

Using Corporate Wisdom to Advance Your Writing Career

BY SHIRLEY JUMP

One of the greatest lessons I ever learned from a fellow writer was that publishing is a business to everyone in this industry except me—and many of my fellow writers. Most writers are right-brained people, meaning that we think creatively. To me, those 90,000 words are a personal creation. But as soon as I learned to start approaching my writing business—and all the business connected with my writing—in a more corporate America manner, the more success I had. My book, after all, is a product, and I want that product to sell.

Other writers agreed and we've recommended a number of business books as must reads (see sidebar on page 6) for writers wanting to glean information they can apply to their writing career.

Laura Resnick said it only makes sense for writers to apply business savvy to their writing careers. "Saying, 'Oh, I don't really like business, so I'll just leave it all to someone else,' has never, in my own experience, been a viable option when my car breaks down, or I find erroneous charges on my bank account, or there's a disagreement with my landlord, or an uninsured driver rear-ends me, or my health insurance company refuses to pay its share of the bills," she said. "So why on earth would I hope that saying, 'Oh, I don't really like business, so I'll just leave it all to someone else,' would be a viable option in my *professional career*, for goodness sake?"

Elaine Isaak admitted that, like most writers,

she'd rather write than deal with business issues, but recognizes that they are a necessity. "I don't have much patience with artists of any sort who can't (or won't) handle basic business concepts or transactions. When I did craft shows and open studio events, I often encountered other artists who seemed to think that acting professional (as opposed to artistic) would somehow detract from their art." She said they'd use that "artistic temperament" excuse to act irresponsible about everything from making space for credit and cash transactions within their display areas to completing the necessary day-to-day business tasks. "The artists I know who are successful, and I count authors among them, are those who are willing to buckle down and learn the ropes. There are dozens of books, workshops, and local business programs to provide what you need."

Top Techniques

Candace Schuler said some of the top techniques she learned came from *Women Don't Ask; Negotiation and the Gender Divide*, by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever. "One of the main techniques I learned (and am still—continually!—working on) is eliminating the modifiers most women use to 'soften' our demands so they don't sound so much like...well, demands. Saying 'maybe' and 'perhaps' and 'if it wouldn't be too much trouble' and 'could you think about' makes women sound weak and indecisive."

Resnick said she learned a lot from a Donald Trump deal that took place in her hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio and was described in his *The Art of the Deal*. Because she was personally familiar with the details, it made a bigger impact. "What I learned from Trump's process and success on that particular deal was to approach business decisions with attention to detail and also to the broad canvas. In acquiring a Cincinnati apartment complex, Trump did everything from examine details of

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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. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair Holly Jacobs
P.O. Box 11102
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or email holly@hollysbooks.com.

New Applicants:

Nancy Parra, Lake Villa IL
Tobias Buckell, Bluffton OH
Lori Devoti, Madison WI
Kathleen Baldwin, Plano TX

New Members:

None this month.

Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership to your colleagues. Prospective members may apply online at ninc.com.

Refer members at ninc.com. Go to Members Only, "Member Services" and click "Refer a New Member to Ninc."

Heading to a conference? Take some Ninc brochures. Contact Holly Jacobs at HollyJacobs1@aol.com with your mailing address and the number of brochures wanted and she'll get them out to you asap.

REMINDER:

The Board and the Membership Chair, Holly Jacobs, want to know your thoughts regarding redefining Ninc's membership requirements. Let your voice be heard. Write letters to the NINK editor (to be included in NINK), explore your thoughts on Ninlink, or contact the Board members.

Lessons from Riley

Writers take our stories—and our lessons—where we can get them. We're the greatest recyclers around. Everything we do, see, think, hear, feel, touch, and smell can be reused and revitalized.

I read and listen to interviews with leaders in the arts, business, and politics, weighing what's worked for them against what might work for a writer. You might have caught some of the reviews of business books I've been reading, too. But recently I realized that the source of many of my best lessons for life and career is Riley.

And it doesn't matter that Riley's a dog.

So, what have I learned?

- What you sniff along the way is more important than where you go.
- The more treats you ask for, the more you get. It doesn't hurt to look adorable and absolutely confident that the treat will be forthcoming.
- Everything is worthy of a treat. Action, non-action—it's all good.
- When offered a treat, do not ever, ever demur. Instead, accept with gusto because clearly you deserve it.
- Everyone loves you. Anyone who does not recognize immediately that he loves you simply needs more intimate acquaintance to realize he loves you. For those few who still don't get it, growl. You don't want them anywhere near you. Clearly, they're too stupid to ever be trusted.

The lessons started when I adopted Riley from a collie rescue group. I wasn't going to. I already had an airline ticket to fly to Illinois for the holidays and it was well into November, and how could I leave a newly adopted four-month-old puppy at the kennel for 10 days? But I agreed to look at him—just to look at him. Just to look.

Yes, you're right. Stupid to even think he wasn't coming home with me that day. So the first lesson was:

- When you find yourself doing what your head says you shouldn't do, it's often because you really want to do it. Don't fight it. You just get more bruises if you do. Instead, go with it.



Riley—philosopher, companion, and all around good guy.

And, of course I didn't leave the newly adopted four-month-old puppy at the kennel for 10 days. I bought him a plane ticket that cost more than mine and took him with me.

Within minutes of our arrival, Riley was being disciplined by being made to sit and not budge because he hadn't listened. The humans were a couple of yards away, looking at him. He looked back with complete aplomb. My father observed, "That dog has no shame."

He was absolutely right. More than 11 years later, and I can say that never once has Riley wavered from the lesson:

- Embarrassment is a waste of time.

Dad went on to say how lucky Riley was to have been adopted by me, to have found a good home and someone to love him. Ten days later, as Dad and I watched the baggage handler at O'Hare Airport roll away Riley in his carrier for our return flight, Dad said, "That's a great dog. You are so lucky to have gotten that dog."

- The balance of power can shift when you're not looking. And it can happen very quickly. It doesn't necessarily mean you're at fault. It just happens. So don't angst over it.

Riley became the role model for a canine character in a series of books. "Sin" (supposedly short for "Sincere, but I knew better) had many of Riley's habits, including leaving no door ▶

unopened if he can help it and seeing-into-the-future skills.

I quickly figured out the source of Riley's agitation when I picked up my keys—it meant I'd be leaving the house, and (in contrast to the leash, which was always good news) most likely without him. It took me a bit longer to put together why he barked whenever I put on shoes. Apparently he'd recognized that I didn't wear shoes much in the house and he associates my putting on shoes with my leaving the house. As he grew older, he started getting agitated when I opened the sock drawer. And now his reaction varies depending on if I take out sport socks (not as reliable as the leash, but still has the potential for good news) or the dress socks (dum-da-dum-dum Dummmm!).

The lesson here?

- In trying to foretell an event, don't be satisfied to check only the action immediately preceding the event. Keep looking farther back in the sequence to give yourself the greatest advance warning.

Riley's collie bloodlines show a lot in his herding abilities. If a thunderstorm was threatening, he was quite adept at gathering neighborhood kids and starting them toward my house. (That doesn't work as well now that they're older and know his tricks.) I've also spotted him trying to herd moths attracted by a light at night—an entirely unrewarding enterprise, which for some reason reminded me forcibly of writing.

- Instinct is strong, but not infallible.

A year and a half ago Riley was diagnosed with degenerative myelopathy. His spinal cord is

degenerating, starting from the back and moving forward. Eventually it will attack the brain stem.

He's in no pain—the nerves aren't working, so there's nothing to signal pain. Right now, the effects include that he wags his tail less. (He still makes his feelings quite clear.) And he has a lot of trouble with his back legs. So he gets up stairs largely by pulling himself up with his front legs, letting the back ones tag along. Sometimes one or the other of his back paws turns under (called "knuckling") and he drags it.

To his chagrin, our walks have been cut from daily to every other day so he can recover. We walk more on grass than concrete so if he drags a paw it won't bleed. Sometimes he stumbles. Other times his legs just give out and he ends up sitting suddenly. He doesn't let any of that stop him. In fact, usually when he takes a sudden seat, he finds the pause a good time to point his nose at the pocket with the treats and give me that "of course I deserve one" expression.

- Just like embarrassment, whining about "I can't do what I used to be able to do" is a waste of time. All that matters is doing things now.

For some dogs this disease progresses very rapidly. I've been fortunate that Riley's has not. Fortunate because he makes me laugh every single day, and that's always good. Fortunate also because in this, he has taught me perhaps the most important lesson of all.

- If you stumble, get up and keep going.

— **Pat McLaughlin**

Ninc Online

Browse our Reference/Resources/Research page in the Members' Only area at **ninc.com**.

For never-ending e-conversation—for members only—join **Ninclink**. If you have questions, email moderator Brenda Hiatt Barber at **BrendaHB@aol.com**

For critique and brainstorming, join **Ninkcritique**. FMI: Email moderator Pat Rice at **price100@aol.com**.

For discussion regarding health insurance questions for the self-employed, join **NincHealth**. FMI: Email moderator Pat Rice.

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Using Corporate Wisdom

Continued from page 1 ▶ individual tenant payment histories, to touring the neighborhood, and studying the local economy. He considered every factor he could think of when making his decision to commit to the deal.

“I also learned in this book to *revisit* my business decisions every year or two. Trump shed that property five years later, when the neighborhood economy started to suffer, crime increased, and fewer solvent tenants were interested in moving into the complex. The company that bought it from him (for a sum which ensured Trump made a huge profit) lost their shirts on it after a year, since owning that property was no longer a good business decision.”

Isaak’s top technique came from the perennial favorite, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. “I read it before going to the World Fantasy Convention a couple of years ago, and easily accomplished several networking goals I would not have had the confidence to try before. I mended fences with an editor I had inadvertently offended, approached a bestselling writer to ask for a blurb, and shared non-writing expertise with someone I didn’t realize needed to know it. I’m lousy with schmoozing, and this book gave me a real step up.”

Find Like Minds

For Lauren Bach the best way to find good business techniques has been to join forces with other people who study business practices. She belongs to a mastermind group, which consists of five diverse business people. She’s the only writer (the others are a sound therapist, an accountant, a salesman, and a fulltime eBay-er). “The common thread was that we were all self-employed and interested in attaining greater levels of business and personal achievement. Everyone in the group had a desire to expand, stretch, achieve—coupled with a positive, solution-oriented mindset.”

The group met weekly, in a semi-formal, manner. “Each week we reported progress made toward our individual goals and set new goals. We brainstormed challenges and synergized innovations. The group accountability, support, and brainstorming helped me find a new sense of energy, focus, and determination. I loved it! While the group has decided to disband since three of us are moving out of the area, we each hope to start another mastermind group and have agreed to keep our email list going for support in the interim.”

Do Writers Have Left Brains?

When asked if they thought it was possible for

writers, stereotyped as “right brained” people to use left-brained techniques, hands-down, the writers I interviewed said yes. We may not all be super organized or great at filing, but we can all take the best techniques from the masters in business and use them to improve our bottom lines.

“The hard part [for me] was opening to the idea that I could use both sides effectively,” Bach said. “I thought using the left side too much would squash the right side. The people in my mastermind group politely chuckled at my notion that creativity can be fickle, or muse-driven, or that stars have to be aligned just so in order to produce. They challenged me to find ways to create on demand, to view creativity as part habit, part skill, part talent, part desire, and part belief.”

To that end, I challenged each of these writers to put on their Trump/Covey/Carnegie hats and offer five pieces of sage business advice. They rose easily to the challenge, proving that writers are pretty smart business cookies, too.

Candace Schuler: *Five Habits for Always Being Successful*

1. No matter how bizarre it sometimes seems, publishing is a business and decisions will *always* be made based on how they affect, or are perceived to affect, the publisher’s bottom line.
2. When it comes to what’s best for your career, your editor is not your friend. Neither is your agent. When push comes to shove, it will *always* come down to what’s best for their careers.
3. Read every single word of every single contract and if you don’t understand it, get the (impartial) advice of someone who does (see rule #2).
4. Publishing/writing is not living: make sure you have a life outside of writing or you will burn out in short order.
5. Take care of your health.

Laura Resnick: *The Art of Success*

1. No one will ever care about your career, your income, or your books as much as you do, so take charge of these things in a proactive, hands-on way.
2. Know your market well, and constantly update your self-education about it. If you’re interested in entering a market you don’t know well, research it.
3. Know your contracts, your legal obligations, and your rights as a writer. Read whatever you sign, and *understand* whatever you sign. If you don’t understand any part of a contract, research it or hire a recommended literary lawyer to explain it to you.
4. Next to word-of-mouth, your book cover is the single most important way your book will attract new readers. Educate yourself about effective

packaging, and learn how best to work with your publisher on implementing it. (This is an ongoing process in any career, particularly since most publishers aren't easy to work with in this respect.)

5. If you keep sending out a manuscript, it may never sell; but if you don't keep sending out a manuscript, then it will *definitely* never sell. Most of my book sales have been for projects that various agents I worked with or queried didn't want to handle, or gave up on after a few rejections. (Not surprisingly, I recently decided to give up on agents altogether.)

Elaine Isaak: *How to Win at Publishing*

1. Ask for what you want. In business, this means asking for the sale, or for more favorable terms. You may get turned down, but you may find that your associates are willing to compromise. On my first book, I let the editor know that I had an interest in the cover, and suggested a few cover artists I'd like to see do the work. She was surprised—which surprised me. The number one thing that authors seem to complain about is lousy covers, and many authors, especially first-timers, assume they don't have any influence. It can't hurt to ask! I got my second-choice artist as a result.
2. Research the business. What are your markets? Who is the competition? How is your product the same and how is it different? Many new authors resist comparing their work to anyone else's, as if they're creating the first truly original work of fiction...but if the editor and the bookseller don't know what it's like, they can't successfully market that book to the publisher, or to the ultimate reader.
3. Make a plan. Make a plan for the next conference you go to about what you'd like to accomplish by being there. Make a plan for how to get your book finished, submitted, promoted. Make a plan for the shape of your career—where do you want to be in five years? How do you want to be characterized as a writer, and what steps can be taken to get there?
4. Cut the fat. If something's not working for you, no matter how much you love it, it might have to go. This goes for editing your work, when a lovely scene really isn't adding anything to a book that's already too long. It goes for marketing and promotional efforts, when you need to ask what sort of return on investment you get. It might also mean paying serious attention to what you choose to write. I'm not saying you jettison the book of your heart to write a knock-off of someone else's best-seller, but if you have two ideas you'd like to work on, examine which one will get you closer to achieving the goals you've set.
5. Become a ruthless manager of your time. Nobody

says you have to answer the phone—that's what the machine is for. If you're addicted to a TV show, record it and watch it without commercials—and without watching what comes on before or after. The one commodity of which you can never get more is *time*. Develop efficient systems to deal with the work that needs to be done and schedule your top priorities. At every moment you're making a choice about how to spend your time. Make it a deliberate choice.

Lauren Bach: *The Power of a Good Author*

1. Mastery is fluid; stagnation results from thinking you already know it all.
2. Take nothing personally.
3. There is more to Life than writing.
4. You can't solve a problem using the same mindset that created the problem.
5. Never underestimate the power of acquired skill. No one is born professional, proficient, or elegant.

New York Times and USA Today bestselling author Shirley Jump spends her days writing romantic comedies for Harlequin NeXt and Romance (Back to Mr. & Mrs., May 2007) as well as Kensington Books (Pretty Bad, February 2007) to feed her shoe addiction and avoid cleaning the toilets. Visit her website at shirley-jump.com.

Top Recommended Books:

- Women Don't Ask; Negotiation and the Gender Divide*, by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever
- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey
- The Art of the Deal* by Donald Trump
- How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
- The Power of Full Engagement* by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz
- Anatomy of Success* by Ronald A. Kaufman
- The Highest Goal* by Michael Ray
- Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't* by Jim Collins
- The Long Tail* by Chris Anderson
- Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* by Steven Leavitt
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A Novelist in the House

BY MARGARET EVANS PORTER

At a writers' conference this spring, keynote speaker Jane Yolen summed up my personal philosophy in a succinct and memorable quote: "Writers should be in a constant state of revision, in their work and in their life."

In June 2006, I sowed the seeds of my latest life revision by stopping by our Town Hall to file my candidacy for the New Hampshire House of Representatives. Every few years, I act upon an urge to empty my piggy bank of eight quarters and fill out the paperwork. Our filing fee is a whopping \$2.00, which I prefer to pay in loose change.

My home state has a citizen legislature—essentially unsalaried, very part-time, extremely low-maintenance—and this is a point of pride. The aged, primarily masculine members of our House of Representatives have been described by constituents as either "rich, relaxed, or retired" or "frail, pale, and male."

Together, tiny New Hampshire's House and Senate equal 424 persons—the third largest representative body in the English-speaking world, after the British House of Commons and U.S. House of Representatives. Members' pay is \$100 per year (before taxes), plus mileage reimbursement. Serving is therefore a form of volunteerism. And, perhaps, insanity.

Why did I run? Not because I'm a politician. Before running for the House four years ago (I lost) my only other campaign was for Junior Class Vice President (I won). Yet I was weaned on politics and always had an interest in public policy—partly because for several generations my mother's family was based in Washington, DC.

My chief motivations were my community and

volunteer spirit, combined with an abiding affection for my quirky state and a desire to serve it in this fashion. Oh, yes—and a strong premonition that party organizers, who four years ago had taken note of me, would eventually urge me to get into this race. And indeed they did, shortly after I filed my candidacy. No arm-twisting required.

My district is made up of three small towns

strung along the Suncook River, very much alike in demographics and geography and population. Each is primarily rural, with just under 5,000 residents apiece. For a veteran self-promoting author with a media background, campaign publicity in this environment was all too easy. Writing newspaper ad copy, mailing out flyers, printing palm cards, planting yard signs—no big deal.

On Election Day, November 7, 2006, I made an appearance at all three polling places—traveling the district I encountered a flock of turkeys and several white-tailed deer. That evening my husband and I settled down before the television to watch the national returns.

Never guessing that the national sour mood would catapult me into office, I'd turned down invitations to election night parties. News of my un-

expected victory came via the telephone and was soon confirmed by the scrolling town-by-town vote results on the local TV station.

Were we surprised? Speechless is a better description. I was so prepared to *not* win—because I hadn't won the last time—that the result caught me off guard. I needed time to adjust to the new reality. This adjustment was necessary for lots of people, because our election ushered in a new majority party in New Hampshire. It also placed women in positions of authority in our state: President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, House Majority



Margaret in her assigned chair—Seat 3-93 —wearing her official hardware: name tag and security pin.

Leader, State Treasurer, House Clerk, even the Sergeant-at-Arms!

No sooner was I elected than we decamped to London on a trip originally intended as my post-defeat consolation prize. As I wandered places familiar to my characters (actual historical figures) and immersed myself in the 17th century books and newsheets they would have read, I started to ponder how my new public role would infringe upon my writing time.

My new life started in December with a string of thrilling firsts: Organization Day (when I and 423 others took the Oath of Office dating from the 1780s), the Governor's Inauguration Day in January, the Governor's Inaugural Ball (a glamorous and memorable night), and other ceremonial events that preceded the *real* work.

My duties as a representative for this two-year term are twofold: serving on a 20-member, bipartisan legislative policy committee that reviews bills and makes its recommendation on passage—or not—to the full House, and attending Session days when the full House acts on bills. In general, I'm at the State House for official business two days a week from late January to late June.

How has my existence changed since November?

I'm re-learning how to play well with others after so many years of solitude. I'm either an introverted extrovert, or an extroverted introvert. When I abandoned the theatre, broadcasting, and film worlds to write, I adjusted frighteningly well to sitting alone for days on end, pounding a keyboard. Now I regularly find myself surrounded by hundreds of other people. Noisy, opinionated, restive, passionate people. On occasion the doorkeepers have locked us inside the hall together, to preserve a quorum. This total loss of personal freedom is rare . . . but it can occur.

As one whose writing income arrives sporadically, in big lumps, I relish my small, bi-weekly infusion of cash (mileage reimbursement, direct-deposited). Much of it is spent on clothing appropriate to my new status. Or books I have less time to read. Or toys for the dogs, to enrich our quality time together.

The perks of high office can be addictive. My car has special license plates that allow me to pass through tollbooths without paying. I—and my chosen guest—receive a free ski pass at a state-owned mountain and free entry to state parks. Week in, week out, I receive invitations to breakfasts, lunches, dinners, receptions, charity fundraisers, and recreational opportunities. Every interest group in the state wants to feed a legislator! If I attended all of these events, I couldn't write a complete paragraph, never mind a book!

Admittedly, progress on my historical novel has been affected. Laptops aren't allowed in Represen-

tatives Hall, so I keep a notebook to scribble scenes whenever the muse speaks to me. Usually during a House session I can't follow freely wherever my active imagination leads me. I must be attentive to protocols, procedure, points of order. In order to cast my vote appropriately, I need to concentrate on the debate. Are we discussing the bill or an amendment? Does the policy committee recommend "Ought to Pass" or "Inexpedient to Legislate"? Is this a roll call or a division vote? Should I press the green button or the red button?

In any case, it's difficult—even during lunch breaks, even accompanied by my Alphasmart Dana—transporting myself to a 17th century royal court. I miss the props that surround me at home: reference books, maps, architectural renderings, portraits, music CDs. More than ever before, I cherish the days when I can write and only write. The necessity of multi-tasking doesn't permit me to "live in the book" in the way I used to, when I had the luxury of being a hermit for long stretches.

My travels are somewhat restricted now. Though the House meets for just under six months, committee work sessions, bill filing, and other duties could arise at almost any time. Before the election, I hopped over to the UK in spring and in autumn. At least for this first year in office, I don't plan to sneak back to Britain more than once.

In politics I've confronted a previously unimagined degree of self-absorption and, often, of self-importance. All my life I've associated with two of the most self-absorbed personality types—actors and writers—who are at least inherently curious about other people. It's our job to be nosy. As for politicians, I'll just say that I've learned far more about my legislative colleagues than they know about me.

Hardly anyone seems interested in discovering my profession. I enjoy flying under the radar so much that when people do inquire about how I spend my time when not at the State House, I reply vaguely, "I'm a writer." "What do you write?" "Everything," I say. If pressed, I'll mention magazine articles, newspaper columns, nonfiction books, scripts, poetry. Last on the list, though first in my heart, fiction.

I find myself accepting more short-term, high-paying nonfiction assignments these days, such as magazine and newspaper articles. Though they delay the completion of my novel-in-progress to some extent, they require less time and can be extremely lucrative. As well, they're necessary assurances that I remain a working, earning writer.

I've found that citizens aren't shy about contacting their legislators to express opinions about pending legislation—by phone, letter, or email. Keeping up with the incoming correspondence, never mind replying to it (which I do), is time-consuming.

My talent for persuasion was tested when I gave my “maiden speech” in March to the full House in support of a report by my committee. How gratifying that the vast majority voted the way I asked them to! I confess, I never dreamed I’d someday put my word crafting and public speaking skills to this particular use. My second address was in support of a bill I co-sponsored, creating a permanent memorial in my town for two local police officers killed in the line of duty. It passed unanimously, as I expected, but I hadn’t expected a motion that my remarks be printed in the permanent journal of that session. Or that my moment at the podium would appear on the evening news!

In life and in writing, I tend to be a long-range planner. Not so much these days. A committee hearing or House session or a breakfast with the Governor or a meet-and-greet with a Presidential candidate might be announced at very short notice. I’ve learned to go with the flow, be flexible. This can actually be fun!

Because my blog is primarily lifestyle-oriented rather than a writing blog, it attracts a global readership with diverse interests who check in for various reasons mostly mysterious to me. My regulars have followed me on my journey into the corridors of power. From the comments I know which ones

share my thrill at “fun firsts.” But because I do not want it to become a political blog, I carefully refrain from expressing partisan sensibilities. Occasionally I’ll mention a vote on a particular bill without stating how I voted. Except for books or music, my blog is an endorsement-free zone, so I try not to reveal my feelings about the current crop of Presidential candidates—whom I frequently encounter, this being New Hampshire.

Since the election, I’ve repeatedly heard these three questions.

Will you write a novel about your experiences? While I don’t plan to, I *never* say never.

Is this a stepping stone to higher political office? Absolutely not. If I *did* ever say never, that would be my answer!

Do you intend to seek re-election in 2008? So long as I’m satisfied with my writing productivity and income.

And if, at filing time, my piggybank has eight quarters in it.

Margaret Evans Porter, award-winning author of 11 novels and numerous other works, has been a Ninc member since its founding. Her adventures in and out of the New Hampshire State House are sometimes featured at margaretevansporter.blogspot.com

Conference Recap: The Future Is Now

SUMMARIZED BY SUSAN GABLE

Chris Anderson, author of *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*, came to Ninc armed with interesting statistics. Consider these:

- ▶ 172,000 titles published in 2006 (includes self-published, etc.)
- ▶ 94% of all books that get ISBNs sell fewer than 5,000 copies
- ▶ There are 100,000 unique titles on the shelves of a B&N Superstore
- ▶ 25% of Amazon.com’s sales are products not available on shelves in “retail” bookstores. (That’s the Long Tail coming into play—Traditional stores have limited shelf space, but in the new “virtual” store, and with newer technologies (POD for one), storage space is greatly expanded, so Amazon can offer a wider selection of books than a brick-and-mortar store can. Hence the reason that the “Future of Business is Selling Less of More”—Amazon will sell a larger variety of titles, even though not all titles will sell in great numbers.)

Anderson’s book began as a PowerPoint presentation on his theory. After signing a publishing contract in Dec. 2004, he started his blog to keep chatter going about the book/theory while he wrote the book. The blog grew and grew (70K/day hits the day before he spoke to us) and became an open source for ideas/feedback for the book. It was written in conjunction with the readers of his blog, who offered the subtitle of the book, and even ideas for cover art. (Anderson referred to this as crowd-sourcing and included this as part of the marketing plan for his book—the blog readers were invested in the book, so were perhaps more likely to go out and buy a copy.)

Other marketing techniques he employed included free ARCs to any blogger willing to review it, free ARCs as prizes for reader contests, MeetUps instead of signings (MeetUp is where you just gather a group to chat), and a company speaker series of talks.

Chris did say that even in our sound-bite society where “snack entertainment” (YouTube, blogging, etc.—short bits) has become popular, “Books can satisfy the depths that ‘snack entertainment’ can’t.” ▲

Authors Guild Announcement

When collectors donate manuscripts, letters, and diaries of an author to libraries or universities, they are entitled to deduct the fair market value of those literary papers from their income for tax purposes. When authors donate their manuscripts and other papers to libraries or universities, they're permitted to deduct only the cost of the physical materials used to produce those documents (the cost of paper, ink, toner).

The difference, of course, is immense, and immensely inequitable to authors who choose to donate their papers for scholarly research.

The "Artist-Museum Partnership Act" was recently reintroduced in the House and Senate to correct this inequity. The legislation has solid bipartisan support, but we need many more co-sponsors.

A list of co-sponsors, a suggested letter, and additional details can be found at authorsguild.org/news/literary_papers_tax.htm. To find contact information for your representatives, visit senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm and house.gov/writerep. Online or phone contact is strongly recommended. Mail goes through a labyrinth to get to the offices (still checking for anthrax, etc.) which takes forever.

"Comely Curmudgeon" Goes Paperback

The monthly "Comely Curmudgeon" columns that Laura Resnick wrote for *NINK*, including the quotes, anecdotes, insights, and bizarre publishing experiences that Ninc members shared with her for three and a half years is now available in *Rejection, Romance, and Royalties: The Wacky World of a Working Writer* (Jefferson Press, June 2007) ISBN: 0977808645. Available in bookstores and online. For more information, visit lauraresnick.com.

Unusual Promo Opportunity

From Tina Wainscott: The Bent Pages bookstore in Louisiana has a coffee shop, and the owner said she'd love to have authors' mugs to serve java in to give us a little extra advertising. I've known Molly, the owner, for years, and she is an absolute hoot. She's legit, not someone just out to save a few bucks on mugs. She's very pro-author, very supportive. So anyone who has boxes of mugs sitting around, send one or more to:

Kay Levine
Bent Pages
200 Glenhill Lane
Houma, LA 70360



Correction to May *NINK*: The start date for Eric Maisel's Writers' Support Group for Novelists, Inc. members only is **June 15**, not May 1. Cost is \$125/month. Contact Eric at ericmaisel@hotmail.com

Business Briefs

E-Reader Preview: While Amazon previews a new e-Reader to a very limited audience and declines to talk to the media about it, the reader was under discussion at the London Book Fair. Those who have seen it claim it has a sharp screen with better functionality than Sony. The expected release is soon and the machine will be interoperable with all PCs, handheld devices, and mobile phones. Titles for the player will come from Mobipocket that Amazon purchased two years ago. The cost of the reader is estimated at \$400.

Harlequin Finally Has Good News: The beginning of 2007 has shown a 5.1% increase in revenue. It's not just a good foreign exchange rate. The North American Division reports sales are up in series and single title, even with declines in the direct-mail business. Online sales were up as well. The German market continues to lose with some gains in Scandinavia.

AMS Continues to be Bought Out: With the North American distribution taken care of, American Marketing Services began shopping for buyers for Publishers Group West on the international scene. After court approval the lucky buyers will be Cathy Parson and Medwyn Hughes in the UK. (They currently operate Publishers Group UK.) Burmby Books Holdings will take on Bookwise International and Bookwise Asia from PGW's Australian distributor, Bookwise International.

— "Briefs" compiled by Sally Hawkes



WRITING is TAXING

The Truth about Travel for Research Purposes

BY DIANE O'BRIEN KELLY

I recently took a cruise with my family and decided—en route—to set my next novel on a cruise ship. My heroine might even eat the same cheese soufflé I enjoyed my second night at sea, drink a dozen or so of those fruity tropical drinks I tossed back while tanning on the pool deck (what were they called again?), maybe even have a fling with that well-tanned, perfectly proportioned cabana boy (boy, did he ever earn his tip!). But if I thought using these juicy tidbits in a novel would make the trip deductible for tax purposes, I'd really be tripping.

As writers, we are constantly on the lookout for interesting locales in which to set our novels and may come up with ideas while on a personal vacation. Unless the main purpose of our travel is for business, however, we can't deduct our travel expenses even if we happen to use information we gather on our trip in our writing.

Here's what the IRS says: If the primary purpose of your travel is for business reasons, the trip is deductible. If the primary purpose of your travel is for personal reasons, you cannot deduct the trip. Sounds simple, huh? Once you've proven that the primary purpose of your trip was for business purposes, you're done, right?

Not necessarily.

The IRS could still deny your expenses. The IRS allows you to deduct any expenses that are "ordinary and necessary" in your line of business. An *ordinary* expense is one that is common and accepted in a particular industry. A *necessary* expense is one that is "helpful and appropriate for your trade or business." (See IRS Publication 535 "Business Expenses.") Arguably, travel for research purposes is not only common and accepted in the writing industry, but such travel is also generally helpful and appropriate in describing a location with authenticity. Sometimes a writer just can't get a true feel for a setting without actually visiting the

location and taking in its unique sights, sounds, and scents. Then again, many writers can't afford the time or expense to visit every locale in which they might set their novels. Many writers simply take a trip to the library or spend a few hours in the bookstore's travel section to perform research about a setting, without ever visiting the actual place. Hmm, the waters are getting muddier now, like the Red River that runs through Shreveport, Louisiana, to which I recently took a tax-deductible trip. Fun place!

Even if the primary purpose of travel is for research, the IRS could debate whether the travel expenses were truly "ordinary and necessary." The good news is that the IRS generally won't second-guess a business owner unless the travel expenses are unusually lavish or extravagant, which may indicate personal enjoyment was a significant consideration for the traveler. As long as the amount of your expenses is reasonable and you can show that the main purpose of your travel was for your writing business, you should have nothing to worry about.

What if the primary purpose of a trip is for personal purposes, but you take side trips to particular destinations for research purposes? You're in luck! Even if the main purpose of your travel is a personal vacation, you can deduct the cost of specific activities on the trip if they relate to your business. For example, let's say my husband and I decide to take the kids to the Grand Canyon. I take a day trip south to Sedona, Arizona, because I've heard it's a mystical, romantic place with fantastic rock formations and I've considered setting a novel there. Although I find geology interesting on a personal level, the primary purpose of my trip to Sedona is to get a feel for the place for my book. While there, I take extensive notes about the colors of the rocks and their intriguing shapes, the artistic nature of the town, the unique Pink Jeeps loaded with sunburned vacationers. Disappointingly, as a tax advisor, I am immune to the ►

powers of Sedona's spiritual vortexes and have no out-of-body experiences. Come tax time, while the costs of travel to and from the Grand Canyon would not be deductible, the extra costs I incurred traveling from the Grand Canyon to Sedona would be, including the terrifying, nearly vertical ride up the rocks in the Pink Jeep and the cost of having my pants dry cleaned later.

What if you drag your spouse or a friend along to keep you company? Are their expenses deductible? Probably not. You can deduct expenses for another person's travel only if that person is your employee, has a bona fide business purpose for the travel, and would otherwise be entitled to deduct the expenses. Moreover, the fact that a spouse or friend accompanies you may make your travel appear to be more personal than business related. It's best to travel alone when it's safe and reasonable to do so.

A writer once asked whether she could deduct the costs of a trip she took for research purposes that turned out to be a bust. After traveling to the location, she realized the place was not an appropriate setting for her book after all. In that case, go for it. Just because the trip proved fruitless does not transform a true business trip into a personal one. Salesmen go on fruitless sales calls all the time, but just because they fail to drum up business doesn't mean they weren't on the job.

Another writer asked if there are any guidelines as to when the research has to be used. She'd originally planned on writing a book set in a particular place just after she returned from her trip, but you know how that goes. Another project insisted on being finished first and it might be years before

she'll actually get around to using the information she compiled on her travels. Although the fact that the information has not yet been used might cause the IRS to question whether the trip was truly for business purposes, the writer should still claim her deductions since she knows the trip had been primarily for research.

Not sure if the primary purpose of your trip is business or personal? Ask yourself this question: "Hey, gorgeous, would you take this trip if you didn't expect to use what you'll learn in a writing project?" If your answer is: "No. If not for my writing, I'd stay home," then the primary purpose of your travel is for business.

As always, it's important to keep good records of your expenses, so be sure to hang on to any receipts. You should also keep any notes, photos, or video that you take while on the trip, as well as any brochures, maps, etc. that you collect to prove you performed research during your travels.

Don't forget that only 50% of the cost of meals and entertainment while traveling is deductible. Be aware, too, that the allowable deduction for luxury water travel is subject to certain limits. The IRS has also established guidelines and limits for foreign travel. See IRS Publication 463 "Travel, Entertainment, Gift, and Car Expenses" for further details.

Got a tax issue? Email your question to Author@BlarneyBabe.com.

Diane O'Brien Kelly is a Certified Public Accountant, tax attorney, and humor writer from Texas. Visit her at BlarneyBabe.com.

Business Briefs

BBC Audiobooks Crosses the Pond: May sees the retail debut of BBC Audiobooks in the U.S and Canada with the first commercial recording of Alex Haley's *Roots*. This line, which departs from their institutional market, will have two imprints. BBC Audiobooks America will provide bestsellers from genre fiction, literary fiction, and selected non-fiction while BBC Radio will focus on dramatized readings from productions on BBC Radio 4. Perseus Distribution will be the distributor in North America with a combined list of 50 titles. Almost immediately upon their arrival, BBC Audiobooks America purchased Audio Partners Publishing Corporation. This adds 400 titles to their holdings. Audio Partners was the publisher of all unabridged Agatha Christie audio titles in the U.S. and Canada.

What's New in the Style of ARCs? Simon & Schuster doesn't want to get lost in the shuffle of new books. Chelsea Cain's new release, *Heartsick*, is being "packaged" in clear evidence bags for mailing. The cover art—red blotches on a white cover—represents bloody fingerprints. The ARCs for the first of the three-book Beauty Killer series is costing the publisher more than usual for ARC expenditures. The ARC package also includes a companion CD with a video of Cain giving a guided tour of Portland, OR (the book's setting) and excerpts of the book read by Dylan Baker. In addition, a website offers action video from the novel. More than 4,000 galleys will be given out at BEA. ▲



Writer: Beware

Martha Ivery: Anatomy of a Literary Scam

The events of 9/11, a tragedy for the rest of the USA, were an excuse bonanza for Martha—she claimed she'd been burned in the disaster, that she was in mourning for relatives who'd been killed, and that "dozens" of Press-Tige manuscripts had gone down with Flight 93.

BY VICTORIA STRAUSS

On January 9, 2007, literary scammer Martha Ivery reported to the Danbury Federal Correctional Institution for Women in Danbury, CT, to begin a 65-month prison term. Her incarceration closed the book on one of the most brazen scammers *Writer Beware* has ever tracked.

A high school dropout, Martha Ivery worked at a succession of low-paying service jobs, supplementing her income with acts of petty dishonesty. By the time she was in her 40s, she'd acquired an extensive rap sheet, with arrests for drug peddling, bad check kiting, and bigamy (she married her boyfriend so she wouldn't have to testify against him at his arson trial; unfortunately, she neglected to divorce her previous husband first).

Martha enjoyed writing stories, and even tried to get them published. In the early 1990s, an encounter with a fee-charging literary agent changed her life. Deciding that if he could get away with it, so could she, she opened a literary agency under the name Kelly O'Donnell, charging "intake" fees of \$350 and selling editing services at costs of up to \$1,200 (despite the fact that she could barely write a grammatical sentence). She wasn't above a bit of resume embellishment to impress potential clients, claiming that famous writers like R.L. Stine were really her under a pen name, or that she represented bestselling authors Dean Koontz and Stephen King.

Martha didn't make any sales. But she did place a few manuscripts with fraudulent vanity publisher

Commonwealth Publications, which paid kickbacks to ethics-challenged agents willing to funnel clients into Commonwealth's greedy maw. Around 1996, realizing that kickbacks were peanuts compared to what she could make if she ran her own publishing enterprise, she established Press-Tige Publishing, charging \$4,000 for publication and offering Press-Tige contracts to O'Donnell Agency authors once they'd racked up enough rejections from real publishers to become desperate. To create the illusion of separate businesses, she ran Press-Tige under her real name. Writers who dealt with both the agency and the publisher had no idea that Kelly O'Donnell and Martha Ivery were the same person.

Unfortunately for her future as a scam artist, Martha had a problem with performance. Manuscripts taken on by the agency were never sent to publishers. Paid-for editing was never completed. Books contracted for publication were never printed, or if printed, weren't marketed. Concerned clients were fobbed off with excuses, the more dramatic the better. Martha/Kelly had numerous heart attacks. She frequently got cancer. In both identities, she died several times (of course, that sort of thing is easy to screw up; one persistent author, shocked to learn from Kelly of Martha's tragic demise, was later somewhat taken aback when Martha phoned him). The events of 9/11, a tragedy for the rest of the USA, were an excuse bonanza for Martha—she claimed she'd been burned in the disaster, that she was in mourning for relatives who'd been killed, and that "dozens" of Press-Tige manuscripts had gone down with Flight 93.

If excuses didn't work, Martha tried intimidation—angry phone calls, abusive emails, threats of "blacklisting." Sometimes things got really ugly. One client who dared to complain got a visit from Child Welfare Services; it turned out that Martha had phoned in an anonymous tip that the woman was beating her children. Another client received a call from an FBI agent—really, one of Martha's relatives—who threatened him with investigation if he didn't shut up. My colleague Ann Crispin and I also became targets, especially as *Writer Beware's* ▶

warnings started to cut into Martha's business. She sent us death threats, made allegations on the Internet about our supposed criminal activities (the most outlandish was that we were terrorists in league with Osama bin Laden—not really a joke right after 9/11), and attempted to discredit us professionally, posting scurrilous reviews of our books on Amazon and starting Internet rumors that we'd plagiarized our novels.

Complaints about Martha in her various guises had been flooding in to Writer Beware from the moment we opened our doors in 1998. We quickly amassed substantial documentation, including proof that "Kelly O'Donnell" was an alias, and began to feel that just warning people wasn't enough. So we contacted the FBI. We were lucky enough to be referred to an agent who was genuinely interested in what we had to say (since literary fraud is a niche crime that doesn't threaten the general public, it's very difficult to get law enforcement to take it seriously). He told us that if we could document \$100,000 in losses, he might be able to open a case. This we did. In 2001, the FBI launched an official investigation into Martha's activities.

In mid-2002, dogged by the investigation and by growing public knowledge of her scammery (thanks in part to Writer Beware, but also to the public complaints of increasingly angry victims), Martha decided to fold Press-Tige by declaring bankruptcy. Always truth-challenged, she lied on her bankruptcy petition and perjured herself at two successive bankruptcy hearings.

Throughout the hearings, she continued to solicit business as a literary agent under a number of aliases, and also dabbled in real estate fraud. By December 2003, however, when the judge in the bankruptcy case signed an order to close admini-

stration of the estate, she had given up her attempts to make a living through scammery. At the time of her sentencing, she was working as a signal flagger with the New York State Department of Transportation.

The FBI's investigation culminated in September 2002 with a raid on the premises of the now-defunct Press-Tige. Many boxes of material were removed, but no arrest was made. A long and frustrating hiatus followed, in which the case was repeatedly shunted aside. But at last, in the fall of 2005, Martha was indicted on 15 counts of mail fraud, one count of credit card fraud, and one count of false sworn testimony in a bankruptcy proceeding. Nearly 300 victims were identified, with a total "take" of more than \$728,000. In December 2005, Martha pleaded guilty to all 17 counts, and in November 2006, she was finally sentenced. In addition to her 65 months of jail time, she'll serve three years' probation, and make restitution to her victims at the rate of 10% of everything she earns or \$100 per month, whichever is greater (given the restitution amount, this is more symbolic than anything else).

Writer Beware is hoping that Martha's case will serve as a precedent for the prosecution of other literary scammers. In the end, and in spite of her best efforts, Martha may wind up doing some good after all.

Victoria Strauss is the author of seven fantasy novels. She's also Vice-Chair of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's Writing Scams Committee, and maintains the Writer Beware literary scams warning website at WriterBeware.org. She welcomes visitors to her own website: VictoriaStrauss.com.

Conference Recap: SF Down, Fantasy Up

SUMMARIZED BY SUSAN GABLE

According to Betsy Mitchell, Editor-in-Chief at Del Rey, SF is not the healthiest market right now (not as healthy as it has been in the past) and her theory is that it's because science itself hasn't grabbed society's attention lately as it did in the past. She says the fantasy market is much rosier now, and she thinks that's a reflection of the audience's desire for escapism. The versatility of this market can be seen in areas such as Urban Fantasy and even paranormal romance.

Del Rey publishes two hardcovers, two trades, and four to five mass market paperbacks per month. They do a lot of media tie-in work (appr. 15% of their total), including Star Wars, TV shows, and the Halo game books. These contracts are generally work-for-hire, and she advises you should love the world that you'd like to write. (For more information about media tie-in writing, check out the International Association of Media Tie-In Writers: IAMTW.org.) Star Wars (insert your favorite universe here) blogs are another good place to spot opportunities for tie-in work. ▲

Asking for What You Want

In the mid-'80s, LaVyrle Spencer was in Tucson looking for people to go to dinner with. She invited a friend of mine, and, as an afterthought, me. She didn't really know who I was and referred to me as "that woman with three names." I felt anointed by greatness. To think that I and my three names would dine with the likes of LaVyrle.

At that point I'd published a few books for Harlequin. Although LaVyrle hadn't published a ton more than I had, her books were single title and talked about in all romance circles. She was Big Medicine. She proved it to me that night by announcing that in five years she'd be on the *New York Times* list.

And by damn, she was.

A few years and many more Harlequins later, I was sitting in a Ninc conference roundtable discussion monitored by Catherine Coulter. She asked, "Who can tell me where you want to be in five years?" God knows why I shoved my hand in the air, but I'm like that. A participator.

Catherine pounced. "Okay, Thompson, where do you want to be in five years?"

"Still selling."

I know. Wrong answer. Pathetic, especially after LaVyrle had demonstrated the right answer. But the sad truth is that I couldn't imagine myself on the *NYT* list. I didn't have mainstream stories churning in my brain clamoring to be turned loose on an eager world.

The goal of "still selling" stayed good enough for more years than I care to admit. Part of it was money. With two kids who had the maddening habit of outgrowing their clothes and who occasionally demonstrated enough intelligence to warrant college educations, we needed the money. I knew that I'd never have an *NYT* book writing for category romance, but I wouldn't risk financial disaster, either. Taking time to write a breakout book on spec could cost me some bucks, bucks I might never recover.

Or maybe that was a convenient excuse for being a coward. Who knows? I do know my life was simpler, partly because I'd never had to bother with an agent. I managed my career for sixteen years without one.

No telling what finally nudged my sleepy ambition. The kids finished college, which might have been part

of it. Maybe glancing around at some of the younger writers, who all seemed to be trying to break into mainstream, gave me a clue I was about to be left in the dust.

Left in the dust was exactly how I began to feel, come to think of it, and that's not a position I favor. Trudging along in step with the rest of the crowd works for me, but left in the dust smacks of failure. Unacceptable.

I still had no mainstream stories churning in my brain, so I hired an agent, figuring if I finally had to pay 15%, that would stick in my craw and I'd come up with a mainstream idea. Which I did. *Nerd in Shining Armor* dropped out of the sky, almost literally, and into my lap. Who knew it worked like that?

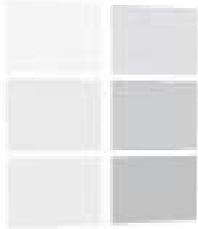
When the story sold for halfway decent money, I hit the mother lode of ambition. I was no longer content to break into mainstream and create a respectable single title career. I wanted an *NYT* bestseller. Fortunately, Carly Phillips had shown me how I could do that with Kelly Ripa's book club.

Was it as simple as finally saying *I want*? The odds of my getting on that show were terrible, but get on it I did. Almost 20 years after hearing LaVyrle proclaim her intention of becoming an *NYT* bestseller, I had become one, myself.

And guess what? It's not enough. I naively thought it would be. I blithely told people that after having such a long and satisfying category career, this *NYT* experience with *Nerd in Shining Armor* would be icing on the cake. It wasn't. It turned out to be a whole other kind of dessert, and I've developed a taste for it.

Four years and seven books after the "nerd" series began, it's run its course, so I'm off to do something different, a paranormal series. Do I want to hit the *NYT* with this series? You betcha. And I'm putting myself out there to make that happen with appearances, promo packets, whatever I think it will take.

So, Catherine, I can finally tell you where I want to be in five years. At the top of the *NYT* list. There, I've said it. I've announced an ambition that would have made me blush ten years ago. I may not get there. But I definitely won't get there unless I say, loud and clear, *I want*. ▲



Open A New Window

CREATING & RECOGNIZING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Novelists Inc.'08 in NYC

March 28-30, 2008 • Affinia Manhattan

Welcome to insanity...a monthly column dedicated to Promoting Attendance in NYC in 2008, because if you don't come, Pat McLaughlin and Laura Resnick will send you nasty emails for the next five years. (I made that up, but I wouldn't put it past them.)

Do you know that feeling that engulfs you when your hot air balloon starts losing air and lands in the middle of a subdivision on top of a bulldozer having just missed hitting the nasty nasty electrical wires by inches? No? Well I do, intimately, since it happened to me on a video shoot in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Trust me...it's a combination of downright terror followed by a surge of energy when you fall out of the basket and embrace terra firma. You end up with a determination to succeed—or at least thankful that you walked away from the experience. That's the feeling I have as the Ninc Conference Coordinator for 2008 in NYC.

Luckily, we are assembling a great team and we need more of you to join us. Let me introduce you to some of our key members so far:

Holly Jacobs, Assistant Coordinator, cheerleader, motivator, bull-dog/bounty hunter-type tracker of details and finally Conference Vocalist singing the "New York, Center of the Universe Song."

Dianne Despain, Program Director, responsible for creating programs that thrill and challenge everyone's ideas of today's entertainment (yes, this includes publishing) while satisfying expectations at the same time.

Melinda Haynes, Nite-Owl Program Director, responsible for presenting topics that will interest you and inspire you at the same time, while not putting you to sleep before you get back to your hotel room.

Susan Gable, Registrar, graciously reprising her role from San Diego, mainly because I plied her with wine then asked in front of witnesses if she would handle Conference registration.

We have more people in place but need more volunteers. Trust me, you'll enjoy it. (Don't you just love those annoying people who say-Trust Me!) That wraps it up for this month. Now as long as I don't see a hot-air balloon with my name on it before the conference, I'll be okay.

— ***Lynn Miller***

PS. Did I mention that all complaints must go to Holly? What good is it having an assistant if you can't dump on her?

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