

# NINK

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## *Recapping the Magic:*

# *Five to Fight For*

*Anita Fore, Director of Legal Services for The Authors Guild, describes five contract clauses every author should be prepared to fine-tune.*

BY EDIE CLAIRE

As soon as Anita Fore launched into her workshop in the elegant Queen Anne Ballroom of the Monteleone Hotel in New Orleans, we conference-goers knew we were in for something good. Anita, a practicing attorney for ten years who has been with the Authors Guild for six, is a woman who not only loves laughter, hanging with authors, and eating Cajun food; she also loves—wait for it—reading publishing contracts.

The Authors Guild provides its 9000-plus membership (which includes nonfiction and fiction authors) with free legal services including contract review and assistance with rights reversion and collection of owed royalties. Seeing a large volume of contracts from a

wide spectrum of publishers gives Anita and her colleagues the perfect perspective for spotting trends in the industry and for recognizing the best—and worst—deals going.

Is your contract truly “standard,” or are other authors getting better terms? If you’re a member of the Authors Guild, you can run your contract through the legal office for a skilled assessment. But any author can benefit from familiarizing himself or herself with the five issues below—all of which, Anita asserts, are well worth fighting for.

### **Option Clauses**

Most authors grant their publisher first dibs on future works. But should we? According to Anita, agreeing to an Option

Clause gives up something for nothing—namely, the ability to shop for a better deal sooner rather than later, which can be a tactical advantage if it is in the author’s best interests to sign the next work before the current work’s numbers are in. Option clauses are ubiquitous, but surprisingly, they are not unavoidable. Anita has succeeded in having them deleted by many small and medium publishers, as well as some large publishers—so the question is worth asking.

If deletion is not allowed, try to limit the option to the same type of work, and set a fixed time period in which the publisher must act. The author should also insist on right of first refusal, which allows the author to walk away if the publisher’s offer is unacceptable. Right

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## President's Voice

# It's all about communication

I seem to be getting into a habit of writing this column on airplanes. This time, I'm on my way home from Tokyo, where I spent a week visiting my daughter, who's studying there for a semester. It was a fascinating week in many ways, largely because Japan is so very different from anything I'd experienced to date. It's beautiful (the azaleas were in bloom!) but it's also alien—and I felt very much the alien in their homogenous society. Japan is no melting pot, and “gaijin” like me and my blonde daughter are sometimes openly stared at.

Then there's the language. In Europe (which some of you may remember I visited last spring), while I didn't speak the languages in France or Italy, I could at least figure out the meanings of most signs, menus, etc. by the relationship of some words to English or Spanish, or at least by their Latin roots. In Japan, there are FOUR different forms of writing, only one of them using our alphabet—and that one is in the minority. Without the help of my daughter, who has been studying Japanese for a few years now, I'd have been completely lost. Spending a week in a country where I was functionally illiterate has given me a whole new appreciation for the importance of reading—and for the power of words.

Take this newsletter, the one form of communication every Ninc member receives from the organization. As recent, spirited discussion on Ninlink has shown, our members are both passionate and outspoken about *NINK's* content. What they aren't (being writers) is in agreement. Some members want more articles by industry experts outside the organization, while others want to more effectively tap the talent in our own ranks. Some hearkened back to the days when *NINK* contained more late-breaking industry news, but others pointed out that with daily online communication, that may no longer be something a paper newsletter can provide. Instead, it might make more sense, and be more timely, to bring you that news via our website. Some suggested reprinting previous articles of enduring usefulness, or making such articles available in the Members Only area of our website on a permanent basis. Other ways to “beef up” the newsletter were suggested, including paying the editor, raising dues to pay for more professional articles, or saving money on printing and distribution. While some were in favor of going to an electronic version of *NINK*, many others were violently opposed to the idea of having to print out their newsletter every month or read it on-screen.

Disagreements aside, a wealth of ideas was generated during that discussion, some of which are already assuming more tangible form. Quite a few specific article topics were suggested, which our intrepid editor, Annette Carney, is already pursuing. A few articles you can expect to see in coming months include: The Future of the Mass Market Paperback; Authors Guild Attorney Anita Fore on Deadly Contract Clauses (this month's cover story); Financial Strategies for the Writer as Sole Breadwinner; Bestseller Lists Explained; Selling Your Backlist on Your

Website; the Authors Guild on Royalties; Making a Genre Switch; Plagiarism—what to do if it hits you; Retirement Planning and Investment Advice for Writers. And that's just a sample! Some of these articles are already in the pipeline, while others still need to be assigned. (Hint: volunteer to write one. We do pay!)

We've also been discussing the overall direction of Ninc, some of which I've addressed in earlier columns. Several of our longtime members expressed the feeling that Ninc has drifted from its roots and has become less relevant to their needs. While we must address the concerns of our newer members, we certainly don't want to neglect the people who founded this organization. Some of the ideas for articles mentioned above stemmed from that discussion as well. It would be a wonderful thing if some of our veteran members who have navigated the sometimes prickly maze of bestsellerdom could take time from their busy schedules to write the occasional article for the benefit of their peers, as well as for those of us who aren't there yet.

Most importantly, I hope all of you will continue to speak up about aspects of Ninc that you feel can be improved—and about aspects you particularly like. While it's obviously impossible to please every member all of the time, the more input we have, the closer we can get to that goal. We on the board aren't mind readers, so tell us what you want. Here, at least, we all speak the same language.

*-Brenda Hiatt Barber :)*

# Bits'n'Pieces

## Edgars Awarded

Edgar Awards celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Among the winners were: Best Novel—Jess Walter, *Citizen Vince*; Best First Novel by an American author—Theresa Schwegel, *Officer Down*, Best Paperback Original—Jeffrey Ford, *Girl in the Glass* and Best Screenplay—Stephen Gaghan, *Syriana*. Janet Evanovich steps into the MWA presidency. The newest Grand Master is Stuart Kaminsky

## Ninc Member Appears in *Publisher's Lunch* Ad

As it says in *Publisher's Lunch*, bestselling author Carla Neggers lent a quote to the AuthorBuzz ad in May. <http://www.authorbuzz.com/>

## Behind the Scenes of Alloy Entertainment or Who Needs Authors?

It does make you wonder who really does write a lot of YA books these days; or is it any different from the heyday of Carolyn Keene and Stratemeyer Syndicate? [http://www.observer.com/20060508/20060508\\_Sheelah\\_Kolhatkar\\_pageone\\_newsstory3.asp](http://www.observer.com/20060508/20060508_Sheelah_Kolhatkar_pageone_newsstory3.asp)

*"Bits" Compiled by Sally Hawkes*

## INTRODUCING.....

*The following authors have applied for membership in Ninc and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc:*

### **New Applicants:**

Robyn DeHart, Cleveland TN  
Rachel Gibson, Boise ID  
Fiona Gillibrand (*Fiona Brand*),  
KeriKeri, New Zealand

Marianna Jameson, Stamford CT  
Mary Jernigan (*Elle James*,  
*Myla Jackson*), Rogers AR  
Sandra Kleinschmit (*Samantha James*,  
*Sandra James*), Salem OR

### **New Members:**

Jacquie D'Alessandro,  
Lawrenceville GA  
Emily McKaskle (*Emily McKay*),  
Austin TX  
Barbara Meyers, Naples FLA

Sylvia Wolicki (*Sylvia Day*),  
Murrieta CA  
Donna Young, San Mateo CA

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



# Bits'n'Pieces

## People on the Move

Marjorie Braman, executive editor, is moving to William Morrow from Harper and will be acquiring for Morrow and Harper Entertainment under the supervision of Lisa Gallagher. Braman will continue with her current Harper authors.

Farris Jacobs will be Harper's executive editor for teen fiction, leaving Red Dress Ink behind.

Ballantine has promoted Julia Cheffetz to editor.

Promotion was in the air at Viking Penguin as well, with Alexis Washam moving up to assistant editor.

Johanna Bowman moves from assistant editor for Random House to editor at McGraw-Hill.

Jill Schwartzman moved up at Harper to editor.

The new acquisitions editor at Candlewick Press is Hilary Breed Van Dusen, who will also look over titles that come from Walker Books UK.

## Urban Legends, Actual Fiction

One World/Ballantine is launching Nikki Turner Presents, urban fiction written by original, fresh authors. The premiere date is set for early 2007 with two to three books a year.

## Trade Tidbit

Houghton Mifflin reported a 7.4% drop in trade and reference titles in their first quarter.

paper, and 8% on mass market publications. However, these royalty rates generally go up after certain sales benchmarks are reached. [See Part I. Reasonable Current Royalty Rates, Examples 1-3.] If you are bargaining from a position of power, you may be able to negotiate for the higher rates right off the bat.

Notice that in all the examples given, the contracts specify that royalties are based on "retail price" or "suggested customer's price." This is what you want. Under no circumstances should an author settle for royalties based on the publisher's "income from sales," "net receipts," or "cash receipts." Such terminology, though it may seem innocuous in context, can actually halve your royalties. [See Part II. "Net Receipts" Clause.]

With more and more books being heavily discounted for sales in nontraditional outlets, authors who do not protect themselves contractually may find that a significant number of their "sold" books are netting them nowhere near the royalties they anticipated. One emerging problem is the tendency of publishers to take "deep discount" clauses, which were originally intended to apply to sales through nontraditional outlets (i.e., places that don't normally sell books), and evoking their terms to cover sales through regular wholesale or discount booksellers. To protect his or her interests, an author should carefully define high discount sales as applying only to copies sold outside of normal trade channels. [See Part III. Deep Discount Clauses.]

For maximum protection against the losses wrought by heavy discounting, try to negotiate

language that spells out—in excruciating detail—the royalties that will apply to each type of publication (hardcover, trade, and mass market) at each level of discounting, and include a clause stating that very heavy discounts (>75% of list price) are not allowed until a set period of time after initial publication. [See Part IV. Sales Through Regular Trade Channels.] For sales outside of regular trade channels, try to negotiate for reduced rates that apply only to large orders and very deep discounts. Such rates should be tied to the publisher's discount, and ideally, should set a limit on the maximum reduction allowed. [See Part V. Sales Outside Regular Trade Channels.]

Even if you do have an agent, Anita advises, it is unwise to assume that any and all such matters will be handled to your satisfaction without your input. The onus is on us as authors to educate ourselves about what contract terms are regular and reasonable—and not to be afraid to ask for them.

*Edie Claire has published five mysteries and two mystery/romance blends, and is now busily attempting to break into mainstream women's fiction. She would like to thank Anita Fore for her incredible enthusiasm and her assistance in making this material available online. Special thanks also go to Jody Novins, whose conference notes filled in many of the holes in Edie's (particularly the places where she couldn't read her own handwriting)!*



# *Recapping the Magic:*

## *Troubles and Traumas of the Creative Life*

BY NANCY HERKNESS

Eric Maisel maintains a creativity coaching practice in San Francisco and leads workshops all over the world. He holds a doctorate in counseling psychology, trains other creativity coaches, and is the author of over 30 books including *Fearless Creating*, *The Van Gogh Blues*, *Coaching the Artist Within*, and *The Creativity Book*. From his perch on the Ninc speakers' table, Dr. Maisel spoke about the troubles and traumas writers face on three fronts: the person, the work, and the world.

Dr. Maisel's overarching theme was that while we cannot control outside forces, we can control the way we talk to ourselves about our creative life and turn negative self-talk into more positive, active statements. The most easily recognizable negative statements are ones such as "I have no talent." Harder to recognize are the camouflaged negatives, such as "I'm too busy to write" or "I'm too tired to write." All of these statements arise from anxiety. Since our primary defense against anxiety is to avoid its source, these mental comments provide us with an avoidance mechanism. We trick ourselves out of working, even though we know that when we are in the trance of creating, it's the best place for us as writers to be. Dr. Maisel promised that by the end of

this workshop we would change our way of speaking to ourselves. The next step, and one for a longer session, is to change the world we deal with in relation to our writing.

**"Person"** refers to our personalities, and the ways in which we cannot get out of our own way. Every writer has similar meaning-making needs; writing is how we keep meaning afloat in our lives, so it is important to us. However, we often approach it negatively by saying "this paragraph doesn't count for anything" and extrapolating that to mean that the writing doesn't count for anything, that it's no more important than, say, the laundry. We need to say, "I matter and my writing life matters — to me."

One of the main obstacles to deep thinking and free expression is what Eastern philosophies call the "monkey mind," a brain too filled with the daily matters and to-do lists of life. These literally take up neurons, so you feel as though you don't have a thought in your head, or a thing to say. The positive way to deal with this is to tell yourself: "I can get myself calm and centered with a quiet mind." This reduces anxiety and allows us to discover the ideas waiting to be recognized.

Dr. Maisel described the three-step process cognitive therapists use to overcome negative self-talk. First, notice what you're saying to

yourself, either by writing it down or just listening closely. For example, listen to the statement "I have no talent." Second, dispute what you don't like about what you're saying. Be irate. Ask "how is that helping me?" Third, substitute more affirmative, positive language, such as "I'm equal to the work." What you substitute doesn't have to be the truth, it simply has to be affirming.

Using the snow globe analogy, Dr. Maisel spoke about how we feel when we approach the computer to write. Everything in our brain is shaken up and whirling around, like a snow globe in action. We need to remind ourselves that the snow will fall to the bottom in a few seconds. Say to yourself, "I just need to let this settle and then I will be able to work." A concrete way to break through our resistance to sitting down to write is to put a bowl beside the computer and crack an egg into it. This is such a shocking and physical thing to do (if you're not planning to cook the egg) that it can break through the mental block about writing. In self-talk, the monologue would sound like this: "I'm too unsettled or confused to write." To turn this around, say: "I'm feeling anxious, tired and overworked but I can write anyway." This admits the reality of the situation, but allows you to reorganize your priorities so outside worries, like the laundry, come second to writing.

Writers are endowed with self-trust, self-direction and self-confidence, yet we can be influenced by the opinions of others, such as the agent or editor who wants major changes. It becomes hard to trust ourselves when that happens. "I really don't know what I'm doing," gets confused with the necessary sense of "I don't know what my characters will do next." Inappropriate, self-flagellating "not-knowing," overpowers real and appropriate "not-knowing." We must continue to have confidence in ourselves. Dr. Maisel noted with some humor that this does not mean we are infallible, just that we trust ourselves to show up and address the work. There are no guarantees that the work itself will be splendid.

There are 75 personality traits found in the creative person. Each can tip into either insufficiency or excess. Writers need to find the middle ground so, for instance, assertiveness does not pass into recklessness. As an example, the reckless personality says, "I'm going to get even with my editor by turning in my book six months late." To counteract that impulse, stop and think, "Do I really want to act out here?" Get off the phone, consider whether you want to operate from the shadow side of your personality, and call the editor back. Dr. Maisel points out that our interactions with editors tend to be especially fraught because they are relatively brief and infrequent.

Relationship dynamics are subject to the same negative self-talk. "My husband says I'm a parasite for not bringing in enough money so I'm going to feel miserable." This leaves the writer with nothing to do except stew in unhappiness. Instead, tell yourself: "It looks like I need to have another chat with my husband about why my writing matters." Unlike the first statement, this offers real world actions to alter the dynamic. While this self-talk requires some risk-taking, it often generates a

useful conversation in which the husband/partner reaffirms his understanding. Often the writer is projecting feelings which aren't being felt by the other person.

Depression is epidemic in the creative community. According to Dr. Maisel, 100 percent of artists have to deal with some level of depression. There are four basic kinds/roots of depression: 1) biological, as in a genetic or constitutional susceptibility; 2) psychological, as created by childhood trauma, etc.; 3) social, when we don't feel we are in the right relationship to other people; and 4) existential/spiritual malaise, when we feel we are not making sufficient use of ourselves and our resources, that we're not making enough meaning. Writers are prone to this fourth type of depression. To combat the negative statement "I'm depressed (or sad)," ask "What is this depression about?" It takes some energy to answer this question, but you can often talk yourself through whatever has transpired to send you spiraling downward.

Wondering what you will write tomorrow often triggers depression, even though you've had a great writing day today. Don't allow these useless negative thoughts to destroy a positive mood.

Not all manias are bad. Dr. Maisel points out that wanting to get up extra early to work on something we're excited about is a positive mania. We need to make distinctions between that passion and an unmediated mania when we're not in control and will ultimately crack under the pressure. To reduce the uncontrolled manic feeling, try a hot shower or reducing stimuli by doing something as simple as closing the window shades. Pressure is the warning sign for a bad mania. Always ask yourself if you feel as though you're still in charge of yourself.

Addictions act as "meaning substitutes." Making meaning provokes anxiety which we want to avoid, so we play 1,253 consecutive games of

Solitaire. At a certain point in an addiction, we become unhappy with ourselves. If we embrace the anxiety that writing provokes as being natural, we can stop the compulsive behavior.

**"The Work"** requires that we have an "abundance model" in mind. The reality is that Book 1 will be good, Book 2 may be bad, and Book 3 will be just okay. This is hard to accept, but in a lifetime of writing, we can only stand fully behind some of the work. You cannot emphasize the current book; be wholeheartedly, but provisionally, committed to this book. It's a difficult but necessary balancing act.

When the book isn't going well, the negative self-talk often turns to "This is bad, therefore I'm bad." Instead, say, "This is a process and I'm working honorably." Some books will come out whole from beginning to end, others we will labor over for two years and question every word. To avoid this, you can keep doing work you're sure of, repeating yourself forever. Obviously, this is the wrong solution to the problem.

Writers often struggle with the fact that a book begins in one place and then takes off in another direction. We get irritable when this happens because we're not sure if we should allow the book to go off on this tangent. Of course, there's no hard-and-fast answer to this. In fact, we may not know if it was the right thing to do even when we finish the book. This is an unavoidable part of the process and instead of fighting it, we should think "how enjoyable this is." Dr. Maisel laughed and referred to this as an "adaptive illusion."

Choosing provokes anxiety, and creative people must make choices constantly, one after another, at every level. When we are in the trance of writing, we make choices automatically without stress. Then the phone rings and breaks our flow, and we lose the effortlessness of the choices. When that happens, ▶



# Recapping the Magic: Troubles and Traumas

▶ ▶ ▶ make a little popcorn rather than taking a month off from writing.

Dr. Maisel addressed another choice writers agonize over: whether or not to outline a book. His advice was to choose which you would prefer to do on a project-by-project basis. Consider both options as available tools, and don't make any category your enemy because it's a naturally occurring duality.

As writers, we spend too much of our time hating the book we're working on. We need to recommit to loving the work in front of us. With a smile, Dr. Maisel suggested we say, "I love you, Work." He also pointed out that he's from California so he can get away with saying things that. He warned that we should never say it out loud or we'll be taken away in a straitjacket.

**"The World"** is the intersection of our person, our work and outside forces. Our mantra must be: we have to create in the middle of things. We cannot wait for "other things" to pass. The negative self-talk might sound like "I can't write while my son is getting a D in algebra." The writer needs to turn that around to be "I can help my son and still write."

Criticism and rejection are facts of life in the writing business. If we can't face those, we should get out of the game now. We can develop techniques for dealing with both, but we cannot avoid them. Detachment cannot be our only strategy.

The negative self-talk is "I don't want to be criticized or rejected." That can lead to the impossible goal of doing such perfect work that we'll never be criticized again. Instead we have to say "I embrace criticism and rejection."

As a writer becomes savvier about marketplace dynamics, it often gets harder to want to write. The numbers game—and all the baggage that comes with it—is discouraging. In that case, we need to circle back around to the bedrock statement "I matter and my writing matters." We need to remind ourselves to honor the process because while one book may be a bestseller, eighteen others may not be. This does not mean you can't do smart things for your career, but you cannot focus on a single book, or bad cover, or you may become disinclined to proceed.

An aspect of our culture which works against us as writers is being told to be good, nice, and quiet. Some portion of not wanting to write is not wanting to speak out, or feeling we do not have permission to write about things that matter to us. The writer's memoir is often the seventh book because it takes that long to feel ready and able to speak out about what is important to him or her personally.

The agent-writer relationship is the subject of a great deal of negative self-talk which needs to be transmuted into action. For instance, "I think my agent has lost interest in me" needs to be changed to "I need to know if my agent has lost interest in *this project*." Now you can address the problem because it's necessary to find out if this is true or not. You may get a positive response, or you may get a

less satisfactory "I'm trying to think of someone else to send this to." If the latter is true, then you know it's time to send that project to another agent. Dr. Maisel says he routinely uses multiple agents simultaneously; he feels that if one passes on one of his proposals, he or she shouldn't mind if he contacts another agent about that particular project. In this relationship, the writer needs clarity. Because there's a lot of "muddiness" and anxiety in an agent-writer conversation, you should feel free to call your agent back to clear up anything you aren't certain you understood.

The editor-writer relationship is probably even more difficult and again clarity is a necessity. When the editor says "take out three chapters in the middle of the book," you need to find out what this really means. You should call back and ask "Is this about word count or something else?" That way you can make an informed decision about what you're doing or not doing to the book. Then your choices will feel comfortable to you. Editors have a horror of "difficult writers" so always be professional in your dealings with them. Then you are more likely to be able to exert influence in the relationship.

Our goal should be to change the self-talk. We can even write out the positive statements and post them everywhere. Old habits die hard. This may help others in our family to understand that we're affirming our work.

Dr. Maisel suggested three anxiety management techniques. The first was simply deep breathing, five or six seconds in and five or six seconds out. The second is to add "useful cognition" to the breathing.



On the inward breath, think “I am perfectly” and on the outward one, finish with “okay.” You can choose any phrase that calms you to create a breath-and-thought package. Finally, Dr. Maisel mentioned his personal favorite: the discharge technique, otherwise known as silent screaming.

An audience member asked if writers can help each other online since we don’t always get to meet face-to-face. Dr. Maisel suggested a couple of ways of doing this. Every writer wants a single person whom she respects and can bounce ideas off of. This relationship can be very

useful. In a group email loop, a writer can check in occasionally as a way of simply saying “I matter and my writing matters.” Then she may choose to go deeper and reveal more to the group as her comfort level increases.

Dr. Maisel concluded that there is no way to perfect any of this. The key is not to get down on ourselves—or others—in this crazy business.

**Note:** Dr. Maisel trains creativity coaches over the Internet. His trainees need clients to work with, so a writer may receive four months of

free creativity coaching from Dr. Maisel’s students. There is also a self-coaching track for writers. The information on these programs is available at <http://www.ericmaisel.com/coaching/coaching-writers.html>.

*Nancy Herkness is the author of two contemporary romances, A Bridge to Love and Shower of Stars, both published by Berkley Sensation. Her essay “Oh, Give me a Home” appears in the anthology Welcome to Wisteria Lane: On America’s Favorite Desperate Housewives. She definitely believes that her work matters.*

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## A Recipe for Brainstorming

BY JUDY GILL

*At the New Orleans conference, we had a couple of Ninc at Night sessions during which brainstorming was discussed. Since interest was high among conference attendees, it could be that other members might like to see one method of brainstorming that has worked well for a number of writers. Hence this:*

Take a maximum of eight and a minimum of two writers, blend until compatible. Before you begin cooking, toss in one brief, unfleshed-out story idea, and switch on brains. This works best in a private dwelling with enough comfortable chairs, lots of snacks and juice (fresh, fermented, brewed, distilled or not, personal preferences applying), a large flip-chart with plenty of paper, a few felt markers of different colors, and no one else around but the writers involved. When the author of the moment whose book is being brainstormed says “Stop,” do so at once and move on to the next author. Repeat with each individual writer’s ideas until all have acceptable plots. Each writer gets to keep his or her sheets of paper to use or not to use, as desired.

In the past, I held retreats to which a select group of trusted friends (all writers, of course) were invited. Our twice-a-year venue was the old house where I grew up. It is out of cell-phone

range, though there is a land-line for emergencies. We used these retreats as a time to both unwind and to get wound up in new books for as many of us as possible.

**Let’s begin.** We have five present for this retreat: Bonnie, Judy, Kathleen, Lyn, and Vanessa. It might go like this:

**Judy:** Okay, what I have in my mind at this point is just a picture of a large, nicely tanned male hand with clean, spatulate nails, holding up a sign reading “APRIL.”

**Bonnie:** What does “April” mean? A person? A date?

**J:** Person.

**Vanessa:** Who’s holding the sign?

**J.** The hero. His name is . . . Eric! Well, where did that come from? I didn’t know ‘til you asked about him.

**Lyn:** Doesn’t matter. It came. (Lyn has the fastest and most legible handwriting, so she’s at the flip chart. She uses a red marker to write *Eric*.)

**Kathleen:** Where is he that he’s ▶

# A Recipe for Brainstorming

- ▶ ▶ ▶ holding the sign? An airport, maybe?
- J:** Sounds right. (Lyn writes *airport* next to *Eric*.)
- K:** So April's a person he doesn't know. A woman?
- Everyone:** Sure! She must be the heroine. (Lyn picks up the green pen, holding it ready.)
- J:** (gives it some thought), I don't think so. She doesn't feel like the heroine to me.
- B:** What does she feel like?
- J:** (after more thought), What if she's a little girl? One Eric's never met, but has to pick up. (Lyn uses the blue marker to write *April – stranger to Eric*.)
- B:** Whose child is she? Eric's? Has her mother died and he's suddenly been granted custody as her only living relative?
- J:** I don't want an encumbered hero. She's not his child. She's . . . his friend's child. His friend was supposed to pick her up but couldn't make it for some reason.
- E:** (tossing questions like machine-gun fire) What reason? It better be good. You have to justify his not being there. What kind of father would let a stranger pick up his own child?
- J:** (feeling argumentative) John's a secondary character, remember? Do we need to go into his motivation?
- K:** Yes. Editors ask about stuff like this.
- J:** All right, already. But Eric's not a stranger to . . . to John, though he is to April. John's his best friend, and April is John's niece, not his daughter. (Lynn writes *John* in the same blue as she wrote *April*, the color for secondary characters.) He couldn't meet her himself because he broke his leg skiing and is still in hospital in . . . in the Dolomites, or some place.
- V:** Why would he go skiing so far away when he knew his niece was coming to visit? What kind of uncle does that make him?
- L:** Yeah. Would your hero be such good buds with an irresponsible guy like that? What kind of hero does that make him? Remember, we're known by the company we keep.
- J:** You guys are making unnecessary trouble.
- B:** So, talk yourself out of it. Think!
- J:** (Heaving a disgusted sigh. She hates being forced to think.) Okay, then. What if John and Eric are air force pilots living in . . . in Germany? The Dolomites aren't so far away if my setting is Europe. What if John went skiing before he knew April was coming? What if April's parents, his sister and brother-in-law, were killed?"
- K:** Doesn't wash. His sister dies, he's going to be informed immediately. The air force would fly him home from wherever he was, despite a broken leg, especially if there's an orphaned child involved.
- J:** All right. What if April's parents died when she was a baby? Maybe her grandmother has been raising her, but recently had a stroke and was admitted to a nursing home.
- V:** People don't get put into nursing homes just like that. She'd have been in hospital for a while before they decided she wasn't going to recover enough to look after April. Like Kath says, John's aunt, mother, whatever – a relative, anyway – has a serious illness, he's going to be notified.
- J:** Hmm. But what if April's grandmother is no relation to John and no one even knew April had another living relative until the grandmother got sick and told them? What if grandma is John's late sister's husband's mother and was named guardian? She'd make a bet-ter one than a single air force officer. John probably never even wanted custody anyway.
- B:** Who's been looking after April since granny got sick?
- J:** The grandmother's . . . neighbor? Her lawyer? Is that important right now? I'm more concerned with why Eric knows, but John doesn't.
- B:** But maybe John does know. If he went skiing, Eric, with whom he shares a house, took the phone call.
- V:** They share a house? Why don't they live in Bachelor Officer Quarters? They can't be gay if Eric's the hero.
- J:** They both like more space? Home cooking? Gardening?
- L:** Writes, *Research if single officers can live outside their air base in foreign countries.*
- J:** They can. I know. I lived there. Okay, Eric notified John (in his hospital bed) that April was coming, and naturally, heroically, agreed to look after April until John gets back on his feet. Pun intended.
- K:** A little convoluted, but it could work. So where's the heroine? We want her on stage really fast. Who is she?
- J:** She's, um, she's with April! Her name's Kendra. She accompanied her on the flight because April's not old enough to fly alone. She's, let's say, six? Is that too young to fly alone?
- L:** writes *Research minimum age for unaccompanied kids on flights*. Then writes *Kendra* in green). She says, Kendra accompanies a little kid on a flight to Germany. But what's her motivation for doing so? Believe me, your editor will want to know.
- J:** Okay, maybe she's the neighbor who looked after April? And she likes the kid.
- K:** That could be her initial motivation for going to Germany and meeting

Eric, but what's going to keep her there?

**J:** I'll figure that out . . . later.

**V:** Not good enough! Figure it out now.

**J:** Okay! What if Kendra refuses to give the kid up to anyone but the man who was supposed to meet her?

**E:** (More machine-gun fire) Oooh! Yeah! Good! That's real heroine stuff. She's stubborn. Feisty. Not going to let anyone force her into putting a child in possible danger. *She's responsible!*

**J:** I like this! Kendra's going to insist on accompanying April to Eric's and John's house and staying until John returns and she can safely turn April over to her uncle. That's her motive for staying, and what keeps her on stage with Eric. (Lyn rapidly writes this all down in purple underlined with green for Kendra. Purple is motivation.)

**K:** How does Eric feel about this?

**J:** (grinning) He hates it, of course. He didn't even want a little girl in his house, but John's his friend. Besides, they have a housekeeper who can take care of April, so he sees no need for Kendra to stay. He *really* doesn't want Kendra there. He's much too attracted to her and this scares him. (Lyn writes all this in black—conflict, underlines with red for Eric.)

**B:** What is April to Kendra? If she's just a neighbor, why did she accompany the kid? Altruism's weak motivation and doesn't cut it with editors anymore. Women have lives of their own. She must have a career she can't leave for an undetermined period of time.

**J:** Hmm . . . She's not a neighbor? She was hired by the grandmother, or her lawyers?"

**V:** Why? Why her, Kendra, specifically?

**J:** Kendra's career is, um, a special courier? Sure. That would work. She delivers important items for people who don't want to entrust them to the mail or FedEx or something like that. A child would qualify. The grandmother hired her and paid her well. Grandmother's lawyer wrote

up a legal contract. (Lyn writes *getting job done, fulfilling contract*, in motivational purple.)

**K:** What's her initial goal?

**J:** To get April where she's supposed to be. (Lyn writes this in orange, indicating goal, underlines with green for Kendra.)

**L:** Okay, so we've got Kendra and Eric forced to occupy the same space. Is Kendra happy about having to stay?

**J:** Not at all, but her conscience won't let her leave April with someone not named in her contract, no matter who he says he is, even when he makes it clear he doesn't want her there.

**L:** Writes *John's absence* in black for conflict, underlines it with green for Kendra.

**B:** So why doesn't she take April to wherever John is, and get back to her life ASAP? I mean, the man only has a broken leg. He's not totally incapacitated. She's supposedly capable and trustworthy. Where's her initiative? Surely she can book herself and April onto another flight to Italy or wherever the Dolomites are and if necessary, stay there in a hotel till John's ready to come home?

**V:** Right. You can't have her just move in on a man who obviously doesn't want her under his roof just because it suits *your* convenience. Motivations, reasons.

**J:** (thinking fast) She can't, because the hospital he's in is in a remote valley, cut off by an avalanche.

**V:** Okay. Valid reason for not leaving. Valid enough to tick off the hero. Is she attracted to him?

**J:** Physically, of course. He's TDH, even if he is abrasive and opinionated.

**E:** What more do you want? That's enough to start with. The rest can come later. He's a hunk, he's the hero, he'll have redeeming qualities. He already does. He could have just told the lawyer or whoever to make other arrangements for April 'til John was able to act, but he didn't. He's got initiative, too.

**J:** Yup. I like this guy better all the time. And I like Kendra for her dedication to little April. They're both going to

be good fun to get to know.

**L:** Want to recap now? Remember, these are just initial goals, motivations and conflicts. You're going to have to come up with a lot more than chapter one.

**J:** Yes. Let's recap. I'm getting a real feel for these people, but I need to have it laid out on paper.



**L:** (drawing different colored columns on a fresh page with the names of hero & heroine heading each.

**ERIC:**

(orange: goal)—Meet April, take care of her

(purple: motivation)—Do favor for injured best friend

(black: conflict)—Inability to keep Kendra from staying with April

**KENDRA:**

(orange: goal)—Get April to John

(purple: motivation)—Fulfilling contract & refusing to abandon little girl she likes.

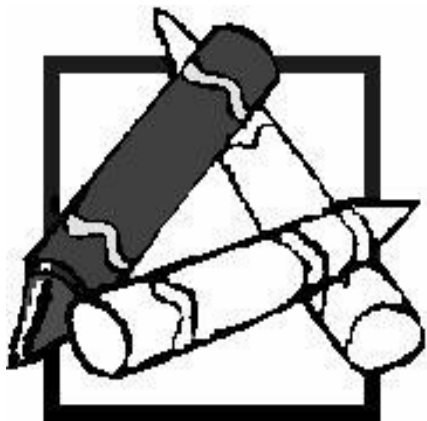
(black: conflict)—Inability to convince Eric her way is right way.



**J:** Thanks, friends. I want to stop for now and let this settle. Who's next?

**B:** Me, me! I have this great idea about woman who was raised as a foster child and is now convinced she knows the identity of her birth mother, but the birth mother has an interfering step-son and . . .▲

**Crayon  
on my**



**Key  
board**

# *The Differences*

BY JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER

I'm a member of several "authors" email loops. Some I follow closely (usually in digest form) while others I just check in on from time to time. My reason for joining each was the same; I had something in common with the other writers.

Those commonalities often start our discussions: how to combine writing with family obligations, how to balance writing and "the rest of life," how to weather discouraging career turns, etc. It's the differences, however, that create the really spirited discussions.

I'm one of those people who really hates conflict. I have to work at weaving enough conflict into my stories to make them real. Thus, when a "discussion" gets, shall we say, intense, on any of my loops, I go really, really quiet. I've learned a lot from this observer stance.

The primary lesson is this: despite the comfort we derive from affiliating ourselves with people who love writing as we do, writers are more individualistic than homogenous.

Some love to study the theory of creativity. Others think that's too much airy-fairy, and prefer a "butt in the chair" approach. Some revise each chapter until it's perfect before going on. Others just put their heads down and keep writing until the entire story is on paper, in whatever state of imperfection. Some get lost in their creative worlds. Others think through each twist and character change before committing it to the computer screen.

Those are the easy contrasts. Mention an issue even tentatively related to those well-known hot buttons, religion and politics, and the verbiage really begins to fly.

Watching the interplay of these differences has given

me insight into my portrayal of the characters I write. I tend to write characters who are consistent. If my heroine is a political conservative, then she appears conservative in all her decisions. If my hero is a loner, then every situation I put him in depicts his aloneness.

My fellow loopers have taught me, however, that it's the idiosyncracies of my character's personality that makes him or her come alive for the reader. Take, for example, a friend of mine who writes about an elderly woman living in an idyllic small town. The stories are gobbled up by some of the pickiest, most conservative readers in the country. Yet my friend is also outspoken in defense of another writer (whom she's never met) who is often derided by ultra-conservatives.

So I ask myself, what is the one situation in which my loner hero actively seeks some sort of connection? Is it a contact with a childhood best friend? Weekly phone calls to his mother? A cat who is allowed to sleep on his bed?

What causes my heroine to make a choice that's either reckless or politically left-leaning? Encountering injustice in the work place? A plea from her much younger sister to help resolve a family crisis? Being adopted by a stray dog and thus becoming an advocate for abandoned animals?

The other lesson for me has been that the more theoretical an issue is, the more impassioned the response, and the more splintered the opinions. (There are exceptions to this, of course, but this has been my general observation.) I'm one of those people who is somehow able to understand both sides of almost any issue. It doesn't mean I agree with both sides, but I do find myself able to understand why "the other perspective" exists.

This makes it difficult for me to write characters who hold opinions so tightly they are unable to see any other

perspective. And yet, is there any person alive who doesn't have at least one issue about which they are implacable?

In other words, it's the rough edges of interaction with my fellow loopers that teaches me the most about writing "real people." One loop (not Ninclink, by the way) has an individual who has The Definitive Answer for every question, even when he/she is wrong. When this person's tenth strongly worded opinion of the day lands in my inbox, I ask myself, "What would interaction with this person reveal in my hero or heroine's personality?" I usually don't use a character with this abrasive

personality in my story, but what I learn about my characters through imagining such an interaction has, on occasion, provided me with the twist I need to keep my story moving.

And sometimes, the opinion I most disagree with simply serves to remind me that this world would be a boring place if we were all the same.

*Janelle Clare Schneider enjoys email discussions, though when the debates get intense, she tends to go take a nap.*

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Authors Get Another Excuse to Party

Look for the Up South International Book Festival September 29 to October 1, 2006 in Harlem. The brain child of Atria Books senior editor, Malaika Adero, the collaboration with Up South. Inc. will celebrate books and performing artists in recognition of writers and artist of color. The purpose is not only to recognize established authors such as Toni Morrison or Gabriel Garcia Marquez but showcase authors from African, Latino and Asian-American cultures that are underexposed. Adero hopes the festival of dance, music, drama and books will expand to five days in 2008.

### Tired of the Poor Little Girl from Harvard Story?

Sara Nelson of *PW* took a different spin on the hottest plagiarism story in town (something to eclipse *The DaVinci Code*). She didn't care who stole what, but told some home truths about the state of the industry, book packagers, buying practices, etc. The editorial first appeared online April 28 and was reprinted May 1.

### More than a Jolt of Caffeine

Starbucks doesn't just want to jangle your nervous systems. What they really want to do is direct, or develop. They're working with William Morris Agency to look for film, music and book projects to promote.

Strangely enough, CEO Howard Schulz is using the word "self-publishing" to help bring deserving books (*The Kite Runner* is an example he used) to the public's attention. He confided that he also would have liked to help promote the film *Crash* (you know the one that got Best Picture at the Academy Awards this year). It will be interesting to see what other unappreciated books and films will catch Starbucks' interest. ▲

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

BY BARBARA SAMUEL

## The “S” Word: celebrating spirit

My mother has a decidedly ambivalent relationship with religion. Raised by a devout Christian of the grim variety, she made up her mind early that she wasn't going down that road. She did, however, take us all to church regularly, endured years of Sunday school and Easter pageants, then when the last of us was raised, never went back again. I asked her once why she would bother to teach us all something that had little meaning for her, and what she said has stuck with me: everyone needs something to believe in.

Spiritual practice, spiritual beliefs, the whole realm of God and faith and worship, is one of the stickiest wickets of all. Nothing makes us more uncomfortable in America. While it seems to still be all right to be devoutly Catholic elsewhere, in Europe and Latin America—and it's still fine to discuss religion in many places outside of America—in this country, it's difficult to be open about being devout in any form, unless you are Native American practicing traditionally. Maybe. Or an immigrant with a “quaint” set of practices that can be traced back ten thousand years (unless it's Islam, which is really unfashionable just now).

I'm not sure what the reasons are. Fanaticism has certainly contributed. It's impossible to have a dialogue with a fanatic in any religion. Too, we've questioned everything to pieces, and made it impossible to even have a conversation about spiritual matters without first establishing a careful boundary of agreed upon terms: spirit or Spirit or god or Higher Power or Goddess or practice or—

Just gets to be a big headache. Why bother?

And then there's the squirm factor. When someone talks about sSgHPGp in some way that seems frankly

weird to you, it's hard to take it seriously. Or avoid gagging, guffawing, rolling your eyes. We all like to think we're open-minded, but there's somebody going on about their prophet or the forbidden foods on their lists or the non-moving meditation they practice or the habit they have of asking for an answer and flipping open the bible or drawing a card or lighting a candle, and it's just weird.

It's like eating food from other cultures. The breads are lovely, the veggies are okay, and the fruits are just plain gorgeous—oh, and please pass some more of that baklava, yeah?—but the meats bring us to a dead stop. You want me to eat dog? Pork? Cat? Horse? Chitlins? Worm? Snake? Beef? Hearts, tongue, brains?

Urp.

That's how it is with a lot of spiritual beliefs and rituals. We have to just agree to disagree, and look away when someone swallows a big slimy plate of something squirmy or cute.

But that doesn't mean giving up spirituality entirely. The body/mind/spirit triad is a triad for a reason. Soul issues matter as much as anything to do with the body. Just as parts of your physical body atrophy and start to die off when you don't use them, just as your mind shuts off unused rooms, spiritual practice of some sort is required for good overall health. You don't have to get all weird about it. You don't have to even say god or spirit. You do need a set of rituals to connect you to your spiritual side.

It was not easy for me to write that last sentence. I find it intriguing that I'm perfectly comfortable telling you that you need to eat right and exercise and get enough sleep, that I don't mind bossing you around to

go get some art supplies or read more books or celebrate any other part of your being, but telling you to find a spiritual practice is difficult, even though I believe it's even more important than a daily walk.

Writers, particularly, need rituals. It goes back to that magic of where the books come from. Where? Do you know? From your mind, you say? What part? What grants inspiration?

Against the wall in my office is an altar. For a long time, it was sort of hidden in a dark corner. I didn't want anyone to see and give me a hard time. I didn't want to have to explain it or defend it.

My younger son, seeing my quiet devotion, brought me a statue for Mother's Day a few years ago. As he is male and exuberant and thinks anything worth doing is worth doing, it is a two-foot rendering of the Virgin of Guadalupe, with gold and even some lights on it. Around her neck is draped a string of black rosary beads the same child brought me from Barcelona (along with a Heineken ashtray stolen from a sidewalk café). It's impossible to tuck that statue away anywhere, and I decided to bring it all out into the open, my hodgepodge of spiritual practices.

Now, Guadalupe smiles benevolently beneath a large photo of tulips—I can't imagine anything more spiritual than living flowers—and around her feet are photos of the children, and shells I've found on various beaches, and a purple and green bowl made by one of the children in some forgotten art class into which I drop money in various currencies. There are little pieces of paper tucked around her feet, with requests for help with this or that thing—a friend who is grieving, a habit I want to change, a sense of direction for someone else.

This is the general altar. I love to come here when I'm tired or grumpy or just want to sit quietly. I do some meditation there or say the rosary or practice some asanas. She seems okay with whatever I do, always smiling, smiling.

As I write this at my desk, a candle burns on the writing altar, a small shelf beneath the white board where I keep my schedule for writing pages and exercise and the inspiration of the moment. Here are two nichos, little homemade altars created in cigar boxes (remember the cigar box?). There is a fertility goddess from Oxaca, an egg shaped paperweight, the first gift my lover gave me, and a turtle crawling across the surface. Ganesh, the god of fresh beginnings and happiness, is decorated with marigolds.

That's not all.

At my elbow is a stack of Angel Cards. I'm sure you've seen them or something like them—a sort of fortune telling cards, like tarot. I also have some animal spirit cards that seem very friendly. I sometimes just draw a card for the heck of it. The one I just drew is Spiritual Growth, which strikes me as eerie and cool.

The tarot cards are wrapped in a shawl a friend brought me from Kiev, years ago, and I only read them occasionally. (Writers do seem to connect with cards of various sorts. I've been to many conferences where someone is doing readings in a room with any number of decks available. Many of us love tarot in various forms. Is it the story possibilities?)

On the ledge beneath my monitor is an obelisk made of some blue and green stone that shines with opalescence when the light catches it, and there are rocks with Success, Blessings, and Faith carved into them. A tiny spider is painted onto another, and a plain piece of rose quartz rests next to a crystal ball just larger than a pearl.

Everything has meaning, all these little objects. They have meaning because I have assigned it, but also because they embody hope. Possibility. Good fortune, arranged.

Of course, being my stuff, it's all a bit excessive. I'm sure it's possible to be spiritual and spare. Austere and meditative. Give me color, bells, dancing, singing, candles, incense.

Your spirituality is going to match your personality. A commonsensical sort isn't going to bother with bells and dances. She'll like the *Book of Common Prayer*, or a nice Mass, or a sitting practice, or lots of healthy gardening.

In *The Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore says, "In the modern world, we tend to separate psychology from religion. We like to think that emotional problems have to do with the family, childhood, and trauma—with personal life, but not spirituality. We don't diagnose an emotional seizure as 'loss of religious sensibility' or 'lack of spiritual awareness.' Yet it is obvious that the soul... needs an articulated world view, a carefully worked out scheme of values, and a sense of relatedness to the whole."

In other words, it's the spiritual part of us that yearns for cornerstones and connectedness. As human beings, we hunger for light at the dark times of year, so there is Christmas and Solstice and Hanukah, all festivals of light. As humans, we want to mark the rebirth of spring, so there is May Day and Easter and Passover. The enormous, splendiferous, overwhelming moon rising out of the harvested fields has dazzled us for eons and we give thanks and honor it in a thousand ways.

Ritual is the stuff of the soul. A baby's birth, a death, a marriage, a loss. When I practice with my friend the medicine woman, we dance with the ancestors, and it was not something I understood at a gut level until I danced for the first time with my grandmother who had passed over to the spirit realm. Ritual for the seasons of a life.

A good friend of mine is an atheist, and as I transcribed the above, I wondered what she would ▶



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

# ***Celebrate... the spirit***

▶ make of all the falderal of religious discussion. She doesn't feed her soul with God or spiritual ideas, yet she is undeniably a very soulful person. I suspect her practice is in study, her practice in the pursuit of her art, and the raising of her children, and her connection to the writing community. She finds transcendence and soulfulness in her rituals of good food, a silent time of communing with nature every morning while she runs, and tending the connection to her children and her community.

**W**riters are ritualistic by nature, I think. I have these altars because it seems like something I can use to make sense of the world that doesn't make sense. I am, by nature, a spiritual person.

But spiritual rituals are quite practical, as well. If I light a candle when I come into my office, and ask for protection for my children and loved ones and ask for intervention for friends who hurt or things that are troubling me, it frees me to let go of those concerns for the time while I'm writing. If I then sit down and light a

candle on the writing altar, I'm signaling the girls in the basement that it's time to forget about the potter's wheel and the grocery lists and the vacuuming and the hair-braiding, and focus on work. Time to bring up the pages, gang.

Even if you're a skeptic, far too intelligent or commonsensical to consider something like a religious practice, consider the ways in which you tend your own spirit. Most creative people do it through their work, and writers engaged in creation are certainly in harmony with something.

What spiritual practices do you engage? And if you don't, are there some you've wanted to get back to or want to explore?

Do you have rituals connected to work, starting the day, getting ready?

Notice and celebrate your own rituals this month. Enjoy them. Be open to whatever they might bring.

Yeah, even you.

*Barbara Samuel's current book is Madame Mirabou's School of Love, about rituals of perfume and love. Visit her webpage at [www.barbarasamuel.com](http://www.barbarasamuel.com)*

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