



NINK

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

Elvis Has Left the Building...

but he might still be around if he'd read this first...

BY ANNETTE CARNEY, PH.D.

It's way past noon. Our writer told herself that today she'd write one scene—just one complete scene—but despite her promise, she simply stares at the blank page. She can't get past the thoughts chasing themselves around and around in her head. She has no money and no talent. By the end of the week, her bank account will be overdrawn unless that advance from the publisher comes through.

The doorbell startles her. She shuffles to the door in her rumpled pajamas. It's the UPS man. Her heart races. She signs for the package and tears it open with shaking fingers. It's her manuscript. With page after page of revisions. And no check. Not unless she can revise the hero, the pacing, and most of the plot by the end of the month. Then, the editor suggests, even though she's not wild about the story, she might still be able to sell it at her next editorial meeting. Our writer slumps down in the hallway. No money.

No house payment. No more writing career, or so it seems at the moment.

With days like this, it's no wonder we writers can be prone to depression. In the 15 years I've been a psychotherapist, I've seen hundreds of clients overcome by depression under the weight of similar, unrelenting pressures. I've also seen them recover.

What Depression Is...and Isn't

Let me start by hauling my butt onto my soapbox and pointing out what depression is not. It is not the result of a weak will, an inability to cope, or a spiritual failing or even a melancholy personality.

Clinical depression, whether it be a clear, paralyzing episode (major depression) or a more subtle, long term suffering (dysthymia) is a real illness that includes an imbalance in neurotransmitters in the brain. While we don't yet know exactly what factors create the imbalance or how it causes the symptoms of depression, research does

show clear differences in brain wave activity between depressed and non-depressed individuals.

Depression can be caused by external factors (such as prolonged or severe stress, grief, or anxiety) or internal ones (genetic predisposition, chronic pain, medical conditions, or medications).

Depression is about a lot more than feeling down or having the blues. It saps mental and physical energy. It chips away at self-esteem. Not good for anyone, to be sure, but for those of us who must call upon a high degree of mental energy every day, and who work in a field where rejection and isolation are simply a part of doing business, depression can be particularly deadly.

Depression creates a whole host of problems beyond the sort of sadness, apathy, and lack of energy and drive most commonly identified with it.

Depression destroys the ability to concentrate.

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE....

Conference news at last! Your trusty Board has chosen Albuquerque, New Mexico as the site for the 2004 Ninc Conference. And *New York Times* bestselling author Cathy Maxwell, who's as good at planning conferences as she is at writing books, has agreed to serve as our conference coordinator. Hooray! Cathy and Advisory Council representative Julie Kistler, our Site Committee chairman, will be visiting Albuquerque soon to look over hotels. Julie has several great offers from some top hotels there, so they're guaranteed to find us the perfect spot.

We also have a number of intriguing program ideas under discussion and will share them with you as Cathy and her crew get them firmed up. In addition, last year's dynamic conference coordinator, Laura Baker, who lives in Albuquerque and knows the area and its people intimately, will be advising on research and tour opportunities. The challenge is going to be stuffing all the great things to do into the time available to do them!

Just a friendly reminder... The 2003 Ninc roster, which members should have received in their newsletter last month, is confidential and for the use of members only. It is not to be used for promotional purposes by anyone for any reason. It is also not to be shared, copied, loaned, or given to non-members for any reason at any time, either in whole or in part. If someone you know asks for help in contacting another Ninc member, it is permissible to use the information contained in the roster to let that member know that someone is trying to reach them, but that's as far as it goes. Thanks!

I had a great column drafted for this month, but both my main and my backup computers crashed the same weekend...and guess who didn't have her stuff backed up.

Hey! You weren't supposed to guess that fast!

Fortunately, I do remember the main thrust of the thing, even if the elegant turns of phrase and incredibly brilliant insights that distinguished the original version have somehow failed to make it into this cobbled together repeat. (Sorry about that.)

What set me off were a couple of articles in the March 10 issue of *Publishers Weekly*. The lead article had an eye-catching title: "Book Sales Increase 5.5% in 2002, Top \$26 Billion."

I had to read that twice: Book. Sales. Increase. 5.5% In 2002.

Increase. As in, publishers sold more books last year than they did the year before. (Or at least they pulled in more money even if they didn't actually sell more *books*. The title isn't clear on that particular point.)

Now, I don't have any back issues of *PW* lying around, but I could swear that recent articles about book sales, at least as reported by the major chains and distributors, indicated a stagnant to slightly downward trend over the past year or so. I can't prove it, you understand, but that's definitely my impression. Something along the line of, "Monster Books, Inc. reports second quarter sales dipped 4.3% below the previous year's levels. Unit sales declined even more, but MBInc. protected earnings and cash flow by stripping a gazillion of last month's paperbacks and returning them for credit." (Yes, they meant *your* magnum opus, the one that stayed

on the shelves a total of 3 days, 14 hours, and 57 minutes. Not counting all the stores where they stripped it right out of the box.)

I might have thought I'd dreamed up all those grim sales reports if it weren't that *PW* was clearly as surprised by the increase as I was. They start off pretty cool and collected, but they don't make it past the second sentence before disbelief sets in.

The first paragraph of the article reads, "Total book sales rose 5.5% to \$26.87 billion in 2002 according to preliminary estimates released by the Association of American Publishers. The 5.5% increase (if it holds up when final figures are released) [*their parentheses, not mine!*] represents a significant improvement over the 0.6% increase in sales in 2001. The sales increase was led by a 12.4% gain in the college segment, to nearly \$3.9 billion, and an 11.7% increase in sales of mass market paperbacks to \$1.73 billion. The trade segment had an 8.8% increase, to \$6.93 billion."

Pretty nice numbers. The skeptics, however, hit full stride in paragraph two.

"While the gains in the college and mass market paperback segments seem to square with revenue gains reported by the major players in those markets, the improvement in the trade segment appears high given reports from publishers and retailers. The Census Bureau, for example, reported that bookstore sales rose only 1.5% last year. The discrepancy between publishers' sales and bookstore sales figures could be explained in part by aggressive discounting by the stores—which would affect store sales but not publishers' receipts—and more sales through nonbookstore channels, though the evidence here is mixed...."

The next page in that same March 10 issue has a shorter article titled "Unit Sales Topped Dollar Sales in '02." The body of the article says, "A report issued by Ipsos seems to confirm conclusions drawn from AAP sales data—that publishers did better than booksellers in 2002. According to the Ipsos Book Trends survey, unit sales of adult books rose 3% last year, to \$1.14 billion, while consumer spending on books rose just 2%, to \$10.97 billion."

The piece went on to report that Internet sales rose to 8% of total adult book purchases, up from 7% the previous year. Chain stores' share of the market went down slightly, from 23% to 22%, while independent booksellers held steady at 16% of the market. According to the article, used book stores total sales represented 5% of the market, up from 3% the year before.

In general, pretty welcome news, especially in light of the frequently gloom-inducing reports and forecasts of earlier months. It will be interesting to see if the final AAP report proves the *PW* skeptics right by lowering the overall sales figures, or if it confounds them by keeping to the more encouraging numbers in the preliminary version.

Whichever way it goes, the whole thing reminded me

of a quote I remember using way back in high school debating. The quote, which was always handy for skewering any opponent who dared trot out numbers that undermined my position, ran: "He uses statistics like a drunken man uses a light pole, for support rather than illumination."

To be quite fair, that quote doesn't apply to *PW*, at least not in the sense I used it back when debating. The folks at *PW* try hard to discern the broader business picture that is so dimly illuminated by the available statistics, and I don't mean to suggest otherwise.

What *is* useful about the quote is the visual image it offers: that of a lamp casting its cone of golden light into a place that is otherwise shrouded in darkness. It reminded me that, whatever our source of illumination, we can only see as far as the light reaches and no further. Beyond that, we're just guessing.

Like that light pole, statistics are nothing more than points of light in the darkness. They're measurements of specific events taken at specific times. A series of statistical measurements can allow us to discern trends and to make educated guesses at what might come next, but they can't pierce the darkness beyond the area they illuminate.

Which doesn't stop us from trying to use them to peer into the shadows, anyway. Even if they can't guarantee we'll really end up where we think we're headed, statistics can, at least, give us a direction to aim for as we stumble forward into the dark. Until someone perfects the crystal ball, that's about the best we can expect.

In the meantime, whenever we're reading an article that throws a bunch of statistics at us, we need to remember what those statistics are *really* illuminating and what is just a lot of honest, well-intentioned fumbling in the dark. Predictions of doom and gloom can be based on the best and most accurate statistics available, and they can still be wrong. Unfortunately, so can optimistic predictions that better times lie right around the corner. But—for me, anyway—unwarranted optimism is never much of a problem, while doom and gloom can put me in a funk that gets in the way of my writing, which leaves me looking pretty stupid when those grim predictions turn out to be wrong.

Actually, I look pretty stupid even if they turn out to be *right* because publishers will publishing books regardless of which way the market is headed this week. But they won't publish *my* book if I didn't get it written because I was worrying about something that's out of my control, anyway. Fortunately, I'm in good company: I know lots of talented writers who are better at worrying about the things they can't control than they are at working on the things they can. You'd think we'd be smarter than that.

— Anne Holmberg

Even in this online age—with Ninc link—we still welcome your letters. Submit to the editor via e-mail or old-fashioned snailmail [see masthead on page 2]. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.

MWA Writer Touts

Value of Ninc Membership

I received my April 2003 *NINK* today and was reminded again why I always tell people Novelists, Inc. is the most helpful writers organization I belong to. And that's from someone who is presently president of the Midwest Chapter of Mystery Writers of America—which I love—and thus a member of MWA's national board. What makes Novelists, Inc. so important is the consistent excellence of *NINK*.

When I started to read "The President's Voice" I thought I was in for: "Three cheers for good old Wal-Mart and let's all go there (perish the thought) and help them sell books!" But instead, I got Anne Holmberg's thoughtful and thought-provoking essay on "illiteracy." Thank you so much.

I confess I only skimmed the interview of Donna Hayes, since the closest I've ever gotten to a Harlequin book is my own paperback from Worldwide Mystery (which was out of print in about 24 hours—but at least I had no trouble getting the rights back). Ronn Kaiser's article on why stories work/fail had me reading and re-reading, and Laura Resnick's "Fool's Gold" was so absolutely true and, as always, fun to read.

Add in "Bits'n'Pieces" and "Sticky Notes," and what's not to like about this newsletter? I look forward to the May issue.

— David J. Walker

Writers and Depression

Continued from page 1 ▶▶▶

This is one of the most marked effects of mood disorders. Depressed people have a hugely difficult time staying on task. They often find their short term memory and organizational abilities slipping. No abilities vital to writing there.

Depression causes a negative thought cycle. Although depression interferes with the ability to concentrate, perversely, depressed people have little trouble focusing on negative thoughts.

Nice, huh?

Clearly, we all experience our share of negative thoughts about the world and about ourselves. People diagnosed with depression seem to generate these thoughts more frequently, and have a much more difficult time getting rid of them. Research suggests that this continual focus, or perseveration, on the negative is a function of disrupted neurotransmitter activity in the brain.

Asking a depressed person to stop thinking negative thoughts is like asking a diabetic to suck it up and get off insulin.

Several polls done in the late '90s showed that between 70 and 75 percent of Americans believed that a person with depression could get better simply by being more positive. I think this misperception is the most damaging thing about depression. Not only do depressed people have all of these awful symptoms, but society, family, friends, employers often blame the depressed individual for not just snapping out of it.

Depression creates low self-esteem. This is a more specific example of negative focus. Unfortunately, it's highly damaging and helps complete the vicious cycle of depression in a big way. Even the most confident among us has fleeting, self-disparaging thoughts on a surprisingly frequent basis. As with their other negative thoughts, depressed people experience these types of thoughts more frequently and more intensely.

Depression destroys frustration tolerance. Depressed people have poor concentration, they're generally sleep-deprived, and have a negative view of the world and themselves. Hmmm. There goes patience and equanimity right out the window.

Depression breeds irritability. Indeed, people suffering from depression will often appear angry rather than sad. This is particularly true of depressed children and teenagers. And men. Not that I'm lumping you all in the same category <grin>.

Are Creative Types More Vulnerable to Depression?

The answer appears to be... maybe.

I read yet another article just this morning indicating that those of us in creative fields are as much as 38 times more likely to suffer from serious mood disorders than the general public. Yikes! And I thought writing was difficult enough.

Actually, though, the statistics are still murky and open to interpretation. While it may be that we creative types are indeed more vulnerable to depression, it

may also be that we're simply more expressive or more vocal about our difficulties than others. After all, we know a great deal about public figures' battles with depression, etc., simply because they are, uh, well, public. Still, even if we artists as a group aren't any more prone to mood disorders than the average Joe, there's no denying that a significant portion of average Joes suffer from depression at some point in their lives.

Or make that Joe-ettes. Our best estimates now suggest that 1 in 5 women will suffer at least one significant bout of serious, debilitating depression in their lifetime. As with many things related to psychology, the numbers for men appear to be smaller, although they've been harder to pin down.

Whether we writers are more vulnerable to becoming depressed or not, my particular concern for us is our isolation. Not being required to interact with many people on a daily basis can help hide depression. Let's face it, from an outsider's perspective, the writing life often looks the same. On days I get to stay home and write, I rarely make it out of my pajamas. It's one of my favorite perks of being a writer. I suppose that could make it tough for the UPS driver to tell if I'm an eccentric artist or a profoundly depressed unemployed person in rumpled flannel pajamas.

Not having to interact with others can also exacerbate depression. Most of my depressed clients say that although it's a titanic struggle to get dressed and out the door every morning, they find that it's good for them to have to push themselves. I find depression harder to treat in people such as homemakers, retirees, and yes, writers, who don't have to drag

their rear ends out of bed every morning on a regular schedule if they're not urgently required to. People deep into a bout with depression don't do *anything* they don't absolutely have to. But every little thing they do certainly helps.

Treating Depression

Now the good news. Depression is eminently treatable.

The research is overwhelming. ***The best course of treatment for depression is a combination of medication, therapy, and exercise. Each on its own helps, but the combination is dynamite.***

Antidepressant medications are very safe, have a low incidence of serious side effects, are non-addictive, and are highly effective for most people. Since several brands (such as Prozac) have gone generic over the past couple years, they can also be relatively cheap.

The key to taking antidepressants is longevity. They must be taken for weeks before they take effect. They also need to be taken consistently for an extended period of time, on the order of 6 to 12 months, at minimum. As with finishing a course of antibiotics, to be truly effective, antidepressants should be continued for some time after the symptoms of depression have disappeared.

Psychotherapy: The old couch has also been shown to alleviate depression. While insight-oriented therapy is certainly useful in helping people change life-patterns, short-term, cognitive treatment that focuses on changing specific thought patterns seems to be particularly effective in treating depression.

Symptoms of Depression

- ▼ Persistent sad, anxious or empty mood
- ▼ Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- ▼ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- ▼ Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- ▼ Fatigue, decreased energy
- ▼ Difficulty concentrating, poor memory and decision-making
- ▼ Insomnia, or hypersomnia (oversleeping)
- ▼ Significant weight loss or weight gain
- ▼ Thoughts of death or suicide
- ▼ Restlessness, irritability

Websites:

All of the following offer information on symptoms, self-diagnostic tests, tips on finding therapists, and information on medications as well as providing links to both internet and live support groups

Mental Help Net
www.mentalhelp.net

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
www.dbsalliance.org

The National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm



Writers and Depression

Self-help for Depression

Of course my preference is that people suffering from depression get medical and psychological help. But hey, I live in the real world, too. Many people don't have health insurance. Many more would sooner get hit by a truck than go to a physician, or God forbid, a shrink.

Still, I urge anyone who has a significant number of symptoms related to depression to see a medical or mental health professional. **Any person experiencing suicidal or self-harming thoughts should definitely seek professional help immediately.**

That said, there are a number of things people can do on their own. Several types of over-the-counter remedies seem to help alleviate symptoms of low-level depression. The two main OTC treatments are St. John's Wort and SAM-e (S-Adenosyl-Methionine). Both substances, while not tested or approved by the FDA are available by prescription in a number of European countries.

A word of caution here, too. While both are widely available, often prescriptions of generic antidepressants will actually be less expensive and potentially more effective. A month's dosage of SAM-e at our local Costco runs about \$45. A month's prescription of generic Prozac (fluoxetine) was \$7 the last time I checked.

Like prescription drugs, OTC treatments need to be administered correctly. An occasional cup of St. John's Wort tea is useless as a treatment for depression. Actually, from a medical point of view, I have no idea what a cup of St. John's Wort tea is useful for. Effective treatment requires a daily, sustained dose for the same length

of time as prescription medications. Teas are particularly problematic. Even if consumed daily, brewing methods, times, etc. will vary too much to get proper dosage.

Exercise: The goal of exercise as a treatment is to increase endorphin levels. To work, exercise needs to be both regular (as in at least four to five days a week) and fairly intense. By intense I mean exercising enough to feel pleasantly tired at the end of the day. I've seen exercise work beautifully for people willing to commit to it. Unfortunately, starting an exercise program is onerous enough for those of us who don't have depression. For people whose energy has been sucked out of them, it must seem impossible. But it works.

Other self-help: There are shelves full of excellent books on treating depression. There are also long lists of great websites. Information is power.

That's a quick overview of what I know about treating depression. The biggest thing I know is that depression is treatable. In our age, in our time, no one needs to suffer without help. Not even writers in rumpled pajamas.

End note:

Help Wanted!

"Ask Annette" is a monthly column I'll be writing for *NINK*. As a writer and Marriage and Family Therapist with over 15 years' experience working with children, adolescents, and adults, I'm thrilled to be putting together my two loves for this venture. I'd like your help, though. I want to tailor this column to the unique/quirky/avant garde needs of Novelists, Inc. members. (Picture Lucy from the "Peanuts" cartoons, hanging out in her cardboard doctor's booth, waiting to dispense advice for a nickel.) I'm looking for comments, situations, or questions related to mental health (our own

and maybe even our characters'), creativity, self-esteem, motivation, or family issues, just to name a few areas. All comments and inquiries will be kept strictly confidential. My contact information:

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fax: 775-746-4560,
phone: 775-746-1680.

Resources in Print

The following is a list of books I recommend to my clients:

- ▼ *When Someone You Love Is Depressed: How to Help Your Loved One Without Losing Yourself*
- ▼ Laura Epstein Rosen and Xavier F. Amador
- ▼ Fireside, 1996

- ▼ *Understanding Depression: What We Know and What You Can Do About It*
- ▼ J. Raymond DePaulo Jr., M.D. and Leslie Alan Horvitz
- ▼ John Wiley & Sons, 2002

- ▼ *Prozac and the New Antidepressants: What You Need to Know about Prozac and Others*
- ▼ William S. Appleton
- ▼ Plume, 2000

- ▼ *Undoing Depression: What Therapy Doesn't Teach You and Medication Can't Give You*
- ▼ Richard O'Connor
- ▼ Berkley Pub Group, 1999

- ▼ *What to Do When Someone You Love Is Depressed*
- ▼ Mitch Golant, Susan K. Golant
- ▼ Henry Holt, 2000

- ▼ *The Depression Workbook 2nd Ed: A Guide for Living with Depression and Manic Depression*
- ▼ M. A. Copeland
- ▼ New Harbinger, 2002

Meet the Editor



Anna Genoese, Assistant Editor

Tom Doherty Associates, LLC (Tor Books, Forge Books)

Every single memory I have somehow involves a book. My parents are both readers, my grandparents and great-grandparents are/were all readers. My sisters and aunts and uncles are readers. We all read different things—the newspaper, the classics, computer programming language instruction manuals, religious texts, *Reader's Digest* condensed novels, the Scrabble® dictionary, Westerns, mysteries, historicals...

Every house I spent any length of time in had an extensive library of reading material. I read everything I could get my hands on, in any genre. One of the clearest memories I have from my formative years was a New Year's Eve; I was nine years old and I spent the whole day, and all of the hours until the non-alcoholic champagne toast at midnight, reading *Little Women*, *Jo's Boys*, and *Little Men*. I finished a half-hour before midnight, just in time to watch the ball drop.

I hid novels inside textbooks during class; I read on the train and while I was walking through the streets of Brooklyn, where I've spent most of my life. I am never without at least one book in my shoulder bag; sometimes I have two or three, and possibly a manuscript submission or two.

When I was a teenager, I went through a huge category romance phase, reading nothing except my homework assignments and category romances. I read every single one in the library, and then some. There was one with a main character who was slim and beautiful (of course), and well put together (of course), and making an obscene salary as a romance editor at a New York

publishing house. I remember nothing else about the book except one chapter: this editor came home after a bad day, put her feet up, and sorted through some unsolicited submissions. She came to one she really liked, read the whole thing, and suddenly her day was better. Despite the late hour, she picked up her phone and offered the author a contract right then and there.

It sounded too good to be true, but it stuck with me. Now I sit in an overstuffed armchair with my feet on a coffee table and my laptop on my lap, in a hotel room in Florida in February, at a romance writers' conference. Rain is well on its way; lightning is flashing, and a damp breeze is coming through the open balcony doors, ruffling the drapery, cooling my coffee, and fluttering the pages of the submissions I brought with me to read if there was a lull in conference activities.

If I find a submission that catches my eye, I don't just call the author. Before I can even suggest to the author I'm interested in publishing it, I have to fill out forms and figure out numbers and weigh the cost of making the book against how much money we could make from selling it. I have to think about who would read the book and possibly blurb it, make lists and get addresses. I have to find out what else has been published recently that's similar to this so that we have comparative numbers, and what were the first printings, and were there subsequent printings, and what did the covers look like, and where are those books shelved?

I have to talk to other editors and see if there's a place in the schedule

where this book could go, and make sure nobody else in the company is working on a book with a similar (or identical!) plot. I have to talk to marketing and sales and publicity and the publisher, and make them all just as excited about the book as I am.

And if all goes correctly, that's when the real work begins, the work of negotiating contracts and writing an editorial letter. The work of catalogue copy and cover copy and blurb request letters and author information sheets and bound galley mailings; as published authors, you know the drill. Proofreading press releases, fixing screwed-up copyedits, rewriting frantically when you suddenly realize that both you and your editor missed a huge plothole.

I confessed a few weeks ago to one of my co-workers that despite my love for the editorial process and the publishing business, despite all the fun I have even when I'm so frustrated I want to chuck my computer and all the authors in the world out the window in my office on the fourteenth floor of the Flatiron building, this might not be what I am supposed to be doing. I'm not a writer—how can I be the one who tells writers how to write?

"Editors aren't writers, mostly," she told me. "We're primarily readers. We don't tell authors how to fix the problems we spot in their work; we just tell them what bothers our eyes and brain, and what doesn't bother us, and it's their job to work out the how."

Then she used a phrase I've been hearing for three years, since my very first day as an intern. "You just have to have the eye."



Meet the Editor



Anna Genoese, Tom Doherty Associates, LLC (Tor Books, Forge Books)



It made sense then, and it made sense later on that night when I sat home with manuscript pages strewn over my bed. It made sense when I woke up the next morning, too, and when I sat on the train watching people read books with the Tor imprint on the spine, books I'd written the cover copy for, books I helped edit.

This certainly wasn't what I was expecting when I showed up for my first day as an intern at Tom Doherty Associates, my only previous publishing experience being my love of reading books and that half-forgotten chapter in a romance novel. I was bright and shiny and new and ready to learn.

Just over a year later, I'd been sucked in, hired full-time before I even graduated from college for the knowledge I'd already accrued, my eagerness to learn even more, and my talent, which was nurtured lovingly and diligently by my mentors. It was wonderful and addictive and the most fun I had ever had. Conventions, late nights out drinking whiskey and talking about books, learning to work with authors and agents, being trained in the database programs... and reading and reading and reading. It's stressful, and it's sixty-hour weeks, and it's *fun*.

It's fun because every once in a while I get to that one in every five or six hundred submissions, the one that has me taking it home, reading it on the train. I can't put it down, I have to take it into the kitchen and read it while I make dinner. I have to stay up until three in the morning to find out what happens in the end, and stumble bleary-eyed into work an hour late because I overslept, with

smudges from the ink of the last page on my cheek.

What keeps all the editors I know going isn't coffee or alcohol or the late nights spent crunching numbers to get the largest possible advance for their beloved authors. It's the love of the book, of the creative process, of making something good even better, of finding that gemstone buried under fool's gold and polishing it to a brilliant sheen.

That's what I'm looking for; as a voracious reader, that's what I want to spend my money on when I'm in a bookstore, and as a publishing professional, that's what I want to edit.

I'm interested in several different genres, but right now I am concentrating on two. I'm helping to expand our mainstream women's fiction title selection. Think Oprah Book Club meets Nick Hornby—funny, poignant, emotionally compelling novels with happy, or at least bittersweet, endings.

I'm also running Tor's paranormal romance program. I am looking for stories that are novel length (80,000 to 130,000 words), with well-realized characters, set in well-realized worlds—either this one, one similar to this one, or a completely new, never seen before world—with paranormal elements. Those elements can be science fictional, fantastical, magical, or horrific—witches or ghosts or vampires or gargoyles, time travel or space opera or historical fantasy; anything supernormal, as long as it's made somehow plausible within its context. Of course, there needs to be a conflict—an *interesting* conflict. As a parallel or secondary plotline, there

should be an emotionally satisfying and evocative relationship between two consenting adults.

These books are going to be sold as mass market original romance novels, with the word "Romance" and the Tor imprint on the spine. This a well-travelled path for Tor Books; we're the number one science fiction and fantasy publisher in the world, and we've published plenty of romantic fantasies, romantic science fiction novels, and various other books with romantic subplots, like Westerns, mysteries, historicals, and horror. This is the first time, however, that we're specifically targeting the romance audience, and so far just the mention of this is enough to excite the writers out there who are all looking for that niche to put their not-quite-traditional romance novel.

It took a while to come up with our plan of action, and we're still working on it, moving slowly but surely. We want every book to be interesting and unique and appealing to both the traditional/category romance reader as well as the reader who wants something a bit more substantial.

We want everyone who picks up one of these books—everyone who picks up any Tor or Forge book—to enjoy reading it as much as the author enjoyed writing it, and as much as we enjoyed working with it.

You can find Anna's paranormal romance guidelines on the internet at <http://www.tor.com/paranormalromance.html>, or you can contact her directly at anna.genoese@tor.com or Anna Genoese, Tom Doherty Associates, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010; be sure to specify whether you would like her paranormal romance guidelines, her women's fiction guidelines, or the general guidelines for Tor/Forge. She does accept unagented and/or unsolicited submissions, but does not accept submissions via fax or telephone pitches.

One Writer's Journey From Depressed to "Succeeded"

This month's column is intensely personal for me. For years I've suffered periodic bouts of depression. When I have the soul deep blues, I am paralyzed—rendered helpless by a force over which I seem to have no control.

I am in good company. Dickens, Eliot, Poe, Blzac, Melville, Fitzgerald, and Tolstoy are among the writers who suffered depression. Some cut short brilliant careers because they could no longer cope with the deep black moods that descended on them—Hemingway, Plath, Sexton, and Woolf, to name a few.

It is only within the last 25 years that the scientific community began to study the high incidence of depression among creative people. The results may astonish you. According to Kay Redfield Jamison (*Scientific American*—"Manic Depressive Illness and Creativity"), writers are ten times more likely to be depressed and 18 times more likely to commit suicide than people in other professions.

While the problem is often *clinical*, I suspect that a huge factor in depression among writers is the nature of the profession. By necessity we write alone. If we also live alone, our isolation is total. And who among us has never perceived a rejection letter as a personal insult? Who has never wondered if the check will arrive in time to pay the bills.... or if there will be a check at all. Deep down we all know that there are 15 jillion talented aspiring writers waiting to take our place if we fail.

In addition, we are battered by life (divorce, sickness, death, family issues). So what's a writer to do?

I turned to Charlotte Hughes for answers. A multi-talented author of romantic comedy, mystery, action adventure, and soft horror, my friend Charlotte suffered personal and professional reverses that would have wiped out a lesser person. Born in Beaufort, South Carolina, this two-time Maggie Award winner is currently riding high on the *NY Times* list. How did she climb out of the pit?

She has shared her amazing story with candor and a generous spirit. Here's what Charlotte told me: "If telling about my painful experience will help others, I'm happy to share my story."

NINK: Charlotte, you're in a secure position now, both financially and personally, but I know your journey hasn't been easy. What were you doing when everything fell apart?

Charlotte Hughes: I could say my life fell apart five years ago, although it actually began happening long before that. But five years and four months ago, I walked out on a 20-plus year marriage, left two sons behind, one of whom had and still has serious emotional problems, and signed over my shares of a highly successful business, that I helped create, to my husband. I gave up a luxury home on a private island and took on all the marital and IRS debt, only to find myself suddenly unemployed after 18 years of publishing books.

Did I mention that my sons refused to leave with me? In fact, they refused to even speak to me for months and months after I left their dad. Or did I tell you that, during this period, the older one barely survived an automobile accident in which his neck was broken?

Whew! I get stressed even talking about it.

NINK: After the shock wore off, how did you feel?

CH: I felt like a failure. I had failed at everything—motherhood, marriage, my profession. Everything had collapsed. I felt as if everybody and everything I loved had been swept away in a tornado. One day I had it all and the next I had nothing.

All I had to show for a lifetime of hard work was a condo I managed to purchase, two spoiled-rotten Dachshunds, and a lot of debt.

NINK: That must have been horrible for you. What was your first thought?

CH: I knew I had to find a job fast, making as much money as I could until I started selling books again. At the time of my separation I was writing for two publishers. One of the lines discontinued (I'd been writing for this line for 12 years) and the other one simply had no interest in buying another book. When I began looking for a job, I was stunned to learn the kind of salaries my girlfriends were making. We're talking about college-educated professionals making less than \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year. When you consider that the per capita income in South Carolina is less than \$24,000 annually, that's scary. I couldn't live on that and pay off my debts. The only people I knew who made really good incomes were lawyers and my old housekeeper who was cleaning up—pardon the pun—due to heavy tourist trade in our area.

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The Buzz in the Biz.....

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NINK: *How did you survive financially?*

CH: When you have lost almost everything, you will do anything to protect what you have left. I was determined to keep my condo, pay off these marital debts, and keep my high credit rating. So I went to work for my housekeeper.

The money wasn't bad. I worked seven days a week for a year and a half cleaning vacation homes and condos, sometimes three houses/condos per day. There were no sick days. I went to work one day so sick I carried the garbage can around with me while I cleaned so I could lean over and throw-up. I came home at the end of the day, grabbed something to eat, showered, worked on my latest proposal, and then fell into bed. Come morning, I got up and did it all over again. One day ran into another. I had no life outside of work. But I kept the bills paid, and the long hours kept my mind off my children. I was just coping.

NINK: *How did you cope emotionally?*

CH: I survived emotionally through good friends and a therapist who allowed me to clean her office in exchange for therapy sessions. This is funny but true. I read and listened to self-help books and tapes. Dr. Wayne Dyer was a favorite. In one of his tapes, he says, "Don't let a tired or old person move into your body." That became my mantra.

NINK: *But you kept plugging away at your writing?*

CH: Yes. I studied a book entitled *Get it Done, A Guide to Motivation, Determination and Achievement* by Ian McMahan, PhD. After reading his work, I began to think how I could apply his suggestions and create a change in my life. That, along with Dr. Dyer's suggestions helped me formulate a plan.

NINK: *And what was that plan?*

CH: First, I had to get rid of all the negative crap in my head. I had to stop being angry with my ex-husband and everyone else who had ever hurt me. I'd remembered reading an article in *Reader's Digest* where an author wrote, "To hate someone is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die." Dr. Wayne Dyer mentioned a quote by an author that went something like this: "Forgiveness is the fragrance released from the lily beneath the heel that crushed it."

I can honestly say that today I have forgiven everyone. I can top that by saying that today I am capable of loving and praying for everyone, even those who hurt me the most. What joy and freedom!

I had to let go of those things that hurt me most. The first two people I had to let go of were my children. If they wanted to hate me for walking away from an emotionally abusive relationship, then they were just going to have to hate me. I had served my time, gone the distance.

I began looking at friendships. I had to let go of friends who were too needy or negative. This can be painful because everyone brings something good into your life, despite their shortcomings. But I had to let go of any and all unhealthy relationships.

I also memorized another quote: In his book, *As a Man Thinketh*, James Allen writes: "All that a man achieves and all that he fails to achieve is the direct result of his own thoughts." Amen to that. I could not risk surrounding myself with negative people or negative thinking.

Next, I *narrowed my priorities*. My priorities consisted of getting healthy physically and emotionally, keeping my bills paid, and selling a book. I constantly listened to Wayne Dyer's tapes as I drove from one cleaning job to the next, and that gave me a lot of

hope.

NINK: *Resolutions, goals, and plans are hard to keep. How did you do it?*

CH: I committed myself to this plan of self-improvement.

One of the books I'd been working on during this time was entitled *A New Attitude*. This was *my* book, a retelling of my story in a fictional way. Although my protagonist's story was entirely different from mine, the theme was the same: A woman rebuilds her life after having lost everything. In Marilee Abernathy's story, her husband, a Baptist minister, runs off with the town floozy. Here's the kicker. Her 15-year-old son goes with him. Through Marilee I was able to get my "stuff" out while looking at it in a hilarious way. Writing about the 15-year-old son who makes a few serious mistakes, just as my own son had done, was very painful for me, but I was finally able to look at what I had gone through in a whole new light.

NINK: *Tell us how your book also became your catharsis.*

CH: *A New Attitude* opens with Marilee, having lost her family, trying to kill herself. Fortunately, she botches each attempt. I laughed until I cried as I wrote these scenes. It's really strange—okay a little sick—that I am able to find humor in almost everything. Thank God for that or I would have been right up there trying to hang myself alongside Marilee! Just like me, Marilee had a support system of women, and they were as funny and loving as the friends who supported me. And just like me, she went through some very dark moments, only to find herself in a hilarious situation the next. So writing Marilee's story was very cathartic for me. I laughed and cried as I wrote her story because I was actually writing my own.

NINK: *So you finished the book then waited for the sale?*

CH: Yes, but I was unable to sell

A New Attitude although one publishing company kept it six months and had me do rewrites. Finally, I hired a new agent, and he withdrew the manuscript. But even he had trouble selling it at first. Weeks passed and I heard nothing.

I continued listening to Dr. Dyer telling me not to let a sick or tired person move into my body, but this was not always easy. Almost 1½ years of constant work had passed, and still no sell. Even though I tried to keep a tired person from moving in, I'll have to tell you I had muscle aches. Consider the fact there are 650 muscles in our bodies: that's a lot of aches! But I kept going.

NINK: How did you feel after yet another defeat?

CH: Demoralized. I was so broken. I had struggled for so long. And I felt so alone.

Still, I pushed. When I left for my cleaning jobs each morning, I was dressed nicely and my makeup was perfect. I greeted my customers with hugs, listened to their problems, which helped me forget mine, and they became my extended family. Also, my customers were thrilled to have what they referred to as a "celebrity" cleaning their houses. One woman dragged me into her den where she was holding a bridge game, and she introduced me to her friends as a very successful author. Everybody had questions. Where did I get my ideas, how long did it take me to write a book, etc? Here I was holding a toilet brush, trying to explain the fundamentals of writing. One woman's daughter was so excited; she'd never met a real author, and she'd always wanted to write. She had a million questions. I told her I'd be glad to share what I knew, but there was a serious mildew problem in the master bath, and I had to see to it immediately.

NINK: What was your turning point?

CH: I also cleaned for a cancer patient who was being cared for by Hospice. This was where I learned one of the most important lessons in my life. This woman had been diag-

nosed with stage four ovarian cancer and given six months to live. I will tell you now that she is still alive and kicking five years later. Sure, she's had surgery and numerous chemo treatments, but her attitude is what has kept her alive. I took care of her most personal needs, held her when she became sick and cleaned up after her. I bathed her. I washed her feet. I got to know all the Hospice volunteers, and I could literally feel the love coming from them as they helped this woman who was now my friend. And I became friends with the Hospice people.

Suddenly, I realized that this was my lesson. Something or someone greater than me thought it was time I found out what real life was about. It was while seeing to this woman's most basic needs, watching her bravery at times when I was certain she would die, that I found God.

This was my turning point.

NINK: What did you do next?

CH: One night I walked to a small chapel, and I finally cried. It was as if a damn had broken inside of me. I cried so hard I thought my guts would come up. I told God this: I said I was grateful that He'd kept me well so I could perform the labor necessary for me to keep my bills paid. I thanked Him for so many things—my loved ones, my little Dachshunds who slept with me each night and made me laugh when I didn't feel I had much to laugh about, my little condo that was my very own nest, and especially my friend with cancer, from whom I'd learned so much.

I also told God I was willing to clean houses for the rest of my life if He wanted me to. I told Him I was prepared to spend the rest of my life alone, that if I were to ever have another mate, I wanted God to choose him because I hadn't made a very good choice before. I told God I would put away my writing tools if He had something else in mind for me, but in return I wanted Him to give me the strength I needed to go on.

I don't know if anyone reading this has ever had a spiritual experience, but I had one that night.

NINK: Though we call our

spiritual experiences different things—connecting with the Universe, talking to God, writing with the angels—many writers I know have them. In her book on writing, *Escaping Into the Open*, Elizabeth Berg talks about meditation as a way of opening to the Universe before she writes.

CH: God literally spoke to me, and this is the absolute truth. In my right ear, God said this: "I will show you success like you have never known."

Now most people would have jumped up and down and said, "Yes! Success! All right! 'Bout time!" But here's the kicker. What God viewed as success for me did not necessarily mean the same thing I thought it meant. Perhaps God wanted me to continue helping others through my hard work, just as I think I helped my cancer friend. Maybe He thought I'd be better off working for Hospice or some other organization. All I could do was thank God for talking to me, go home and wait it out.

I surrendered it all to Him.

NINK: How did events unfold after that?

CH: Two weeks later my agent sold *A New Attitude* to MIRA books. Next, came *Hot Shot* which hit the *USA Today* list.

Then my younger son moved in with me, and he literally turned his life around. He has kept a good job as an electrician's assistant for more than a year, and he recently went back to college where he is an A student despite working a full time job. My other son still has problems, but we are taking it one day at a time.

Janet Evanovich, a friend who supported me through all the tough times, asked me to write a new series with her. Two books have been published thus far; each one has spent about eight weeks in the top ten spot on the *New York Times*. Janet and I are working with a great editor and having a ball with the series.

And... I met the man of my dreams, a clinical psychologist—although God would

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The Buzz

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ have done me a bigger favor by introducing me to a cosmetic surgeon. This man champions groups such as Citizens Opposed to Domestic Abuse and fights for women's rights. He is one of the kindest human beings I've ever met.

NINK: *Tell us where you are now, both in your personal life and your career.*

CH: After five years of struggle, I can finally relax and know that everything is going to be okay. I'm a newlywed, and I'm learning that love doesn't have to be hurtful. My new husband, having no children of his own, loves my sons and

my Dachshunds dearly. They have become his sons and his Dachshunds, which means he has to clean dog poop from the yard now and then. My sons love him as well. My husband is also very gentle and nonjudgmental, which helps in dealing with my older son and his problems. When my husband looks at me, I know there is unconditional love.

NINK: *I believe we're meant to learn about ourselves in every situation. What did you learn?*

CH: I discovered that I have more strength and determination inside of me than I ever thought. I also learned that life is about change and growth, and that there are going to be good times and bad, and that I am not the only one who has

been through the bad. And the voice that whispered to me that night—"I will show you success like you have never known"—spoke the truth.

I'm publishing books again, and, yes, I've become what most people would consider a success. But success is not really about how many books you publish or whether or not they make the lists. That's the icing on the cake. My success is knowing that, no matter what, I never have to be alone and that if I look deep inside I will always find a source of strength that can literally move mountains. Anything is possible!

NINK: *And that says it all: we are not alone. Thank you, Charlotte.*



Sticky Notes from the Edge

— Cheryl Anne Porter

Defining and Defending a Writer's Rites

Original title: "Writing Made Me Anal Retentive Beyond a Degree That is Considered Normal in the Real World." But then I thought: *Do I really want to see that word in my title?* I, of course, mean "normal."

First topic: rites and rituals we perform daily before we sit down to write. You might not have considered your pre-writing activities as such, but they are. It's OK. You're simply performing those behaviors, which have, in the past, successfully called up your muse. And now you have to keep doing them, or the blasted little demon will not return.

The problem is you might have been doing something totally stupid right before you were charged with a creative burst that produced some of your best writing. And now you have to keep doing the stupid thing in the fervent hope that it will again produce the magic. Me, I have to...I'm not proud of this, so I'll say it quickly... empty all the separate little trash cans in the house into one and toss it into the big garbage container in the garage. Go ahead. Laugh. It got me a starred review in *Publishers' Weekly*.

Want more? I have to make the bed and water the house stalks (can't honestly call them "house plants"). Rid the kitchen counters of such detritus as dishes, small appliances, and children. Then I stare blankly out a window (also called "thinking"). Bottom line? I have to get things "just so" before I can finally sit down to write. I also have to have that last mug of coffee I never drink. But the mug must be there. People. Or I can't write.

Let's talk about you. Maybe you wear certain clothes (covered in a previous column). Or sit in a certain place (in front of the computer is best). Or have music playing or the TV on. Or your bullwhip close by in case a clueless loved one dares to interrupt your flow.

Which brings us to this: At some point, you're going to have to explain yourself to the non-writers in your household.

Try this. When the non-writer wonders aloud what the hell it is I'm doing vacuuming the curtains when I said I was going to write, I respond, with a maniacal glint in my eyes (practiced in front of a mirror): "I must have order around me before I can create chaos."

If that cosmically artistic comment doesn't clear the room, try this one. But first, I have a question. *Why* are there non-writers in our houses to question our daily attempts to call up the muse? *Why?* Anyway, they're there. So stare at them (same maniacal glint) and say: "Why are you messing with me? How can it be, after all this time, that you do not understand my mood must be clear in order for me to write?"

Or...you could just tell them the truth. You are indeed performing a ritual, the next step of which is a sacrifice. Any volunteers?

The writer would have you know that no small household appliances or lovingly planted stalks were harmed in the production of this column.

Agent's View



What Kind of Agent Should You Have?

BY IRENE GOODMAN

The right agent can make a vital, dramatic, and permanent difference in your career. So, how do you narrow down the possibilities? Besides checking your sources and compiling a short list of excellent candidates, it's important to consider what *kind* of agent would best suit you. There are various styles, and each style has its set of pros and cons:

1. The "Living Room Agent"

Many agents start out by working out of their homes, and some continue to work at home throughout their careers. The general image of this is that it's a one-person operation. While this kind of agent may have an assistant or some other people on board, there is generally only so much room in anyone's home or one-room office, so the image is often close to the truth. The advantages of this kind of setup are that your agent has every reason to be available, attentive, and very tuned into your needs. He may answer his own phone, which eliminates delay, he may be available for longer hours, and he will depend very directly on commissions. There is an immediacy to this setup that works well for authors; you don't have to go through any layers and the relationship is often very close.

The down side is that there is no particular luster to this kind of arrangement. A one-person business may be very powerful, but it's still just one person. If anything happens to that person, the business may cease to exist. And no matter how many big names that person may have, it's still a one-man band.

2. The Medium-Sized Agency

This is a situation in which there is more than one agent but it is not a huge "brand name" kind of place. This gives both you and the agent a lot of flexibility. Although you are represented by one person, there are other people around with whom your agent can exchange information and advice. This gives all the agents in the group more clout, more visibility, and more knowledge. I should tell you that I am partial to this arrangement because I just moved into such an office. There are seven of us, and although we maintain our separate identities

and are responsible for ourselves, we constantly refer people to each other, we exchange all kinds of ideas, information, and tips, and we are recognized as a forceful and experienced group. I feel that this gives authors the best of both worlds: we offer the clout and image of a larger agency, but can still provide the hand-crafting and individuality of a boutique agency.

The down side? Agencies of this type function in different ways, so you will need to ask some questions. Some of the down sides of the brand name agency may apply here, but you will need to check to find out.

3. The "Brand Name" Agency

We all know what the big-name places are. And if that kind of razzle-dazzle is what you want, then go for it. There is always something to be said for instant recognition. If you go with a big agency, they will tell you that they can call on their huge client base to help you get great sub rights deals. For example, they'll see if Harrison Ford, a client of another branch of the agency, wants to star in the movie version of your romantic suspense novel. While this sounds plausible and certainly appealing, it almost never happens. The reality is that your romantic suspense novel becomes one more item in the larger scheme of things of a huge agency, so it's not the priority to them that it is to you, or to a "smaller" agent. And Harrison Ford can choose from just about anything he wants, so you have to weigh the glamour against the perspective. Individual authors can get lost in a large agency. It's also a fact that the movie side of a large agency is going to make a lot more money than the author side, so no matter how big you are as an author, you will not be as big here as you will be in another kind of agency.

A big agency is departmentalized, so that an accounting department will handle money, a separate sub rights department will send your books to foreign agents, and another department will consider it for dramatic rights. This can be very efficient, but it also means you can fall through the cracks, and it is almost always more time-consuming.

The most important aspect of a large agency that authors do not usually consider is that your agent is probably not a free and independent



What Kind of Agent?

Continued from p. 13 ▶▶▶

operator. By this I mean that he is an employee. He works for someone else. Arrangements may differ, but the most usual is for the agents to give half their commissions to the company in exchange for overhead and the image of a large agency. Think about this. It changes the dynamic considerably when your agent does not have to worry about taking care of expenses, but works for a smaller commission. The rent, the personnel, the messenger service, the phone system, the computers—all those things come with the job. And a job is exactly what it is—not an entrepreneurship.

While any reasonably successful agent should be able to take care of overhead, it's a different psychology when you can, but you don't have to. I am not saying that agents who work for someone don't work hard for their authors. I'm saying that they are never living as close to the reality as their authors are. The equality of the author/agent relationship is compromised when the agent is cushioned.

I'm sure some people will find this objectionable, but that is my view of it. There is nothing quite like

knowing that every penny you earn is yours, and every expense you have is also yours. It's called being in business. It's like owning as opposed to renting. When the plumbing breaks in a rental, you just call the landlord and he calls the plumber. When you own the house, you call and pay for the plumber—but you also retain all the equity the house accrues.

Whatever kind of agency is best for you, be as thorough as possible before making a decision. Ask for references. Ask for stories. Ask how the business is run. And by all means, consider the chemistry factor. This is someone you're going to work closely with, hopefully for a long time. Make sure it's someone you can laugh and dish with as well as make money with.

I would like to add that the best time and place to find an agent isn't usually at a conference. If it's too hectic, everyone's attention gets diluted. So much the better if you can make a special trip for which this is the sole purpose—but if that's not feasible, a few long and uninterrupted phone conversations just may be better than a harried lunch at some hotel in Denver or Orlando.

In the end, you should go with your gut. If you really have trouble deciding, here's a trick. Get a coin and choose sides—heads for one agent, tails for another. Shake the coin thoroughly and hide the result with your hand. Now quick. Before you look, was there one agent you were secretly hoping it would be? Then that's your answer. ❖

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:

Mary Burton, Richmond VA
Susan Hicks (*Elizabeth Chadwick*), Radcliffe-on-Trent,
Nottingham, UK

New Members:

Joan Avery, Framington Hills MI
Michelle Black, Overland Park KS
Beverly Brandt, Saint Petersburg FL

Ninc has room to grow...recommend
membership to *your* colleagues.
Prospective members may apply online
at www.ninc.com.

Bits'n'Pieces

AMAZON TRAFFIC
DOWN...One measur-
able effect of the war in

Iraq is reduced traffic at Amazon.com. According to comScore, U.S. visits to the site were down 7 percent for week ending March 23. Of course to be fair it should also be reported that Borders and B&N and also book-sellers in the UK report lower first quarter sales due to the war as well, but since many of us at Ninc have Amazon issues, I just thought you'd all like to know...

AND IN ANOTHER ONE I WISH I'D MADE UP...

It wasn't a book on how to make methamphetamines that Denver's Tattered Cover was keeping confidential purchasing information on as police suspected. It was a book about Japanese calligraphy, *Guide to Remembering Japanese Characters*. Attorney Dan Recht noted, "The Tattered Cover believes that all information about customer purchases is private. The bookstore is not in the business of determining what is helpful to law enforcement and what is not." The confidential purchasing information was finally revealed at a recent panel discussion. So why does this make me smirk?

— *Compiled by Terey daly Ramin*



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Passion”

“Technique alone is never enough. You have to have passion.”

—Raymond Chandler

The other day, I was watching the Chandleresque, hard-boiled thriller *L.A. Confidential*. Guy Pearce plays an intelligent young cop who discovers that he has become corrupted by ambition. In a confessional conversation about this, Pearce talks about what made him become a cop: He wanted to catch the bad guys who thought they could get away with it. Then he asks Kevin Spacey, who plays a shrewd, morally corrupted cop, why *he* became one. A sad, surprised look washes across Spacey’s face as he says, “I don’t remember.”

I am a shrewd, emotionally corrupted writer, and, some days, I don’t remember, either. I have forgotten many times why I became a novelist. It’s often a challenge to keep remembering why I write.

It is the heavy reality of the writing life which makes the “why” so easy to forget: Gutless rejection letters, denigrating revision letters, incompetent copy edits, insulting reviews, late checks, disappointing sales, down-trending print-runs, shrinking advances, royalties paid in a geological timeframe, imprints folding, publishers down-sizing their lists and conglomerating their overhead.

One day your editor expresses all the enthusiasm of an overtired undertaker. The next day your agent demonstrates all the faith and commitment of a diseased street-walker. Your book is packaged with a cover that would embarrass anyone who wasn’t raised in a Red Light district. You give a thoughtful interview only to discover the resultant article describes you as churning out trash. Three people show up at your book signing, two of them because they thought you were someone else; the third person came because you owe him money. When you make the *New York Times* list, a neighbor asks you “which” *NYT* list you’re on, because there must be a separate one for *those* type of books. Though you’ve been publishing regularly for years, you know people who ask, every single time they see you, if you still write. (No, I fell back on my independent wealth when the going got tough.)

More than one writer has discovered that a handshake deal with a publisher turned out to be worth less

than the paper it never got printed on; and, hey, raise your hand if even the stuff that got written down didn’t get honored, gosh, imagine that. Publishers which require sacked employees to vacate the premises immediately, accompanied by a security escort, nonetheless object to writers who request that their earnings not be turned over to agents whom they have fired. Writers have delivered work to editors only to be told it was “unpublishable,” “unacceptable,” or “unsalvageable.” Even in cases where the editors have clearly been wrong (ex. the book sells elsewhere for a good advance and goes on to get award nominations), they nonetheless do it again to someone else. Because, what, if they keep refusing to publish books, they’ll eventually get it right? (Of course, I’m only basing this remark on personal knowledge, not overall statistics. Of the eight writers I know whose editors refused to publish their delivered work, seven soon got offers elsewhere; the eighth couldn’t market the work elsewhere because of a rights restriction.)

Editors have told me that my advance is more than I’m worth, my work isn’t that good, I should write more like so-and-so, my work is “shit,” I don’t know how to write, my work is an “insult” to them, and I don’t “appreciate” them enough. Agents have told me I’m “not worth” their time, I’ll never amount to anything, my query is an insult to them, I’m “self-destructive” (based on my choosing to fire that agent), they “hate” my work, I’m “lazy” (I wrote a mere 1,400 pages that year), and I’m “crazy.”

And people wonder why I’ve become a little harsh on the subject of publishers, editors, and agents over the years.

You sweat blood, tears, and guts over a manuscript for six months or three years, only to have it rejected everywhere it’s submitted, or to see your own publisher treat it so carelessly that people start saying to you, “There *must* be a personal vendetta against you there. Things have gone past the point where so many screw-ups on a book could be sheer coincidence.”

And just when you’re teetering on the brink of insanity, hovering at the edge of reason, clinging to the last shreds of your self-respect... someone tells you how *lucky* you are to be a professional novelist.

(Bartender! Over here, please!)





THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

▶ ▶ ▶ You *bet* I sometimes can't remember why I came to this party.

"My muse is a stubborn bitch. She's showing up on her terms, not on mine."

—Anne Stuart

As paid professionals with contractual obligations, commercial pressures, and financial needs, many of us know the feeling of the well running dry, the enthusiasm being smothered, the spirit getting withered. Maybe we've experienced it ourselves at various points in our career (*I* have, anyhow); or maybe you've only seen friends go through it, even if you've (so far) dodged that bullet yourself.

Yet I remember writing my first three manuscripts in a fever, over a period of less than one year. I was so absorbed in the stories, I would sometimes cancel fun social things for the pleasure of staying home and writing more. I always looked forward to sitting down with my writing. I often completely lost track of time or reality, writing for hours after I should have gone to bed, or for twenty minutes past when I should have left for work.

I have never recaptured the innocent rush of delight I experienced while working on my first few manuscripts as an unpublished unknown amateur. (As wise Ninc member Robyn Carr once said to me, "You can't be a virgin twice.") It was like falling in love. It was the pleasure and the fun of the work which kept me going in the absence of any obligation, encouragement, contract, money, kudos, or other external reasons to keep going. It was the *passion*.

Now, please note, I was writing with every intention of seeking publication. I specifically chose to write short category romance because, at that time (the late 1980s), that subgenre seemed like the best possibility of selling something I thought I might actually be able to write: a very short novel about two likeable people falling in love. So even then, my writing involved ambition and commercial-world baggage. I did not start writing for self-expression (you can't seriously imagine that I've ever struggled to express myself in the normal course of events). I didn't even start writing for personal satisfaction. I started writing because I wanted to sell a book. So I can't ever say that the desire to be published is necessarily the wrong reason or a bad reason to write.

However, that stark ambition did not interfere with my falling in love with writing and becoming compulsive about the stories I was telling. Indeed, had I *not* experienced all that pleasure, obsession, and satisfaction—all

that passion—I doubt I'd ever have finished my first manuscript. I've never been the most disciplined person, and a book is *very* hard work, after all.

Eventually, after too many hours in this chair combined with too many demoralizing experiences in this business, I tried to quit. (Twice, in fact.) But I couldn't do it. The problem wasn't that I couldn't quit the business; it was always that I couldn't quit writing. When I was a teenager, an adult who was a mentor to me and my chums once told us that we should wait until we were older to start having sex, because "once you start, you'll discover you can't give it up." The same compulsion is true of writing, too, though no one ever warned me about it.

And the thing is, if I'm going to write—and I am, I can't give up that passion—then I want to be published. My passion isn't just for writing, I'm also passionate about my work being *read*. Call it the difference between masturbation and sex; it's so much more fun with a partner. Call it cooking a five-course meal that you damn well want appreciative food-lovers to come over and *eat*; otherwise all your hard work, skill, and commitment just rot alone and wasted.

So I endure all the garbage that our business inflicts on me. Not just for the passion of writing, but also for the passion of being read. This is what I remind myself when I start wondering (sometimes every damn day) why I became a writer and why I don't just quit when I'm frustrated, unhappy, or demoralized. Passion is the source, the well, the font. It is ground zero. Without my passion, it would indeed be time to pack up and blow this popsicle stand.

But while I have the passion, it's still worth enduring all the shit that the writing life brings down upon me... even though the rational part of me wants you to hit me repeatedly until I come to my senses and blow this pop stand, anyhow.

"The storyteller's own experience of men and things, whether for good or ill... has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart."

—Murasaki Shikibu (c. 978-c. 1031)

Not long ago, another writer told me that a romance editor at one of the big houses remarked that she was getting a lot of submissions which were polished and hit their genre marks... but which had no spark and weren't grabbing her at all—submissions which were competent but lackluster, professional but passionless.

I was at a romance conference two years ago, and one of the things I noticed is that the vast majority of ques-

tions posed by aspiring writers were all about the rules: Can I use this or that setting? Can I use this or that profession? This or that time period? Can I write a paranormal element? Could I have a cop and a teen instead of a cowboy and a baby? What length should the book be? How do you feel about subplots? (Well, to be frank, I wouldn't want my sister to marry one.)

It's as if a novel is a punch-card, with some aspiring writers convinced that if they get all twenty holes punched, then they'll win *The Secret Handshake*. And like a friend of mine who is an award-winning novelist, I find myself thinking, "Where's the passion?" Where's the individuality, the story which only *this* writer can tell, the story which this writer is *obsessed* with telling? Where is the fun? Where is the risk? Where is the storyteller's compulsion?

Not that this phenomenon is restricted to aspiring writers; it exists among frustrated professionals, too. I've seen professional writers asking the same questions in essence, but with the details altered to reflect their own aspirations: What makes a book a lead title? What makes it a bestseller? A blockbuster? If I changed the kidnapping to a mass abduction, would that make the book a Big Commercial Novel?

I have occasionally felt a mad impulse to provide editors with a placard they could simply hold up instead of repeating over and over in their Q&As that there isn't a perfect formula, there isn't a generic answer about what kind of book will enable an aspiring writer to break into the business, propel a midlist writer into a lead slot, or bust a genre leader out into mega-star status.

"Part of being a real writer is defending your vision and not caving in to outside pressures."

—Jennifer Crusie

In truth, I tend to believe that publishers bring repetitious story questions and passionless submissions upon themselves by actively exhorting a cookie-cutter mentality. While sitting in a workshop audience a few years ago, for example, I was stunned to hear an editor tell us, when asked about Kathleen Eagle's brilliant novel, *Sunrise Song*, that such original work was all very well for a great writer like Eagle, but don't you folks try this at home, *you* should definitely stick to the specific settings, tones, and storylines I'm telling you I want to see.

Gosh, connect the dots and see if *you* can figure out the mystery of passionless manuscripts.

Another editor once told me that although she usually said she was looking for something new and fresh, what she was actually looking for was more of what's selling well this year or what perpetually sells well.

Even if writing-by-numbers sells books in theory, though, I've learned in reality that the result of repressing my passion in favor of publication is invariably that I get *neither* thing: I don't get the passion of writing something I love and believe in; and I can't *sell* anything but work I love

and believe in, anyhow—at least, not for long. So the cookie-cutter mentality is a dead-end for me. Sacrificing my voice, my vision, and my story is a bad choice for me, because it inevitably results in a lose-lose-lose situation: I don't get the sale, the career growth, or the professional break that I want; I end up with weak work which lacks voice, sparkle, depth, individuality, or integrity; and I don't experience the pleasure, the obsession, and the satisfaction—the passion which is what makes all the crap of the writing life worth enduring.

I'll probably always write with a determined eye on selling and publication, and I'll probably always strive for bigger advances, better packaging, and more readers (whether I'll *get* them remains to be seen). But I have learned, over the course of taking many knockout blows in this ring, that the starting place every single day has to be passion. I can't write well without it, I can't write for long without it, and I believe that I can only achieve success by honoring my vision, my voice, and my stories rather than by attempting to fill out a publisher's checklist, whether it's a real one or one which I merely imagine exists.

As with the evolutionary behavior of a predator filling its special ecological niche on the savannah, the writing process must provide its own reward (the thrill of the chase, the pleasure of the kill, the satisfaction of the feast) in order for the writer to thrive in the hostile environment of the publishing world.

"What another would have done as well as you, do not do it. What another would have said as well as you, do not say it; written as well, do not write it. Be faithful to that which exists nowhere but in yourself—and thus make yourself indispensable."

—André Gide

Laura Resnick's June release, *The White Dragon*, is the first volume of an epic two-part fantasy tale. The second volume, *The Destroyer Goddess*, will be released in December. Additionally, *Fallen From Grace*, written as Laura Leone, will be available in June. You can find her on the Web at www.sff.net/people/laresnick.

Bits'n'Pieces

BOOKS FOR SOLDIERS

...<http://booksforsoldiers.com> features a message

board where soldiers (or their friends and family members) can request reading material. At last glance, there were requests for romances as well as other genres. The board is simple to use and instructions for packing and sending the book(s) overseas are included. It's an easy morale booster for individual troops and an alternative to Operation Paperback for those who haven't the time or energy to collect books to send to Resnick. (Hi, Laura! <g>)

— TdR

ONLINE FAREWELL

When I inherited this column from Brenda Hiatt in April 1999, I considered it a forum to help those who were wary of the Internet and hesitant to step into cyberspace. People were confused by listserves and lost in the maze of a seemingly billion URLs that were simply “out there.”

Now googling has a place in the dictionary, and we can easily find anything we want on the Internet by simply typing in a request. Authors have added their own URLs to the Internet maze. Listserves are as common as story ideas. And the information I provide in this column these days seems about as useful as a mother-in-law’s advice.

So I have decided, with Olivia’s blessing, that it’s time to put the mouse away and bring this column to a close.

The resources that you need are readily available on the Internet. As always, I recommend that you begin with the *Novelists, Inc.* website. If you haven’t visited **www.ninc.com** recently, pop out and take a look. It provides an array of useful information. You need a password to get into the Members Only section, but you can easily get the password by clicking “Members Only” and following the prompts provided. It might take a day or so for a response because all memberships are verified but you’ll find information—*The Agents Guide*, in particular—which makes your efforts worthwhile.

My favorite site on the Internet remains Jaclyn Reding’s *Useful Links for Romance Writers and Readers*, **www.jaclynreding.com/links**. I’m always amazed when I visit to see how much Jaclyn offers for both readers and writers. Her site is always a good place to begin if you don’t know where to go.

RESEARCH

Ninc member Kristen Kyle recently recommended *Dancetime Publications*, **www.dancetimepublications.com/store/index.htm**. The site sells videos on historical dance. Titles include: *The Romance of Mid 19th Century Couple Dances*, *The Ragtime Era 1910-1920*, *The Majesty of Renaissance Dance*, *Victorian Era Couple Dances*, and others.

FREE SOFTWARE

A couple of sites that offer freeware and shareware are **www.versiontracker.com** and **nonags.com**. If you’re looking for some specialized software, Version Tracker is a good place to look around. I discovered a free downloadable “Cliché Cleaner” which goes through a document and highlights clichés.

If you have a Palm Pilot® or Pocket PC, you might want to check out these useful sites that offer

downloadable software—much of it free—

- <http://www.handango.com/>
- <http://www.pocketpccentral.net/index.htm>
- <http://downloads-zdnet.com.com/2001-20-0.html?legacy=cnet>

OF INTEREST

Common Errors in English, **www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors**, is an interesting site. Once you get to the site, click “Go to List of Errors” where the real fun begins. It’s important to stop by the homepage first because the site owner, Paul Brians, is a university professor who doesn’t get paid for this site but relies on the number of hits for indirect benefits.

ONE LAST SITE

I’ve enjoyed sharing my discoveries with you these past four years and want to thank those who were always so helpful in providing tips on sites that would be of interest to Novelists, Inc. members. We’ve grown right along with the Internet, and we’ve managed to demystify it a bit.

I’ve had the privilege of working with four exceptionally talented *NINK* editors, and I thank them as well for allowing me to be part of this publication.

In closing, I re-recommend one last site, **www.1112.net/lastpage.html**.

Enjoy! And I’ll see you all on the Internet.

— Lorraine Heath

NINK bids Lorraine a fond farewell as columnist and extends many thanks for her invaluable contributions to the newsletter. You’ll still find her at ninlink as a moderator [see box below].

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BY LAWRENCE
WATT-EVANS

DEAD • RAYGUNS, ELVES & the WALKING



When I was a little kid I did the usual little kid thing of talking about what I wanted to be when I grew up, and as a general thing my parents were very encouraging.

I said I wanted to be a nuclear physicist when I couldn't yet *pronounce* "physicist," and they thought that sounded wonderful, and they told me that they were sure I could do that. When I talked about selling real estate, they said that would be a fine career choice. When I wanted to go into urban planning (a field that hardly existed yet, and which I called being a "city designer"), that was great. I'm pretty sure I went through the usual little-boy period of wanting to follow in my father's footsteps—not that I had a very clear idea of what an organic chemist actually did—and of course, they liked that idea.

Then when I was in second grade my teacher praised my very first creative writing assignment, and I went home and said that when I grew up I wanted to write stories for a living, and my parents said, "No, you don't." My mother told me it was almost impossible to break in; my father told me there was no money in it.

I was baffled. Writing stories was harder than nuclear physics? I didn't know the word yet, but I definitely had the concept "counter-intuitive," and that was about as counter-intuitive an idea as I'd ever heard. And the mere fact that there was a career my parents would try to talk me out of astonished me; up until then I'd thought they'd support me in anything short of axe-murdering puppies and kittens.

And naturally, with the perversity of youth, I now wanted to be a writer

more than anything. Other career choices had come and gone like mayflies, but for the next five years I was determined to be a writer when I grew up. I wrote my first story for submission when I was eight—a short science fiction story about a mutant lab mouse. A *very* short story. I wrote it out neatly in ink, since I didn't have permission to use the family typewriter, and put it in an envelope correctly addressed to the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (otherwise known as *F&SF*), with a five-cent stamp—and then my nerve ran out and I never mailed it. I still have it; I didn't actually send a story off for another nine years.

I kept writing stories, though—in fact, I got my hands on my father's old portable typewriter and wrote *lots* of stories, though I didn't tell anyone. I didn't show any of them to my parents or siblings. School writing assignments got far more attention than any other schoolwork, and were pretty much always highly praised by my teachers, but I didn't tell my parents about those, either. And I tried to find out why my parents didn't want me to write.

They told me that editors receive hundreds of submissions, and reject almost all of them. Well, yeah, I thought—most people aren't as smart and talented as I am. I didn't say that aloud.

They told me that it's harder than it looks, that it takes years of study and practice for most people to get good enough to be published. Sure, and nuclear physicists spend years in college and grad school.

They told me that most people who try to write never succeed at it. Oh, and most people who want to be

nuclear physicists just breeze through college admissions, ace all their courses, and have eager employers waiting for them?

And then they told me how writers often only got paid a penny a word (which wasn't true even then, but they thought it was), and I did some arithmetic, and decided I'd just have to do better than that.

In short, I wasn't convinced and thought they were just being pessimistic, that for some reason they had made up their minds on this particular subject.

For five years I said I wanted to be a writer, and they said I didn't. And finally they wore me down, and in junior high school I decided I wanted to be an architect instead, and write as a hobby.

But I still intended to write, I just didn't intend to do it for a living.

So I took drafting in high school, and math and physics, and got admitted to one of the top architecture schools in the country. I kept writing in private; in fact, in my senior year of high school I finally got up my nerve to send out a few stories (which were, of course, rejected). I even got a part-time job writing feature articles for a local newspaper.

But then it was off to college to study architecture—where I discovered that I didn't agree with my professors' opinions of what constituted good architecture; they were modernists, and I wasn't. I promptly flunked out.

And there I was, nineteen years old, living in my girlfriend's apartment in Pittsburgh, working as a cook at Arby's, with no idea what I wanted to do for a living.

I wanted to look busy while I figured it out, though. And I wanted to get back into college, for several reasons, and I didn't think my job at Arby's was going to

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ impress the admissions office. So I started writing and sending out stories, a lot of stories—I thought a stack of rejection slips might at least show the admissions people that I was making an effort at something interesting.

Which worked; I got readmitted, and after a year and a half in Pittsburgh I went back to school.

The thing is, during that year and a half I went from form rejections to encouraging letters, first from editorial assistants and then from the editors themselves, and the same week I got readmitted I sold my first short story, for all of two and a half cents a word.

My parents had been wrong. I had proven it. I *could* sell my fiction.

So I started writing novels, and sold the first one in 1979 at the age of 24, and I've been doing it full-time ever since. I've written about three dozen now, under a couple of different names.

It wasn't until after my father died that I finally found out why, apparently, they'd tried to discourage me. Among my father's papers, along with various technical articles and the half a textbook he'd written, we found a few old science fiction stories.

Really, really *bad* science fiction stories. Unpublishably bad, even by pulp standards.

It appears that when he was in grad school in the late 1940s my father had tried to write SF, and had failed miserably at it. In fact, it seems

to be about the only thing he ever tried to do that he *did* fail at. He'd apparently assumed that if he didn't have the talent for it, then neither would I.

What he forgot, of course, was that my mother was the family storyteller—*her* family was the one with the reputation for tall tales and yarn-spinning, and she was the one who had told her six kids her own versions of fairy tales and Greek and Norse myths.

She doesn't seem to have ever considered that this knack for telling stories might have anything to do with writing, either.

So they were wrong about the difficulties I'd face in breaking into the field. Writing actually came pretty easily for me. Oh, it took persistence, but it wasn't really *hard*.

Sometimes I wonder whether their determined efforts to discourage me are why I became a writer at all. Did I just want to meet the challenge and prove them wrong? Would I not have bothered to stick with it if they'd reacted to the suggestion as just another possibility, like selling real estate? Or was I born to be a writer, and nothing could have discouraged me?

If they had actively encouraged me to write, what would have happened? Might I have broken in even earlier?

It seems unlikely; after all, 24 is quite young enough; before that, what did I have to *say* about anything?

Or what if they'd been completely ignorant of the writing business, like so many people we meet, and thought that it was just a matter of finding time to sit down and type up your ideas? What if they'd thought, as so many people do, that all published novelists are rich? They might have encouraged me, and then when I ran up against the realities of rejection, tiny advances, slow payments, and all the other difficulties of a writer's life, how would I have reacted? *That* might have deterred me far more effectively than their advice.

So it may be that I'm a writer exactly because my parents told me it was the one thing I couldn't be. If so, I'm glad they were wrong.

But they were right about one thing.

It doesn't pay enough. ◉

Bits'n'Pieces

AGENCY NAME
CHANGE...Jane Dystel Literary Management has changed its name to Dystel & Goderich Literary Management. (Miriam Goderich has been a partner in the firm since 1995.) The agency also hired Jessica Papin, formerly an editor at the AOL Time Warner Book Group, and Jim McCarthy.

— TdR

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