

# NINK

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## *Slamming the Brakes on the Internet Superhighway*

BY JULIE KENNER

My name is Julie Kenner, and I was an email junkie. Was, that is, until a few months ago when I went cold turkey on (almost) all of my email loops. But I'll get to that in a moment. First, the addiction...

I'm not sure how it happened, really. For the most part, I don't even have an addictive personality (venti non-fat lattes notwithstanding). When I first started writing, I wasn't even aware of email loops. A friend casually mentioned such a creature and I (someone reasonably technologically savvy) just stared in wonder that such a venue existed, at the same time wondering why I should care.

Oh, sure. I joined one or two groups aimed mostly at readers and a few newly published authors. I'd heard about the groups at various RWA events, and I thought they might be interesting. So I signed on, participated some,

but mostly utilized the "delete" key.

Then, in 1999, I sold a book. I joined the Temptation authors' email loop. I made some wonderful friends and learned a huge amount about every aspect of publishing. Since publishing can be a very scary ocean to wade into, that's no small endorsement. And since I am, at heart, an information junkie, I was not only hooked, I wanted more. And as it turns out, I'm not really alone in that. As Carly Phillips (*Body Heat*, HQN) noted, "I think that as authors, these things are cyclical. When we sell, there's the high of being included on these loops. Along with that high comes the 'need to know' that you can't turn off. You read everything, reply to everything, and think if you miss anything, your career will be over."

A common enough reaction, but one that can be overwhelming,

as Jennifer Colt (*The Mangler of Malibu Canyon*, Broadway Books, June) discovered. "I know women are supposed to be multi-taskers, but I am a genetic freak—a uni-tasker. I can do precisely one thing at a time and do it well. ... When I signed up for all the groups and got the flood of mail, I completely panicked. Here's more stuff I should do that I'm not doing! I found myself retreating into a fetal position with my hands over my ears, muttering, 'Judge Wapner at three o'clock, Judge Wapner at three o'clock...Mass delete, mass delete...'"

I almost wish my reaction had been more like Jennifer's. I would have been done with the email thing years ago. But, no. I like being informed. And depending on my level of insecurity at any particular moment in my life, I even like the illusion of being informed. The loops filled both those voids.

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## President's Voice

# Springing ahead

Right now, most of you are probably still finding stray clocks that need to be reset for Daylight Savings Time—that one on the coffeemaker, or maybe the alarm clock in one of your kids' bedrooms. Me, I'm celebrating changing the clocks here in Indiana for the first time since I've lived here. This state was one of the last holdouts against DST (one of the arguments was that "it would confuse the cows") and it's an issue I felt strongly enough about that I actually wrote letters to the editor and to my state legislators. I'm really looking forward to that extra hour of light in the evenings (and, okay, that extra hour of dark in the mornings), and to no longer having to explain our weird time zone to people from other states.

I'm also excited that Ninc is doing its own "springing ahead" on a few fronts, and I wanted to take this opportunity to share some of those with you. First, and perhaps most importantly, we're finally moving forward on the used book sales issue. Many, many of you have indicated that this is an area you want to see Ninc tackle, and we're going to do our best. We now have a Used Book Committee headed by the dedicated Joan Wolf, and they are already undertaking some serious research on the issue to find out what's already been done, what might be possible, and the best approach authors can take to make a difference.

I know that our members' opinions are not unanimous on this subject, but rest assured that we are in no way hoping to put used booksellers out of business. We just want our fair share of the record profits they're raking in. How much profit? As Sally Hawkes reported in Bits 'n' Pieces in the November *NINK*, the Book Industry Study Group has done a large-scale study on the issue. Some of their findings: 2004 saw \$2.2 billion in sales of used books, an 11.1% increase from 2003. This represented more than 111 million books sold, and 8.4% of all consumer spending on books. The *IOBA Standard*, the magazine of the Independent Online Booksellers Association, reported that in 2003, 54% of used book sales were made online. In 2004, according to the BISG report, online used sales increased 33.3%, to \$609 million. So we're not talking about little Mom & Pop stores anymore. This is big business, and while we provide the product, we're not getting a dime of the profit.

Ninc is not alone in its concern about this issue. I was recently approached by the vice president of RNA, the UK's version of RWA, about the possibility of pooling our efforts on the used book problem. England has just created a law to provide royalties to artists for the resale of works of art—paintings, sculptures, etc. but not books (yet)—which could be the camel's nose nudging under the edge of the tent, at least across the pond. For those who'd like a non-confrontational way to gently educate your readers about the issue, please consider a link on your websites to the Q&A on used books at Ninc's website, put together by our own Edie Claire.

Which brings me to the next area where Ninc has been springing ahead: our website. Ginger Chambers has been a dynamo as our new Website Chairman, coming up with lots of ideas to make our website more attractive to prospective members, as well as easier to use—and more

useful—for current members. Most of these have already been implemented. For example, our members with multiple pseudonyms and URLs can now list them separately in the Author List in our public area. Neff Rotter is also including author URLs in the Next Page listing of members' upcoming books. A little bit of free extra promotion is never a bad thing, right?

We also now have the beginnings of an Outreach Committee, with volunteers (so far, at this writing) from Australia and Costa Rica. Sherry-Anne Jacobs gets credit for the idea of making this an international committee, to

extend Ninc's push for new members across the globe. As the publishing industry becomes more and more globalized, this makes a lot of sense to me. I hope by the time you read this we'll have committee members from the UK, Canada and elsewhere, as well as a chairman for the committee.

You can see why I'm excited about Ninc's forward motion. Now, how DO I reset that VCR clock?

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber** :)

## ***THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME!***

I'm ba-a-a-ack! Ninc has this quaint custom that the past prez becomes the chair of the nominating committee which chooses the next slate of officers. I think it's designed to show that I'm not dead. Look! She walks, she talks, she breathes! She mutters to herself now and then, but basically, she's A-Okay!

Which I am, and if you've ever thought of serving on the Ninc Board, now would be the time. We took care of a few housekeeping issues last year and the organization is humming along on all cylinders. To keep that baby purring we need eager volunteers for the 2007 Board—president-elect (who becomes the president in 2008), secretary and treasurer. We also need nine energetic candidates for the 2007 Nominating Committee.

But first let me rave about the 2006 Nominating Committee. What a dynamite group! We are going to have such fun helping shape the look of Ninc in 2007. Want to be part of that look? I'm tellin' ya, it won't get any better than this. If you're ready to stick your hand in the air, or you're ready to point your finger at someone else who's a likely candidate, please get in touch with us ASAP. We start work any day now. We are:

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***Vicki Lewis Thompson, Head Honcho  
2006 Nominating Committee***

# Slamming the Brakes

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And, wow, were there a lot of loops to choose from.

I have no scientific proof to back this up, but I'm pretty sure that the number of Yahoo Groups (and similar groups) began to increase exponentially around the time of my first sale. Everywhere I turned, I heard about some new group for writers or readers of a certain genre. Authors' loops were dedicated to specific publishers or lines (or both, creating anywhere from one to three—or more—loops!). Fans had loops for readers and writers of every genre.

Authors (published and aspiring) had loops for established genres, as well as genres that were just beginning to flourish. Every RWA chapter has a loop, and RWA itself has several. Ninc has a loop. Throw a stone at Yahoo, and you'll undoubtedly hit a writing-related group. Throw a stone at an RWA conference, and you'll undoubtedly hit someone who participates in at least one email loop.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Participating in loops is a way to interact with other authors and readers. To promote your name. To learn about trends in the industry. To make new friends. And, frankly, it's fun. How else can you participate in a conversation when the other participants are in different states, maybe even on different continents?

Where else can you openly eavesdrop, listening to a heated debate on covers or point-of-view or the value of promotion, absorb-

ing all that information that might, someday, be relevant to you?

That's the up-side of email loops. But there's also a dark side. For one thing, except on very small loops, it is often the case where you don't know who's "listening." It is, perhaps, the ultimate marketplace of ideas, but you have no idea who's shopping there. Even on the

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smaller loops, breaches of trust can occur.

"About a year ago, I discovered that one of our own had forwarded an email to an outsider, with potentially very damaging consequences to the woman who made the original post," states Stephanie Feagan (*Run For The Money*, Bombshell, April). "I can't begin to explain how betrayed I felt. Naturally, I remembered all the intimate details of my personal life, and worse, my professional life, that I had shared with this

group. I kept wondering, has anything I've posted been sent off-list?"

Breaches of trust aren't the only dark side, either. "Those sites are insidious," states Julia London (*Extreme Bachelor*, Berkley, May). "If you let them, they can make you feel like you must be the biggest loser in the world. I'm not saying I let them intimidate me, but okay, let's just say for the purpose of illustration that when I surf too much, I forget my career goal—steady progress with each book. I notice that if I don't get some recognition for each book, or have something really cool to announce to cyberspace, I begin to feel like I am falling farther and farther behind the pack. What pack? I don't know what pack! I just know there must be a pack of very successful authors defined by how much recognition they get for each book on those sites, or how many cool things they have to announce, and I am not one of them!"

And it's not just the good news announcements that can bring out the neuroses in a

writer.

"I was short-tempered, and after one too many blow-ups online finally figured out that while the writing community is a really great bunch of people for the most part, there are too many negative Nellies out there and I'd get sucked into their black cloud." Denise Lynn (*Falcon's Heart*, Harlequin Historicals) ultimately unplugged her modem from the wall, and is only slowly getting back online and returning to a few select groups.

And, of course, there's the very common fear that stems from the belief that by posting and promoting on the email loops we're furthering our career. But it's the converse that is the scary part: If we quit posting and participating, will we suddenly find our career in the toilet?

Carly Phillips ultimately concluded that she wouldn't. "My posting in those places won't make or break my career. But that wasn't an easy conclusion to reach because it meant breaking an addiction."

"Addiction." An interesting word for a manner of interacting with people through a computer. And yet almost everyone who commented used the term, which I think says loads in and of itself. The nature of email—and the technology surrounding it—is both compelling and insidious.

I've recently had a lot of time for extra reading (because I gave up those loops, doncha know?), and I've been reading Neil Postman, an education critic and commentator. I thought it particularly appropriate that I picked up his books at the same time I pitched this article to *NINK*, because as I was reading *The End of Education*, I ran across Postman's comment that "[a]ll technological change is a Faustian bargain." In other words, the advantages of technology are balanced against the disadvantages. Oh, how those words struck home!

All that wonderful, addictive, helpful information comes with a price. For me, the disadvantages were rampant. I've always been a "back-and-forth" writer. I can sit and write for hours on end once I hit the climax of a book. But until that point, I have to write a scene, get up and wander. Draft a sentence, go pay a bill. Crank out a chapter, go water the lawn. I need that motion to compose the next bit

in the book, even if it's not a conscious act.

Enter approximately eight billion emails on a daily basis. (I'm only slightly exaggerating. Really.) Suddenly, my "back-and-forth" was entirely virtual. I found myself going back and forth between Outlook and Word, not my desk and my yard. My wrists were tightening, my eyes getting fuzzy, and my butt expanding. Worst of all, I wasn't allowing my brain time to mull over the story as I loaded the dishwasher (or whatever). And even though I was no longer working a day job, I found myself producing fewer pages.

That was what really caught my attention. Prior to summer, 2004, I worked full time as an attorney in addition to writing anywhere from three to five books a year. From October 2001 on, I'd also managed to work into that schedule time with my daughter. Difficult and exhausting, but I was getting it done, and I anticipated the day I could finally write full time, not only because I would have met a personal goal, but also because I knew I would have so much more time! Except that didn't happen. Hasn't someone said that time expands to fill a vacuum? If not, I will. Or, more accurately, I'll say that emails expand to fill time. To steal time, if you will.

And, wouldn't you know it, Postman had something to say about that, too, in his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In 1984, he notes, we all breathed a sigh of relief that we weren't living in the anticipated Orwellian world. But Huxley's *Brave New World*, so Postman's thesis goes, snuck in under the radar. Where Orwell "feared that truth would be concealed from us," Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.

"Worst of all, we would be so enamored of the technology that, ultimately, we would be ruined by what we love."

The passage struck home. Because I do love the email loops. I enjoy having that connection to other writers. To having access to information. To being able to take breaks at the "water cooler" as Julie Leto (*Dirty Little Lies*, Pocket, September 2006) so accurately defined the email-loop communities.

What I didn't like was the price I was paying while zipping down the Internet super highway. And so I slammed on the brakes. Cold turkey, I've found, is really the only way that works for me.

Was it worth it? Ohmygosh ... yes. For me, at least, the decision was the only decision I could reasonably make. I needed to get my writing back in line with my life. I needed to not feel compelled to answer (or even read) all the emails that were pouring in. And, really, it was as easy as going "no mail." (I don't have the kind of personality that will log into Yahoo groups to read mail, so "no mail" serves the same purpose as unsubscribing.)

Not too surprisingly, when I said goodbye to my email loops, I discovered I had more time. It's like finding that watch from John D. MacDonald's *The Girl, The Gold Watch, And Everything*, and manufacturing more hours in the day. More, it's like having the life I had before I jumped on the email group bandwagon. Only this time around I don't have the law job to factor in. Can you say: laundry actually washed and folded? Carrots planted in the garden (for the first time ever, much to the fascination of my four year old)? Almost-daily swims and bike rides? Reading for (gasp!) pleasure?

Lest you think that I was spending hours upon hours reading emails, I assure you I wasn't. But those trips to pop over into an email conversation cost a lot. Rather than wandering around the house (and letting my mind ▶

# Slamming the Brakes

▶ wander around the book), I was thrusting myself into someone else's conversation.

Getting back into the book when I flipped screens, therefore, took that much longer. Whereas I used to write ten pages a day easily, I was lucky to manage five in the same time period.

My observation of my own behavior is actually backed up by a university study I recently heard about (but naturally can't lay my hands on to specifically cite). That study concluded that it takes over 20 minutes to get back on track after an interruption. Which means that every time I clicked over to email, I was slowing down my overall productivity. Considering I found myself writing slower, I'd have to say the study is accurate.

I handled the reduced daily page count by staying up late to make up the difference. My mind naturally wanders more at night, so I'd click over to emails "for a break," thus going to bed even later. Waking up later. Going to the computer tired. Reading a few email loops just to "wake up." A vicious cycle, and one I was able to break after going cold turkey.

Not that I don't still stay up late to work. I do. But it's either because I'm in the mood or because I've spent time doing other things. Like keeping my daughter home from day care to play. Or catching up on the waist-high stack of filing. Or finishing a book I started reading because I simply couldn't put it down. Or, yes, because I've blown my deadline because of any number of reasons not related to reading email loop messages. It's not because I'm disconnected from the book because I've been living in email land. Or, worse, because I'm feeling guilty for not having read or

answered the slew of incoming emails.

Julia London also went cold turkey, though she hasn't found the lovely cache of time that I have. (Not that I have enough time, mind you. Just more.) "I figured if I stopped surfing those lists," says London, "I'd have gobs of time to write world-class, high-brow fiction. But what I discovered was that surfing

**...we have to learn to control technology, rather than let it control us. Somehow, some way, we have to find that balance.**

the romance lists was really just another method of procrastination, and without it, I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't have any more world-class high-brow fiction in me than normal, and the genius was not flowing from my fingertips. I still needed a crowbar and some pliers to get the gems out. But up until the day I said, 'No more.' I didn't have Oprah, either. Oprah has filled the void nicely, and I must say, Oprah's career is going so well, I am not intimidated by it. Basically, I have had the revelation that I am essentially lazy, with too many deadlines and too many sweatpants in the maybe pile. I am so much happier knowing who I am without all that bloody noise in my head!"

The response that I received to my query about these loops was refreshing. When I decided to cut out most of the loops, I honestly thought that I was the only one who'd been sucked into the seductive lure of an

online community and then found that the sucking didn't stop. But when I solicited input for this article, I discovered that I wasn't alone, not by a long shot.

Nancy Warren (*Bayou Bad Boys*, Kensington) summed her feelings up nicely by saying that "email is the devil." Alesia Holliday (*Blondes Have More Felons*, Berkley Prime Crime, March 7) confessed that she "went no-mail on everything the end of last year/beginning of this year, and started joining back in only in a select few. I found that the multiple e-lists were beginning to all sound alike, and the constant chatter only fed my rapidly narrowing view of the world: All Publishing All the Time. It wasn't healthy! So now I <gasp!> actually get out of the house instead of obsessively checking e-mail on 30 different groups."

Vicki Lewis Thompson (*Talk Nerdy to Me*, St. Martin's Press), said that she "used to spend two or three hours a day on email, and now it's usually less than thirty minutes. But email is seductive. After 30 minutes, I'm saying 'where's the rest?' I'm better off." She also noticed that her wrists ache less, simply because the motion of mousing through emails is so much different than typing a book.

Dee Davis (*Eye of the Storm*, HQN, June) has managed a more balanced approach. "I admit at times I've fallen into the trap of being so involved with online loops that I am not as productive as I should be. I also like the link to other people. Writers by nature are solitary people, and I think writing/reader loops gives us a way to spend eight hours a day in front of our computers and still have human interchange. So while I am tempted from time to

time to go cold turkey, instead I've just developed a habit of deleting digests when I'm in the throes of writing and reading/responding when I'm not as harried. Best of both worlds, I suppose."

Kathleen O'Reilly (*Looking for Mr. Goodbunny*, Downtown Press, July) suggested using "technology to tame technology by automatically filtering your loop emails into a specific loop folder or folders. Most email programs will let you use 'rules' to route emails into a non-threatening folder that you can browse at your leisure. I don't do this, simply because a folder wouldn't stop me if I was determined not to write, but I think it might work for some more disciplined people than myself."

Like Kathleen, I am not that disciplined. I've been using email folders and filters from the get-go, and still the little email beasts sucked me in!

So what's a writer to do if you find your temper short, your mind stressed, your temperament neurotic, and your wrists aching? Go cold turkey? Maybe. But maybe not. With regard to the question of email, there really is no one right answer, and

every writer has to figure out their own comfort-and-productivity zone. But I think one common denominator has shone through all the information that I've gathered from other writers, and from myself: even if you start out cold turkey, eventually at least one loop finds its way back into your email box.

The question, of course, is why? And the answer seems to lie in the "water cooler" aspects of email loops. "Surely it's our longing to feel connected with our fellow human beings, and for us, especially, our fellow writers," opines Brenda Hammond (*At Your Service, Jack*, Harlequin). "In some respects it's an illusion, but not entirely, and it's surely a way of overcoming any threatening feelings of isolation, especially when the loop is such a supportive one as this."

In that instance, Hammond was referring to the Temptation authors loop which is, in fact, the one loop to which I've never unsubscribed, never gone no mail, and never switched to digest. (I will diligently hit "delete" on occasion, though—nothing personal, girls!). It was my first loop and will always be my water cooler.

So what's the bottom line? I think it's that we have to learn to control technology, rather than let it control us. Our methods, though, may vary. Be it going "no mail" on everything except your "water cooler," unplugging the modem for detox time, creating email folders and filters, or simply exercising enough self-control that you aren't compelled to pop over to your email program every five minutes. Somehow, someday, we have to find that balance. Once we manage that, we really can enjoy this brave new world.

*Julie Kenner (www.juliekenner.com) is the author of The Manolo Matrix (Downtown Press) and California Demon: The Secret Life of a Demon-Hunting Soccer Mom (Berkley, June), as well as a number of other books (both past and upcoming) that she managed to write despite spending too much time reading emails. If you'd like to send Julie a comment about this article, send it to julie@juliekenner.com. But don't post it on the Ninc loop, because she won't see it there!*

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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:**

Carole Bellacera, Manassas, VA  
(returning member)  
Chris Green (*Chris Marie Green, Crystal Green*), Henderson, NV

Sally MacKenzie, Rockville, MD  
Erin McCarthy, Westlake, OH  
Linda Susan Meier (*Susan Meier*),  
Johnstown, PA

### **New Members:**

Lisa Ellis (*Lisa Kleypas*),  
New Braunfels TX  
Annie Solomon, Nashville TN  
Wendy Wax, Marietta GA

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recommend membership  
to *your* colleagues.  
Prospective members  
may apply online at  
[www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com).**

# Demonizing Our Thoughts

BY YASMINE GALENORN

Why are we writers afraid of being alone with our thoughts? For a long time, when I was starting out in my writing career, I welcomed the isolation and used it wantonly, not speaking to anyone for days except my husband and the cats. I was free to explore my inner horizons. My husband agreed that I should focus on building my career instead of working a day job. With his support and belief in my talents, even though the living was lean, we looked forward to a future I knew I could achieve.

The beauty of this period in my life doesn't seem to translate when I talk to aspiring writers. Before I landed my first contract, there was nobody to tell me I was doing it wrong, nobody to say "that doesn't work" or "that sounds stupid" or "No, I wanted you to slant it this way." There was no "I have to write this even though I want to be writing that."

I spent hours alone with my thoughts, and loved it.

But now, many books on the shelf down the line, I find myself doing anything and everything to distract me from the silence of being with myself. Would I go back to that time? Not on your life. But there were some advantages that bit the dust when I made the transition to career writer.

I shouldn't be so distracted now. We can pay our bills, we have health care, plenty of good food, and enough left over for a few little luxuries. Life is much better than it was years ago. I don't have kids, Samwise works out of the house, and we have four cats, who at various times of the day let me know they really want me to come play with them or pet them. Other than the felines and the occasional phone call, nobody really bothers me, so I should be able to focus totally on my work. But that isn't always the case, and it's gotten worse the more successful I've become.

First, there are the outside issues. Email. More email than I've ever gotten before. From fans and readers. From friends I've met on the net. From family who finally have joined the computer age. From peers and publishers and spammers. A deluge of thoughts pouring in each and every day.

Then there are the online forums. Places where I can connect with other people who have food allergies, who love their cats, who know what it's like to be a career

writer, who follow an alternative spiritual path—all people I never would have known existed before the advent of the internet.

And let us not forget the net itself: millions of sites from around the world, from the puerile to the philosophical. From the informative to the misinformed. From weird and wonderful to startling and scary.

Information... communications... a flurry of words and thoughts and pictures flying at us every single day, within instantaneous reach if we can turn on a computer and hit a few keys. And all of it, all of it, clamoring to be read. But just because it's there, doesn't mean I have to respond. And yet... I spend far too much time on the net. I waste energy on email and newsgroups and surfing when I'm supposed to be working.

Oh, there are places that keep me from going nuts—the Ninc list, for one. Friends. Cute, weird little sites that make me laugh when I've had a long day. But really, when I look at it, seventy percent of my internet time is spent in the futile race to get away from my own thoughts. And I want to know why. I talk to a couple of friends—also writers—and find they're having the same problems.

So I've started examining the question. Why are we afraid to be alone with our thoughts after so many years? What are we afraid we'll hear, or find out about ourselves?

I think back, to when I first learned that people actually "make" books. I was about three years old and in love with language. I remember the day it dawned on me, or someone told me, or perhaps the muse flew out of the air and bit me on the nose. Whatever happened, I finally made the connection between the stories my mother read to me and the fact that somebody out there had created them. They didn't just magically appear on their own.

That very moment, I knew that I wanted to "make" books, and that pretty much settled my career choice. Language was a toy to me, and while I was a quiet child on the outside, inside my mind churned along, creating stories, absorbing stories... taking in everything I saw as grist for the mill. I didn't try to hide from my thoughts at that point. I lived in them to escape a painful and abusive reality.

So why am I now avoiding my own thoughts? As I sit in silence, tentatively exploring the contents of my mind, I



stumble over a niggling fear. A little self-doubt that hid in the corner, nursing itself on every bad review or off-comment that I've heard. What's going to happen if I actually just bumbled into success? What if I examine my career and discover that everything evaporates, like water drops in the desert? The old cliché, "don't look a gift horse in the mouth" starts dancing in my thoughts, and I take a deep breath and knock on wood.

Surely I had that demon under control? After all, I've worked long and hard to get where I'm at. I'm starting to see success in the near distance. I know I can handle the work. I've proven myself time and again... so where does the fear come from?

Truth is, when I talk to writers who've been in this gig for decades, who are selling well, the fear is there in their voice, too. *Will the next book work? Will the readers like it? Will the publisher like it? Will some catastrophe half a world away tank it?* The latter happened to one of my books. *Crafting the Body Divine* came out a month after 9/11 and, like many other books, ended up a casualty of economic fallout, as did my publisher at that time.

Granted, I feel that I should take the high road and say, "It doesn't matter in the scope of the disaster," but if I'm going to be honest with myself, then I have to admit that it hurt. I had four books with that publisher, and by the time the publisher was bailed out by another one, all my books were pretty much in line for the pulp mill. A lot of work. A lot of time. Little hope for any resuscitation.

Facing these fears can bring about so much angst that I'm sure my subconscious decided to just turn down the volume. After realizing that a lot of writers have the same fears, even years into success, it's easier for me to turn around and confront this *midnight of the soul* issue.

On to the next demon. This one hid out under a rock in my mind, probably because it makes me feel like a worm when I grit my teeth and let it out into the light.

This is a delightful one—and as I said, embarrassing to admit. The demon is dressed in green—the green of professional envy. A subject not a lot of writers openly discuss, and yet it's very real.

Yes, I *am* thrilled for my writing friends who are doing well—truly, I am. I learned long ago to make a distinction between, "I wish I could have that kind of success, too," and "I wish they weren't successful."

But in truth? Yes, I am envious of writers who can tag "best-selling author" next to their name. I wonder why my books—which are good enough for my agent, my editor, my publisher, my readers, and myself—don't get the promotion and backing that other books do. Most mid-list authors go through this angst. It's normal, but it doesn't feel very good to admit. Quite frankly, it makes me blush and stare at the ground, thinking, "Am I that petty to envy a friend?" even as I'm thinking, "Damn it, I want that kind of success, too!" Because if you have to say you want it, the automatic implication is that you don't have it.

The third demon that I found rummaging around upstairs in the attic?

The fear of being unmasked.

Those thoughts that whisper in our ear every time we meet someone, "Maybe they wouldn't like me if they knew who I really was." "Maybe, if they knew that I hate pickles, and I don't think kids are that cute, and I really think that any coffee except for Starbucks sucks rocks, they'll call me a snob, and not ever want to talk to me again."

We all have secrets that we don't want getting around. Most of them probably wouldn't cause an eye-blink if they did, but to us, these secrets matter.

I've noticed a distinct tendency to mute my opinions as time goes along. If I tell people I'm a centrist Democrat, will that offend my Republican readers? If I say I'm pro-death penalty, will that offend my liberal readers? If I say that I love cats more than children, will that offend the mothers who read my books? Do I dare have an opinion and expect to be a success?

As I examine my thoughts, I realize that I've gone mute in some ways. And does it really matter, when I think about it? Do I care about whether Stephen King was an alcoholic for many years, or the fact that Tolkien was Catholic? After all, I don't drink much and I'm a Witch. The honest answer? No, I don't care, and it wouldn't matter if they were lesser known authors or the stellar successes they are. I read a book because I love the world the author has created. So if I lose a reader because I say I think we're alienating the world with our current government's actions, then maybe that has to be okay.

In the end, I realize that by avoiding my thoughts, I have avoided the nagging realization that I've been hiding behind a mask of banality, so as to not frighten away potential readers. That in itself makes me feel both stupid and untrue to who I am.

I'm sure there are other demons up there running around, causing havoc, but these three were the ones that stood out during the past few months as I ventured into the wild tangle that exists within my mind. If we can expose our inner demons to light, hold them up and honestly examine them, perhaps we can defuse the power they wield over us.

*Yasmine Galenorn writes the paranormal Chintz 'n China Mystery Series, and the Bath & Beauty Mystery Series (the latter under the name India Ink), both from Berkley Prime Crime. Witchling, the first book in her new paranormal romance/dark fantasy series, the Sisters of the Moon Series, will be coming out from Berkley, 10/06. And she's written eight nonfiction metaphysical books. Yasmine describes her life as a blending of tea-cups and tattoos. She lives in Bellevue WA with her husband Samwise and their four cats, all of whom are an integral part of the Galenorn household. She may be reached through her web site: Galenorn En/Visions (<http://www.galenorn.com>).*

*The following commentary is reprinted with permission of the Authors Guild.*

# **. . . But Not at Writers' Expense**

**BY NICK TAYLOR**

Saturday, October 22, 2005

I am a writer.

For some time now—too much time, I suspect my editor believes—I have been working on a history of the Works Progress Administration. This has taken me to states from Maine to California, into archives and libraries, and on long and occasionally fruitful searches for survivors of the Depression-era program.

I have invested a small fortune in books chronicling the period and copies of old newspapers, spent countless hours on Internet searches, paid assistants to dig up obscure bits of information, and then sat at my keyboard trying to spin a mountain of facts into a compelling narrative. Money advanced by my publisher has made this possible.

Except for a few big-name authors, publishers roll the dice and hope that a book's sales will return their investment. Because of this, readers have a wealth of wonderful books to choose from. Most authors do not live high on their advances; my hourly return at this point is laughable.

Only if my book sells well enough to earn back its advance will I make additional money, but the law of copyright assures me of ongoing ownership. With luck, income will flow to my publisher and me for a long time, but if my publisher loses interest, I will still own my book and be able to make money from it.

So my question is this: When did we in this country decide that this kind of work and investment isn't worth paying for?

That is what Google, the powerful and extremely wealthy search engine, with co-founders ranking among

the 20 richest people in the world, is saying by declining to license in-copyright works in its library scanning program, which has the otherwise admirable aim of making the world's books available for search by anyone with Web access.

Google says writers and publishers should be happy about this: It will increase their exposure and maybe lead to more book sales.

That's a devil's bargain.

We'd all like to have more exposure, obviously. But is that the only form of compensation Google can come up with when it makes huge profits on the ads it sells along the channels its users are compelled to navigate?

Now that the Authors Guild has objected, in the form of a lawsuit, to Google's appropriation of our books, we're getting heat for standing in the way of progress, again for thoughtlessly wanting to be paid. It's been tradition in this country to believe in property rights. When did we decide that socialism was the way to run the Internet?

The New York Public Library and Oxford University's Bodleian Library, two of the five libraries in the Google program, have recognized the problem. They are limiting the books scanned from their collections to those in the public domain, on which copyright protections have expired.

That is not the case with the others—the libraries of the University of Michigan, Harvard and Stanford. Michigan's librarian believes that the authors' insistence on their rights amounts to speed bumps in the road of progress. "We cannot lose sight of the tremendous benefits this project will bring to society," he said in a news release.

In other words, traffic is moving too slowly, so let's

remove the stop signs.

Google contends that the portions of books it will make available to searchers amount to "fair use," the provision under copyright that allows limited use of protected works without seeking permission. That makes a private company, which is profiting from the access it provides, the arbiter of a legal concept it has no right to interpret. And they're scanning the entire books, with who knows what result in the future.

There is no argument about the ultimate purpose of Google's initiative. Great value lies in a searchable, online "library at Alexandria" containing all the world's books, at least to that fraction of society that has computers, the electricity to run them and Internet connections. It would make human knowledge available on an unprecedented scale. But it must be done correctly, by acquiring the rights to the resources it wishes to exploit.

The value of Google's project notwithstanding, society has traditionally seen its greatest value in the rights of individuals, and particularly in the dignity of their work and just compensation for it.

The people who cry that information wants to be free don't address this dignity or this aspect of justice. They're more interested in ease of assembly. The alphabet ought to be free, most certainly, but the people who painstakingly arrange it into books deserve to be paid for their

work. This, at the core, is what copyright is all about. It's about a just return for work and the dignity that goes with it.

The writer is president of the Authors Guild and is the author of nonfiction books.

Nick's op-ed appeared opposite one by Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan entitled "Riches We Must Share..." (registration required). Coleman suggests that the Google Library project will help provide access to published works to anyone in the world. If she means works that are still in copyright, then we face copyright infringement that is even more troubling than what've alleged in our complaint. If she means public domain works, we of course have no objection.

The Authors Guild ([www.authorsguild.org](http://www.authorsguild.org)) is the nation's largest and oldest society of published authors and the leading writers' advocate for fair compensation, effective copyright protection, and free expression. The Guild represents more than 8,000 authors.

### **Penguin Discounts Royalties Down Under**

Australian authors are looking at a reduction in royalties from Penguin for added editions. The publisher is planning on cutting royalties on 2nd and 3rd editions from 10% to 7% or 8%. Previously all editions of books received 10%. With Penguin in a leading role in Australia, the prediction is other publishers may follow.

## **Bits'n'Pieces**

### **Google at It Again— Publishers to Decide**

Google is calling on publishers to select books they want to offer online to consumers and name the price. Restrictions will be removed from named books, and those books could be viewed according to what the publisher determines they want. Publishers would also decide if books could be printed out by the reader. Readers would have "perpetual access," however titles would not be downloadable. Fees for the books will be split by Google and the publishers, and Google will collect payment for access. No projection on when this will be available to the public

### **High Street vs. the Supermarkets**

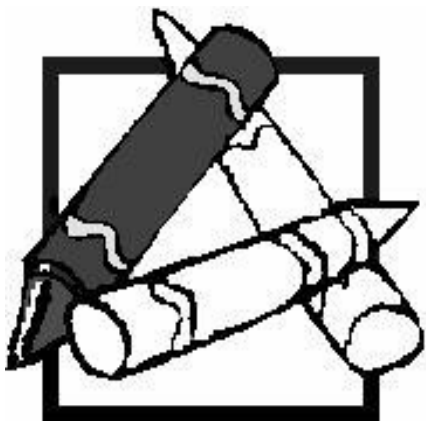
A bookseller's panel at the London Book Fair reviewed the state of selling in the UK. Christmas discount was deflated book prices, as the High Street retailers (retail bookstores) competed with other markets for the top 50 bestsellers. Panelists despaired over the focus of more bestsellers at high street bookstores, which continues the trend of selling more copies of fewer titles. The observation was made that publishers now have to consider if a book will be highlighted by Richard and Judy, instead of winning the Booker award. Panelists were from a bookstore (Waterstone's), two publishers (Faber and Harper), and one agent.

### **Publishers Spend More on Ads?**

*TNS Media* reports that the total advertising expenses by publishers rose 15% in 2005. They didn't report who the money was spent on, however.

*"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes*

**Crayon  
on my**



**Key  
board**

# *In Awe of Life*

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

This past November, I learned that the squadron my husband leads would be welcoming two babies in April '06. One of my favorite, unofficial jobs as Hero's wife is to keep track of and help the squadron (or should I say the squadron women) celebrate these events. Babies are one of my favorite aspects of being on planet Earth. I could hardly wait.

However, one of the babies would be born to a couple who have had a history of miscarriages. Thus, when Tammy's water broke in late November, we all anticipated the worst. She was rushed to the city, where she was put on bedrest and lots of antibiotics. I gasped with horror when I learned the doctor sent her home for Christmas, particularly since the family was scheduled to move before the New Year. Every time Hero's cell phone rang, my stomach went into knots, sure we'd hear sad news.

Then on February 1, Parker Rhys was born. (His mother had returned to hospital in early January, the move successfully completed and her other two children put in the care of their grandparents.) It took me a week to get details from the male-dominated chain of communication, but eventually I found out Parker weighed 3 lbs., 3 ozs., and was 16 inches long.

For the first 12 hours, the doctors were pretty sure we'd lose the little guy. Because there had been so little amniotic fluid cushioning him as he moved into the birth canal, his head was black and blue. As is typical for babies born this prematurely, his heart and his lungs weren't ready to function as needed to keep him alive. By the time 36 hours had passed, though, he was pulling at the tubes attached to him, ready to try breathing independ-

ently. By one week, he was nursing normally, rather than being fed through a tube. As of this writing, he's doing magnificently, with no indication of brain damage, heart defect, or lung ailment.

I had the privilege of visiting him when he was a week old. His mother's hand completely covered his tiny back, and his head was no bigger than my fist. Yet I felt his fighting spirit. He opened his eyes to miniscule slits more than once, and I was able to glimpse the tough little soul within. (I immediately tendered my condolences to his mother. He's going to be quite the challenging toddler and teenager!)

I still can't believe he survived all those weeks in utero with barely enough amniotic fluid to keep him alive. When he did make his entrance into our world, he didn't languish in the incubator. His minute body figured out what it had to do to keep him alive on his own terms, not dependent on machines for breath and sustenance.

His saga strongly reminded me of another warrior baby I met a little over five years ago. Griffin was born with a defective heart. Against all odds, a transplant was found when he was a mere three weeks old. He survived the surgery, but the defective heart had done so much damage to his body that we lost him when he was just two months old.

Still, I consider my acquaintance with Griffin one of life's greatest gifts to me. As a close friend of his mother's, I "knew" him before he was even born. I felt his determination to live. Many times during his short 63 days of life, his parents were summoned for what the doctors thought would be the end, only to have him battle his way back from the edge. Though I visited him only twice, I felt his fighting spirit from afar. Sometimes I sensed his crisis even before his mother called with the news, and sensed the triumph without being told.

Every year between November 21 and January 22, I relive Griffin's brief life. The brokenness I felt at his death could only be surpassed by the devastation I'd feel if, God forbid, something happened to one of the Little Realities. Though any of my friends would tell you I've been besotted with the Little Realities from the moment I realized I was pregnant, in the months and years since knowing Griffin, I've taken their living exuberance much less for granted. I still have moments when my breath catches at the wonder of their very being, and cell-deep gratitude that I've been spared the excruciating goodbye experienced by Griffin's parents.

But Griffin's, and now Parker's, impact on my life goes beyond appreciation for my own offspring. I am in awe of the sheer power of life. I celebrate it each spring as I go a little crazy watching the bulbs sprout through the soil. When a spider shows up in my house, despite being borderline spider-phobic, I no longer squish it without a thought. I find a way to return her to the outdoors where the spark of life in her can continue to thrive, or perhaps less romantically, contribute to the spark of life in some bird or other creature who deems her a tasty meal. (I'm not nearly so tolerant of the mosquitoes which insist on munching on me and the Little Realities [one of whom seems to be allergic], nor of the tiny bugs which infest my houseplants. I figure the Cycle of Life gives me the right to be a predator from time to time.)

To be honest, words fail when I try to express the incredible power of what I've witnessed in these two babies. I've since found out that two boys I see every morning at the Little Realities' bus stop were born at about the same gestational age as Parker. Had their mother not told me of her harrowing days by their incubators, I would never have guessed their lives started so tenuously. Though life is fragile, it is also far more tenacious than we often realize.

This sense of wonder keeps me grounded on days when the writing doesn't go so well. If those babies could hang in there against all odds, why shouldn't I keep plugging away? Five years without a contract pales in comparison. I breathe, I move, I lavish affection on the Little Realities, I revel in being cherished by my Hero.

Isn't Life grand?

*Janelle Clare Schneider still harbors hope that a novel with her name on the cover and a hint within of her awe of Life will once again grace bookstore shelves.*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Ups and Downs of Book Sales

AAP reports that total 2005 book sales rose 9.9%, up from the 4.1% decline reported in 2004. Trade books sales rose 24.9% over the previous year, with the largest increase in children's hardcover at 59.6%. (Yes, Harry Potter and Lemony Snicket helped.) Adult paperback sales rose 9.5%, and children's paperbacks went up 10%. Other formats increased as well: e-books 44.8%, and audio books up 29%. News wasn't as good for book clubs and mail order sales, which decreased by 6.7%.

### Long Pen Debuts in London

Margaret Atwood debuts her "Long Pen" device at the London Book Fair. It's billed as "the world's first long distance signing device." It's intended to save publishers money, and help authors reach more readers than they would going on the road. Think the UPS signing pad combined with an interactive computer/camera hook-up. The author appears on the screen at a remote location, and by using the Long Pen, signs books set up in a Long Pen dock at the bookstore.

### Harlequin Sales

Torstar reported profits down \$81.1 million in US dollars. Lower earnings in Harlequin's North American retail division resulted from changes in the products offered, and increased promotional costs. Direct-to-consumer and overseas profits were up. The numbers of units sold increased by one million over 2004. 85% of the units sold in North America were mass market paperbacks.

### Stay in Touch with Ninc online.

Visit the website at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com). Join the neverending e-conversation—for members only—by joining Ninclink. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at [BrendaHB@aol.com](mailto:BrendaHB@aol.com)

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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## Celebrating Others.

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

One day last May, I had what Judith Viorst's Alexander calls a "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day." I'm a fairly optimistic person, with that annoying *Sound of Music* gene that believes something good is just around the corner almost all the time, but the spring had been long and full of challenges of all sorts. That day in May, I'd had a tiny bit of very minor bad news that was just enough to knock a bunch of juggling balls down on my head. I was putting ice on the lumps on my head, nursing a black eye, feeling enormously sorry for myself, and I did what I often do under such circumstances: I called my sister, Cathy.

Cathy is the practical one of the sisters, a sturdy, clear-eyed oncology nurse, the one who organizes and keeps track of things, bosses us all around, and takes care of things no one else wants to bother with. A battleship is my sister Cathy, reliable as the morning.

She's also nurturing. When we were girls, she often brushed and French-braided my long hair before we went to school. She cooks the best lasagnas and cheesecakes in the world, and she brings me earrings when she travels to "hippie" places (as she calls them) like Sedona.

That terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, I called Cathy and cried on her shoulder. She listened and listened. She told me I was a good person. She recommended a good walk and a nice cup of tea. I hung up feeling better.

That afternoon, she showed up at my door with a

custom-made CD she'd put together for me. All lyrical and wistful and thoughtful songs, from REM's "Losing My Religion," to "Vincent," to Dido's "White Flag." But the best one was a new song, one she'd just heard on the radio in the past few days. "Listen to this first," she said. "This made me think of you, the way you write, the way you look at the world." It was Anna Nalick's "Breathe," which went on to massive popularity, but at that moment, I had never heard it (I first typed "heart" it). It pierced me. The song, the ideas behind it, but also that there was someone in the world who loved me, and supported my weird, creative life, and cared enough to spend her time to make sure I knew it.

The whole CD is brilliant. Music designed to let me wail, which my sister who knows me realizes I need to do, and music to build me up, but mostly, it's music about artists trying to stay the course in some way, or express their imperfect lives.

It remains one of the best CDs I own. I've played it so often that it's getting skips in it and I have to put it together again.

The weird thing is that I'd been seriously struggling with music for the book in progress. Nothing was right, and it was driving me crazy—I need my soundtrack—and somehow, that CD was exactly right. It's the story of two women, one finding herself, the other losing herself at midlife. The music is all about second chances and mistakes and the imperfect splendor of living, and what the novel is about, too. Finally, I had the soundtrack for the book.

The point is that my sister was there on a very bad day to do something encouraging, to see me. As I have been there for her when she wanted, at the age of 32, to quit her sensible job as a mortgage banker to go to school for four years to become a nurse (my father: “you’ll be sorry!”) or when she was just demolished over her eldest going off to college. I’m passionately grateful for my sister. I’m not sure how I’d get along without her.

Our relationships with others are often the source of the richest moments of our lives. I’m sometimes overwhelmed by the numbers of humans I love, but it’s funny how that number keeps growing, and how much I gain from each relationship.

I don’t know how I’d do without my writing buddies who call to say, “It took me all day, and I didn’t take a shower or do my exercise, but I got my pages done and I needed to tell somebody who knows what a big deal this is.” Or my son who calls to tell me silly jokes. Or Christopher Robin who nurtures the artist in me so carefully, but also drags me out for walks and adventures. Or my friend who has such a great artistic sense who, just by being such an exuberant artist herself, has allowed me to embrace the eccentric visual artist part of me.

Each one, unique in him or herself, but also in relationship to me, brings some miracle of understanding and opportunity into my world. Each one is a prism, a frame, a way to see the world in a new light. Relationships are about the particularities of life. We don’t love another person in some general, vague way, we love them specifically, for precise reasons.

My friend Renate, with her German accent and green eyes, hikes with me week in and week out, and shows me it’s possible to be very fit and healthy well into your 50s and 60s. My mother, who didn’t get her ears pierced until well into her adulthood, now has two sets of piercings, and matches the earrings to her outfits every single day. Every day. My uncle, six foot six, who loves Spanish red wine, and meditates daily, who says lamb is not red meat. My son Ian, who adores debate, and has a funny, tilted forward walk. My agent’s beguiling, enormous laugh. My partner’s way of saying, “well done,” in that quiet, British way.

This fact is more evident when you think of people who are no longer in your life, when you think about what you miss about them. I miss my dog April’s thick black fur and husky tail. I once had a boyfriend who had the neatest pantry in the known world, all carefully piled up with particular treats he doled out at prudent intervals. When I moved on, it was the memory of that pantry that caused pangs.

This singing celebration ignores the difficulty relationships pose, of course. But perhaps the answer to that is the possibility that the difficulties are part of what we should celebrate. Thomas Moore, in *SOUL MATES, Honoring the Mysteries of Love and Relationship*, says that we—

and our relationships—are always vernacular, that we all spring from the native, indigenous, specific worlds we inhabit. If we wish to learn from relationships, he says, “We cultivate soulfulness in a relationship by honoring its vernacular life. We deal with the given relationship and forgo the indulgence of imagining something better or different. We respect its style and its unfolding qualities.”

This means dealing with other humans exactly as they are. (Remember, we’re dealing with ourselves just as we are, too.) My brother drives me crazy with his politics, but I love to talk music with him. My ex-husband is a Peter Pan but he has a heart as big as the world, and he loves to call and talk movies with me. A friend of mine never gets his hair brushed, but it’s because he’s so exuberant about life.

Accepting the foibles of others means being more accepting of ourselves. I once knew a man who lived in sharp judgment mode all the time. His critical eye roved the landscape with unerring grimness, finding things awry wherever he looked. It was defensive, a way to attempt to be safe, but such a method means it’s awfully hard to ever be happy, to even know what it looks like when it arrives.

Better to respect the mysterious combinations of virtues and flaws, and the combinations of balances we find with each other, and see what they reveal. It drives me crazy that my eldest loves to argue. I bribed him to join debate when he was fourteen so he’d stop following me around, trying to start a political discussion. Now he’s studying law with such drunken happiness that it’s a joy to behold. Same child also prods and pokes me in ways that are uncomfortable sometimes, but when I’m with him, I feel good about myself, my mind, my life.

That sister of mine, the nurse, is a bossy brat sometimes. She thinks she knows everything. But when we travel together, she’s the one who remembers where the key is, and knows I get scattered with too much stimulation. I reproduce that relationship in friends, which both appalls and amuses me. I asked a friend of mine once what she got out of our being together. She’s so reliable and steady, what could I bring to her? She said, “even when it’s just something like going to get coffee, it always feels like there’s something exciting going on with you.”

The common wisdom is that relationships are mirrors, ways we see ourselves more clearly. Instead, they are windows—into the world, into our work, into our own hearts, into the souls of others. Where would any of us be without the other beings in our lives? Our parents and spouses and siblings and friends and animals?

Writing novels is entirely about relationships. By observing and participating fully in the relationships in your life, you have truckloads of material whenever you need it. Our work, too, is vernacular, but that’s a ▶



## The Girls in the Basement . . .

### Celebrate...Others

▶ subject for another column.

Celebrate others this month. Be grateful for each human in your path. Express gratitude to them, verbally or materially or with a small gesture, whatever feels good. Do it secretly. Do it exuberantly. Do it privately in a journal no one will ever see but you.

But do it.

### HOMEWORK

If you're playing along with this game, the homework for this month is three-fold. First, make a list of the humans and animals in your life and write a sentence noticing something specific you love about each one of them. Second, find a way to express your specific pleasure in three of those beings. Third, let a troubled relationship just be as it is for a whole month. See what happens.

*Barbara Samuel is lucky enough to have way many beings in her life and is writing this column with a squirt bottle at the ready to keep the meowing cats out of the office. Her fifth book for Ballantine, Madam Mirabou's School of Love, is on the shelves this month. It's all about relationships.*

### Latest Legal Work on Copyright—Orphan Works

<http://www.copyright.gov/orphan/>

A House sub-committee is currently reviewing the language in the "orphan works" portion of the copyright law. Legislation proposed last year would limit liability in the reuse of orphan works, covering what would happen if the copyright holder came forward after usage, and what compensation would be available. AAP is supporting the legislation with some minor adjustments to the language. Objections have been raised by other groups, including photographers' organizations.

### Orange for Women's Fiction

The 11th Annual Orange Prize for excellence, originality, and accessibility in women's writing has issued the long list of twenty nominees: Leila Aboulela for *Minaret*; Lorraine Adams for *Harbor*; Naomi Alderman for *Disobedience*; Jill Dawson for *Watch Me Disappear*; Helen Dunmore for *House of Orphans*; Philippa Gregory for *The Constant Princess*; Alice Greenaway for *White*

*Ghost Girls*; Gail Jones for *Dreams of Speaking*; Nicole Krauss for *The History of Love*; Hilary Mantel for *Beyond Black*; Sue Miller for *Lost in the Forest*; Joyce Carol Oates for *Rape: A Love Story*; Marilynne Robinson for *Gilead*; Curtis Sittenfeld for *Prep*; Ali Smith for *The Accidental*; Zadie Smith for *On Beauty*; Carrie Tiffany for *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*; Celestine Hitiura for *Frangipani*; Sarah Waters for *The Night Watch*; and Meg Wolitzer for *The Positions*. Selections for the shortlist will be announced April 26, the winners on June 6. ▲

# Bits'n'Pieces

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