—collect royalties each time a creative work is photocopied. Protected materials include both works in text (such as nonfiction books, novels, magazine articles and plays) and graphic works (such as photographs, illustrations and cartoons). These payments are seldom tracked by specific author. Instead, collection/distribution agencies in foreign nations (called reprographic rights organizations) group most royalty income by the types of materials photocopied and the countries of the works’ origins.

Q: Where does this royalty money go?

A: In the United States, the reprographic rights organization is called the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC). Until the early 1990s, the CCC received all reprographic funds from abroad and used the money for copyright enforcement. At that point, the Authors Guild began working to secure a portion of these funds from the CCC, to be used for the direct benefit of the American authors who had created the works. In 1993, the Guild negotiated an agreement to that effect with the CCC.

There was no way to assign this money to individual creators, so the Guild proposed to pass on the

funds to organizations whose primary purpose was the professional advancement of authors. To accomplish this, the Guild spearheaded the creation of the Authors Coalition of America (the ACA). Novelists, Inc. was one of ten founding members of the ACA, which was formed in November, 1994.

Q: How much money are we talking about?

In 1995, the Authors Coalition received about half a million dollars, solely from Germany and Norway. (Before the ACA can receive money from a foreign country on behalf of U.S. authors, that country’s reprographic rights organization must recognize the ACA as a legitimate recipient.) In 1996, Ninc member Marianne Shock took over from Authors Guild staff as the paid Administrator of the ACA. In the years since, she has led an ACA team that attends international meetings, meets with foreign rights organizations, and conducts country-by-country negotiations to obtain funds. To date, in addition to its agreements with Germany and Norway, the ACA has concluded agreements to receive funds from Sweden, Finland, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, and Australia. Further negotiations—always

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Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

Advisory Council

Rebecca Brandewyne*	Linda Barlow	Pat Rice
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Jasmine Cresswell*	Evan Maxwell	Jean Brashear
Maggie Osborne*	Victoria Thompson	Vicki Lewis Thompson
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If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

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Address changes may be made on the website.

For members without Internet access, send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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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. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair Holly Jacobs
P.O. Box 11102
Erie PA 16514-1102
or email HollyJacobs1@aol.com

New Applicants:

Debra Clopton, Madisonville TX
Yvonne Lindsay, Howick Manukau, New Zealand
Tosca Lee, Lincoln NE
Meredith Efken, Omaha NE

New Members:

Alan Jacobson, Walnut Creek CA
Nicole Seitz, Mount Pleasant SC
Cynthia Pratt, Germantown MD
Maya Bohnhoff, San Jose CA
Deborah LeBlanc, Lafayette Louisiana
Peggy Hillmer, Edwardsville IL
Sue Carey, Knoxville TN
Sandy Curtis, Innes Park Queensland
Nicola Marsh, Rowville Melbourne Victoria
Roxanne Farmer, Wichita KS
Donna Fletcher, Toms River NJ
Jennifer Stevenson, Evanston IL
Judson Roberts, Houston TX
Hank Phillippi Ryan, West Newton MA
Laurie Alice Eakes, Arlington VA
Elizabeth Moon, Florence TX
JT Ellison, Nashville TN
Maxine Sullivan, Altona Meadows VIC Australia
Elizabeth Edmondson, Rome Lazio Italy

Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership to *your* colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online at ninc.com.
Refer members at ninc.com. Go to Members Only,
"Member Services" and click "Refer a New Member to
Ninc." Take Ninc brochures to conferences. Email Holly
with your mailing address and requested number of brochures.

Ninc Statement of Principle.

"Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve."

Eight Days a Week

Here's what we've been working on eight days a week in Ninc lately.

Ninc.com

Check out the **new website** launch at our longtime address, <http://www.Ninc.com>!

We've done a complete redesign, to make the new site's look more updated, professional, and welcoming. We've reorganized existing content to make it more user-friendly and self-explanatory, so now you (and I) can find stuff. And we've added new content to make Ninc a better tool and resource for members.

One of the first updates we made was in late July, when we added a Ninc blog to the website. In addition to our own members, we've also been hosting guest blogs by industry professionals. The Ninc blog has already become a popular destination on the internet with hundreds of hits per day!

If you're interested in becoming a Ninc blogger, please check out the *Nink* Bulletin Board for instructions on how to join the blog, or investigate Ninc.com and the blog site.

Many thanks to Patricia Rosemoor, Ninc Blogmistress Extraordinaire, and to Joe Nassise, her brilliant and good-natured blog assistant!

We've also added many resources to the Members Only pages of the new website. (That's the section you have to log-in to access.)

Among these, there's a page for members to promote to Nincers the industry-related businesses they own, and a page where members can also recommend non-Ninc-owned businesses to each other. The Members Only section now also provides publishing news and updates about industry events. And every Ninc committee now has its own page(s) in this part of website, which will make it easier for you to find out, whenever

you want, which committees are doing what work, how they can help you, or how you can help them.

The new Members Only section has also increased the administrative information that we provide to members. For example, there's a page with answers to the most-commonly asked "How do I...?" questions in Ninc (questions that most of you just ask *me* all the time), and another page that directs you to, "Who do I ask about...?" (so that you will stop asking *me* about everything). These two pages are my very *favorite* part of the new website.

We've also made the Members Only pages easier for you to access, by changing the log-in system. Your email address can now serve as your User ID for logging in, though the User ID that Ninc.com assigned to you once upon a time is also still valid; and you can reset your own password in your Member Profile. (To do that, first you have to find the old password and log-in with it.) But please keep in mind, you need to log-in with the email address that Ninc has for you (which is whatever email address you gave us). Once you're logged in, you can change that, too, if need be.

And we're not done yet! Additional work on the website will carry on in 2008 and carry over into 2009.

Meanwhile, I and the Ninc Board want to thank website co-chairs Pati Nagle and Ginger Chambers for the stellar work they've been putting in on the website for months, as well as web designer Tammy Seidick, Ninc's web programmer Tina Haggard, and the people who've joined the web committee this year. Ninc's 2008 web team rocks!

Bylaws Amendments Proposal on Ninc.com

Pay attention: This is boring, but very important. ▶

We're sending a Bylaws amendments proposal (Ninc's first in six years) to you in November, along with your annual dues renewal forms.

For the Bylaws amendments to pass, *at least* two-thirds of the *entire membership* must vote in favor of the proposed amendments. That means you—yes, **YOU**—need to vote.

So please don't chuck the ballot into the garbage in November, or shove it under a pile of catalogues, or feed it to your dog. **Please fill it out and mail it to Ninc.**

Meanwhile, in accordance with a requirement set forth in the Bylaws, the proposed amendments are currently posted on Ninc.com for your advance review. They will remain there through the end of the Bylaws vote, which will coincide with the dues renewal period.

As you will see, the proposed amendments are all operational matters. Among other things, we're trying to create the option for Ninc to develop a system of online voting for Board officers and for future Bylaws amendments, and to give future Ninc Boards more leeway in scheduling conference. But we can't even explore these possibilities until we've got Bylaws that allow them.

Get your 2009 Ninc Membership Fee Comped!

We're now one month into the **Outreach** Committee's find-two-get-one-free campaign whereby if you recruit two new applicants to Ninc by November 30, Ninc will comp your 2009 membership fee—that is, you get one year free!

To get your 2009 Ninc membership comped:

▲ You must name your two recruited applicants in your renewal form (a space is provided)

▲ You and another Ninc member can't both get credit for the *same* recruits

▲ The two recruits must have *already* applied when you renew your membership

▲ The two recruits must name *you* in the space provided on their applications. (If they forgot to do this, ask them to email Membership Chair Holly Jacobs and tell her so.)

▲ Since the Ninc application process takes a while, the campaign does **not** require that your recruits be *accepted* as Ninc members; only that they have *applied* for membership by the time you renew.

Finally, if your recruits' applications are rejected for some reason, no, your complimentary year of membership will not be withdrawn. You have no control over the application process, after all. We ask only that you play fair and invite novelists into Ninc whom you believe qualify for membership. Rather than, say, convincing your hairdresser and your Uncle Fred to apply, just so that you can get a year of Ninc comped.

Elections

Don't forget to vote for your 2009 Ninc officers and Nominating Committee, if you haven't already done so! The ballot was in your September *Ninc*. If you've forgotten, go dig it up now and use the ballot.

— **Laura Resnick**

Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

Penn State Study on E-book Use with Sony: Penn State University Libraries and the institution's English department will work together on a year-long study of e-book usage. The study will include use in the library, as well as tools for the disadvantaged. Sony is donating 100 readers. Five of the readers will be available for check-out for one month, with books in popular categories and bestselling fiction loaded for the users. A major point of the study is to see why readers are resistant to reading full length book from a reader.

New Distributor Down Under: Simon and Schuster is changing business in Australia and New Zealand in April 2009. Their distribution will be handled by United Book Distributors instead of Harper Entertainment Distribution Services and marketing and sales will go to Penquin Group (NZ) from HarperCollins New Zealand.



St. Louis History: Only Steps Away

The moment you check in to The Drury, Ninc's conference hotel, you've stepped into St. Louis's history. From 1912 to 1957, this building housed the International Fur Exchange, a company that harkens back to the days when trappers sold furs from the Rocky Mountains to brokers whose warehouses lined the St. Louis riverfront. Within a few blocks of our hotel, a few stops on the Metrolink, or a few minutes by car you can find other wonders of St. Louis's history.

History within walking distance:

Diagonally across Fourth Street from our hotel is the Old Courthouse and Museum. This is where slaves Dred and Harriet Scott sued for their freedom in 1846, claiming that because their master had taken them to live in Illinois and Wisconsin, where slavery was illegal, they ought to be granted their freedom. The case was eventually argued in the Supreme Court, which in 1857 ruled against the Scotts. This high court decision was one of the precipitating causes of the Civil War.

From the Courthouse steps, the Gateway Arch and St. Louis riverfront are laid out before you. The arch grounds mark the site of the original town, founded by Auguste Chouteau in 1746. The flags of France and Spain flew over St. Louis before the U.S. bought the city in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase.

The arch, designed by Eero Saarinen and completed in 1965, celebrates St. Louis as the Gateway to the West. An underground museum beneath it offers multimedia presentations on Westward Expansion, rides to the top, and an excellent American history bookstore.

From the steps that lead down to the river, you'll have no trouble imagining everything from dugouts to riverboats landing at the levee.



A ride on the Becky Thatcher or Huck Finn can give you a taste of that riverboat experience.

Also on the arch grounds is the "Old Cathedral." Built in 1834, when the buildings were tightly packed together in old town, only the cathedral's façade was ever finished. In an earlier church on this site, Sacagawea's son, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, was baptized in 1809.

Several historic houses are near the hotel: Eugene Field's house (author of "Little Boy Blue"), the Victorian home of fur trader Robert Campbell, and the residence of ragtime great Scott Joplin. ▶

By Metrolink: (Closest station is located just past Busch Stadium.)

You can appreciate the Mississippi's power by riding across the lower level of the Eads Bridge to the first stop in Illinois. In this graceful span completed in 1874, engineer James Eads introduced construction techniques that revolutionized bridge building.

Stop back at the Arch/Laclede's Landing where many of the mid-nineteenth century warehouses along the cobbled streets have been turned into shops and restaurants. Or ride west to Union Station. Built in the 1890's in an architectural style known as Richardsonian Romanesque, this railroad station was the world's busiest during World War II. Updated to celebrate its former grandeur, it houses a hotel, restaurants, and shops. Don't miss the station's barrel-vaulted waiting room (a great place to have a drink) or the whispering corner beneath the hotel's spectacular stained glass window.

Another site you can access by Metrolink is Forest Park, site of the 1904 World's Fair. It now holds, among other things, the Missouri Historical Society (with excellent collections on the history of St. Louis, the Mississippi and Missouri settlements, Louisiana Purchase, American West and Charles Lindbergh, among others), and St. Louis's Art Museum, not to mention the Zoo, with the original 1904 Birdcage Walk.

If you're looking for more westward expansion history, try the St. Louis University Museum of Art on Grand Avenue that houses the collection of Western Jesuit Missions.

By Car:

Half an hour away is old-town St. Charles, Missouri's First Capitol in 1821, one of Lewis and Clark's stops, and a classic river town. It's a lovely place to wander on a sunny afternoon. Beyond St. Charles is the Daniel Boone

Home and Historic Village, made up of nineteenth-century buildings rescued from demolition. Missouri's many wineries are sprinkled out that way, as well, and can offer a pleasant afternoon's diversion.

An hour to the south of St. Louis is Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, a charming river town with excellent examples of extant French Colonial architecture from as early as the 1770s.

Not far over the river in Illinois is the Cahokia Mounds archaeological site, which documents the Mississippian culture that flourished along the river during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and includes the world's largest woodhenge.

If you're interested in a specific kind of history or doing in-depth research, please email me directly at elizagrays99@yahoo.com, and I will do my best to point you in the right direction.

Karyn Witmer-Gow

**Ninc Goes Platinum:
20 Years of Excellence**

Drury Plaza Hotel, Saint Louis
September 30 – October 4, 2009
Co-Chairs:

Leslie LaFoy, lafey@earthlink.net
Karen Tintori Katz, ktinti@aol.com

***Early Registration Information and Easy-Payment
Plans coming soon***

Business Briefs

Rowling Wins Lexicon Suit: U.S. Judge Robert Patterson has ruled in favor of J.K. Rowling in her suit to stop Steven Vander Ark's print publication of the Harry Potter Lexicon. Patterson pointed out that this book took too much from Rowling for its purpose as a reference book, but other references that aid the readers should not be stifled. Vander Ark claimed the print version was taken from the online site that Rowling had always supported. In the past months Rowling cited this version as "wholesale theft," and its publication would take away from money earned when she did her own Potter reference. She planned to give proceeds to charity but now says she may not go through with writing her own. Vander Ark will have another book out in October from Methuen Publishing, *In Search of Harry Potter*, which visits the locations that were used to inspire the Potter universe. RDR Books is still considering its next step with *The Harry Potter Lexicon*.

Harlequin and the Readers' Opinions: TellHarlequin.com gears up for romance readers to join in discussions and research surveys. Readers go to <http://www.TellHarlequin.com/eHqn> to sign up for online advisory panel. The members will join in online surveys, give opinions on new miniseries ideas, new series concepts, cover designs, etc. Gee, more "help" from the readers!

Cover To Cover

By Lou Aronica



Covering Covers, Cover-to-Cover

Since most of us write commercial fiction and therefore generate a significant portion of our sales from paperbacks, cover packaging is a hugely important issue to us. In reality, packaging is only slightly less important in hardcover. A great package serves many functions. First, it revs up the in-house team at a publisher. A book with a strong and distinctive package just feels more special and it makes the organization prouder. It's a little like having the hot date at the prom without any of the awkwardness of after-prom expectations. Second, it announces your book as a big deal to the accounts. Bookstore buyers receive a pitch on a book with a great package differently than they do a book with a nondescript package. A rep who shows up to present a book with a strong cover is like the person who shows up for a job interview with a designer outfit, expensive haircut, and polished shoes. It announces that you're taking the interaction seriously (or that you have a lot of money to waste on expensive stuff, which is sometimes true of both the book cover and the interviewee, but that's not the point I'm trying to make here). Finally, a great cover sells books. Proverbs aside, consumers make buying decisions based on packaging all the time. I know I've done it and you know you've done it as well—and we have nothing to be ashamed about. There's actually some logic to this, which will hopefully become clear by the end of this article.

Cover packaging is hugely important. It is the most important thing a publisher can do for you that remains entirely in control of the publisher (as opposed to co-op, which requires a strong level of cooperation from booksellers). Yet, most of us who have been publishing books for any length of time have had some experience with lousy packaging. How does this happen? What can you do about it? I'll get to those points in a minute, but first a little background.

At most major houses, packaging conversations begin at a cover conference (or some similarly named meeting). The attendees include the book's editor (and often the boss of the book's editor), the art director and members of the art director's team, the copy chief, the managing editor, the Publisher (or the Publisher's duly appointed designee),

someone from marketing, sometimes someone from sales, and some guy to take notes (I never forget this last one because my first official title in publishing was *Some Guy to Take Notes*). At the cover conference, the editor talks a little about the book, positions the book, and throws out an idea for a cover. The other people in the room consider this idea and toss around others (except for *Some Guy*, who really isn't encouraged to speak). By the end of this, the art director has a general idea of what to do with the cover.

From there, the art director takes over. He decides whether he's going to commission new art or use stock art. He hires someone to generate the art. He reviews sketches for the illustration and shares these with the editor. He assigns the art to a designer and reviews samples created by the designer, before showing the package to the editor/Editor-in-Chief/Publisher for approval. Sometimes, the art director has additional conversations with editorial or marketing people to clarify direction. Sometimes the artist or designer assigned to the project generates some new ideas. At some point, though, you have a cover.

And when you get it, you sometimes think it is brilliant and you sometimes think you're glad you don't know where you left the ball peen hammer. I have seen many, many great covers and I could try to explain how that happens, but my guess is that you'd rather know how the bad ones happen. Here are some reasons:

▲ Your editor did a lousy job of presenting the book at the cover conference. As you've probably gleaned from your experience, editors range widely in their levels of talents. Even great editors are sometimes terrible at the cover process. One of the best editors I ever worked with—our true go-to person for any problem manuscript—had no visual head at all. The problem here is that cover conferences come so early in the process that there's a good chance that your editor will have been the only person who's read your manuscript when the conference happens. If the editor can't at least describe the book well and position it properly, there's every chance the cover will be off the mark. ▶

▲ The art director is an autocrat. The very first art director I ever met was a genius. He also scared the crap out of me and everyone else. At cover conferences, he chewed up editors, marketing people, and even senior publishing executives and spit them out. He got away with this because he created some of the most distinctive packages of his generation. Of course, he also created a great deal of garbage. I mean, Paul McCartney is a genius, but even he wrote “My Love” and “Hi Hi Hi.” Thomas Edison was a genius, but he also created 999 versions of the light bulb that didn’t work. The problem with this art director was that he didn’t want to hear any criticisms about his bad light bulbs. To him, he lit up the room with every package he ever created. That meant that when he generated “Ebony and Ivory” rather than “Eleanor Rigby,” you just lived with it.

Not every art director is as autocratic as this one was. However, most of them rankle at having to explain their “art” to the untrained. For an editor or a publisher, that leaves settling for something you know isn’t as good as it should be because the alternative is starting a revolution. Is this a stupid way to do business? Absolutely. Is there an alternative? Not an easy one. Look, you’re an artist, too. You know what it’s like to have people who aren’t writers try to tell you how to write.

▲ The sales or marketing people got involved. Many excellent sales reps work for publishing houses. It’s actually remarkable how many when you consider the discrepancies in earning potential between great book reps and great salespeople in other fields. In my experience, the great reps aren’t as much brilliant at selling as they are passionate about books and great at conveying that passion to others. Therefore, it isn’t as though these people could make a killing selling pharmaceuticals.

There’s a handful of high quality marketing people in the book business. Really, the industry is quite talent-poor in this regard. This is purely understandable. I mean, who graduates from Wharton with a degree in marketing and says, “I know P&G is banging down my door, but what I really want to do is market hundreds of different products every year on a shoestring budget?”

Regardless of level of skill, though, people in these sectors of the industry rarely have the additional talent to imagine great packages. It just isn’t part of the job description. What they do have is a direct connection to the numbers. And since every company needs numbers in order to succeed, senior management tends to listen to the people connected to the numbers. If a national accounts manager says she thinks a wildly creative package is too risky, the Publisher is likely to decide on a less-risky package.

▲ The accounts got involved. Booksellers love great covers for the same reason that the rest of us love them. Their biggest concern, however, is that the cover speak quickly and clearly to its intended audience. They’re much more likely to respond to a well-executed version of a

proven packaging technique than a new technique. If your cover seems derivative to you when you thought you were going to get something fresh and exciting, this might be the reason.

▲ You’re wrong. You know how we were talking a minute ago about under-qualified people being involved in the packaging process? Well, there’s a real possibility that you’re one of them. Just because you wrote the book doesn’t mean you have a clear sense of how to convey the specialness of your book to the world. I would say that at least half of the author complaints I’ve received about packaging were wrong-headed. What they wanted to do with the type was a design disaster. The image they wanted on the cover was more appropriate for a nonfiction book on growing orchids than it was for a novel about long-held family secrets. Showing every main character on the cover was already dead by the time Duran Duran had their first hit. It’s easy to miss the point when it comes to packaging your own work. It’s difficult to boil your novel down to one image. That’s a little like asking someone to define himself in one word: sometimes it’s just better to let others do that kind of thing.

So, what can you do to improve your chances of getting a great cover?

▲ Make sure your editor has a good handle on the novel. Most editors are very open to discussing packaging ideas with you. The ones who feel uncomfortable at cover conferences (and therefore the ones you need to be most concerned about) might even appreciate it. The key here is not making sure that your editor knows that your hero’s hair is brown. The key is making sure that you feel good about the way your editor is positioning the book for the rest of the company. Does your editor understand where your book fits in the bookstore? Is he or she aware of the direct competition for the novel and how those books are being packaged? Is your editor’s sense of the most commercial components of the novel similar to yours?

▲ Bring useful ideas to the table before the cover conference. The first priority here is knowing when the cover conference is going to be. If you present your ideas afterward, there’s a good chance they’ll be ignored. Beyond that, unless you’re an award-winning graphic designer (and even then, only if you won the awards for packaging commercial fiction), it is a tremendously bad idea to send your editor your version of the cover. Chances are that this will come off as unprofessional and make anyone the editor chooses to show it to cringe. However, your house will often welcome examples of competitive covers that you’d like yours to emulate. They might even respond positively to ads you find in magazines or forms of packaging that have nothing to do with books. I’ve seen editors come into cover meetings with frozen food packages to illustrate a design element.

Cont on page 16 ▶

Ninc Volunteer Jobs List

► Job title: Fiction Anthology Volunteers

Job Description: Two people to invite members to contribute to the fiction anthologies that Ninc will be generating and then follow up on the contributions. This will be an exciting new project beginning in the fall.

Contact: lillianscarl42@sbcglobal.net

► Job Title: Web committee member (multiple positions open)

Description: Committee members will choose or be assigned to a subsection of the public pages of the website. They will monitor and update these pages on a regular monthly or quarterly schedule. **NO TECHNICAL SKILLS NECESSARY;** we have a web programmer to whom needed changes will be reported. Most of these jobs will be light work, a way to contribute to Ninc while at home, in your pajamas, on your own time, with just a few hours each month. It's also a great way to get to learn more about Ninc, its projects, its members, and its contacts!

Contact: one or both of the Website co-chairs:

Ginger Chambers, Co-chair (members-only pages):

gingerchambers@sbcglobal.net

Pati Nagle, Co-chair (public pages): naglel@pgnagle.com

► Job Title: Ninc Outreach Volunteer:

Description: The Outreach Committee needs a few more volunteers to help expand the Membership in Ninc.

Contact: Pari Taichert, chair, Ninc Outreach Committee — ptaichert@comcast.net

Thank you to all the wonderful Volunteers who came forward to fill positions on the VJL.

Thank you to Robin Bayne, who is tracking down broken links in the website.

Thank you to Denise Lynn, who answered a VJL job listing. Denise is now the *Nink* Indexer, creating a record of *Nink* articles by topic and by author, 1994-present, so Ninc members can more easily reference and access past *Nink* articles.

Thank you to Phoebe Conn and Garda Parker who have already stepped up to invite members to contribute to the new fiction anthologies project.

Thank you to Patricia Rosemoor for volunteering to be our Blog Coordinator. She is already hard at work on this new website feature.

Thank you to Fran Baker for volunteering to collect Industry Events information. This is an awesome resource—a list of upcoming trade shows, book fairs, and book festivals.

A big thank you to all the website volunteers:

Denise Agnew- Member Appearances page

Fran Baker- Industry Events page

Robin Bayne - Collector of Agent Hunting Posts from Ninlink

Dara Girard - Blog Industry Guest Scheduler

Chris Marie Green - Blog Industry Guest Scheduler

Megan Hart - Book Trailers Resource

Sally Hawkes - Links from Library & Reference page

Elaine Isaak - Blog Assistant

Mary Kilchenstein - Author Links Checker – 3 x year

Joe Narssise - Blog Assistant

Patricia Rosemoor - Blog Coordinator

Neff Rotter - New from Ninc Members page (The Next Page)

Patricia Sargeant-Matthews - Member-to-Member Resources page

Linnea Sinclair - Shareware Links for Reference page

Mary Stella - Committee pages Coordinator

Sasha White - Ninc Members Recommend page

Business Briefs

Jewel Finds a New Home in U.S. and U.K: After being dropped by Random House just prior to its August publication, the potentially controversial *The Jewel of Medina* is being picked up by Beaufort Books in the U.S. with an October publication date. The story of the very young A'ishe, one of the Islamic prophet Muhammad's wives, was not well received by some who were asked to read advance copies. Word of mouth said there was potential for anger in the Muslim community, which led to Random House returning the book to the author. Rights in the UK went to Gibson Square Publishers, which is also aiming for an October release. The author was allowed to keep the RH advance. There is no word on if Beaufort will give an uncharacteristic advance on this book or go with their usual practice of royalties only.



WRITING is TAXING

Not Just Another Number

When it comes to personal services, we hate to be treated like just another number. But when it comes to taxes, we have no choice. The Internal Revenue Service identifies us individuals by our unique nine-digit social security number and it is normally with this number that the IRS requires us to report and file our taxes.

But there is another option for taxpayers, like writers, who operate a business. Taxpayers engaged in a trade or business have the right to obtain an identifying number distinct from their social security number and to use this number for tax and other business purposes. Although this number is known as an Employer Identification Number, or EIN for short, the name is a bit of a misnomer as a taxpayer is not required to be an employer in order to obtain an EIN.

Why would you need or want to get an EIN for your writing business? Several reasons.

First, in the event you hire employees or contract workers, you will be required to list your EIN on the W-2s or 1099s you must issue to the workers after the end of the tax year.

Second, your bank may require you to have an EIN, rather than simply using your social security number, in order to qualify for a business bank account. Banks seem to equate social security numbers with individuals only, ignoring the fact that a business operated as a sole proprietorship is entitled to use the owner's social security number for tax purposes. At any rate, fair or not, you may not qualify for certain business banking privileges if you don't have an EIN.

Third, in these days of identity theft, safeguarding your personal information is critical. The fewer people you disclose your social security number to the better. If you have an EIN, you can supply this number to publishers and agents for use in your writing business rather than giving out your social security number where it may be accessed by an assortment of office staff who may come and go, possibly with your name and social security number on a Post-It note tucked into their pocket. Not to be an alarmist, but identity theft issues are a common

problem I see regularly in my law practice, and the perpetrators are often office staff, such as human resources or accounting personnel, with access to personal data. An identity thief can have a field day (or should I say shopping spree?) with a social security number, but an EIN won't get him far.

Like a social security number, the EIN is nine digits, but it is formatted differently. The first two digits are offset by a hyphen, with the remaining seven digits following (for example 75-1234567).

You can apply for an EIN online, by fax, by phone, or by mail, though the IRS website states that online is the preferred method. If you apply online at <http://www.irs.gov> or by phone, you will simply need to answer a few questions in order to obtain your new EIN. If you apply by fax or mail, you will need to complete Form SS-4 "Application for Employer Identification Number," available at <http://www.irs.gov>. It can take up to four weeks to obtain an EIN by mail, but with the online system you can have an EIN in just a few short minutes.

No matter how you apply, there is no fee for obtaining an EIN. Your hard-earned royalties stay in your wallet.

Although you will normally operate under the same EIN for the entire duration of your writing business, you will be required to obtain a new EIN if you go through a bankruptcy, later choose to incorporate your writing business, or dissolve your corporation to operate as a sole proprietorship.

Careful, now. Don't confuse EINs with ITINs (Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers). ITINs are a different animal entirely, intended for persons who are required to file U.S. income tax returns but do not qualify to obtain a social security number, such as foreign nationals or non-resident aliens with income from U.S. sources.

Got a tax question for Diane? Email her at Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com. Your question might be addressed in an upcoming issue. For further tax tips, check out the "Tax Tidbits" page on Diane's website, <http://www.dianeobrienkelly.com>.

Changing Agents Gracefully

BY G. MIKI HAYDEN

People leave their agents every day, and yet, the process of changing agents can be an emotional and confusing one. In fact, before you change, you might want to pause and rethink the situation. Is this agent really not doing her job, or are your expectations unrealistic. Has the agent stopped shopping your work, willing to take whatever contracts are offered, and not going out of her way to boost your career to the next level? If so, you might be quite right in wanting to get out.

After trying to repair the relationship with your agent, or simply deciding that can't be done, get ready to leave in a way that takes into account the full range of business realities.

"Keep it friendly but professional," suggests Kristy Montee, one-half of the sister team writing the *NYTimes* best-selling Louis Kincaid and Joe Frye mysteries by P. J. Parrish. "Thank him for his work on your behalf, then simply state that the time has come for you to move on."

You don't need to explain your reasons any further, counsels Montee. This breakup between author and agent is a common fact of life in publishing. "You can do it on the phone, even though that might be awkward. But it might be best to fire the agent by writing a great letter." (Many authors feel strongly that if the relationship has been a long and fruitful one, you owe your agent a telephoned termination.) Again, she advises, say something positive, but approach it in the context that the relationship has run its course and that you appreciate all that was done. Wish him the best.

"And don't feel guilty. This is your career," Montee notes.

What is the agent thinking while all this is happening? Long time agent Peter Rubie, CEO of Fine Print Literary Management in Manhattan, admits that the break-up is always at least somewhat awkward. "No matter how civilized you may be in your handling of this, one party or the other will feel a frisson of resentment, even if that quickly dissipates." Strong feelings about such a separation are inevitable, he says.

"However, an agent friend of mine told me many years ago: 'Everybody leaves,'" continues Rubie, "and that comment has helped me keep a balanced perspective. The best way for either party to handle this is to just be firm but pleasant, polite, and professional, and not get drawn into an excited or bitter exchange."

Authors seem to be split as to whether to be completely out of a contract with the first agent before seeking a second agent, or to line up another agent prior to quitting the first. Agents, as well, have mixed feelings about taking on a client

who hasn't left the current agent, and one told me recently that she won't consider speaking to anyone who still has representation. "I might be wasting my time," said New York's Grace Morgan. "That author might turn around and stick with her old agent, despite our discussions."

Rubie's take is it would be perfectly reasonable for an author and agent to sound one another out. "That is a far cry from promises of intent. I then usually tell authors in this position that they need to conclude the relationship with the current agent first."

If Rubie is interested in having the author as a client he'll indicate a willingness to talk seriously once that existing arrangement is resolved. "I don't want to be in a position where it appears that I'm poaching someone else's client."

Commissions Are the Question

An even more crucial consideration in moving on has to do with sales and money. Rockville, Maryland publishing attorney Daniel N. Steven, chair of Mystery Writers of America's Contracts and Grievances Committee, has this to say: "In general, upon termination of your agency agreement, your agent loses authority to make a deal but would be entitled to a commission on any sale made before the date of termination. If the book is out on submission, and the editor calls the agent to buy after the date of termination, the editor must be referred to the author, and the agent would not receive a commission on the sale."

That's the ideal for the author, of course, but Steven adds that the contract may have a clause or clauses in the contract that confer the commission to the agent in such a case.

As always, your agency agreement controls these issues," comments Steven.

Florida contract attorney and author Phyllis Towzey suggests you "take a close look at your contract with your agent before issues like this come up—preferably before you even sign it—and either have it reviewed by a lawyer—always the safest course of action—or at least make sure the terms are all clear to you."

What the word "sold" may mean can be determined by a definition in the contract itself. Towzey notes that many contracts have an opening section defining terms, usually in alphabetical order." It would include something like, *Sold: for purposes of this Agreement, 'sold' shall mean [that a publishing house has extended an offer ...] or [that an offer from a publishing house has been accepted by Author...] or [that Author has signed a contract with a publishing house ...].*"

She also advises, "Get your agent to explain the situation in the hypothetical—answering the question 'what happens if...?' Then confirm that understanding in writing, ►

preferably by making a note on the contract itself, clearing up any ambiguities, and you both initialing it.”

If your contract does not define the term, then, she notes, the custom in the industry would control. “Unfortunately, people do get into legal disputes over what the ‘custom in the industry’ is on particular points.”

If the contract isn’t clear as to the meaning of the word “sold,” Towzey suggests that when you withdraw from your contract, you consult a literary attorney—expensive, “but still much cheaper than having your former agent later sue you when one of your books sells;” or to, at the very least, FedEx the former agent a letter stating what you believe the contract term to mean and how you understand it affects your respective rights.

For example:

“Dear Former Agent,

“I have reviewed our Agreement and I understand that you will remain Agent of Record on any works sold on or before _____, the effective date of the termination of our business relationship. It is my understanding that ‘sold’ means [insert what you think it means—for example, that an offer has been extended by a publishing house]. It is my understanding that you have submitted project A to X, Y and Z houses, that an offer has been extended for project B by house W, and that you have still have project C which I sent to you in-house and have not submitted it anywhere.

“Based on the foregoing, it is my understanding that you will remain Agent of Record on project B, but that you have no right to receive any future remuneration with respect to projects A and C. It is my understanding that I may instruct my new agent to contact X, Y and Z houses regarding project A, without the formality of my withdrawing the submission and resubmitting through my new agent.

“If you disagree with the any of the foregoing, or have in fact submitted any other projects not mentioned herein or received any other offers on my behalf, kindly advise me of same within the next ten (10) days. If I do not hear from you to the contrary, I will assume that the foregoing information is correct and act accordingly.

“Sincerely, etc.”

Towzey, who is a contract attorney, but not a publishing attorney specifically, adds this is simply general advice and not a definitive legal opinion intended for anyone reading this article.

The best advice in changing agents is to stick to what’s polite as well as ethical and legal. In being courteous, however, don’t let your rights be trampled on, and be sure not to give away more than you have to. Know what you’re entitled to and what you want, and be firm.

G. Miki Hayden is the author of The Naked Writer, a comprehensive grammar, punctuation, and optimal style guide.

The Authors Coalition and Ninc

Continued from page 1 ▶ long and tedious—are in progress. The ACA currently has twenty member organizations and anticipates revenues in 2008 of about four million dollars.

Q: But how much money can there be in photocopied novels?

A: Aha! Exactly the point. As I said, foreign nations generally track only the types of materials photocopied and their countries of origin. Reprographic royalties on American works, in turn, must be distributed to authors’ organizations in the U.S. that represent the types of creators who created the sorts of materials photocopied. So, for example, if the Authors Coalition received funds from a country that stated the material photocopied and included in that particular distribution was solely music/lyrics, the money would pass only to organizations that represent songwriters—largely or entirely to the ACA’s member organization, The Songwriters Guild of America.

Which brings us back to those forms you fill out. Ninc automatically gets a share of fiction monies based on its entire membership—we’re all published authors of fiction—but fiction isn’t photocopied as widely as nonfiction. Fortunately for our budget, we also get a share of

nonfiction monies. How much depends on how many of our members report being published in the various nonfiction categories on the form you fill out (such as critics, periodical writers, authors of full-length books, and so on). The more of you who report your nonfiction publications to Ninc, the more dollars Ninc gets.

And that’s why we ask you to fill out an Authors Coalition survey every year. Novelists, Inc. is one of the smallest organizations in the Coalition. The money we receive from the ACA—now about \$25,000 to \$30,000 annually—has allowed us to increase our services to our members without raising dues. So next time you think about the excellence of our newsletter and conference programs, or remember that Ninc’s legal fund is available should you need advice about a legal problem, or use the website to hunt for an agent, literary attorney or reference resource, please remember that Authors Coalition money helps fund all these member benefits. And be sure fill out your ACA form when you pay your dues.

Deborah Gordon, a former Ninc vice president and treasurer, became Ninc’s main representative to the Authors Coalition when McPat and Resnick roped her into it.

The View from Here

By Susan Wiggs



“She’s Not There”

At the time of this writing, I’m not in San Francisco at the RWA national conference, as so many of you are. I haven’t agonized over wardrobe choices, RSVP-ed to all the party and dinner invitations, prepared a workshop, sent in a handout, made a spreadsheet of my appointments and a PowerPoint of my presentation. I haven’t schlepped bags through busy airports, emailed with friends to arrange rendezvous or surfed the Web researching the area.

No, I’m sitting on my patio with the laptop, listening to the shush of waves on the shore and watching a giant blue heron fishing in the shallows. I’m not gloating, because I do love seeing girlfriends and associates, but I’m happy with my decision. It’s enormously liberating once it hits you that going to conferences is entirely optional. It doesn’t make or break your career.

Epiphanies happen in the strangest places, don’t they? My “conference speaker” epiphany took place on a hot summer day some years ago. I had trekked from my breezy green island over to an airport hotel to be on a panel at a Big Regional Writers Conference. Naturally I was flattered to be asked to take part on a panel of experts. It sounded like a perfectly doable local gig, a chance to hang out for an afternoon with other writers and do some networking. In preparation, I spent a couple of hours pulling together the requested information—bio, photo, bibliography, topic description, contact info—sent it in, put the event on my web site and forgot about it until the day approached.

I noticed my name was used in the conference’s promotional literature, although several details of my bio were wrong. It took a bit of backing-and-forthing to get someone to specify the precise date and time of my workshop, but eventually I tracked it down. I showed up at the appointed time to discover that the conference book fair had failed to order any of my books, so I lost out on the chance to find new readers. The panel itself

was so large there were actually more of us at the microphone than there were sitting in the audience. Total waste of time. But the fun didn’t end there. I still had the drive home ahead of me.

I was sitting in a ferry-waiting line under an elevated highway in Seattle. After missing not one but two boats due to waterfront traffic and overcrowding, I glanced at my car’s outside temperature gauge—106°. Two things happened almost simultaneously. The car overheated and died, trapping me in the city for another six hours. And when I grabbed for my mobile phone, I came across the check I’d received for the day’s conference appearance: \$25.00 in US funds. Firm.

At that point I realized I needed to either a) have an epiphany or b) become an alcoholic. Since I only had \$25, I chose option A.

Since then, I’ve become extremely picky about which speaking engagements are worth my time. At a minimum, every expense needs to be covered, including mileage and/or airfare, parking, and even per diem if it’s a long trek. For some groups, I charge a speaking fee.

Here’s a form I have created (okay, stolen and then adapted) from author and motivational-speaking phenom Liz Curtis Higgs (<http://www.lizcurtishiggs.com>). It’s been incredibly helpful in keeping track of where I’m going, who needs what info and when. And—this is important—it separates the groups that aim to treat you right from the groups wanting cheap talent to fill their conference schedule. If you lay it all out for them as soon as they invite you, you’ll find out quickly what their expectations are. Some groups will backpedal when they tally up the fees and expenses, and withdraw the invitation. This is fine by me—it saves time and aggravation for everyone. Please help yourself and adapt this to your own needs:



The View from Here

Date:

Dear [name of group/coordinator]:

Thank you for inviting me to your event. I've prepared the enclosed materials with information about myself and the details of our arrangement. Please feel free to share the enclosed with your fellow conference planners who may need it.

I also ask that you provide the information requested below and either mail or email it back to me. That way, I won't bother you with, "Now, WHAT were we going to do...?"

Sincerely,
Etc...

Encl:

Request for Information About Your Group and Your Event
Contacting Susan
Curriculum Vitae
Author bio
Books by Susan Wiggs
Awards, Honors, and Distinctions
Workshops and Lectures
Book Fair recommended titles
Anticipated Expenses
Mailing labels—my friends and readers in your area

Information About Your Group and Your Event

Name of organization:
Dates of event (include year):
Contact person:
Address/ Phone/email:
URL of web site:
What day/time do you want Susan to arrive? What time(s) will Susan speak?
Name/address for reimbursement of expenses (if different from above):
Hotel address, email url, phone:
Workshop requested:
Keynote or address requested:
How long will the keynote/workshop(s) last?
Is there a book fair or book sale in conjunction with this event? Yes No
If yes, please provide contact information:
Bookseller / Co-ordinator Name / Address / Phone/email

Contacting Susan:

[my mailing address, phone, mobile phone, email]

Literary agent:

[contact info for agent here]

Publisher contacts:

[contact info for my editor & PR manager]

Publicist:

[contact info here]

Curriculum Vitae:

[author's background, education, professional affiliations, experience, organized in a bulleted list]

Author Bio:

[insert long and short versions of informal narrative bio]

Author Photo: [jpg attached]

Keynote Topics, Workshops and Lectures offered—please make a note of special props, materials needed, length:

[Here, list a title and thumbnail description, including equipment & materials you'll need, and approximate length of each presentation.]

Book Fair recommended titles:

[Most conferences have bookstores affiliated with them, and most of us list our favorite books on writing craft and inspiration. I always give them a handful of suggestions, knowing that after a workshop, attendees will be looking for books cited in the session.]

Books by Susan Wiggs:

[A list of titles of books that will be out around the time of the conference. Note: Include ISBNs and ordering information. I provide my publisher's toll-free tel-sell contact number. That way, the conference organizers can't say, "Oh! We're so sorry! We couldn't get your book in!"]

Anticipated Expenses:

[This is the part that separates the wishful thinkers from the pros. The key here is to be realistic. What is your time worth? What are your expenses going to be? Do not underestimate, because if you do, it's a set-up for frustration. If your expenses are too high for a particular group's budget, then you're probably better off declining the invitation.]

Honorarium: 1 hour to ½ day: \$ _____

Full day: \$ _____

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Ninc Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY NANCY J. PARRA

Want to blog?

Join the Ninc authors and industry guests who are already doing so. Signing up is easy. Go to <http://www.ninc.com/blog/> fill out your profile. then send me a notice that you have done so at Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com. Don't mail the notice to the list, please. The webmistress will approve you as an author so that you can post to the blog.

To sign up for a date, use the Yahoo calendar at the yahoo/Ninc website:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NINCLINK/cal//group/NINCLINK/?v=2&t=1215072000>

Hopefully you have your yahoo ID and password. If not, you'll need to get them. Note that all the Wednesdays are already reserved for INDUSTRY GUESTS.

Please sign up for M-Tu-Th-F first, then sign up for weekends.

Have you joined NINCLINK?

NINCLINK is the email list-serve for Novelists, Inc., a place of lively discussion and a great way to get to know your fellow Nincers. For instance, recent threads have looked at Google Books and Bookcrossing, and the merits of website contests. To sign up and join in the discussion, send a blank email to NINCLINKsubscribe@yahoo.com

Have you signed up for e-Nink?

Be the first to get all the scoop from this newsletter by signing up to have it delivered directly to your email box. The PDF format is easy to read and easy to print out in color or black and white. e-Nink subscribers not only receive the newsletter earlier than snail mail subscribers, they're privy to exclusive e-only features such as Eric Maisel's great series on Creative Recovery—a Novelists, Inc. exclusive.

To sign up, go to <http://www.ninc.com>, log in to the members-only pages, go to your profile and click the box for e-Nink ?

Ninc Member Appearances:

Check out the new website for this great section.

If you have an appearance coming up any time from October through February, please email Denise Agnew at danovelist@cox.net with the following information:

- ◆ Date/s of appearance
- ◆ Your name (or pseudonym)
- ◆ Type of appearance (signing, talk, conference)
- ◆ Location (including country!)
- ◆ Time (if applicable)

If you've already sent your appearance info, there's no need to send it again.

-- Pati Nagle (website co-chair)

Ninc has a brand new promotional

brochure. Going to a conference? Giving a talk to a writers group or library? Ask Outreach Chair Pari Taichert (ptaichert@comcast.net) to send you a bundle of Ninc brochures to pass out! Let's get the word out there about Ninc, which has the highest density of professional achievement of any fiction writing organization.

Recruit 2/get free year's Ninc membership campaign

Objective:

It's easy! Get two of your published friends to join Ninc, and get your 2009 membership free!

Rules:

- ◆ Recruits must be new members, not returning members, unless they have been away from Ninc for at least the previous year. Prospective new members must have published at least two novels.
- ◆ Campaign runs from Sept 1 thru Nov 30, 2008 – this is the time in which your recruits must APPLY to Ninc. Since their application processing takes time, their application will count for your free membership.
- ◆ No two members may claim the same recruit, and no recruit can name more than one sponsoring member.
- ◆ There will be a line on the application form for them to mention your name as their recruiter. This must be filled out.
- ◆ You will fill out a line on your renewal form for your free membership for 2009. This must be filled out.

Go forth and recruit!

The View from Here

Continued from page 14 ▶

Air/Rail fare (arrangements to be made by _____):

Nearest Airport:

Hotel expense:

Taxi from airport to hotel*:

Ferry/Taxi: Round Trip to/from author's home to airport/station:

Per diem:

Other (airport parking, rental car, public transportation, etc.):

Total:

*Please Note: Due to the ferry schedule, I'm unable to depart (by air) from Seattle before 8:30 am and cannot arrive in Seattle after 10:30 pm. If an early departure and/or late arrival can't be avoided, then please add \$100 to expenses for an overnight stay at an airport hotel.

Database:

[Attach a database (usually an Excel file) of all your readers and writer friends in the area, if available. Most

groups do everything they can to boost attendance, including a mailing to your fans.]

A few more sanity-saving hints:

Cut and paste all the details into your Google calendar or master calendar, whatever you use, and set a reminder so you don't forget to show up.

After you send in all your handouts and other requested info, make a note that you did so. That way, you won't end up sending the same stuff three times.

Have your publicist contact the conference people several weeks in advance of the event to make sure they will have your books on hand. Every writer I know has had the experience of arriving at a conference, only to find that her new book isn't in the book room.

There you have it. One-stop shopping for a conference or workshop appearance. I would love to see Ninc organize a speakers' bureau for anyone to browse and find speakers for their events. After three years of being the speaker-wrangler for a nonprofit group, I can definitely see the need. Let's talk about it on Ninclink.

Susan Wiggs's latest book is Just Breathe from Mira.

Cover to Cover

Continued from page 8 ▶

The key here is thinking as much like a marketing executive as possible. The goal of your cover is to signal readers that they're going to get something they want when they buy your book. Editorial issues are secondary. Of course you want the cover to make sense in the context of the novel, but most important is that your paranormal romance cover shout, "This is a fabulous paranormal romance" to readers who love that kind of fiction or that your psychological suspense cover announce, "Hey, psychological suspense lover! You haven't truly read psychological suspense until you pick up this one."

▲ Have good marketing reasons why you don't like a cover if you get one that you don't like. "It doesn't look good" is not a useful bit of criticism. Neither is, "It wasn't what I imagined." If you think the cover you've gotten for your book is dreadful, have a good marketing reason why you think it needs to be changed. If you can't think of one (and your agent can't think of one, or your best friend, or your agent's best friend), live with what they send you.

Ultimately, all of this is subjective (isn't that true of so much of our business?). For your sanity, though, it's best to know how the process works, what the point of packaging is, and who makes the decisions. If you can talk intelligently on this subject with your publishing house, there's a good chance you'll get what you want. ▲

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CREATIVE RECOVERY—Part 6

THE ABUSE CONTINUUM

In recent years the addictions field and the science behind it have grown and changed enormously. Some controversies have been settled and new ones have developed to take their place. Emerging information on addiction and on brain functioning promise new understanding and treatment options. By employing harm reduction and motivational enhancement strategies, clinicians have gotten better at helping clients “where they are” rather than expecting them to have already changed.

If you are blocked trying to figure out the end to your novel, that is exactly where you are; you can't be expected to know how to end it until, miraculously or through some practice you have cultivated, the ending does come to you. Similarly, if you are stuck abusing alcohol, you can't be expected to understand how recovery is going to work; rather, you have to be helped—and maybe coaxed—into recovery, so that in recovery you can acquire the actual experience of recovery. This is all by way of saying that people are exactly where they are—including exactly where they are along the abuse continuum—and they need to meet there by a clinician, a sponsor, a friend, or whomever. This also means that you need the self-awareness and patience to meet your self where you are. If you are already chemically dependent, it makes no sense to wish that you were only a habitual user: you or you and your clinician both have to deal with your precise reality.

For those of us in the field who hear countless

stories about peoples' relationships with mind-altering substances or with addictive behaviors like gambling or compulsive sex, predictable levels of use emerge. It is common for people to enter and exit different levels depending on life circumstances, sometimes fluidly and rapidly moving up and down the abuse continuum. However, once a person has graduated to the dependence level of use, he will invariably return to that level if he continues actively using, a point that we want to underline at the outset.

The following are the levels of use found along the abuse continuum:

▲ **Abstinence.** You do not use a given addictive substance at all or engage in a given addictive behavior at all. (This stage obviously does not apply in the same sense for something like a food addiction, where “abstinence” would amount to starvation. In that case, “abstinence” refers to maintaining a healthy diet.)

▲ **Experimentation.** At the experimentation level, you have limited exposure to a given addictive substance or behavior. You may experiment with a substance out of curiosity or peer influence but you do not continue to use. Experimentation rarely results in serious negative consequences; and if you do experience some negative consequences, you discontinue use accordingly.

▲ **Social use.** Your use of a particular substance



THE ANXIETY OF NOT MAKING MEANING

or your engagement in a particular behavior is infrequent, does not establish an ongoing pattern, does not have substantial impact on your life, and is primarily recreational in nature. Social users take the initiative to use and, unlike experimenters, anticipate a known desired effect. It's like the difference between experimenting with watercolors and not finding it to your liking versus returning to watercolors every once in a while because you like the "risky experience" of having to deal with colors that drip.

▲ Habitual use. With habitual use you have established a regular pattern of use and you are now at least to some extent controlled by the substance. Some people stay at this level without negative consequences and without further progression. There is both a clear positive sense and a clear negative sense to having put a habit in place: getting in the habit of working on your novel every day is a good thing, if you intend to write, but getting into the concurrent habit of relaxing after you write with a few beers is less clearly a pure positive, especially depending on your personal risk factors for moving from this innocent-enough habit to abuse or dependence.

▲ Abuse. At this level you experience clear negative consequences of your use but continue to use anyway. The negative consequences can be obviously use-related (such as a DUI arrest) and difficult (but not impossible) to deny, or more subtle (such as feeling chronically unmotivated in response to a marijuana habit). In the latter case, if your goal is to continue using, you have a golden opportunity to misattribute that consequence to something other than the use. For example, you can blame your lack of motivation on your lousy job. This is how denial typically works at the abuse level: you admit to certain consequences but are reluctant to connect the dots back to the cause, your now-abusive use of a

substance or your now-abusive engagement in a behavior.

▲ Dependence. Becoming dependent means that you've experienced a compulsive "loss of control" related to your use in addition to all the negative consequences of using. Typically, the addictive substance or behavior has become the organizing principle in your life, pushing other people or activities, including your creative efforts, to the sidelines.

The more you pay attention to the distinctions that these six stops on the abuse continuum represent, the better you will be able to prevent a slide down the continuum or, if you have already slid into abuse and dependence, the better you will be able to climb back up. To begin with, think about these six words and phrases: abstinence, experimentation, social use, habitual use, abuse and dependence. Each is rich, interesting and resonant and should pique your creative imagination. Is abstinence the same sort of thing as it applies to not using heroin, not having sex, or not going to the mall to shop? When is daily Net surfing more like a not-too-worrisome habit, more like abuse, and more like dependence? Spend a little time thinking through these distinctions. They will help you understand your situation and alert you to the possibility that it is time to engage in a real recovery program (for that complete recovery program, please consult Creative Recovery).

Come back next month for more of our discussion. If you have any thoughts or questions, by all means drop me a line at ericmaisel@hotmail.com. For a comprehensive look at the addiction issues that confront writers, please consult Creative Recovery (Shambhala, 2008).



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