

N I N K

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Protecting your Literary Legacy

BY ELAINE ISAAK

Do you have a properly executed will? And if so, does it include provisions for your literary executor? While hopefully we are all years away from needing any such thing, a recent panel at the ReaderCon Science Fiction convention has convinced me that it's never too early to plan for the future.

The panel opened with a horror story: A local, well-loved author passed away a couple of years ago, dying rather unexpectedly, and intestate—that is, without a will. This author had been estranged from his family for some time, and, when they gained access to his apartment, the first thing they did was to destroy all of his papers and manuscripts. They had no interest in science fiction, placed no value on his work, and had no connection to the literary community at large, which would have looked forward to seeing more of his writing.

Most of us are lucky to at least have a supportive family who would not willfully destroy our literary works—but would they know what to do to protect them, and make them available to future generations? Perhaps you are thinking that your work isn't important or that your genre doesn't have a long lifespan. In the new era of digital publishing, however, your shelf life is unbounded, and it only takes one instant hit or slow-burning classic to make your mark on literary history.

Why be concerned about your literary legacy?

1. *Your heirs reap financial benefits.* This is the obvious one that most of us have in mind when we write a will. Depending on the date of publication, the copyright on your work may last as long as 70 years after your death.

2. *Your books continue to be read in the future.*

3. *Your books can be reprinted—many times over.* Editors of anthologies and reprint series, reprographic rights organizations, film makers, and college professors who wish to use them will have access to them and will know who to contact. Most authors' work goes out of print within a few years of the author's death, primarily because of confusion about who to contact for rights inquiries.

4. *Your name or work can create a lasting impact on the future in whatever way you'd like to see that happen.* Scholarships? Literary awards? Charitable trusts? These are just some of the possibilities.

Alongside the horror stories, there are also great things that can happen if an author's legacy is handled well. For instance, the Phillip K. Dick estate continues not only to handle movie

INSIDE this ISSUE

President's Voice: "Are We at an Inflection Point?"	3
New! Rules. New! Tools.: The Recap	
The New Publishing Landscape	6
Here, There, and Everywhere: Young Adult	10
E-Book Packaging: Working with a Graphic Designer	11
Not Your Usual Writing Advice: The Sound of Creativity	13
Writing Is Taxing: Peter Piper Picked a Tax Preparer	15
The Mad Scribbler: Showing Up	17
P.I. Confidential: How a Sleuth Might Track a Missing Person	19

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

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laronica@fictionstudio.com

Treasurer:

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Newsletter Editor:

Marianna Jameson
Marianna@MariannaJameson.com

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Denise Agnew
danovelist@cox.net

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Pat McLinn
Patricia@PatriciaMcLinn.com

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Complete committee member listings
are available on the website:

<http://www.ninc.com>

Central Coordinator:

Tonya Wilkerson, Varney and Assoc.
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 2037
Manhattan KS 66505
Fax: 785-537-1877
Ninc@varney.com

Website:

<http://www.Ninc.com>

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Introducing...

The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this Nink issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair: James LePore
leporej5@optonline.net

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Recommend membership to your colleagues.
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Go to Members Only, "Member Services" and click
"Refer a New Member to NINC." Take NINC
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mailing address and requested number of booklets.
ptaichert@comcast.net.

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.

“Are we at an inflection point?”

The man posed the question to me while we were sitting on an Amtrak train heading from DC to my hometown of Stamford, CT. He'd been engaging me in conversation nonstop for an hour and a half—time that I'd budgeted for revising a novel. While I needed to get back to work terribly badly (though there was little hope for that; my fellow passenger had ignored even the most overt signs and my mention of how much I had to get done), the question captured my imagination.

“Yes, I think we are.”

We weren't specifically talking about book publishing. We were talking about the sociological implications of global digital connectedness. We *could* have been talking about book publishing, though. As you'll come to learn, I can find a metaphor for book publishing in nearly everything. My dog's barking at the UPS guy as he delivered print copies of a new Story Plant book last night? That's, of course, akin to the voice of the e-book future announcing to the print world, “This is my house.” The smudges on the face of my iPhone? Well, those are, of course, the obstacles in a writer's attempt to communicate clearly. Really, anything. Pasta. Politics. Sports. Socks. People tell me I'm something of a monotonous conversationalist.

We *are* very much at an inflection point, though. This isn't news to any of you, of course. We've had two NINC conferences on the topic, you fill up the link daily with the implications of this inflection, and you've probably felt the impact of it in your own career. I'm sure many of you are also aware that we're at the *beginning* of the inflection. All we know at this point is that the e-book has led to the most overwhelming change in our business since the mass market paperback (and is interestingly in the process of making the mass market paperback considerably less relevant).

The real questions are only starting to come. How much of the market will the format take in the next few years? What happens to print books? What happens to the publishers who have built their business around print and need to maintain that business while growing their digital presence? How many of them will survive? Who is going to be selling e-books to consumers? What happens if one bookseller muscles out the others? Does it make sense for writers to continue to share their income with publishers? Will the issue of discoverability make self-publishing too expensive and risky? Are the signs really pointing toward there being room for more novelists to make a living at their craft? Can English-language writers really prosper from easier global access to English-language readers, especially those in India and maybe China? These are some of the questions we'll be facing in the near future. We'll have very few clear answers to them in the upcoming year.

I mention that, of course, because I've just become president of this great organization. A smarter person would have chosen a better time to take this spot for a couple of reasons. One is that I'm following Donna Fletcher, who did a profoundly good and wise job of leading NINC. The other is that inflections are disruptive. That means many of us will (and already do) feel unsettled over what's going on and might feel the temptation to panic, lash out, walk onto the ledge, etc. I'll be opening my e-mail with a bit of trepidation from now until next December.

The upside to all of this is that the industry is in good shape. It has been more than a decade since I've spoken to as many writers and publishers who are happy about their sales and the income being generated. The midlist is stronger than it has been since the eighties. The marketplace is making it clear that it was never as concerned about genres and categories as publishers and booksellers were. These are very good indicators for our business, from both a commercial and creative perspective. A year and a half ago, I addressed a large group of writers and said, “This is not a great *time* to be a novelist, but I believe it will be a great *age* to be a novelist.” Now, I believe it is, in fact, a great time to be a novelist. ▶

My guess is that the biggest agenda items for NINC in the coming year have yet to present themselves. However, I can tell you that my biggest agenda item going into the year is finding a way for all NINC authors to be more discoverable. This is something I'll be working on with the board and with the marketing committee, and I think we'll be able to use our upcoming anthology to help us with that. We have some big ideas that we're hoping to present to you soon.

For now, let me say that I'm honored to be NINC's president. This is such a fine, fine organization. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the role NINC can play in our industry's future and how NINC can do the most to serve its members. We know the next year won't be boring. Let's make it hugely productive as well.

Best, Lou



Protecting your Literary Legacy

Continued from page 1 ▶ deals, anthology, and reprint rights, but it also established a foundation that administers an annual award for paperback science fiction—a way to “pay forward” Mr. Dick's involvement with the genre. The Heinlein Society Blood Drive is another example, maintaining the author's reputation through charitable work.

The reach of your legacy will depend to some extent on the number of titles you have, their popularity, and their longevity. Whatever legal arrangements you choose to make need to be sufficiently flexible to allow for future expansion and change. A good literary executor can manage the philanthropic use of your estate, and even enhance your reputation as an author after your death.

Your literary executor is the key to managing your legacy, however large or small. The ideal literary executor should meet most of the following traits. He or she should:

1. *Not be a direct beneficiary of your will.* Your executor should be one step removed from the process, and thus able to view your legacy with objectivity (neither burning your work, nor idolizing it, nor being paralyzed by grief). Children, spouses, and other close loved ones are not the best choices. Neither are agents or editors who have specific financial interests in some aspect of your work.

2. *Have an interest in your work and in seeing it prosper.* While you don't want an immediate beneficiary running the show, neither do you want someone so distant that he or she doesn't care what happens to the work or to your posthumous reputation.

3. *Be able to comprehend legal and publishing language.* The best candidate will have a familiarity with how publishing works, and be able to read and understand contract language in order to make decisions on behalf of your estate.

4. *Maintain good relations with the immediate family as well as with publishing professionals.* Choose a person who will be engaged, accessible, and easy to work with.

5. *Be at least a generation younger than you.* This person is supposed to out-live you by a good margin. It is also recommended to name a back-up executor in your will in case your candidate predeceases you or is otherwise unable to take on these duties.

Personally, I am in a bit of a bind because most of the people I know who are familiar with the publishing world are a good deal older than I am. However, I have a younger lawyer-cousin who otherwise fits all of the requirements, and can certainly learn about publishing in more detail.

The executor can be paid a stipend or a percentage of future contracts (usually 10 to 30%). While it's understandable that you would like to have an influence on how your legacy shapes up, please don't micromanage from the grave. Give your executor the flexibility to handle future opportunities. In general, give him or

her as much freedom as possible to make the choices that will maximize the goals you've outlined, whether that is money for your heirs, a strong presence in the market, or philanthropic endeavors. The executor will also be empowered to select his or her successor, or to establish a trust that will manage the estate on an on-going basis.

Do consider how you'd like your work to be handled after death. What should be done with unpublished manuscripts, partial manuscripts, or series outlines? The recent mid-series death of author Robert Jordan might have also been the end of his popular "Wheel of Time" series, but his own writings and outlines provided the basis for a successor, Brandon Sanderson, to continue the work. On the other hand, there was a lot of controversy surrounding the decision to publish Robert Heinlein's first novel, *For Us, The Living*, which was discovered in a surviving manuscript years after his death. While you don't want to intrude beyond the grave, please do give some thought as to what happens to your unpublished, unfinished, or even unwanted literary babies.

On an even more pragmatic note, the management of your online presence is a new dimension of end-of-life planning, and thinking about it now will likely save your heirs some headaches, as well as ensure some closure for your fans. Editor Robert Runte suggests storing a list of your passwords for social networking, bulletin boards, websites, and especially content management dashboards for your e-published work along with your will, and passing that information to your executor. An author-friend of mine passed away suddenly, and while we heard news of the death through other sources, it took a while to learn of the family's plans in terms of memorials, donations, etc. The online memorial is increasingly common, and often spontaneous; it can incorporate the deceased's social networking stream in a way that family and friends might find comforting if they have the ability to connect. Mr. Runte breaks down some last will considerations at <http://bit.ly/tPBrbk>

You may also wish to consider the work of biographers or researchers who would like access to papers of a more personal or autobiographical nature. Will the executor serve as a gatekeeper for these requests? Will your papers be available through a library bequest, or would you prefer them to remain private? The executor is in a position to see that your requests are carried out, but it helps to make sure the family and other beneficiaries also have an understanding of your intent. Some authors prefer that certain works remain unpublished, while others ask that the works be released after death—but heirs do not always follow those wishes. Considering how other estates have been managed and mismanaged may give you a better handle on what you'd like to have done after your passing. Follow this link (<http://bit.ly/sCGyRK>) for a discussion of some authors' last wishes.

One of the primary roles of the executor will be to serve as the contact for rights inquiries about your work, preventing the problem of orphan copyrights. To this end, provide your executor with a list of pseudonyms you've worked under. Create a list not only of published works, but also any completed works that may be available for publication. Update this information on a regular basis. Give your executor contact information for any current contracts, including your agent and editor(s), and make sure that your literary partners have information about the executor as well! Some organizations, such as Science Fiction Writers of America, will register the name of your executor to help ensure that future rights-seekers know who to contact.

This article is in no way intended to supply legal advice or counsel, but rather to offer some food for thought as you approach end-of-life planning, to ensure that your literary legacy goes on.

Elaine Isaak's latest sale is to a classic anthology with a special place in the homes of thousands: Uncle John's Bathroom Reader. She's excited to serve as NINC's new Marketing Chair.

It's Dues Renewal Time....

Renew easily online at the NINC website: <http://www.ninc.com>. Remember to fill in the Authors Coalition form so that NINC can receive its fair share of the ACA funds. You need NINC, and NINC needs you. Please renew now.



New! Rules. New! Tools.: The ReCap

The New Publishing Landscape (Looks Like the Wild West To Me)

BY MEREDITH EFKEN

Here we are again, at lovely St. Pete Beach, FL. Not exactly the Wild West—unless the Wild West now comes with palm trees and a white sand beach. But as our panelists gather and our audience takes their seats, we are all wondering what kind of a showdown is waiting us in our writing careers.

Every Wild West story has its *femme fatale*, and ours is our emcee, the lovely, newly *NYT*-bestselling author, Tosca Lee. The mostly-female audience is having collective shoe-lust over her amazingly hot boots. And we're wondering how she manages to race all over the conference room to take audience questions in such high heels.

But you're not here for a fashion report. You want to know what the future holds for this hardscrabble publishing frontier. So let's get to it...pardner. (Sorry, couldn't resist. I'll try not to let the metaphor become too obnoxious.)

Our Panelists:

Liz Scheier, Barnes and Noble
Mark Coker, Smashwords
Carolyn Pittis, Harper Collins

Lou Aronica, Story Plant and Fiction Studio
Linda Quinton, Tor
Don Weisberg, Penguin Young Readers

Theme:

So many options exist now for authors seeking to become published. How do we evaluate the best alternatives for us? This panel is exploring the alternatives when authors are considering whether to pursue a traditional publisher or head out on their own with new publishing methods.

Our panelists are a mix of traditional publishers and alternative publishers. As in all the panels this year, each panelist is given the chance to present for five minutes, and then the audience is allowed to ask questions.

Main Take-Aways:

- ▶ **Story is still king...or, uh, town sheriff.** A really bad-ass female town sheriff. Don't mess with her—she'll take you out. Point is, regardless of publishing method, the most important thing is telling an awesome story.
- ▶ **Lots of opportunities for writers.** This makes life a bit more confusing and difficult for us, perhaps, but we have more potential than ever for a successful career.
- ▶ **Even the long-time industry pros feel like they are starting all over again.** They are experimenting and learning, right along with the authors.
- ▶ **Don't let the choices and possibilities distract or paralyze you.** Maintaining and even increasing output is important for writers who want to keep a presence in this rapidly changing market. Shorter works may be helpful for doing this.
- ▶ **The power of publishing is shifting to authors, where it ought to be.** Mark Coker said this straight out, but even the traditional publishers alluded to it. They all spent time explaining to the authors why their particular publishing path had merit.

What Are My Choices?

As each panelist presents and then answers questions, there are some main points emerging about the benefits of each publishing option. Here's a summary:

- ▶ **Traditional Large Publishers:** The traditional publishers offer a large team of people focused on your book and (they claim) your career as an author. They have potentially huge resources, particularly in marketing. They are a good choice for authors who do not want to manage all the aspects of book publishing and promotion themselves. Plus, as Carolyn Pittis pointed out, one-third of book discovery is still happening in bookstores alone. In the digital-print shootout, print is not dead yet.
- ▶ **Small, Independent Publishers:** These publishers might only publish six to eight titles a year, but they are flexible and personal for the author in a way that a larger house can't be. Additionally, a well-run house has a great deal of knowledge about its particular audience and can provide a supportive publishing home for an author long-term.
- ▶ **Vertical Publishers:** These can be small publishers or large ones. They are publishers who have a highly defined target audience and interact with that community on all levels of the publishing experience. Linda Quinton represents Tor, which is an example of a vertical publisher. The advantage of a vertical publisher is that they have created a strong, loyal community of readers, booksellers, agents, writers, and editors. In an age in which "crowd-sourcing" is becoming one of the most important vehicles for promoting anything, it's clear how a community-based publishing model would be effective.
- ▶ **Self-Publishing:** This opportunity has exploded thanks to e-books. With tools like Smashwords, Barnes and Noble PubIt (and Kindle Direct Publishing, of course, but no one liked to mention them ...) authors have been able to gain more control over their books and careers simply because now they have options other than traditional publishing. That new opportunity for control can be a great thing, or it can be overwhelming. But either way, it has given all authors new leverage in the industry.

Particulars:

- ▶ **Is the mid-list dead?** No. In fact, as Lou says, it's back with a vengeance. The new diversity in publishing means that books with "no market" have a chance to find their market. It's the best time in 60 years to write what you are passionate about. Carolyn adds that they are seeing a small number of premium best-sellers and a large number of "value books," but there is a gap in the middle. She feels that this will evolve and improve, but there needs to be a better way for readers to discover "alternatively priced" books—those that are not bestsellers and not priced at \$0.99.
- ▶ **Editing is important.** I think everyone in the room agrees about that. Mark Coker even goes so far as to say it is *more* important than marketing.
- ▶ **Barnes and Noble has a particular demographic they appeal to.** According to Liz, this is primarily educated suburban women aged 25 to 55.
- ▶ **Piracy:** (Or masked bandits, in our Wild West theme) How big a problem is it? Carolyn says that if you are writing text books, or are an international big name with recognizable characters and stories, or you write about vampires, you should probably be worried and keep an eye on it. Otherwise, you should worry more about being undiscovered than being pirated. Most piracy is not domestic. It is international, from countries where there are few legal avenues for acquiring English language books affordably.
- ▶ **Traditional Publishers, are you supporting back list books longer than you have in the past?** Don says in children's books, it is to their advantage to develop and maintain the backlist. Linda says that in vertical publishing, there is often ongoing interest in the backlist as well. She also says that because of digital marketing, it is becoming much easier to keep that interest in back list titles sustained over longer periods. Lou says that ongoing marketing is starting to pay off for the first time because they aren't constrained by what booksellers are keeping on physical shelves. In a digital world, the concept of shelf life has no meaning.
- ▶ **Is Co-op Marketing coming to Digital Outlets?** Liz couldn't say much, but she said yes, it is, and there isn't a timetable for that. (Cue foreboding music.) ▶

- ▶ **With the agency model, why are publishers pricing e-books the same as print books?** Lou says that the Big Six publishers are trying to hold e-books to a price point that is higher than consumers are interested in paying. Carolyn says that the digital market is not growing the overall market as much as it is cannibalizing the print market. And she says that what might be a good short-term strategy for selling a lot of books may not be the best for the long term.
- ▶ **What about e-book royalty structure? 15 to 25% royalties are not that attractive to authors.** Lou says that it's important to remember that no one knows how much e-books will really end up costing in terms of marketing costs. As Liz mentioned, co-op marketing for e-books is coming, and while it may be very cheap right now to produce and promote e-books, that may not always be the case. Publishers are reluctant to adjust royalty structures until they know more about what will happen with the cost of marketing the books.

Shoot-Out at The Trade Winds Corral

The climax of our Wild West adventure arrives with the question, *It seems that marketing and sales committees are more in charge of what books get published (at traditional publishers) than editorial is. Who is driving the purchase of our books, and what does this mean for authors?*

[Cue villagers scrambling for cover, and a huge tumbleweed rolling down the suddenly silent streets.]

Don makes the first move. He shakes his head. "I can only speak for my company. I don't think it's the case at my company. I can never say never, because I see from my perspective and live in an ivory tower."

The original questioner asks, "Okay, who all thinks that sales and marketing are controlling which books gets published instead of editorial?"

All the villagers ... er, authors ... raise their hands. Every last one of us.

"Who doesn't think that?"

Silence. And then, Lou looks at Don. "You, apparently."

Don shakes his head again. "Most of my competitors have acquisitions meetings, but I don't. Each of my departments [has] teams and [is] responsible for [its] own acquisitions."

Linda says that from her experience, the trouble is that marketing and editorial don't really know how to communicate well. The conversations about books started including more and more historical sales data that needed to be addressed. What appears like marketing making the decision is often simply a challenge or question that marketing raised, and she feels they all need to do a better job of trying to find solutions to those challenges instead of abandoning a book. She feels that marketing and editorial need to work at understanding each other better so that really great books have a better chance at being discovered by the market.

(I now have the song from *Oklahoma* stuck in my head... "Oh, the farmer and the cowman should be friends...")

Lou says that there is an erroneous binary idea that marketing committees have that if an author hasn't sold well before, it means no one wants to buy that author. In the new digital world, this problem should eventually go away, but it takes the larger publishers longer to make adjustments.

Don stands up for the cowman—I mean, Big Publisher. "It's not black and white. Some publishers will ignore previous sales if they really believe in the book. Sometimes, [previous sales are] an easy excuse to turn down a book."

Finally, Mark Coker joins the conversation. "I am the barbarian at the gates of the ivory tower," he says, to much laughter and applause from the townspeople. He goes on to say that publishers are not in the business of *publishing* books. They are in the business of *selling* books. What he is hearing is that the bean counters have more power than before and that editors have less power. They need to acquire what they can sell, but they don't know what will sell until it's published. They acquire what is selling now, and hope that it is still selling a year later. So it's a slower model.

Don replies, "I don't think anyone is in business not to make money. Even if Smashwords was losing money on titles, they probably wouldn't keep doing that. Everyone got into publishing because we loved books and they changed our lives. We are all passionate about books." He feels Mark's comments are selling publishers short because they are really trying to run a good business and do right by their authors.

We all look at Mark to see what the response will be. He does not disappoint. “Should the value of books be judged solely on the number of sales?”

(Yee ha!)

He says there is nothing wrong with wanting to keep the lights on and stay in business. He knows that people in publishing love books. But they are hamstrung by a structure that makes it difficult for editors passionate about books to acquire the books they want to.

There is a brief scuffle of conversation that I can't keep up with. Finally, our lovely emcee encourages the boys to settle down and hug it out afterwards. They do. There are no casualties or good-guys vs. bad-guys in our Wild West tale. There is only a room full of book lovers trying to find their way in a rapidly changing industry and doing their best to create a strong future for books.

*Publishing folks should stick together,
Publishing folks should all be pals,
Smashwords dance with Big Six writers
Big Six dance with Smashwords' gals!*

Best Quotes of the Day:

- ▶ “I am the barbarian at the gates of the ivory tower.” —Mark Coker
- ▶ “You have a ridiculous number of choices.” —Lou Aronica
- ▶ “The world is crashing all around you and it's a wonderful time to be in publishing. But don't let it distract you from writing.” —Mark Coker
- ▶ “Whatever happened to make midlist go away, midlist is back with a vengeance.” —Lou Aronica
- ▶ “Editors aren't looking for midlist or bestseller, they are looking to be touched by the story.” —Don Weisberg
- ▶ “Your risk of being undiscovered is probably higher than your piracy risk.” —Carolyn Pittis
- ▶ “Shelf life doesn't mean anything anymore.” —Lou Aronica
- ▶ “Should the value of books be judged solely on the number of sales?” —Mark Coker

Meredith Efken is the author of the critically acclaimed SAHM I Am series that traces the friendship of a group of stay-at-home mothers through emails to each other. Her latest book, Lucky Baby, tells the story of an American family that adopts a child from China and the blind orphan girl who strives to create a family for herself in a lonely world. Meredith lives in a ramshackle Victorian fixer-upper in Nebraska with her family.

NINC Bulletin Board

Compiled by Kit Frazier / kitfrazier@yahoo.com

JOT—Just One Thing . . . volunteers needed!

If you're interested in seeing that we have industry guests again every Wednesday (we haven't had one since October 26), please contact Patricia Rosemoor (Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com)

Promote NINC, promote yourself—on the NINC Blog

If you haven't registered, please do so at <http://www.NINC.com/blog/>

Fill out the profile, then email Patricia Rosemoor at: Patricia.Rosemoor@gmail.com



New! Rules. New! Tools: The ReCap

Here, There and Everywhere: The Young Adult Market

BY MARY STELLA

When writers ask editors what they're looking for, we're accustomed to the reply, "good stories." Sitting in on the talk by Don Weisberg, president of Penguin Young Readers Group, we heard more than the stock answer. "We want to invest in people's careers," he says. "We're looking for writers who can produce great material time and again." According to Weisberg, there's no magic to being a publisher. "At a time when the business is complicated, the mission remains simple. Find great authors writing great books."

When his company finds a great book, they commit heart and soul to its success. Right now, Weisberg and his colleagues are very enthusiastic about the newly released title *The Apothecary* by Maile Meloy, an illustrated adventure published by Putnam Juvenile, targeted for ages nine to twelve. Weisberg says his team will devote a strong marketing effort to this book for the next three years.

The youth market is different from what many mass market authors know. An author may do a booksigning at a bricks and mortar store and sell dozens of copies, but then visit a school and sign hundreds of books. Young readers have the power to put a book on the bestseller lists. Children and young adults grow up and keep reading.

People are always going to read, Weisberg believes, regardless of the changes in the devices and the ways that we read. Writers have the hard job and a world of opportunity, he says, but it's a case of "play at your own risk." He cited the statistic that 50% of sales might happen in electronic format if the book is a lead title. Discoverability in just e-book format is much more difficult. It's his belief that it's "crazy" not to have the title available in print, too.

Weisberg oversees nearly a dozen juvenile imprints including Dutton Children's books, G.P. Putnam's Sons, Grosset & Dunlap, Philomel, Dial Books for Young Readers, Razorbill, Puffin, and Viking Children's Books. *Winnie the Pooh*, *Madeline*, and *The Little Engine That Could* are just some of the famous characters and brands published by these houses. Penguin is actively looking for series that appeal to readers in the middle grades.

Prior to his current position, Weisberg was Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President of Random House North America. Since beginning his career in 1980, he also spent time with Bantam Books and Bantam Doubleday Dell.

Mary Stella is the author of two contemporary romances. All Keyed Up and Key of Sea were originally print published and recently republished by Mary for e-readers everywhere. Mary lives in the Florida Keys where she is working on her next novel and also busy with her "day job" as Director of Media and Marketing for Dolphin Research Center. She can be found online at www.mary-stella.com.

It's Dues Renewal Time....

Renew easily online at the NINC website: <http://www.ninc.com>. Remember to fill in the Authors Coalition form so that NINC can receive its fair share of the ACA funds. You need NINC, and NINC needs you. Please renew now.



New! Rules. New! Tools.: The ReCap

E-Book Packaging: Working With A Graphic Designer

BY JOANN GROTE

NINC member Julie Ortolon has become an Amazon bestselling author by e-publishing her backlist. She has a background in graphic design and turned her skills to learning what makes a great e-book cover. When considering a cover for your e-book, Julie's strongest recommendation is to stop thinking like a writer. It's time to sever the emotional ties to your story: you have to start thinking like you're the head of the art and marketing department, because that's what you've just become.

Whether a writer works with a graphic designer or designs a cover on his or her own, it's in the author's best interest to understand what makes a terrific cover, which is not as simple as it sounds. You have to go back to the basics: intent. Frequently, the professional graphic designer wants to create a cover that will help the author sell books; the author wants the cover that represents the story.

The most common mistake writers make is to believe the cover should be a visual synopsis of the story. The cover's purpose isn't to tell the story, she said, but to "sell the author's voice, and to grab a potential buyer's attention in the blink of an eye."

This is where thinking like an ad agency begins. You need to define four things *before* starting to design a cover:

1) **Your target audience:** You need to know your readers' age range, income range, education, taste, gender, ethnic group, and locale (where they live and where they *want* to live).

2) **The flavor of the story:** Is it a cozy mystery? Thriller? Sweet romance? Women's fiction?

3) **The characters and setting:** Think of your characters as part of your target audience. What appeals to your characters will appeal to your readers.

4) **The sizzle:** Graphic designers are taught that when they design a restaurant ad, they're not selling the steak, they're selling the sizzle. Translated into bookspeak, this means *don't sell the story, sell your voice*. Ask yourself why your readers buy your books? What emotions do you evoke in your readers? What is the intensity and complexity of those emotions? What adjectives define your voice?

A cover speaks to readers with three powerful tools:

1) **Color.** Attraction to colors depends upon factors such as age, economic level, and locale (urban vs rural). Solid colors appeal to youth, and subliminally indicate a story is less complex emotionally. Gradations of color appeal to more mature readers. Textured colors, brocade fabrics, or an intriguing landscape appeal to more sophisticated palettes and tell the reader the characters are more affluent and/or the story is more emotionally complex.

2) **Fonts.** Different fonts appeal to people of different ages and economic levels. To develop a sense for what fonts appeal to your audience, turn again to the pros and look through magazines that might appeal to your readers. Notice products they might like, and the fonts used in the ads. Online sources for fonts include www.fonts.com and www.searchfreefonts.com.

3) **Image:** A close-up view tells a potential reader the story line is intimate, the time covered is short, and/or the pacing is quick and snappy. A wide panoramic view says the story is emotionally complex, covers a long period of time, and/or the writing is more lyrical. For example, a panoramic view with a textured ▶

design more accurately portrays women's fiction than category romance, which is better represented by a close-up image.

Once you've developed a cover concept, look for covers you believe would appeal to your audience, then look for images. Images can be purchased online from \$2 to \$30. Make a collection of what you find to show the graphic designer. (Julie's e-book, *E-Book Revolution: Survival Guide for Authors* has live links in it to search for images. Also check out her web site, www.juliesjournalonline.com, and make sure to click on her Authors Resources page.)

When choosing a graphic designer, you need to consider the budget you have to work with and how much help you'll need. Here are your options:

- ▶ Recent college graduates and self-taught semi-pros. This may be the least expensive option.
- ▶ Experienced designers who have gone freelance. This is your next most affordable option.
- ▶ An advertising firm. This is your most expensive option.

Julie suggests the second option is best for most authors. The first is a good alternative on a tight budget, but can be a bit risky. The third is needlessly expensive. Whoever you choose, be sure you are clear up front as to cost.

Once you have a potential design, see how it looks as a thumbnail and in gray scale. A cover package includes the cover, title, and blurb. Is the package consistent with your brand? Will it appeal to your established readers?

If your book doesn't sell well, re-evaluate the cover and don't be afraid to change it. Doing so doesn't take long, and might make all the difference. In the case of Patricia Ryan's medieval romances, sales improved 60%. Julie has some real-world before-and-after examples on her website.

Remember: every detail of the package is critical. To create an effective e-book package, define your size, know your target audience, create a distinctive and consistent brand, and don't be afraid to change your approach.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children's nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.

NINC Bulletin Board

From NINC Research Resources:

Get Away With Murder . . . Do you want a violent drug interaction to stump your hero or heroine? Check out <http://www.itzarion.com/thisdrug-thatdrug.html>

Do you need your character to quote Maya Angelou, JK Rowling, or Oprah Winfrey? Find quotations by author, subject or motivation at <http://www.literaturepage.com>

Upcoming Conferences and Festivals of Note

12th Anniversary Girlfriend Weekend Author Extravaganza: January 12-15, Jefferson, TX

<http://www.pulpwoodqueen.com/2011/07/announcing-greatest-book-show-on-earth.html>

San Francisco Writers Conference: February 15-17, San Francisco, CA <http://www.sfwriters.org/>

Tucson Festival of Books: March 10-11, Tucson, AZ <http://tucsonfestivalofbooks.org/section/index>

Tennessee Williams / New Orleans Literary Festival: March 21-25, New Orleans, LA

<http://www.tennesseewilliams.net/>

Not Your Usual Writing Advice — The Sound of Creativity

BY JOANN GROTE

“Music has the capacity to touch the innermost reaches of the soul and music gives flight to the imagination.”

— Plato



Photo by Sabrina Ingram

Studies on the effects of music on the brain have been taking place for more than 50 years by scientists such as Drs. G. Lozanov of Bulgaria, Hans Cousto of Switzerland, and Alfred Tomatis of France. Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder popularized these studies in their ground-breaking book, *SuperLearning* in the 1970s, and updated their information in *SuperLearning 2000* (Delacorte Press, 1994).

Dr. Lozanov discovered that the slow, 60-beat-per-minute *largo* or *andante* movements of Baroque music by themselves can shift the brain into alpha state and provide the benefits of meditation. Alpha state, as you may recall from my December 2011 column in *Nink*, is a state in which brain waves occur at eight to 14 per second, and a person is relaxed, yet alert, aware, and focused.

Playing slow-tempo Baroque music while you write is one way to create and stay in the alpha state; it mimics the creative hypnogogic state we experience upon awakening. Slow passages of Japanese Koto music have been shown to have similar effects to slow-tempo Baroque passages. Vivaldi's *Largo* from *Concerto in C Major for Mandolin, Strings, and Harpsichord* and J.S. Bach's *Largo* from *Harpsichord Concerto in F Minor, BWV 1056* are examples of the slow-tempo Baroque music that produces the alpha state.

The high frequencies of string instruments in faster tempos of classical music appear to perform wonders while played as one works. Mozart's "*Hoffner*" *Symphony* and Beethoven's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Major, Op. 61* are examples to try. Writers can benefit from listening to the entire piece as opposed to the *largo* or *andante* Baroque movements which are usually very short.

To take advantage of the slow, Baroque effect, companies and individuals have begun to record music combining a number of these short movements. "Brainwave" music is becoming more widely available as more people discover its benefits. One site from which you can purchase downloads and CDs is www.superlearning.com.

NINC member Yvonne Lindsay says, "I'm a strong fan of 'getting into state' or 'anchoring' when I write. If I don't follow my pattern, my writing output is never as good, nor as good quality, as it is when I do follow the pattern ... It puts me into that rhythm/state that I need to work. For me, it involves using pure essential oils in a vaporizer, a little water fountain, a closed office door, and brainwave or new age music (oh, and headphones).

"The type of music I listen to is typically what you'd hear in a day spa when you're having a lovely body treatment or facial: relaxing sounds with water or bird sounds filtering through them, all instrumental, or the *Creative Mind* CD's by Dr. Jeffrey Thompson. Either way I tend to shut off from what I'm hearing, and what I'm doing, and just write."

The late Canadian playwright and author Patricia Joudry underwent sound therapy involving classical music for her hearing disability. While her hearing improved, she received other, unexpected results. In her ▶

autobiography she states, “Within a week I was going around in a perpetual state of exultation. Before the therapy began, I’d been working on my novel, *The Selena Tree*. It had struck a roadblock and stopped. Suddenly the words began flowing again. I sat scribbling all through my sessions and was still working at home at midnight, though ordinarily I wasn’t able to write beyond noon.” (You can read her autobiography online at <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/Theatre/joudry/autobio14.htm>.)

NINC member Elaine Isaak uses music to transition from other daily activities to writing. The music she chooses isn’t necessarily the slow Baroque or the high-frequency symphonies discussed above, yet it obviously “gives flight to [her] imagination” as Plato assures.

“I seem to be one of those people who concentrate better when I have the right threshold of attention occupied,” Elaine told me, “so I listen to music when I write (also when I drive, etc.) or I get distracted. Seems strange to some, but I think there have been studies done of this. When I started writing medieval fantasy, I picked out music that evoked the mood of the work—often Celtic or period music. It helped me to immerse myself in the fantasy world. I also noticed that, once I turned the music on, I was already starting to think about the book.

“Then my husband got laid off, and I had to get a Real Job. Ugh! I could still write in bits and pieces, but how to stay in the mood for it with all these interruptions in my day? I brought one of the tapes in my car for my commute, and it worked like a charm: while the writing music was playing, I was still thinking about writing. I had to carry a scratch pad on the seat next to me to jot things down at stoplights or when I got to the office. And when I drove home, I was ready to plunge back into that other realm.

“I had a dry spell for a while after losing my contract and my agent, and it was hard to care about writing, but I finally decided to suck it up and get back to work. Again, I was stumped—I felt too rusty. Then I remembered my soundtrack. It took a little while of staring at the screen, notes at my side, listening to my mood music before I got back into that groove, but it worked! And when it’s my turn to drop off my son for preschool, I listen to the music on the drive home to get ready for my writing day.

“Computers, of course, make it easier. I can string together the songs that most suit my current work in progress in a playlist and loop it or shuffle it. I also like Pandora radio, where I can plug in the name of one group that seems to hit the mark for a project, and Pandora will find me more like that. I have a “Silly Wizard” Pandora channel (traditional Scottish folk) and a “Medieval Babes” channel, which is a little more edgy, but based on historic music.

“Pandora radio is online at www.pandora.com. You can plug in the name of a favorite band to have it generate a “station” for you. You can give thumbs up or thumbs down to songs as they are played to tweak it. The regular version has occasional ads, or you can pay to have none.”

Unlike the writers noted above, I’ve always liked to write surrounded by silence, or at most, natural sounds like the breeze through the trees or waves gently lapping the shore. Not for me the practice of writing to music, or even “white noise.” But the more I heard about the connection between music and creativity, the more enticing the combination sounded. I’m just beginning my musical writing journey, and am looking forward to great results.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children’s nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.

Business Briefs

e-Book Agency Model Pricing and the Justice Department

A DOJ antitrust investigation is focusing on possible cooperation between prominent publishers and Apple prior to the release of the iPad; specifically whether there was a concerted effort to force use of the agency model for pricing instead of Amazon’s wholesale model. The European Union Competition Committee is also investigating Apple’s relationship with five of the Big Six publishers.

Publishers Weekly



WRITING is TAXING

By Diane Kelly

Peter Piper Picked a Tax Preparer

Picking a tax preparer isn't quite as easy as picking a peck of pickled peppers. While it may be tempting to simply choose a preparer with an office close to your home or perhaps to choose the one who offers the lowest price, picking a tax preparer shouldn't only be a function of convenience or rates. The quality and extent of services varies widely among tax practitioners. The important thing is to choose the one who is right for you. Your options are a CPA, an enrolled agent, or an uncredentialed tax preparer. Which type of preparer is right for you depends on various factors such as the amount of your earnings, the complexity of your financial issues, and whether you prefer a preparer who can also represent you before the IRS should the need arise.

Regardless of which type of preparer you choose, request that you be given ample opportunity to review your tax return before it is filed with the IRS. Tax season is a busy time for tax professionals, and regardless of their credentials they can make mistakes. Compare the information on the return to your source documents to ensure the numbers jibe.

CPAs

A certified public accountant is likely to cost the most, but a CPA can be invaluable if you earn a significant income or have unusual or complicated financial circumstances. CPAs are often the best trained to deal with complex issues and often provide tax advising services in addition to tax preparation. A CPA may be able to help you save money through advance planning.

Be careful, though. The CPA license doesn't necessarily mean the practitioner will be familiar with the ins and outs of a writing business or other highly specialized types of businesses or transactions. Some CPAs work primarily in one specific area or another and may not be familiar with the rules relating to your particular situation. For instance, in my home state of Texas, some CPAs are adept at dealing with the intricacies of oil and gas investments, while others shy away from these complicated transactions. But just because a CPA has not had an author client before does not mean you should immediately dismiss the CPA. It just means you may need to educate him or her about your writing business.

A CPA may represent you before the IRS should you encounter an audit or other tax problems. Thus, developing an ongoing relationship with a CPA can benefit you should the dreaded audit notice arrive.

Be aware, however, that rates for audit representation and tax-planning services may be different than the rates charged for tax-preparation services. Tax preparation is a notoriously low profit margin, so expect higher rates for advising and audit representation.

Be aware, too, that a CPA may not be a tax expert. The focus of CPA practices varies widely, and the makeup of their client base can range from individuals only, to businesses only, to any mixture of the two. A CPA whose practice consists primarily of performing financial audits or compiling and reviewing the financial statements of corporations or partnerships may not be up to speed on the tax laws that apply to individuals. If you hire a CPA, be sure it is one whose practice includes a significant tax element and who performs services for a significant number of self-employed individuals.

Enrolled Agents

An enrolled agent is a practitioner who is neither a CPA nor an attorney, but who is nonetheless qualified to represent taxpayers before the IRS. Enrolled agents must have a certain amount of experience ▶

working for the IRS or must pass a rigorous test in order to receive their credential, and are required to engage in continuing education in taxation each year. Enrolled agents also undergo a background check. Because the focus of the enrolled agent credential is strictly on tax, an enrolled agent may be better versed in tax law than a CPA who does little tax work. As with CPAs, an enrolled agent may charge you a different rate for tax-advising service and audit representation than tax preparation. However, an enrolled agent's rates are likely to be less than a CPA's.

Unaccredited Tax Preparer

Due to a multitude of problems with unaccredited tax preparers, the IRS recently enacted new regulations governing tax preparers, and now requires every paid preparer to register with the IRS. Paid preparers will soon be required to pass a competency test and engage in a minimum amount of continuing education. The quality of services offered by unaccredited preparers varies widely. Some are perfectly competent, while others are not.

An unaccredited preparer will offer the lowest rates for tax preparation, but will not likely offer advising services. If you do not earn significant income or if your finances are simple, an unaccredited preparer may be perfectly capable of handling your tax preparation for a good price.

An unaccredited preparer may represent the taxpayer with respect to the prepared return only before revenue agents, customer service representatives, or similar officers and employees of the IRS during an examination of the tax year covered by the return. However, unaccredited preparers may not represent the taxpayer before appeals officers, revenue officers, Chief Counsel personnel, or similar officers or employees of the IRS or the Department of the Treasury. Such representation is known as "limited practice." Thus, if you have a complicated audit issue that may go to appeal, you might be better off hiring a CPA or enrolled agent to represent you.

While unaccredited tax practitioners are not currently subject to a background check, the IRS is considering whether to implement a check.

Questions to Ask a Potential Preparer

These questions may help you decide if a preparer is right for you:

1. Do you provide tax-planning services? What is your rate for tax planning services as compared to your rate for tax preparation?
2. Do you send out a newsletter or other communications to advise clients of changes in tax law that may affect them?
3. What percentage of your time is spent on tax preparation and advising versus other types of services?
4. Do you handle a significant number of returns for self-employed taxpayers? Do you feel that you understand a writing business? What questions do you have for me about my writing business?
5. If I receive an audit notice, will you represent me in an audit? What are your rates for audit representation?
6. After you prepare my return, will you provide feedback regarding areas for potential tax savings or deductions I may have missed?

Diane Kelly is a CPA/tax attorney and the author of the humorous Death and Taxes mystery series from St. Martin's Press.

Business Briefs

The Devil You Know: Amazon's Price Check App

December began with booksellers getting angry at Amazon (again), this time for an app that enables brick-and-mortar bookstore shoppers to purchase books on-line—from Amazon—while browsing in the bookstore. A California bookstore produced buttons for the app that picture Jeff Bezos with horns. This app is reminiscent of the Used Book Blue Button that authors decried several years ago.

Publishers Weekly

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Showing Up

“Eighty percent of success is showing up.”
— Woody Allen

Welcome to my annual update on my perpetual New Year's resolution to make my book deadlines. (And you thought the seasonal fun was over.)

When I first introduced the subject in this column two years ago, confessing that it had been many years since I had made a deadline for a novel, I noted that I always seem to wind up being seated next to writers (on program panels, at dinners, in the bar) who say things like, “Someone burned down my house, shot my dog, and stole my Bible—but I made my deadline, even so.” And this tends to make me feel inadequate. Nor is the feeling illusory; after all, in terms of making book deadlines, I *am* inadequate.

On the other hand, my goal is much more mundane than finishing a book while bandits throw flaming spears at me through the shattered windows of my burning home as I continue typing away, undaunted by this distraction. No, indeed. I just want to make my deadlines in an ordinary sort of way. I don't strive to be one of those ubermensch writers who can deliver a book on time while also serving under heavy fire in Iraq, unexpectedly giving birth to triplets, and reorganizing the European Union.

Which is just as well, since there *is* a sense in which I was buried under a bandit-infested burning building for a while this past year, and that put me even further behind on my deadlines than usual. That is to say, I sustained a serious eye injury in summer that prevented me from writing (or reading, cooking, cleaning, driving, opening mail, speaking coherently, etc.) for about two months.

Back in 2005, after many years of being extremely nearsighted, I got elective PRK surgery on both eyes. PRK (photorefractive keratectomy) is recommended for certain patients (such as someone with a thin cornea) instead of Lasik, which is the more popular surgery for vision correction. PRK is also usually recommended for an “enhancement,” which is a second procedure done on an eye that has already undergone one vision correction surgery.

Prior to the PRK surgery, I had been someone who couldn't even leave my bedroom without my glasses. Ever since the surgery, I *loved* being someone who could see at all times, never dependent on glasses or contacts (in fact, I found contacts so uncomfortable that I had given up on them years before having the surgery). But by 2011, six years after the procedure, my left eye had grown nearsighted again.

The vision in my other eye had remained stable. However, I had chosen “monovision,” a treatment option in which one eye (my right eye) is left somewhat nearsighted. The advantage of this for someone past a certain age is that it means you don't need reading glasses. I rely on my right eye for reading and other close-up visual tasks, and on my left eye for distance. (Not everyone is comfortable with monovision. However, due to the substantial difference between my two eyes even back when I depended on glasses, I had unconsciously functioned this way for years. Therefore, monovision was not an adjustment for me.)

Thus with my right eye being nearsighted (though much improved over its pre-2005 level), the redevelopment of myopia in my left eye was very problematic for me. By 2011, I felt visually disoriented in unfamiliar places, I was having trouble seeing street signs when driving, and so on.

With this possible development in mind, I had paid for a lifetime plan when getting my original PRK surgery. Therefore I was eligible to get an enhancement on my left eye without spending more money. A thorough exam at the Lasik clinic confirmed that, apart from renewed myopia, my left eye was perfectly healthy and should respond fine to a second PRK procedure—especially since I'd had no problems after the first one. We scheduled the enhancement procedure on my left eye, and I cleared my calendar for a few days. ▶

The procedure went as expected, and so did my first post-op exam. However, there was concern at my next exam about some corneal cells that weren't healing. By the following day, all hell broke loose, and the eye surgeon diagnosed—and then spent the next three months treating me for—recurrent corneal abrasion (or erosion).

This is a condition that sometimes develops as the result of an injury to the cornea—such as scratching the eye with a fingernail, a contact lens being left in for too long ... or the eye responding to corneal surgery as an injury. The corneal cells that grow over the initial wound are, for some reason, unable to attach properly to the eye; so the eye gives up, sheds them, and grows some new ones, trying again to heal. Each time this happens, the cells leave behind a raw wound on the eye as they slough off. The bigger the wound, the longer the healing process takes. As the erosion incidents keep repeating, more cells attach properly to the eye each time, fewer cells are shed on the next go-round, and the resultant wound is smaller and covered more quickly by new cells each time. Until, finally, all cells are properly attached and the eye is fully healed.

In keeping with this prognosis, my initial abrasion, which covered about one-third of my cornea, lasted for twelve straight days of constant, intense pain; whereas my last one (as of this writing), three months later, was so small that it only caused sharp discomfort for about a half hour. The early attacks I experienced felt like there was a large fragment of broken glass stuck in my eye for days on end; the later attacks felt more like someone was sticking a needle into my eye for an hour or two.

(Sorry about the imagery.)

The good news is that, in most cases, recurrent corneal erosion is acute and curable rather than chronic or permanent, and (if treated properly) the condition usually heals fully after several months—though the eye is thereafter always more vulnerable than before and should be handled with care.

The bad news is that the cornea is extremely delicate, very vulnerable to infection, and rich with nerve endings—so this condition is excruciatingly painful. Although I was taking so many prescription painkillers every day that I was very disoriented and couldn't function at all (I often couldn't even converse coherently), I was still in mind-numbing pain, around the clock, for weeks. To give you some idea of just how bad it was, I stopped eating. As you probably know, that's one of the signs of the Apocalypse.

My light sensitivity was so severe that my twice-weekly visits to the eye doctor throughout this period were agonizing. People guided me around like a blind person, while I huddled under a broad-brimmed hat and behind dark sunglasses like a celebrity fleeing paparazzi. My condition was further complicated by the onset, after a couple of weeks, of severe ocular dryness and swelling, which may (or may not) have been a response to the treatment (which sometimes escalated to a regimen of a dozen daily applications of various eye medications).

Because of my intense light sensitivity, I could seldom even be near a computer screen—or a light, or a window, etc. And my painkiller-induced mental confusion ensured that I couldn't even really follow the plots when listening to audiobooks. So if someone had asked me during that period if my *deadlines* were on my mind, or if I *felt bad* about not writing ... I would have beaten that person to death with the ice pack that I held gingerly against my raging, swollen ocular region for about seven straight weeks.

Because I don't yearn to be an ubermensch. I just want to become competent and reliable at meeting book deadlines in an ordinary, unremarkable way. Self-immolation on the altar of my keyboard is not among my goals.

Fortunately, my recovery followed the path of my doctor's prognosis. After two months, I was able to return to most of my normal activities, which included gradually getting back to work as my bouts of eye pain and swelling became fewer and briefer. After three months, I was pronounced healed and ready to cease treatment—which is where I am at this time, leading a normal life, pain free (hooray!) seeing very well (yay!), and optimistic about this being all behind me now. (However, my doctor only pronounces patients with this condition "recovered" in hindsight; I will be considered cured one year after the final attack—which, as of this writing, was in November.)

So as we enter 2012, I'm running even further behind schedule than usual. But if eighty percent of success is just showing up—well, here I am, showing up once again, as I do every year, to chase my book deadlines.

Hello, 2012! Ready or not, here I come!

Fantasy novelist Laura Resnick's 2011 release was Vamparazzi. In 2012, DAW Books will reissue Disappearing Nightly (which Resnick revised after healing) and Polterheist (which she was still frantically writing when she delivered this column).

It's Dues Renewal Time...

Renew easily online at the NINC website: <http://www.ninc.com>. Remember to fill in the Authors Coalition form so that NINC can receive its fair share of the ACA funds. You need NINC, and NINC needs you. Please renew now.

P.I. Confidential

By Colleen Collins

P.I. Confidential: How a Sleuth Might Track a Missing Person

BY COLLEEN COLLINS

A large percentage of a real-life and fictional P.I.'s' work involves, to an extent, finding persons whose location is unknown to the P.I. For example, a person might be actively avoiding being found, such as a debtor who does not want to be served with a lawsuit. This person might come and go at odd hours or start shimmying in and out a back window instead of using the front door of her residence.

Sometimes the missing person case is more complex, such as a parent who has abducted his child and fled the jurisdiction. In such scenarios, people are more deliberate in their efforts, typically travel farther, and attempt to cover their tracks more thoroughly.

If you're writing a story with a P.I. or sleuth, your character might be hired to locate someone. A few techniques for finding a person whose location is unknown include:

- ▶ Searching databases that contain public records. There are numerous online public records that anyone can search, such as:
 - ▷ County assessors' sites have lists of owners of real property. If the person was not the owner of the residence, you'll find out who is. That owner/landlord might have information about the person's current whereabouts or know someone who does.
 - ▷ Privately owned cemeteries and mortuaries maintain burial permits, funeral service registers, funeral and memorial arrangements, obituaries, intermediate orders, and perpetual care arrangements. For example, if the missing person recently attended a funeral, a P.I. can find names of friends and relatives through some of these records.
 - ▷ The Social Security Death Index (<http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/ssdi>) provides lookups on whether a person is deceased.
- ▶ Interviewing past and current neighbors, as well as relatives, past and current landlords, co-workers, and known associates.
- ▶ Searching the Internet using Google and other search engines for blogs, images, news, and so forth. You'd be surprised what you can find by simply typing a telephone number into the Google browser, for example.
- ▶ Looking up bride/groom's names if there's been a recent wedding or one is in the works: The Wedding Channel (www.Weddingchannel.com). Often, photos and lists of guests are also posted.
- ▶ Checking Internet communities and social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We once located a missing person who was on the run, but she still found time to log into her MySpace account and blog away. One search engine that searches dozens of social networking sites with each lookup is Social Mention (www.SocialMention.com).

Conducting surveillances at locations where the subject has been known to hang out, from bars to exercise clubs to softball games.

▶

There are entire books written on the subject of finding missing persons—if you’re writing a story with a missing-person plot, considering purchasing a recent book on the topic. www.PIstore.com offers a wide variety of books on different investigative specializations.

There are also organizations whose websites offer help with networking, services, and resources to find people who are missing—below are several of these sites:

- ▶ Let’s Bring Them Home (www.Lbth.org): National missing adults program, partnered with Discovery Channel
- ▶ NamUs (www.NamUs.gov): National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, a clearing house for missing persons and unidentified decedent records
- ▶ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (www.Missingkids.com): Leading non-profit organization in the U.S. working with law enforcement to address issues involving missing and exploited children.

If your fictional sleuth specializes in missing persons, think about the following character traits:

- ▶ How tenacious is your character? This kind of research can be time-consuming, detailed, frustrating, with lots of dead-ends before finding a clue.
- ▶ Is your sleuth a people person? Because most likely he’ll be talking to a number of people and trying to, in the course of their conversations, pull the nuggets of information he needs.
- ▶ What kind of tools does your sleuth use? Does she have access to a computer, proprietary databases, an adequate vehicle to conduct surveillance? Is he knowledgeable about conducting research in public libraries, courthouses and the like?
- ▶ Does your sleuth incorporate all of the tools of the P.I. trade in her search, including trash hits at recently vacated residences for signs as to where the missing party might have been headed?
- ▶ Does your sleuth like putting together jigsaw puzzles? Because that’s what locating missing persons is like—assembling varied pieces of information from disparate sources to get, finally, a clear picture.

Colleen Collins is a professional private investigator, multi-published fiction author, and co-author of How to Write a Dick: A Guide for Writing Fictional Sleuths by a Couple of Real-Life Sleuths available on [Kindle](#) and [Nook](#). Her current release is The Zen Man, a “21st-Century Nick and Nora” mystery.

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