

# N I N C

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## DECLUTTERING THE WRITER'S LIFE

BY CIJI WARE

*This article has been adapted for NINC from excerpts originally published in AARP The Magazine. All rights reserved. This material may not be reproduced without permission from the author.*

A hallowed tradition occurs each spring and summer, when we working writers start kidding ourselves. We vow that *this* will be the year we keep the one resolution that invariably appears on our personal to-do list: Clean out the clutter in our home offices and related closets, bookshelves, storage cabinets, and wherever else we've stashed the flotsam and jetsam of scores of ongoing or stillborn writing projects.

Even worse, we can't even bear to think of objects unrelated to our writing life that may be stashed under beds, in the attic, or in the borrowed storage space in a relative's garage.

If it makes my fellow and sister writers feel any better, I freely admit it: I'm a recovering clutterbug myself, and the subjects of clutter and decluttering are close to my heart.

The dilemma of what to do about personal items that could produce tears or rage if anyone attempted to make me give them up resulted, in 2007, in my second nonfiction book, *Rightsizing Your Life: Simplifying Your Surroundings While Keeping What Matters Most*. Thanks to excerpts published in *AARP, The Magazine* at the beginning of this year, I suddenly found myself declared the "Decluttering Queen."

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Trust me, I am not one of those amazing writers with dozens of books under my belt, but I've been a working journalist, broadcaster, and nonfiction writer, as well as the author of five historical novels (currently being reissued in trade paperback from Sourcebooks Landmark), and a new historical, *A Race to Splendor*, due out in April, 2011, to coincide with the 105th anniversary of the disastrous San Francisco earthquake and fire.

Given that I've been a published writer for nearly three decades now—and due to the frenzy of activity the last two or three years—I obviously have the file boxes and research folders to prove that I can be as messy and disorganized as any other member of NINC! But the difference is: now I know that decluttering is *not* rocket science, and all of us writers can *Continued on page 4* ▶

## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

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Complete committee member listings  
are available on the website:

<http://www.ninc.com>

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<http://www.Ninc.com>

Address changes may be made on the  
website.

For members without Internet access,  
send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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permission.

## 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: JoAnn Grote  
PO Box 5, Le Sueur, MN 56058  
jaghi@rconnect.com

### New Applicants:

Lavinia Klein, aka Lavinia Kent, Washington, DC  
Sherri Browning Erwin, Longmeadow, MA  
Judy Fitzwater, Germantown, MD

### New Member:

Karen Foley, Groveland, MA  
Kimberly Llewellyn, Safety Harbor, FL  
Gerri Russell, Bellevue, WA

### Ninc has room to grow...

Recommend membership to *your* colleagues.  
Prospective members may apply online at  
<http://www.Ninc.com>.

Refer members at Ninc.com. Go to Members Only,  
"Member Services" and click  
"Refer a New Member to Ninc."  
Take Ninc brochures to conferences.  
Email Pari Taichert with your mailing address and  
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### Ninc Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

# Something to Consider ...

Those of you on the Ninlink have already read the letter I posted from Ursula Le Guin about the National Writers Union, but because not all of our members are on the Link, I wanted them to have access to it as well. So I'm reprinting it here. My own comments follow.

May 7, 2010

Dear Fellow Writer:

I first sent this letter to authors who signed my petition to the judge in the Google Book Settlement case. I asked them to join the National Writers Union, which opposed the Settlement from the start as part of its steadfast support of writers' rights. Kay Hooper asked me to send it on to the members of Novelists, Inc., and I'm very glad to do so.

The effort to keep Google from mass copyright violation is at a particularly frustrating moment—we don't even know if Judge Chin is going to make a ruling, since he's being moved to a different judgeship. I find it all too easy to think there really isn't much use trying to do anything. It's hard to stand up against a colossus like Google, which has succeeded in confusing everybody (including, I believe, itself) about the nature of copyright, the definition of 'orphan,' the responsibility of libraries, the right of the Authors Guild to make a class action suit for all authors, and so on. Confused or not, Google is not going to stop grabbing copyrighted material without permission until we stop it.

The story of David and Goliath has given me some comfort in the circumstances. (Especially since David was not only a little guy, but a poet.)

The Union's problem is that it is a very little guy. To act effectively in our own interest, writers need an organization that genuinely represents us, hears what we need, listens to member input, and acts on it. That is the National Writers Union. But it hasn't enough members to have the clout it needs.

Your membership gives the Union and yourself that much more strength, that much more hope to resist coercion, act rightly, see justice done.

Every member is a writer. Every member has a voice in policy and decision-making. You can be as active or as quiet as you please—get into the fray, or just do your work and let the union give you support. Dues are sliding-scale, and not backbreaking. The Union offers free professional help negotiating contracts and filing grievances against publishers who cheat; online groups discussing such issues as e-publishing, agents, promotion, and the GBS; a network of member homes where a member traveling on book promotion can stay; and information and an open forum in the NWU letter. And NWU as a member of UAW and AFL-CIO has access to scholarships, mortgage, and legal services.

You can join online by going to <http://www.nwu.org>. Please do. Unlikely as it may seem, "I do believe that we will overcome some day." Let's bring that day closer.

Yours truly,  
Ursula Le Guin

For the record, I myself have had a change of heart about the whole Google settlement struggle. Though initially shrugging and deciding that "opting in" was probably better than the alternative, I have since read enough and thought enough about what was going on to decide that I prefer to be on the side of those who firmly believe Google

neither understands nor respects our intellectual property rights, and that this “settlement” idea is a bad one.

Now, that's me, my opinion, and my decision. Every

writer who cares about the issues is going to have to decide for themselves what they want to do—or not do—about the situation.

I belong to the Author's Guild, but in this instance I believe they've chosen a short-term goal (compensating, however poorly, authors whose work has been appropriated by Google) over the long-term goal of protecting copyright, intellectual property rights, and the best interests of writers.

Again, that's my view, my opinion.

It's in this spirit that I signed Ms. Le Guin's petition, and in that spirit that I joined the National Writers Union. Now, we've talked a lot on the Ninlink about writers making hard choices when it comes to spending their membership dollars wisely; many of our members have been forced by economic realities and other reasons to curtail the number of writers groups to which they belong. Naturally, I would hate to lose a member to another group.

But to those of you who are very concerned with the future of our industry, most especially the dangers posed by behemoths like Google, who have shown little or no respect for our rights to control our intellectual property, joining the NWU should be something you consider.

Which is why I was more than happy to pass along Ms. Le Guin's letter to our membership. I felt it my responsibility to do so.

— Kay Hooper

# Decluttering

*Continued from page 1* ▶ “Just Do It!” when, periodically, it comes to restoring a bit of sanity, serenity, and order to our lives—that is, with a little help and guidance.

## THE THINGS IN OUR LIVES

Several years ago, my husband and I made a major move from 4,000 square feet of living space in Southern California to a sparse 1,200 in the compact city of San Francisco. Much of the excess “stuff” I was able to dispatch without a qualm, but certain items hit me hard—the chair I had rocked my infant son in (he's now 38); the 26 cartons of radio scripts from 17 years covering health and lifestyle topics for ABC in Los Angeles; the reams of research for the 18th- and 19th-century historicals I've turned out since the 1980s.

Here's the deal: we all have cherished possessions that are freighted with meaning, and, until we *understand* what that meaning is, we resist dealing with the messes that surround us. Remembrance of things past can be a real deterrent to moving forward. So can what I call the “Future Syndrome,” which plagues every writer I know. Translated? It's the “I might need this again sometime” curse.

But once we find a way to clear out what is *no longer relevant to our lives*—whether that is a drawer full of folders, piles of clippings, objects, activities, or even people—we open a path to look at all the parts of our lives and determine what matters to us *now*, not in the past or in the future.

## WHY DO WE SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF?

So how do we let go of all the objects large and small that, at heart, are fairly irrelevant in the grand scheme of things?

The most effective way, in my experience, is to face the emotional and practical aspects of the problem at the same time. That approach worked well a few years ago when I was helping a childhood friend—who is also a newsletter writer—organize her new, much smaller home. Before we could even get to her files, she greeted me clutching a shoebox full of shoulder pads from the 1980s, squeezed into a nest of even larger ones from the 1940s.

“Just tell me the reason you don't want to give them up,” I asked, a little frustrated that she was being so stubborn about used shoulder pads!

“The big shoulder pads were my mother’s,” she replied, her lip quivering slightly. (Her mom, a Depression-era baby, had imbued her daughter with a “Save everything” philosophy.) “And the other ones are mine from when I had that great job with Crown Zellerbach,” she admitted.

Once she understood that the shoulder pads had prompted *emotions* linked to her past and recognized that—and of themselves, they weren’t useful anymore and were taking up room better used in a small studio space she hoped to create—she could then keep a token pair and let the rest go.

## **BUT THAT SIDEBORD BELONGED TO DEAR AUNT HARRIET!**

The same approach can apply to family items highly charged with meaning, but that are preventing you from turning your unused dining room or basement or attic space or stair landing into a more workable home office. And don’t get me started on those shelves chock-a-block with books signed by authors you don’t know well and whose work you don’t particularly admire—the very shelves that could be used to set up files for projects that could turn into your next bestseller.

For me, the litmus test about whether to keep or toss (or recycle) any material object in my personal environment is: do I love it? Do I use it in the life I’m living *now*?

Now that our son is married and our big dog Chelsea has gone to doggy heaven—our most recent move to an 1,100-square-foot seaside cottage resulted in my office suddenly shrinking into an armoire with a drop-down desk in our multi-purpose dining room. That, plus a few bookshelves lining the hallway, is all the space I have. Period.

Talk about your drastic domestic downsizing and decluttering! But I can honestly say I love my tidy, organized working space. To my amazement, I have been far more productive in these simplified surroundings, and have pared my life down to only what I use and love. Another big bonus? Now I can actually *find* things. Happily, most of the research and reference material I was forced to jettison I can locate online in a nanosecond.

## **WHERE AND HOW TO START**

Okay, so perhaps you’re not ready to clean out your house or office to the drastic degree that I was. But take heart, there are less radical ways to begin the decluttering process.

First, you have to take your temperature: how miserable does it make you to be surrounded by clutter and mess? If you’re okay with it, stop reading this article. No one, least of all your sister writer, Ciji, is a member of the Decluttering Police.

But if you’d like to try to sort out the material things that are bugging you and slowing you down, set aside a firm, two-hour window each week for the next couple of months devoted to the task of tackling one, small area at a time that you’d like to straighten out.

Then start in—drawer by drawer, corner by corner, room by room. Tell yourself that old adage: Rome wasn’t built in a day, and unless you’re forced by an unexpected need to move to other living quarters, pronto—you probably will have a better chance of succeeding in decluttering if you assign yourself one “doable” task at a time. Another tip is to get yourself a “Decluttering Buddy,” and alternate working through the areas in your two homes that you want to sort through and tidy up.

## **BUT WHAT ABOUT MY CRANKY SPOUSE?**

Many writers I’ve talked to about the problem of dealing with clutter insist it’s the *other* people in their lives that have put road blocks in front of a more simplified way of living: housemates, house guests, uncooperative “significant others,” as well as offspring who prefer to live like piglets.

My answer is channeled through the words of my sainted late mother, “Well, dear, just stick to your own knitting and clean up your room!” In other words, set an example by—at least—keeping your own areas tidy and functioning.

However, if your plans to declutter unavoidably involve others, I found that the “Dot System” can be an effective tool to steer clear of disputes when tackling a room that other members of the family also inhabit. On a declared “Declutter Day,” each person gets to stick white adhesive dots on objects they cherish and use daily.

From white dots, hand out some green dots for items used weekly. Yellow dots are for objects touched in the past month; red, for those handled only once in the past year.

Use this system as a visual guide for making your decisions, but here’s the rule of thumb: if there’s an item with *no* dot, quietly get rid of it by recycling, giving it away, or sending it to the trash. For objects with red dots, you should probably say goodbye to them, but allow family members weigh in first and make his or her best case to declare ▶

a particular item a “keeper”—and it better be good!

Once you’ve made decisions about the other no-dot stuff—be tough and start *tossing*!

## GET IT OUTTA THE HOUSE!

Label sturdy cartons or large bags “Trash, Keep, Donate, Gift, Recycle, Sell, Repair,” and—my personal favorite—“Don’t-Have-A-Clue-For-Now.” The last is for items that would halt the decluttering process if you had to debate them. (I’m thinking of my husband’s too-tight Naval uniform, or my own collection of paperback First Editions—most of which are not very valuable and, because of cheap paper, are virtually disintegrating). Within a few days, one of you will usually come up with a solution. (He kept the fancy jacket for costume parties in our seaside town; the pants went to Goodwill; and 80 percent of my paperbacks went to our Friends of the Library).

As you are making your decisions, use clear plastic bags when it’s important to see what’s inside, so you won’t throw out good things by accident. Then, *immediately*, take the rejects to their final destinations by putting them in the trunk of your car, or calling the appropriate person or organization to come get them from your front step or holding area *outside* your home. If you leave those bags or cartons close at hand, you or someone else is likely to start pawing through and “retrieving.” Not good.

## DECLUTTERING NIRVANA

What you will gradually discover, as you begin to declutter the space around you, is that *as* your personal ecosystem changes (and especially the space devoted to your writing), your choices begin to broaden. Life feels more manageable, and your surroundings become better suited to who you are *now*—and what you’re aiming for in the future.

The process of purging and paring down was one of my family’s most liberating experiences. When the unneeded possessions—especially the piles of stuff in my office—were gone, I felt that we had cleared space not only in our house, but in our lives.

*In July and August: Ciji tackles the specifics of Big Paper—dealing with the avalanche of the white stuff that’s burying us writers—along with advice on scanning important documents, as well as suggestions for coping with an excess of “collections” (everything from plastic bookmarks to priceless art), books, photos, and dead electronics.*

*Ciji Ware is a multi-published fiction and nonfiction author, Emmy-award winning television and radio broadcaster, professional speaker, and the first woman graduate of Harvard College to serve as President of the Harvard Alumni Association. For more on Ware’s fiction/nonfiction career and to see the new Sourcebooks Landmark covers of her five reissued historicals as well as her new novel, go to <http://www.cijiware.com>*

*Read a free chapter from Ware’s Rightsizing Your Life and learn about her instructional CD on <http://www.rightsizingyourlife.com>, or check out [www.aarp.org/decluttering](http://www.aarp.org/decluttering) for more decluttering tips.*

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## Business Briefs

Compiled by Sally Hawkes

### Becoming Ballantine Bantam Dell

Random House’s reorganization continues with Ballantine and Bantam Dell becoming a single group. Libby McGuire will be the senior vice president and publisher. Nita Taublib is leaving. Jennifer Hershey, from RH, will be the new group’s editor-in-chief, with Linda Marrow and Kate Miciak working for her. Hershey will still work as editor-at-large for RH. Scott Shannon (Del Rey/Spectra) will oversee BBD mass market, and Jane von Meherne will helm trade paperbacks.

### New Short Fiction “Launch”

A digital imprint will be coming from Orbit at Hachette. The SF/fantasy program hopes to stimulate a market that has disappeared with few print publications available. No word count has been announced.





## Let's Talk Workshops ... and Stuff.

BY KASEY MICHAELS, CONFERENCE CHAIR

The first day of *Brainstorming On The Beach* is going to be pretty intensive. (One of the reasons we're ratcheting back for the remainder of the conference; we'll need the rest and time to digest everything we've learned.)

We're going to begin at nine o'clock Thursday morning, October 7, with two morning sessions, a break for lunch, and then two more sessions in the afternoon. You don't want to miss any of them!

We're hoping for four to six panelists sitting comfortably up front during each session, all of them asked a prepared jump-off question—and then we will all sit back to hear the thoughts of both an agent and a publisher as to, oh, contract language concerning author permissions and grant of rights in the face of all this new technology.

Yes. We ask both of them; actually, the question is directed to everyone on that particular panel. And they answer, they discuss. Together; talking about the same thing at the same time, each viewing the question and the inherent difficulties and/or benefits from their own perspectives. Maybe a literary attorney on the panel will step in with another way of looking at that contract language, one of our member authors will point out a possible problem at his/her end, or someone will raise a related question from the floor.

And we're off! Real discussion, in real time. From there, we'll go where the discussions take us, where the ideas lead us, and we're all—Ninc members and other attendees—invited to raise questions and share information from the floor.

At the end of the day, we're even turning the room over to the industry types, to give them some time together, sans authors, to discuss the day amongst themselves before dinner.

Already signed up to participate in the discussion:

Christopher Kenneally, Copyright Clearance Center and [beyondthebook.com](http://beyondthebook.com)

Donna Hayes, Publisher and CEO, Harlequin Enterprises, Ltd.

Alan Kaufman, Literary Attorney

Writers House, represented by Al Zuckerman, Simon Lipskar, or Jodi Reamer, Esq.

Eileen Fallon, Literary Agent

Brian O'Leary, Founder, Magellan Media Partners

J. A. Konrath, Author, Blogger

Lou Aronica, Publisher, The Story Plant

Joan Schulhafer, Publishing and Media Consulting

Kay Hooper, *NYT* Bestselling Author and Ninc President

... and more!

Join these publishing professionals in Florida, share your expertise and questions and ideas as, together, we look to the future of publishing! ▶

## And two reminders:

For a fee, *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing* is open to non-Ninc published writers, perhaps someone you know who hasn't quite qualified for Ninc membership as yet. Tell your writer friends to check out the website for details on the One-day Program Registration: <http://ninc.com/conferences/2010/index.asp> And if they do already qualify for Ninc membership—ask them what the heck they're waiting for—they need to join!

Both the *Future of Publishing* day and indeed *the entire conference* (other than Night Owls) are open and without charge for all industry professionals. Same drill—direct them to the above website page, where they can register as Industry Guests.



Oh, and if you haven't as yet registered, just click on this nifty artwork and reserve your spot at the conference. Then add the badge to your website, your Facebook page, your Twitter page, your emails, etc.

We're doing our best to keep the remaining workshops (Friday, Saturday, Sunday-until-noon) to morning workshops only because, you know, we've got that beach out there, and those warm Gulf waters, waiting for us.

Because the focus is brainstorming, Dr. D.P. Lyle is going to present workshops on the Psychology of Character Motivation, The Autopsy of a Thriller, and Plotting the Perfect Murder. Get the ol' brains pumping!

Our own Melinda Haynes, M.Ed., CH, who is a licensed professional in this stuff (Ninc has so much talent!) will be showing us how to relax, de-stress, and even self-hypnotize ourselves into the proper mood for creativity to flow like never before.

Marsha Zinberg, Harlequin Enterprises Executive Editor in charge of Feature and Custom Publishing, is going to work with us, brainstorming ideas and methods for multi-author projects, single-author trilogies, or other limited series, and give us the scoop on what works and what traditionally fails to pique reader (and editor) interest. We're going to bat around ideas, see where they lead us—and they might lead us to collaborative efforts with other Ninc members being talked about in the beach bars or while paddling around in the pools ... and to contracts down the road!

Brian O'Leary has done some fascinating research on book piracy, its effects on publishers and (face it, they're easier to track) bestselling authors. His conclusions are fascinating, and a little surprising. Come listen to Brian, and then share with him your own experiences with pirated books. After all, at the end of the day, it's the guy on the ground (the struggling career author) who is most concerned with how piracy affects his or her bottom line, and how to protect his or her interests in the future.

There will, of course, be our members-only Night Owl sessions on Thursday and Friday evenings. Want to learn how to set up a nifty spreadsheet system for tracking your royalties? That's just one of the Night Owls already planned for Florida. Melinda Haynes, Night Owl Director, will be telling us more in the next issue of *Nink*.

## Now for the Other Stuff:



We still aren't quite sure how it happened, but it seems we're going to have a belly dancing lesson, given by our own Karen Tintori Katz, Program Chair. Karen says to bring your *zills* if you have them (and I'm figuring you'd know it if you do—if you don't, google *zills*, if you feel you're missing out). There's no rule about the lesson not being coed, and if you've brought a spouse, child, friend with you—bring him or her along to the lesson!

We're working on gathering a Ninc band. (And if we don't have a drummer by the time of this issue, *please speak up!*) We've got lead singers and back-up vocals, guitars, keyboards, and a lot of enthusiasm, but we're lost without a drummer. If this works out, it should make for fun on Saturday night!

We're still investigating a possible Yoga class. (Several bestselling authors swear Yoga is the way to better creativity.) We already know we've got access to personal beach cabanas, paddleboats, and miniature golf. Not to mention all that lovely sand and warm Gulf out there.

We'll have a collage center open all day, every day. Bring your own supplies, use some of ours, and have a ball tapping into yet another possible way to brainstorm your characters and plot.

We're working on having a presentation of different e-reading devices, or at the very least, a time and place for members to bring their different e-reading devices and pass them around, talk tech and different roads to uploading backlog, and new work for fun and profit.

And I'm writing this April 29, so who knows what else we'll have lined up by the time you get this newsletter! ▶▶▶



## So here you go, one more time:

October 7 –10, 2010

Tradewinds Island Grand, St. Pete Beach, Florida

Room Rate: \$129 plus tax

<http://www.tradewindsresort.com/properties/island-grand.aspx>

Conference fee (includes *Brainstorming: The Future of Publishing*): \$255. EZ payment plan: three payments of \$85 between now and July 31. Ninc keeps its conference fees low, because we know writers need a quality conference and reasonable costs.

Sign up today, keep checking Ninlink and the website for additions to the list of invited speakers and workshop topics. Come to Florida in October, and be a part of this groundbreaking and fun conference.

Bring your questions, your imagination, and your suntan oil!



# IS "KINDLING" FOR YOU?

BY CJ LYONS

The publishing industry is in an era of upheaval, forcing many authors to flex their entrepreneurial muscles, searching for new avenues of income and ways to keep their books in the public's eye.

One way of doing this is to self e-publish your backlist or other books to which you hold the rights. With more and more readers embracing e-books (over a quarter of a million books were downloaded to iPads in the first weekend they were available) and e-books becoming the fastest-growing segment of publishing, the idea of cutting out the middle-men and keeping profits for ourselves is tempting.

Here are a few things to think about before walking the path of electronic self-publication:

## Why self e-publish?

Like many authors, once I was firmly established with NYC publishers, I never thought about e-publishing or self-publishing, much less doing both!

But I found myself with four manuscripts that had all previously been in the hands of NYC publishers, but that for a variety of reasons, never made it to publication. Then I saw a blog by multi-published thriller author JA Konrath discussing his own experiment with electronic self-publishing. His argument was logical, the numbers impressive, but I was still skeptical.

I wanted these books to find an audience, but I didn't want to tie them to contracts I might later regret, especially as these four novels were all romantic suspense/thrillers and my career is moving to more mainstream suspense/thriller. So, I decided to perform my own self-publishing experiment.

I realized that I could use these books as promotional products as well as money-makers. Because I was in control of when they were released, how long they were available, and what their price was, I had a greater freedom than I do with my traditionally published works.

This turned out to be an unexpected bonus as, by the time I had them formatted and ready for publication, it was December, 2009. Then a few weeks later the earthquake in Haiti hit. Because I'm a pediatric ER doctor as well as a thriller novelist, I wanted to raise money for Doctors Without Borders.

What better way than using my experimental self-epubbed books?

I sent out a newsletter and posted on my website and a few blogs that I was donating my proceeds of my Kindle sales for the month of February to DWB. I chose the Kindle format simply because it is exceptionally easy to track Kindle sales on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis through my Amazon's DTP (digital text platform) account.

What I discovered was: Kindle readers read...a lot! I ended up raising over \$1,600 for DWB, which translated to almost 1,700 books sold in one month on Kindle. ▶

## Possible Pitfalls

Anyone deciding to self-publish should have a good grasp of their target audience. You want to build an audience that will stay with you and help spread the word of your books—and that means making a promise to always deliver a high-quality read.

Konrath agrees. “E-books are a perfect place to experiment and try new things, and since you own your rights, you aren’t tied down to any particular genre, and you can always delete something that isn’t working.

“But whatever you put on Kindle should be perfect. No errors, well-edited, great covers, perfectly formatted. This should be your best work, presented in the best way possible.”

In other words, just as in mainstream publishing, self e-publishing is still all about the reader. It’s not about clearing your closet of dusty manuscripts just because you can. Unless you plan on giving your work away for free, your goal is to attract paying customers. Which means the books you self e-publish need to be just as good as any book a NYC publisher is selling.

If you have a backlist that you own the rights to, they’ve already been professionally edited, so you’re good to go. Do be aware that publishers own the cover art, so you’ll need to create a new cover for your e-book.

If you’re planning to publish a book that hasn’t been previously published, make certain it is professionally edited. The four books I chose for my experiment were all edited prior to my self-publication—three by NYC editors (before their road to publication went astray) and one by a professional freelance editor. Do not rely solely on your critique partners or your Great Aunt Martha who gushes to her bridge club about your writing!

Remember, not only are you competing against *NYT* bestsellers, you’re also selling a product to a consumer. If you expect to win their hard-earned money—and more importantly, their time, attention, and *future* sales loyalty—then you need to create a worthy product.

When using a previously unpublished book, you’ll want to register a copyright (I did all four in one electronic batch using the US Copyright office’s online registration) and include a copyright notice in the front of your book. You may also want to purchase an ISBN number (this will allow you to better track your sales). More on this below.

## The Nuts and Bolts

Being a cyber-klutz, I thought this would be the most difficult part of self e-publishing, but it actually was quite easy (if a bit tedious and time-consuming).

All the major e-pub sites have guidelines available. All you need to do is to follow them.

The major e-pub sites that I used initially were: Amazon, Scribd, and Smashwords. I also loaded my books onto Lulu after several readers requested an avenue where they could purchase print copies. (Note: because books printed by POD technology are more expensive, I kept the price on the print books as low as I could, so I essentially make no profit from these sales; they’re more to generate goodwill.)

Step one: create an account at the sites you’ll be using. Through this account you’ll upload your books, track sales, make any revisions to your final product, and, at some sites, interact with customers.

Step two: read each site’s guide to formatting and follow it closely. For all the sites I worked with, this basically comes down to stripping all formatting from a Word doc of your manuscript and then exporting it in the format the e-publishing site requires. I found the Smashwords guide to be very thorough and in-depth with a lot of trouble-shooting tips, so I started there, transforming my Word doc to a document suitable for Smashwords and then simply exported it as a HTML file for uploading to Amazon.

This step is the most time-consuming because you need to go through every line of the manuscript ensuring that no errant formatting remains behind and that the resulting manuscript is readable.

Step three is almost as equally tiresome as step two. You need to upload the re-formatted manuscript to each site and proofread it (yes, again!) to ensure that nothing is lost in translation.

Step four: add cover art, a description, tags, and set a price. This is where using more than one platform comes in handy. I started by publishing my books on Smashwords because, if they are qualified for Smashword’s Premium Catalogue, then they’ll be distributed to a variety of channels including the Sony, Barnes and Noble, iBooks, and if you want, Amazon Kindle stores. You can also inexpensively purchase an ISBN for each book. Smashwords also has an easy-to-use coupon generator, which is perfect if you’re trying to target certain groups and want to measure your success.

I preferred to distribute to all of the channels through Smashwords, except Kindle—that I did myself. I liked being able to control the Kindle channel myself, because I knew it would be the one with the most sales.

Step five: hit publish and you’re done!

## What about the money?

Some authors may choose to give their work away for free in order to gain new readers or as a promotion tied to other books. But most of us will be hoping to earn some income from our e-published books.

Konrath believes that the price point you set is the key. “I truly believe the secret to big sales is a low price point. At \$1.99 per download, the author is earning 70 cents. That’s more than an author earns on a \$6.99 paperback sale. Make your books impulse purchases by keeping the cost low.”

I did my own experiment, setting various price points for my four novels. The first, *Nerves of Steel*, is a romantic suspense that includes a cover quote from Sandra Brown as well as endorsements from a dozen NYT bestsellers, so I set it at the highest, \$3.99.

The next two books, *Chasing Shadows* and *Lost In Shadows*, were romantic thrillers, the first two of a series, and were a bit shorter in length than my other two novels, only around 80,000 words. I priced them at \$2.99.

The last novel, *Borrowed Time*, was the oldest manuscript of the group, and I priced it at \$1.99.

I wanted slightly higher price points than Konrath had recommended because I thought it would be nice to have special “sales” tied to my traditionally published releases in the future.

My results? In the first week, with no advertising or promotion, the most expensive, *Nerves of Steel*, sold 42 copies on Amazon and four on Smashwords.

*Chasing Shadows* sold 85 copies on Amazon and 10 on Smashwords. The second book in the Shadows Op series, *Lost in Shadows*, sold 49 copies on Amazon and nine on Smashwords.

And the least expensive of the four, *Borrowed Time*, sold 37 copies on Amazon and four on Smashwords.

Each of the books sold three trade paper copies on Lulu and no copies of any of the books has been sold via Scribd. Even though the Smashword sales lag behind Amazon’s, I’ll continue to use them because of the ability to distribute to the other major e-stores such as Apple.

After that first week, when I began to advertise my program to raise money for Doctors Without Borders, my sales increased dramatically to an average of about 50-55 sales a day on Amazon alone.

It’s not a huge amount of money, but I’m on track to make more in a year than I would if I took any of the offers from NYC publishers that I’d received for these particular manuscripts. All with no expenses incurred other than my time and a few dollars for the copyright, ISBNs, and the stock art I used in the cover design.

As Konrath says, “E-books aren’t a substitute for print books. Your results may vary. But this is a very exciting time to be an author. It’s free to post books on Kindle. For the first time in history, we can potentially reach a wide readership, all by ourselves.

“Just make sure you’re giving those readers something they’ll enjoy.”

I firmly agree. Self e-publishing has its place in an author’s career path, whether to keep a backlist alive, to try new genres and markets, to use as a promotional tool in conjunction with traditionally published books, or to generate a little income on the side.

## Resources:

JA Konrath’s blog, A Newbie’s Guide to Publishing

<http://jakonrath.blogspot.com/2009/10/kindle-numbers-traditional-publishing.html>

US Government Copyright Office — <http://www.copyright.gov/register/>

Amazon’s Digital Text Platform — <http://dtp.amazon.com>

Scribd — <http://www.scribd.com>

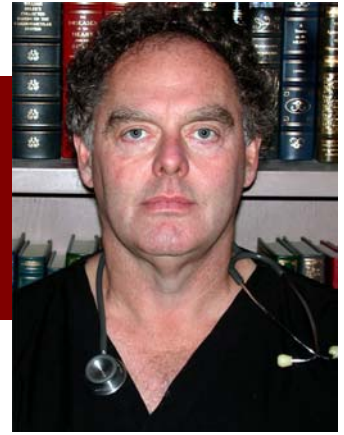
Smashwords — <http://www.smashwords.com>

Lulu — <http://www.lulu.com>

*As a pediatric ER doctor, CJ Lyons has lived the life she writes about. In addition to being an award-winning medical suspense author, CJ is a nationally known presenter and keynote speaker. Her first novel, Lifelines (Berkley, March, 2008), received praise as a “breathtakingly fast-paced medical thriller” from Publishers Weekly, was reviewed favorably by the Baltimore Sun and Newsday, named a Top Pick by Romantic Times Book Review Magazine, and became a national bestseller. Her award-winning, critically acclaimed Angels of Mercy series (Lifelines, Warning Signs, and Urgent Care) is available in stores now. Her newest project is as co-author of a new suspense series with Erin Brockovich. To learn more about CJ and her work, go to <http://www.cjlyons.net>.*

## Forensic Files

By D. P. Lyle, MD



# Can a Blow to the Head Cause Unconsciousness and Amnesia?

**Question:** *How hard do you have to be hit on the head to be knocked unconscious? Is there a particular place on the head, that if struck would be more likely to cause unconsciousness? How long does it usually last? How hard do you need to be hit to cause partial or temporary amnesia? What sort of things do people forget in these situations? How long does it usually last? Are there any other physical symptoms a writer should be sure and include in a scene with head trauma?*

**Answer:** In medical terms a blow to the head, or anywhere else, is called blunt force trauma as opposed to sharp force trauma as would occur with a knife or some other cutting instrument. When the blow is to the head, it is called a blunt head injury.

The degree of force required to render someone unconscious is completely unpredictable and varies from situation to situation and from person to person. Though a minor tap on the head is not likely to cause unconsciousness in anyone, almost any blow of significant force can. It makes no difference where the blow strikes the head as far as causing unconsciousness is concerned. That is, a blow to the front of the head is no more likely or less likely to cause unconsciousness than would one to the side or back of the head.

The period of unconsciousness in a simple concussion, which is what loss of consciousness due to blunt force head injury is called, is measured in seconds or minutes. Unlike Hollywood where the bad guy is slugged in the jaw, knocked unconscious, and then written out of the script after that—or at least the hero no longer has to worry about him—is not what happens in real life. Think about every boxing match you've ever seen. One guy smacks the other one, knocking him unconscious, and 30 seconds later the guy is awake and complaining that it was a lucky punch. This is what really happens.

Unconsciousness from a simple concussion can last several minutes and maybe even up to 10 or 15 minutes, though that would be unusual. Typically the person wakes up within a minute or so but might be slightly groggy or confused for a while, again for several minutes. But if he is unconscious for longer than a few minutes, the odds are that a serious injury to the brain has occurred or that bleeding into and around the brain has happened. Both of these situations are true medical emergencies. It doesn't sound like that's the situation you are posing with your questions.

Amnesia can indeed follow blows to the head. Typically the blow has to be powerful enough to render the person unconscious, or at least woozy, before amnesia enters the picture. But I should point out that, other than the time period the victim is actually unconscious, there is no loss of memory in the overwhelming majority of people who suffer head injuries. Amnesia is not rare, but it is not common. But amnesia can occur after head injury, so you can absolutely use this in your story.

Amnesia comes in many flavors, but they are usually divided into retrograde and anterograde types. Anterograde amnesia is very rare and is a situation where the person cannot form new memories. This was the subject of the excellent movie *Memento*. I won't dwell on this because this is not the type of amnesia your questions deal with.

Retrograde simply means whatever came before. This type of amnesia is the most common in that the person forgets things that happened before the injury. This amnesia can cover events that occurred for only a few minutes before





# Ask the Agent...

JoAnna Stamfel-Volpe



**Question:** *Inspired by Joe Konrath, I'm finally getting the several books I have the rights back to ready for the Kindle. I'm also going to put up some of my short stories (some published, some not). I don't know how all this Kindling is going to look to the agents who are considering my work, or editors who may one day think about buying it. If I had an agent, I'd obviously consult with the agent. But I suspect I would regret not putting these out-of-print (OOP) books out there while the Kindle self-pubbed market isn't totally swamped.*

**Answer:** To be honest, I don't foresee a problem with this at all, at least not at the current time (as we all know, anything that has to do with technology and contracts is ever-changing). To me, it's a lot like self-publishing. Just because you're a self-published writer does not mean that I won't look at your work. Of course I will! But I want to look at *new* work. Not your self-published work. It's difficult to sell anything that's already been exposed to the market without big success. However, if you've self-published and sold 10,000 copies, I do want to know about it. The same would go for your Kindle release. But selling 10,000 copies or more is difficult to do.

But that doesn't mean that I think it's a bad idea to get your books up on Kindle. In fact, it's great way to build an audience, if you're prepared to market on your own. But if we're going to work together, I want to work on something new with you. And so do publishers.

But to cover all bases on this question, I decided to wander on over to the other offices in our suite and ask a couple of other agents. This is what they had to say:

**Peter Rubie, CEO of FinePrint Literary Management:** The truth is, I don't see any problem from an agent's perspective, with selling OOP books through Amazon. It's pretty much the ideal situation at the moment for an author and far superior in my humble opinion to print on demand, though it would be useful to have POD options with an e-book as well.

I'm not sure what the downside would be, with this one proviso, that Amazon doesn't maintain absolute control of the books forever and a day once you agree to let them sell the books for you. Should a mainstream publisher want to reissue your books, they will want to have the flexibility of reissuing the e-books themselves, so a writer needs to ensure that Amazon will return these rights once asked to do so. Never having had this discussion, I don't know what Amazon's position is in regards to this.

**Janet Reid, Literary Agent with FinePrint Literary Management (and Query Shark):** When an author puts their work up for sale via Kindle, they are essentially self-publishing. That's fine, right up until they have to divulge how well the book sold to a prospective agent or editor. I'd almost rather see people put work up on their blog or website for free (horrors!) than subject themselves to the tyranny of "how well did the book sell?"

Editors and agents, above all, are looking for books that a lot of people will want to buy. If, by uploading a book to Kindle and selling two copies, you're showing me people do *not* want to buy, that's going to be a problem.

Of course, much of this is simply gazing into the crystal ball and hazarding a guess. We're at early days on this stuff. Still, I never like my clients to be the first ones trying new stuff. I like to be second or third. See what doesn't work, or where the problems are with the first guy, then avoid those when it's our turn. ▲



# Not Your Usual Writing Advice— Take the Next Step You See

BY JOANN GROTE



“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the staircase.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

My goal as an aspiring writer was to write inspirational romances. I wrote and submitted a proposal to one of the lines, received an acceptance call, and then the line closed—before I even received the contract. The inspirational romance market died. (It later revived and is presently going strong.) I decided to try my hand at young adult (YA) fiction. If adult readers weren’t interested in inspirational romance, perhaps teenage readers were interested in mysteries. I wrote a manuscript for my new target audience, put together a proposal for a series, submitted the proposal, and waited.

Meanwhile, I attended a writers’ conference with workshops presented by authors of YA and adult romance. My goal was to meet the YA authors and learn all I could from them. At the conference, a YA author introduced me to an author who was one of the stars of the inspirational romance market before it plummeted. We talked a few minutes and exchanged business cards.

Six months later, I received a phone call. An editor with whom I was unfamiliar, who worked for a publisher I’d never heard of, wanted to speak with me about the inspirational romance manuscript I’d almost sold. He wanted to consider my manuscript for an inspirational romance line his publisher was starting. He’d heard the story of my almost-sale from the woman I’d met at the conference, who gave him my contact information. He accepted my manuscript for the new line, and my career as a published author began.

What irony; my first inspirational romance book contract came about because I attended a conference to meet YA authors. When I commented on it to author Debbie Barr, she said, “But you did exactly what you were supposed to at the time; you kept taking the next step you could see.”

I’ve recalled her wise comment at many points in my writing life and in my life in general. I believe strongly in setting goals and making plans to reach those goals. Yet, we can never take the last step the moment we set the goal. We can always and only take the next step we see.

That’s scary.

Sometimes, as in my case above, the path to your goal appears completely and irrevocably blocked. The only next step you can see might appear to be a detour or a path to an entirely different goal.

We don’t like the unknown. We want to know the end from the beginning. If we write the book of our heart, will an editor buy it? If so, how soon and for what size advance? Will readers like it? Will it pay the mortgage?

More than once in my career I’ve felt I was stepping off a cliff on faith only, like Indiana Jones in *The Temple of Doom* stepping off a high cliff into an apparent deep canyon, relying only on his father’s notes. It helps to remember that instead of stepping into air, Indiana stepped upon a rock bridge that blended so well into the cliffs on the other side of the ravine that he didn’t see the bridge until his foot landed on it.

Perhaps you’re at one of those places in your own career. Maybe you’re trying something new, something you can’t see a market for at the moment. Maybe you’re writing a book that requires a higher level of writing quality from you than ever before, and you wonder whether you’re capable of making that step up. Or maybe a door shut for you, or you’re afraid it will as the market changes.

“Sometimes we stare so long at a door that is closing that we see too late the one that is open,” Alexander Graham Bell warned.

More times in my career than I’d like to admit to myself, I did just that. Recalling the times I did look away from a closed door and walk through an open one gives me the courage to do so again, albeit sometimes on trembling legs.

Choose to remember your own positive choices.

Then just take the next step you can see. Then the next step. Then the next. ▲



## WRITING is TAXING

By Diane O'Brien Kelly

# Recordkeeping

The U.S. income tax system is a self-assessment system in which taxpayers determine their tax due. As a result, taxpayers bear the “burden of proof,” meaning that, if questioned, the taxpayer must prove the validity of the numbers reported. For these reasons, recordkeeping is critical.

### What Records Should I Keep?

In an audit, the IRS will request original documentation that provides specific details of the transaction. Why? Without an original receipt, that check or credit card slip showing a payment to Staples won't prove whether you bought items for your writing business or your children's school supplies. Likewise, for business meals, the IRS will want a restaurant receipt showing you enjoyed the *linguine formaggio* and an appletini. Your credit card statement showing a \$50.00 charge at *Luigi's Ristorante* won't show whether the charge was for a business meal or three kiddie mac-and-cheese specials (indicating the meal was actually a personal family dinner).

For business meals and entertainment expenses, jot down the name of the person with whom you dined or engaged in the entertainment and a brief note about the business conducted before, during, or afterward. For meals eaten alone while traveling, make a note of the business reason for the travel. Don't forget to include tips when computing your deduction!

Keep bank and credit card statements as secondary backup. Because receipts can be misplaced or fade, some people scan them into a computer file, too. If you're missing an occasional original receipt but can show your records were otherwise well kept, the auditor may give you the benefit of the doubt on expenses for which you have only secondary evidence.

If you receive an acknowledgement of payment, such as an email confirming receipt of a PayPal payment, stick a copy of that in your file, too.

A mileage log is essential. Car expenses are a common audit item. Auditors are sticklers since there's lots of room to “fudge” here. It's not enough to use Mapquest to determine the distance between points A and B. The IRS will want a log showing the date on which the miles were driven, the destination, the business purpose of the drive, the beginning and ending odometer readings, and the total mileage for each trip. For a sample log, see page 35 of Publication 463 at <http://www.IRS.gov>. Be sure to write down your odometer reading at the end of each year (which also serves as your beginning mileage for the following year). You'll need the total annual mileage to complete the vehicle information on page 2 of your Schedule C (if you use the standard mileage rate) and to compute your deduction for a pro-rata portion of your auto loan interest.

To verify the veracity of your log, an auditor will request car repair/maintenance receipts showing the odometer reading at the time of service. These readings will be compared to your log. If they don't jibe, you'll be in trouble.

For travel expenses, keep hotel receipts, airline ticket stubs that show the cost of the ticket, and cab receipts. It's a good idea to keep a notebook where you jot down the amount of tips, the date, and to whom the tip was paid. Although you won't have receipts for most tips, the IRS recognizes these are normal expenses and shouldn't question a reasonable amount of unsubstantiated tips.

If you claim home office deductions, keep your utility bills, invoices for repairs and maintenance, as well as proof of your rental payments/lease or mortgage interest/property taxes. If you own (or are buying) your home, keep documentation to show how you determined your home's depreciable value. Depreciation is based on the lesser of the home's cost or its fair market value when the home office is established, so you'll need documents showing both values. Keep a copy of your original appraisal or the settlement statement you received at closing along with a valuation around the date you established your home office. Your property tax valuation may suffice if the valuation represents actual market value, not a capped or grandfathered value. Otherwise, data on comparable real estate sales or a new

appraisal would be helpful.

Although you're not required to maintain separate bank accounts and credit cards for your writing business, some find it helpful. With separate accounts, you'll know every transaction posted is business-related rather than having to comb through personal statements each month to circle the business items. A separate credit card is a good idea if you don't pay your balance off each month. Interest on a business-only credit card is fully deductible. Personal interest, however, is not deductible. If you use a personal credit card for business expenses, it's debatable whether you'd be entitled to deduct interest or how much. Likewise, if you incur bank fees on a business-only account, those fees would be fully deductible.

### **How Long Should I Keep Records?**

Normally, the IRS can go back only three tax years to examine a return and assess additional tax. However, the IRS can go back six years if income was understated by 25% or more. The statute of limitations is unlimited for fraudulent returns or if no return was filed.

Assuming you report honestly (of course you do!), you should keep documentation at least three tax years back. Most accounting firms keep records six years back.

Be sure to keep records for items that carry over to future tax years until at least three years after they're no longer relevant. For instance, if you depreciate furniture, the deduction will be spread over eight tax years. Because the IRS can go back three years to examine a return, you'll need to keep the receipt for eleven years in case the IRS audits the final year in which the furniture is depreciated. The same goes for other carryover items, such as home office deductions carried to future years.

### **Is There a Right Way to Keep Records?**

Facing a stack of disorganized receipts at tax time is daunting. Utilize a bookkeeping system to organize and update your information throughout the year. Having summaries to provide to your tax preparer may also reduce fees.

There is no one right way to keep records. Find a method that works for you.

Some people use a simple manual method in which they jot down a summary of expenses in a notebook. Others use a system in which they maintain separate envelopes for each type of expense—i.e., one envelope for supplies, another for postage. Some who use this method make a note of each entry on the outside of the envelope when they slide the receipt inside.

Some use spreadsheets, either to maintain a simple chronological summary of expenses or with separate columns for each type of expense.

More advanced bookkeepers use software such as Quicken. Show-offs.

For more information, see IRS Publication 583 "Starting a Business and Keeping Records" and Publication 552 "Recordkeeping for Individuals."

*For further tax tips, check out the "Tax Tidbits" page on Diane's website, <http://www.dianeobrienkelly.com>. Got a tax question for Diane? Email her at [Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com](mailto:Diane@dianeobrienkelly.com). Your question might be addressed in an upcoming issue.*

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## **Business Briefs**

### **Shatzkin's Crystal Ball at Book Industry Study Group Conference**

Conference organizer Michael Shatzkin did some forecasting at the April conference. The year 2012 will have 25% of all new titles purchased as e-books with traditional retail closing in droves. Also a 25% royalty rate for e-books will not last. This isn't what the people in publishing are saying when surveyed. There is opportunity with digital and it is the future. Over half surveyed said they didn't think their editorial jobs would be different and almost two-thirds felt they had the ability to continue in their current job. Not too much was projected about the authors.

### **Print-on-Demand Cubed**

Scribd.com is joining with other POD publishers to meet the demand of material size and format. Mag-Cloud will be handling periodical, with Mimeo dealing with pamphlet-length documents, and Blurb will be in charge of paperbacks.

# The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



# Writers on Parade

*“When audiences come to see us authors lecture, it is largely in the hope that we’ll be funnier to look at than to read.”*

— Sinclair Lewis

My non-writing friends are always surprised when I say that, of the hundreds of writers whom I know, more than half of them drink alcohol only in moderation or not at all. People in the real world are further astonished when I say that, as a generalization, most novelists whom I know live quietly and only appreciate crowds, parties, and excitement in limited doses. There are affairs and divorces among the writers I know, but not a higher percentage than among normal people (i.e. people who don’t write); and volatile love triangles and rampant bed-hopping are decidedly unusual among writers of my acquaintance (though not entirely unknown).

Frankly, this is not what people expect of us, and they find my revelations sadly disillusioning.

A popular image of writers as fast-living extroverts is perpetuated by the many tales of famous writers of the past partying, bull-fighting, drinking with Spanish loyalists, and having scandalous sexual affairs in dazzling world capitals. We’re supposed to be out big-game hunting, whoring in brothels, gambling in night clubs, drinking absinthe, uttering witty *beaux mots* at high-society parties, and shooting our lovers; not sitting quietly at our keyboards in the spare bedrooms, which we’ve converted into offices in our middle-class homes.

I have no explanation for why various famous writers of the past preferred a lifestyle that would make me seek the silence of a nunnery after a week or two; but I do think the reasons that I and so many of my peers are dull by comparison (a fact that perpetually shocks and dismays the civilians of my acquaintance) is pretty self-explanatory.

Yes, the occasional high school prom king or cheerleading captain becomes a writer; but most writers were bookish teens. After all, who’s *more* likely to grow up to spend their professional lives, by choice, alone in a quiet room with imaginary characters? Logically, it’s the shy kid who’s always got her nose buried in a book, rather than the one who doesn’t.

And, by and large, we didn’t undergo radical personality transplants upon entering adulthood. Instead, we grew up to be people who still enjoy an evening spent at home with a good novel. And being bookish people who live in their heads and spend a lot of time alone at their keyboards, writers often still suffer from shyness in adulthood.

So it’s ironic that one of the first things that happens to a writer who experiences even some modest success is that she’s expected to start behaving as if she was indeed a cheerleading captain in high school, rather than a kid who sneaked into the library alone during pep rallies. The modern profession’s expectation is that the published writer will do public autographings, attend conventions, give interviews, teach workshops, participate in panel discussions, and deliver keynote speeches.

This can be a little daunting to someone who thinks of a quiet evening at home with a book as a good time.

I realized early in my career just how hard this is for some writers when I did a joint workshop with an experienced, respected writer who, shortly before we took our places in front of the audience, had a severe anxiety attack in private; the writer turned pale green, shook like a leaf, and got teary-eyed and nauseated—but, being a true pro, pulled it together so well once we were in front of the audience that I doubt anyone suspected how agonizing this writer found public appearances.

Nor is it only public speaking that's a stumbling block. Many writers find it very daunting to walk into the large publisher parties at conventions, where they hardly know anyone, and start mingling. Any number of writers have expressed anxiety to me about being invited to big publisher dinners, or to meals with executives from their publishing houses.

I, for one, always wish I *did* drink heavily when doing autographings, because I find small talk with strangers agonizing; I never know what to say. But I keep in mind that, even more so, most readers don't know what to say to *me*; and so I try to approach a signing as an exercise in making my visitors comfortable.

And that's similar to some of the best advice I've ever received about such situations, and which I hereby pass on to any writer who's not really comfortable having a drunken brawl in a Left Bank brothel after killing a bottle of whiskey with a bull-fighter: Think about the other person (or the audience) instead of yourself, and it's *amazing* how much pressure that removes.

I have a longtime close friend who is famously charming; she can enter a large party as a total stranger and be the person whom, the following day, everyone who was present remembers fondly. The first major step in my conquering my own paralyzing shyness as a teen was based entirely on something she taught me way back then, and it's a technique that I still use regularly: Just keep asking people questions about themselves or a subject they've introduced; this keeps the conversation going, it completely saves you from the burden of having to say anything interesting or clever, and everyone who chats with you will walk away thinking they've just had a good conversation with an engaging person.

This technique has gotten me safely through more industry events, convention gatherings, book signings, and dinners with strangers than I can count. It's also gotten me through some panel discussions where the topic was too flimsy to fill the hour or where the speakers (hello!) were paralyzed by shyness.

For public appearances and extemporaneous speaking (panel discussions, interviews, Q&As), I also apply something I learned in acting school (yes, as a paralytically shy young person, my bizarre first choice of profession was the theatre): Always read one line ahead of where you are. This skill is essential for cold readings, which are part of almost every acting audition, so it's something you practice a lot in any serious professional acting program (and it does require *practice*).

As a writer, I've extrapolated from this. When speaking without a script in front of an audience, I write my answers or comments in my head as I'm going along, and I "read" one line ahead (inside my head) of what I'm saying. This doesn't necessarily prevent me from saying stupid things, but it does prevent the anxiety, the agonizing silences, and the helpless space-filling utterances ("um, um, um... um...") that can make extemporaneous speaking so uncomfortable.

Finally, one of the most useful tools I've learned for being on parade in public is simply: *Practice*. Just as most rough drafts aren't publishable, most unrehearsed performances aren't presentable. A speech or workshop will be more polished and less nerve-wracking upon delivery to an audience if the writer has *practiced* it before standing up in front of 12, 20, or 400 people to do it for real. The corollary to this is that the more extemporaneous speaking, small talk while signing books, and mingling-at-parties-full-of-strangers that a writer does, the better she gets at it over time. (Although, personally, I still find big publisher parties so daunting that I usually wind up pretending a great fascination with the generic furnishings or the mass-produced art on the walls.)

*Laura Resnick's public appearances in recent months included Millenicon XXIV and Write On Vancouver.*

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## ***Business Briefs***

### **People on the Move**

Marcy Posner, moves from Sterling Lord Literistic to Folio Literary Management, focusing on children's and young adult books as well as women's fiction, romance, and serious and commercial nonfiction. Also moving to Folio, Emily Van Beek has left Pippin Properties to help the Agency build its children's book division; her primary focus continues to be YA

John Pearce of Westwood Creative Artists has gone to Victoria, BC to establish a Pacific NW location for the agency.

Kendra Harpster is now a Senior Editor for Random under Susan Kamil.

Sarah Knight started as Senior Editor with Simon and Schuster adult trade, for both fiction and nonfiction at the end of May.

# Nine Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY JACKIE KRAMER

Got any news or information  
for the Bulletin Board?

Send it to Jackie at  
jackiekramer7@netscape.com

## Election Notice

**President Elect:** Lou Aronica

**Secretary:** Denise Agnew

**Treasurer:** Marcia Evanick

**Nominating Committee** (listed in alphabetical order—five to be elected):

Roberta Gellis  
Sally Hawkes  
Sherry-Anne Jacobs  
Annette Mahon  
Katie MacAlister

Jody Nye  
Leigh Riker  
Lea Wait  
Jeane Weston  
Gina Wilkins

As set forth in Article IX, Section 4 of the Bylaws, additional nominations may be made in writing if signed by the nominee and at least ten (10) active members who have not signed the nominations of any other person for the same position.

Such nominations must be made by August 15, 2010. Mail all written nominations to Sylvie Kurtz, P.O. Box 702, Milford, NH 03055.

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# Our Digital Future: An Interview with Lori James of All Romance Ebooks

February 18th, 2010  
by Kassia Krozser

As a book buyer, I have a keen interest in thriving bookstores. As a book reader, I have a keen interest in independent publishing and access to my books. And while I wait for traditional independent bookstores to transition to robust physical *and* online presences, I have enjoyed the emergence of digital booksellers, particularly [All Romance Ebooks](#) and its sister store, [OmniLit](#).

Traditional PDF is the gateway drug to e-books.

All Romance Ebooks was founded in 2006 by Barb Perfetti and Lori James. The original site, All Romance, focuses on romance novels, while OmniLit sells general fiction and non-fiction. Both sites focus on what makes independent bookselling so valuable (with some modern twists, as you'll see,) and Lori James graciously succumbed to a few questions from me about her company, her customers, and her digital publishing wishlist.

**Q: So, first, describe it. All Romance eBooks, OmniLit. What they are, how they fit together.**

AllRomance.com is our specialty store and it primarily caters to the romance and erotica markets. OmniLit.com is a full-service bookstore. Readers will find all types of fiction and non-fiction there, including all of the romance and erotica that we have at All Romance. Although they are branded differently, the two sites are integrated. Customers can access their account at either site using the same login and password, and they share libraries.

**Q: I've heard people say Amazon has cornered the e-book market, but, obviously, that's not true. You are not only competing, but growing. Without revealing the secret sauce, what are some key ingredients?**

I think in order to be successful in any industry you need to know your market, the community, and how to grow and maintain relationships. This is more than a business to us, it's something we're very passionate about.

**Q: As a longtime e-book consumer, all I want is the ability to read the book I've just purchased. I am not opposed to DRM used in the right way, but your success comes from a mostly DRM-free purchasing experience. How do you convince publishers to make this (reader-friendly) move, and how do your customers react?**

DRM (Digital Rights Management) is a form of encryption that is frequently employed by publishers, primarily for the purpose of protecting against theft or unauthorized use of digital content.)

Although I personally prefer the ease of open format, the pragmatic part of me understands publishers need to do what they believe is going to be in the long-term interest of their business. ▶

As a reader, I want the houses to stay open and solvent enough to feed my addiction. Some publishers believe DRM helps safeguard their position. Unfortunately, it also seems to be a deterrent to the average reader. The vast majority of our customer-support issues are DRM issues. The vast majority of our sales are of open format books. We do share general business statistics every year with publishers—one of which is the percentage of DRM vs. Non-DRM sales. I'm looking forward to Harlequin's launch of Carina Press. I think it's a move that's going to be very well received by our customers.

**Q: Do you think readers know what DRM is or do you think they know there's a barrier between them and reading?**

The average reader wants to make a purchase and start reading. That's their expectation. That's what they've become accustomed to in the print world. Digital can be advantageous. They don't have to wait for their local bookstore to open or wait for the postman to arrive on their doorstep. With the click of a few buttons they can begin reading instantly—if they have the correct file type, software, etc. In my opinion anything we can do to remove barriers in the delivery system is a plus from the perspective of the reader, and there are readers who consider something as simple as having to download software a barrier.

**Q: How does it feel to be on the leading edge of the book retailing revolution? You are a 21st century bookseller.**

Barb and I both feel very lucky to have launched this business when we did. We're having a blast. It's an exciting time for the industry. Things are moving quickly, technology is growing and advancing. We're thrilled to be a part of it.

**Q: In your [Publishing Perspectives](#) article, you noted that Adobe is far and away the leading format, and this corresponds to my research about how people read. However, are we talking traditional PDF or running the file through Adobe Digital Editions? (Yep, I break out in hives when dealing with ADE.)**

Traditional PDF – it's the gateway drug to eBooks. Almost everyone has read a PDF document and is familiar with Adobe Reader.

**Q: Also in your Publishing Perspectives piece, you mentioned providing tech support to readers. Publishers have been making noise about selling e-books directly to consumers, and direct customer support is not something they've dealt with on any scale. Can you discuss the various support issues you face a bit more? What are the biggest technical problems readers face?**

The customer-support issues for a digital bookseller are primarily technical. I would estimate less than 5 percent are typical bookseller questions (i.e. asking for recommendations, requests for a particular title.) Although some publishers are talking about selling e-books, we're hearing from others who are wanting to step back from retail and focus on their primary business—publishing. I do think it's possible to do both, but it's difficult to do both well. Customers are expecting more and more in terms of their buying experience and the complexity of support needs are escalating. Part of the challenge is that needs are idiosyncratic. There are multiple variables – the file type, browser, desktop operating system, reading device, reading software, virus software, etc.



**Q: Shatter this myth for me: romance readers aren't tech savvy.**

Romance readers come in all shapes and sizes. Some are tech wizards. Some we have to teach to copy and paste. We encounter more of the former than the latter, but we are quick to point out that, for many, this is new technology, and we don't want anyone to feel self-conscious about needing to ask for help. One thing that does seem to be universally true is that romance readers are busy people. Because we recognize that, we endeavor to make things as simple as possible for them. So much of life is already challenging.

**Q: Now that the agency model is all the rage (though it's still a work in progress,) what kind of impact do you anticipate for your business?**

Most of our small- to mid-sized publishers (who are also almost exclusively non-DRM) have subscribed to the agency model from the beginning. They set their own pricing, we don't change it, and they can't undersell. This model has worked very well for us, and we'd be happy to see more of it.

**Q: Traditionally, publishers haven't learned much about their customers while retailers have known far more. What are your thoughts about providing more information to publishers about customers and their habits?**

We believe in providing publishers with information that will lead to improved product. That's in everyone's best interest and one of the reasons we share so openly with them.

**Q: What's on your e-book device, experience, format wishlists?**

I read almost exclusively on my iPhone. I buy ePub or secure eReader and use Stanza. I have just about every e-book reader out there at my disposal, but the iPhone is already with me all of the time and I have hundreds of books on it. My number one wish at the moment is for Adobe to create an ADE app for the iPhone that will work. Reflow and ability to change font size. Are you listening Adobe???

Meanwhile, publishers who must apply DRM, please create secure eReader files so I can easily read your books. I want to read Laurell K. Hamilton's *Flirt* in Stanza and, yes, I'd pay the \$23.95 for it.

If the eReader folks are listening, could you get on that release for the Android? The one that will allow readers to read DRM content? That would be sweet.

Are you getting the impression I could go on and on?

**Q: How are space cowboys selling? Just curious.**

Hmm. Is it just a coincidence that I happen to be working my way through my *Firefly* DVDs? Cowboys (in or out of space) are doing well. Shifters are very popular at the moment. In general, it seems hot, edgy, cross-genre is in.

Thank you, Lori for answering my questions. I purposely held back from the thrilling topic of metadata — trust me, it's what all the cool kids are talking about — because Lori recently talked to Sarah Wendell of *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books* about [the magic of metadata](#). Read it!

Note: All Romance Ebooks is celebrating "28 Days of Heart," a campaign to raise funds and awareness of heart disease. They're highlighting members of their community and having lots of fun. As if you needed another reason to buy books! ▲

