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

Pride and Preservation, or Finding a Home for Your Papers

BY BRENDA W. CLOUGH
AND COLLEEN R. CAHILL

[This article was originally published “in slightly different form” in the Winter 2004 issue (Vol. 37, Issue 3) of *The Bulletin*, a publication of the Science Fiction Writers of America.]

All men are mortal. We therefore wisely prepare (or ought to) for our certain demise by planning our wills, trusts, estates, and such. The writer, however, has an additional chore. She has to consider her literary estate. A subset of this task is the disposition of papers, manuscripts, and research material. This article is going to focus primarily on the whys and hows of donating your papers to a library, university, or some such institution.

Before we get into donation, however, let us clear the preliminary ground. Naturally the writer’s first step in the consideration of his end times is to think about his will. Find an attorney, and wrap up all your major financial and personal affairs first. Any instructions or expressions of intent about your literary estate will be a document appended to, and kept with, your will.

Then, select a literary executor: someone who will manage not only your royalties after you die, but your legacy in literature. This executor can be a person or an institution—a library, university or bank, for instance. Plan to draw up written directions about what in general you want to happen. Do you want your copyrights to be

milked for all the money possible so as to support your spouse and kids? Or would you much rather have your books reprinted widely?

There are many ramifications to this issue. Would you let other writers continue your series, so that your characters can live on like Sherlock Holmes, Nero Wolfe, and James Bond? Or do you definitely want posterity to keep its paws off, the way Modesty Blaise has been put off limits? Laura Anne Gilman, executive editor for NAL/ROC, says, “It used to be that there was a lot more leeway in these things, but after a few consumer lawsuits by readers who felt gyped that they were reading a book not by Author A but by the author B-of-Author A’s estate’s choosing, you really have to get everything sewed up tight if you want the name to go forward.”

Madeleine E. Robins, author of *Point of Honour*, told us how she did it. “Long ago I arranged with my oldest writing bud to be my literary executor, to finish up anything he wanted to finish, and otherwise to make sure nothing was done with my work that would make me look like I had egg on my posthumous face. He will get a small fee for doing this. He turned around a couple of years later and had me written in in a likewise capacity for his work.”

The right literary executor can make a world of difference to how your work is remembered thirty years after you’re gone. Consider how Philip K. Dick’s career has been hardly marred at all by his demise. Reprint anthologists can tell sad

Continued on page 3 ▶ ▶ ▶

Members Only!
Be sure to vote...
Ballot in center.

INSIDE: *President’s Voice: Your Vote Matters...2, Sticky Notes: Fame, Fortune, and Notoriety...7, Empower the Writer: Conference Intro...8, BALLOT...Centerfold, Take Care of Your Eyes...9, Harlequin/Silhouette Changes...10, Writing Tech: The Pen...11 Ask Annette: Green-Eyed...12, Bits’n’Pieces...13, 16, The Girls in the Basement: How Lucky Are We?...14*

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Advisory Council

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

2004 Board of Directors

PRESIDENT Jean Brashear
P.O. Box 3000 #79
Georgetown TX 78627-3000
(512) 426-7153
bejean@cox-internet.com

PRESIDENT-ELECT: Vicki Lewis Thompson
1536 W. Cool Dr.
Tucson AZ 85704-2141
(520) 297-9308
VLTPEPWR@aol.com

SECRETARY: Jaclyn Reding
P.O. Box 3554
Worcester MA 01613-3554
(508) 886-4916
jaclyn@jaclynreding.com

TREASURER: Ann Josephson
P.O. Box 151596
Tampa FL 33684
(813) 915-0747
annj@tampabay.rr.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Lorraine Heath
P.O. Box 250034
Plano TX 75025-0034
(972) 359-7027
lorraine-heath@comcast.net

ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE:
Barbara Keiler
32 Atkinson Lane
Sudbury MA 01776-1939
Phone: (978) 443-0770
Fax: (978) 443-0775
b.keiler@juno.com

CENTRAL COORDINATOR: David L. Brooks
Novelists, Inc.
P.O. Box 1166
Mission KS 66222-0166
Fax: (913) 432-3132
ninc@kc.rr.com

Website: <http://www.ninc.com>

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President's Voice

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

In this issue, you'll find the ballot for the 2005 slate of officers and the Nominating Committee. Please take the time to vote!

Because Ninc's modus operandi is to present a slate of officers, it might be easy to assume that your vote isn't important, but nothing could be further from the truth. The slate is suggested by the Nominating Committee, with a set period after the slate is announced for additional candidates to be nominated, and the final lineup might appear to be a fait accompli. Done deal, no sweat, why bother, right?

Wrong. Perhaps the most important votes you'll cast will be for the Nominating Committee. Its members are charged with finding qualified and enthusiastic candidates to run for office, and their job is absolutely crucial to Ninc's continued well-being. Perhaps as you sit at home, it appears that Ninc runs so smoothly by default, but I promise you that it doesn't. Weighty issues and more subtle—but also important—ones land in Board laps all the time. We will remain a strong and viable organization, in great part, by the strength of the Boards who take office and accept the responsibility for stewardship of this organization we all prize so much.

So please...take a few minutes to mark your ballot and grab a stamp. We've made it easier than ever for you this year; you don't even have to hunt up an envelope. Just fold, staple or tape together, stamp it, and mail.

The members whose names appear on the ballot are willing to devote considerable time out of their busy schedules to caring for Ninc so that we can continue to have this wonderful and endlessly fascinating venue for lively and far-ranging discussions, laughter, angst, and support; in other words, the fellowship of those few who truly understand the lives we lead. Please help them out by devoting a few minutes out of your own busy schedule to exercise one of your most important privileges of membership: casting your vote.

— Jean

P.S. Also in this issue, Ken Casper gives us the first peek at his exciting plans for the 2005 conference in Manhattan. He and his committee have a ton of great ideas, so stay tuned for more!

Pride and Preservation

Continued from page 1 ▶▶▶ tales about literary executors who ignorantly hold out for inordinate sums of money for short story reprints—and thus ensure that the works never see the light of day again.

After you do all this, then it's time to think about a long home for your papers.

Reaping the Benefits

Reading accounts of other writers' papers would turn anybody green with envy. Consider what Ernest Hemingway's manuscripts brought at auction in 2000. The autographed handwritten first draft of his short story "The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber" went for a cool \$248,000, the highest price ever fetched by a short story manuscript.

There are plenty of golden stories of this type. Susan Sontag sold her manuscripts, papers, and 20,000 books to UCLA for a reported \$1.1 million. The late Terry Southern's archives were acquired in 2003 by the New York Public Library. Valued at \$200,000, the collection runs to more than forty boxes and is reputed to offer a complete portrait of the screenwriter who co-authored *Barbarella*, *Easy Rider*, and *Dr. Strangelove*. And also last year, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward sold their Watergate papers and notes to the University of Texas at Austin for a record \$5 million.

Obviously, to be paid cash for papers would be the most fun and profitable, and if you can persuade some institution to cough up the big bucks, by all means go for it. But for most of us it's as likely as a movie deal directed by George Lucas and starring Tom Cruise. In this era of budget cuts, it is unlikely a library will pay that kind of money for a collection unless it is of major historic or artistic importance. But a tax deduction in exchange for a donation of value is a much more realistic possibility, within anyone's grasp. You'll be giving something of value to a nonprofit institution and will thus be entitled to a tax write-off.

While current tax law is ungenerous, there are possible changes in the wind with a bill currently in Congress: S. 287, the "Artist-Museum Partnership Act." It would allow authors, artists, and others "a deduction equal to fair-market value" for "charitable contributions of literary, musical, artistic, or scholarly compositions created by the donor." This bill exists as of this writing but is due to expire in the fall. It is possible it will be re-submitted, something that writers' and artists' organizations should agitate for. Check on the status of legislation before you finalize your plans. In the meantime, under current regulations you do get a smaller tax write-off which may make donation profitable. Many writers

have found the current deduction sufficiently worthwhile to set up a repository for their papers well before they die.

It's important to keep in mind that the physical papers are separate from your copyright. Giving away your archives does not touch the copyrights unless you say so. You can donate the physical papers, but retain your right to publish new editions of your works—a real have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too situation. Nor is this arrangement disturbed by your passing. Your copyrights can continue to be separate, under the management of your literary executor, as part of your estate.

Better yet, you get to exert control over your material from beyond the grave. Those racy letters to your boyfriends? The incontrovertible proof that you've been cheating on child support since 1967? All these embarrassments can be hedged about with elaborate protections. You can require the material to be sequestered for decades after your death, or insist that it can only be read by students, or allow it to be read but not published. Those juvenile first drafts of your great works, for instance, might go better forever unpublished. Ernest Hemingway neglected this detail, and look what happened—his unfinished novels made a belated and depressing appearance in the bookstores several years ago.

You can even set up the donation and not give them the stuff until later. Woodward and Bernstein are being cagey that way. They're hanging onto the documents relating to the identity of Deep Throat, still red-hot after all these years, until the relevant people pass away. Only then will the papers join the rest of the archive in Texas. You might prefer to hold on to some items until you no longer need them, even to your death. All or part of the materials can be sent to the institution on your demise. But check with your lawyer on this one—you might not get any tax write-off until the donation actually takes place.

Setting up a bequest can ensure that your work stays in public the way that you would like. Not all of us are J.R.R. Tolkien, with a devoted Christopher Tolkien prepared to spend his life stoking the literary legacy and editing volume upon volume of notes and drafts. Do your heirs know anything about your work? Will your notes and manuscripts just be Grandma's junky old papers to them? Maybe your alma mater would be a more reliable steward. You can bind an institution contractually in a way that you may not be able to bind your heirs.

There's a prestige angle, too. There's no denying that to have all your junk carefully preserved for future generations is ego-boosting. You can brag that your papers are being kept at the Library of Congress or in a research collection at Harvard University. If your stuff is sufficiently cool they'll have exhibits of your manuscripts and memorabilia. This is a leap for ▶▶▶

Pride and Preservation

▶▶▶▶ immortality.

Finally, there's the housekeeping aspect. Giving your papers away gets them out of your filing cabinets and basement. If you're never going to look at those forty-year-old manuscripts again, why not get some money for them? A time comes in your life when you want to lighten the load, maybe move to smaller quarters. Safely parked in a research collection, your manuscripts would become someone else's responsibility. Students and fans who want to see them would go nag the librarians, not you. Someone else gets to worry about climate control, insect infestation, and dust. Someone else gets to pay for preserving and storing your stuff—irresistible!

Of course you have to be careful. This news item was up on SFsite.com in November 2002:

"The University of Winnipeg Library is selling off items from its vast holdings of science fiction. Willed to the university in the late 1990s by Robert Stimpson, the collection contains more than 30,000 books and periodicals. Because of space limitations, the collection, which was valued at C\$250,000, was stored in a basement storage room at a Greyhound station. Last month, the collection was sold to rare book dealer L.W. Currey for a reported C\$140,000. The university retains about 4,000 hardcovers from the collection."

This is not what most of us would like to happen to stuff we donate!

In contrast, J.R.R. Tolkien's papers are a good example of how it can be done. While his academic and philology materials are kept at Oxford University where Tolkien studied and taught, the manuscripts of most of his fiction are unexpectedly housed in a place Tolkien never visited in life: at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI.

How did this come about? In the mid-1950s when *The Lord of the Rings* first appeared, Marquette's library director read it. He was immediately seized with the idea of obtaining the manuscript, and opened negotiations through a London rare-book dealer.

Meanwhile, Tolkien's royalties for **LOTR** began arriving in early 1956. According to biographer Humphrey Carter, the first check was for three and a half thousand pounds, considerably more than the professor's annual Oxford salary. The draconian tax laws in Britain of that period hit this sudden access of wealth hard, and Tolkien was well-pleased to entertain Marquette's offer. They agreed on a payment of 1250 pounds (\$5,000 at that time) for the manuscripts of *LOTR*, *The Hobbit*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, and the long-unpublished *Mr. Bliss*.

Marquette went on to improve its holdings by playing its cards cleverly. With the original manuscript as a draw, the library has been able to attract donations of

other Tolkien material from important *LOTR* fans and collectors. Christopher Tolkien presented additional papers in 1997. The accumulated material is now surely one of the top research collections for Tolkien scholarship.

Trash or Treasure?

With this cheery example before you, perhaps you, too, are ready to start looking for a home for your papers. This would be a good time to go down to the basement and actually see what it is that you have. Make a list: Manuscripts? Books? Photographs? Correspondence? Illustrations? Maps? Libraries like all that kind of thing—but only if it relates to your writing. Letters to and from other authors and editors are good; letters to your Aunt Minnie, perhaps not.

You could be a picturesque person and have acquired many interesting souvenirs over your checkered lifetime. Author Katherine Ann Porter had a coffin custom-painted for her in Mexican Day of the Dead motifs by artist Joe Mayhew. She wasn't buried in it—it's on display at the University of Maryland. Terry Southern's collection at the New York Public Library includes his eyeglasses, typewriter, and whiskey flask. (Perhaps you looked up from the page as we did when we read that, exclaiming, "I have eyeglasses, a typewriter, and whiskey, too!")

Or it may be that your most beloved and famous novels were inspired by some artifact or item you still have around the house. In 1973 Wheaton College in Illinois purchased the wardrobe of the late C.S. Lewis from his estate. This wasn't Lewis's old clothing, but the item of furniture they were stored in: the inspiration for the famous magical wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and a priceless bit of literary memorabilia. However, Wheaton was one-upped the next year by Dr. Arthur Lynip, an English professor at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. Dr. Lynip learned that a second wardrobe was still in Lewis's old bedroom and went to England to investigate. It was there, too large to get out through the door. The current owner of the house was happy to sell it in return for the cost of lumber to build American-style closets. Lynip had the old wardrobe disassembled, shipped back to California, and lovingly rebuilt in the University library. So there are now two authentic Lewis wardrobes in the U.S. The two colleges continue to dispute the question of which one inspired the *Narnia* books.

Even if donating furniture is not in your plans, it would be helpful to get a rough idea of how much stuff you're talking about. Libraries measure research materials in feet—papers and manuscripts are loaded into cardboard boxes and lined up on shelves to be measured. It will make a difference if you're going to be dealing with one box, or two hundred.

In this modern age, email and text files can be part of the deal, too. One of the problems of composing straight onto the computer screen is that you may no longer have

earlier versions of your magnum opus. Earlier versions are the meat and drink of PhD thesis writers! So a word to even the youngest writer—start today, saving versions of your manuscripts to separate files every now and then. Zip the files and burn them onto a CD or something, for the benefit of future researchers. Thirty years from now your tax refund will be the plumper for it.

The Search for the Perfect Home

Armed with a list of what you have to offer, you are ready to start considering actual institutions. Think about what you really want out of this. Do you want your stuff to reside with a noted fiction collection? Are you primarily interested in promoting research, or do you want a focus on republishing your writing? Is it important to you to find someone who will love and care for your material? Are you prepared to buy extra love and care, perhaps by adding a bequest in your will? An endowment attached to a donation will attract much more interest.

Is your work of local interest, so that your state college or university would want it? Local interest in this context may mean your interest. Stephen King, for instance, could probably leave his manuscripts anywhere. Odds are long, however, that he'll select an institution in Maine, to continue supporting his home state. Perhaps instead of folding your stuff into a massive research collection someplace far away, where you will be one item among hundreds, you'd rather be the undisputed star of a smaller collection right here in your neighborhood.

You don't necessarily have to give all your material to one institution. As Tolkien did, you may cut a better deal by dividing your stuff, especially if you've written in more than one genre. Also, you don't have to give it all away at once. Test the waters with a smaller donation, and see how it goes. You can't take a donation back, but you can always decide not to give any more. There are tax ramifications to spreading out your donations as well—consult your accountant on this point.

By this time you have probably developed a short list of possible homes for your stuff. Open negotiations by contacting an institution and saying who you are. Get hold of the acquisitions or rare book librarian. Mention that you're thinking about doing something with your literary estate, and ask if they're interested.

If there's no interest, walk. Remember you're trying to give them something. You don't have to beg! It's nothing to worry about. Institutions being the models of efficiency that they are, it may be that your name will trickle round to some more knowledgeable ear, and you'll get a phone call in six weeks from the very library that you had written off as uninterested. It is also possible that some library or institution will come, unasked, to you. And don't forget to ask the original institution if they know of a place that might be more interested in your material.

In either case, you should do your research. Once ne-

gotiations open, find out more about the institution. How much money do they sink into maintaining and supporting their collections? Does this money come from endowments or state budgets vulnerable to the whims of politicians? How large are the collections and what do they consist of?

There are things that a good research collection will have. They should have a collections librarian. They may have a conservation staff. They will organize their collections in some way, with catalogs or finding aids. For instance, will your correspondence be bundled into a folder labeled "Letters, 1960-1970," or will each item be sorted and described?

As negotiations get more serious, demand a tour of the facility. What's it like in the back—clean and professional, or is it a dump? Be sure to talk to the people you will be working with, and get a sense of the institutional culture. The library will be scoping you out, too. Certainly they'll want to see the material you're offering. They may send someone out to your house to look at it, or you may have to bring it in.

Find out who else has donated stuff to this institution, and see if you can talk to them. How was their experience? Were they happy with how they were treated?

The most important thing that has to happen about this stage in the process is that you will have to have your material assessed and valued. The library will not do this for you. You have to pay for this yourself, because it would be a conflict of interest for the recipient to determine the value of the donation. They may let you ship your stuff to them and have the appraiser come to the library.

But choose the evaluator yourself. This is vital, because it's the assessed value of the donation that gets you that tax deduction which is your only immediate profit out of this whole business. Select a qualified and licensed appraiser, perhaps a member of the American Society of Appraisers, who has experience evaluating material for donations. A person who is geographically near by (or near the library) will be less expensive, but be sure that the appraiser knows romance or mystery or whatever, and knows manuscripts. You don't want someone to look at your boxes of manuscripts with a jaundiced eye and dismiss them as waste paper. You want someone who will say, "Wow, this is the first hand draft of *My Sweet Vacuum Cleaner*, the groundbreaking modern romance novel from 1954—it's worth a fortune!"

When you finally come to a meeting of minds, there is going to be a contract. This is why you do this after you get your will drawn up, so that you already have an attorney on hand. The deal may also affect your other bequests. You may agree that the library is going to get the rest of your manuscripts after you die, for instance, or you could bequeath the institution a sum of money to maintain your collection. Your accountant is going to keep you current on the tax implications of ▶▶▶

Pride and Preservation

▶▶▶ your bequest. And certainly your literary executor should know about your plans. Every item you prepare a repository for now is one that the executor won't have to deal with after your demise. So everything has to coordinate and work together.

The document you sign should get in writing all the picky details you've been discussing with the institution. Get in a clause that says the library will give you a certain number of photocopies of anything in your collection per year. This is so that if you suddenly land a deal for the Easton Press slip-cased leather-bound collector's edition of *My Sweet Vacuum Cleaner*, you don't have to trek to the library and copy the manuscript yourself. And remember the late Robert Stimson, whose treasures were stored in the Greyhound station and then sold off by the University of Winnipeg? If you don't want that to happen to your stuff, stipulate what should happen to the items the institution deaccessions. At the very least have the items returned to your estate.

At the beginning of this article we mentioned that donation is part of the larger natural process of tidying up your affairs. You provide for your children in your will, so that they may carry your genetic legacy on. Planning for your artistic descendants ensures that they, too, have a future, being published and read, bearing your name down through time. Since the days of Homer, that's what it's all about.

*Colleen Cahill is the Recommending Officer for Science Fiction and Fantasy at the Library of Congress. An avid reader from a young age, she is also a book reviewer by avocation, and you can find some of her opinions in the Washington Science Fiction Association Journal, <http://www.wsfa.org/journal/index.htm>, and in the TV show on contemporary science fiction and fantasy, *Fast Forward*, <http://www.fast-forward.tv/>.*

Brenda W. Clough has written and published fiction and nonfiction for twenty years, and has been a finalist for both the Nebula and the Hugo awards. She is also a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and active in writers' issues. Her bibliography and web page are at <http://www.sff.net/people/Brenda>.

Useful URLs

More detailed information on IRS rules for donation of materials is in Publication 526: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/526.pdf>

Keep up on S.287 by going to <http://thomas.loc.gov> and entering the bill number into the search window.

See <http://copylaw.com>, for articles about selecting a literary executor

Top SF Repositories

The J. Lloyd Eaton Collection of Science Fiction,

Fantasy, Horror, and Utopia at University of California, Riverside <http://library.ucr.edu/?view=collections/spcol/eaton.html>

Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Collection at the Cushing Library of Texas A&M University http://library.tamu.edu/vgn/portal/tamulib/content/renderer/0,2174,1724_556647,00.html

University of Maryland Literary Manuscripts <http://www.lib.umd.edu/ARCV/litmss/other.html>

University of Maryland Baltimore County Campus <http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/SpecColl/popcul.php3>

National Union Catalog of Manuscripts <http://lcweb.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/nucmc.html>

Romance Genre Repositories

Browne Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University holds collections which includes the papers of the Romance Writers of America: <http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/pcl/pcl13.html>

A model for other states is the collection of romance novels by Brown University graduates and Rhode Island authors: <http://128.148.7.229591/romance/about.html>

More on Repositories

There are over 124,000 libraries in the United States, according to the American Library Association, and even if you knock out elementary and high school facilities, there are still thousands, if not tens of thousands, all possible homes for your papers. Using all the criteria above, you will want to check out a few of these. A good source to begin with is Gale Research's Directory of Special Libraries and Information Centers.

A quick search of "science fiction" listed forty-seven libraries and other institutions that collected this genre. One of these is the University of California, Riverside's The J. Lloyd Eaton Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, and Utopia which has a collection of 75,000 books, thousands of serials, and about 150,000 fanzines, plus the papers of Robert L. Forward, Gregory Benford, David Brin, Anne McCaffrey, and others. This is one of, if not the largest science fiction collection in the United States. But they are not alone in their collecting: the Texas A&M University's Cushing Library has the Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Collection, which has strong holdings in published works from the 1970s to today and an active manuscript program, including the papers of Chad Oliver, Michael Moorcock, and George R.R. Martin. But these big collections are not the only choices. University of Maryland collects manuscripts of Maryland authors, and their branch campus, University of Maryland Baltimore County, has a popular culture collection that includes pulp fiction, comic books, and manuscript papers of over a dozen science fiction writers, including items by Issac Asimov, Frank Herbert, and Roger Zelazny.

A quick search of "romance," however, will show pitfalls, as this term will bring up mostly libraries with collections of romance language materials. It is easier to track down individual authors' papers. By searching for Georgette Heyer, I discovered that 251 of her letters are at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma <http://www.lib.utulsa.edu/Speccoll/heyegr0.htm>.

Another resource that is good to check is the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. When I put in "science fiction" as a very basic search, I got back

147 hits. When I put in "romance" as a very basic search, I got back hits, but these were all over the map, from romance language, to items subtitled "a romance." Romantic was not more effective: genre terms are not always the best way to look for materials in this catalog. Individual authors are more useful to show where papers are located: "Austen, Jane" turned up sixty-seven collections with letters by or to this author. Remember letters she wrote to others would be in their papers!



Sticky Notes from the Edge

Cheryl Anne Porter

Fame, Fortune, and Notoriety

Are you really sure you want fame and fortune in your life? Okay, fortune, sure. I, for one, subscribe to that old saw that you can never be too rich or too thin. The IRS and Calista Flockhart notwithstanding. And with fortune enough, comes fame. Can't help it. Hello, Bill Gates.

But fame, notoriety—everyone knows your name. And not necessarily in that warm fuzzy *Cheers* sort of way.

Fame *sounds* like fun, but dang! Try going to the grocery store in your spangled t-shirt and sequined tiara! Ha! See how far you get. Sure enough, somewhere in the vicinity of the asparagus and cabbages, you'll hear it: "Hey, it's that lady, Mom. The one who writes those books you keep between the mattress and boxspring." The Victorians were SO right about that whole seen-but-not-heard thing.

And notoriety? As I understand it, you have to do something creepy to gain notoriety. Something illegal, or immoral, or otherwise universally offensive. What with reality TV, road rage, and the return of those chunky-heeled shoes from the '70s, even notoriety has lost its luster. In fact, it's become downright ubiquitous. How's a working writer supposed to increase her visibility these

days? Ah, for the golden years when notoriety came easy. All it took was hard drinking, drug abuse, and dark talent (see Algonquin Hotel)! Okay, so some things *don't* change...

I once read that the fame of a writer is perfect. It can get you a good table at the restaurant, but it's not enough to get you bothered while you eat. But really. Wouldn't it be more fun to be the exception? The infamous and thoroughly scandalous writer who sets the whole place abuzz just by walking in the door? Think of the possibilities. Hell, the potential for free desserts alone makes it worth the trouble!

So there you have it. My take on fame, fortune, and notoriety. Hmm. Turns out that, yes, I'd like all three. But wait. Fame means time in the public eye. And fortunes require management—all sorts of complicated business decisions. Creating notoriety must be a real time-consumer, too. When would I write? I guess there's something to be said for a life of quiet desperation after all. Still... anybody care to join me at the Algonquin?

The author would have you know she has none of the three, but aspires to them.



Think: Conference. Think: New York.

We finally did it. We booked a hotel for our 2005 Ninc conference. When you're shopping around a place like New York—well, let's face it, there is no place like New York—there are a lot of options. We are talking about the Big Apple, after all, and there are always sales and bargains.

So have we got a deal for you.

We've booked the newly refurbished Crowne Plaza Hotel on Times Square!

The place has recently undergone a multimillion-dollar renovation, and it looks absolutely super. We got a darn good deal on rooms, too. \$175 (plus tax) a night for singles and doubles. Last time we were there, we paid \$189.

Everybody knows the three major rules about real estate: location, location, and location. Well, the Crowne Plaza has it in spades. It's right in the heart of the theater district. Restaurants galore. Easy walking distance to many famous sights, including Fifth Avenue shopping, and you're at the hub of public transportation. Folks, we're talking about the crossroads of the world here! The hotel is full-service, of course. It even offers a lap swimming pool, if you're so inclined.

Speaking of food...if you're unfamiliar with the city, we'll be providing a list of local restaurants, categorized from inexpensive to expensive. No matter what your taste or dietary requirements, you can find it in New York. I promise.

Oh, yes, the dates. Mark your calendar. **April 7 - 9, 2005.** We'll start out Thursday afternoon with registration and our annual general membership meeting, adjourn for dinner at the places of your choice, have a couple of Night Owl sessions, then pig out... ahem, enjoy a desert buffet to get us all sugared up (or sugar-substituted up) for the heart of the conference that begins Friday morning.

"How much?" you ask.

Good question. Early registration will be \$295. If you're tardy (we certainly hope you won't be), it'll cost you \$315. Hey, that's still a bargain.

Since we're going to be in the publishing capital of the world, the theme for the conference will be: "Empower the Writer." Our program will focus on the business side of writing, which means we'll have plenty of editors and agents in attendance, but we'll also have some people to inspire you, too. In coming issues, I'll do some name dropping and go into more program details, but I don't want to give everything away right now, just whet your appetite. Hmm, notice how food always seems to come to mind? Now, where did I leave my cheese Danish?

— **Ken Casper, Conference Coordinator**

Take Care of Your Eyes Before They Turn On You (or How to Avoid Eye Strain)

BY KELLY McCLYMER

All my life I've been a reader. On a summer break I could go through hundreds of books. My mother (and later my mother-in-law) were always turning lights on for me. I never understood why until recently, when my aging eyes began to rebel at the workload I placed on them. Eight to twelve hours at the computer, plus several hours staring closely at books and manuscripts had finally taken their toll.

Not that I went down easily. At first I tried ignoring the dryness and pain of sandpaper eyelids. I cut out my for-fun reading (the newspaper, about fifteen minutes a day). I turned on the lights full force (fortunately neither my mother nor my mother-in-law was witness to that). I complained to my husband. A lot. I drank water until I didn't dare go anywhere without a (clean) ladies room. But I had a book to finish, an agent waiting for a polished proposal, students who counted on me to give them detailed feedback, and homework and lesson plans for the specialized tutoring course I was two-thirds of the way through. Not to mention RITA contest entries I'd agreed to judge.

It wasn't until I backed out of my garage (something I've done multiple times daily for nearly 18 years) and knocked off the driver's side mirror that I realized my tired eyes were more than inconveniently painful—they were dangerous. A recent and thorough eye exam had turned up nothing more than the need for .25 magnification reading glasses (which I had not bought because they would require special order—the ones in the discount stores started at 1.00 and went up from there). I'd borrowed the 1.25 mag glasses my dyslexic youngest son used to help him read, but more often they ended up on the table beside me as I read. My neglect had resulted in a case of eye strain so severe that I became slightly dizzy and could actually feel the transition whenever my focus shifted from near to far, or vice versa.

Being a sensible soul, I promptly shifted from ignoring the problem to sheer panic. I'd never be able to read again! Could I learn Braille? How would my son get to fencing lessons if I could no longer drive? My husband's sympathetic response was a raised eyebrow as he went out to bring in the car that I'd abandoned parked half in the garage and half in the driveway. My husband, after

he glued the mirror back on to the car and assured himself that the garage door mechanism wasn't damaged, suggested I try giving my eyes a rest for the weekend. Desperate, I called up to say I was skipping my eight hour Saturday class, turned off my computer, and read nothing at all for the entire weekend. This is harder than it sounds. I found myself reaching for the newspaper so many times I made my son take it out to the garage. And I discovered just how many times I need to read package directions during a weekend, too.

The rest helped. But not nearly as much as I'd hoped. The week found me back in my regular grind feeling as if I was going to have to find a career that didn't require close eye work—and quick. I complained to my tutoring mentor, and she said some magic words—eye drops (she added to skip the regular drops and go straight for the extra lubricating drops). Duh. I'm the kind of person who doesn't like to medicate except for desperate cases, but this had long passed that point. I stopped at the pharmacy by my house and begged the help of the lady behind the counter—a nice Iranian woman who was very sympathetic to my plight when I explained that my eyes hurt too much to read the specifics on the eye drops packages. She helped me choose a nice extra lubricating bottle of drops and wished me a speedy recovery.

Two bottles of lubricating eye drops and four days later, I was slightly better. The eyelids had gone from coarse to fine grain sandpaper, and I no longer needed to wear my sunglasses to cut the pain from monitor glare. I'd made significant changes in my life to adjust to the fact that my eyes needed tender loving care for a lifetime, not a weekend. I'd changed my computer resolution from 1280x1024 to 832x624. I'd increased the display size of my documents in my word processing, Internet, and database programs. I'd learned to turn on the lamp whenever I sat down to read. Still, I could feel the transition of my eyes whenever I shifted focus, and reading was a painful duty rather than a routine task.

Trying to catch up, I logged on to the Google site to do some research for my current book, and the little search box blinked mockingly at me, daring me to put on my sunglasses for the work ahead. Defiantly, I typed in "eye strain" instead of "personal shopper" and discovered that the answers I needed were available at the cost of a few clicks of my mouse. Besides rest, ▶▶▶

Take Care of Your Eyes

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ adequate lighting, eye drops, and magnifying glasses, there were eye exercises specifically meant for those of us who spend too many hours a day focusing close up. Exercise, of course, that dirty word. But I was desperate. I printed out the exercises, squinted as I read them, and practiced them, all the while feeling utterly foolish. Focus on the finger, focus on the hall light switch. Back to the finger. Back to the switch. I felt every transition. I liked the other exercise better—focus on something close, then quickly switch to something farther away, then closer, then even closer, then mid-distance. I discovered a cobweb the size of fishing net on the ceiling and a layer of dust that made the glass shelf over the window look frosted. I focused on the moose my colleagues had given me when I quit my job two years ago and remembered them with a smile, and then a picture of my sons ten years ago when I was taller than they were.

I'd been focusing closely for so long that I'd forgotten that muscles like a full range of motion and a good stretch, even the muscles in my eyes. Within two days my eyes stopped hurting and I could no longer feel the transition when I shifted focus. I didn't need the eye drops any longer. But I kept the magnifying glasses—and now they rest on top of my head instead of the clutter of my desktop. I'm hoping soon I'll remember to pull them down and use them. And I'm stuck with the big ugly 832x624 resolution of my monitor, no matter that I can't see four documents at once anymore.

The lessons I learned: even your eye muscles can be overworked and need a stretch now and again (preferably every two hours or so). Ignoring a problem doesn't always make it go away. Ergonomics is more than a good chair and proper keyboard height. Asking others for advice should be done sooner rather than later (and don't mess around with your eyes—see a doctor for an exam if you notice a change). My husband will glue anything, even automobile parts. And last, but not least, Google everything.

Useful eye strain websites:

Eyestrain and VDTs (SFWA site for writers): www.sfw.org/ergonomics/eyestrain.htm

Eye to Eye (Cornell "site for sore eyes" that discussed ergonomics): www.eye2eye.com

Computer Eye Strain (a straightforward site created by an eye doctor with some great exercises, all of which I tried, but not all of which worked for me): www.visionworksusa.com/computereyestrain.htm

Eye Strain and Ergonomics (a great site that discusses ergonomics, including how to prevent eye strain): www.office-ergo.com/12things1.htm

Kelly McClymer is the author of the Once Upon A Fairy Tale historical romance series from Zebra, a writing instructor, and—the likely cause of her most recent eyestrain—is learning to tutor children with dyslexia in order to encourage a new generation of readers!

Harlequin/Silhouette Organizational Changes

(Announced August 12, 2004)

Loriana Sacilotto will assume the newly created position of Executive Vice President, Global Publishing and Strategy.

Her team will consist of Isabel Swift, Vice President, Author and Asset Development; Randall Toye, Director of Global Series; Dianne Moggy, Director of Global Single Titles; Janet Finlay, Director of Research; and a new position, Director Editorial Analysis.

Isabel will oversee key strategic acquisitions, developing new business opportunities and accelerating author development. Her team includes Malle Vallik, Editorial Director of eHarlequin and Asset Development, and Executive Editors Paula Eykelhof and Leslie Wainger.

Randall Toye will oversee Series, with support from Editorial Director Karin Stoecker; Editorial Director Tara Gavin, responsible for the development of Next; Executive Editors Mary-Theresa Hussey and Birgit Davis-Todd, responsible for the Silhouette and Harlequin imprints respectively; and Executive Editor Joan Marlow Golan continues responsibility for the Steeple Hill imprint.

Dianne Moggy will continue to be responsible for the Single Title strategy, including ongoing acquisitions. She will oversee Margaret Marbury, Executive Editor of MIRA and Red Dress Ink; Tracy Farrell, Executive Editor of HQN Books; and will assume responsibility for the Gold Eagle and Worldwide Library imprints under Executive Editor Feroze Mohammed and the Signature program under Executive Editor Marsha Zinberg.

The Pen Is Mightier than The Mouse



BY JO BEVERLEY

I write on a 486 in XY Write, an old DOS word processor program. Of the many benefits, I don't need a mouse. However, I also have a modern computer for graphics, web-surfing, email, and the rest, and that's where the problems strike. Perhaps if I was more used to a mouse, I'd not end up in pain from using it. Or perhaps not.

Whatever the reason, last Christmas I was struck by excruciating pain in my right arm and shoulder. When I thought about it, I could see why. I take December off from writing. One of the things I like to do then is genealogy. There's more and more information on the web, often in lists of names to be checked. Click, click, click, day after day. Ouch!

Which, cutting the saga brutally short, is where I met the Wacom Graphire graphics tablet. Karen Harbaugh mentioned it as having helped her mouse-inflicted problems. I have to say that I was puzzled as to exactly what it was and how it could help, but I clearly needed a long-term solution. I checked it out on the web then headed off to the store, still a bit fuzzy about it.

I was in luck because they had one discontinued version for \$75 Cdn. If I'd had to lay down more, I might have balked because I wasn't at all sure this weird idea would work. A similar low-end model to mine is presently \$99 US from Wacom. I took my new toy home, reckoning that at worst it would be fun to play at graphics with it, and I've been a convert ever since.

What is it? Physically, it's:

- 1) A flat surface attached by a generous wire to the computer.
- 2) A thing that looks exactly like a pen with a little switch on the side.
- 3) A wireless mouse.

The pad itself is approximately 8.5 by 8 inches, but the active surface on mine is 3.65 x 5.02 inches. You can get much bigger active surfaces, which could be important if you want to use the graphics pad for its primary purpose—drawing. If not, I find my size works fine.

What does it do? As I said, it was designed for artists, hence the pen. Draw on the pad with the pen and what you draw appears on the screen in a program like Photoshop. Flip the pen and the end is an eraser. Cute, eh? The pad has a transparent flap so you can put a picture underneath and trace it. I haven't explored these features because for me the pad and pen are my mouse substitute.

I keep the pad on my lap, but to the right, as I'd keep a pad of paper that I was writing on. I hold the pen exactly like a pen. Tap with the tip and it's like a right click. Stroke with it, and it glides

over and selects as a mouse would. The switch on the side is a rocker switch that operates like the left and right buttons, but the beauty of it is that it is exactly where the thumb naturally rests.

Pick up a pen and hold it comfortably. Where your thumb rests is where the switch is. Hardly any movement is necessary to push the lower part down—left click, or the upper part down—right click. As you can probably see, this action is natural and comfortable. I don't know whether we designed pens to be comfortable in the human hand or people adapted over time to be comfortable with pens, but holding a pen and using it to control the screen causes me no pain at all while the mouse sets up strain as soon as I start.

One very nice feature is that the pen will scroll pages when hovering above the pad with only the smallest movement of the fingers. The thumb presses the toggle switch on the side, and I just point the pen up or down with that easy but complex flex of the fingers that we use to write. I don't have to press on the pad, so no tension.

Another advantage of the pen is that I can type while holding it, though I do find that if I do that too much it causes a bit of strain in my hand. For situations where I'm going between a bit of typing and a bit of maneuvering, however, this is a useful feature. It's great for some computer games, too, such as Zuma. Point and fire.

My technical advisor, my husband, was impressed by how smoothly and easily it installed and was ready for use.

Disadvantages? Yes, there are a few. The pen doesn't give quite as precise a connection as a good mouse. Tapping a link with the pen sometimes doesn't work the first time. Sometimes selecting areas of text is imprecise. I don't think you can do anything with the pen that requires the left and right mouse buttons to be pressed together, such as Minesweeper. In those situations, I just pick up the wireless mouse that comes with it. That mouse mostly snoozes, though.

The only other disadvantage I can see is price. The system costs more than a mouse. However, if you're constantly fighting mouse-triggered hand, wrist, and arm pain, I strongly suggest giving the graphics pad a try.

You can find out more at www.wacom.com/graphire/4x5.cfm

Jo Beverley has managed to write twenty-seven romance novels without crippling herself, and hopes to write many more the same way.



Help! I'm Living with a Green-Eyed Monster

DEAR ANNETTE:

I'm going crazy. Maybe. My husband says that he wants me to write and insists he supports my second career. But his actions don't match his words. I wish I didn't feel like this, but I'm afraid that the more success I've had, the more barriers he throws my way. Suddenly my writing time is an imposition on the family. Things he "has" to do get scheduled in the middle of my work time. The worst part is that I used to feel I could share the ups and downs with him, and now he barely listens. It's as if my writing has become a sore spot in our relationship. I've tried to talk to him about it, but he dismisses my concerns and says I'm imagining things. I'd love to have my partner back. Help!

Signed: Missing My Guy

DEAR MISSING:

First, I'd like to say that if you feel like there's something wrong, or something different, then there is. Period. I'm a big believer in intuition, especially between people in a long-term, intimate relationship. It may not be anything your husband is consciously aware of, or it could be he's just not ready or willing to confront the issue.

I can understand that. Watching your writing success grow could be exceedingly intimidating for even the most well adjusted, even-keeled person.

My guess is that he may well be feeling jealous, unsettled, or just plain afraid of your success. Does he seem happy with his own career? It's awfully hard to

support someone in reaching for the stars (and actually see them touch them!) if we feel like we're drowning in mediocrity.

Watching someone succeed can be intimidating, too. It forces us to look at our own choices. If you've been brave, diligent, and dedicated enough to commit yourself to such a chancy enterprise, it could be forcing him to look at dreams he hasn't had the courage or dedication to follow through with. Not a nice thing for anybody to have to face.

Fear is another possibility. What if you hit the bestseller list and decide to run off with Harrison Ford after you meet him in the green room at the *Today* show? What if you're so fulfilled by your success and consumed with your craft that you don't need him anymore? Uh, by "him" I mean your husband, not Harrison.

Or maybe your spouse just never envisioned what an all-consuming career writing is. You've probably changed more than you realize. He could be reacting to the possibility that your writing is taking up more and more of your time and energy. And, for many of us, our spurts of creative energy can be unpredictable. *Yes, I did plan to make dinner at 6 pm, but dang it, I'm on a really great roll right now... can you wait until 8?* Even if you're one of the more disciplined writer-types who sticks to a more predictable schedule, let's face it, we writers go to far off places in our heads where civilians just can't follow. We deal in magic. That itself could be a tad intimidating.

But clearly I'm just speculating, and that's a dangerous thing to do. The only person who really knows what's at the root of this is your husband, and the only way you're going to know is if he's willing to talk about it.

If you don't talk, the issues will only get worse and pull you two further apart. I've seen little in my almost twenty year career that couldn't be talked out. So, my most brilliant suggestion boils down to figuring out how to create a supportive, encouraging environment so he'll talk.

My talking plan:

1. Pick a time free from interruption, when you're not tired or angry, and you're reasonably certain he isn't either. Just a hint: as he walks in the door after work probably isn't the best time. Unplug the phone. Get a babysitter and go out if you have to.

2. Plan the issues you want to bring up, and do your best to have concrete examples. Write down talking points if you need to.

3. Try to avoid blame, judgment, and for God's sake, mind reading. Saying, "Last week when I was talking about that good news from my agent, you interrupted me and changed the subject," presents facts, but saying, "...when I was talking about that good news, you got mad," or "you shut down," or "you never listen to me," adds blame and speculation. Remember, the goal here is to get your spouse to open up so you two can have

a dialogue about what's really going on.

4. Stick to this one issue. Now's not the time to add that little aside about how he promised to haul all the basement junk to the dump six months ago.

5. Be brave and be direct. If you're afraid that he's resentful of your success, then say so. Now's the time.

6. Just make sure you're not telling him how he feels. Personally, nothing makes me madder. Saying, "I'm afraid you're jealous of my success," is a whole lot different than, "You're jealous of my success."

7. Once you feel like you've presented your concerns, give your spouse a chance to respond. Be forewarned. He may need time to formulate his thoughts. You've been stewing on this for a long time already. If you're like me, you've even been rehearsing dialogue in your head. It's only fair and reasonable to give your spouse some time to digest what you've said.

Fear and envy are some of the touchiest, most difficult emotions for us fragile humans to face. Getting your spouse to open up is likely going to take some finesse and a whole lot of patience. If you're not confident in your abilities to communicate this touchy stuff without blaming, it might well be worth the time to talk things through with a therapist first; or better yet, suggest that the two of you do it together.

I don't know what's eating at your partner, but I do know that if it's left to fester, it'll only grow greener and a whole lot uglier.

Annette Carney, PhD is blessed with an un-enoivous spouse. Don't try to hug her though. She does have a very jealous Australian Shepherd. You can "Ask Annette" in strict confidence at one of these contacts: email: annettecarney@sbcglobal.net, fax: 775-746-4560; phone: 775-323-0445.

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Bits'n'Pieces

Solution to Getting UK Bookscan

Having trouble getting to Bookscan? Change the URL from www.booktrack.co.uk to www.neilsonbookscan.co.uk. [reported to NINclink]

HQN Has Impressive Beginning

The debut list of the new imprint has Diane Palmer's RENEGADE (110,000) hardcover and Carly Phillip's HOT STUFF (513,000) are both #15 on their respective bestseller lists from *Publishers Weekly*. Phillip's book has gone back for a second printing.

It's Not Tupperware, It's Books

Selling at home takes on a new look as Penguin goes into Direct-to-Consumer sales. Family Books at Home was launched in late June. Independent consultants will be used to have "parties" at home, earning 25 % commissions and bonuses of 5-7%. The initial line will be 200 books, mostly for children and the DK line and aimed at preschool and young readers. An interesting concept that could be tailored for genre book clubs?

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:

- Karen Brichoux, Lawrence, KS
- Kresley Cole, Windermere, FL
- Nancy Herkness, Glen Ridge, NJ
- Patricia Knoll (Patricia Forsythe), Tucson, AZ

New Members:

- Linda Ann Allsopp (*Liz Fielding*), Armmanford, Carms, UK
- Jamie Denton, Rouseville PA

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



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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

How Lucky Are We?

I am one of those writers who made up my mind at the age of about ten that I was going to write novels for a living. Not everyone decides this so early, and it's not a mark of authenticity or anything.

But in my case, it's just a simple fact. I realized in the fifth grade that somebody actually wrote all those books I loved so much. It's a very clear emotional memory: a dawning sense of understanding—some people spend their lives WRITING BOOKS—and the life-focusing next thought: why would anyone do anything else?

There has been nothing else in my life with so little ambivalence. Not having a baby or getting married or going to a place I wanted to visit or...anything. I have no doubts about my career path. The only thing I ever worried about was that I might not be able to make it happen—that I didn't have the talent or guts or whatever to make it so. I definitely hate some aspects of the writing life—it's pretty hard on the ego at times, and it's awfully isolating now and again—but it's also very, very satisfying.

I suspect the same is true for most of the readers of this column. In spite of the harrowing ups and downs of the business angles of writing, in spite of cash flow problems that can turn atheists to beggars (please-please-please-let-there-be-royalties-in-the-mail-today!); in spite of editors departing and agents absconding with the cash and professional jealousy and a book you love disappearing without a trace, if you stop and think about it, isn't it amazing?

At the conference in Santa Fe, two of my best

writing buddies and I were drinking wine in one of the quirky old rooms at the Bishop's Lodge. We were in fine spirits (pun not intended, though the spirits didn't hurt). It's hard to be in *bad* spirits at Bishop's Lodge, honestly, with all that high desert air and brilliant winter sunshine, and I'd had one of the best massages of my life. Something to do with oil in the hair. (Buckets... gallons of warm oil. All these months later, my skin sighs in sybaritic memory. The girls LOVED that place!)

One of my friends lifted her glass and said, "How lucky are we?"

It was true. There we were, in a lovely hotel in a lovely city with friends we loved, drinking wine and talking about books, ideas, hopes, and dreams. We had wandered the plaza together, ate blue corn enchiladas, and brainstormed plot ideas and scribbled notes on setting and theme. Two of us circled back to a little shop and bought a shawl for the other one, to mark a significant event in her life—a *writing* event that others had noted, but only her fellow scribblers could properly appreciate.

At a breakfast that morning, three other writers and I had hammered out the details for an anthology, aligning visions and passions to create a mosaic that will be very interesting—challenging and exciting.

I was there because I am a writer, and so was everyone else. And it's not the first time I've been able to be in an inspiring setting with good friends, talking about work and writing. It happens a lot. My sisters, a nurse and a teacher, are often quite jealous of my little

jaunts around the country, days spent in the company of like minded others, talking books, books, life, books, diets, books, aspirations, dreams, plans. It's enormously nourishing.

How lucky are we?

We can get so caught up in the difficulties of writing, of the writing life and (especially) the business end that we can make ourselves crazy and forget about all the great things that are part of our lives as writers. We can take for granted some rather amazing things, both about being an "author," that public self, and a writer, the private artist. My two friends and I drank our wine and made verbal lists of our favorite things.

As we did so, a little roar of happiness sailed up from the Basement. The girls clapped and cheered and threw streamers of confetti and roman candles. (Hilary lugged in illegal mortars and artillery shells to light up the night sky, and Roberta shook her head, but shrugged—as long as we're careful she won't mind too much.)

We're writers. How cool is that?

Okay, and let's just deal with this part: some of you are thinking, "Well, it would be great to be a writer IF I could land a new contract/ get paid on time / get an editor who really understands me/ get through this bad stretch/ get unblocked/ get some real attention/ get the advances so-and-so is commanding/ (fill in the blank)."

The struggles always exist. There are always dark stretches in our careers, our lives, and for whatever reason, we spend more time and words on the dark stuff than on the good. I'm all for whining and letting out the small and large griefs, as I've demonstrated here, but to have balance, we must also take time regularly to count our blessings.

In honor of that, let's declare the month of September a month of counting blessings: Celebrate the Writing Life month. Each day, let's consciously focus on the aspects of writing that brought us into it in the first place, the things that keep us doing it, and the things we will leave behind as our legacy.

Where to begin? Let me spend a few minutes with the objections that might arise from those who might be in a difficult period—a time of grieving or a time that's fallow or a time that's brutal. You can still celebrate. You don't have to write just this exact minute, but it might be even more fun for you to remember all the good things about choosing a writer's life.

Everyone who is reading this column has at least two books published. That's a significant, amazing achievement in any human life.

September 1 (or whatever day you read this column): get out a piece of paper and write down ten cool things about your life as an Author (being a writer comes later). Here are some of mine:

► The guy who used to always introduce me as "And this is Barbara, the famous author who hangs out with us sometimes." Ditto my friend, who is a substantially powerful person and has gone a long way up the ladder in the military, who wrote an email and said, "Did you know that if you put your name in Google, there are 100s of references?" I didn't have the heart to tell him that all writers' names come up like that. Far be it from me to dissuade him of my fame.

► Sometimes my kids impress girls by telling them that I'm a romance writer.

► Whenever a telemarketer or loan officer or new doctor's office or bartender asks what I do for a living, they are impressed when I say, "writer." Even in a world so focused on movies, fame in reality TV, etc., it's still impressive to be a Published Novelist.

► The jolt of pleasure you get when you walk into a store and unexpectedly see a book that's yours. How many people in the world dream of that pleasure? Don't take it for granted.

► Working at home. I'm sitting here with my black and white cat draped over the desk like a rug, soft and sleepy, willing to give a little squeak every time I reach out and touch him. My feet are bare. It's nearly 99 degrees outside and I don't have to go out in it. I'm playing the Blind Boys of Alabama on the CD player and my stomach is growling, so I might hustle up some lunch in a little while.

► Letters from readers. All of them. Every word written in cyberspace or in green ink on pink paper with hearts above the i's. What a precious, precious gift we're each given with those letters. How many humans get regular feedback like that? Wow. Another thing not to take for granted.

► That's the external, non-writing stuff. The artist stuff, the inner life things I like include:

► The pleasure of the company of my own mind. The other day, I returned home from the RWA National conference to discover the washing machine was broken. Naturally, it would take several days for a repairman to show up, and naturally I had laundry piled to the ceilings, so I schlepped off to the Laundromat for the first time in a decade. As I walked in, the particular combination of smells and sounds—the freshness of soap, the faint undertone of fabric too hot in a dryer, a television playing some talk show, a little girl complaining about her sister drinking all the soda they shared, the swish of washers—electrified some memory center, and even as I was loading clothes into washers, my writer brain was buzzing, excited. I'd brought a file of work with me, and ended up standing at the washer, scribbling notes in longhand about a community, a time, a place, an entire milieu.

It's all been lurking, bobbing above the ► ► ►



▶ ▶ ▶ surface every so often, but the Laundromat brought it, whole body, to the surface.

▶ Embroidering everyday life, and not so everyday parts of life. Think of the many, many times you've been in some ordinary place, and your brain has begun to whisper

possibilities, "What if that was that, and this was there and what would happen if...?" Having a writer's imagination lends a lot of pleasure to things like Laundromat visits, but also trips to castles and isolated little islands and tourist traps along Route 66.

▶ It's fun to make things up. I know, I know, it's also hard and it's hard to do it on deadline, but it's also a real delight at times to create human beings and all their quirks and go along, writing and discovering all the little tidbits that make up the world you're working with.

▶ It's a good way to get even with your enemies.

Who else will know the hump-backed snaggle-toothed hag is really the second grade teacher who made your child's life a living hell?

▶ Related to that: writing novels is cathartic. It's hard to hang on to a grudge or a bubble of poisonous sorrow when eventually the girls grab it and say, "I think we need to use this emotion now. Barf it up."

▶ It's a solid, productive way to spend your life, producing a body of work. That's author and writer together, admiring the books that have been written, thinking of which ones might join them. I open a file cabinet and see the open files and I know the time will come that I won't get to write them all. For now, I'm doing my best.

What do your lists look like? What can you celebrate today, and every day this month, about being an author and being a writer? Let's celebrate the writer's life all month long, remember why we began.

There's always time for whining next month. *

Bits'n'Pieces

Active Readers Decline in 20 Years

Reading At Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America - "The percentage of U.S. adults reading literature dropped from 56.4 percent in 1982 to 46.7 percent in 2002, a decline of almost 10 percentage points."

You've been hearing the bad news about the decline in reading literature; this is the report that started all the discussion. Here is a link to the complete report by the National Endowment for the Art in August 2002.

<http://arts.endow.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>

French Invasion of British Publishing

Hodder Headline was purchased by Hachette Livre this summer after negotiating with WH Smith for several months. Hachette is part of the Lagadere Group, which also owns Orion Octopus, Watch and Chamber Harrap, will now control 13% of the publishing market in the U.K. They will also be the second largest consumer book publisher after Random House.

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