

NINIK

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To Brand
Or Not
To Brand

To Brand or Not to Brand: First Know Who You Want To Be as a Writer

BY LAUREN BARATZ-LOGSTED

My first novel was published in July 2003. By the end of 2011, I will have seen 22 books published with my name on the spine: five contemporary comedies for adults, *The Thin Pink Line*, *Crossing the Line*, *A Little Change of Face*, *How Nancy Drew Saved My Life*, *Baby Needs a New Pair of Choos*; one literary Victorian suspense novel, *Vertigo*; one anthology I edited and contributed to, *This Is Chick-Lit*; one serious YA novel, *Angel's Choice*; one seriocomic YA novel, *Secrets of My Suburban Life*; a contemporary YA re-visioning of *Beauty & the Beast* called *Crazy Beautiful*; a light historical YA, *The Education of Bet*; a dark historical YA, *The Twin's Daughter*; a time-travel YA, *Little Women and Me*; one tween novel, *Me, In Between*; and eight books for younger readers, the first eight in the nine-book series known as *The Sisters Eight*, co-written with my husband Greg Logsted and our daughter Jackie. Plus assorted short stories, essays, blogging and guestblogging.

I realize the above is an awful lot of me-me-me, but please try to bear with me-me-me, for there is method to my-my-my madness.

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There's a nugget of publishing wisdom, usually spoken by certain agents, that goes something like, "Never try to sell meat in your fish market." This ties into all the noise you hear about "branding" these days that states that new authors should try to establish a brand for themselves, becoming known for doing one thing and doing it well, so that consumers will come to regard the author as a reliable source for a particular form of entertainment.

I think this is fine if an author is 100% certain she will always want to write one kind of book and that this will satisfy her. And it's fine if the branding plan does work out that way and you become Danielle Steel or Stephen King. But what if it doesn't turn out that way, you are first published as one kind of author, having chosen that route

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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:

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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.



“Fabulous!” “Great information!” “Energy!”

BY KASEY MICHAELS, 2011 CONFERENCE CHAIR

New Rules, New Tools: Writers In Charge is turning out to be the best-attended NINC conference in years. There are reasons for that, beginning with *Brainstorming On The Beach*, our 2010 conference.

Let’s recap:

Last year, the intensive one-day program that kicked off the conference was titled *Brainstorming the Future of Publishing*. It was a full day of listening to and

interacting with experts discussing the future of the industry and, of course, our place in that future.

Joan Schulhafer, of Joan Schulhafer Publishing and Media Consulting, summed up her experience this way: “Fabulous business panels and fabulous workshops—one of the best conferences I’ve ever attended great information I would not have gotten in that form or forum otherwise.”

Joan will be returning to Florida to be with us again—and she’s not the only one. Nearly every NINC member who attended the 2010 conference is heading back to the beach this October ... and this time many are bringing spouses, friends, families, because they know they can combine a great conference with a great vacation (and write most of it off!). Besides, spouses, friends, whomever are invited as NINC’s guests to sit in on the one-day program (meals are extra).

Lauren Wittig enthused about “...The energy and excitement of hearing about all the new opportunities Gorgeous place, great resort, but that first day, with so many panelists with so many great points of view, so many ideas about what’s happening now and what can happen in the future? Fabulous!”

When we announced the 2011 conference, we were out to top ourselves—and we have. This year, the intensive one-day program is moving us beyond *hearing about* the future. The four expert panels will cover all aspects of *how we can be a part* of the exciting future of publishing.

Here, once again, is our truly incredible and diverse lineup of speakers for the one-day (with most also presenting stand-alone workshops during the main conference):

Mark Coker, Founder and CEO, Smashwords
Don Weisberg, President, Penguin Young Readers Group
Carolyn Pittis, Senior VP, Global Author Services, HarperCollins
Tracee Gleichner, Founder and CEO, Literal Exposure
Linda Quinton, Associate Publisher, VP of Marketing, Tor Books
David Wilk, Creative Management Partners
Joan Schulhafer, Publishing & Media Consulting
Lou Aronica, Story Plant and Fiction Studio

Carly Phillips remarked at the close of the 2010 conference: “The level of conversation was so elevated and fantastic.” Barbara Keiler said, “The 2010 Novelists, Inc. conference gave me a new perspective on the ever-evolving business of publishing. More important, it gave me a new sense of myself as an artist and entrepreneur. I left the conference feeling enlightened, empowered, and energized. ... I can’t wait for 2011’s conference!”

Night Owls sessions, open only to NINC members, also drew rave reviews. Jordan Summers told us, “I didn’t quite expect there to be such wonderful information in the Night Owls They combined an equal amount of play with learning.”

Angela James, Executive Editor of Carina Press, told us, “I enjoyed the publishing conversations and networking so much at NINC 2010 that I immediately put the 2011 conference on my calendar the energy and interest in the changing publishing culture was so apparent at this NINC, and ... the outlook was more positive and open than it ever has been.” Angela has agreed to do a workshop this year, which she described as a “talk about the nitty gritty of surviving in the industry and how digital and/or self-publishing can do that, the pros and cons of each, and why you should/shouldn’t be afraid. And yes, specifics of editorial quality control, the submissions/acquisitions process, etc. I think ▶

that would be a fascinating conversation to have.” So does NINC.

Dr. Doug Lyle, one of our fantastic workshop presenters in 2010, said, “For me the best thing about attending or speaking at the NINC conference is that the audience consists of professional writers. They hear it, they get it, they use it. It’s just that simple. It’s useful and fun from either side of the podium.”

He makes a great point: it’s not just the speakers, not just the workshops, not just the beach; a NINC conference is, more than anything else, a chance to be with other NINC members to talk, brainstorm, discuss, relax, and become energized, renewed, and ready to conquer the world. You can be a part of these great conversations. You can get that energy, that “Go get ’em!” enthusiasm that went home with every NINC member who attended the 2010 conference. Check out the conference pages on the NINC website for more information on the one-day, the main conference, and the Night Owls at <http://ninc.com/conferences/2011/index.asp>

We’ve added three more workshops, conducted by NINC members, to complement the stand-alone workshops given by our one-day speakers: Sally Hawkes will talk about libraries and writers; Laura Hayden will show us how book-buying really works for brick-and-mortar booksellers; and Dianne Despain, who has more than 1,000 magazine articles to her credit, will show us how to supplement our income by freelancing for magazines.

Let me mention just one more thing: the NINC binder. This year, each conference attendee will be given a loose-leaf binder containing the hard work of several volunteers who have spent this last year compiling information. We’ve given it a simple title: *A Comprehensive Guide to the New Publishing*. From A to Z, soup to nuts, from how to format to how to Facebook, from how to publish to where to sell, even a glossary of terms—we’re going to cover it all in simple language that the most neo neophyte can understand. And we’re leaving room for your own notes. After the conference, the binder will be available in e-form on the website, for all members to download. But attendees get the real thing!

If you’re still wondering why you should attend the 2011 NINC conference, download the recap of the 2010 conference from http://ninc.com/conferences/2010/FutureofPublishing_NincRecap.pdf ... and remember the words of Pat McLinn, who said at the end of the 2010 conference: “NINC is the best organization for keeping up with the business; there are so many members, representing so many genres; there is wonderful cross-pollination that keeps us on the cutting edge of information.”

Sasha White’s complete interviews are on the NINC website Conference page—just follow the link.



New Rules, New Tools: Writers In Charge

October 19-23, 2011

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Fee: \$285

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Special One-day program open to all writers and industry professionals:

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(NINC members: this cost is included in your conference fee)

Registration now open at www.ninc.com

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First Know Who You Want to Be as a Writer

Continued from page 1 ▶ because you thought it would be easiest, but now want to try other things? You know, even John Grisham got tired of writing legal thrillers all the time.

Think about yourself as a reader. Do you only read one kind of book or are you, like me, vastly eclectic in your tastes? If I love to read a variety of things, why then, as a writer, would I want to confine myself to one thing? A lot of this boils down to taking the time to think about who you are as a writer and who you want to be as a writer. I will say that, as a general rule, the YA market is far more accepting of genre-jumping than the adult market.

Here, then, are my reasons for diversifying to the degree I do (please keep in mind, I'm not trying to pen a prescription for the rest of the writing world, merely myself):

1) I'm a complex human being, as are you all. This means that there's not just one side of me: yes, I'm funny, at least people tell me that; yes, I'm serious; yes, I'm interested in time periods I've never lived in; yes, I'm in touch with my inner teen and younger self. But I'm not one of these things to the exclusion of all others.

2) I like to explore a variety of themes and it's impossible for all the themes in the world to be addressed in one format. Some themes are only suitable to Victorian erotic suspense while if you try to address the same themes in a book for younger readers, well, you will get yourself arrested.

3) Writing in a wide range of fields and always adding to the range keeps me fresh. I never feel like I'm writing the same book over and over again because I never am.

4) Writing in a wide range of fields and being published in them means I get to go on living my dream, which is to be a full-time working writer. You see, the sad truth is that most publishing contracts broken down book by book don't amount to a fortune. Why do you think so many literary novelists work at universities? Yes, I'm sure that some of them love to teach, but not all. And the same is true of commercial novelists, working in other professions to support their writing habits. If you can write in more than one area, though, and if you can attract various publishers who are interested in those different areas, then you can actually make a living wage in this insane business.

So that's me: insane, working like crazy, and loving every minute of it. As for not selling meat in my fish market, well, I like to think of myself more as a supermarket, hopefully an upscale one, where readers learn to come for the variety of experience. And my fans bear this out, many of them buying whatever I write, be it Victorian erotic suspense or books for younger people. To those faithful readers, Lauren Baratz-Logsted does represent a brand, only not quite in the way that the publishing gurus would have you think a brand should be regarded.

Lauren Baratz-Logsted has already name-dropped all 22 of her books above, so she doesn't need to do that again here. If, however, you are interested in reading more about her life and work, visit her at www.laurenbaratzlogsted.com.

If I love to read a variety of things, why then, as a writer, would I want to confine myself to one thing?

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When a Genre Chooses You

BY SARAH DARER LITTMAN

People who know me in real life or follow me on Twitter (@sarahdarerlitt) know that I've got a pretty good sense of humor. So how did I end up writing books for teens about such cheerful, lighthearted topics as terrorism, bulimia, religion, and Internet predators? Heck, I'm making myself depressed just looking at that list. I tell folks that G-d gave me a gift, the ability to express myself in writing. Then, so it shouldn't go to waste, He (She?) decided to make sure I had plenty of "material."

Like most YA authors, I'm often asked the question. You know the one: "So when are you going to write 'real books'?"

It's a question that makes me want to connect my fist with the questioner's face—in the nicest possible way, of course. To me, there is nothing more "real" than writing for young people, who are experiencing some of the most powerful human emotions (love, lust, despair, alienation, the quest for identity) for the first time, while being hit by a veritable tsunami of hormones. Although outwardly teens might exhibit a frustrating level of ennui (Son's response to my query about how the prom went: "It didn't suck as much as I thought it would"), underneath lies a yet to be jaded sense of fairness, and an unquenchable thirst for social justice.

People who ask this question don't show sufficient respect for young people and should avoid writing YA, even if it's a growth area in publishing and they covet the royalty checks of JK Rowling and Stephenie Meyer.

One of the reasons I love writing for teenagers is because it's literature without the bullshit. If you're enamored with your genius as a wordsmith, here's some advice: stick to writing for grown-ups. Teens won't put up with you spending eight pages of the first chapter on long descriptive passages, no matter how finely crafted they are. They don't have the patience. To be honest, neither do I. I literally threw a book by an award-winning, best-selling grown-up writer across the room at the end of Chapter One because I became so frustrated with masturbatory wordplay that led the story nowhere. Remember: it's all about the story.

Which brings me to another point—"issue books." While my books have examined a variety of serious topics, I didn't set out to write them with the idea of imparting an important message. If you think young people need to be taught something, get a teaching certificate; don't write a book. My first book, *Confessions of a Closet Catholic*, was an exploration of the confused feelings I had growing up in secular Jewish America during the '70s and getting the message: "Be Jewish, but not 'too Jewish'." My second novel, *Purge*, was inspired when my mother sent me a picture she'd found of me in a bikini at age 15. My first thought, as a middle-aged woman was, "Wow, I had a bitchin' bod. Why didn't I enjoy it then?" But almost immediately, another voice kicked in—the Voice in the head of the girl in the picture. The Voice that said, "You're fat. You're ugly. You're defective." And I remembered why I didn't enjoy my looks as a teen, and was compelled to write Janie's story.

Does it touch me deeply when I get letters from readers saying that the book has helped them, and asking me for advice on how I was able to overcome bulimia? Yes. But I am a storyteller, not a therapist or a nonfiction writer. My job as an author of YA fiction is to have the courage to dig down to places that are sometimes dark and extremely painful, in search of the emotional truths that I can weave into a narrative; or, to paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, to write "fiction [that] reveals truth that reality obscures."

Teens expect nothing less. They have built-in, top-of-the-range Bullshit Detectors. They don't want to be talked down to or lectured. They get enough of that from their parents. (Just ask my kids.)

So how do I write with an authentic teen voice as a 40-something-year-old woman? Because I understand that while the lingo, technology, and music changes from generation to generation, the emotions are constant. Exploring the intensity and passion of those feelings are at the core of my books.

Besides, after friending some of my middle and high-school classmates on Facebook, I realize part of me is still probably stuck in adolescence mentally, and it's cheap therapy.

Sarah Darer Littman is the award-winning author of Confessions of a Closet Catholic; Purge; Life, After; and the upcoming Want to Go Private? (Scholastic Press, August 1). She is also an award-winning political columnist for <http://CTNewsJunkie.com> and Hearst Newspapers in Southern CT. Visit her online at <http://sarahdarerlittman.com> and <http://wanttogoprivate.com> and on Twitter @sarahdarerlitt

What Do You Do When Your Muse Gets Restless? Jump Genres

BY MARY JO PUTNEY

I never had a career plan. I entered into the murky realms of publishing rather like a golden retriever puppy on Christmas morning.

Oh, boy, I have a computer and when I fix mistakes, they stay fixed!

Oh, boy, I think I'll write down some of the stories in my head!

Oh, boy, someone actually wants to buy my book!!!

I had no expectations, no goals beyond writing traditional Regencies. That changed, of course. My first and abiding ambition surfaced when I realized that I could never write Regencies fast enough to support myself, and I really wanted to be a full-time writer.

Though in retrospect that looks like massive chutzpah, at the time it seemed like an achievable goal. (As, indeed, it was.) But it meant finding a genre in which I could make more money. Since my traditional Regencies had an unfortunate tendency to run 30,000 or 40,000 words over the limit, historical romance was the obvious choice.

The jump wasn't too difficult, though I had to figure out how to write sex scenes. I'd done the research so I managed. I wrote mostly Regency historicals because I really liked the era and I was able to find plenty of oddball corners to explore beyond Almack's.

The next genre I moved into was a harder jump. After a dozen or so historical romances, the muse started getting restless. I'd started getting ideas for contemporary stories, and pretty soon, I started one.

The big challenge was finding a contemporary voice. I have a natural historical voice, with lush language and over-the-top situations, and a deep love for compound sentences. But contemporaries did suit my soap-box tendencies, and these were stories I wanted to write.

Though the contemporary market was healthy then, selling still took time. My editor of the time bought my first contemporary after approving the outline, then decided after I handed it in that I couldn't write. (We call that "the year with no income.")

So after I wrote another historical, I revised the contemporary and found another willing publisher. I did three contemporaries, but I was writing serious and gritty when the market was swinging toward lighter books. Oops. Those three contemporaries are the only ones I wrote. But I'm glad I wrote them.

Once more, I focused on my historical romances. The paranormal craze was really starting to take off, and since I'm a lifelong *sfff* reader, I came up with the idea of adding magical elements to my historicals. I had a whole pitch written to persuade my editor, and then didn't need it because it turned out she loved paranormals, too.

So I happily wrote a book that blended historical romance and fantasy. My editor left. My new editor, not so much into paranormals, wasn't sure what to do with my next proposal, which looked like a perfectly workable book, but not her cuppa.

So she handed it around the corner to the *sfff* editor in the next office, who was looking for a writer who balanced romance and *sfff*. I'd fallen into my first fantasy contract. That *really* triggered the golden retriever reaction: *Oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy, I'm a real fantasy writer!!!!*

It was one of my happiest writing moments but, in time, an unfortunate fact emerged: historical readers as a whole aren't keen on having woo woo elements in their stories. They got their fantasy fix from the setting. Having protagonists who are mages—not so much.

Since history and fantasy weren't a particularly commercial blend, I needed a new publisher and all

the editors wanted straight historical romance from me. Being no fool and having a mortgage and hungry cats, I settled back into historical romance.

But I still wanted to write fantasy, and the one genre where I might be able to do that was young adult. This was not necessarily an obvious choice. Frankly, I wasn't a very good teenager even when I was one, and that was ... quite some time ago.

But I had a story I wanted to tell, and I'd read YAs over the years, so I had a sense of genre expectations. Proposal time, and this time I *really* struggled with finding an appropriate voice. No way could I do modern teenagers or high school books. But historical teenagers? Maybe I could fake that because I really wanted to have time-traveling Regency teen mages save the day at Dunkirk.

I may not have a real YA voice, but as another writer said, the trick is not to create a YA voice, but have a voice YA readers will like. While eleven editors good and true didn't like my story, occasionally suggesting I drop what I considered the soul of the concept, the twelfth and last editor liked it. (If she hadn't, I was going to abandon my YA aspirations.)

Am I going to have a serious YA career? I have no idea. The first book, out in March, was nominated by YALSA, the young adult librarians' group, for best YA novel of the year. This is lovely but does rather confirm my suspicion that adults might like my YA voice better than real young adults. We'll see. I may end up a one-trilogy YA author, and that will be just another interesting chapter in my writer's life.

Having jumped in and out of various genres, what are my conclusions?

First, my core writing interests are romance, history, fantasy, and happy endings. The most enduring of those is happy endings, since not all of my books have been romances. (Though all have romantic elements.)

Second, I've been overpaid and underpaid. Overpaid is a lot more fun (not to mention good for the retirement fund), but after the contract is signed, it's all about the story and doing the best job I know how.

In all of my career shifts, I've followed the story. Craft can be learned. Business and marketing can be learned. Reading other genres and learning genre expectations is doable.

For me, the core of genre jumping is falling in love with a particular story and wanting to write it—whatever genre that leads me to.

I still don't have a career plan, but I've written a lot of stories I'm proud of. Some have been commercially successful and some haven't, but they're all my children and I couldn't wish that any of them had never happened.

So call me a genre jumper or a story slut. Both are true.

And I still get all golden retrieverish over the chance to write stories I love.

Mary Jo Putney has written a lot of books—an exact count is harder than you'd think. They generally include history, romance, cats, happy endings, and maybe some fantasy. She can be contacted through www.maryjoputney.com.

Business Briefs

New Interpretation of Fair Use

On June 21, a federal judge ruled that reposting an entire editorial from a newspaper to a blog was not a violation of copyright law. Briefly, the judge found there was no evidence of financial harm to the paper and found that the use was non-commercial and only intended for "online discussion." Most surprisingly, however, the judge stated that only five of the editorial's paragraphs were "purely creative opinions" of the writer and, therefore, "not enough to consider the work a purely 'creative work'."

Compiled from *GalleyCat* and *Wired*

Good News/Bad News

While Barnes & Noble recently reported a 20 percent increase in sales for the fiscal year, it also posted a \$59 million consolidated net loss for the fourth quarter of 2010. Its stock took a further beating after the news of the loss was announced. One reason for the loss, according to the company, was the shuttering of 200 Borders stores nationwide, which "temporarily negatively impacted" B&N sales. However, the company noted that sales have increased in those now-Borderless markets.

A Writer's Work . . . Is Never Done

BY PATRICIA MCLINN

The title of this article, *A Writer's Work . . . Is Never Done*, is the official slogan of AWritersWork.com, and the idea behind AWritersWork.com is quite simple—it's a place of our own.

Amid the Wild West that is the burgeoning e-book market, AWritersWork.com is a place where authors run the show. A place where the goal is to return the maximum amount to the author whose e-book sale brought in the cash. A place where multi-published print authors come together to sell e-book versions of our writing—in any combination of fiction or nonfiction and previously published or original—directly to readers.

What makes us different from Kindle or PubIt or Smashwords or the others is that there's no profit motive for the website www.AWritersWork.com. In fact—to the dismay of my brother the CPA—it is designed *not* to make a profit. It is designed so that all proceeds not required to keep it going flow to the authors for the sales of their works.

At the moment, the breakdown on any sale, at any price-point is approximately 70% to the author, 25% for website costs, 5% to PayPal (PayPal's fees vary, which is the reason for that “approximately.”). There's a quarterly accounting, with payments going out 15 days after the close of a quarter.

As Jasmine Cresswell says, she's not buying a Ferrari with her AWW proceeds. (Sorry, Jasmine, probably not even the down payment.) On the other hand, after 16 months of existence, I'm proud to say that AWritersWork.com has been self-supporting from the start. As business improves, our expectation is that we will be able to decrease the percentage going to the website and increase the amount to the author. As long as we have the dollars of income to support the website, we can—and will—do that.

In general, the authors earning the most at AWW, have more titles available (our customers tend to return to buy more e-books after trying us out) and fewer other outlets for their books. (Go figure.) As the previous indicates, there is no assignment of rights—in other words AWritersWork.com authors are free to sell their e-books anywhere else they choose. Nor is there any “editorial” exercised. Once an author joins AWritersWork.com, he or she is free to include any genre of work. That's why we're limiting our authors to those who are proven, professional authors.

Since our launch on March 1, 2010, we've grown by 50 percent in the number of authors, and more than that in the number of books offered. The seed for AWritersWork.com germinated at a Night Owl session at the 2006 NINC conference in New Orleans. I heard myself say, “The technology is such now that authors could produce the books themselves. And if we don't take advantage of this, someone else will.”

Hey, I thought, that's really true. And then I waited for someone to act on my brilliant insight. Nobody did. I talked it up some more, and waited some more. Listened to Chris Anderson of *The Long Tail* fame at the 2007 NINC conference in San Diego, and said, “C'mon, somebody, you've got to do this!”

And I waited. And talked. And waited some more until I gave up hoping someone else would do all the prep work, gave in, and got started. With a design for the website in hand, AWritersWork.com started signing up launch authors in fall of 2009.

I had a co-op structure in mind—until I researched the legal and financial requirements of a true co-op. Instead, AWW provides a platform for individual authors, which we operate as an informal co-op, with a Yahoo group to thrash out decisions and make announcements. Our informality extends to the ICOT concept of “upper management.” I am the instigator/central coordinator/exchequer. Pat Rice is my ICOT—In Case of Truck—backup. Should that truck come along and smooch me, all AWW accounts are set up so Pat Rice can pick up the reins.

AWritersWork.com has a low-cost business model that allows us to keep our costs low for member authors, and gives us the luxury of growing slowly, benefiting from word of mouth. Once approved by current AWW authors, a newcomer pays a one-time joining fee of \$35, which goes toward reimbursing the ▶

website's start-up costs that I fronted. When my costs are paid back, that joining fee for new AWW authors will go into a fund for special projects. Each author then pays \$50 for his/her first-book package, which includes the Author Page (bio, photo, booklist), Book Page (blurb, awards, a few reviews, links) for one book, cover on the homepage, inclusion in the genre and by-author listings, a sample first chapter, and, of course the set-up for readers to buy the book, either in PDF or e-book format. For additional books added at the same time as that first book, the cost is \$40 per book that is sent in as an MSWord doc or \$30 per title for which final versions of PDF and e-book files are provided.

Each author provides his/her own covers, and is responsible for costs for additions or changes to his/her material. However, there are no further financial obligations to the website—no monthly fees or annual dues or any such. Once the books are on AWritersWork.com, they can stay there at no further cost to the author as long as the website endures.

However, we do ask AWW authors to help with our no-cost, informal, word-of-mouth promo. Becky Barker is our point person on the AWW Facebook page; I'm the same on Twitter; and Karyn Witmer-Gow writes a newsletter, which I format and send out. In addition, most of our members do guest blogs, send announcements/newsletters to their individual mailing lists, and otherwise bring AWW in front of potential readers.

We've also done special promotions with lots of free books on Dec. 26, a different free book each day of the month for Book-Up in January, and \$0.99 sale to celebrate our first year of existence.

I view AWritersWork.com as our piece of real estate on the Internet. As such, it's a form of long-term insurance.

No one doubts that—as things are now—most authors will make more money at the commercial sites than they will at AWW. But those commercial sites can (and skeptical me figures, will) make their terms far less amendable to authors any time it suits their bottom line. AWritersWork won't because it's run by authors for authors. We're in charge, and we make the rules.

So if/when the day comes that those commercial sites are not friendly to individual authors, the authors of AWritersWork.com will already have an established, trusted outlet for selling e-books directly to readers. A place nobody else can touch.

I like that insurance. A lot.

That way, AWritersWork.com will never be done.

Come visit us at: <http://awriterswork.com>; on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AWritersWork>; and on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/AWritersWork>

*Patricia McLinn is delighted to ride out into the Wild West of e-books with the [AWritersWork.com](http://awriterswork.com) posse. The most recent of her 26 books is e-book *Principal of Love*. (<http://awriterswork.com/>)*

Business Briefs

No Signing For You

The owner of Seattle Mystery Bookshop, J.B. Dickey, won't stock books from Thomas & Mercer, Amazon's new mystery imprint, nor will he host signings for the authors, telling one author in an email exchange he placed on his store's blog site: "We cannot do anything to support, help or benefit Amazon. They're the enemy of independent bookshops and aiding them in any way—mainly ordering their books and selling them and promoting them—would be suicide. Things are tough enough without cutting our own throats."

Other reasons he gives for refusing to deal with Amazon: It's "a huge corporation that has not only taken massive amounts of sales away from me over the years but also sales reps (which means the attention of publishers)"; it has "waged a price war with the NYC publishers over their e-books"; it has "reached into the private devices of individuals and deleted e-books"; and it "appeared to buckle to outside pressure to remove gay and lesbian fiction and, when caught, blamed technical problems, not mendacity." He closed the exchange by telling the unnamed author, "I'm the owner of the Bailey Brothers Building and Loan. You are working for Mr. Potter. And Mr. Potter is always buying."

Read the full exchange at http://seattlemysteryblog.typepad.com/seattle_mystery/2011/06/cant-shake-the-devils-hand-and-say-youre-only-kidding.html

Not Your Usual Writing Advice — Seasons

BY JOANN GROTE

“Rather than yearning to be ‘full-time artists,’ we might aspire to being full-time humans. When we do, art is the overflow of a heart-filled life.”

— Julia Cameron



Photo by Sabrina Ingram

There are seasons to every life, writing project, and career.

It's easy to see how seasons describe the stages of an entire career: the winter of prepublishing, the spring of first publication, the summer years of more publication and building readership, and the fall harvest of a body of work, becoming a known name within a niche and for some, best-seller status.

Success models would have us believe that when we reach the harvest season, all that is ahead is more and greater harvest. Nature teaches us otherwise. Within most lives there are not only the overall seasons of childhood, young adulthood, middle-age and—well, older than middle-age, but a full cycle of seasons within each year of that life. In nature, winter follows fall harvest season. In today's capitalistic world, winter season in a career often feels like the end, a place of failure. We can choose it to be an end to our career, or we can see it as the beginning of another cycle of seasons.

A winter writing season is often identified by lack of physical, mental, and emotional energy to write the story. Sometimes there's frustration because the writer cannot make a story work. Why, he wonders, when he's written X number of books with much less trouble? Very likely in such a case the writer is growing: time to tell a different style, length, type or complexity of story, time to grow the skill to another level.

Sometimes our publisher's seasons bring on a career winter in our lives. I've lived through writing seasons in which editors left my publishers, in which contracts were cancelled because publishers' business plans changed, and in which a line was dropped. In every case, spring arrived with new contracts with the same or different publishers, interspersed with the opportunity to write a different type of book.

A career winter is often brought on by a life season. I've experienced many life seasons that took time and energy from my writing. I've lived through divorce, cross-country moves, death of loved ones, helping loved ones fight against cancer, watching other loved ones fight with alcohol. Through much of it, I continued to write prolifically. Through other times, to my surprise, I found writing almost impossible. Every season left me changed, and therefore affected my stories and the seasons of my career.

It isn't always what we consider the hard and sad things that make up a life season; a wonderful season in my life turned into a winter season in my writing career. The month Joe and I moved in together seven years ago, he gained full custody of his two children, ages 8 and 11, who'd lived with his ex-wife and a stepfather for seven years. At first I kept up well with my writing and my accounting day job. As the new family took more of my time, the writing slipped to the wayside. Finally, Joe and I decided I should quit the day job and concentrate on the writing.

We thought I quit accounting to write. God or the Universe apparently thought otherwise. Two weeks after my last day at the accounting firm, the school suspended the youngest child, resulting in more focus on the family than anticipated. That coincided with an unexpected winter writing season. I wrote a lot, but nothing sold. Even items for which proposals had been accepted were returned—a very different experience than from my almost-everything-sells days. What happened?

A new season happened; a season in which other people took priority over my career, a season in which children trying to figure out life brought unexpected turns and caused major energy and time drains, a season in which I struggled to bring my writing to a new level and learn to write a different style of novel, a season when what I felt I ▶

was “meant” to write changed, and a season when *I* changed. A season, I’ve come to believe, that happened exactly as it was meant to happen.

Our family moved into a new season, and so did my writing. My novel-writing is producing fruit again, fed by the time that appeared unproductive.

Carl Jung spent two solitary years in the wilderness. That season, which looked to outsiders as if he’d opted out of life, and certainly out of healthy, sane, productive life in the traditional American style, gave him the time to study, to discover his own beliefs, which was essential for his life work. Maybe as an author one’s winter season, which feels unproductive, does the same thing: feeds the Muse and future writing.

NINC member Meredith Efken shared the story of a friend to whom one catastrophe after another happened in the space of one year: two writing contracts with different publishers fell through, he lost his day job, and he moved to a different state to care for his aging parents. He set his fiction writing on hold. Life happens, and sometimes it doesn’t look or feel pretty. But the time spent in a season of drought or helping others does not mean the season is wasted time.

His experience and that of other writing friends taught Meredith that “People who have a break in publishing often use that time to reevaluate and change how they are approaching their writing career, or to develop better skills in marketing, or to broaden their life experiences and skills in general. They are often forced into changing their paradigms about publishing. This brings a whole new perspective that people who have been on deadline constantly don’t have. They’ve had time to experiment, to try new things, to learn about things that authors with contracts haven’t had time to do. These people are not damaged goods or has-beens. “Rather, Meredith says, these people develop “a valuable perspective and fresh ideas.”

If you are in a winter season that seems overlong, try this:

- ▶ Write even when it’s hard or feels inadequate in quality or amount.
- ▶ Write something just because you want to write it.
- ▶ Read something that takes you into that wonderful world of story that spurred your desire to write in the first place.
- ▶ Do anything that gives you joy or makes you laugh, for these always give energy to our bodies, minds, and creative life.
- ▶ Above all, remember that winter is not a time of death for your creativity. It is a season of incubation, of renewal, and of preparation for an abundant and joy-filled spring season.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children’s nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.

Business Briefs

“Mom, have you seen my book...?”

A recent article in *Library Journal* pointed out that the skyrocketing sales for books aimed at the Young Adult market may be due in a significant way to adult readers purchasing those books ... for themselves. While acknowledging that the teen demographic has grown in the last five to ten years, the article identified some reasons why many adults are “35 going on 13” when it comes to their reading matter:

The books are frequently “coming of age” stories, which allow adult readers to “relive that crucial experience of growing up”. While the literature itself and the situations younger readers may face have changed over the last few decades, “the angst and ... issues are much the same” and many adults continue to face similar troubles even as they age.

The writing is strong and “the best of YA literature can stand up to work by any adult award winner.”

The stories have an “emotional immediacy” that hooks readers and keeps them engrossed in the book. The article states that, frequently, the first 15 pages of a YA novel will introduce the plot, as well as the main characters, their motivations, and emotional situation, whereas an adult novel might take 50 pages. While “unreliable narrators” abound, “there is rarely unintelligible subtext” and this produces “an immediate connection to the book’s characters and their experiences.”

Adult readers are returning to authors they loved when they were young and, increasingly, their favorite adult authors are “jumping the YA/adult divide.”

Parents want to know what their children are reading. Sharing books allows a “peek into their heads and their world.”

The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



Thrills! Romance! E-venture!

"I'm working harder than I've ever worked before. And I don't know what more to do. I mean, I'm not gonna stop trying. Ever."

— Amanda Hocking, March 2009

At the start of this year, I got serious about electronically self-publishing my backlist, with a view to getting all my unemployed titles back into the work force and earning income in e-book format by the end of 2011.

Alas, as is so often the case, my intentions have so far turned out to be more ambitious than my execution. I am currently running well behind schedule on that plan, and it's clear that I will still be posting old backlist well into 2012. (My excuse is that most of my time at this keyboard is devoted to writing frontlist. As you may remember, my *primary* goal for the year is to start meeting my book deadlines. How's that going, you ask? Oh ... don't even get me started.)

To date I have e-published a small hodgepodge of old titles, mostly based on what I've had time to do so far, rather than based on any sort of cunning market strategy: one nonfiction book, three romance novels, two short fiction collections, and one solo short story. One of the novels—*Fallen From Grace*, a 2004 Rita Award finalist, published under my romance pseudonym, Laura Leone—accounts for half of all my self-published e-earnings to date; the other five books and one short story combined account for the other half.

My big summer project (well, in addition to writing and delivering a novel *by deadline*, that is) is to proof-read, format, convert, package, and e-publish an out-of-print fantasy trilogy which is, in total, close to 700,000 words. After that, I've also got another short fiction collection to do, at least one more nonfiction book, and possibly a novella or two; and then I need to start going through my old category-romance backlist (twelve books) to see what I want to do with those.

So I've got my work cut out for me for the foreseeable future. The prospect of self-publishing *new* work isn't even a blip on my radar yet because, in addition to wanting to get through my backlist first, I also currently owe frontlist novels to my publishers and am—as I may have *mentioned*—still chasing that speeding train.

In any case, I now have the results of the first three months of my e-self-pubbing business.

The bad news is that my luck runs ever true to form; I have *not* turned out to be one of those people whom I so envy—the ones who say things like, "I posted one old novel and one never-published book two months ago, and I've already made \$2700." Or: "I have just bought a beach house on the moon with my e-earnings."

My e-sales have been modest, as has my e-income.

However, the good news is that, with only seven titles posted (and most of them not likely earners even by e-standards, in my opinion), I went into profit on my e-venture in just three months. (Hooray!) This is ▶

in large part because, as stated in a previous column, I have kept my expenses low by self-publishing entirely via a Do It Yourself process.

I proofread my word processing files, I format them for conversion to Mobi and ePub format, I do the conversions, I create the covers, and I upload the books to e-vendors.

All the expenses for my e-venture, which I've completely recouped in three months of modest earnings, have been for software purchase, software lessons, and cover images. In retrospect, if I knew then what I know now, my expenses would probably have been only one-half or one-third of what they actually were; in which case, even with my modest e-sales level, I'd have gone into profit within two months.

My two best investments were software: I acquired ZappTek's Legend Maker to convert word processing files into e-book formats and Adobe's Photoshop Elements to manipulate images for my e-covers.

Legend Maker was \$49.99, including subsequent upgrades. Admittedly, there was a learning curve involved; but doing my own formatting and conversion means that I have every opportunity to make sure that the interiors of my e-books are as professional-looking as I want them to be. The same can definitely not be said for almost half of the 20 randomly selected e-book samples, both self-published and professionally published, which I recently downloaded and examined.

Although I have applied the expense of Photoshop Elements (\$63.99 for the previous year's version) strictly to my e-venture earnings, this software is already coming in handy for other things—particularly since I design and maintain my own website. The method I developed for creating e-covers, after some trial and error, is to manipulate, alter, and combine cover images in Photoshop Elements, and then complete the cover by importing the finished images into PowerPoint—which is not among my e-venture expenses, since it came bundled with my Microsoft Office software some years ago. In PowerPoint, I adjust all the visuals into the proportions, orientation, and layout that I want, and then I add text and flourishes. (In some cases, I dress up the text with some additional fonts I bought for my website years ago for about \$15.)

An expense which, in retrospect, I'm not sure I'd make again is the \$198 I spent on online software lessons to learn to use Photoshop. Although the lessons are good, I now suspect I could have learned what I needed to know from a \$20 "How To" book. I also bought some software (\$52) for drawing maps, since I'd like to include a map with my fantasy trilogy. Reality only set in after purchase: I don't draw—at *all*. So unless I subsequently find a use for it, I have to regard this as a bad expense in my e-venture; but, fortunately, my first three months' earning have covered this cost, too.

The rest of my start-up expenses all went to licensing cover images. In several cases, I spent too much money, simply because I didn't know what I was doing yet. The first few times I licensed images, I got much *larger* file sizes than I needed; and this cost a little more money. In another instance, I offered an artist more than I should have for licensing rights. (I love the artwork; but with more experience at packaging and licensing now, I would only choose to pay 25% to 50% of what I actually did pay.)

However, after those early mistakes, I subsequently acquired a large number of good images for about \$1 per image, which has substantially reduced my overall packaging expenses while providing me with enough images for the rest of my backlist—as well as having a large supply of images left over for use on my website or other visual projects. (Shutterstock.com offers a one-month subscription which allows you to download a large number of individually selected images for a fixed fee. If you split it among several people, you can get many good images for a very reasonable sum.)

I'm still experimenting with covers. I replaced one after about a month; sales improved *s-l-i-g-h-t-l-y* after that, though not enough to clarify to me whether the new cover was a relevant factor. (However, I prefer the new cover.) Having come this far, I will continue doing my own covers for the foreseeable future; though it's possible that at some point, after I am *well* into profit, I may commission a designer to replace a few of them.

I have not yet experimented with pricing, since I'd like to get more books posted and watch my sales patterns over a longer timeframe than three months before fiddling with prices. For now, I price a full-length book at \$4.99, a shorter book (ex. the short fiction collections) at \$3.99, and a solo short story at \$0.99. I'm thinking of pricing my fat fantasies at \$5.99 and my old category-romances at \$2.99; but we'll see. Pricing is

something that I continue to watch and think about without holding firm opinions yet.

I currently base my prices mostly on instinct, i.e. what would I consider a fair price for this e-book, as a reader? Since I'm notoriously thrifty, I tend to trust my instincts on this. I am aware of the success some people are having with pricing full-length books at \$0.99 or \$2.99, but I'm currently reluctant to price my work so low. I'm also uneasy about juxtaposing such low prices against my professionally published frontlist, which is currently priced at \$6.99-\$7.99.

My first three months of e-earnings are based strictly on Amazon and Barnes & Noble sales. Now I have begun expanding into additional venues. In recent weeks, I started self-publishing in Apple's iBooks store; another learning curve, but I got there in the end. I have also contracted with Nina Paules' business, ePublishing Works!, to handle my e-books on Sony.com, Kobo.com, and various other vendors. When I explored Sony and Kobo, I felt they were so complicated and author-unfriendly that I'd rather just pay a reliable service to deal with them. There are a growing number of good services available these days (as well as a growing number of sharks seeking to fleece writers); I chose this one because I know the owner and, in particular, because I like the customizable nature of the service, since I prefer to DIY so much of my e-publishing business.

Thus, by expanding my markets and by continuing to upload more backlist titles, I hope to steadily increase my e-income over the course of the year. I do not anticipate buying a beach house on the moon, alas; but I am happy to have my old books paying some new bills around here.

The weary Laura Resnick's e-books can be seen on her website at: <http://LauraResnick.com> → E-Books.

ZappTek's Legend Maker software is at: <http://Zapptek.com>.

And ePublishing Works! is at: http://Ebookprep.com/epublishing_works.

Business Briefs

Don't Be A Twit

GalleyCat recently identified five items writers should pay attention to when using Twitter to promote themselves and their books:

Your profile: make sure it describes who you are, what you do, and what you write.

Your links: make sure you include links to your website, FaceBook page, Amazon page, and any other place you want your readers to find or follow you.

Your picture: It's part of your online presence. People want to know who's Tweeting them.

Your location: Even just a city and state listing is enough. Many of Twitter's features are tied to location.

Keep your Tweets open: Don't protect the Tweets you're using to build your audience.

GalleyCat

Finally Getting into E-Books

J.K. Rowling recently announced the formation of Pottermore, the only official site for purchasing *Harry Potter* e-books. The site, which will open officially in October, will be "a safe, unique online reading experience built around the *Harry Potter* books." Additional information will be announced on July 31st, which is Rowling's birthday and that of her most famous character.

Her announcement that the books would be DRM-free caused an almost equal flurry on its own. They won't be completely unprotected, however. Each e-book will contain digital watermark in an effort to deter pirates. The digital watermark links the file to the purchaser, enabling files to be tracked if uploaded to file-sharing sites.



**WRITING is
TAXING**
By Diane Kelly

The State of State Sales Tax

Due to the e-commerce boom, state and local sales tax revenues have dwindled and budgets are in crisis. States estimate they lose hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes each year on orders placed by mail, phone, or the Internet. Brick-and-mortar retailers are in an uproar, claiming unfair competition from online merchants who are not required to collect sales tax in their state and, therefore, offer customers a lower total cost at the time of purchase. Customers who order goods online don't know what their tax requirements are and often fail to pay use taxes due on their purchases. As a result, states are cracking down and attempting to close loopholes and collect unpaid taxes.

Current Law

The *Internet Tax Freedom Act* prohibits multiple or discriminatory taxes on electronic commerce. Each state is required to give taxpayers a credit for taxes paid to another state. No state can tax e-commerce transactions at a higher rate than comparable non-electronic transactions, nor can a state require tax to be collected by different parties or under terms less advantageous than those that apply to comparable non-electronic transactions.

The states' hands are somewhat tied when it comes to tax collection, however. Under current law, a state can impose tax collection obligations only on businesses or individuals with which it has a legal "nexus," or connection. A state can impose tax collection responsibilities only on individuals and businesses that are located in or do business in the state. A state cannot impose tax collection responsibilities on out-of-state businesses or individuals with which they have no nexus.

Because the mere delivery of a product is not sufficient to constitute "doing business," a state cannot impose tax collection obligations on an out-of-state business that merely delivers products to parties located within its borders.

Each state that imposes sales tax has a companion tax, called "use" tax, that is imposed on the use, storage, or consumption of a taxable product or service within the state. Use tax applies to orders placed by phone, mail, or Internet. The use tax can be imposed only on those with a nexus to the state, such as residents, and is imposed only when the state sales tax has not been collected. The purchasers of products or services are required to report and pay use tax directly to the state government. The use tax rate is generally the same as the sales tax rate that would have been imposed had the transaction taken place at a local brick-and-mortar retailer.

Some states allow individuals to report and pay use tax as part of their income tax return. Others require taxpayers holding a sales tax permit to report and pay use tax along with their sales tax report. Still others have a separate form for reporting use tax only. Most states require use tax to be reported and paid on an annual basis but a few require monthly reports and payments. Be sure to educate yourself on the rules that apply in your state so that you don't end up with an unexpected bill and penalties.

The Crackdown

Those of you who participate in the “Amazon Associates” program or similar programs may already be aware that states have targeted online retailers, and Amazon in particular, in attempts to collect unpaid sales and use taxes. Several states have enacted legislation to clarify that associates who live in the state and provide advertising links on their websites are, essentially, agents of Amazon and thus create a sufficient nexus between the state and Amazon to allow the state to impose sales tax on Amazon. In response, Amazon has terminated its relationships with associates in several states in order to avoid sales tax responsibilities.

One resource I found indicated that some states may instead request customer order information from Amazon and try to collect use tax directly from the customers in their state rather than trying to collect sales tax from Amazon. The source indicated that Amazon representatives have expressed an intention to comply with such requests, but time will tell. Amazon currently has an outstanding \$269 million sales tax bill with the state of Texas, in which it maintained a distribution center. When Texas attempted to collect, Amazon closed the center.

What This Means for You

You can be liable for use tax on your Internet, phone, and mail orders. Be sure to file your returns and pay the tax on time. Don't forget that if another state's sales tax is assessed on a transaction, you can claim a credit against use tax for the sales tax paid to the other state. Don't forget, too, that sales and use tax paid on products or services purchased for your writing business would be deductible on your Schedule C for the year in which the tax is paid.

If you are an Amazon Associate, or an associate under another company's similar program, your earnings would be considered advertising income or a commission on a service. Generally, such income is not subject to sales tax, though check with your state to be sure. Although your presence in the state could create a nexus that allows the state to impose sales tax on Amazon, this nexus does not make you responsible for sales tax on the items purchased. You are not considered to be the seller of these items merely by providing a link on your site.

What May Come

I predict the law will continue to evolve in this area. The Internet has created a brave new electronic world, yet the fact remains that sales tax is a huge income generator for states and tax revenue is needed if state and local governments are going to continue to provide services. It would not surprise me for the law to change and one day hold that delivery of a product in a state creates a sufficient nexus for that state to impose a sales tax responsibility on the seller.

*For further tax tips, check out the “Tax Tidbits” page on Diane’s website, www.dianekelly.com. Diane’s debut romantic mystery *Death, Taxes, and a French Manicure*, will be released November 1 and is available for pre-order now at the Barnes and Noble, Borders, and, you guessed it, Amazon websites.*

NINC is exploring the possibility of publishing back issues of the newsletter on the public page of the NINC website. If you have contributed to our newsletter in the past and do *not* wish your material used in this way, please contact the Nink Editor.

NINC Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY SUSAN LYONS

**Do you have info
for the Bulletin Board?**
Send it to Susan at
susan@susanlyons.ca

You're in Business A Quick Reminder

Tonya Wilkerson, CPA, and NINC's central coordinator for many years, will be joining us for a workshop in Florida during the 2011 conference, *New Rules, New Tools: Writers In Charge*. Tonya will be showing us how to get all our accounting and tax requirements lined up properly as we set ourselves up not only as writers but as business owners selling directly to consumers via e-books.

To make sure your individual questions are answered, please them to Laura Phillips, who is compiling a list for Tonya so that the workshop is full of "This is how you do that," rather than "Let me get back to you on that." Even if you can't make it to the conference, please send your questions. Email your questions to Laura at: laura@napdog.com

NINC Online

NINC's Blog

NINC's blog is a large part of our online presence and a great way to promote your work. We're averaging about 10,000 hits a month and have had a total of 356,000 hits since July 2008. Please sign up to blog by going to the YahooGroups NINC Calendar. We also feature industry professionals, so pass along suggestions—e.g., your own agent, editor, publicist, website designer, cover artist, etc.

Adventures at the NINC Website

Have you forgotten how to:

- ▶ refer a new member to NINC or request NINC brochures?
- ▶ find a reversion of rights request sample letter?
- ▶ print out NINC business cards? (did you even know we had them?)
- ▶ list your appearances on the NINC website?

You can find links for all those things and many more on our website. Log on as a member, go to the **NINC BUSINESS** tab, then click on "How do I...?"

What's Going on with Other Writers' Organizations

Note: The following is provided for member information and does not constitute an endorsement by NINC of the organizations or activities.

It's awards season, so if you're looking for a good read, check out some winners and finalists:

Edgar Awards for mystery/crime:

<http://www.theedgars.com/nominees.html>

Nebula Awards for science fiction/fantasy:

<http://www.fantafiction.com/news/?p=115>

NINC on Facebook

Don't forget we're on Facebook, too. Please visit often and share your news and ideas. It's another great place to promote yourself and help expand NINC's public profile.

P.I. Confidential

By Colleen Collins

"Let me explain something to you, Walsh. This business requires a certain amount of finesse."

— Jake Gittes in *Chinatown* (1974)

Writer's Question: Are there any legal restrictions on a P.I. getting involved with a client, the subject of an investigation, a fellow P.I., or a law enforcement officer who's involved in the same case? If not, are there generally accepted ethical guidelines or is it totally up to the P.I.'s own judgment? How about any lawsuits arising out of these kinds of relationships?

Answer: It's certainly popular in film and books for a P.I. to get involved with a client. It's not uncommon in real life, either. In our community, there's a high-profile P.I. who became romantically involved with a woman who'd hired him to be her bodyguard—years later, they're still happily together.

Although there aren't always legal restrictions, there are often ethical ones to consider in the relationships mentioned. As to lawsuits, none appear in online sources; however, that doesn't mean none exist.

Involvement with a Client

Attorneys, physicians, accountants, psychologists cannot legally get involved with their clients because those professional-client relationships are interwoven with significant trust. However, in the vast majority of jurisdictions, there is no legal proscription forbidding a P.I. getting involved with a client.

That said, there are a pile of reasons why a P.I. should scrupulously avoid romantic entanglements with clients, a key one being the P.I.'s loss of professional objectivity. After all, clients hire P.I.s to make factual discoveries, not be advocates of their versions of events.

If a P.I. is hired through an attorney, the P.I. is an agent of that law firm, and the P.I.'s conduct is covered by the attorney's code of professional responsibility. Therefore, if a P.I. were to get involved with a client, that attorney is on the hook for negligent supervision. For example, the attorney could be viewed as authorizing the P.I.'s sexual misconduct with a client, and the attorney could easily lose his/her license. Horrible scenario in real-life, juicy for fiction.

Involvement with the Subject of an Investigation

Let's look at a few examples of what might be construed as a "romantic involvement": Taking the subject out to dinner, weekend trips, buying presents. In the eyes of the law, the appearance of impropriety is as bad as the impropriety itself. In other words, if it looks like a fish, then it smells like a fish.

In a worse-case scenario, if police or opposing counsel learn that a P.I. is romantically involved with the subject of an investigation, it's conceivable the P.I. could be charged with tampering with a witness, improper influence, or bribery. What if it was truly an innocent get-together, just an interview over dinner, nothing more? Sorry, a qualified P.I. should know appearances count. Again, this scenario offers ample fodder for fiction. ▶

P.I. Confidential

Let's say the P.I. has become romantically linked to the subject of an investigation, and the romance goes south. A heartbroken witness might report a P.I.'s "misconduct" to authorities, maybe concoct a few heinous details (there's no fury like a scorned lover). The P.I. could be publicly skewered by the local media, opposing counsel in open court, and let's not forget the far-reaching impact of blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn...

Involvement with a Law Enforcement Officer

If a romantically involved P.I. and officer are on different sides of a case, and share—or even *appear* to share—case information, it can undermine a legal proceeding. For example, a convicted person is sitting, and stewing, in prison ... then one day learns the D.A.'s detective in his case, and the P.I. his family hired, were lovers. Convict rings up his attorney, who files a motion for a new trial, claiming the P.I. shared investigative information and strategy with the other side of the case. Guess what? The conviction could easily be overturned.

Involvement with a Fellow P.I.

Yours truly eloped with her P.I.-business partner, so she highly recommends P.I.-P.I. relationships. Seriously, it's common for professional peers—whether they're P.I.s, cops, lawyers, or stockbrokers—to get involved. However, an ethical dilemma could arise if the P.I.s are working opposite sides of a case (see Involvement with a Law Enforcement Officer, above).

A by-product of a P.I.-P.I. relationship is the absolute unpredictability of each partner's schedule. With one cell phone call, a candlelit dinner has every possibility of turning into a moonlight surveillance. If they're both working the same case, no ethical problems there ... as long as both P.I.s keep their eyes on the target, not the moon ... or each other.

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