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

New York, New York!

2002 Ninc Conference Report

BY OLIVIA RUPPRECHT

Ah, yes. New York, New York! As we all know, and all too well, if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. Old Blue Eyes didn't lie about that, and neither can I. Truth be told, this article is a collaborative effort. Rather than try cramming two and a half days into a boring, dry report, I wanted to put you in the moment as much as possible. How? By capturing our members on tape while they were in the marvelous midst of it all.

Without any particular order, here's a sampling of what they had to say:

"I was thrilled to listen to the editor of *Library Journal* and how that works—how libraries buy, both the big libraries like the New York Public System and then a small library from Illinois was there as well. I'm very interested in library sales and this was a very smart panel. Good information, I really enjoyed it." (Julie Tetel Andresen)

"Being here is like the Ninlink digest expanded—it's like you get the deluxe version in person. People are sharing their feelings about what they're doing, they're networking; just so many opportunities to get information....I was really encouraged to hear how much more of a push libraries are making, and I was

amazed when they talked about buying 100 or more copies of a single book to feed into the New York Library system, so there's really a market with libraries out there. In branch libraries they'll track what the patrons gravitate to and try to earmark a portion of their dollars to purchase books in a particular genre if there's a demand for it. One of the representatives from the Illinois system said they're even training genre experts so they can speak knowledgeably about mystery or science fiction or romance and make recommendations to readers, almost like a bookstore..." (Sharon Schultz)

"I have had my suspicions confirmed and it's reassuring to know you're not alone in the ups and downs of the business—no matter how many books an author has published, they've been there, too. As for the information we're getting from the panelists, there's a level of professionalism with questions and answers that you don't always get at other conferences—it's like the other side of the table knows we've been around and they can't break our spirits, so they're direct and upfront with their responses." (Sharon Antonowitz)

"One of the most impressive sessions I attended was on subsidiary rights, which featured speakers from the Mystery

Book Club and Audio Books. What I think most of us were startled to hear is that agents and editors and publishers are not always on task about seeing that your rights to audio books or book clubs are exercised—that it's often up to you to get after them to push your book in that direction; nowadays with audio books particularly, they're simultaneously released with the printed version. That means they can't wait for a galley, it needs to come at the manuscript stage, so it has to be bing-bing-bing acted on right away to get it all coordinated. Books that come out in audio form will often encourage people to go out and buy the written copy, so it's something worth putting your energy into getting done." (Joyce Ware)

"As always I go for the marketing information and it's encouraging that new lines are being started—there's movement in the industry now after so many years of doom and gloom. Harlequin mentioned that they're launching a women's fiction inspirational line in 2003 and they're actively looking for books that are 80,000 to 125,000 words. They're also expanding Red Dress Inc. to include female protagonists in their 40s and 50s (the audience nicknamed it Mama-Lit or Geezer-Lit).

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

Hidden somewhere in this column is the secret to obtaining your discounts if you were kicked out of the Marriott at the conference. Read carefully!

By the time I sit down in the evenings to write these columns, my brain is fried. When the *NINK* editor suggested that I expound upon the parts of the conference that struck me most, my first thought was: how do I write about the Naked Cowboy? He wears white jockeys covered by a guitar, cowboy boots, a cowboy hat, and he stands on street corners. I'm sure he's a metaphor for something.

Then I decided that since from all reports, no one is reading stories about cowboys these days, not even naked ones, he isn't a column option. Cowboy lovers will have to look elsewhere.

I considered creating an analogy between the Ninc conference and a writer's life. Just think about it. As writers, we've learned to divert, subvert, or otherwise overcome adversity in our careers. If a publisher tells us to take a hike, that we're small potatoes and not worth their effort (as the hotel essentially did) we apply our creativity and not only fight back, but get even. We hire kick-ass agents—and the inestimable Kate Dooley is a travel agent with a whopping big stick—to take us elsewhere, get us more, and prove we can't be kept down. It was rough there for a while, but we came out ahead in the end. Maybe cowboy writers should take heed?

Or perhaps I should compare the conference to a writer's ability and willingness to communicate on every level. We share our lives, our ideas, and our beliefs with our readers in hopes of reaching out and touching others, or at least entertaining them. That's precisely what we did at our conference, although instead of readers, we spoke with people on every level of the industry: the editors who buy our books, the marketing personnel who promote them, the distributors who rack them on the shelves, the publishers, the agents, the librarians. Everyone. We shared our ideas, our questions, our hopes, and they shared theirs. We opened discussions on a number of thorny issues, and knock wood, opened a few minds at the same time. As with our books, some readers don't like what we have to say, but we at least made ourselves heard. And better yet, we got instant responses.

But to me, the best thing about the conference was a step *outside* of the writer's life. I don't know about you, but my life is a solitary one. I sit all day in my office in old clothes staring at a computer screen that only talks back to me when it says *You've Got Mail*. (There are days when I attempt to edit that line of dialogue.) The conference was a chance to remember that I own normal clothes, and that I even have a few pair of shoes in the back of my closet. It's a chance to sit in the bar and talk with other writers. It's a chance to eat great food and talk face to face with editors and agents, exchange ideas, make contacts, hear the industry gossip just as the big boys in the penthouse offices do. As a result of that extra stimulus, it's hard to say how many ideas were generated, how many stories were developed, or how many deals were initiated. Isn't that what New York is about, wheeling and dealing?

Did I mention making deals? As I promised at the beginning of this column, we've got one for you. For those of you who were bumped from the Marriott to the Crowne Plaza, Kate has negotiated a few perks aside from the ones we enjoyed while we were there. Your hotel bill should have been reduced to \$179 a night, your local calls should have been eliminated, and you should be receiving a letter from the Marriott Marquis offering a free night's stay at any time of your choice. If you didn't receive the discounts when you checked out, contact Kate Dooley at Mountain State Travel 800-344-6602 or e-mail at NINC2000Conf@yahoo.com.

— Pat Rice

INTRODUCING.....

The following authors have applied for membership in *Ninc* and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of *Ninc*:

New Applicants:

Stephanie Doyle, Marlton NJ

New Members:

Linda Barrett, Houston TX
Nicole Burnham,
Hopkinton MA

Tracy Fobes, Yardley PA
Marcia King Gamble, Tamarac FL
Toni Herzog (*Toni Blake, Toni Blair*),
Crescent Springs KY
Dara Joy, Randolph MA
Jody Lynn Nye,
Barrington IL
Alice Orr (*Elizabeth Allison*),
Burton WA
Paxton Riddle,
Shelton CT
M.J. Rose, Greenwich CT
Maura Seger (*Josie Litton*),
Stamford CT

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recommend membership to
your colleagues.**

**Prospective members may
apply online
at www.ninc.com.**

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WHEN YOU RENEW or
JOIN IN 2003....**

You can save the international postage surcharge by notifying *Ninc* that you'll read *NINK* online at the website, www.ninc.com

New York, New York!

Continued from page 1 ▶▶▶

Maggie Crawford from Pocket said they're launching a new line called Downtown Press for chick-lit and they're actively seeking manuscripts. Also, Warner Forever is launching in January 2003, coming out with two books a month and they're open to everything. The children's and young adult market are really hot, plus a bookseller said they have a totally separate section for teens now. NAL, Avon/Harper, Warner, Harlequin were all represented and they all seem to be actively looking for books...Laura Baker and her staff are to be congratulated on putting together some real heavy weight panels; as always the NINC conference has been wonderful." (Shirley Hailstock)

"I think I learn the most from conversations people are holding, and I kind of worm my way in and find out what they're doing, what they've heard. And then you listen to a panel—these are just fabulous, people that don't show up at a lot of other conferences are here. Questions are raised, concerns addressed... totally professional. I love it!" (Kathleen Eagle)

"I'm so sold on these conferences. They're full of industry professionals and I always learn something new. Today I learned the process to get a book into the book clubs, something I knew a little about but now I know a whole lot more.

A lot of us have book rights that are handled by a department we never see, they're like a phantom department with the publisher, and you don't really know if you're being offered to the book clubs. You have to submit a manuscript well in advance, you can't wait for a galley, and you could do it then refer them to your publisher—but it's a problem because there's so many authors and the book club reps have a tendency to focus on the major bestsellers. Some of us may be totally skipped over if we don't take an active hand in it ourselves, so if the publisher won't act on your behalf, you could go to the web page for the book club and see who's in charge of acquisitions..." (Carole Nelson Douglas)

"The best thing is getting together with other writers—letting down our hair, talking shop—because we lead such isolated lives. This is such a comfortable group; we're not trying to impress each other. Occasionally I think some of our speakers forget they're dealing with seasoned professionals, but overall the panels are amazing—I mean, Irwyn Applebaum, Al Zuckerman, Michael Cader, Donna Hayes and all these other top people in the industry, all together in one sitting. How often does an author have access to a group like that? Great conference, great conference!" (Barbara Keiler)

"What I've always been impressed with is the ability of the organization to

bring out top key players in the industry. It's always important to get behind the scenes, get into the executive suite to find out what the editorial directors and vice presidents are thinking, the people in charge of marketing and promotion. That is very vital information for me as a writer, and you can't get it at any other level and you can't get it anywhere else except at our conferences. What I learn is very important from a business standpoint, which is also an integral aspect of a writer's career." (Sandra Kitt)

"Ninc gives a published author a place to go to talk about his or her work, and that of fellow writers. Those of us who've been in the business 15 or 20 years, know that it's cyclical and coming together like this, we can hear stories, share stories—maybe they're war stories, but that's part of the business, too. This gives us a chance to realize that we are veteran writers, we're good, we have to keep up with our craft, and even if things get tough, life goes on, there are more books to sell—and to write!" (Laura Parker)

As we all know, going to a conference can be intimidating for anyone, but particularly for those who have never attended a particular organization's conference before. And so, let's hear what some of our first-time at- ▶▶▶

New York, New York!



tendees had to say after the first day:

"I think one of the biggest differences between this and some of the larger conferences is the air of relaxation. That's not to say there isn't some level of tension professionally—that's just the nature of the publishing world—but you feel that if you say something it's not going to be jumped on and repeated accidentally somewhere else, and that's what allows people to let down their hair. And I think the minute you do that, you get a keener perspective and insight into what this world's really about. I've written six books and I'm looking to the future. This trip has been very valuable on several levels, one of them being that I've gained insights from people who know a helluva lot more than I do about this business. I'll definitely come back to the next conference." (Lynn Miller)

"I found what I was looking for here—not so much in the workshops, but in the other writers who are here. I've been having some conflicts about what I'm writing and how I'm writing it and I've figured out a lot by speaking to people and learning from their experiences. Now I have a much clearer idea about what I really need to do. I feel like I can go home and start working and be producing what I want to produce." (Debra Mullins)

"I've been very impressed by the entire conference. The panel discussions have been wonderful, the people are very professional. There's a lot here for the published author, no matter what level you're at. You can find a lot to enrich your whole professional life, and I would certainly attend again." (Dara Joy)

There were many other enthusiastic remarks, but I'm sure you get the picture. As for hard information not yet mentioned, Pat Roy did a bang-up job of taking notes and condensing them into a post on our link. She has kindly consented to sharing her insights with us all.

Good news—people have been buying books (and presumably reading them) in ever increasing numbers since shortly after the 9/11 lull. The agents, almost to a one, said they've had one of their best years in a long time. More books were put out last year than ever before. According to

the editor of Publishers Weekly, the increase is due to small presses, not the New York crowd... the publishers seem similarly enthusiastic. Avon is putting out a trade paperback line.

Talk about trends in story lines was inconclusive. Romantic suspense is still hot, though one and all felt the serial killer genre had been overdone and some thought that legal thrillers were similarly saturating the market.

Bill Golliber from Anderson News talked about their program to get books in more retail outlets—drug stores, etc., and targeting demographics via what magazines are bought at which outlet. Though Amazon's used-book business is distasteful, apparently their sales are very small.

Book clubs are increasing in popularity. Jill Conner Browne (author of Sweet Potato Queen's Book of Love) talked about how much fun she has with her Eatin' and Readin' Clubs around the country.

There was much talk in the hospitality area about "the book of your heart" being your fun book, the one you play at when your contracted books get you down. Curious that though we are continually urged to ignore trends and just write the "book of your heart," often the same book can't be sold for love nor money.

Thank you, Pat! And depressing as that last statement is, I do have an anecdote Al Zuckerman passed on that falls into the "laugh to keep from crying" category. The story was about a poor novelist friend of his who'd had to borrow \$200 from another friend for utilities while he waited for his royalties to come in (assuming there would be some). His phone is about to be turned off as Al met him for lunch, so the nearly starving artist implored Al to help him "fix" whatever was wrong with his books so he could start making a decent living. Al knew them to be good solid books and had to admit there was nothing he could do to fix them. The good agent's conclusion: "What can I say? The whole situation was just really depressing."

"Well, did you at least pay for his lunch?" shouted someone from the audience.

Nita Taublib also admitted that the heartbreak of the business is that great books can flounder while not-so-great books can flourish.

On a lighter note, it was almost worth the conference fee just to hear John Baker (VP and Editorial Director of *Publishers Weekly*) taunt Irwyn Applebaum by saying the expected profits of scale weren't happening with the big publishing conglomerates and his earnest hope is that the business will break back up into 1,000 independents.

Irwyn shoots back, "Yeah, and we're trying to figure out how to bust up that monopoly called *Publishers Weekly*!"

Tom Doherty, President and Publisher of Tor/Forge was impressive with his passion for both books and the business of selling them. He made bold statements like, "Wholesalers are our future, our outreach, and we don't give them the respect they deserve for this outreach that the future depends on for us." He went on to offer Gallop stats on what prompts people to buy books. Here's the breakdown:

27% said they purchase books because of the author

26% buy on recommendation from friends and family

24% plunk down their dollars as a result of attractive physical packaging

6% were swayed by advertising

Mr. Doherty then broke the advertising venues down: 3% were persuaded by magazine ads, and 1% each for radio, TV, and newspapers. His conclusion? It makes a lot more sense for a publisher to spend their bucks on physical packaging (artwork, type size, cover copy, endorsements, content...) than marketing something out the kazoo that *might* get 6% more sales as a result.

Let's see, 24% vs. 6%. Hard to argue with that.

It's also hard to argue with Richard Curtis's view that "Few pleasures are greater in this world than opening an envelope and shaking out a check for doing absolutely nothing." He and other top agents strongly cautioned against giving away world rights to publishers since an author can actually make as much or more money in foreign sales as from domestic ones. In fact, we were told, foreign sales on many titles account for 40% of fiction revenues. And then there was the example of an American author who didn't do too well sales-wise in the U.S. but the readers in Germany were wild for him, so he ended up with a successful on-going career there and a fairly non-existent one here. Clearly he had an agent doing something to shake that money out of an envelope.

Winding things up, I'd like to share something on a personal note. I've been to many of our conferences, oft-times in a reporting capacity. Yet this one was different from a professional standpoint. After having 18 books see print with various publishers, I bowed out from writing fiction several years ago for both professional and personal reasons. So when I showed up this year, I initially felt awkward, unsure. I wondered, what right did I have to be amongst those actively writing books and getting them sold when I've taken a long hiatus from the novel-writing game?

This question plagued me as I pasted on a smile and put on my best clothes to mix and mingle amongst my colleagues.... who somehow never considered me to not still be one of them. A writer is a writer is a writer, perhaps. But whatever the reason, how nice to have one's opinion sought for story problems, editor/agent problems, and the like.

And how unexpected to make valuable contacts who could help advance my nonfiction writing goals. Those goals include freelance editing, ghost writing, and a non-fiction project that's been near and dear to my heart for quite some time.

I left New York exhausted (hey, just ask Frank, who goes there to sleep?). Yes, exhausted and totally awed by the professional avenues that unexpectedly opened wide; enveloped by a sense of completion that only the comfort of other writers can provide.

Now, in anticipation of EVERYONE making it to the next unforgettable Ninc Conference, I've made it a goal to stock up on several cases of affordable champagne (read: Andre) so we can all raise a toast in unison:

"Here's to the fellowship of storytellers!"

As for those of us fortunate enough to gather together in New York, oh what stories we still have to tell. Like the "naked cowboy" in tighty-whities strumming his guitar on Times Square, Nita Taublib proclaiming that she buys the books she wants to pass on to her sister (forget Oprah, just *where* is that sister?), Laura Resnick's playwright debut on Broadway that garnered a standing ovation and brought down the house with Barbara Keiler simulating an orgasm....

Olivia Rupprecht gratefully acknowledges her peers who contributed to this article. Further contributions in the form of cash or champagne sent to her personal address are not tax deductible but will be gratefully acknowledged as well.

Bits'n'Pieces

TRIDENT MERGES WITH ELLEN LEVINE...Robert Gottlieb's two-year-old Trident Media Group merged with the Ellen Levine Literary Agency in what's called a "partnership deal." The combined agency flies under the Trident banner, and expects to occupy new office space together later this year. Levine is a partner and senior officer of the group, and her director of foreign rights Diana Finch holds the title of agent and associate managing director of foreign rights. Trident noted that, in addition to the merger, the agency recently signed *New York Times* bestsellers Michael Capuzzo and Ninc's own *Regis and Kelly* media star <g> Carly Phillips as clients.

RUMOR IN PRINT...Penguin Dropping Putnam?...The *New York Observer* printed the rumor that Penguin will drop Putnam from their corporate name. Robert Cavosi "would not deny the information outright, but said, 'Nothing's imminent and nothing's been finalized.'"

AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOOK CLUB...Essence Launches Book Club...With its October issue, Essence magazine named four backlist selections (Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, and Louise Meriwether's *Daddy Was a Number Runner*) as part of its new book club program. New titles, to be selected quarterly, will be based on both reader and editor choices. Book editor Patrik Henry Bass was quoted as saying, "The moment Oprah retired her book club, we decided to go ahead with ours, but we wanted to let the dust settle... Our readers trust us. We believe we've set the standard for coverage of black authors and books about African-American culture."

AND A SPANISH LANGUAGE BESTSELLER LIST...Criticas Launches Bestseller List...Criticas's first list of bestselling books in Spanish was introduced on a Univision talk show. One revelation: "As in English-language lists, translations tend not to sell well. Original versions of Latin America's best-known novelists, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*, No. 6, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, No. 7, beat out Spanish translations of Tom Clancy and John Grisham." Included on the list were the familiar elements such as self-help and Harry Potter.

iUniverse MAKES "MINOR LEAGUE" DEAL TO REFER BOOKS TO KENSINGTON...

iUniverse announced a partnership with Kensington Publishing wherein the POD self-publisher will more formally serve as a "minor league team" directing books that show modest signs of success to the publisher's romance imprint for consideration. Self-pubbed titles selling more than 500 copies in six months will be eligible for review by an outside board; if the board likes the books, they'll be sent on to Kensington for consideration. If Kensington picks up rights to any of the books, iUniverse gets a percentage of the proceeds.

Filed by Terey daly Ramin

More Bits, page 7....

Tricks of the Trade

BY RONN KAISER

TIPS: Part Two

There once was a time when I was an organized person. I refer to it as my anal-retentive phase. My life was lived logically, carefully, consciously, responsibly. Then I became a writer.

Now life gets in the way of what I do. MacBeth, I discovered, is more real than Shakespeare. My characters crowd out most everything in the world but my family and even they get exasperated with my absent-minded behavior. (Can imaginary love or imaginary murder really be more important than an anniversary or a school play?) We writers must take the Fifth more often than we would like.

But even writers have a need for love and approval, so we can't piss-off our loved ones *too* often. And since we must eat, we also have to accommodate those nagging editors, the bill collectors and the IRS (but if you're like me, only minimally). What this means is that writers have to descend from Olympus for a few hours from time to time to tend to life. Do you find keeping the nitty-gritty stuff straight a painful experience? A primary cause of those migraines? Well **Sylvie Kurtz** has the solution for you.

Says Sylvie, "An organizational tool I use and love is from a management book called *Getting Things Done* by David Allen. It's a tickler file system — much easier to explain with a graphic. You need forty-three folders. Thirty-one labeled 1 through 31 and twelve labeled January through December. The daily files are kept in front, beginning with the file for tomorrow's date (if today is October 22, then the first file is October 23). The succeeding files represent days of the rest of the month (24 through 31). Behind the 31 file is the November file and behind that are files 1-22.

"The first thing I do every day when I sit at my desk is empty the file and do the 'must dos' for the day—this includes notes I've dumped in there about following up on whatever needs to be followed up on this specific day—bills that need to be paid this specific day, calls I need to make, birthday cards that need to go out that day, etc. If it's a monthly thing (like a mortgage), then I do it and refile it in the file for the next month (i.e. if it's October, I'll put it in the November file). If it's a yearly thing, then I refile it in the monthly file (i.e. if it's October, I'll put it back in the October file).

"On the first day of every month, I take the monthly file (i.e. on November 1, I'll take the November file), empty it of all the notes I've tucked in there and file them in the specific daily files. That way every day I start with the must dos and get them out of the way. It sounds complicated, but it's actually simplified things and helps keep me on track."

Okay, now that your personal and business life is organized, let's do something about your creative life. (Yes, our subconscious minds, prolific as they may be, can use a little help from time to time.) Following are some helpful tips in organizing your writing:

Carole Bellacera likes the Marshall Plan Workbook, available from *Writers Digest*. It contains some tear-out sheets that help keep characters and their attributes straight. One is a sheet where you can list minor characters, their physical description, and personality traits. "I keep it right near my keyboard," Carole says, "so I can refer to it whenever one of those pesky minor characters show up, and I can't remember what they look like."

Annette Mahon has developed her own method for dealing with characters that's similar to the Marshall Plan. She has separate files for the various aspects of her books. Says Annette, "I always have one labeled either 'names' or 'characters' where I list each name as I add it to the manuscript so that I don't repeat myself. I also check that none of the names are so close in spelling that they might be confusing to a reader. I often add a few physical characteristics for the main characters, especially age. As I add names for new characters, I jot down short references like 'heroine's sister,' or 'neighbor.'"

Along the same lines, Annette has another file she calls her "outline" file. "There," she says, "I jot down a brief sentence or two about each chapter. I open a separate file for each chapter, so this provides a place to go when I can't remember where a particular scene is. (And I always seem to have to reference an earlier scene, either because of something happening later that is influenced by it, or because of an inspiration for revising it.) I also put down a time and place reference for each chapter. This helps me keep the timeline correct as I move through the story and is a quick way to figure out what day of the week it is in a new scene."

Vicki Hinze keeps her organizational materials for each book in a 3-ring binder which is divided into sections. "When it's done," Vicki explains, "I dump the entire contents into an envelope with the title on it, and store it. That way, research, notes, correspondence, character traits — everything — is handy to use during the writing, and handy to find later, when the memory is gone and queries come in from editors/copyeditors."

Ever let a minor thread drop or forget to tie up a loose end in your story? **Jean Brashear** has a nifty method for dealing with that. "I have a sheet of paper," Jean explains, "on which I put a sticky note each time I set up something, then I pull it off later when I've resolved it or hit that second beat. That way I can tell at a glance if I've left anything hanging, rather than trust my sieve of a brain. The big stuff's easy to keep in your mind because it's the meat of your story, but particularly when I've got several major characters, each with his own thread going, this failsafe for the little stuff helps."

Daphne Clair has this tip for Word users: "If anyone else is frustrated by not having the path of a document visible in Word 97 and up—go to tools/customize/ commands/web. Click on "address" in the r/hand pane and move it up to wherever on your toolbar you want it. You can move it around and adjust the width so long as you have the commands window open. When you close, it is fixed. Now you will know in which drive and/or directory your document is at all times. Handy if you work with different versions of a document, or use A: and C: or a backup drive."

You know the old saw about getting your fingers burnt? **Patricia Bray** is a fanatic about backing up files, but don't ask her

why. After an early, near tragic experience, Patricia not only saves regularly and uses a wordprocessor with an automatic backup feature, but she also copies files to a diskette or CDROM, keeping a copy in a safe deposit box or other fireproof container. Additionally, Patricia purchased an automatic backup program, NTP's Backup Now! She says, "I set up the program so it checks the working directory I use for my writing, and backs up any new or changed files. It also backs up my email address book and my web pages. You can schedule the backup job to run at regular intervals, thus removing the need to make backups a conscious decision." A woman prepared.

We all know about the emotional pain associated with writing, but any writer who's been at it a while can tell you there can be physical pain as well. **Anne Holmberg** bought an extra large monitor, but found looking up at it caused strain on her neck, shoulders and arms. Says Anne, "After experimentation, I found that lowering the monitor to the level of my keyboard (I put it on a small...table...24 inches from the floor), then propping my feet on a stool and setting the keyboard in my lap not only made the monitor easier to see, but eliminated...the strain."

Jo Beverley's solution is the Aeron chair. I'm with you, Jo, though so far I've had to admire them from afar. But if I ever get a check from my publisher larger than the rent and my grocery bill, I'll be the first in line at the office furniture store!

As for the mental preparation for writing, **Carole Bellacera** recommends listening to music appropriate to the project she's working on, noting that, "it helps that my heroine enjoys the same kind of music I do, and loves to sing along with Guns'N Roses." And to clear her mind, **Annette Mahon** finds that "playing solitaire on the computer is great! My favorites — free cell (of course) and spider solitaire."

I've been working on a computer since '85 and confess I still haven't graduated up to the level of "computers for dummies." Even so, let me pass on this tip for the two or three of you who haven't heard it yet (I've known it for a whole year now). Do you get annoyed by the habit computers have of displaying your documents/chapters in list files, thus: 1,10,11,12, 13, 14, 15, 16,17,18,19, 2, 20, 21, 22...3, 31, 32,...4, 41, 42, etc.? Somebody once explained to me to get documents displayed in *actual* numerical order all you have to do is number the single digit documents 01, 02, 03, 04. Duh...

Incredible how naive (stupid?) we can be about some things, isn't it? Like the Western author I once met who told me he was so green and badly informed when he first started writing that he thought manuscripts were supposed to look like printed books. Noting the right margin justification in printed material, he proceeded to write an *entire* novel on a *typewriter* changing word choices and sentence structure so that every line ended at the same margin stop! He actually thought it was the writer's responsibility to make the printing look good on the page. The fellow went on to publish twenty-some novels, admitting that the others were much easier to write than the first. True story!

Personally, I think ol' Bob deserved a million dollar advance for succeeding in finishing the book without going crazy. Just goes to show, if you want to write badly enough, there ain't nothin' that's goin' to stop ya.

Is there a January topic already in the works? The whole section about topic and "send in...." was not at the end of

this column????????????????

HELP WANTED

Ever dream of the fame and fortune that goes with being a columnist for *NINK*? Here's your chance to put your name on the map. Ronn needs help and "Tricks of the Trade" needs fresh blood. The ideal candidate will be bright, energetic, literate, willing to work long hours for psychic pleasure, and look like Michelle Pfeiffer (or not). Duties include gathering and collating the collective wisdom of Ninc members on an alternating monthly basis. That's only six columns per year (less if three or more persons job-share). Send your application and \$25.00 processing fee (or not) to Jasmine Cresswell, editor at Jasmine444@aol.com. Your questions and comments are invited.

Bits'n'Pieces

AND A NEW TWIST ON THE BOOK - MOBILE...Print-On-Demand Van Delivers

Books Across the Country...As Salon reports, "The Internet Bookmobile is a van on a mission: to drive across the country, stopping at schools, museums and libraries, making books for kids and spreading the word about the digital library that is the Net." The print-on-demand van is equipped with a satellite dish, duplexing color printer, a \$1,200 desktop binding machine and paper cutter. Signage indicates, "We download a book from the Internet. We print it out, put a binding around it, you get to pick the book you want. The idea is to put books on the Internet. We can do this with these books because they're in something called the public domain. That means they're free! We think there should be lots of books in the public domain." It also proclaims "1,000,000 books inside (soon)." Yeah, well, don't get excited. They're really only mostly working with selected titles from the 6,000 texts at Project Gutenberg. But yes, indeed, it could get interesting in the copyright wars. Stay tuned.

— TdR

More Bits, Page 11....

The Buzz in the Biz.....by Olivia Rupprecht

One of the highlights at this year's conference in New York was getting acquainted with Karen Moy and Kathie Fong Yoneda. Although their professional data has appeared in *NINK* before, an abbreviated version bears repeating for anyone just tuning in:

Karen Moy is VP of Creative Affairs at Columbia Pictures, where she's overseen the story department for over five years. Other stints include Sony, story editor for Tristar Pictures, and development executive for Jade Rose Productions, Rebecca De Mornay's production company. She's also been a freelance story analyst for Orion and the Disney Channel.

Kathie Fong Yoneda has developed films and animated TV series including *Strictly Business*, *Toy Soldiers*, *Big Business*, *Stakeout*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *Picture Bride*, *Aladdin*, *Goof Troop*, and *the Little Mermaid*. Currently under contract to Paramount TV, she's also an independent script consultant whose list includes award-winning writers, has conducted workshops worldwide, and is the author of *The Script Selling Game*.

And that's the abbreviated version. Whew! Yet these two industry veterans, with nearly 50 years of combined experience in the film industry, turned out to be equally impressive on a personal level. Funny, down-to-earth, smart, ambitious but not at the expense of others. Oh, and did I mention they're beautiful?

Since space won't allow for our entire conversation, we'll skip the details on Karen's cute boyfriend and lots of other fun stuff. Not to say the rest isn't fun, too. So read on, pick up some tips, and enjoy getting to know them yourself!

NINK: The two of you seem very close. Just when and how did you meet?

Kathie Fong Yoneda: We met in 1985—

Karen Moy: We didn't work together but we met in the business—

KFY: And there were so few Asians, especially Asian women. There were basically three of us at the time in a huge industry—

KM: And if you heard something like, "Hey, guess what, so-and-so from this or that studio is from Hawaii," you'd go meet them. So there was a strong networking amongst Asian executives or aspiring executives at that time, in the mid-'80s. I think it was at a birthday party for a colleague that Kathie and I really started talking.

NINK: And were you and Kathie executives then or still aspiring to be?

KM: I had just come out of film school and was struggling, trying to find any kind of work. But Kathie was further along with her career—

KFY: (laughing) I was older!

KM: You were more experienced, Kathie.

KFY: More experienced, okay, I can handle that.

NINK: (to Kathie) What made you want to get in the industry to begin with? Were you into movies and TV as a kid?

KFY: I've always been a movie freak. I love movies. They used to have these Saturday matinees and you'd trade in your little soda bottle caps and go see a free movie—they had double fea-

tures then, that's how long ago it was. But academically I started out as a journalism major in the arts program at Sacramento Junior College, then I moved down to L.A. to go to the California Fashion Institute, which is kind of a bizarre thing, but I wanted to do something creative. My parents, on the other hand, wanted me to have a stable job, working as a teacher or a pharmacist, something dependable. I ended up taking off on my own and doing fashion design, only to find it unsatisfying. Eventually, I started doing extra work around the camera, little bit parts, and it would get really boring, mostly sitting around waiting, so I'd pick up scripts and read them. I was much more interested in that aspect of it—I'm a voracious reader, can't sit still without a book or something to read—so I started out at the bottom, in the typing pool. I was the first Asian woman hired full time at Universal Studios—like, over 30 years ago! It was at a time when the U.S. government was thinking of basically suing the motion picture and television industry for discrimination.

NINK: And how is it now?

KFY: It's not great but it's better, maybe 10%, 15% of minorities. It used to be that I could walk around for a whole week at a studio and not see another person of color.

NINK: And what about you, Karen?

KM: I was born and raised in Los Angeles, and got a business degree at USC. Then the summer after I graduated I did some soul searching about what I really wanted to do. I didn't want to work for IBM or a major corporation like that, so I decided to go back to school, into the film program at USC. It was a good basis from which to meet other people who were starting out at the same place—aspiring directors, writers and producers. I got jobs as an assistant, a reader and, like Kathie, ended up staying on the development side, which is the very beginning, before movies get put in front of the camera. We're often the first people to see a potential project.

KFY: The Guardian of the Gate, so to speak.

NINK: Are you still in development because you want to be there?

KM: I do!

KFY: Me, too!

NINK: But you're in more of an executive role, aren't you?

KFY: I went up through the ranks and got into the executive capacity. Karen is still in an executive capacity. I left it because I got to a point where I wanted a little more balance in my life, I wanted to get back to actually working with writers. Because once you start to move up and become a VP, you often become saddled with casting, or holding the hand of the director to make sure his interests are taken care of, doing the stuff the producer doesn't want to do, all those kinds of things. And those weren't the things I was interested in. I wanted to get back to the roots of working with writers and their material.

NINK: Have either of you thought of writing a screenplay yourself?

KM: You know, I had to take a screenwriting class and I have the utmost respect for screenwriters because it's a really tough job. The problem is, when you read a lot of material, you tend to be over-critical of your own work. Funny, though, when I think about writing something, it would be in another medium—like fiction. Part of it is probably an antidote to reading scripts day in and day out, and knowing what's great about that medium, and what the limitations are to it. For example, you can't get really deep into a character because it's the actor's job to flesh a character out and make it their own. So something like a novel seems really appealing, being able to take forever to write it—

NINK: (laughing) Not if you want to get published and stay that way, you can't!

KM: Well, believe me, it's nothing I would do to try to live on because I know how difficult that would be. So the idea of writing a novel, or a memoir, is just more of a reaction to constantly reading scripts—some good scripts, and many more not-so-good scripts. But I started as a junior development executive assistant, a story analyst—like what Kathie does for Paramount—and you'll get people who say, "God, it must be the best job in the world to get paid to read," and I have to remind them that being paid to read means you've gotta finish everything that comes in, no matter how BAD it is.

NINK: What? You have to read every submission from start to finish? No 15-second read, then off your desk and out the door with a form letter, if it doesn't immediately grab you?

KM: As an executive you can maybe get away with that.

KFY: As a union analyst, you can't get away with that.

KM: There has to be somebody on staff at the studio that gives every submission a thorough perusal, writes up a summary, writes up comments, and then hopefully if it's good, more people will take a look at it. But it is time-consuming, whether the material is good or not. That's why we can't accept unsolicited work

NINK: How many people do you have in your department doing this?

KM: At Columbia we have 11 fulltime story analysts.

KFY: We had up to 15 when I was at Disney.

NINK: How would someone go about breaking into that part of the industry?

KFY: The way it works, there's the first reader. There are freelance readers and then story analysts that are the studio readers. Studio readers have to be in the union and it's really hard to get in, so most people start off doing freelance—it's how most of my friends got their start as story analysts. As a freelance reader, you not only have to love to read, but have to sacrifice a lot of time and energy because you make considerably less money and have to run all around town to three or four different production companies, trying to keep yourself busy. I think nowadays the going rate for a freelance reader is \$50 to \$75 per script.

KM: That means reading it, and then summarizing it, writing comments on it. It's time-intensive and can take hours. So you have to be fast—and good—to make it work. Otherwise, it won't pay the rent. And I can't say it's good for someone who wants to be a screenwriter to be reading all this other material.

KFY: I've actually had to fire some of my readers because they were themselves aspiring screenwriters and I didn't feel their comments properly reflected the respect due to someone else's

project, that obviously their comments and feelings were colored by the fact that they hadn't made it as far themselves. It hasn't happened a lot, but there can easily be a conflict of interest in such situations.

NINK: Since we're on the subject of scripts, I was surprised by how many similarities the business of writing novels had with The Script Selling Game.

KFY: Linda Lael Miller, who's a good friend, was the first to bring that to my notice. I was staying over at her house once and typing up a presentation about a ten-point check list for a finished script. Linda asked to see it and said, "Kathie, you could change script to novel and it would be totally applicable. Do you mind if I make a copy of this and share it with my group?" I told her "sure" and the next thing I know, the list has started making the rounds and I'm getting invited to speak at all these conferences! So, there are a lot of similarities between getting your book sold and getting a script sold—particularly when it comes to pitching.

NINK: Ah yes, pitching. It's definitely part of the art of the deal—a part most of us tend to dread.

KFY: Writing is such an insular thing to do, it's not surprising that most writers hate to pitch, whether it's a book or a script. For novelists it can be particularly hard because you're having to distill hundreds of pages into a few sentences, while a screenwriter has to boil down 100 to 120 pages, which translates to a minute of film per page. What's valuable for a screenwriter, or even a novelist wanting to have their book considered for the screen, is doing a Pitch on Paper, or P.O.P. for short. Basically, it's a one page synopsis of your project that consists of a logline—that's a couple of sentences that gives a general idea of the storyline; then a paragraph explaining the setup—main characters, their situation, the location, what moves them into action; another paragraph that briefly describes the challenges the characters face by the middle of the story; and finally, a quick summation of the ending that finishes with an intriguing question or situation that leaves the climax up to the imagination of the potential buyer.

NINK: In your book you also talk about the "elevator pitch." Could you elaborate on that?

KFY: Sure, it's a short, verbal pitch. Just imagine that you've gotten on an elevator with...in Hollywood it would be, say, Clint Eastwood, but for a novelist it could be a top editor you'd love to work with. So, the two of you are alone and you have maybe ten to fifteen seconds to grab his or her attention and hook them in with your story. The elevator pitch shouldn't take more than ten to thirty seconds and be no longer than a few sentences. The first one should lay out the major storyline, bring in the main character's backstory and motivations that propel him forward. The second sentence lays out the ground work for the sub-story, like if there's a romance involved in an action adventure. What you're doing is distilling it all down to the essence of the spine of the story.

NINK: You give an excellent example of that with In the Line of Fire, which starred Clint Eastwood. If you don't mind...?

KFY: Okay. "An aging Secret Service agent goes after a deranged would-be assassin who plays mind games by reminding the agent of his big failure: The agent was unable to prevent the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As he's tracking the assassin, the agent must also prove himself in the

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

The Buzz in the Biz.....

►►►► eyes of his rookie partner and the rest of the presidential Secret Service squad, including an attractive female agent.” Now, boil your book down the same way and you’ve got your elevator pitch.

NINK: *Quite a few of our members are doing pitching sessions with you at the conference, so there’s obviously a lot of interest amongst novelists to have their books made into movies. How about some tips from the experts on that?*

KFY: Pitch your story, not as a book, but how you see it as a movie. Think of the five most important scenes an audience

would want to see in a movie trailer.

KM: And do your homework about the studios, the same way you would with a publisher. Does the studio do motion pictures, TV, or cable, and which would make the best fit for your story?

For more Buzz about screenwriting, don’t miss Part 2 in Next Month’s NINK.



Sticky Notes from the Edge

A Gifted Moment

So I was perusing a Mensa publication. I hear you: *It had to belong to someone else.* All right, smarty pants, it was a friend’s. Me, I’m in Densa. Anyway, I came across an article dealing with the personality traits held in common by gifted adults. Not even one of the traits was “intelligence.” I’m just saying. But the individual headings! Dang! Really difficult psychology-sounding words (see “Densa” above). But some of the traits listed under each heading really struck me as...well, us. Writers. And I thought I was unique in my weirdness. Turns out I’m merely gifted. So are you. How ironic of us, right?

I don’t have the article in front of me (like I said, it wasn’t mine), so I’m paraphrasing some of the traits that struck me as being “us.” See what you think. The article said gifted adults have a sense of creativity outside the norm. Duh. Ability to juggle many things at once. Yup. A sense of humor. Ditto. Low tolerance for mediocrity and frustration. Amen. Very hard on ourselves when we make mistakes. Check. We feel like impostors or frauds, like we’re going to be found out. Uh-huh. We feel alienated from the mainstream and go our own way. Don’t think that’s you? A question: Are you the one in your family who is different from everyone else? Thought so. And I don’t mean different because you think you’re actually an alien hybrid life form. You might very well be, but that doesn’t count. Not with the Mensans, anyway.

You want more? How about this? Leadership qualities. I like to say I have them, but some people insist on labeling this, with reference to me, as “bossiness.” I am not bossy. My ideas are just better than theirs (credit Edith Ann, aka Lily Tomlin with that one). Here’s another one: An interest in non-traditional careers. Who? Us?

Isn’t this exciting? I think so—even if I do have to share my traits of uniqueness with others (you). But here’s a perk: From now on, instead of saying we’re suffering from “mental pause,” we should say: “I don’t know what came over me. I must have suffered a gifted moment when I tripped over that line painted in the street.” Or got turned around and lost in a phone booth. Confession: I lost my wallet twice in the same day...in Chicago. Yeah, gifted, all right. That’s me. And you.

But you know what? Suddenly I’m beginning to realize a comfort and a security in being part of a group made up of individuals, each of whom are unique. To end things, here’s a really dumb joke (unless you’re seven years old, in which case you’ll think this incredibly witty).

Q. *Do you know how to catch a unique rabbit?*

A. *U-nique up on it!*

OK, it had to be explained to me, too. Yes, by a seven-year-old. Clue: “You (s)neak up on it.” You neak...U-nique. Get it?

Jeez, I am so gifted it hurts.

– Cheryl Anne Porter

OUTSIDE THE BIG APPLE

All right, reality check. Sometimes the kind of writing that brought us to Ninc doesn't pay the bills. What then?

In my case, I took heed of the experiences of a couple of writer friends (do I have any other kind?) and applied to be an instructor at a national writing school. Little surprise, I was accepted and invited to come on-board.

About a year has passed since then, and although there are times when the weekly pile of student assignments makes me scream (particularly when the 50-something man who lives on a Kansas farm with his parents insists that, "this" is the piece that will launch his career as an international journalist), I'm glad I made this decision. I'm not getting rich, but the money I'm making is taking the edge off my graduate student son's debts, and, to my surprise, my own writing skills are getting sharper. Also, being an instructor looks great on my résumé and just led to a gig as an editor for a regional journal. The down side is the cut in my own writing time, but those weekly checks takes away some of the sting.

I don't know how many writing schools are out there. The *Writers' Digest* school is probably the most well-known, but my checks come from Long Ridge Writers Group, an arm of the Institute of Children's Literature. The Institute, as those in the know call it, was founded in 1969. It's approved by the Connecticut Commission of Higher Education and Better Business Bureau and they're members of the International Council on Distance Education and the Association of Educational Publishers.

All right; that's all the P.R. stuff you're getting from me. If you need a more stable financial base than the work of our hearts gives us, and working from home under your own schedule (kind of) appeals to you, what does it mean to be an instructor? First, instructors are, "highly professional published writers or editors whom we have trained to teach our course." In other words, Ninc members qualify hands down.

The Breaking Into Print Course takes students through twelve planned assignments beginning with a character sketch and ending with at least two completed and hopefully ready-to-submit short stories or nonfiction articles. I chafe a bit at the parameters, but I'm not calling the shots. Besides, the progression meets the needs and abilities of most students. My part consists of editing each assignment and writing a letter pointing out strong points and making suggestions for improvement. (One thing I "got" early on was that "students" are also paying clients so bluntly telling someone not to quit their day job is a no-no) I'm given guidelines on what to cover in each assignment (several practice assignments followed by an intense, on-site workshop in CT trained me). I cover characterization and plot, POV, show versus tell, organization and focusing, market research, etc. Long Ridge supplies paying students with a

wealth of material including a yearly Magazine Markets guide that rivals *Writer's Market*.

According to the time management folks, the majority of assignments should take an hour to deal with. They're about right now that I've hit my stride and should max out with 200 students and an average of 20 assignments per week. In other words, a half time job give or take. I make \$12.75 an hour, not great but not bad considering I don't have to leave home and a raise is around the corner. Instead of having to explain the basics over and over again, I simply include the relevant tip sheet into the packet.

Drawbacks are predominantly student related: those who'll never get it but think they do. Same with the rewards. I'm surprised by how good some of my students are. I'm meeting people from all over the country, being invited into their lives and experiences, and occasionally picking up ideas or finding an expert in some area I need.

At the top of the list is my Arizona lawyer. His introductory letter described a hike he took into the Grand Canyon. On his folder, I jotted: "Shit, can he write!" Now we e-mail privately as he tackles the book of his heart—a mainstream about the drug trade. If he doesn't fall into a canyon, that book's going to get published! Even if it doesn't, I'd still run away with him.

— **Vella Munn**

Bits'n'Pieces

AND ON THE HARRY POTTER FRONT...Conflicting Reports ...

Stories filed two days in a row report that a) there's still no sign of the fifth Harry Potter book and b) J.K. Rowling is through with writer's block and has finished a massive draft of the fifth book though there's still no publication date in sight for it. The draft, which was initially supposed to be shorter than her last Potter book, has turned out to be, if anything, longer. Which, you know... these things happen. <g>

— **TdR**

More Bits, Page 13....

For reasons I have yet to identify, I waited almost two years before placing a counter on my website. Okay. I can identify the reasons. The first was that I didn't want someone to visit my website and discover she was only the second person to do so, my sister being the first. The second reason was that since I had no plans to ever advertise anything from my website, I didn't think the statistics would ever serve a purpose. Honestly, who really cared how many people came to my website? Whether a dozen people or a million visited my site, its purpose is simply to provide information about my books to my readers. It's what's known as a "brochure" site. Just page after page of information.

But in August, curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to add a counter. I used a free counter provided by *Bravenet*, <http://www.bravenet.com>. It's very simple to register and install the counter if you're managing your own website. You select your design, and the necessary html code is displayed. You copy it directly into your html code. I use Front Page and simply added it to the bottom of the code on my index page, and it worked with no problems. The counter doesn't display when you "preview" the page on your hard drive, but it does once you've published the page on the Internet. At that point, it'll begin keeping track of the hits. You can set it up so that it doesn't increment when you visit your site so your counter reflects "true" hits.

What I have found most interesting and useful—and the reason I'm mentioning my counter to you at all—is that I can review the statistics and discover where the people are coming *from*. Most come from the Avon Ladies site where I have a link. Many come from my publisher's website or Painted Rock where I also have a link. Some people find me using different search engines and those engines are identified; some come directly to my site without clicking a link. They simply type in my URL in which case they display as a direct hit.

All right. So now I know where people are coming from. How does this help me? Well, when the Avon authors decided to begin paying to have a professional site created, I knew it would be well worth my money to invest in the project since they send most of the people my way. For authors who are contemplating advertising on various sites, having a count of which site referred the visitor to your site might help you determine if your investment is worth it.

PARANORMAL WRITERS

You can subscribe to a paranormal romance listserve that serves the interests of both published and unpublished by sending a blank e-mail to: paranormalromance-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

RESEARCH

Terey Daly Ramin shared a site which "could prove not only entertaining but extremely research-rich for writers. It's *The Open Diary*, <http://www.freeopendiary.com>, which introduces itself this way: "Welcome to Free Open Diary, the first interactive diary community on the Internet. Read about the lives of thousands of real people, or get your own free online diary. We are currently home to many diaries from around the world."

"You can literally look into lives from anywhere. Diaries can be locked, of course, and kept private, but many of them are open, so the search for insight into characters from around the world can be...entertaining or at least interesting and intriguing at worst. There are diary 'circles' by age, topic, continent, area, etc. It can be as serious or flighty as the content warrants. There's also a weekly theme (which appears to be geared at teens or younger kids.) For our members researching teens/kids this would seem a prime place to find out what they need to know written in the language they need to hear it."

For information on subscribing to *The Regency Plume*, a magazine devoted to the Regency era, visit <http://hal.ucr.edu/~cathy/plume.html>.

A map of *Dickens London* can be found at http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/dickens_london_map.html.

Kansas Gunfighters, <http://www.ukans.edu/heritage/owk/128/guns.html>, is an interesting site that dispels some of the myths surrounding gunfighters. Most did not die in gun duels.

If you are searching for a character name and want it to have a specific meaning, you might try *Behind the Name*, <http://behindthename.com>, which provides the etymology and history of first names. Names are broken down by origin. You might also check out *Parenthood.com*, http://www.parenthood.com/parent_cfmfiles/babynames.cfm, where you can type in the meaning you are searching for and it'll provide a list of names.

Need to know the distance between two points anywhere in the world? Visit *indo.com*, <http://www.indo.com/distance/>. I was able to get the mileage from my birthplace in England to the tiny town in Texas where I grew up. *James Stevens-Arce*, <http://www.stevens-arce.com/Links.html>, provides links that encompass several different areas of writing including horror, scriptwriting, mystery, historical, science fiction, and fantasy.

If you ever need to know how something works, visit *How Stuff Works*, <http://www.howstuffworks.com/>. They cover just about everything. The history of shaving, for men and women, from facial to body hair, can be found at *History of Shaving Events*, <http://www.quikshave.com/timeline.htm>.

PROMOTION

E-advocates, http://www.e-advocates.com/media_tools.html, provides an easier way to contact the media. When you type in your Zip Code, it displays all the local newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations in that area. From this list, you can select five and send them a press release in just one e-mail. While the site promotes itself as a grassroots advocacy site and most of its information is geared toward influencing Congress, I couldn't determine any reason why it couldn't be used to distribute press releases that didn't have to do with political issues.

Booklist, <http://www.ala.org/booklist>, is the American Library Association's digital version of their *Booklist* magazine. Information on which books are reviewed and how to submit your work for review is provided at the website.

In the September column, I mentioned that I ran a contest through *New and Previously Owned Books*, <http://www.newandusedbooks.com>. For those who were interested, I had 799 contest entries. I have no idea if that number has any real significance or if having a contest garnered me any new readers. I gave away four copies of my book; three of the winners had never read me before.

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Fair Use, <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fairuse.html>

Reading True Romance, by Michael Y. Park
<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,61370,00.html>

The Plot Thickens, Brand-Name Authors Hire Writers to Flesh Out Their Bare-Bones Stories, by Linton Weeks
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A53078-2002Jul23.html>

The Eye of the Reporter, the Heart of the Novelist, by Anna Quindlen.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/23/books/23QUIN.html?todayshadlines>

JUST FOR FUN

Check out *Jacquie D'Alessandro's* website, <http://www.JacquieD.com>. Her husband added a cool feature called a Guest Map. As Jacquie explained it, "You place a little person where you live and list a few different things—like your favorite local restaurant, food, saying, and bookstore. The Guest Map link is on the front page, below the Upcoming Events and Latest News section, between the Archived Guestbooks and Meet Me links. Hope to 'see' you on the map!"

If you discover sites that you think would interest Novelists, Inc. members, I'd appreciate it if you'd e-mail them to me. I'm always looking for interesting and useful sites to include in the column. E-mail me at lorraine-heath@attbi.com. Thanks!

Bits'n'Pieces

Law Suit Dismissed...In other Potter news. Nancy Stouffer's suit alleging Rowling infringed on her *Legend of Rab and the Muggles* stories about a character named Larry Potter has been dismissed after the court found that "publication, distribution, and exploitation of the Harry Potter books does not violate any of Stouffer's intellectual property rights," and ordered that "Stouffer is permanently enjoined from making false representations to third parties indicating that she owns all rights in the 'Muggle'

and 'Muggles' trademarks and copyrights, or indicating that plaintiffs have violated her intellectual property rights." And further the court declared that Stouffer "perpetrated a fraud on the Court through her submission of fraudulent documents which were willfully altered" as well as through her "untruthful testimony"; and "asserted claims and defenses without any reasonable basis in fact or law and has attempted to support such claims and defenses with items of evidence that have been created or altered for purposes of this litigation." They imposed sanctions of \$50,000 and a portion of the defendants' legal fees.

— TdR

More Bits, Page 16....



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Ninc Conference Diary”

Thursday, September 19:

Romance novelist Lynn Miller shows up at my door before dawn so we can drive to New York. Well, Connecticut, actually. Lynn is delivering some inherited family furniture to one of her daughters, and I’m going along to share the driving.

It once took me 36 hours to fly from Baltimore to Cincinnati. So I think it’s entirely possible that if I traveled to Ninc’s September 2002 conference by air, I might not get there until next March. Besides, I’m a terrible flyer, a white-knuckled, glassy-eyed, easily-nauseated airplane passenger. As Ninc member Kathy Chwedyk knows to her sorrow, you really don’t want to be sitting next to me on a flight when they start serving food. At least not unless you’ve got a big supply of airsick bags and a really resilient constitution. So driving to this year’s Ninc conference seemed like a good idea.

However, as I roll around the floor of Lynn’s blue van somewhere on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, bouncing off the walls and sliding into the sharp edges of the furniture we’re transporting, I begin to wish I’d flown.

I pick my disheveled head up off the sleeping bag long enough to snarl, “This is a van, not a sports car! It doesn’t corner.”

Lynn also begins to wish I’d flown.

She tells me to go back to my nap and promises she’ll stop doing loop-the-loops on the highway. I wake up in a better mood a little while later, and my healthy sense of self-preservation prompts me to offer to take the wheel for a while.

By the time we’re in New Jersey, circling the greater New York metropolitan area, Lynn correctly advises her daughter Sarah, via her cell phone, that I will faint, upon arrival, if there is not a health-giving alcoholic beverage available. Finally, thirteen hours after setting out, we reach our destination. Sarah, a petite pretty blonde who’s married to a Navy guy and consequently swears like one, has wisely opened a bottle of wine for me—but I have to help unload lots of heavy furniture before I can have any of it.

They’re strict in the Navy.

Friday, September 20:

We get up before dawn again, this time so that I can catch an early train into the city and be sure of arriving punctually at my first appointment of the day.

Lynn takes one look at my face and says, “Put on make-up.”

I, however, wisely refrain from poking a mascara wand at my eyes at this ungodly hour. Only after being disgorged from

the train in Grand Central Station three hours later, along with a billion other sleepy people, do I start giving any thought to my appearance.

There is an unexpected glitch at Grand Central, though. Ever since 9/11, there’s no longer any luggage storage there. No place to leave a suitcase. So I wind up dragging mine with me all over the city all day, to meeting after meeting, up and down subway stairs, through crowded restaurants, and even into Central Park—which is the only place quiet enough, indoors or out, in a six block area, for my agent to use his cell phone to make a call to my publisher.

Indeed, all over New York, from the moment I arrive, I’m taken aback by the *NOISE*: Roaring bus engines, growling car motors, squealing brakes, honking taxi horns, shuddering jackhammers, falling construction equipment, rumbling bulldozers, blaring radios, booming stereos, roaring commuter trains, howling subway lines, and eleven million people all talking at a shout. I wind up spending much of the trip lip-reading because I can seldom actually *hear* anyone through the city’s incessant din. Since I have no experience at lip-reading, though, it doesn’t go so well. Who the hell knows what these people are actually saying to me?

Saturday, September 21:

I wake up in Brooklyn, where I’m staying with an old friend, her husband, and their pending arrival (a baby due in December). Suzanne is an actress who’s got to rehearse some stuff today, so I head into the city to get some stuff of my own done.

When I arrive at the subway station, though, I discover that the trains to this district have all been shut down for track maintenance this weekend. So I hop a variety of vehicles for the next 90 minutes, consistently aiming myself towards Manhattan. There is much noisy grumbling all around me from pissed off New Yorkers; but one fellow sitting near me on a bus says to his overwhelmed houseguest, “Well, this is good. I wouldn’t want you to get the impression that living here is ever easy.” At one point, I have to change trains somewhere in the bowels of Brooklyn, and I find myself walking through dank, crumbling, *Terminator*-like tunnels with water pouring through the sagging ceilings while masked men all around me wield jackhammers and blow-torches. Wow. Armageddon City.

(Hmm. Good title. I should write that down.)

I feel a lot older by the time I finally reach Manhattan. Has the city changed, or have I? I lived here very briefly in the first flower of my youth, and even more briefly eight years later. So I’m pretty familiar with the city—or, at least, I used to be. Now

it's been five years since my last visit, New York has survived the most destructive terrorist attack in history, and the whole place feels as alien to me as if I haven't been here since a previous century. Which, oops, is actually the case.

The city also *smells* even worse than I remember. That combined stench of sweat, garbage, sewage, and carbon monoxide which has always been New York's peculiar pheromone has evolved into a physical entity that keeps smothering me in its stinky embrace. While waiting in line after line after line for everything I do today, I ponder the financial empire I will build on my brilliant idea: selling bottles of country air, with little face masks and inhalers, on street corners in Manhattan.

Sunday, September 22:

I have a nice visit with my cousins Sidney and Mildred in Queens, who feed me up with bagels, lox, and other forms of manna, and then take me to a train which—as incredible as this now sounds—takes me straight into Manhattan.

The UN has gone into special session and hundreds of diplomats have refused to check out of the Marriott Hotel—which is legally obliged to humor them. So our sleeping-room reservations have been transferred to the nearby Crowne Hotel. This is probably just as well; based on the average time it takes to catch an elevator at the Marriott, I estimate that I would have gotten to my room there for the very first time roughly three hours after the conference ended.

In our room at the Crowne, I unsuccessfully try to wash the smell of the subways out of my hair. Then Lynn and I attend the Ninc business meeting. At some point, as I'm discussing with Jasmine Cresswell on my right whether there's anything left on the agenda here except waiting for the vote to be counted, and discussing on my left with Lynn whether we could discreetly slip out to the bar, since I really want a cocktail after three days of trudging around New York City and before they start the Night Owl sessions... I suddenly hear my name called. I turn to see the whole room looking at me.

"Huh?" I say, demonstrating my gift for ready wit.

Pat Rice, at the podium, asks something about the surprise program item we've planned for Tuesday. But my mind is on the dual conversations I'm in the middle of having, and I hear myself blurt, in front of the entire assembled group, "Are we doing anything here but waiting around now? I want to go get a drink."

Any number of bemused expressions indicate, in case I wasn't sure, that I'm behaving badly. Thank goodness I'm a notorious bitch. This could be hard to live down, otherwise.

Since there is clearly no rescuing the situation now, I head toward the door. Lynn follows me to make sure I actually come back, since I'm moderating one of the Night Owls. Up on the eighth floor, we discover that wine is nine dollars a glass. Being a curmudgeon of very modest wallet, I head back downstairs with the sole glass of wine I will ever purchase at the Marriott Marquis. (My god, man, you can get *dinner* for nine dollars back home.)

Lynn and I attend the "Enhancing Your Chances in Hollywood" Night Owl. It's an excellent session with informative speakers giving specific and detailed advice. But now that I've had my cocktail, I get hungry, since I haven't had any dinner. My stomach informs me it won't wait until the dessert buffet later tonight, so I leave the room to go say hello to Ninc's conference warrior princess, Kate Dooley, and raid the nearby

refreshments bar for my evening meal.

Later that night, at the dessert buffet, Hollywood's Kathleen Fong Yoneda sits down at our table, looks at me, and says, "You're the one who left our session early." So I'm still batting zero today when it comes to making a good impression here. It's too bad this isn't a SFWA affair, where an outbreak of vicious name-calling or physical violence would soon erase my own social gaffs.

I wind up the evening in the bar with conference chair Laura Baker, who's currently too tired to have that deer-caught-in-the-headlights look by which you can usually instantly recognize conference chairs. I am drinking tap water, of course, now that I know what they're charging for drinks here. An upbeat and remarkably calm person, Laura eventually says hesitantly to me, "You know, I was actually a little nervous about meeting you. Because you have this... People say that... Er, that is..."

"Because I'm a notorious bitch?" I offer helpfully.

She looks as if this might be a trick question.

"That's okay," I tell her. "I like it that way."

Please, do I *look* like a people person?

Monday, September 23:

The remarkable revelations the following day, on panel after panel, where publishing personnel with impressive job titles do Q&A sessions all day long, seem to boil down to one precious nugget: Write a great book.

(Hmm. Must stop churning out mediocre crap. Better make a note of that.)

You know: Write the book of your heart.

(Right. Because... until now I've been sweating blood over throw-away flotsam that I only write for the vast sums they pay me for it? MWA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!)

The best part of the day is lunch, which I have with my first two editors in the business, Paula Brown Pearl and Lucia Macro. Since they're sane, responsible, personable, honorable, prompt, and reliable, I blame them for ensuring that much of my career has come as a huge shock to me ever since we parted company. My agent once told me I was terribly spoiled by working with people like them right at the start.

Tuesday, September 24:

By the third day of making my way through the seething throng on the streets to get to the Marriott conference sessions, I've realized that, at any given moment, four-fifths of the world's population and half of its motorized vehicles are in Times Square.

Today's Broadway debut of "The Purple Rose of Romance," goes exceedingly well, thanks largely to the wonderful performances of my capable cast, Lynn Miller, Barbara Keiler, and Ken Casper, as well as our able *chargé d'affaires*, Jean Brashear. Laura Baker and Kate Dooley have been so considerate in helping arrange this that it's all come off without a hitch, despite my last-minute nerves. It's so cool to hear people performing my work, maybe I should quit this fiction gig and fling myself into playwriting.

There are some vibrant, energetic, enthused agents on the various panels. The sort of people who make me think we're lucky to have them on our side of the fence in this business. Luckily for me, the publisher who makes the most positive impression on me is Tor Books CEO Tom Doherty, who happens to be *my* publisher. He bluntly says, in the





THE COMELY CURMUUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ final session, “We demand excellence of you.” This has always been my experience, and I have always shed blood, sweat, and tears to meet this challenge. I’ve fallen short at times, but not for lack of trying.

“We demand excellence of you.”

You sure as hell do. And we can deliver. That’s why we’re here. That’s who we are. Unlike so many seasonal favorites in publishing, I’m not a celebrity, I didn’t get into a political sex scandal, and I haven’t committed a notorious murder. I’m just a career novelist, and delivering excellence every damn day is my duty and my vocation. So it heartened me to see a publisher on the dais who seems to know and respect that.

(No, I’m not sucking up. No one at Tor ever reads this column.)

Wednesday, September 25:

After some last-minute visiting and a little tourist fun, we’re ready to blow this popstand by early afternoon. The metropolis is so vast and crowded, though, that it takes us forever to get onto a highway leading out of the New York area and into fly-over country. Although we originally plan to stop halfway home and spend the night in a motel, Lynn and I decide that after a week in New York, we can’t sleep again without the sound of crickets outside the windows, so we push on through the night to get home.

Around two o’clock in the morning, Lynn’s head pops out of the sleeping bag to criticize my driving, but she’s clearly just doing it out of habit, her heart’s not really in it.

Thursday, September 26:

A few hours before dawn, exhausted and very pleased to be back in my clean, quiet, nice-smelling home, I creep into my office and look around: book-stuffed shelves; pictures, sketches, maps, graphs, and post-it notes pinned all over my work area; stacks of research, mountains of notes and photocopies, piles of paperwork; paintings, prints, photos, and batiks on the walls; two pairs of wrist braces lying around, because I’ve worn away parts of my body by writing my books; empty coffee cups and crumpled napkins; and hundreds of files, not visible at the moment, inside my hard drive...

Although I’ve only been gone a week, somehow being in New York makes it seem longer, and makes me feel incredibly glad to be back here now. This room is where I am the CEO, the artist, the marketing chief, the magic well, the researcher, the creative director, the business manager, the accountant, and the promotional consultant. This room is where I am the river which ultimately flows into the sea of New York’s publishing world.

Without us, there is no water.

“We demand excellence of you.”

Damn straight. And this room is where I do my best to deliver it, every single day.

NINK

Bits'n'Pieces

And Earlier Speculation In This Column Suggested Rowling Might Be Having Too Much Fun Being Married ...Well, that seems to have been proved out—at least in romance writer speak. That’s right, the writer and her new hubby’s baby is due in the spring. ;-)

— TdR

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