

# CRAP

BY LAURA RESNICK

I'm having trouble concentrating on my work today.

My health insurance company is claiming that my coverage expired two months ago, and it is therefore refusing to honor a recent medical bill. I've been phoning the insurance company repeatedly for two straight days, pointing out over and over that I have the signed, stamped, dated, official paperwork right here showing that I am currently covered, and I also have a credit card statement showing that the company accepted payment from me for coverage for this quarter.

The oxymoronically titled "customer service" representatives I'm talking to just keep reiterating that their computer system shows that my coverage expired two months ago and that they know of no one who can help me. None of them seem to have supervisors, bosses, brains, or the functional competence that one would expect of a reasonably precocious goldfish.

So I am sitting here trying to concentrate on the comedic fantasy tale I'm supposed to be writing... while I keep worrying about whether or not I've got medical insurance. Which is a pretty complicated, important, costly concern for

an American these days. Every time I try to focus on my book, psychic mice start dashing through my head, chattering frantically at each other: What should I do if I get severe chest pains or break a finger this weekend, while my insurance situation is still unresolved?

This is a standard, mundane, daily-life example of crap.

Unlike gunk, which we discussed in October's *NINK*, crap is the stuff that others inflict on you, intentionally or inadvertently, that makes it hard to write. Gunk is in your head, the roadblocks that *you* put in front of yourself. Crap, on the other

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## President's Voice

# The Last Words

I've been looking forward to writing this column for a year. And before you get all smart-alecky and assume that's because I'm giddy with joy at the thought of leaving office, that's not the reason. So there. Well, maybe a smidgen of the reason. Ninc presidents have an expiration date, and mine is 1/1/06. Time to restock the shelves.

But the biggest reason I've wanted to write this column for a year is that I finally get to thank those who have given so much to Ninc. We've had spectacular volunteer service in the past, but I'd put the 2005 bunch up against anyone. I've been incredibly blessed to have such intrepid souls donating their valuable time to the organization. Their powerful words, and you may think I overstate. If anything, I'm soft-pedaling the praise.

First of all, Ken Casper put on a dynamite conference in New York without benefit of meeting planner or site committee. Sandi Kitt stepped in to provide on-the-ground support, and together they brought that conference in under budget. In NYC, that's quite a feat. Ken and Sandi, my humble thanks.

Our 2006 conference coordinator, Pat Roy, hasn't completed her work yet, but she's determined to make New Orleans the experience of a lifetime, come hell or high water. And she's faced both. Pat, you're some kind of woman. And all for the price of cheap wine and chocolates.

While I'm on the subject of conference angels, I need to thank Susan Gable for her unsinkable optimism as registrar for NYC as we tackled our first-ever online registration. Then—she must've been smoking wacky tabacky—she agreed to do it all over for New Orleans. Susan, get a life. Just kidding! You're the glue on the spine of our conference notebook! And special thanks to Darlene Gardenhire, Joyce Ware, Linda Barrett, and Eve Gaddy for helping make NYC so great.

Moving on, I scatter rose petals at the feet of those who graciously said yes when asked to help Ninc. Georgia Bockoven took on our Advocacy Committee and is working on a speakers' compensation guide. Past President Jean Brashear brilliantly chaired the Nominating Committee that included Connie Brockway, Kathy Garbera, Vicki Hinze, Julie Leto, and Sylvie Kurtz.

In other news, Sue Swift agreed to be Ninc's voice on a multi-organization task force looking into Google and Amazon's book-scanning plans. And Sue, along with Judy Myers, helped Deb Gordon complete our 2004 audit. Then Randi Dufresne and Ronn Kaiser took on Ninc's ad hoc committee on used bookstores, while Lorraine Heath offered to head up our Outreach Committee.

In addition, Julie Leto did a stellar job of hounding members—I mean collecting—proxies for our annual meeting, and Annette Mahon competently handled our election for the second year in a row. Lillian Stewart Carl remains willing to be our Membership Chair (bless you!), and recently, Ginger Chambers took on the task of monitoring the website to make sure all our links actually link. Amazingly, not one of you snarled when I made my request. As one who hates rejection, I cherish that.

And now for my fellow-board members. This is the part where I get

all choked up. All I can say about Brenda Hiatt Barber is that Ninc is one lucky organization to have her. Brenda's continued to be our Ninlink moderator all year while serving as president-elect, and she hasn't mentioned giving up the moderator's job even next year! Meanwhile she revised our membership brochure and has worked hand-in-glove with Pat Roy on the New Orleans conference. Ninc will have an amazing year with Brenda at the helm.

But the whole board might be in a ditch without the diplomatic and steady guidance of secretary Linda Madl, who is staying on for another year, both to her credit and Brenda's. Linda effectively recorded our sometimes crazy meetings and served as liaison with the new Central Coordinator in Manhattan, Kansas. Kudos to you, Linda.

As for the treasurer's job, I have two people to thank—Ann Josephson for weathering the first few months of our online system, and Deb Gordon for stepping in when Ann's deadlines made the treasurer's job an impossible burden. Deb has miraculously agreed to stay for another year, which gives us the gift of continuity. Deb, I owe you, big time.

Probably the most demanding job on the board is editing *NINK*, and Annette Carney has accomplished it with grace and style. She must be running on Eveready batteries, because she's decided to go for another year, and I'm trying to be very quiet so that nothing disturbs that excellent status quo. With four people returning to the board in 2006, Pat McLaughlin as the new president-elect, and Pat Rice as Advisory Council rep, good times are ahead. And a certain amount of confusion as they juggle all those named Pat. (Three counting Pat Roy.)

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***“Teaching is like writing.  
You have to find your tone.  
And you have to tell the  
truth. If you put on a  
mask, they’ll find you out  
every time. ...I’m not  
claiming wisdom, but when  
you learn that you’re always  
learning, you’re liberated.”***

***Frank McCourt, quoted in Newsweek***

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And now for Barb Keiler, who was nutty enough to decide to stay on as Advisory Council rep for my presidency. Or maybe it was my threat to throw myself off the rim of the Grand Canyon unless she signed on for just one more year. Now we can ride off into the sunset together. BK, I couldn't have made it without you.

I couldn't have made it without any of the people I've mentioned, come to think of it. Special thanks also to our webmaster Craig Johnson and our newsletter publisher Sandy Huseby. I'm honored to have spent this year working with all of you, and I'll miss you dreadfully while I enjoy the next twelve months vacationing in the Bahamas. Kidding! Somebody revive Brenda. Love you guys.

***Forever yours,  
Vicki***

### **The election results are final, and they are as follows:**

#### **2006 Board:**

Joining Brenda Hiatt Barber, President, will be:  
Patricia McLaughlin - President-elect  
Linda Madl - Secretary  
Deborah Gordon - Treasurer

In addition, Annette Carney has agreed to serve as Newsletter Editor again, and Pat Rice has agreed to serve as Advisory Council rep.

#### **2006 Nominating Committee, in alphabetical order:**

Beverly Brandt  
Carole Nelson Douglas  
Eve Gaddy  
Sally Hawkes  
Eloisa James

My deepest gratitude to those of you who offered to serve in 2006. We're all busy, which makes your volunteer efforts that much more generous. Ninc is destined to have a fabulous year!

***Vicki***

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hand, is a roadblock erected by *others*, an obstacle placed in your creative path by outside forces. And it's a bitch.

Crap is when water starts pouring through the electrical fixtures on your bathroom ceiling from the apartment overhead, and you can't get a maintenance guy on the phone for two hours. (Come on, could even the most dedicated of you keep writing while waiting to die in an electrical fire caused by a neighbor's sewage?) Crap is when most of your time and energy are consumed by trying to straighten out the chaos caused by identity theft. When the two-week renovation job on your bathroom turns into a six-month-long nightmare followed by a lawsuit. That's crap.

Crap needn't be petty, bureaucratic, or even deliberate. It can be a very serious, painful matter. For example, grief and loss inflict crap on the writer. It's not uncommon for people to have trouble writing when they're getting divorced. Ninc member Lynn Miller, a normally productive writer, went nine months without writing fiction after losing her mother. A friend of mine found her creative flow interrupted when her longtime companion had a stroke. Yet another friend decided to cancel a book contract while caring for her increasingly infirm husband, who died later that year.

The first time I ever came in very late with a book was after my aunt and my grandfather died within two weeks of each other. It took the stuffing out of me. I called my editor and said, "Sorry, the book will be late, I can't write just now." My editor and the publishing house were reasonable and considerate: "We understand, take your time, no problem." I believe most publishing professionals respond with this kind of human decency under such cir-

cumstances. But if an editor, publisher, or agent responds in some bizarre, whacko "Tough luck, you damn well better make your deadline!" manner to such news, that would be an example of *more* crap.

As my friend writer/psychologist Robin Graff-Reed (formerly Robin Wiete) says, sometimes you just need to give yourself permission not to write for a while.

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That doesn't always go well with our release schedules, our financial needs, and our work ethic; but since nothing is gained by adding gunk to crap, there's no point in beating yourself up if some crap is just so overwhelming that, for a while, all of your creative energy is sucked up by dealing with it.

Yes, I know, there are some people who can keep writing through, for example, the illness and death of a loved one. There are also some people who can eat a lot of high-calorie foods without gaining weight, or who can play the piano by ear, or who have a natural golf swing. Not everyone is the same. I thought one of the strongest decisions I ever saw a writer make was the day my friend told me she was buying back a book, because the stress of trying to write it while caring for her dying husband was adding a lot more crap to her daily life than she felt able to shovel. Writing through the illness and death of a loved one would also be tremendously strong, of course, and some people do it; but not everyone is the same.

Robin Graff-Reed also points out that we often find there are other

things we can do to be productive in our profession even when crap is clogging our creative pipes. A non-writing period may be a good time in which to bring your financial records up to date. (Surely I am not the *only* writer among us who currently has about six months' worth of income-and-expenses I need to enter into Quicken?) In a period when your well is too dry to complete a novel, you may still have enough juice left to get some marketing materials prepared, update your mailing list, send out a newsletter, organize your filing cabinets, sort through your hard drive files, clean your overflowing bookshelves, start reading a pile of research you've probably got lying around for the current or the next book, or reformat your out-of-print novels that you could market to a print-on-demand program or small press if they were available in a more modern word-processing program than the 25-year-old Easywriter II (I've still got six old books I need to convert).

Of course, life, crap—from identity theft to plumbing disasters, to personal grief and loss of loved ones—happens to everyone. Just like you or me, every banker, retail clerk, lawyer, secretary, doctor, waitress, bus driver, and accountant has to find a balance, a way to keep functioning, when confronted with irritating, infuriating, painful, or frightening problems that distract them from their work. I find it challenging to generate funny dialogue and humorous action, as is my task on the current manuscript, when I'm worried that I'll have no insurance coverage if I slip and fall on the stairs tonight. Then again, a waitress finds it challenging to smile and be gracious to customers who whine about their steak being medium instead of medium-rare on the same day that she's learned she has breast cancer, or her child has been up all night with stomach flu, or her car

has been vandalized.

Crap is egalitarian, it screws with people in *every* line of work.

Additionally, every line of work has its own kind of crap. As writers, of course, we deal with our profession's uniquely aromatic crap.

Rejection is perhaps the single most common form of crap in our business. It doesn't seem to get any easier to shovel, no matter how many books we sell along the way. Additionally, getting dumped by a publisher or an agent; seeing your book eviscerated by reviewers; discovering that due to publisher screw-ups your novel was released with 10,000 words missing or with a secondary character mysteriously rewritten as a raccoon; waiting four, six, seven months for a delivery check; going a year, two years, seven years without a contract; sending in your option proposal only to learn four months later that it got put in your publisher's general slushpile upon arrival; getting a new offer that's actually lower than your previous contract due to "sagging sales" (after the publisher contributed a bad cover and zero marketing support to the release on which they're basing this decision); discovering that you've been plagiarized...

These are all typical examples of writer crap.

Unfortunately, crap is like death and taxes; it'll always be around, there's no escaping it. No writing career is ever free of crap. The key for the career novelist is to develop habits and strategies to keep working *despite* writer-crap, rather than crawling into a deep hole and staying there because of it.

My friends Lynn Miller and Robin Graff-Reed both have experience with crap. As they pointed out when we were talking about crap recently, it's very important for the writer *not* to buy into someone else's perception of her or of her work.

A great example of a writer

who survived crap by employing this strategy is a friend of mine, a bestselling writer who once delivered a novel that an editor declared unacceptable, unpublishable, and "unsalvageable." The author believed in the book and wanted to see it accepted and published, so she spent a year doing multiple revisions rather than give up on it, while the editor kept making emphatically negative comments about the results. After encountering a final, no-further-discussion refusal to accept the novel, rather than sink into a black hole of tail-chasing despair, the author wrote a replacement novel. Thus she maintained—and continues to maintain—her profitable association with that publisher. (Luckily, however, the difficult editor resigned around the time the author delivered the replacement book).

Since the worst burn-out of my career, which lasted 18 months, occurred in part due to my paralyzing dread of delivering another novel to an editor with whom I'd had a nightmarish experience on the previous book, I asked this author how she had managed not only to keep *steadily revising* the "unsalvageable" novel (which sold the following year to another house in a very good deal and was subsequently released with what was at that time her largest-ever print-run), but also to face the daunting task of immediately writing a replacement novel right after this confidence-draining experience.

She says, "I'd had ten fairly successful years as a writer, so I knew I could write. This doesn't mean that I never experience those transient, 'Aiighh, my career is doomed!' moments. But, at heart, I knew I was a competent writer no matter what a volatile editor told me."

In other words, she didn't let that editor's perceptions screw with her belief in her work. Thus she maintained enough confidence to

protect her creative flow and keep writing despite the demoralizing, year-long experience described above.

In a similar example of creative survival under the onslaught of negative input, Ninc member Toni Blake says, "I spent four years and four books (and countless rejections *between* those four books) paired with an editor who simply didn't 'get' my work. She didn't like it, her editing was highly destructive, and by the time we parted ways, I felt like I was a *terrible* writer. It's the closest I've ever come to giving up, but even then, I knew I wouldn't." Toni has gone on to publish successfully elsewhere (and for better money), having since then signed contracts at two other houses with editors who love her work and let her know it. After soldiering on through several years of dealing with an editor who was destructive to her writing process, she adds, "That sort of constant negative reinforcement can drive you into the ground emotionally and mentally. If I have any advice, it's to try to keep your perspective... Try not to let that one person's perception of your work become your own. Look inside yourself and remember what *you* love about your stories, or your voice, or whatever particular facet of the work is being torn down. And then keep writing." On the other hand, don't stay indefinitely in a bad situation! As Toni advises, "Move forward. Or sideways. Or in some direction that doesn't involve this same editor. I felt between a rock and a hard place the entire time I was working with this editor, but if I have any regrets, it's maybe that I wasn't brave enough to move on earlier, to just decide I could do better elsewhere and be willing to take that chance."

This final comment of Toni's really hits home with me. Now that I am in a happy place in my career and enjoying creative ▶

▶ health, my single biggest regret is that I didn't have the confidence and clarity to move on from bad circumstances sooner than I did. I did three releases with an editor whose behavior I found so destructive that, by the time I finally put my foot down (meaning I told my then-agent that if I didn't receive word by Friday evening that he had *finally* requested reassignment for me, then I would call the publisher myself first thing Monday morning to do it), I was suffering, for the first time in my life, from multiple stress-induced illnesses: insomnia, indigestion, heartburn, intestinal trouble, chronic migraines, facial ticks, muscle twitches, and a weird psychosomatic pain on my left side that made typing almost impossible. Within 48 hours of my getting the news that I had been reassigned to another editor... all these symptoms miraculously disappeared, as if they had never existed. And they have never returned.

In retrospect, I only wonder why I let things get that bad before finally moving on, with or without the support of my then-agent. Then again, I also wonder why I retained an agent who was so resistant to removing an editor from my working life whom I found that destructive. I fired that agent a few months later, and now I only wonder why I stayed so long with an agent who described me as "lazy," who categorized some of my work as "mediocre," and who denigrated my accomplishments.

Who needs this crap?

One surefire way to reduce the crap in your working life, I soon discovered, is to get the wrong people out of your career. The main reason I didn't do it sooner is that I was awash in the negative perceptions of my work and my career that that editor and that agent expressed to me. When they applied words like "disappointing" to me, I went along with that! I let their negative

comments become how *I* saw myself. I let their perceptions affect *my* perceptions of myself as a writer. Big mistake.

In fact, the way I got gunk (remember gunk?) out of my life was by realizing one day that self-denigration was a luxury I could no longer afford. With so much crap falling on my head from other sources, *I* couldn't afford to be anything other than *very* positive and

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encouraging when talking to myself about my work, my talent, and my career. So it was in learning to identify and work around crap that I also learned to identify and eliminate gunk.

In seeking more strategies to protect my creative health from negative influences, I asked best-selling writer Susan Wiggs why the publishing business rarely ever seems able to mess with her head. Her response: "Maybe I'm just lucky. But more probably, it's a combination of the way I was raised (I often describe my parents as the cheerleaders on *Saturday Night Live*) and eleven years of classroom teaching. You're pretty much bomb-proof after that, I think. *I do* get stressed and upset over things now and then.... For me, the solution is extreme physical activity—running or biking up and down hills, swimming laps, all those things that make me eat like a horse."

Ah-hah! In addition to yoga, I enjoy martial arts. I train specifically in the unique personal fighting style of my longtime teacher, who combines aspects of Indonesian *penjak silat*, Filipino *kali*, and some off-road

law-enforcement training, using weapons as well as empty-hand techniques. Sometimes what I need to protect my creative space is a soothing and energizing yoga class where I focus on my breathing and my pose. Other times, the best creative therapy in the world for me is the weekly session where my martial arts training partner and I beat the living daylights out of each other. There are days when a little violence just makes you feel all better inside.

Another technique I've practiced, with varying success, in order to protect my creativity from crap, is compartmentalization. To some extent, it's a yoga technique. We're instructed to try to leave behind the outside world when we're in the yoga studio. This is so we can focus on trying not to fall on our noses and so that we can get the deep-relaxation benefits of *savasana* ("corpse pose"). While I'm trying to stand on my left earlobe, the cares of my daily life are left outside the door.

When I work on my book, I try to separate from the world. There's book time, and there's real time. In book time, I try to shut out the chattering mice in my head, to leave them outside the door while I work. They'll be there when I stop working, eager to resume their noise; but if I can define *this* space as a place where they're not allowed, then I can keep working.

On the third day of my quest to resolve my health insurance dilemma, I get a hold of someone in a parent company. To my relief, she verifies that I *am* covered and says there is no question about it. But the people at the insurance company don't know how to use their software, so they tend to have trouble correctly loading the data-lists of their covered clients. Rather than fix this problem, they just go around denying that we're covered. She'll give them a call and advise them to

reload the data. Then I'm supposed to phone them again next week to see if they will *finally* acknowledge that I am covered and honor my recent medical bill.

What a bunch of crap.

*Laura Resnick is the award-winning author of twenty books, fifty short stories, and dozens of articles and columns. Her next release is Disappearing Nightly (12/05). She is currently under contract for four books and also trying to write her thesis for*

*her MSJ degree. This winter, she'll be shipped off to the Middle East on her journalism internship. As if Middle Easterners didn't have enough problems.*



## ***Good times, good fortune roll on...***

**Nora Roberts - Keynote Speaker  
March 30 - April 1, 2006  
Hotel Monteleone - New Orleans, Louisiana**

Ever longed for a life coach for creative folks? Are you in luck. Our Friday afternoon workshop on dealing with the trials and tribulations of the creative life will be led by Eric Maisel, a multi-published author, psychologist, and creativity coach who was highly recommended by a number of Ninc members. Check him out at [www.ericmaisel.com](http://www.ericmaisel.com) and email

me with specific areas you want him to bring up.

More good fortune. The Tennessee Williams New Orleans Literary Festival ([www.tennesseewilliams.net](http://www.tennesseewilliams.net)) is going on while we are in New Orleans. Not only will we be able to attend their events but Paul Willis (Executive Director of the TW Festival) has invited us to join the authors they are bringing to town (Elizabeth Berg, Rick Bragg...) Wednesday night in the Carousel Bar and Saturday night at their uptown party with the New Orleans/Gulf South Booksellers Association.

Paul phoned me from New Orleans to say that the French Quarter is back in business and though it is cleaner than he can ever remember, the let-the-good-times-roll-what's-the-rush ambiance has returned. Said he stopped by the Hotel Monteleone to talk about hors d'oeuvres for our Wednesday night get-together and everything was running smooth as silk. Said the only difference we are likely to experience is the heartfelt connection to the people for sticking by them.

The stars are lining up for this to be the conference we'll talk about for years. If money is holding you back from registering, tell Santa to get on it as the Hotel Monteleone is filling up fast.

***Laissez les bon temps rouler***  
***Pat Roy***

P.S. With all the creativity work we will doing at this conference, this would be a terrific time to sit down with your editor(s) and agent and chart out future projects. If they have not received (or cannot find) the registration information I sent out last summer, you can either email me ([patroy1@charter.net](mailto:patroy1@charter.net)) with their snail mail and email address or email Susan ([sgable@susangable.com](mailto:sgable@susangable.com)) for the code to register online.

# Duo-logue

## Doing and Teaching

**Pat:** It seems to be almost expected that writers will teach writing in some form or other – workshops, articles, critiquing, editing, or more formalized teaching. I started thinking about this because I was griping about The Other Job impinging on my writing (we really, really need a few years with no big news stories) and my sister-in-law asked if I'd ever considered teaching. University level, she quickly added, perhaps fearing for the emotional well-being of tykes everywhere.

My first thought was: Was she nuts? My second was: I already do teach in a variety of ways. My third was: A new job always has so many difficulties (from benefits to finding the bathroom) that switching has to be a leap forward to make up for those difficulties. My fourth was: Was she nuts?

I started thinking about how many writers do teach in some form or another, and wondering how/why it fits with writing, if it can fit better, if it can benefit writers and if all those people thinking it's a natural fit really are crazy.

So, who better to Duo-logue with on this topic than my friend, Alicia Rasley. First, I know she's nuts, so that question's out of the way. Second, she teaches in a wide variety of ways. When I called her about this, she was grading university English papers. Right?

**Alicia:** Yeah, grading papers. It's endless.

**Pat:** Let's start there. What course(s) are you teaching and why? Is this new?

**Alicia:** I am teaching two sections of freshman comp, and a section of professional writing (required for most majors). Why? Well, for money. It's not a lot of money and there are no benefits for part-timers (so don't quit your job, Pat!), but it's an easy job to get if you have a master's degree, and it's not like anyone else hires English majors. I taught for about eight years in the '90s, both at this school and a private college. I have the idea that it's much harder now. I don't know if the university expects more of instructors, or if I just didn't have

such high standards for myself previously.

The supposed workload is ten hours a week per section (three hours class time.) I am putting in more time than that, but I think that's because I'm having to prepare everything new. Next semester I probably won't have to work so much.

I also teach fiction-writing classes online, and like that much better. And I think I teach that better too. It's just more fulfilling when I'm dealing with students who want to learn. You can't count on that with college students.

**Pat:** How sad is that?

**Alicia:** But I just finished grading papers, so am feeling a bit burnt out. The paper-grading is endless, because they get to revise once I've graded it. This is pedagogically good – they learn to revise that way – but it means that there's always a stack of old or new papers for me to grade.

**Pat:** Sounds like line edits and revisions and proposals and WIPs. A second job like writing – ack!

**Alicia:** I treat it pretty much as I would an editing job – I mean, I fix the punctuation and re-write sentences and move paragraphs around. I suspect no other teacher does this much work, but I can't help myself. I don't know if all the students like it – after all, when I get done with their paper, it's got marks all over it, and that might be a bit dispiriting.

Most seem to appreciate the real-world experience, but one was grumbling that it isn't fair that she's getting graded by an editor with an eagle eye.

**Pat:** Go back to the online fiction writing courses. I also know you do workshops and have scads of writing articles posted on your website.

I know how much workshop attendees and article readers get from these, but what do you get from them? I can say money for the courses, but the articles are



there for everyone to use for free. So, what's in it for you? What do you get out of it? Or is it all altruistic?

**Alicia:** Well, teaching fiction-writing is fun (as opposed to teaching college writing). I work directly with the students, getting into their books, making wise suggestions I don't have to apply myself. :) And the questions the students ask really make me explore writing issues, like how to develop a theme through parallel scenes, or how to keep secondary characters in line. And often those end up as articles on the website.

The truth is, writing about writing is my great love. It's the academic in me. I love to analyze. In fact, I think I'm more analytical than creative. Teaching allows me to use that part of my brain. Sure, I ought to be doing that for my own writing, but it's so much easier to see the mote in the other's eye than the beam in my own scene, you know! But actually, sometimes I am lecturing about how, say, a novel setting can energize a scene and create conflict, and watch out for mindless repetition of settings, and I suddenly realize that my characters have just had the fourth restaurant meal in the book (never go on a diet when you're writing a book—your heroine suddenly becomes obsessed with food!). And I decide I should practice what I preach, and move one of those scenes to, say, a firing range.

So teaching writing does help my craft somewhat—that is, when I listen to what I'm saying!

But teaching and writing aren't the same things. Not all writers want to teach. I think that the writers who do would be teachers somehow anyway—that is, if they weren't teaching writing, they'd be teaching CPR or something. It's really a different impulse. I suspect that it comes up in more extroverted people who pretty evenly balance creativity with analysis in cognitive ability.

The very creative writers—the ones who “fly into the mist,” for example, who write in a white heat of inspiration—often don't want to examine how they plot, because it might mess up the magic. I wish I were like that! One thing teaching has done has given me respect for the variety of writing processes, and the one I envy the most is the “white heat” writing process.

**Pat:** Tell this mist-flyer that at least you draw scads of readers to your books from teaching.

**Alicia:** No, two separate lives. I actually don't know that I want my students that close to my psyche, so I'd prefer they don't read my stuff. Plus it would be really annoying if they took a red pencil and found every sentence fragment.

**Pat:** Are there any costs to teaching—in addition to the obvious one of time—for you?

**Alicia:** I think “nurturing” and “creativity” often feed off the same energy stream. So, to a degree, nurturing students—and the way I teach requires a lot of interaction, not just lecturing—uses up some of the energy that would otherwise go into my writing.

And there are a lot of failures in teaching. Maybe over the course of the semester, the majority of students learn, but on a day-to-day basis, it often seems like I'm doing a lousy job. (I mean, really, after I stressed and lectured and work-sheeted about commas in compound sentences, they turn in papers that show no sign they've ever heard of commas, much less compound sentences.) Couple that with writing failures ... last week I had a class where only half the students showed up, one only to argue that her C+ midterm grade was an insult (trust me, it was a *gift*). And so I dragged home to find a letter from my agent that an editor had rejected my book. Doesn't take too many days like that to make me question whether I would maybe be happier as a bank teller.

**Pat:** Blech, blech, blech! But that does point out one benefit to writing: There are plenty of downs and, yes, there are some stinky people in the biz, but you so seldom have to actually meet them face to face. No matter how stinky they are, they're seldom in your physical space.

And then you can kill them off vicariously in your next book. I strongly recommend that treatment for Ms. C+.

**Alicia:** I've got one student who has improved extraordinarily in the first nine weeks, mostly because she works so hard to absorb and apply everything I suggest. That one student makes it worthwhile—I know I've actually been involved in changing her life a bit. I have several other students who are also making real progress and will, I think, end up good writers. I hope the balance of students will at least be able to write a decent paper (with thesis statement and topic sentences) for their history classes next year.

But none of them, none of them, knows how to punctuate. Drives me nuts! If they learn nothing else from me, I want “comma then conjunction” ringing in their ears for the rest of their lives!

**Pat:** Yikes, I don't want to be in your class—what a thing to be in my head forever! Especially because I don't know many of the names of grammar rules; I know the rules, not the names. I figured I absorbed most of my grammar from reading, rather than memorizing rules under some dragon of a teacher, ahem <g>.

So, how do you balance/schedule the time and creative energy that teaching demands with your writing? ▶

# Duo-logue

**Alicia:** Not very well. I teach three days a week, but often have papers to grade on days off. I try to do the paper-grading in the evening, watching TV with the family. (Don't tell my students!) That way I can pretend that it's family time too. Alone-time should be writing time.

As for creative energy, well, I think if I make the time, I make the energy. Any writer who has an outside job, not just teaching, any outside job, has to learn to generate the creativity on demand. There just isn't enough time to sit and wait for the muse to arrive.

**Pat:** There's another aspect of this teaching/writing business I've been thinking about: conscious vs. instinctive and how it affects teaching. I feel that what I've struggled with is what I'm better at teaching, because I've had to find methods and tricks and downright crutches. But what people tend to want most writers to teach is what they're good at.

That's understandable from a conference chair's viewpoint, but doesn't necessarily deliver the most useful information to the participant.

I was trying to explain to someone how I edit, and that for me it's sort of like telling myself that now it's time to see the old lady instead of the girl in the hat in that trick painting, and it just happens. I actually *see* the pages differently. For a mechanical typo/grammar read-through, going over the pages is the visual equivalent of a robot reading the words instead of actors letting the lines fly.

And when I finished trying to explain this, I knew I'd lost my listeners, entirely.

Give me something that's not ingrained and I think I'm much better at articulating it because I've had to articulate to myself in the first place.

**Alicia:** Exactly. The truth is, we do a lot of things well because we've absorbed that lesson long ago, or we're naturally talented at that. And usually we can't teach that. "Uh... read a lot! That'll help you with punctuation!" "Dialogue?... you know, I just hear the voices in my head, and I jot down what they say, and it never comes out wooden or stilted!" or "Plotting? Well, somehow I just know what comes next. Trust your instincts!" really aren't good lessons.

But problems we've had and overcome—that we can teach. "I couldn't get backstory in-

tegrated right until I figured out how to break it down, and here's how." "I use too many 'justs' and 'thens,' so I look for that when I edit. We all have words we overuse, so figure out what yours are, and try this—do a global search for those words, and replace or delete them when they're unnecessary. That works for me." "I worked out this handy-dandy grid to keep track of where the hero is on his heroic journey. You're welcome to use it too if it helps!"

We teach best what we've actually had to learn, because then we have techniques beyond talent and instinct. Those are great things to have, but we can't rely on them, and we sure can't tell that to other writers—who have other talents and instincts and don't need to be instructed in those areas.

Something I remember from a teaching composition class I took—yeah, have to be taught how to teach :)—is that most writers do 95% of writing right. It's the 5% they need to learn. But of course it's a different 5% for every writer! So I think the best teachers of writing are often the writers who started farther back (like they only did 80% right originally), or who have such high standards that 150% is their personal goal. They've taught themselves so much that they have lots of lessons to pass on.

**Pat:** Ahhh. But . . . with those of an analytical bent, I'd worry that teaching might foster Analytic Paralysis for the teacher when s/he turns to her/his writing? What? You've never heard of Analytic Paralysis? That's when your internal editor knows every darned rule and preference and technique and structure and correct comma placement <g> and keeps nagging at you so much to remember to do this and don't forget that, that you can't just *write*.

**Alicia:** Well, comma placement comes naturally to me—maybe that's why I can't seem to teach it to my students!—so I don't get paralytic about that. The truth is... uh... I don't often practice what I preach, at least with fiction. (I do with nonfiction—that is, I'm just as rigorous about topic sentences and transitions in my own writing as I expect my students to be. I'd give me an A, in fact. :) With my own stories, I don't do a lot of pre-writing. I jump right in and hope my subconscious is working today.

But I revise constantly, especially the ordering and organization of scenes, so I guess eventually I do what I tell my students to do—find the character motivation, track the character journey, provide external catalysts for internal changes.

What I find I do is write the “results” scenes, that is, where the heroine realizes that she’s been misinterpreting the situation, and then I have to remind myself to go create a scene that causes that result.

So (as I try to tell my students) I draft on inspiration, but I let the internal editor take over after that. The problem is, sometimes the internal editor decides to show up early at work, during that drafting phase. I find that a glass of wine is usually enough to send the internal editor off to a

dark corner booth where she can mumble about sentence structure but the jukebox drowns her out. :)

**Pat:** My muse goes to sleep after a glass of wine, unless she has plenty of fellow writers to talk with. And then no writing gets done, anyway.

*Pat McLaughlin’s mist cleared long enough for her land a December release with Delphi Books, The Games. Check out her website [www.TheGames2006.com](http://www.TheGames2006.com) devoted to the Winter Olympics and her book, of course.*

*Alicia Rasley teaches writing at a couple state universities, online, and in workshops around the country. She has just finished “creating” a women’s fiction novel and is currently “analyzing” its pacing problems. Her website, [www.rasley.com](http://www.rasley.com), offers many writing articles.*

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## INTRODUCING.....

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*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:**

Megan Crane, Los Angeles CA  
Monica King (*Monica Jackson*),  
Topeka KS  
Barbara Plum, Mtn View CA

Alice Sharpe, Brownsville OR  
Jill Strickler (*Jillian Hart, Jill Henry*),  
Spokane Valley, WA

### **New Members:**

Diane Amos, Greene ME  
Lisa Chaplin (*Melissa James*),  
Empire Bay, NSW, Australia  
Edward Hoornaert (*Judi Edwards*),  
Tucson AZ  
Laura Iding, Waukesha WI  
Rosemary Laurey (*Madeline Oh*),  
Columbus OH

Michael Sherer, Mercer Island WA  
Pari Noskin Taichert,  
Albuquerque NM

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may apply online at  
[www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).**

## Bits'n'Pieces

### **PAY-PER-READ! WHO GETS PAID?**

What a surprise! Amazon has two new schemes, er, programs. Amazon Upgrade will charge \$1.99 for Internet access to books, *after* a reader has purchased a print copy. Then there’s Amazon Pages, where the “e-tailer” will charge pennies per page for access. That’s the plan, anyway, when they get publishers to agree to the program. So far publishers and authors are not enthusiastic at this point, though Jeff Bezos is in discussion with various publishers. He has yet to announce a projected launch date, but says Pages will be available with various products.

### **Random Online and Hollywood Bound**

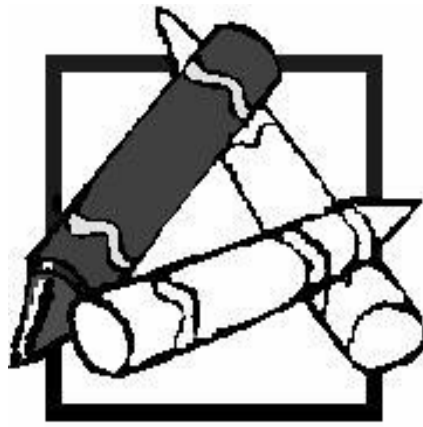
Random’s Internet adventure includes both general fiction and non-fiction. They plan to charge 4¢ per page for viewing that wouldn’t exceed more than 5% of

the total book. This is what RH is calling a reasonable “free sample.” Books considered to be in the reference category would have higher viewing prices, and smaller sampling percentages. Viewing would be on-screen only, with no downloading, printing, or copying. The introductory model would involve splitting the revenue with the authors. Authors have the choice not to participate.

Venture Two has RH forming a partnership with Focus Features (NBC Universal) in producing films of RH books. Random House Films will be headed by Peter Gethers. RHF plans 3 films a year. Previous films by Focus include *The Pianist*, and *The Motorcycle Diaries*, with budgets between \$2 million to \$20 million. No RH authors will be required to sign over film rights but RHF hopes that authors interested in a friendly environment will be interested in negotiating with RH. They hope that books in the RHF deal will have higher sales, as well as the publishing of screenplays and tie-in books.

*“Bits” Compiled by Sally Hawkes*

Crayon  
on my



Key  
board

## What I Learned About Writing From NCIS

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

Tuesday evening is “TV Night” in my house (and dance night and hockey night, but the TV part is what this column is about). After the Little Realities crash into bed, get their three stories read, and their cups of water and their blankies and whatever else they can dream up to keep from actually dreaming, Hero and I settle in to watch one of our favorite shows, *NCIS*.

When the series premiered, Hero and I were not impressed. We were still watching, and pleased with, *JAG*. (Any *JAG* lovers out there—wasn’t the series finale just the lamest piece of writing you’ve ever seen? If you disagree with my opinion, I really would love to hear from you. I felt that finale was so bad it almost ruined the countless hours of previous enjoyment I’d received from watching hunky Harmon do the impossible predictably and repeatedly.)

I think it was in the second season that Hero and I got hooked. I think it was actor Mark Harmon that lured me in. I watched him in *Chicago Hope* and loved his acting. Between him and Adam Arkin, I spent most of every episode drooling. But I digress.

Much as I enjoy watching Mark Harmon, the character he plays, Jethro Gibbs, intrigues me even more. (Yes, truly.) What we don’t know about Gibbs’ past looms larger than what we do know. The writers have a wonderful way of alluding to Gibbs’ past in almost every episode without ever forcing the point.

Then there are the secondary characters, the Goth forensic scientist, the quirky medical examiner who talks to his “patients” as if they’re still alive, the self-absorbed special agent who barely manages to avoid messing up more frequently than he succeeds, the new agent who gets picked on, the strong female agent. In each episode we find out just a little more about each character, which is what makes the show so enjoyable for me.

I mean, the plot is pretty much predictable. Dead body shows up somewhere. Team investigates. Team hits dead end. Forensic Scientist or Medical Examiner turns up Key Clue. Team solves case.

However, each of the characters continues living life in the middle of—and around—the demands of crime investigation. The writers have given us something to care deeply about in each character.

Toward the end of last season, the trailers for the finale announced that one of the characters would be killed. I made a mental list—well, okay, it was verbal, too, as I told Hero what I was pondering—of which characters I wouldn’t mind “losing.” It was a short, very short, list. I decided either of the male agents could go. I’d miss either one, but I could probably live without them.

Gibbs, of course, has to stay. Replacing his character would be something like when they replaced Admiral Chegwidden on *JAG*. The show pretty much fell flat afterward.

The quirky characters have to stay. They’re the ones that set the show apart from, say, the various permutations of *CSI*.

As it happens, it was the strong female agent who was killed. Another writer friend and I have discussed this at length by email. We were both ready to ditch the show forever after Kate’s death. We both felt betrayed.

Yes, I know, we’ve talked on Ninlink about people to whom fiction becomes reality, and how unhinged we think they are. Bear with me here. I do have a craft-related point.

We realized that the same thing that keeps us watching the show week after week is what made us resent Kate’s death so deeply. The writers made us care about each character. When Kate was killed, we “lost” someone who mattered to us.

That’s what I strive for in each of my stories. I want my readers to care, and care deeply, about my story peo-

ple. Yes, the occasional reader does make a really wacky comment or demand as a result of devotion to my characters, but even that gives me a sense of a job well done. I want the details of my stories to be so strong that my readers feel as if they're living a different life . . . for as long as my story lasts. The "disconnect" after reading the last page is equally important, but we'll save that topic for another time.

I can't say I waited with bated breath for the new season of *NCIS* to begin. I felt like they'd ruined it for me, and there was no fixing it. But when the season premiere aired, there I was, curled up on my end of the couch, watching to see what the writers would do next to keep me from walking away entirely.

In the first two episodes, the writers used ghost-like re-appearances of the Kate-character to give us even more hints into the motivations and histories of the remaining characters. Each character had a different type of encounter with the Kate-ghost. When she appeared to the forensic scientist, she was dressed Goth. When she appeared to the self-absorbed, woman-chasing agent, she was dressed provocatively.

It made me realize how my memories of people I love are influenced by my own personality, past and preferences. I'm sure I remember my mom much differently than does either of my younger sisters. Even in my interactions with those still alive, no two people bring out exactly the same facet of my personality.

I'd like to try this technique in my writing. How can I use the perceptions of the secondary characters to enhance my readers' attachment to my main characters? What is unique about the way my heroine interacts with her brother, her college professor, her elderly friend?

The writers of *NCIS* "left Kate's desk empty" for three episodes, both literally and figuratively. No one was brought in immediately to take the character's place. Just as I felt betrayed by Kate's death last spring, so I felt respected, as a viewer, by the fact they didn't rush to introduce the new face. The other characters' memories gave me a chance to mourn the loss of my fictitious "friend."

However, last night, "the replacement" appeared. I'm delighted to see that she interacts differently with her

co-workers than Kate did. For example, Kate could be counted on to react to every single one of her fellow agent's woman-chasing comments or actions. The new agent lets some of them pass, and has a way of keeping this other agent off-stride that Kate never did. Kate reacted to Tony. Ziva sometimes gets Tony to do the reacting. I love watching it, both as a viewer and as a writer.

My writer friend also pointed out to me that Ziva is showing us new details about Gibbs' character, as well, primarily because Ziva and Gibbs have a secret. Everyone thinks Gibbs killed the Supremely Bad Guy a couple of episodes ago, but it was Ziva who actually pulled the trigger, thereby saving Gibbs' life. Despite—or maybe because of this—Gibbs doesn't want Ziva on his team. He doesn't want to respect her, much less like her. With each episode, I look for clues as to why he feels as he does and then love watching how Ziva's choices are demanding his respect anyway. I'm learning more about each character through their reactions to one another than through their words or their friendlier reactions with others.

Perhaps in stories, as in life, conflict is a better indicator of character than tranquility.

I have no idea why Kate got written out of the show. I'm pretty sure it has more to do with the actress who played her than with the story line itself. However, I'm actually seeing benefits to the change I initially resented. I think the show may have been strengthened by the change.

That's the lesson I'm struggling to hang onto with my WIP. I'm having to "kill off" certain scenes in order to strengthen one of the subplots—parts of the story to which I'm particularly attached—in order to weave something better into the whole. There's also the obvious parallel with the vagaries of the writing career as discussed by Nancy Harkness in her article "Dumped" in last month's *NINK*.

Nothing in a writer's life is wasted—not even the (fictitious) death of a beloved TV character.

*Janelle Clare Schneider understands all too well how readers get over-attached to characters and want to help dictate their destinies.*

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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

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## Filling the Well

I took the day off today. Just did not want to do one more day of words, work, other agendas.

Over the past year, I have written roughly three times what I ordinarily do, and I'll do the same again in the coming year. I'm happy to do it—the stories are knocking around loudly and demanding to be heard. I'm naturally a compulsive writer, so the words might as well be going toward whole books, and this period of explosive fertility follows one of learning and reorganizing.

Still, I haven't really had much time off lately, and the girls in the basement staged various forms of protest. Hilary, the brassy teenager, threw a tantrum and smoked a pack of cigarettes (she does the smoking for all of us these days, lucky girl). Roberta, the older churchy mother type, banged pans around in the kitchen, muttering under her breath. Eliza sharpened pencils until there were 49 of them in a jar, insisting tightly there was nothing wrong at all. Guinevere fell to her bed, weeping beneath her yards of hair.

All right, all right, I said. Let's have a day off.

Because I have been working so hard, the exercise is non-negotiable. Five days a week, I have to do some exercise of some kind, and this was an exercise day. Usually on Tuesdays, I walk the mile to the YMCA, do a yoga class, and walk home. I allowed myself to drive to the class and decided to view it as a treat, as if I were going to the spa. What do I feel in yoga class? What thoughts run through my busy mind?

Illuminating exercise, this.

I'm worried that the very fit, very lean, gray haired

woman behind me is thinking I look clumsy. I'm worried that I'm not wearing the right "outfit." My brain actually uses this term: outfit. In general, most people are wearing official yoga clothing: particular t-shirts and cropped pants and they—huh!—have their hair done. I'm not wearing cropped pants for any reason, but I do like my other yoga pants. They're just in the wash. I don't do my hair before yoga because it gets sweaty on the walk and it would be dumb to do it twice.

I would tell the other students this, in fact I would earnestly like the chance to explain why I don't have that messy coif, but no one asks me. I suspect they do not care about my inner dialogue. Some of them might actually be participating in a yoga class. I do eventually get to that myself today. Warrior feels very good, and pigeon stretches the vague stiff soreness in my hips. The teacher is new and I like her a lot. Since I'm not wearing my glasses, I don't know until she comes over at the end that she's older than I am, and her body, so lithe and flexible, is a good reason to keep up with yoga.

Afterward, I go home to shower and pick out my favorite sweater to wear out. I don't know what I'm doing but probably we (that would be the girls and I) will be going to the bookstore. I do my hair, which has grown out pretty long, and leave it loose on my shoulders and decide, yes, we'll start at the bookstore. Then the Vietnamese nail place, maybe some lunch. Hobby Lobby because the collage for the MIP is not finished and I'm not sure why. It's missing something.

At the bookstore, I wander into the music aisles first,

and poke through the new age stuff and the world beat stuff and the classical stuff. There's an elemental that sounds good—rain. I've been complaining to my partner that we have really not had enough dark weather lately, which is my favorite weather for working. Living in Colorado, dark days are somewhat at a premium. A CD of thunderstorm sounds might help me focus. The clerk comes over to see if I might need to locate something particular and shows me how to use a very cool listening machine that reads bar codes then plays bits and pieces of albums. I'm sure everyone else in the world has seen this machine, but I have not, and spend a solid half hour ambling through various things. I settled on Marin Marais, who is baroque but somehow always sounds medieval to me, the thunderstorms, and a collection of classical pieces that turned out to be a mistake, because the only things I like it on it are on other CDs I already have, as part of the entire symphony, not just a cut.

Anyway. Happily carrying my see-through bag of CDs, I wandered into the book area. Wherever I felt like going. Just looking around. There was a book by a chef I wanted to read and I wandered down the cook books to see if I could find it. Stumbled instead upon *Kitchen Confidential*, by Anthony Bourdain, which caught my eye frankly because the man is very good looking in a dark and dangerous way. He'd make a good rake. His voice snared me on the first page—rough and forthright and vivid and if I ever give up writing I'll head right back into the restaurants I loved so much, so I tucked it into the basket, found another book that looked interesting, wandered over to the magazines.

I'm sure I've discussed collages here. There's a whole mad group of us who use them. I believe it was Susan Wiggs who started it, and it seems the whole of a little writers group I hang out with uses them, including Jenny Crusie, who takes collages to a truly spectacular level (check them out on her website).

I'm hooked, and sometimes I do get into fairly elaborate art projects for them—the one for *Lady Luck's Map of Vegas* had a chiffon scarf and little blue lights to imitate neon, and I built it in a hatbox. I once made a shrine to Tupac Shakur because a character in a book had one. But the truth is, I'm not particularly an artist. I just like the colors and the visuals and the cutting and gluing. It gives me a framework that lets ideas flower.

I know lots of people go to the used bookstore or local DAV for used magazines. I keep a stash in a box in my closet, but part of the ritual is to go to the bookstore and buy three or four magazines for the specific purpose of cutting them up for the collage. It particularly pleases me to use *Veranda*, which is a big, juicy glossy that costs \$5.50. Shocking to buy it just to cut it up! How rebellious of us! How we do nourish our artist!

On today's expedition, I bought a *Veranda*, and a quilting magazine, and a travel magazine that yields a glorious

photograph of a Mexican shrine covered with candles and flowers that feeds into my little world exactly right.

Arms full, I carry my purchases to the café, order a giant latte and pay for the books and magazines, and sit down with a notebook. I was just going to jot down some ideas for the MIP, but a woman's voice begins to speak. All I can find in my purse is a hot pink miniature Sharpie, but it's immediately apparent a hot pink Sharpie is exactly right for her. In twenty minutes, I fill three legal size sheets with her voice.

Then it's off to the nail place. Where I splurge and have a pedicure and the woman really knows how to do it. They're glad for my business—it's dead in the mall and there are three nail places there. I like this one because it has long windows all around so you can watch the world go by. A Vietnamese family runs this one, too, a mother and a father around my age, and two Americanized early twenty-somethings. The father's hands tremble a little as he does my nails, and I always wonder why. Does he drink? Does he have a condition? He's a severe and weary looking man who was very handsome once. And I think, as I always do, that when we were children, he and I and his wife, my neighbors' fathers were fighting in Vietnam. For some reason, this always gives me a little burst of gratitude, that we're not those children anymore, that war is long gone. Life is pretty hopeful if it can circle around to the point where we're all sitting in a clean place doing something so mundane.

At Hobby Lobby, I admire the clocks and artwork and old signs and plastic flowers and kits for candles and cross-stitch and yarn—yarn, yarn, everywhere!—but my basket only gets little things. Stickers, mainly, especially little girl stickers of things like cute dogs and shiny bare feet. The scrapbooking craze is very nice for book collages; since there is in my books, a town called Mariposa, I'm happy to find zillions and zillions of butterflies.

Back at home with my freshly painted fingers and toes, I discovered a new notebook in the mail. Not just any notebook, no sirree, but a *Clairefontaine*, which has the smoothest paper in the world. The pen glides across the page like Fred Astaire in his best shoes.

I carry my prizes upstairs to my office and fling open the curtains so I can see the mountains through my office window. The Marin Marais goes into the CD player, and I start cutting up magazines and old decks of tarot cards and old romance comic books which have the most wonderful ads in all the world. I glue things. Stickers. Yarn. Ribbons. Photographs cut from the magazines, mainly.

There is a white wolf in the center, and butterflies of a dozen sizes swoop through the waterfalls and pictures of quilts and hands and mountains. For some reason, I cut out a picture of various clear glass vases filled with greenery cuttings.

I drink coffee and use iridescent glass paint and paw through the various things in the box. Sticking a ▶



## ***The Girls in the Basement . . .***

▶ little moon there, a leaf over that way. The music is wonderful. Emotional in a restrained sort of way that soothes my tired heart.

When I'm finished, I pour a glass of wine and serve chicken in cream sauce for supper, and when I pick up the dishes, I can hear the girls in the basement gearing up for work tonight. Hilary is dancing to Marais in that funny

way she has, as if she is a ballerina on a stage. Her clothes and hair are splattered with paint. Roberta is humming breathily as she cooks her favorite baked macaroni and cheese. Guinevere is braiding her very long blond hair, singing at the window about a handsome prince.

Eliza brushes her hands fondly over the smooth, smooth surface of the *Clairefontaine* and lays out several gel pens beside it, a purple, a turquoise, a black.

Tomorrow, we'll work.

*Barbara Samuel is thankful to have a job that includes magazine murder and painting posterboard and buying music and glittery stickers.*

*Visit her website at [www.barbarasamuel.com](http://www.barbarasamuel.com)*

### **Warner Goes Latino**

The *Solana* imprint is Warner Books' bid for the Hispanic/Latino female reader. English Language books will appear in early 2007. The line will debut with "*B*" as in *Beauty* by Alberto Ferreras. Six trade-size paperback originals will be published annually, covering a wide range of women's fiction, with the focus on Latino characters and lifestyles. Adrienne Avila, associate editor, is directing the *Solana* line.

### **Kensington Raises the Temperature with Aphrodisia**

The bi-monthly imprint will be—you guessed it—erotic romance. Aphrodisia will launch with four books in the same price range as Brava titles. The new line is set to meet the needs of the readers from the online market, as well as those currently reading Brava titles. The twist with this line is an e-book component for online purchase at [kensingtonbooks.com](http://kensingtonbooks.com) and [aphrodisiabooks.com](http://aphrodisiabooks.com) for \$6.99 to \$8.99.

# Bits'n'Pieces

### **And Now for a Totally Different Market . . .**

Sharon DeVita shared this from Cynthia Sterling's Market Newsletter with her permission and credit. Howard Publishing is based in West Monroe, LA and has published 44 titles for the Christian market since 1969, fiction and nonfiction. They are looking for original work with literary merit. Categories include mystery, suspense, historical fiction, historical and contemporary romance, and women's fiction. Agented and unagented submissions are accepted, but query first. For fiction: Terry Whalin, Fiction Acquisitions Editor, Howard Publishing Co., Suite D-3 #481, 23623 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85255

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