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WINK

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

Receiving Inspiration and Guidance Through Dreams

BY JOANN A. GROTE

"I should have lost many a good hit, had I not set down at once things that occurred to me in dreams." — Sir Walter Scott

As novelists, we tap into our creative energies on a regular basis. We learn what works for us in drawing on our creativity while practicing our craft. Some writers listen to the Girls in the Basement. Some writers work out plot problems while they walk. And some draw on their dreams.

Plots and stories from dreams.

Corrine Simonson, a member of my local critique group, writes wonderful short stories. It's common for her to shrug off our compliments with, "I just wrote down my dream." In response to which we groan and wish aloud that our stories came to us so easily.

Maybe they do, and we haven't been paying attention.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde resulted from one of Robert Louis Stevenson's dreams. Theodor Dostoyevsky, Voltaire, William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Anne Rivers Siddons, Anne Rice, Amy Tan, and Julia Cameron all have used dream information in their writing.

Judy Gill once "dreamed the entire plot as if it were happening to me. When I woke up, I scribbled down notes so fast they were nearly illegible, but I remembered enough that I had that book drafted in 6 (six!) days."

Jo Ann Ferguson's dreams have given her plot ideas

several times. *"Ride the Night Wind* (Harper, 1994) came to me in a dream—actually the set-up for the love scene... Others usually are for opening scenes or black moments, dramatic scenes."

Robin Lee Hatcher "dreamed the entire opening scene of what would become *The Forgiveing Hour*."

"I receive entire scenes," Leah Roman says, "usually a difficult or pivotal one—right down to the exact dialogue I need."

Dream inspired characters.

Sometimes a dream introduces a writer to a character. Cartoonist Charles Shulz once dreamed of a baseball player. Shulz included the character for a week in his famous *Charlie Brown* comic strip. The main character of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* appeared first to the author in a dream.

Rickey Mallory, whose pen name is Mallory Kane, says, "I dream new characters all the time."

Fran Baker relates, "In Sante Fe in March, I saw a face on a worker at the Lodge that I knew belonged in my book. I even dreamed about that face, but had yet to give it a name!" She later dreamed the name.

Kathy Holzapfel, who writes as Lauren Bach, goes a step further. "I usually flesh out all my heroes in dreams. I'll start with an idea of what my hero is or does, then I dream about him. That's where I discover his personality, his sense of humor, his quirks, his secrets, and a lot of physical detail."

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Novelists, Inc.

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President's Voice

TIME FOR RENEWALS

It's time for dues renewal, and you can now do so online at www.ninc.com by going to the Members Only section. You should have already received your new User ID and password back in August, but if you need a reminder, go to the log-in page (www.ninc.com/members_only/) and select the option requesting a reminder.

You can both renew online and pay online via our secure server. All possible precautions to ensure security have been taken by our webmaster and the secure site that now hosts us. Your credit card information will not be captured on the site, so those of you who haven't tried paying online before can rest easy about the safety of the procedure.

You will be able to update your contact information and agent name at any time. This will enable us to have a current roster available at all times rather than only once a year—assuming, of course, that you remember to update your changes when they occur! You can seek out another member's contact information on the site, as well, instead of having to hang onto a paper roster. As always, of course, only the information you give permission to display will appear, and all of it is only available inside the Members Only area and is, as always, confidential to Ninc members.

Likewise, if you have not already done so, you are now able to register for the conference online, and new applicants are already submitting online and saying good things about the experience.

For those of you without Internet access, the old method is still available. The renewal form is included in this issue (on page 9); simply detach it, fill out and mail as usual.

This year we do not have to fill out a paper survey for the Authors Coalition. Efforts are underway to synchronize an electronic survey procedure among the member organizations, and you will be hearing more about that before the 2006 renewal period.

Membership renewals are due by January 15, 2005. I don't imagine I need to sell you on how terrific this organization is; one of the premier benefits of membership is right here in your hands. The range of insightful, provocative, and helpful articles and columns each month is truly topnotch. I've often heard members remark that *NINK* itself is worth the annual dues.

In addition, there is our acclaimed and unique conference—this year's inspiring retreat at Bishops Lodge in Santa Fe and next year in Manhattan, an exciting lineup of speakers and panels dedicated to arming you with the latest insights into the business side of the writer's life.

There's also the fabulous email loop, Ninlink, on which the array of topics is positively dizzying. A sample just in the preceding week (as I write this in September) covered burnout/recovering the joy in writing, psycho sports parents, truth in historical fiction, procrastination, pros and cons of giving up the usual Christmas extravaganza, and side effects of blood pressure medication. Needless to say, the loop is a never-ending fount of wisdom, intriguing discussion, and whimsy...and a support network par excellence.

Remember, too, that if this is a tough year for you, there is always the option of asking to use the Linda Kay West Memorial Fund to pay your dues, eligible to any member to use once every four years. Your request to utilize this benevolent fund is not a matter of public record. We've all had rough

years, and the membership has been generous in contributing to this fund, so if you need it, please use it. There isn't a one of you this organization doesn't need and value.

So...we've made it easier than ever to renew by providing an online option as part of our website upgrade. Simply go to www.ninc.com, click on Members Only, log in, and you'll be prompted to renew. It will be a real boon to Ninc for you to renew in this manner, but however you choose to handle it, please continue to be a part of the fun and fellowship, the camaraderie and caring of this wonderful, wonderful group known as Novelists, Inc.

Jean

**Renew your membership now
with the convenience of
online renewal—
available for members at
www.ninc.com.
Membership renewals due by
January 15, 2005.
Thanks!**

Dreams

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"Often [a dream]... adds to a character's depth," Judy Gill says, "something I've never considered while awake. In *Whispers on the Wind*, I had no idea that the hero's sister was pregnant when she got lost, so he had no idea he was looking for his missing niece, too. That came to me in a dream and added an important twist to the story that aided in the resolution."

Some characters can be persistent, as Judy discovered. "One title character, Bad Billy Culver, stood on the fence surrounding my garden when I was weeding carrots...and demanded I tell his story. Since I didn't know what it was, I had to dream it first, and there it was a few weeks later, not the whole thing, but his personal conflict, which left me the task of figuring out what else the book needed."

Using dreams to resolve an impasse in a story

Judy Gill says, "If I don't have a book intrude on my dreams at least once during the writing process—usually toward the end—I have trouble finishing it because I don't plot ahead, but just let the story flow at its own pace. I seldom know what's going to happen because the characters haven't told me yet. Often, in dreams, they do."

Some writers specifically seek dream guidance. JoAnn Ferguson is one. "I always make my imagination 'work' at night. When I'm going to sleep, I concentrate on what I've done and what I hope to do in the morning—in other words consider what's coming next and begin with the 'what if...' game. I take that with me into my sleep."

Kathy Holzapfel is another conscious seeker. "I can usually dream 'on command' by simply thinking about a story—with the intention to dream about it—as I'm falling asleep. Of course, what happens in the dream always amazes me because I never know where the story will go. A

particularly intense and scary nightmare, where I found myself trapped in a strange town, became the basis of a short story I wrote...I was completely stumped about how it ended. The logic failed me since the story was different than what I'd typically write. So one night I went to bed thinking about the story with the intention of dreaming about it again to see how it ended. It worked."

Sometimes answers arrive in the morning, but not necessarily through a dream. Rickey Mallory has had this experience. "In my first book for Harlequin Intrigue, *The Lawman Who Loved Her*, I knew how my hero was going to catch the bad guy, but I had no idea how he was going to convince the heroine that he was Mr. Right...I went to sleep thinking about my hero and heroine and how they were ever going to overcome their seemingly impossible conflict, and the next morning I knew."

The first book of Peg Waldoch's children's series on recovering from the death of a parent arrived on awakening. "I [awoke] with the first few sentences running through my mind...This happened two to three times...Then I started waking up during the middle of the night for a week until it was completed. When I thought the series was completed, I awakened to add a connecting piece to one of the books. I hadn't realized [the series] had a gap until I'd written down the additional pages and inserted them in the appropriate place."

Between waking and sleeping

Charles Thompson, a creativity expert, says research shows that the fifth-best "idea-friendly" time is "while falling asleep or waking up," the hypnopompic and hypnogogic states. A number of Ninc members have discovered this truth.

For Adriane Lee, during this state "dialogue will just start to come and I need to write it down."

Susan Gable often works with these states. "In my very first book, the heroine came to me one morning ▶ ▶ ▶

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when I was just waking up and said something that changed the entire end of the book...she said...‘Help me. I’m in jail.’ I was like, ‘What? You’re *where*?’ Well, she was right—she was in jail, right where she needed to be for this story to end properly.”

Sherry-Anne Jacobs is another writer who uses this time. “Because I find this state so useful I’ve facilitated and encouraged it. It didn’t happen when I was first writing, or I didn’t recognize it then. Now, with my 30th novel just published, it’s one of my main plotting tools.

“With one book I couldn’t think of the hero’s name...and he ‘walked out of the mists’ and I ‘saw’ him. I found he was 6’4” tall and watched as he stood with his hands on his hips, scowled at me, and said in a Scottish accent, ‘Ma name’s Magnus Hamilton, woman!’”

Sherry-Anne also shared this fascinating example of between-time inspiration. “At about 30,000 words into one story I kept having arguments with a character who was supposed to be the villain of *A Pennyworth of Sunshine*. He said he loved the heroine and should be the hero and refused to be unkind to her. In the end I had to rewrite the first 30,000 words to make him the hero—and he was a far better and more complex hero than the guy I’d intended, who then became the second lead!”

Career guidance from dreams

Dream guidance isn’t limited to help on a current WIP or revelation of new plots or characters. “I’m at a ‘new beginning’ place in my writing,” Janelle Burnham Schneider reports, “working on a project bigger in emotional scope than anything I’ve done before. In the past couple of months I’ve had several dreams which tell me about coming abundance, about the ‘roof’ over me being taken away and infinity being open to me...That kind of guidance can’t be forced. It has to be wooed, and then listened to gently when it arrives. Often in my case, ‘guidance’ dreams make little, if any, logical sense, and yet as I ‘sit with’ the dream for a day or two, the symbolism begins to reveal itself.”

Like Janelle, I’m exploring a new writing frontier. It’s scary. Not only is the current WIP a diversion from my past romances and children’s historical fiction, but it’s based on an experience from my own life. Starting it, I’d no idea of the structure, or who would be interested in publishing it.

Recently I dreamed I was in the audience at an Oprah show. She was showing the audience a movie. She turned to me and said, “I don’t know why people like this so much. It’s only about my life.” Then I was given a huge purple pen filled with light. It would be delightful to report I completed the book and Oprah is telling the world how wonderful it is. But I interpreted the dream more simply: that my story is worth telling, and I will receive the guidance I need along

the way (the purple pen filled with light).

I also dreamed that Random House would publish the book. In a later dream, I was given the name of a publisher I hadn’t heard of in waking life. When I looked it up, it was a subdivision of Random House. Will this company publish this new venture? Time will tell.

Sometimes writing a book whose plot is revealed in a dream can change a career. Discussing *The Forgiving Hour*, Robin Lee Hatcher says, “Dreaming the opening scene...led to a complete change of direction in my career. I’d written 27 historical romances for the general romance market, but this idea was for a contemporary novel and one that required God to be a ‘central character’ in the book. It was way out of my comfort zone. But within six months, I had my first contract to write Christian women’s fiction. Changing career directions was like starting over.”

Accessing your dreams

I’ve learned to pay attention to dream information. Over the last seven years, I’ve received guidance on relationships, where to live, even “orders” to adopt a certain dog. I’ve never been sorry when I’ve followed my dreams.

If you’ve never drawn on your dreams for inspiration and guidance, how do you start? With the intention to recall your dreams? Dream experts say anything you do which tells your conscious and subconscious of your intention will help with recall.

Preparation

1) Work on the problem in waking life, filling your mind with the details. This should be easy, as plotting and character problems are usually swirling in a writer’s mind.

2) Keep a dream journal. You may believe you’ll have nothing to record in it, but experts say those who begin using one usually start recalling dreams within a couple of weeks. **Record the date and day** in your journal before going to bed. Some writers like to keep a **flashlight or pen with a light** beside the journal to capture dreams and ideas in the middle of the night.

3) Narrow the problem to one question—the more specific the better—before going to sleep. You may wish to enter the question in your dream journal. Seeking the resolution to a problem in a dream is known as dream incubation.

Jo Ann Ferguson agrees one should be specific. “Asking for how to end the book would never get me anywhere. Contemplating how the heroine will address (and a lot of my dream results come in dialogue between the characters) the problem facing her in the next scene” results in dream answers.

4) Think on the question, perhaps repeating it in your mind until you fall asleep.

Robin Lee Hatcher may not think on a specific question, but, “One trick that I taught myself many years ago was to think of my hero and/or heroine before I drift off to sleep at night. I don’t think about the scene I’m writing or try to figure out details of the plot...I just think their names and try to

envision their faces. When I wake up in the morning, new ideas are invariably there, waiting for me."

5) Avoid the perils of an alarm clock. An alarm can erase a dream memory. Years ago I began telling myself when to awake. I now regularly awake when I program myself to do so. Phyllis Koch-Sheras and Amy Lemley in *The Dream Sourcebook* suggest making the setting of the alarm part of your ritual, telling yourself, "When the alarm goes off, I will remember my dreams and record them."

6) Avoid alcohol and other drugs if possible, as these are believed to inhibit dream recall.

7) Vitamin B-6 stimulates recall, as does the herb **mugwort**. Antidepressants are believed to help, also.

8) Consider the metaphysical. Writers with an interest in the metaphysical may wish to hang a Native American dream catcher or place rocks of jade or prehnite, which are said to promote dreams, near their bed. Whether these items have special powers or not, placing them may reinforce the message to your subconscious and conscious that you wish to remember your dreams.

9) Make love. Some experts believe making love in the middle of the night increases dream recall!

On Awakening

1) Stay quiet. If possible, awake a few minutes before the rest of the household. Jumping out of bed immediately with a list of what you need to do that day running through your head can chase a dream memory away. Allow yourself time to lie in bed to recapture the dream. The sight of your dream journal or rocks on the bedstand beside the alarm clock will remind you of your intention.

2) Recalling the dream. Don't be disappointed if you don't recall a dream or believe you received an answer the first night you attempt to incubate a dream. It isn't unusual for it to take a number of nights to receive an answer. If you recall only the ending, work backwards. Ask yourself what occurred immediately before the end, then what happened before that.

3) Write it down in your dream journal. Include as many aspects of the dream as possible: colors, names, places, feelings, etc. If you recall only a fragment of a dream, write that down. Sometimes a fragment is all you need for a story idea.

Judy Gill once "dreamed of a man's tanned hand holding a sign reading 'April'...he was in an airport [in] Frankfurt, Germany...When I woke, that was all I recalled...I began with that scene and let it run. April turned out to be a little girl, niece of his best friend who had asked him to meet the child and the woman who was to turn her over to the absent uncle. The woman would not, because the man with the sign was not the uncle. The story...became a Loveswept entitled *Golden Dreams*."

If you don't remember a dream, write down whatever thoughts are going through your mind when you awake. Doing this every day signals your brain that you are seri-

ous about remembering your dreams. I started dream journaling as part of my morning pages, which are a practice recommended by Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way*.

"If you dream something that feels like a plot," Judy Gill suggests, "do not speak or allow anyone to speak to you until you have the gist of it written down."

You don't need a fancy dream journal. I prefer a small spiral notebook. I record my dreams on the left side of the notebook, leaving the facing page free for notes as I study dream symbolism, for additional dream details I remember later, or references to dreams with similar themes or symbols. I title my dreams. After seven years of dream journaling, my journals fill a three-foot wide bookshelf. The titles help me find a specific dream quickly when I want to go back to it.

If some mornings you haven't time to write out the entire dream, jot down a few words to remind yourself of the key characters, setting, items, or plot. Often you'll be able to recall the entire dream later.

4) Waking in the middle of the night. "I've learned that if I don't write it down, the details are lost by morning," Kathy Holzapfel says. "Oddly, I tend to get these ideas in bursts, on multiple stories, so I jot a quick reference at the top of the page about which story the idea pertains to. When I first started doing this, I would wake up completely and write a flurry of notes, but then I'd have a problem getting back to sleep. Gradually I began writing in a semi-dream state, scribbling quickly so I could get back to sleep. Some mornings I find pages that I have no recollection of writing. My handwriting in the dream state is horrendous, but I've learned that if I transcribe it first thing in the morning, I can usually decipher the squiggles."

5) Talk with the dream characters. Use active imagination to find out more about the characters and their motivations. You might want to **set aside a specific time** to do this other than your normal dream journaling time. **Relax.** Perhaps put on some soothing instrumental music. **Ask specific questions.** "Who are you? What do you want to tell me? Why did you do ____ in the dream?" Trust whatever thoughts come into your mind in response to these questions. Some people **role play** with their characters to understand them better. **Interview yourself.** If a dream character is a famous person or someone with whom you are familiar, pretend you are telling someone else about the character. This person has never heard of the character. Tell the person what the character looks like, what he does, how you feel about the character.

There are many books and tapes which discuss active imagination. I like Clarissa Pinkola Estes' example on her *The Creative Fire* audio tapes. Dr. Gayle Delaney's books give wonderful examples of dream questions to ask.

Between waking and sleeping

Sherry-Anne Jacobs says, "I'd not say use dreams, but use the [time between waking and sleeping]— ▶▶▶▶

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which is similar to the relaxed state used in super-learning theory. It seems to free up the creativity and let it loose."

How does Sherry-Anne encourage her creativity to use the between-time state? "I set myself up to relax, especially when I'm half-awake early in the morning—or even in the middle of an insomniac night (caused by the plot nagging at me)...Relaxation is the key...I always listen to whatever it is in my brain that causes me to 'see' coming scenes/characters and so far it's been right."

Lucid dreaming

If you've ever realized you were in the middle of a dream, you've experienced lucid dreaming. Upon the realization, most people awake. But you can train yourself to stay conscious within the dream and affect the outcome. For instance, if a threatening person is chasing you in the dream, you can stop running and ask the person such things as, "Who are you?" and "Why are you chasing me?" It's easy to see how this could be useful to a writer.

The ability to interact with one's dream characters doesn't come easily to most people. To increase the ability, some people recommend asking yourself a number of times during the day, "Am I dreaming?"

There are many books which address lucid dreaming, should you wish to explore this topic further.

Dream symbolism

Answers to your story questions may not appear in a straightforward manner. One writer who was having difficulty with characterization dreamed of a crooked house with crooked walls and hallways. Reflecting on the dream, she realized her characters were too proper. They needed to be a little more crooked, have imperfections.

Sometimes dreams give encouragement through symbols. Mary Kennedy, author and licensed clinical psychologist, speaks of *The House Dream*. "It's a dream in which you discover a wonderful house, a perfect, beautiful house that you didn't know was there before. As you wander through the rooms, you marvel at the size of the house, the loveliness, each room is a delight. You know that this house belongs to you...[The dreamers] were always comforted by this dream...and felt they were in touch with a very spiritual, creative side of their personality."

There are at least three levels on which to interpret symbols. One is personal associations, or what the symbol means to you based on the people and experiences in your life. Another level is cultural associations, or what the symbol means to your culture. Cultural associations can include your country, race, or your religious belief system. Archetypal symbols are a third level. They are symbols which have become so much a part of human history that they are

believed to be part of the collective unconscious upon which we all draw.

Janelle Schneider says, "I've found the study of myths to be particularly helpful, as the symbols in myths often show up in my dreams."

My first exposure to interpreting symbols came from Clarissa Pinkola Estes' *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. The book is not a dream book, but I found the symbolism worked well when interpreting my dreams. According to Estes, "The language of storytelling and poetry is the powerful sister of the dream language."

You might explore one of the many books on dream symbols. I strongly recommend any of Dr. Gayle Delaney's books. She suggests questions to help one understand one's personal symbols, and advises against dream dictionaries. Her books include many examples of actual dreams, questions used to explore them, and their interpretations.

If you want a quick introduction to symbols, you might try a dream dictionary. There are many ways to interpret symbols. If you use a dream dictionary and the symbolism doesn't ring true to you, trust your intuition. Most dream dictionaries I've seen do not blend well with my personal associations. My favorite dream dictionary is *The Encyclopedia of Dreams* by Rosemary Ellen Guiley. The book includes an introduction to archetypal symbolism and different theories on dream interpretation.

Even if you decide not to study dream symbols for their messages to you, you might find studying them improves your use of symbolism in your writing.

Some final advice

"Keep at it," Kathy Holzapfel encourages. "It takes practice, but like most everything, if you stick with it, you'll get better. I've been doing the dream-writing for so many years I don't question the process any more. But it didn't just happen—it evolved—via conscious choice on my part to develop and improve the process. Also, accept that some nights you score, some nights you don't. My patterns are cyclical...I go through stages where I feel I'm not dreaming at all, then *boom!*, I go into a stage where I'm dream-writing every night. I've learned to trust that the process is happening exactly as it's supposed to."

Robin Lee Hatcher advises, "Whether we dream a new scene or simply discover we have new ideas by the time we sit down to write isn't significant. What's important is that we allow our wonderfully creative brains to play."

Peg Waldock's advice is simple. "Remember your dreams, write down your dreams, listen to your dreams, and follow your dreams."

Sweet dreams.

JoAnn Grote is the author of over 35 published books, none of which were inspired by dreams. Her next release is Prairie Schoolmarm in the Schoolhouse Brides collection, Barbour, Fall 2005.

Finding Your Voice

How to Put Personality in Your Writing

REVIEW BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

I approached *Finding Your Voice* with equal parts skepticism and anticipation. I want to learn how to give my writing that inexplicable something that makes readers wait in line for my next book. But could another book really tell me how to do that?

The notes about author Les Edgerton indicate that he certainly has enough experience to (maybe) be able to help a writer get a grasp on this slippery subject. He's written five books, as well as numerous short stories and nonfiction articles. He also has an impressive list of teaching credits.

But he says it was prison that showed him what writing voice is really all about. (I'll let you read the book to find out the rest of this story!)

Tone, vocabulary, imagery, and rhythm are the easily identifiable components and are relatively easy to see by comparing passages from various books.

But the key to it all, Edgerton maintains, is personality. This is the difference between a letter you write to a friend about something you're passionate about and the essay you produce for an English teacher. The first is uniquely you. The second is often more about what he calls "da rules" than about individuality.

So how does one go about injecting personality into writing? "Write as you would to that little (big? huge? stupendous?) group of admirers who is really interested in what you have to say and who laughs at your jokes," he says.

"Remember this above all else: Readers enter many (if not, most) pieces of writing not for the story or idea so much as they do to hear the author's voice and through it, to enter his or her world."

Edgerton then gives several practical tips. First of all, decide what tone fits not the material, but the way you feel about the material. Next, allow yourself to do some prewriting. Whether that's a journal entry by your main character, a letter to your best friend about your story, or some other method that works for you, just let your brain loose. Don't edit yourself or censor what shows up on your computer screen. This is "just prewriting," after all. Whether those actual words ever make it into print isn't the point. The objective is to see for yourself what your voice looks like in this story.

The author relates how he used to struggle with the

advice to start writing and just keep writing until you reach the end. For him, that method felt unnatural and made the work tedious and difficult. Then he read about an "expert" who advised making each paragraph, page, or chapter the best it could be before going on to the next. That advice fit his writing style, and he said his unique voice began emerging much more easily.

I'm just the opposite. If I try to polish before the story is completely out of my head, I'll get lost in the quicksand of my own perfectionism. Thus, the important point isn't how you create your rough draft, but merely that you do create it.

Revision presents a new challenge. Revision combines input from both left brain and right brain. If left brain shouts louder than right brain, personality can easily be stripped from the story. This is where it's important to get inside the skin of your characters. If you can give each of your characters a distinctive voice, then chances are good that the entire novel will be alive with your voice.

In Chapter Nine, Edgerton lists what he sees as the most common weaknesses in popular writing, including examples from some of the "writing greats" we were taught to admire in English Literature classes. He then presents exercises to help the reader/writer identify his/her weaknesses and strengthen those areas.

Chapter Eleven is a collection of statements from various editors and agents about voice. This chapter alone contains some of the best motivators I've ever read for making the effort to find, develop, and preserve my own writing voice.

Finding Your Voice could easily be pompous, but Edgerton's sense of humor preserves it. He pokes fun at himself, at language, and at writers in general. There was no doubt in my mind as I read that I was reading someone like me, someone struggling always to improve my craft, rather than someone who has all the answers.

Best of all, I think I might be finding my own writing voice.

Janelle Clare Schneider lives in Ontario, Canada with her military engineer husband, two children, three dogs, and 13 fish. She has been writing inspirational romance for 10 years, and is now working on women's fiction.

Writing

Power Structure

BY ANNETTE CARNEY

In the distant dark ages of floppy disks, before I'd ever completed an actual book, I was a junky for plotting software. I was convinced there was a magic key that would turn me into a novelist... if I could just buy it somewhere.

Then I managed to figure it out on my own, and I never looked back.

Until I recently realized I could use some help staying organized.

See, I'm not a tidy writer. When inspiration strikes, it may be in the form of an idea for the hero's best friend's dog's name or it's a fragment of a conversation somewhere in the middle of the story that's key to the creation of the black moment. I dutifully record this information... somewhere, and more often than not, can't retrieve it when I need it.

I've tried notebooks, three-by-five cards, and flurries of Post-it notes. I've tried wall-mounted dry erase boards for plotting and I've made elaborate files on my computer for characters, orphaned bits of scenes, and miscellaneous notes, only to forget all about them in the midst of writing.

I found Power Structure when I was searching for some way to consolidate all the bits of info into something I could keep right on my computer. (Lugging dry erase boards with sticky notes posted around the edges from my office and back to it was getting really old.)

Power Structure bills itself as story development software, but right in the first paragraph of the manual, you're advised that:

"There are lots of computer programs out there that promise to make you a better writer. This isn't one of them. There are lots of programs that promise to make it a snap for you to develop realistic characters, exciting plots, and sure-fire story lines. This isn't one of those, either."

What Power Structure does offer is a way to organize your story. Any way you want, actually. Like to start with plot points? Fine. Like to use the Joseph Campbell/Christopher Vogler hero's journey myth as a starting point? No problem. There are also templates for three act structure, TV structure, and plays. Or you can create your own personal structure to create stories in.

Apart from choosing the way you want to organize scenes or plot points, Power Structure offers a customizable way to organize character information as well. I have a standard character questionnaire I like to start out with, but I always end up having different pieces of information I want handy for different characters. The program comes with a few generic questions that pop up each time you create a new



Tech

Program Review

character, but you can choose to add new ones into the main template for every character, for only one character in one particular WIP, or for every character in that one WIP.

That's probably the most exciting feature of the program to me. It's extremely customizable.

Although you do pay a price for that. The program seems very intuitive to me, but I did have to play around with it for awhile to be able to take advantage of all of the nifty ways you can customize it.

And I like having all my information in an intuitive, graphic format. It's hard to describe visuals in an article, but just let me say, having a way to toggle between an outline of my scenes to a three-by-five card sort of format has helped immensely. Especially for somebody like me who doesn't approach plotting in a linear fashion.

Another thing I liked is that you can ignore whatever you wish. When creating scenes, Power Structure reminds you to think about how the scene heightens tension or moves the inevitable ticking clock forward. You can wrestle with those questions, or ignore them, if they don't help.

As I pointed out in the section on characters, Power Structure is quite customizable. I think that's what I liked about it the most. Once you invest some time getting familiar with the program, it's a snap to tailor it to your writing/plotting style.

On the website, Power Structure is described as a tool for writing more efficiently. Once I was able to navigate through the various screens easily, it has certainly done that for me. And as a last point, let me praise their tech support. Actual, live humans answer the phone. I had the answer to my obscure Mac question in less than thirty seconds.

That rarely happens in my world.

The catch? All this organization doesn't come particularly cheap. The program (Mac and Windows versions) lists for \$169 to \$179 on various writing software websites. Ouch. I know. But if you happen to have a student or a teacher in the house and can qualify for an academic discount, I found the program for \$100.

If you're intrigued (or at a stuck place in your latest WIP and bored with Freecell), you can download a fully functional demo from the Write-Brain website www.Write-Brain.com. It's also available on many writing software websites.

Annette Carney is the author of several short contemporary romances and YA series books. She swears she was on the trail of an award-winning WIP, if she hadn't lost the sticky notes for the best scenes in the plot.

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Thank you!



Graphic by Laura Hayden

or
**What I always wanted to
know about the business
of writing...**

I promised last time to do some name dropping, so here goes –

You already know we'll start with *New York Times* bestselling author **Harlan Coben**, winner of the Edgar, Shamus, and Anthony award – the first author to win all three. His most recent novels, *No Second Chance*, *Tell No One*, and *Gone For Good* are international bestsellers. His books have been published in more than 25 languages in over 30 countries.

You'll meet **S. J. Rozan**. She's won the Edgar, Nero, Macavity, Shamus, and Anthony awards for Best Novel and the Edgar Award for Best Short Story. A former Mystery Writers of America National Board member, she's currently on the national board of Sisters in Crime, and is President of the Private Eye Writers of America.

How effective is publicity? Ask **M. J. Rose**. She self-published *Lip Service* in 1998 after several traditional publishers turned it down. Editors had loved it, but didn't know how to market it. Sound familiar? Undeterred, she set up a website where readers could download her book. After selling over 2,500 copies, *Lip Service* became the first e-book and the first self-published novel chosen by the Literary Guild/Doubleday Book Club, as well as being the first e-book to go on to be published by a mainstream New York publishing house.

Still ambivalent? Read on, gentle reader.

We've titled this conference **EMPOWER THE WRITER** because we're focusing on the *business* side of writing, and no one is more savvy on that score than our second keynote speaker, **Irene Goodman**. Irene has

been a literary agent over 20 years and has sold more than 1,250 books. Her columns have been featured in the *Romance Writers Report* as well as *NINK*, and she's been featured in *Publishers Weekly*. Did you know she was the inspiration behind the creation of Harlequin's new HQN imprint? She's also negotiated contract concessions from Harlequin that no one else has ever received. Irene understands that one of the hardest things about being an author is waiting around for someone else to decide your fate. That's why she believes in being pro-active. She'll tell us how we can control our own destinies. Irene Goodman is also the first agent to ever keynote a Ninc conference.

No discussion of the business of writing would be complete without panels of editors, agents, and publishers. So how's this for name dropping?

Editors: *Ginjer Buchanan* (Berkley), *Ellen Edwards* (Dutton/Signet), *Leslie Wainger* (Harlequin).

Agents: *Jake Elwell* (Wieser and Wieser), *Robin Rue* (Writers House), *Richard Curtis* (Richard Curtis Associates), *Amy Moore-Benson* (AMB).

Publishers: *Steven Zacharius* (Kensington), *Matthew Shear* (St. Martins), *Loriana Sacilotto* (Harlequin).

Oops, can't forget those pesky contracts. *Elaine English* and *Bob Stein*, literary attorneys-at-law will delve into legal issues with *Kay Murray* of the Writers Guild.

Still not convinced? Golly, you're a hard sell. Well, if I can't persuade you with these impressive people, I'll have to bring out the big gun: New York City.

You'll be in the heart of the theater district, within walking distance of some of the best shopping in the world. (Am I getting warm?) Then there are the museums and parks, art galleries, historic sites, and just plain fun places to be. If you're not familiar with the city or haven't been there in some time, we'll have working aids to assist you. *A Survivor's Guide to the Big Apple* will clue you in on the transportation systems as well as prevailing customs and courtesies and a partial list of places where you might want to dine. I say "partial," because there's no such thing as a complete list of New York restaurants.

We've negotiated an exceptionally good hotel rate for Ninc members. Registering for the conference and making reservations at the Crowne Plaza can be done quickly and easily online. Just go to our website: www.ninc.com and we'll walk you through the process.

What more can I say, except that I hope you'll come join us? Ninc conferences are unique, fun and, yes, **empowering**. Just like Ninc itself. See you in New York.

–**Ken Casper**, Conference Coordinator

Making a Difference

BY BRENDA NOVAK

Sometimes you're proud to be part of a project; and sometimes you're PROUD to be part of a project. The latter is how I feel about *More Than Words*. You see, *More Than Words*, released the first of October, includes short stories by *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling authors Diana Palmer, Carla Neggers, and Emilie Richards, along with Susan Mallery and myself, but it's not the usual kind of anthology. It's Harlequin's charitable project, which recognizes ordinary women who make an extraordinary contribution to their community. After soliciting nominations for almost a year, submitted mostly through eHarlequin.com, a panel of judges, including Harlequin editorial, marketing, public relations staff, and authors, selected five award recipients, who received \$10,000 for their chosen causes. Harlequin then invited five authors (those named above) to write a short story inspired by each of these real-life heroines. It's rare that fiction and nonfiction are published side-by-side, but that's what you have with the trade paperback *More Than Words*.

My story, *Small Packages*, was inspired by Tera Leigh, a woman who started a charity that provides memory boxes to hospitals for parents grieving the loss of a baby. It's difficult to know what to say when faced with this sad situation, but Tera mobilized a community of women to put their passion and deep sympathy into creating hand-decorated boxes to hold the baby's cherished mementos. The need for this outreach of love and concern has been made very clear to me since I posted an excerpt of *Small Packages* on my website. This is just one of the touching responses I've received: "When I had to go home without my stillborn daughter, I rolled her going-home clothes tightly, put them in her blanket, and held them to my heart as they wheeled me out. Passing personnel thought I held a newborn in my little bundle and smiled warmly at me, and I wept as I left her behind. It was forty years ago, and it still hurts."

The other award recipients have done amazing things, as well. Sue Cobby, recently divorced from an abusive husband, evicted from their rented property, and living in a borrowed car with her five children, started Chefs to the Rescue, a charity that collects donations of surplus food from grocery stores and restaurants and distributes it to shelters and needy families. She's moved literally mountains of food. Jan Richardson and Kathryn Babcock started Sheltersnet, a safe Internet site to link abused women with

local shelters all across Canada. June Nielsen wanted to take away the pain of children in crisis, to wrap them in love, and let them know there was someone who cared. She did this by founding Quilts from Caring Hands, which has made and donated over 3,200 quilts to more than a dozen social service agencies serving children in crisis in Oregon's Willamette Valley area. Dena Wortzel has spearheaded Wisconsin's Motherread/Fatherread program, which focuses on family literacy by helping parents improve their own literacy skills. All of these women understand Helen Keller's words when she said, "I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything; but I can do something. I will not refuse to do the something I can do."

And here's the best news of all: This is only the launch year for the *More Than Words* program. There will be many more *More Than Words* award recipients and many more moving stories in the future. So, if you know someone who is making a difference, please nominate her for the award at www.eHarlequin.com. All the proceeds from the book go back into the program. Harlequin takes no profit and the authors take no royalties.

For more information on *More Than Words*, visit my website at www.brendanovak.com or eHarlequin.com. ▲

Bits'n'Pieces

ImaJinn in Chapter 13

ImaJinn has filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy. This type of bankruptcy allows them to still conduct business. Because they are classified as "creditors," all authors under contract should have been notified by now.

ISBN Expands

A new international standard is expanding the current 10-digit ISBN to 13 digits. The new ISBN will consist of a 3-digit prefix (currently 978), 9-digit number, and recalculated check digit. The new standard is not scheduled to officially begin until 2007, but the Library of Congress began recording the new numbers October 1, 2004.



Wallflowers R Us

DEAR ANNETTE:

Why can't I be as witty and clever when talking to real people as I am when talking with the imaginary characters in my head? At gatherings, I tend to find myself in a corner feeling trapped and wishing I was somewhere else. I can't seem to get beyond asking, "So, what are you writing?" And I don't want to fill the long pauses with a spiel on my own career. Do you have any suggestions for how I might improve my conversational skills?

Signed: So Not the Life of the Party

DEAR NOT:

Are you *sure* you want to ask a therapist about this? Have you ever actually seen a party full of psychologists? "Yikes," is all I can say.

My own party inadequacies aside, I'll give your question a go anyway.

First, my guess is this isn't about your conversational skills. Really. Anyone who can dream up the kinds of characters and situations we do clearly has more than enough imagination to get them by at the canapé table.

I bet this is more about confidence than conversation. I know it is for me. It's about having the confidence to believe that other people will be interested in passing a few enjoyable moments with me, having the confidence to believe I have something interesting to say, and having the confidence to either strike up a conversation in the first place, or carry the ball once the hellos have been said.

The rub is, the only way we gain confidence is to learn new skills and succeed with them.

It's a bigger problem than you might think. In researching your question, I came across this statistic several times; eight out of ten people questioned described

themselves as shy in large group settings. Huh. I guess more of us dread cocktail hour conversation than I thought!

So I guess my first suggestion would be to try and remember that most people in the room feel the same way you do.

Aside from bolstering yourself that way, I've got a few suggestions that should help. My guess is that if you make a concerted effort to train yourself in starting conversations (and keeping them going) it'll become easier and less arduous (and hey, maybe even fun) the more you practice.

But how do you charge right into a room full of strangers, or people who are barely acquaintances, and start chatting them up?

By taking baby steps. If this sounds about as much fun as walking a tightrope across the Grand Canyon, give yourself some small tasks at first. Promise yourself you'll introduce yourself to two different people at the morning coffee break, then two more at lunch. It gets easier, I swear.

But how to begin?

First, try to at least make eye contact with each person you pass. Catch his eye and offer a simple hello. Just that infinitesimal contact will make it easier to break the ice later when you rub shoulders in the buffet line.

Speaking of the buffet line, that's a good place to begin. Pick up a plate or a cup of coffee. Point out that you love Swedish meatballs as you spear a couple, or ask where the person next to you picked up that gooey chocolate thingy.

But what to talk about after that, you asked?

Be prepared. I bet that since you've already given this topic a lot of thought, you're beyond this already, but still, it is the first step. Knowing the types of audiences you're likely to encounter and coming up with some questions or observations sure helps. In researching this, I learned that many successful business and sales people have a few tried and true topics to bring up in different settings.

Ask open-ended questions. I know this sounds a bit elementary, too, but I find that when I'm feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable, I start spewing lame yes or no questions because, well, I'm not sure exactly, but I do. Anxiety makes my brain seize up, I guess. "Wasn't that Chicken Kiev awesome?" "Can you believe the traffic?" "Is it hot enough for you?" Just a simple, "How was your trip to the conference?" or "What's the weather like where you're from?" would get me so much further.

Model your conversational skills after someone you admire. I have a good friend who has the most amazing, welcoming laugh I think I've ever heard. Just hearing her makes you want to laugh from across the room. She also has a unique ability to ask people really interesting questions. Ever since I met her, I've found myself thinking, "I wonder what Mary would ask this person?" I really do think it's helped me ask more interesting questions.

Make observations. Comment on the news headlines (okay, maybe just the ones from *People* magazine for now), or talk about how your kids are wearing the same fashions you

once did. When you share your opinions and observations, other people are more inclined to do the same.

I know what you're thinking. "If I could do that, I wouldn't have asked you for help."

Coming up with things to say might be easier if you imagine what you'd point out to your spouse or your best friend, or what you plan to tell them about when you get home.

Give a compliment. This only works when you're sincere, of course, but I rarely have a hard time finding something nice to say to someone. Aside from the fact that it makes the listener feel good, it offers a nice conversational opening. I know when people compliment me, I'm very likely to toss out a response that keeps the conversation going.

Ask questions. *Duh.* I know. But *what* exactly, you're wondering. This goes back to my first point about being prepared. Before I went to Santa Fe last year, I really did give some thought to things I could ask (besides talking about the latest WIPs, as you mentioned).

You're a writer. This is where you have a *huge* advantage over the average bear. Devote some time to brainstorming a few ideas. People like my friend Mary have the enviable ability to come up with interesting ideas on the fly. I don't. That's just the way it goes. But when I do find a few good topics, I have no compunction about re-using them.

Reveal something of yourself. Talk about the high-speed cab ride you endured on the way to the hotel, mention how much you hate carrot sticks, or how you wouldn't know a Merlot from a Zinfandel. There's always something in the present context to comment on. At Ninc, you could compare aspects of last year's retreat to this year's conference: differences in atmosphere, setting, rooms.

When people reveal something about themselves, the level of conversation deepens. Just sharing that your feet were killing you after those three flights you had to catch

to make it to the conference opens things up for the other person to share, too. Stuck next to three strangers at the pastry table on the first morning of the conference? Mention how much you hate (or love) flying, or how much you love making online flight reservations. Anything that's likely to be a common experience works.

Now that I think about it, that's the key. Common experience. Instead of worrying about coming up with witty, amazing, blockbuster topics, try focusing on things in our everyday experience.

And practice. It gets easier. I promise.

In the office, Annette Carney, PhD, has no problem grilling perfect strangers on intimate details about their spouses and their sex lives, but put her in the middle of a conference cocktail party, and she's toast.

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:

Juliet Blackett (*Jennie Klassel*), Cambridge MA
 Katy Cooper, Peabody MA
 Kaye Dobbie (*Sara Bennett*), Quarry Hill,
 Victoria, Australia
 Ola Ghaith (*Olivia Gates*), Cairo, Egypt
 Susan Kay Law, Minnetonka MN
 Lisa Manuel, Coral Springs FL
 Sophia Nash, Potomac MD
 Jacquelin Thomas, Raleigh NC
 Sara Williams, Deer Harbor WA

New Members:

Mika Boblitz (*Mia Zachary*), Orchard Beach MD
 Anne Gracie, Thornbury, Victoria, Australia
 Alesia Holliday (*Jax Abbott*), Orange Park FL
 Kathryn Johnson (*Kathryn Jensen, K.M. Kimball*),
 Silver Spring MD
 Leslie Kelly, Melbourne FL
 Sandra Marton, Storrs CT
 Carolyn McSparren, Collierville TN
 Edie Swihart (*Edie Claire*), Pittsburgh PA
 Christy Yorke, Boise ID

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

Stay in Touch with Ninc online.

Visit the website at www.ninc.com. Join the never-ending e-conversation—for members only—by joining Ninlink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at BrendaHB@aol.com

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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS, PART TWO

One of the most maddening things about a long-term writing career is the reality that turns more on strange bits of luck than anything else.

On my counter is a line of quilted glass jars. Every so often, I can hear the soft pop of the lids sealing firmly as they cool. *Pop, pop, pop.* Each one is a quiet celebration.

There is, in my front yard, a bed of daylilies. I dug it out myself, years and years ago, on a hot April Sunday. I dragged railroad ties to outline it in a rectangle and carefully planted the dozens of bulbs that had come by truck in boxes made with holes to let the plants breathe.

Over time the bed filled in, thick with daylilies, a splendor every summer. Neighbors admired it, every year. They're nothing special, just ordinary orange daylilies, a flower that grows by the tens of thousands in fields all over the country. But here on a street in the southwest, they are to be admired.

A couple of years ago, Colorado experienced one of the worst droughts in living memory. Everything dried up and blew away on fierce winds. Water rights—always hotly debated, contested, discussed through the west—came under furious discussion as squabbles erupted over who owned which drops. In town, watering restrictions were finally put into place.

Since many people are not aware of this, let me explain a small fact of life in the west: green lawns are not natural to this climate. Lawns must be planted and very

carefully tended in order to grow. I understand that in some places—places where grass is no doubt native—lawns only have to be watered in...oh, August, for a little bit.

Not in Colorado. A green lawn requires watering from March through October, and if you're wise, you'll water now and again through the winter as well.

Although I have complained mightily for years and grumbled about xeriscaping and the need to conserve and understand how precious water is in the west, I admit I had caved into spousal and neighborhood pressure to plant grass in my yard. I also carved out beds for plants—shrubs and roses (which grow quite well, thank you) and other such things, like the daylilies—that are not so water thirsty. When the drought arrived, and I had to choose how to best use my precious gallons of outside water, I chose to let the grass in the hot, south-facing front yard wither. Most of my neighbors were forced to make the same choice. We simply were not given enough outside water to keep a lawn alive unless it was well-shaded, or in some lucky cases, had a good sprinkling system.

I had planned to save shower water and dish water and other second-use waters, but that is against the law here. The minute it flows off my body, or off the dishes or clothes, it must go down the drain because it belongs to someone else after that.

Choices had to be made. I chose to save the roses, the

most precious shrubs, the antique plants I'd inherited with the house, and the daylilies, a sentimental favorite on the block.

It seemed to be going all right until the lilies were invaded by a most tenacious kind of grass: buffalo grass, which can survive drought, floods, forest fires, acts of God. I spent hours trying to yank it out, furious that those blades of mean grass were drinking up the precious water I was doling out to the daylilies. As the hot, dead summer burned along, the ground grew harder and harder, and wherever the grass grew, it was even worse. I didn't have enough water to soften the ground enough to get it really OUT, so there it went, taking over everything. Buffalo grass, surviving in concrete earth, where it was sealed until the rains came.

The lilies ended up being fine—they even bloomed, something of a miracle. Their sword-like leaves stood up high over the grass, and after awhile, I just gave up trying to get it out. It was impossible.

And lest you think I gave up too easily, I should let you know some farmers broke a backhoe when they tried to dig a trench for goosehunters. *A backhoe.*

Towards the end of the summer, I noticed that in the middle of all those lilies and the tangles of buffalo grass there had grown a little tree. I couldn't tell what kind of tree. It made me laugh, really, that in the midst of all the drought, a new tree should be trying to establish itself.

Most years, I would have yanked it out. This year, like the grass, the tree was sealed into the earth by concrete topsoil. Unless I wanted to rent a winch, the tree wasn't going anywhere. By the end of the summer, it was nearly hip-high, a sturdy little thing with long, light green leaves I kept thinking I should recognize.

The dead summer ended finally, and with the winter came a blessed season of snow that nourished the concrete earth. In the spring came the rains. Not as many as many had hoped, but at least a little to keep things alive. One spring day, I headed outside with my leather gloves and spade and shovels, determined to rid the daylilies of grass.

The little tree was budding. Healthy, strong, tall as my waist. I decided it wouldn't hurt anything to leave it until I could ask someone what it was. After all, a tree that was born in a drought was probably a survivor. I liked its pluckiness. In the soft spring grayness, I yanked out buffalo grass until I was aching and sore, tied up the peonies, touched the little tree in bemusement.

It grew and grew. Toward the end of the summer, my mother happened to notice it—by now it was growing quite nicely, tall and slim—she frowned and leaned in close. "How long has this tree been here?" I told her about it. She said, "I think it's a peach tree."

I looked at those long leaves. Could be. I left it alone. Wait and see.

This spring, the tree had grown to above my head, and I kept thinking of a mawkish song from the seventies:

"Honey," which was about a young woman who died (of course) of some disease, and the tree she'd loved. "*See the tree how big it's grown....*"

One afternoon, I stepped out on the front porch, on my way to some ordinary errand, and the tree was covered in blossoms. Not tiny crabapple flowers, but big pink flowers, scattered along the length of the branches. Bees hummed around them happily.

My mother affirmed it was, indeed, a peach tree.

It delighted me. My house is a block from the local elementary school, three from a basketball court that's very popular with young teens, so the sidewalk is a throughway. Some kid had tossed a peach pit into my daylilies three (or more likely, four) years ago. The pit dried out, then germinated in the secret darkness of the jungle of daylilies, unnoticed until it had attained a sturdy toddlerhood during a grim season, and now it was blooming.

It was beautiful. It smelled wonderful. It was the perfect complement to the snowcone peonies, so I'd let it stay. I knew I'd never get any actual peaches. Even if the birds and squirrels left them alone, they'd never survive the children, both those who walk by and those who live on my block (at least seven) would find the fruit too tempting.

So, I tried to avoid getting too attached to the fruit that grew from the flowers. It wasn't that easy. I love fruit trees and have always wanted to have one. And there were a lot of peaches on this little tree. They were very cute. I loved looking at their furry green selves, wondering how long they'd last.

They made it through May. Then through June's endless soggy rain. Rains that poured and poured and poured all summer, refilling the reservoirs, deepening the softness of topsoil, nourishing the fields.

In July, there was a hailstorm that knocked out power, shredded leaves from trees, caused about half my neighbors to have their roofs replaced. The peaches survived, somehow. A few were dinged and marked, but they didn't fall off their branches. They hung and kept growing.

They started turning a little bit yellow, a little bit flushed.

I still didn't allow myself to become attached. When they were obviously peaches, growing and beautiful, I'd start seeing children pluck them. I have experience—children always pick roses and flowers along that sidewalk. How could they resist fruit?

One late August day, I noticed the tree was drooping. Dripping. Ripely pregnant with its offering. Tentatively, I reached out and tested the peach closest to me. It was firm but giving, the exact texture of a youthful breast. Bemused and chuckling, I twisted it, and it came right off in my hand. Yellow, with a blush of dark red over one side, its furry flesh without blemish. It was warm from the sun, and I held it for a long time, admiring tree ▶▶▶



the Girls in the Basement . . .

▶ ▶ ▶ and peach and moment, and I bit into it. It was a little dusty and tart and sweet.

Finally, the reality arrived: against all odds, my little tree had grown, thrived, and now had produced a whole crop of peaches its very first productive year. I had peaches! A *lot* of peaches! Ripe and falling off the tree right in front of me. I ran inside and grabbed a bowl.

I stood in the sunshine of a late August day and plucked fruit off the branches of the tree that should not have been. The history of the summer was written in their flesh. The heavy rains, the cold nights, the hot sunlight, the hailstorm. Each peach was precious, a miracle, grown from a careless act, years ago, nourished by hardship and strange weather. Some were as perfect and round and

flawless as a toddler's bottom. Some had marks and scars. Two had grown together, one overtaking the other until the smaller one shrunk into a hard green knot clinging to the rosy shoulder of the other. Several had round dark marks like thumbprints from the hailstorm, but they'd grown to full size and ripeness anyway.

The tree rustled her branches. I thanked her. I took the fruit inside, and a day later, made peach butter and put it in jars to cool on the counter, where now they make soft little pops of celebration. All winter, I'll have peach butter on my toast. I'll care for my tree, who will give me more peaches. And so it goes. Bounty showing up where you least expect it.

In the basement, the girls whisper to me, to us, in this season of harvest, pointing up the obvious parallels to the writing life, a writing career, those books that are sometimes flawed, the seasons we are sometimes fighting just to stay alive, the surprises of great richness growing out of hard ground. *Do you see?* they ask me.

Oh, yes. *

Bits 'n' Pieces

Google Print -- It's Gone Live!!!

Google's print program went live on Oct. 6, claiming this is the way for publishers to get free PR for books. A book's content is scanned into Google's information archive, and the book becomes part of the search services. If a user selects a search term contained in the book, a brief excerpt from the book along with the book's title, author, and page number will display in the search result. Users can browse two pages forward and backward from the page with the search term. Google states the copy and paste function have been disabled. Other features include links to Amazon.com, BN.com, and Booksense so users can purchase the book.

While Google won't provide the exact number of titles that have been scanned, the number is estimated to be over 100,000. Publishers that are participating include Penguin, Hyperion, Scholastic, Houghton Mifflin, and a number of university presses.

Ninc Member Gets Special Nod from PW

Each month *Publishers Weekly* editors pick a short list of books they consider exceptional for their online *PW Daily for Booksellers* - September included Kasey Michaels *The Butler Did It* from HQN, the only paperback on the list. The other selections for Adult Fiction were *The Inner Circle* by T.C. Boyle, *Good Morning, Darkness* by Ruth Francisco, *The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower* by Stephen King, and *The Falls* by Joyce Carol Oates.

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