

Escaping the Slush Pile

MASTERING THE QUERY LETTER
AND OTHER PUBLISHING SECRETS

MaryJanice Davidson

Escaping the Slush Pile

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by MaryJanice Davidson

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Dedication

For Christine and Dennis, who had a terrible year but came out of it smiling. Christine, I know I'll be reading a book of yours someday. Keep writing!

Acknowledgements

This book wouldn't have been possible without the assistance of several dozen people, particularly the publishers who were kind enough to let me interview them. I'd also like to thank Kate Duffy, Nicola Simpson, Lisa Plumley, Melinda Rucker Haynes, Elizabeth Delisi, Linda Campbell, Bobbye Terry, and Carol Givner, for sharing samples of queries, tales of bravery, and, essentially, taking the time to show others the light at the end of the tunnel. Thanks again, guys. And, as always, warmest thanks to my friends and family for their unswerving support.

Other books by MaryJanice Davidson:

The Adventures of the Teen Furies

Hard Shell Word Factory

www.hardshell.com

Dying For Ice Cream

(Audiobook)

The Fiction Works

www.fictionworks.com

Too Good To Be True

(Reunions novella collection)

Barbour Publishing

www.barnesandnoble.com

Love Lies

Starlight Writer Publications,

www.starpublications.com

Love's Prisoner

Red Sage Publishing

www.redsagepub.com

Introduction

or: Who the Heck Do

I Think I Am Anyway?

Congratulations! You've just taken an important step toward publication, or, if you're already published, toward selling more work. Unless you own Random House, mastering the query letter is probably your number one route to a book or magazine article contract. (Mastering the synopsis is number two, and you'll know how to do both after reading this book.) Writing a great book isn't enough; you've got to be able to "sell" your idea to the publishers. That's where the query letter comes in.

I'll show you verbatim copies of query letters that got an editor's (or agent's) attention, resulting in either a request for a partial or complete manuscript, a contract for representation, and, in several cases, a contract for publication. In addition, I've interviewed several editors and publishers to find out what they like and also seriously hate about the hundreds of queries that cross their desks every week. I'll show you examples of synopses that garnered an instant contract offer, and I'll share all the tricks I've figured out after twenty years of writing, and ten of trying to get published.

While I can't promise instant publication and fame, I can assure you that once you master the query letter, you'll never again be relegated to that publishing no-man's-land, the slush pile. Editors will ask to see your work, and when your envelope shows up on their desk, they'll give it special attention. Why wouldn't they? It's something they want, something they made a special point of requesting.

These days, virtually all my correspondence from publishing houses is made up of requests to read more of my work, contract offers, or a personalized rejection letter which reads, in essence, "love your style but this work isn't quite right for this list—got anything else?" No matter what the reply, I'm always in the game because I use queries to build ongoing relationships with editors.

Some of the query examples are my own, and some are from fellow authors. I'll dissect them and show you what all these letters have in common. By the time you're done reading this, you'll be able to spot a great query from a lousy one and apply that knowledge to your writing.

If it sounds impossible, it's really not. I used to despair of ever being published, and deeply envied those writers who somehow managed to sell book after book after book. Since I was trying so hard to get published (and failing for years), I assumed all published authors were related to publishers or had

fancy degrees or had sold their souls to the devil. What I didn't know—what it took me years to figure out—is that my first impression, the query letter, was coloring entire relationships with editors.

To my joy, once I figured that out, I was also pleased to realize that writing a great query letter was easy. I used to hate that part of it (“Dammit, I’m a writer, not a salesman!”) but now thinking up queries is one of my favorite parts of the creative process. It’s exciting to pitch an idea to an editor, especially when you get positive feedback a few weeks later.

But it wasn’t always that way. It took me over ten years to figure out that it was about writing a great query . . . what a waste of time! Ten years of rejection slips. The yucky kind, the badly copied form letter that starts, “Dear Writer.” Ugh! (My all-time favorite rejection slip was on an inch-wide strip of paper; they wouldn’t even waste a whole sheet on me!) Here’s your chance to learn from my mistakes and trust me, they were legion.

But who am I to write this book? I don’t have a degree (unless you count the high school diploma from Cannon Falls High School, representing an amazingly mediocre GPA). In fact, I have yet to set foot in a college classroom. I have yet to take a writing course of any kind (unless you count seventh grade English, in which I received an uninspired “B”).

And yet, within thirty-six months I sold four book manuscripts, a screenplay option, and five articles. As of this writing, I've sold three books in the last two months. I'm currently negotiating with one publisher to sell the electronic rights to a book, with another publisher to sell the print rights of one of my electronic books, and the editor of one of the magazines I recently sold to keeps bugging me for more columns. In the last four weeks I've received six letters from editors: one a polite no-thank-you (personalized) with a respectful request to see more of my work as soon as I finish my current project, three requests for sample chapters, one request for the entire manuscript, and one contract.

Lest you think I'm bragging (What have I got to brag about? Remember the mediocre GPA and the years of "Dear Writer" rejection forms!), anybody can land a book contract. What's a little more interesting is, non-celebrities can land a book contract. It's true! It just takes persistence . . . and a tolerance for rejection. I started sending manuscripts to publishers when I was 17. I didn't get a book contract until I was 26. That's a lot of rejection slips. But I didn't give up.

Neither should you.

Chapter One

What Is a Query?

Sounds like one of those Zen questions, doesn't it? What is the sound of one query clapping? It's not very Zen, though. It's not even hard. A query is a sales pitch. It's a letter that says to an editor, "Say, you! Here's a GREAT idea you'd be nuts to pass up. Don't you want to see more?" Many of them agree, and request either the article, a partial (usually the first three chapters and a synopsis), or the complete. (I was surprised to learn "partial" and "complete" were nouns.)

When you get good at queries, you don't have to write the full manuscript before pitching the idea to an editor. For my young adult book, *Dying for Ice Cream*, I sent the editor a query letter. He asked for a partial, which I dashed off in a day and sent. Then he asked to see the rest of the manuscript, which I hadn't written yet. I got him to offer me the contract before I had to write the whole thing. Later, I'll show you how I did it.

These days I never write the entire manuscript unless I have strong interest from an editor. I think of it as pure professionalism on my part. (My husband thinks of it as pure laziness, but never mind.)

I tend to think of my writing as a product that has value. Why should I labor for months over a book unless I know there's an editor somewhere who wants to read it? Skilled contractors—home builders, carpenters, photographers, and the like—don't do a big job without a contract. Why should writing be different? Your work has value. If you don't believe it, and act like it, why should an editor? (The photographer example might have been a mistake; now I've got this image in my head of a photographer showing up uninvited to a wedding and snapping pics, then hanging around the reception hoping the bride and groom will pay her for the work.)

SIX ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL QUERY LETTER

- The editor's correctly spelled name and address (to be found in *Writers Digest*, among other places (more on this later)).
- The hook (the first few sentences that grab your editor's interest).
- A description of your story/article idea/whatever (three to four sentences will do; just name the key characters and outline the basic plot/dilemma).
- The word count and status of your story/article idea.
- Information about yourself (this includes writing credits to date, relevant work history/personal experience, etc.).
- A self-addressed, stamped envelope.

You probably know this already, right? But seeing a cold list of ingredients isn't the same thing as seeing the finished product. So I've thrown in lots of examples of successful queries, which follow.

Chapter Two

Queries That Worked . . . and Why

The queries I'll show you are primarily for romance novels, but the fundamentals of a great query apply to any genre or medium. I've been in young adult, various subgenres in romance, and nonfiction. While there is a difference in pitching, say, a romance novel as opposed to a nonfiction book, all successful queries contain The Big Six. Explanations follow each letter.

(Note: I've either deleted the date altogether, or at least the year, on these letters, but of course, always put the date on your query. Also, to clear up some confusion that might result from reading my queries: due to publishing delays, the first book I sold was not the first one to be published. This is not atypical in the industry.)

Date

Kate Duffy¹

Senior Editor

Kensington Publishing Corporation

850 Third Avenue

New York, NY 10022

Dear Ms. Duffy:

Can love be planned? And what happens when your plan to become a man-magnet winds up attracting the wrong man? That's what Holly Aldridge finds out in *Surrender*, an approximately 50,000-word contemporary romantic comedy which I'd like you to consider for publication in Kensington's new Precious Gems line.²

Dumped by her boyfriend, good-girl accountant Holly whips up a sure-fire plan to win him back. To put a little spark into the competition, she adds a sexy new roommate to the mix, Sam McKenzie. As a part-time construction worker with blue eyes and a killer smile, he's got "hunk" written all over him. But Holly's determined not to be tempted from her plan, even by a guy like Sam—isn't she?

Laid-back Sam is more than he seems. A college English professor from September through May, his summer break in Saguaro Vista, Arizona, turns really hot the second he lays eyes on Holly. Sam doesn't have a plan, but he's got a goal making Holly fall in love with him. To do it, he'll have to throw lots of monkey wrenches into Holly's crazy plans to win back her uptight ex-boyfriend. It ought to be easy for a guy with Sam's bad-boy past, but he's left all that behind him—hasn't he?³

I hope you'll have as much fun reading *Surrender* as I did writing it. I've enclosed a brief synopsis and the first three chapters for your consideration, and if the premise of the book appeals to you, I'd be glad to send you the completed manuscript.⁴

I'm an avid reader of all kinds of romance and a member

of Romance Writers of America. With *Surrender*, I've had the opportunity to stretch as a writer and tackle a new romance sub-genre, and I've loved every minute of it! I'm eager to hear your response to the story, and look forward to hearing from you soon.⁵

Sincerely,

Lisa Plumley

¹Ms. Plumley did her homework. She knew the name and spelling of the editor she was targeting. This might seem terribly obvious, but it's probably the number one newbie mistake. There are lots of ways to get this vital information. You can buy *Writer's Market* each year; that's probably the easiest. *Writer's Market* has phone numbers as well as address. However! Never send a query letter without first calling the publisher and checking to make sure so-and-so's still there. The turnover rate at publishing houses is unbelievable compared to many other industries. Besides a sparkling query letter, sending it to the right place and name is probably your number one way out of the slush pile. Addressing it to the wrong person (or addressing a female editor as "Mr." in your letter . . . real short ticket to nowhere, FYI) is a major turnoff.

You can also get information on publishers through the Internet, which we'll discuss later. And

magazines such as *Writer's Digest* and *Romance Writers' Report* are constantly giving their readers updates on which editors are leaving/joining which houses. You can also network. More on that later, as well.

²There are so many things going right in this paragraph, I don't know where to start. First off, she gets the editor's attention with her hook, that nifty two sentence teaser. Then she tells us how many words her manuscript is (very important) and where she's targeting it (Kensington's Precious Gems line). So right away, this editor knows Ms. Plumley is a pro. Even if she doesn't care for the rest of the letter, it will be the idea she doesn't care for, not the presentation, or the author.

³Here Ms. Plumley teases us with a longer description of the book. It reads like the back cover blurb of a paperback, and it should—that back-cover blurb makes us buy the books. What better way to sell to an editor?

⁴ She's offering to send the completed manuscript. It's important to let the editor know if you've finished writing it or not. And look how professional and cooperative Ms. Plumley sounds! She's basically saying, hey, I've got this great book I really think you'll like—want to take a look? Editors, who see maybe one usable manuscript out of a hundred, if that many, are grateful to get a query from an obvious pro.

You don't have to be published to be considered a professional—you just have to be professional.

⁵And now we find out a little bit about Ms. Plumley, her professional affiliations (RWA, very important for romance novelists) and hobbies (avid reader).

Small wonder the editor asked for this manuscript. Not only did Ms. Duffy ask for it, but Ms. Plumley had a contract offer in her hand before a month had gone by.

Below is a query for Ms. Simpson's first book. Ms. Simpson, unlike what I did, got her query right the first time, and didn't need ten years to figure out which end was up. Not only was this a query for her first book, it was her first query ever, and rated an enthusiastic "Please send complete!" from Silhouette Books—not an easy house to impress ever, much less the first time out. I know; I've sent them more than one query, and gotten very polite "No thanks" letters in return. Aarrgh! I hate Ms. Simpson! Just kidding.

Date

Gail Chasan, Editor
Silhouette Books
300 East 42nd Street

Sixth Floor
New York, NY
10017 USA

Dear Ms. Chasan:

Which comes first in a relationship, trust or love? The two are inseparable in *The Big Uneasy*, an 80,000 word romantic suspense that I wrote with Silhouette Intimate Moments in mind.¹

When FBI agent Kate Kendrick is sent to New Orleans to consult on a series of bizarre murders, she is surprised and disturbed by the appearance of her long-time nemesis, investigative reporter and true-crime writer J.C. Trevelyan. When the local police scoff at her theory that voodoo is involved in the case, Trev is the only one she can turn to. Something twists in her stomach at the idea of asking for his help, but she's starting to realize that she wants it. And that she wants him. Slowly, her resentment turns to passion, and then to fear and despair as she realizes that the man she was starting to trust could be the man they're after.²

The Big Uneasy is a fast-paced and touching story about trust and betrayal, and letting yourself love unconditionally something difficult for workaholic Kate and commitment-shy Trev. They are characters that everyone can relate to intimately, caught up in a larger-than-life story.

Regarding my writing experience, I have published a number of short stories (both in small presses and on the Internet) and have written numerous articles and editorials for

three local newspapers. I have also worked extensively in the film and television industry (in fact, my experiences with *The X-Files* partly inspired *The Big Uneasy*), and I still freelance as a script consultant. I love reading and writing romance, and am an active member of the Romance Writer's Listserv.³

The Big Uneasy is approximately 80,000 words and is ready to be delivered. Enclosed here is a short synopsis, as well as an SASE for your convenience. I would be delighted to send you a detailed synopsis and the first three chapters for your perusal.⁴

If you have any questions or want to know more about the manuscript or my background, please don't hesitate to contact me at the address, phone number, or e-mail address above.

Thanks for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Nicola Simpson

¹Oh, this is really excellent. A catchy first line and, even better, proof that Ms. Simpson researched her market. That is, she wrote a book with a specific, targeted romance line in mind.

²A mini-synopsis comes here, which tells the editor what the book is about, but not how it ends (always key in hooking an editor because you want them curious about your book).

³Here the author gives some of her background.

This is an excellent example of a writer who hasn't sold a book manuscript writing a dynamite bio. Who cares if she hasn't sold to Silhouette? She's worked on *The X-Files*!

⁴Ms. Simpson clearly knows the drill, always a relief to an editor. She gives the word count (never never leave out the word count, unless you don't mind your query being round filed), offers to send chapters, and mentions her enclosed SASE. She's clearly a professional.

Note the similarities between successful query letters. Same basic formula: hook 'em with a tease, tell 'em about your book, tell 'em about you.

The differences are interesting to note, however. Even though Ms. Simpson hadn't yet sold a book manuscript, she mentioned her impressive writing credits as well as her exposure to the film industry. You don't have to be a published book author to write a good book, but it's helpful to note other aspects about you that make you suited to tackle the subject matter. For example, if you're a nurse who wrote a thriller that takes place in a hospital, mention your medical background. It proves your expertise, and gets an editor's attention.

Ms. Simpson also gave the editor several ways to reach her: via address, telephone, or e-mail. Be sure to mention all three, if you have them.

Following are a few of my queries, variations of the two “classic” letters presented earlier. All resulted in an immediate (usually within three weeks) request for sample chapters or the entire manuscript.

February 10

Stephanie Kip, Associate Editor

Bantam Books

1540 Broadway

New York, NY 10036

Dear Ms. Kip:

I am a published author who heard you were actively seeking manuscripts, and I thought of Bantam right away for my latest contemporary, *Love Bites*.¹

Jessica Lawrence is no ordinary vampire. She wears a crucifix, drinks holy water like it was Perrier, and hates vampires. “Turned” against her will by the Vampire Prince, she despises what she has become and spends her time mourning the sun . . . and her soul.²

Dr. Anthony Grey knows the talk about vampires “coming out,” so to speak, is all Internet-generated gossip. He’s not thinking about night-stalkers when he pronounces the beautiful car accident victim dead at 4:55 a.m.—fifty-two minutes before sunrise. Dr. Grey decides to perform the autopsy, drawn to the woman for reasons he can’t define. His scientific curiosity is piqued—how can she appear so lovely,

so utterly unharmed, but have no pulse or blood pressure? And why does the thought of the beautiful stranger, dead, make his chest hurt?

Jessica wakes up on the slab in time to see an intense, handsome man standing over her with a scalpel, unable to bring himself to cut into her chest. She lets out a scream that would wake the un-dead, then jumps off the table and locks herself in the specimen freezer, clad only in her toe-tag.

So begins *Love Bites*, a romantic tale of vampire love and revenge. Jessica and Anthony have more than the usual obstacles facing a hero and heroine . . . for one thing, Jessica is a bastion of pain and rage because she was “turned” against her will. She doesn’t trust anyone right now—mortal, vamp, or herself.

For another, Anthony doesn’t believe in vampires, and certainly can’t believe he fell in love with one the moment she sat up in Autopsy Room #2 and shrieked at him. But he does believe in true love, and convincing Jessica they were meant to be together, always, proves to be a formidable task.

Finally, the Vampire Prince is determined to claim his bride and won’t let a puny mortal stand in his way. How Jessica and Anthony finally come to realize the depth of their love, vanquish the Dark Prince, and (of course!) live happily ever after makes for a thrilling, romantic, and humorous read.

Love Bites will be my fourth novel. My first, *By Any Other Name* (women’s fiction), will be out in March, and I have a young adult novel (*The Adventures of the Teen Furies*) coming out next spring. I was contracted to write an audiobook,

Dying For Ice Cream, based on the strength of my synopsis and sample chapter; it will be out this fall. I have also sold a screenplay option as well as several magazine articles.

I would be delighted to present you with a detailed synopsis and/or sample chapters. I can deliver a completed manuscript within two months of a request.³

I have enclosed an SASE for your convenience, but please don't hesitate to call me at either number above if you need more information.

Thanks in advance for your consideration, and many wishes for a pleasant and productive spring.

Sincerely yours,
MaryJanice Davidson

¹I didn't start with a teaser; I started by mentioning I was a published author (sort of . . . I'd sold manuscripts, even though nothing was in print yet). I did this to emphasize my professional status; like I said, editors see so much mail it's important to establish you're not wasting their time. But if you're not yet published, starting with a hook is an excellent way to open your query.

Of note, I heard this editor was hungry for new authors via an e-mail list for romance authors. See Chapter 8: Network, Network, Network.

²My "hook" was almost a miniature synopsis. This works well for me in the romance genre, but I

keep it as short as I can. Still, this letter went to two pages—an acceptable risk, and I've never had any problems breaking the "one page only!" query letter rule. The important thing is to keep the letter on point. Make every word count. If the end result is two pages, so be it.

Speaking of risks, evaluating my own writing ("How Jessica and Anthony finally come to realize the depth of their love, vanquish the Dark Prince, and [of course!] live happily ever after makes for a thrilling, romantic, and humorous read.") is another risk, one I frequently take. My attitude is, if the writer doesn't think his or her book is great, why should anyone else?

³ This book was just an idea; when I sent the query I hadn't written it yet, which I noted in my query. I also told the editor I could deliver it to her within two months. If the book isn't done when you query, tell the editor. And when you guesstimate how long it will take you to write the thing, tack on an extra two weeks to your best guess, just to be safe. It's impossible to predict what your writing schedule will look like even two or three months down the line. At the time of this writing, I have the edits to this book, three book reviews, an article on a writer's conference, and edits on a romance for Harlequin all due to various editors in less than thirty days. Always give yourself extra time when estimating deadlines.

Finally, when an editor asks to see a partial or complete, write **REQUESTED MATERIAL** on the address label below the editor's city, state, and zip. Capitalize it and bold it. This is fairly vital. Sure, the editor's assistant will (eventually) slit the envelope, skim your cover letter, and (eventually) put it on his boss's desk, but if he sees **REQUESTED MATERIAL** under his boss's name, he'll get to it a little faster.

THE FOLLOW-UP

Ms. Kip asked for a partial almost immediately. When I'm writing a cover letter to an editor who asked for my material, I try to keep it as short as I can. Sometimes I'll enclose a copy of my original query just to refresh his/her memory, or at least cut and paste a paragraph from my query into my cover letter. These poor people see hundreds and hundreds of letters a week, and it never hurts to prod their memory a little.

Stephanie Kip, Associate Editor
Bantam Books
1540 Broadway
New York, NY 10036

Dear Ms. Kip:

Thanks so much for your letter last week; it was great to hear from you. As you requested, I have enclosed three sample chapters (the first two, and one from the middle containing a love scene) from *Love Bites*, the story of Jessica Lawrence, reluctant vampire, and Dr. Anthony Grey, reluctant vampire believer. I've also enclosed a synopsis.

You had kindly asked for information about my other works. My first book, a contemporary romance (*By Any Other Name*) will be out this May. It was the Buyer's Choice for spring and has enjoyed extra marketing attention. I've gotten a very favorable review so far ("MaryJanice Davidson is an author with the ability to make dialogues come alive . . . you'll get a glimpse of MaryJanice's talent for dialogues and her strength in creating strong sexual tension between characters not to mention some sizzling scenes!") with at least six other reviewers lined up (Including *Romantic Times Magazine*) for the spring.¹

I have a young adult novel (*The Adventures of the Teen Furies*) coming out next spring, and I was contracted to write an audio book, *Dying For Ice Cream* based on the strength of my synopsis and sample chapter; it will be out this fall. I have sold a screenplay option as well as several magazine articles (I've also managed to squeeze wife and motherhood in the middle of all this!).²

I hope you enjoy my sample chapters; I can deliver a completed manuscript within six weeks of a request. I've enclosed an SASE for your convenience, but please feel free to call me at either number above if you have any questions.³

Thanks in advance for taking a look. I hope you like *Love Bites*, and that this letter finds you and yours well.

Sincerely yours,
MaryJanice Davidson

¹Breaking my own rule, I was a little chatty in this letter, mostly because I had stuff to talk about. Someone pitching his or her first book could simply refer to their query letter, let the editor know when the manuscript can be completed, and thank the editor for taking a look. When in doubt, be brief.

²As the book still isn't written, I made mention of these items to emphasize the fact that I can work on a deadline. Remember, your work is worth something, so after the first or second book sale, try not to write an entire book without a contract unless you have to.

³A quick word about SASEs (Self Addressed Stamped Envelopes). If you're sending a partial or the complete manuscript and don't necessarily want your pages back (I never do—who wants to figure out the postage? And who wants a crumpled, coffee-stained manuscript?), politely tell the editor you don't need the manuscript back, and would they please pass it on as they see fit. My first novel got passed from the hardcover division of Little, Brown to the paperback division this way.

Then just enclose an ordinary #10 envelope as your SASE, for the editor's letter. This is cheaper, much less trouble, and may turn a rejection into a possible sale.

EXTRAS

March 26

Joan Marlow Golan¹

Silhouette Romance

300 East 42nd Street

Sixth Floor

New York, NY 10017

Dear Ms. Golan:

I read your interview at The Painted Rock, and thought of you right away for my 70,000 word contemporary romance, *Yes, Ma'am, That's My Baby*.

Dr. James Markham is outraged to discover his sperm has been shanghaied! An E.R. physician frequently exposed to X-ray radiation, he took the liberty of storing a few specimens at a local sperm bank, just in case—only to discover it was given to a recipient in error.

Lynda Lawrence, a lively young woman determined to fulfill her dying mother's wish for grandchildren, shows up at the reproductive clinic to get the results of her pregnancy test. Not only does she find out she's pregnant, but the donor is

the handsome, dark-haired man delivering a blistering dressing-down to the clinic staff.

When James finds out Lynda is to be the mother of his child, things get off to a decidedly rocky start. James is a confirmed bachelor, a brilliant loner with no time for a family. Lynda is anxious for motherhood, but not at all anxious to share her child with a man who feels he's been forced into fatherhood. How the two of them come to adore their unborn child, as well as each other, will make for an exciting, occasionally hilarious read for fans of the Silhouette line.

I would be delighted to present you with a detailed synopsis and/or sample chapters. I can deliver a completed manuscript within two months of a request.²

I have enclosed an SASE for your convenience, but please don't hesitate to call me at either number above if you need more information.

Thanks in advance for your consideration, and many wishes for a pleasant and productive spring.

Sincerely yours,
MaryJanice Davidson

¹I read an interview with this editor on the Internet. (See Chapter Six: Why the Internet Rocks.) In it, she explained the kinds of books she's looking for, what she likes to see in a hero and heroine, and no-no's. Valuable stuff. I immediately thought of a story idea that incorporated her preferences, and

dashed off a query letter.

²Unfortunately, I outsmarted myself with this query. The editor wrote back immediately and wanted to see the entire manuscript, pronto. Well, I hadn't written it yet. So I learned something important about this editor: don't query her unless you're ready to show a complete work. I could drop everything and write this book, but it would be at least six weeks before I could send a manuscript to this editor, and by then chances are she'd have forgotten all about me, or possibly even have moved on to another job.

Date

Mary Ann Heathman
LionHearted Publishing, Inc.
PO Box 618
Zephyr Cove, NV 89448

Dear Ms. Heathman:

I am a published author who was wondering if you might like to take a look at my contemporary romance, *Love Lies*, set in Boston, Massachusetts.

It's love at first sight for Victor and Ashley when they meet at the Carlson-Musch Institute for Mental Health. He's there to bequeath half a million dollars . . . she's on the lam from

hospital security. They have nothing in common—he's a millionaire, and she's right on the poverty line—but it doesn't matter. Their attraction is immediate and electric.

Not long after they begin seeing each other, Victor becomes ill. Out of his mind with a dangerously high fever, he mistakes Ashley for his vicious ex-wife and takes her against her will, shattering her trust with one thrust. Days later, when he awakens in the hospital, Victor has no memory of what happened. The only clue is a cryptic note from Ashley, wherein she states she never wants to see him again. Ashley, meanwhile, has discovered she is pregnant.

How they reconcile, marry, become parents, and live happily ever after is an exciting, occasionally hilarious, and touching journey. While Victor makes no secret of his love for Ashley, she is not so easily swayed . . . all she's ever had is her pride, and she fears that giving him her heart will mean she has nothing left for herself. How Ashley finds out that loving someone means you end up stronger, not weaker, will leave readers smiling.

I hope you think *Love Lies*, at 70,000 words, would be an appropriate choice for *Lionhearted*. I have enclosed the first three chapters and a synopsis, and can send the entire manuscript whenever you wish. I have enclosed an SASE for your convenience, but you can call me at either number above (or e-mail me) whenever you wish. You need not return the partial.

Etc., etc. This query is worth mentioning solely for the response it received. The editor asked, via e-mail, for a partial,

which I sent. About forty-eight hours later, the woman called me at home on a Friday night and gave me forty-five minutes of priceless critiquing. I was open-mouthed and took frantic notes (desperately wishing I'd taken that shorthand class in high school), unable to believe my good fortune. She had excellent advice and, even better, liked what I had sent her. She had a few suggestions and asked to see the rest of the manuscript. Then we got to talking about Leonardo di Caprio (*The Man in the Iron Mask* had just come out on video).

One of her valuable suggestions was the way she noted my manuscript had no external conflict. I managed not to say “Huh?” over the phone, and she was nice enough to give me a quick lesson in conflict and its importance to novels. I re-read my book and what do you know—she was right!

Even though she ultimately rejected my manuscript, the feedback I got from her was priceless, and I told her so. What follows is my slaveringly grateful response.

Date

Mary Ann Heathman
LionHearted Publishing, Inc.
PO Box 618
Zephyr Cove, NV 89448

Dear Ms. Heathman:

I very much enjoyed our conversation last Friday

evening—I hope you had a pleasant holiday weekend. It was terrific to hear about all the great things that have been happening at Lionhearted—in particular those fabulous reviews your books have been getting, and the plans to soon offer electronic books.

Enclosed, as we discussed, please find the new and improved version of *Love Lies*, now with external conflict—the advanced secret ingredient! Also, by heeding your suggestions I was able to cut a lot of unnecessary pages (among other things, Chapter Two).

Thanks for taking a look and, as always, please don't hesitate to call me at either number above if you have any questions or comments. Even if you must ultimately pass on the manuscript, I remain grateful for your excellent critique and helpful comments.

Sincerely yours,
MaryJanice Davidson

Ms. Heathman eventually passed on my manuscript, but this didn't bother me nearly as much as it might have, because with just a few minutes of her time, she vastly improved my work. After implementing her excellent suggestions, I promptly submitted *Love Lies* to another publishing house, where I was immediately offered a contract. It's now available as a disc, download, and paperback, and another publisher is thinking about buying the

hardcover rights.

The moral: editors are frantically overworked, which doesn't change the fact that there are pretty great ones out there, and if you can get feedback, it's a price beyond rubies. The other moral: a book contract doesn't make you a pro. Acting like a pro, and being treated like a pro by others in the industry, makes you a pro.

I enclosed this sample primarily because one of my publishers said it was an example of a great hook.

March 16

Cabin Cohen Ritter
Zebra Books
Imprint of Kensington
850 Third Avenue, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10022

Dear Ms. Ritter:

Lynn Rawest went a quarter of a century back in time, saved a little boy from certain death, defeated the bad guys, left the boy with a wonderful foster family, and returned to her own time. The end, right? Wrong. All that happened before *My Angel* begins.

I am a published author, representing myself¹, who

immediately thought of Kensington (and Deb Stoker's editor!) for *My Angel*, a different kind of time travel romance.²

The little boy Lynn saved grew up a lonely, cold-hearted man who had exactly one nice memory from childhood—a tall, beautiful blonde woman stepping out of a time portal to save him. She looked like an angel and was as comfortable with her sidearm as any veteran cop. She wiped away his childish tears and protected him from all manner of dangers, finally leaving him with a foster family and disappearing forever, despite his protests. He ran away from the family before the year was over and grew up determined never to be hurt again, all the while subconsciously searching for his angel—all the women he used (“dated” is too strong a term) were tall, blonde, and blue-eyed. None of them could touch his soul.

Twenty-five years later, now a “freelancer” for the government, Kurt Carlson is in trouble again . . . and to his amazement, who should come to his rescue but his time-traveling angel, who has no idea who he really is . . . or was.

My Angel is a different kind of time travel romance—the hero and heroine are of the same generation, but met when the hero was a trusting child . . . and meet again when he is a hardened man. Readers will ache for Kurt, because they'll know that underneath his ruthless exterior beats the heart of a lonely, frightened little boy. And Lynn, while bewildered by her instant attraction to a man with a reputation for doing anything to achieve his mission parameters, will once again save Kurt—his soul as well as his physical self.

Etc., etc.

I mentioned early in this letter that I'm representing myself. That's because Zebra books, at this time, has a strict no unagented submissions policy. The way to get around that is, if you're published, say you're representing yourself. If you're not published, write a great query letter to a specific editor. It's not that they want to deal only with agents, it's that they only want to read professional manuscripts. Berkley is an example of such a publishing house. If you target your query to a specific editor, it will be read, and if it's a great query, it will receive a favorable response, despite their no unagented submissions policy.

A great query proves you're a pro, and that's what editors need. I haven't had an agent in three years (by choice), and can always get past the no unagented submissions requirement.

The way to get the name of a specific editor is to look up the publisher in the current *Writer's Market*, copy down the phone number, call them, and in a brisk, businesslike tone, tell the receptionist, "I'm sending you a young adult (or mystery, romance, or science fiction query). Who's the editor?" Nine times out of ten, it will be as simple as that.

If the receptionist says they aren't accepting submissions, look up the publisher again, pick one of the editors listed in *Writer's Market*, call back, and ask the receptionist if so-and-so still works there. If he/she

says yes, you've got your name.

If your letter ends up going to the wrong person, don't fret too much. Often, an editor will forward a great query to the appropriate person at the publishing house. So don't be surprised if you get a letter back from someone other than the person to whom you addressed your letter. Happens all the time (at least, to me). Address your return cover letter to whoever wrote you back.

²I heard romance author Deb Stover's editor likes paranormal romances, and addressed my letter accordingly. See Chapter 8: Network, Network, Network. Again, the key is professionalism. This editor knows I do my homework, so she'll give my letter some attention. That's half the battle right there. (Pretty quick turnaround! And my not having an agent didn't bother this editor at all.)

April 8¹

Cabin Cohen Ritter
Zebra Books
Imprint of Kensington
850 Third Avenue, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10022

Dear Ms. Ritter:

Thanks very much for your speedy reply! As you requested, enclosed please find sample chapters (the first two, and a later scene of passionate confrontation) and a synopsis for *My Angel*. To refresh your memory, it's a different kind of time travel romance; the hero and heroine are of the same generation, but met when the hero was a trusting child . . . and meet again when he is a hardened man.

As in my earlier letter, I have sold three book manuscripts (two YA and one romance); two are coming out this year. I can have *My Angel* completed within four weeks of a request, depending on your required work count.

As before, I have enclosed an SASE for your convenience, but please feel free to call me at either number above if you have any questions.

Thanks for taking a look enjoy!

Sincerely yours,

MaryJanice Davidson

¹Average response time varies, but no one is surprised when it takes six weeks to three months to receive an answer to a query. I've been very lucky; I average about two to three weeks for a response (I'm not talking about electronic publishers and editors; that's a whole different ball game; see Chapter Three: Electronic Publishers.). Some of them are TENTS (Thanks But No Thanks); most are requests to see sample chapters or the entire manuscript. Getting an

answer after that takes many months.

What to do while you're waiting? Write, and send out more queries!

Chapter Three

Electronic Publishers

Electronic books (books available as a download from the Web, on disc, or on CD), unheard of as recently as five years ago, are spreading like a head cold at an elementary school. Many writers worship electronic publishers if for no other reason than electronic publishers have a much quicker response time than traditional print publishers.

But readers are impressed, too, and so are critics. Many electronic books (“e-books”) are garnering critical acclaim and national awards. As of this writing, the prestigious Franklin Award Ceremony for Electronic Books is coming up soon. First prize? A hundred thousand dollars.

With the invention of hand-held e-book readers (i.e. the Pocketbook, Libris, etc.), consumers are realizing they can pop ten or twenty books on disc into a computer no bigger than a hardcover. Good books, too.

I’m not going to go into a list of e-publishers and which ones are looking for what kind of book, etc. For an excellent resource on the subject, check out Karen Wiesner’s *Electronic Publishing: the Definitive Guide* from Avid Press (www.avidpress.com). Karen

was kind enough to interview me for the book (along with about a zillion electronic publishers and authors), and it's full of priceless info on e-publishers, promotion, author's stories, etc.

Having no desire to re-invent the wheel (as I said, Karen's book is an excellent resource), I'm going to limit my comments on e-publishers to my experiences in getting published. This will be a true pleasure, as, unlike a certain print magazine I could mention (and will, later), my experience with e-publishers has been unfailingly positive.

Once I researched the industry, I realized my young adult novel would probably be better suited to an e-publisher than a print publisher. Many writers turn to e-publishers because their books don't fit the "Corporate Publishing Niche." It doesn't mean their books are of lesser quality (a common misconception), just that they don't fit a print publisher's narrow parameters.

As I told Karen in my interview, "Though many won't admit it, e-publishing will be the saving of the industry. In print publishing, the almighty dollar is often more important than printing books people want to read. Readers are getting really disgusted with what's being offered on the shelves. Did we really need a dozen O.J. books? How many ways can writers write about Princess Diana's last year/month/day/hour/nanosecond? Is there that large

a market for Monica's tell-all? Meanwhile, genre fans (sci-fi romance, for example) are perpetually frustrated because they can't find the books they want to read. Yes, print publishing is a business, and we creative types don't always understand that . . . but, as Olivia Goldsmith pointed out in her wonderful book, *The Bestseller*, "[It's] the book business."

E-publishers can take chances a print publisher would never dare take. Readers interested in more than the five slots (Romance, Sci-Fi, Crime, Literature, Nonfiction) offered by most print publishers are turning to e-publishers and experiencing time-travel fantasy romance, or mystery sci-fi, or a poetry-cookbook, or. . . well, anything a writer can dream up. And everyone is winning—the writers, the readers, the electronic publishers."

Thus, my young adult fantasy/romance wasn't getting much interest from print publishers. They loved my writing and wanted to see more; they just had no place for my book on their lists. (This was pre-Harry Potter. Worse luck, if I tried to sell it to a traditional print publisher now, they'd accuse me of jumping on the Potter bandwagon!)

After realizing I had everything to gain and nothing to lose by querying a reputable electronic publisher I turned to Hard Shell Word Factory. I initially queried them in May. In early September, I had a contract offer. After dealing with print

publishers for so long, it was pretty great to work with a publisher whose timetable was a little more in line with my own.

Following is the e-mail correspondence between me, Intrepid Writer, and Mary Wolf, Publisher.

April 29

Dear Ms. Wolf:

I've heard such good things about you from some of your authors, I thought of you right away for my young adult romance, *The Adventures of the Teen Furies*.¹

Adventures is a young adult novel with an unlikely heroine—Andrea Grouper, chronic wiseass and Air Force brat. When she isn't battling her chauvinist father for freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, she's keeping a wary eye on her best friend (who is under psychiatric care), avoiding her best friend's creepily manic boyfriend, fending off the amorous and pseudo-poetic attentions of her own boyfriend, and hiding her crush on his best friend. Add an uncaring school and a loving but clueless family to the mix, and you've got Andrea's life in a nutshell—rollicking good times, terror, the rage of the oppressed, and painful insecurity. In other words, adolescence.

Andrea and her friends use role-playing games as an escape from their lives as misfit high schoolers, becoming fearless, buff young superheroes with a roll of the dice. Through their

imaginary characters, they experience life, death, and everything in between, while in the real world they are more victims than heroes.

At 50,000 words, *The Adventures of the Teen Furies* is a rollicking read for the young adult. Humorous and poignant, it will strike a chord in teenagers because, like them, the Furies are alternately powerless and powerful, depending on the setting. And, like them, the Furies find that no matter how frightening or silly the circumstance, true friends are invaluable.

My first book, a young adult novel (*Dying For Ice Cream*) will be out next January. I've also sold a screenplay option and several magazine articles, and am a member in good standing of the RWA.

Per your guidelines, I have attached a synopsis and the entire text of the book.² If you have any questions or require anything else, please don't hesitate to e-mail me (malongi@kpmg.com) or call me at 612-305-5260 during business hours. My snail-mail address is 201 McAndrews Road, Burnsville, MN 55337.

Thanks very much for taking a look, and many wishes for a pleasant and productive spring.

Sincerely yours,

MaryJanice Davidson

¹Even though it's an e-query, it still pays to be professional. So make sure you go through the same

steps you would with any other query: check the publisher's name for correct spelling, give a mini-synopsis of your book, mention the word length, etc.

Also, my first paragraph—wherein I explained that I had heard good things about this publisher from their authors—wasn't smoke-blowing. Because I was on three e-mail lists for writers, I had read several messages from happily published electronic authors, and thought I'd give it a try. These days, of course, Hard Shell is considered *the* electronic publisher, but I didn't know that then.

²I was a little nervous about sending the entire book with my query since that sort of thing tends to be a no-no among most publishers (and virtually every publisher I had dealt with until then). Despite my qualms, I did as the guidelines bade me and promptly moved on to other projects. Because I had sent an entire manuscript (unsolicited!) with my query, I didn't expect to hear from this publisher for some time (read: six years).

³With an electronic query, you need to include a snail mail (read: the one used by the U.S. Post Office address).

Four months later . . .

September 1

Dear Ms. Davidson,

First I would like to thank you for your patience while we worked our way through to your submission. Much appreciated!

Then, I'm happy to tell you the editor who worked on *Teen Furies* loved it and recommends offering a contract. There are only a few minor fixes needed. I'm attaching the edited ms, which has comments/suggestions inserted in parenthesis. I'm also pasting some of her specific comments below:

* This manuscript was fantastic, funny, sad, and spooky (the Sleeper Game Yuck! Kids play some weird stuff). Anyway, the corrections are very simple, I think less than ten, mostly typo's.

Plus:

* Marnie . . . ? This name came up twice, and I understood it was intended for Meredith (Merry), but don't get this nickname. I believe it might have been a typo, also, maybe the characters name was changed, and these missed?

* And Terry...if author shortens to 'Ter' of 'Terr,' I believe she should remain consistent and pick one spelling and stick with it.

Other than these, this was well written and totally entertaining. The characters have depth, are likable to the point of extremely lovable (even the jerk kids). In fact, a couple of times I laughed so hard, my kids were worried I was losing it. :-)"

Once you have a chance to look over the suggestions, and if you're still interested in e-publishing this work, please let me know. I'll get a contract out to you and we can set a publish

date. BTW, you can see a sample of our contract on the site in case you want a preview.

Go to: <http://www.hardshell.com/contract.html>.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope to have you join our “turtle” family. :-)

Regards,

Mary Z. Wolf, Publisher

Hard Shell Word Factory

books@hardshell.com

<http://www.hardshell.com>

An apology in the first paragraph? For a measly four month wait? I could get used to this. And not only was I thrilled to get a contract offer, but I was mighty impressed by the editor’s comments as well. Needless to say, I got right to work.

Ms. Wolf:

Attached please find the new and improved version of *The Adventures of the Teen Furies*. I made all your editor’s suggestions—give that woman a raise! ;-)

I look forward to receiving my contract, and to learning my pub date. Please let me know if you need anything else.

September 6

Dear Mary Janice,

Thanks for the quick work on the revisions! I'll send the new file off to her for approval and in the meantime, will get your contracts in the mail. We will be going with a Feb '99 publish date, which means the book will be available onsite starting sometime in the latter half of January.

Welcome to the turtle family!

Regards,

Mary

Four months to a contract offer. And four months after that, my book was available for sale. As of this writing I've gotten great reviews, and *Adventures* will soon be available in paperback.

I would recommend e-publishing to any writer, but I would caution you: breaking into electronic publishing isn't exactly a walk in the park. From January to September of 1998, this publisher received over twelve hundred submissions . . . and bought less than a hundred. I was very glad I hadn't known that when I submitted. Those are intimidating numbers and give lie to the myth that e-publishing is a step up from vanity publishing.

Electronic publishing, in addition to making my book available instantly and internationally, caught the attention of a hard cover publisher, Red Sage

Publishing.

I'd been a big fan of the super-sexy Secrets books (quality romantic fiction novellas) and, by the time Red Sage Publishing requested a partial, I had sold *Adventures*, which of course I mentioned.

August 21

Alexandria Kendall, Executive Editor

Red Sage Publishing, Inc.

Post Office Box 4311

Seminole, FL 34645

Dear Ms. Kendall:

I am a published author who thought of Red Sage for my fantasy romance, *Love's Prisoner*.

Jeannie Lawrence has a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. So she's not entirely surprised when the power goes out in the elevator and she finds herself stuck between floors with a mysterious stranger. She is surprised when the man tells her he is a werewolf; the moon is on the rise . . . and she is ovulating. He must take her, at once. He can't help it, any more than he can help shapeshifting.

Jeannie resists with all she is, fighting both his overpowering strength and her unwilling attraction to him, for naught. In the warm dark of the elevator, he forces pleasure on her again and again, the likes of which she has never known. When he is finished with her, Jeannie is bewildered, sated . . .

and infuriated at herself and her passionate tormentor.

Her tormentor becomes her savior—forcing the elevator doors and thrusting her to safety at the cost of his own life. Or so she thought, until, weeks later, the man—Michael Wyndham III shows up at her door, telling her she is carrying his child. She is whisked away to Michael's Cape Cod mansion where she is gently told she will be kept until she accepts her destiny and agrees to stay with Michael of her own free will. Will Jeannie accept her destiny, as well as Michael's love? Or fight him—and herself—to please her pride?

My first book, a young adult novel, will be out next January from The Fiction Works. I've also sold a screenplay option and several magazine articles, and am a member in good standing of the RWA.

Per your guidelines, I have enclosed a synopsis and the first ten pages of *Love's Prisoner*. If you need anything else, please don't hesitate to e-mail or call me at either number above. I can deliver a completed manuscript (@ 25,000 words) within four weeks of a request.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

MaryJanice Davidson

Ms. Kendall got back to me in record time (particularly for a hard cover publisher), and I had a letter less than a month later requesting the rest of the novella.

September 26, 1998
Alexandria Kendall, Executive Editor
Red Sage Publishing, Inc.
Post Office Box 4311
Seminole, FL 34645

Dear Ms. Kendall:

I was so pleased to receive your letter wherein you asked to see the entire manuscript for *Love's Prisoner*, a paranormal romance. To refresh your memory, it's the story of Jeannie Lawrence, who has a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and Michael Wyndham III, the werewolf who takes her against her will in a dark elevator.

As of this writing, I have not yet finished *Love's Prisoner*. I was wondering if we might discuss contractual terms before I put more hours into this project. You will recall from my earlier letters that I have sold a young adult novel (contracted based on the strength of my synopsis and sample chapters, and delivered well before deadline), several magazine articles (contracted from query letters and delivered well before deadline), and I just sold a young adult novel to Hard Shell Word Factory.

Should I sign with Red Sage Publishing, your house will be my number one priority. My latest sale needs nothing further from me in the way of edits, and as such would not distract me from completing *Love's Prisoner*. I can deliver the

manuscript within three weeks of a contract offer.

I absolutely love the Secrets books (I have Volumes 1 and 2—*Surrogate Lover* and *Roarke's Prisoner* are my favorites!), and I feel your house produces the best, most erotic romances on the shelves today. Nothing would make me prouder than to be associated with Red Sage Publishing; I very much hope we can do business together.

Thanks again for your continued interest in my work, and many wishes for a pleasant and productive autumn.

Sincerely yours,

MaryJanice Davidson

This was a vital letter to write for several reasons. One, I really did want to sell a novella to Red Sage (Their novella collections tend to be picked up by the Dorchester Book Club). Two, I didn't want to write the whole thing without a contract if I didn't have to. And three, I mentioned my writing credits to prove to this editor I understood the concept of deadlines and could indeed deliver a finished product.

It worked. Ms. Kendall called me not quite two weeks later with a contract offer, ruefully admitting, "I've never offered an author a contract based only on ten pages and a synopsis." What tipped the scales in my favor? A great query, a carefully thought out synopsis (which I'll show you later), and being able to prove that I had delivered completed manuscripts on

time in the past. As of this writing, *Secrets VI* has been selling like hotcakes, and will be a Book of the Month Club selection in early 2001.

Again, if you act like a pro, you'll be treated like a pro.

I accepted her contract offer, signed the contract, cashed the advance check (my very first one!), and got to work writing the novella.

October 6, 1998

Alexandria Kendall, Executive Editor
Red Sage Publishing, Inc.
Post Office Box 4311
Seminole, FL 34645

Dear Ms. Kendall:

It was a great pleasure speaking with you last month. I have spent the time since polishing *Love's Prisoner*. This was a story I couldn't wait to write, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

I re-read *Secrets I* and *II* and realized *Love's Prisoner* sounds a bit like another *Secrets* novella (and one of my Favorites), Roarke's *Prisoner*. If you prefer to change the title so it doesn't match so closely, I can offer a few suggestions: *Pack Leader's Mate*, *Jeannie's Surrender*, and *Prisoner of Desire* are a few just off the top of my head. If you're happy with *Love's Prisoner*, that's great, too—I will, of course, defer to your judgment in

this matter.

Enclosed please find *Love's Prisoner*, which weighs in at about 24,000 words, as well as a signed contract and the manuscript on disc (Word 7.0, no page breaks, no paragraph indents per contract instructions). This is putting the cart quite a bit before the horse, but I am always interested in helping with book promotion as much as I can, and I would be quite willing to travel, if you feel that's necessary.

Thanks again for your continued interest in my work, Ms. Kendall. I can't tell you how pleased and honored I am to join the Red Sage family!

Warmest regards,
MaryJanice Davidson
Enclosures

Although Red Sage technically is a "small press" my novella sale to that house remains one of my proudest accomplishments. The Secrets books tend to be selected by the Doubleday Book Club, which means nation-wide distribution and huge sales. Better yet, Alex Kendall is a warm, funny, fabulous lady and I've loved working with her. E-publishing helped me get a foot in the door with her, which is why I'll never stop selling books to electronic publishers. (Assuming, of course, they keep buying them.)

Some writers use electronic publishers as a

stepping stone to their “real” goals. And there’s nothing wrong with this. Plenty of romance writers sell to Silhouette while pursuing their “real” goal of a hardcover romance with Bantam (or whomever). Plenty of nonfiction writers work toward their “real” goal of selling a Hollywood screenplay.

But don’t overlook the fabulous opportunities made possible by e-publishers and the World Wide Web. If electronic books are good enough for Stephen King and Bill Gates, they ought to be good enough for anybody. I’ve found the most successful writers didn’t use e-publishing as a means to an end, but rather the end itself.

I have noticed that getting published, for me anyway, tends to work like a rock rolling downhill. In the beginning, my sales were slow and far apart. Now they’re a bit more frequent, and in each query letter I can mention more manuscript sales. This gets an editor’s attention, which often helps in getting a contract offer, which I can then mention in a query to another editor and so on.

Chapter Four

Publisher Interviews:

What they love, what they hate

Publishers apparently love giving interviews. I contacted over a dozen of them so I'd have at least six interviews in my book. All but one replied in the affirmative. And all replied within twenty-four hours. This is a tough business, but there are some great people working in it.

I want to emphasize that rather than loose writing guidelines, the publishers I interviewed are telling readers what that specific publisher is looking for. These aren't generic statements about all publishers. This will be pretty clear, because as you read through the interviews you'll discover that publishers don't personally like or dislike all the same things. Except, of course, when it comes to spelling their names right.

However, what's interesting is that there are one or two things that are important to every one of the publishers I interviewed.

One, if you hit them with a sparkling query, they'll bite. Period. Stop me if you've heard this before: act like a professional, and you'll be treated

like a professional.

Two, publishers and editors don't care for pushy writers. That's not to say that you shouldn't be aggressive. In fact, I shudder to think where I'd be right now if I hadn't taken the initiative more than once. However, there's a difference between being aggressive and being pushy. An aggressive writer asks for a contract before finishing the manuscript. A pushy writer calls and calls and calls and sends demanding e-mails which ask, again and again, WHY HAVEN'T YOU PUBLISHED MY AWESOME BOOK, YOU LOSER IDIOTS? You may be laughing, but it happens. And publishers and editors have long, long memories.

As to the differences between these publishers, they're legion. Read on.

LionHearted Publishing, Inc.

Mary Ann Heathman, President and CEO

(This is the editor who called me at home on a Friday night and gave me an hour's worth of constructive criticism. I incorporated her suggestions and sold the book to the next publisher I tried.)

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

Word count. If the manuscript is too short, this is an automatic rejection as we don't publish category short romances. In the query, many authors fail to tell editors word count, type of romance, and a paragraph storyline. All of which are extremely helpful to an editor.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and still remember?

*The best is that they have read some of the books published by your house and that is why they feel their work may be what an editor is seeking, i.e., because it has the "feel" or "flavor" of (title) by (author) from the books they have read. Many writers fail to realize that they must stay current in their industry by **READING**, not just writing. A sense of humor helps too. It makes a letter stand out and gives the editor a smile for the day.*

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

A writer telling you where to send the check, because of course you are going to want to publish their book.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from

paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

Both are treated the same.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

I like "d" . . . but I guess the best answer is "c" isn't it? <g>

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

Few agents call as we offer the same contract terms for all. Most agents write, and most queries come by snail mail, which we prefer since we print out the e-mail queries anyway for our files, along with our response back to the author. We receive twelve to twenty query letters each week, about half e-mail and half snail

mail. We receive an equal or larger amount of partials and full manuscripts each week, most unsolicited . . . which is fine if the author has read our guidelines at www.LionHearted.com and feels the work might be what we seek.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

When we receive a query and synopsis only, either by email or snail mail, I personally read them first before passing them to our editors. When we receive a partial/synopsis/query, a hundred percent of the time I read the query and synopsis. Fifty percent of the time I read the partial, too . If it is a time-crunch thing, I pick out the most promising to read. If I like the partial, I then normally phone the author and ask for the full manuscript. Our turn-around time on a query and synopsis is about eight to ten days, on a partial/synopsis/query about four to six weeks, and on a full ms. about twelve to fourteen weeks. We have held to this turnaround time for the past three years due to a flexible editorial staff of preview readers and editors.

About ten to fifteen percent of all submissions are rejected right at the query/synopsis point as they are not

a romance, or aren't the type we seek.

Ninety-nine percent of all manuscripts require some revision by the author to meet our houses' entertainment quality standards. Yes, even the multiple award winning Oracle went through two sets of revisions. An Author Agreement is not offered at this point, but instead a letter of intent to publish is sent along with a detailed letter of the revisions required.

Do editors read thank-you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

Yes. And yes. Thank you notes are not long and take almost no time to read. It is always a pleasure to receive one. I save all mine, so I guess I do like them. <g>

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

At other publishing houses this might be the norm, but not at ours. It sounds much too much like not only conflict of interest but editorial incest. :)

Only once in over 4,000 submissions have we had one of our authors, Katherine Greyle, Oracle, do the

editing on an already acquired work, Unbridled by Delores Fossen, as we were on a deadline for the e-book, and we also wanted Kathy to do a screenplay based on the Western storyline. Kathy has her master's degree in professional writing from USC and did a terrific job as an editor, but her true passion lies with her writing. BTW, the screenplay based on the e-book, Unbridled, is under consideration by Clint Eastwood's production company. It is a great Western romance novel and a great screenplay, and if Clint doesn't want it, we will produce the movie ourselves.

Mary Ann Heathman is President and CEO, creator and co-founder of LionHearted Publishing, Inc., with home offices in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. She has over twenty years' experience in administration and management of multi-million dollar-a-month companies. It is Mary Ann's vision that directs the acquisition and revisions of manuscripts and screenplays at LionHearted. She brings to the publishing industry a vision rooted in the entertainment world with over eight years in TV and radio. She is published in non-fiction, and is one of three editors supervising the editorial staff at LionHearted.

Of the 6.4 million women-owned businesses in the United States, *The Wall Street Journal 1998 Almanac* features only three. Mary Ann's is one of them. Her talent and vision for acquiring original,

high entertainment story content captured the attention of Hollywood producers a few years ago. The multi-million dollar film project *Oracle* (Summer 2001 release) launches LionHearted Entertainment, Inc. Many original novels owned by LionHearted are slated to become feature theatrical films or movies of the week.

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Ponder Publishing

Lindy Ledohowski, Senior Submissions Editor
Ponder Publishing

I asked Lindy Ledohowski for a short bio and some info on how Ponder Publishing handles queries. Lindy, clearly a member of the “go the extra mile” school of thought, answered at once with this letter:

Dear Mary Janice,

I am responding to your query to Mary Barton here at

our Ponder offices regarding doing an interview for your upcoming book.

Let me introduce myself; my name is Lindy Ledohowski, and I am the Senior Submissions Editor at Ponder Publishing Inc. I have worked in this capacity with Ponder since January of this year. Prior to joining this publishing company officially, I did some freelance writing for the firm, as well as some informal editing. I have an Honours Degree in English Literature and have won numerous academic awards in that field.

At Ponder I am now really the last barrier that the potential author must overcome in the evaluation process. I have two assistant submissions editors who act as the first readers. Anything that they feel has potential gets passed on to me, and then I decide whether or not to request the remainder of the manuscript. If I am interested, I obtain the entire manuscript and read and evaluate it before I pass on the successful ones to partners Mary Barton and Pamela Walford to see if they are interested in going to the contract stage with the writer.

That makes up the skeleton of what I do here at Ponder. I hope that you will find all of this information useful and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Lindy Ledohowski

Senior Submissions Editor

You have a query in front of you. What's the first

thing you notice, good or bad?

The very first thing that I notice is whether or not the query is addressed to me. Then I notice things like grammar and whether or not the letter is composed properly. I know that these are picky things, but my training is in English language and literature and things like grammar, proper letter format and addressing really do matter!

Hint: if you are sending a query letter to a publishing company and you do not know the gender of the person who will receive your letter, DO NOT write a “dear sirs” greeting line. This may have been correct in the past but is quite off-putting to a female reader; “to whom it may concern” is far less offensive.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

The most important thing that a writer can do/say in the query letter is to let their personality shine through. If a writer happens to be sarcastic, they should put some sarcasm in their letter; if he/she happens to be chatty, then the letter should be chatty, etc. Second to letting their personality shine through is certainly writing in proper English. If a potential author can write a

query letter that shows his/her personality without randomly compromising common rules of grammar and spelling, then the chances are that he/she can write fiction with that same flair.

One of the best query letters that found its way to my desk started off with a one-line introduction where the writer expressed her interest in writing for our publishing company. She then wrote briefly about her home in wonderful prose descriptions and then segued into her beliefs as a writer. From there she swiftly and smoothly made the transition into her own writing accomplishments. The letter itself demonstrated her humor and her writing ability. She ended the letter simply with "I appreciate your consideration." I remember that this one because it was confident and full of the writer's personality.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

The absolute worst thing that a writer can do/say in a query is to not proofread the query and send off a letter with horrible spelling and grammar mistakes. The impression then becomes one where the publisher concludes that if the writer cannot even compose a simple query letter, then he/she certainly cannot write a publishable novel.

One query letter I read once began with “Dear sirs” (a category to which I do not belong) and then went on to spell the name of the hero of the manuscript two different ways. More than that, the letter was composed as one long sentence that started on page one and ended half way down the second page.

Another thing to avoid in queries is what is known in the industry as “kissing-ass.” Publishers are not stupid, and we certainly know when a writer is laying it on a little thick. Everyone enjoys a little praise, but when it is overdone, it does the opposite of complimenting.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

We prefer the first query to be on paper. We like to keep an address listing so that we can mail out our bi-annual newsletter. As well, we try to give very sincere and personal responses and appreciate a personal, signed and mailed query. Furthermore, our general e-mail address is set up as a mailbox that two people in the company have regular access to. As members of a small publishing company, our submissions team finds it easier and more efficient to answer mailed queries. However, once our interest is

expressed toward a potential author, e-mail correspondence is certainly acceptable.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

It is incredibly difficult to say because my instinct is to say “d” “money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs,” but I cannot let myself bunch all agents into that category. However, practically speaking, Ponder Publishing does not require agents, and we really prefer to work directly with writers. One of our target manuscript categories is what we term a “diamond in the rough.” We are always looking for manuscripts that just might be what we are looking for, if only . . . Therefore, we value the relationship between the publisher and the writer and like to foster that sentiment of good will. If the agent works in that direction, then great; if not, that could pose potential problems.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax

queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

[No answer]

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

Most one- to two-page queries come directly to me as the senior submissions editor. We generally ask for a synopsis (of about two pages) and the first three chapters of a manuscript. When these arrive, we have readers, our assistant submissions editors, who evaluate these manuscripts. Any that they feel do not have potential receive rejection letters. We try to make these letters as specific as possible to help the writers in the future.

If the readers find a manuscript they think has some potential, they pass it on to me. I then read it. If at that point I find that the manuscript requires too much work before it could be published or if it simply is not what we are looking for in a Ponder Romance, I send a rejection letter. I spend a lot of time composing these letters because the manuscripts that make their way to me generally cannot just be categorized as “bad”; they simply are not what we are looking for, and I try to express

where and how the manuscript fell short of our requirements. If, however, I am interested in those first three chapters, then I will request that the remainder of the manuscript be sent straight to me. Once I read the complete manuscript, I then make a decision. If, after reading the full text, I decide that we are not interested, I send out a rejection letter. These are probably the most difficult to write. I am very sympathetic to the writer and try to make these letters as helpful as possible. However, if I believe that the manuscript could go to contract, I give it and my comments to our president and senior editor, who are the only ones with the authority to actually go to contract on any text. Once the manuscript is in their hands, if they disagree with my assessment and are not interested, I then send out the rejection letter. BUT if they do like the manuscript enough to want to publish it, they present it to the Assistant Submissions Editors as well as myself, and we will come to a consensus.

At that point, except for editing, the manuscript is out of my hands. The legalities and payment details of the contract are confidential between the writer and our senior executive staff, who are the two co-owners and co-founders of Ponder Publishing, Mary Barton and Pamela Walford.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have time to read them?

Barely any authors send thank you notes, at least to Ponder Publishing. I've often wondered if, because we are a small company, writers do not think that it is worth their while.

I do read thank you notes and am rather appreciative of them because of the time and the sincerity that I put into each one of my rejection letters. However, I do not keep a master list of those writers that do not bother to send thank you notes. If they resubmit, I do not check any secret stash of thank you note senders to see if they were among them and then give them special treatment. [Author's note: I love this answer!] However, I do appreciate them and hope those authors who do not send thank you notes at least read the rejection letter in its entirety and do not stop reading after the "I am sorry to inform you" part.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

From our point of view, this situation would certainly create a conflict of interest. The only people who read submissions are the Ponder Publishing submissions team. The only people who edit the work of writers for our company are those employed by our company. In the

past this has been Mary Barton, Pamela Walford and myself to a lesser degree. One key aspect to any and all of our contracts is that they are confidential. Therefore, no other writer gets to see the contract of another writer. As for the webmaster question, Ponder Publishing pays an independent webmaster who created the site and updates it for a monthly maintenance fee and has nothing to do with any other aspect of the company.

Lindy Ledohowski is an alumnus of the University of Manitoba where she completed an Honours degree in English Literature in May 1998. For all three years of her honours concentration, she was on the dean's list. In 1996 she was the recipient of the Aikins Scholarship in the English Language and Literature for outstanding achievement. In 1997 she won the John Angus Prescott Memorial Book Prize for the best essay on an aspect of Victorian Literature. In 1998 she was the recipient of the Hirsch Memorial Prize for an outstanding achievement in creative writing. In the fall of 1999 she began her Bachelor of Education program at the University of Toronto.

Lindy first became involved with Ponder Publishing Inc. as an informal editor and proof-reader on a contract basis. She is also involved in the local writing scene as both a creative writing editor and tutor and as a free-lance writer. With her strong

literary background she joined the Ponder team in April 1999 as the Senior Submissions Editor.

Founded in 1996 and incorporated in 1997 by sisters and co-founders Pamela Walford and Mary Barton, Ponder Publishing Inc. currently publishes two to four romance novels per year, under the name Ponder Romance. For years, as romance readers, Pamela and Mary felt that a genre which had expanded to include many sub-genres such as historical, suspense, fantasy, time-travel and even paranormal, just to name a few, was still missing something.

In their quest to identify and fill that void, Ponder Romance, a new line of romance novels emerged, taking the best of formula romance and mainstream romance fiction and forging a new path between the two.

Ponder hopes to eventually add other genres to its publishing credits.

DiskUs Publishing
Marilyn Nesbitt, Founder

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

If the author was able to grab me. I like a query that makes me want to read the manuscript, one that is

exciting and says, THIS IS GOING TO BE A GOOD BOOK.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

One of the best was from a writer who wrote a book about a profession she was in. I could tell from the query that this writer really knew what she was talking about.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

Getting a query where the author tells me she/he must hear back from me within two weeks because she is going to send it to other publishers. Another irritating thing is for the author to tell me it is the greatest book there ever was and my company needs it. Or, and this is really irritating. An author will give me a good hook in the query and tell me to read the manuscript for the resolution.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or

the other?

I treat all submissions the same way.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

(c) no difference one way or the other.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

We get about twenty-five to fifty queries a week. About fifteen percent are from paper/fax/or other, and all the rest are e-mail.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

Our manuscripts go to a reader first. If the reader likes it, she'll send a letter back telling me it should be sent to an editor. If she doesn't think it is DiskUs material, she tells us we should send a rejection.

If the book is sent to an editor, the editor makes the final decision as to whether we should go to contract or not.

All of our submissions get a tracking number so that an author can track where their manuscript is in our system. Our company was the first to do this, and it works so well that a lot of other e-pubs are doing this now.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

I (or another member of the staff) read every single piece of mail that is sent to our company, and some of them are not thank you notes. We also get notes that we shouldn't have rejected such and such manuscript as it will someday be a bestseller.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers?

Does this create a conflict of interest?

We did hire a webmistress (who owns <http://www.pubpromos.com>) to help us update our site. She's very good and very reasonable, and even though she is also one of our authors, I had seen her work and we needed the help so we hired her.

We have on staff editors and readers, but we also hire some editors who freelance when we need to catch up.

DiskUs Publishing is a quality publisher of electronic and audio books in a widespread variety of genres as well as nonfiction books.

Dedicated to remaining on the curl of the breaking wave of technology, DiskUs continues in its quest to offer books in a variety of platforms. Equally dedicated to offering the best in fiction and nonfiction, DiskUs presents award-winning authors and award-winning e-books to its audience, marrying the best in technology and the best in reading material.

Cascade Mountain Publishing
Muffy McClung Berlyn, Editor

[Author's note: Ms. Berlyn sent the information below in addition to being interviewed. Yay!]

CASCADE MOUNTAIN PUBLISHING INQUIRIES, SEND WRITING SAMPLE:

Basically, I love to see writing samples and strongly dislike inquiry letters with no samples attached. A recounting of plotlines tells me nothing about the quality of the writing. So if an inquiry must be made, the writer should at least insert a paragraph or two of his or her writing. The first two paragraphs of one's novel, the first chapter, or even just the first sentence would be fine to pique my interest.

SUBMIT FIRST SENTENCE OF WORK:

A writer's ability can often be judged accurately on how carefully the first sentence of a work of fiction is crafted. I often find myself judging a writer's ability by their first sentence. How strong is it? Does it attract me? Intrigue me? Make me want to read more? Can I imagine other readers wanting to read more from the first sentence? Is it lyrical, odd, funny, magical, mean, wonderful? Does it put me "there?" Is the writer's voice strong and apparent in the very first sentence? A writer's writing style is what sells me the most.

SUBMIT PLOT IN ONE SENTENCE:

I find it loathsome reading the retelling of a book's plot condensed into two paragraphs. Rather I

would care to read a direct one-sentence description of “what the book is about,” in general terms rather than a droning on about the specific plot points. It is well-known in the entertainment industry that if a writer of books or movies can condense a plot idea into one sentence, it is much easier to sell. I find that basically true of all things. Simple, honest and direct is best, because no one ever expects it. It bowls them over when they do get honesty.

SHORT BIO:

Please feel free to add a few paragraphs about oneself, education, writing background, interests, and anything else amusing or interesting about one’s life history. It helps me remember who you are, how you approach your writing, and should you submit or inquire on a regular basis, will make me more likely to take an interest in your work.

LETTER WRITING SKILLS:

When I have nothing else to judge a book by, I look at the writer’s letter writing skills. Rambling letters, poor grammar, no imagination or creativity, leaves me wondering why such a person would choose a creative profession that requires strong writing skills. I usually reject such submissions and never ask to see their work. If they can’t write a one-page letter, I must assume they really can’t write a

600-page masterpiece as they might claim.

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

I notice how well the query letter is written, drafted, composed. How direct the writer is with his or her query, and how informative, interesting and creative they can be in two or three paragraphs. In other words, the general overall impact of the letter as written by a writer selling himself, his novel, and his writing without turning me off.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

The best items a writer can place in a query are: 1) an overall description of the novel in ONE SENTENCE, no plot details. For example, "My book is a contemporary western about a rancher whose localized shoulder cancer slows him down to the point where he must explain to his eight-year-old son how to run the ranch, and in doing so, he tells stories from his past"; 2) follow the description of the book with the first sentence or first paragraph of the novel in quotes, indented, and with credit given to the nom de plume [or

author]. For example: “The fissure in the dry earth ran uphill, stopped by a butte of enormous length that became needle thin at horizon’s edge.” Author’s Name; 3) follow that with a few things about yourself, background, education, publishing history if you have one, whether you’re a working writer, a first time novelist, a student writer, a weekend writer, etc. And you’re done! No long drawn-out plot descriptions please! An attached sample of your writing is truly helpful, first chapter is fine, or even a page or two. A personalized letter helps me remember you should you submit in the future and gives me an idea of your writing goals and attitude towards your writing. Humor in a query is good too.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

Don’t tell me you’re a genius in a long rambling query that is filled with poor grammar, poor spelling, and bad writing. At least, if you must tell me you’re a genius, then show it by the writing skills you demonstrate in your query. Don’t be verbose about anything in particular. Don’t pick your nose while you’re writing it.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from

paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

Because Cascade Mountain Publishing is a small publisher at present, our office is stacked with plenty of paper. E-mail cuts down on our paper load.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

I'd say agents are good for one thing—as tender for burning lawyers at the stake. Seriously, we will actually consider writers who are represented by agents and it won't taint our opinion of the writer at all. Unsolicited manuscript are welcome at present.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

One or two, mostly e-mail.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

We have no current in-house method or process for queries since we aren't queried that often. We generally REJECT upon reading query-only or a query with no writing sample unless it is a writer we have worked with or a writer we know.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

I've never heard of the thank you note, but it doesn't mean it isn't a possible good idea. Usually one thanks the editor in the initial query for their time in considering the idea or manuscript. I would think the extra paper just to say "thank you" would be a nuisance for the editor to open, read and junk. Maybe something more creative would be memorable, a well-written joke only an editor could appreciate. Anything to stand out a bit from the ordinary without seeming too eccentric if you feel you truly need to thank an editor. Otherwise it's just more paper. Unless of course it's electronic.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

Currently, we do all of our editorial services in-house. Other jobs may be contracted out.

Located in Bend, the hub of central Oregon, Cascade Mountain Publishing is dedicated to bringing you software and books you could never purchase using standard means. Our software appeals to small, focused, targeted markets, and our books provide you with access to authors you can get no other way.

Check out our two new collections of original short stories. *Dakota Dreamin'* is a unique and inventive collection of science fiction stories by Bill Johnson, which includes his Hugo Award winning short story, "We Will Drink A Fish Together."

Native American William Sanders' collection of short stories, *Are We Having Fun Yet?* is a different perspective of American Indian tales that defies any genre. Look for CMP writer's guidelines on our website. Order books and games at <http://www.cascadepublishing.com>

Awe-Struck E-Books

Kathryn D.Struck, Editor

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

Some queries actually have no reference to the name of the manuscript. Nor is the genre identified. They read like a form letter, which they just might be. This is frustrating because I would like to have at least a bare-bones description of what I am about to read. A good query names and tells a bit about the book, and gives some info about the formatting of the excerpt I am about to read. A short synopsis in the query letter helps as well. A longer synopsis can be included in the excerpt.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

The best queries are straight-forward, business-like, and do not grovel. They give important information about the manuscript (word count, genre, title, author, brief synopsis). Although the query may indeed be a form letter, it doesn't read like one: my name is used. The author went to some trouble trying to personalize the letter. The file attachment is named in the letter,

which saves me hunting through the “stuff” at the top or bottom of the e-mail to determine which one (of several files I may have received that day) I’m looking for. The file is labeled with the author’s last name. I also appreciate knowing if the manuscript is a simultaneous submission. I also appreciate if an author has actually read and tried to comply with our submissions directives. Some completely ignore them and make it really hard to open their files, etc.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

I still have some query letters that I can’t trace to any file because the manuscript was never named in the letter, and I don’t have the file either! Where’d it go? I have no idea if it was ever sent! If the author wants me to read his/her manuscript, at least name it for me. I received one letter addressed to a completely different person (a man) telling me there was a file attached (it wasn’t). The letter had sort of a worshipful bowing and scraping: “oh, mighty publisher, please be so kind to read the excerpt of my novel (no title) and tell what I might do to have it published by your esteemed company.” That’s really not necessary. We are business professionals and can handle a simple business letter that communicates ample INFORMATION. The author can come

across with confidence and in an upbeat, professional manner. The worst queries are the ones that put five chapters of an unfinished novel in the e-mail, and ask me if I could tell the author if he/she is a good writer. (I usually respond by suggesting that he/she finish the novel and then we can discuss it.. I have gotten an entire novel in twenty e-mails, a chapter per e-mail. Some authors need to learn how to work in rtf [rich text format] and how to attach files.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

Almost all of my queries are e-mail queries. We encourage this because they save paper and speed up response time. I don't even have my company's street address in the submissions directives. I give that out only after contracts have been signed. Or sometimes a disk must be sent to me by mail for my consideration; then I give my address. I much prefer the e-mail approach. I reply to every letter. Really I do. That's my job: to communicate.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required;

(c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

I like to work with authors directly and skip the agent part. Agents have their purpose, but are certainly not necessary to me. E-publishing is, to me, an author-publisher collaboration. The agent is really not necessary for this to occur.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

I get NO phone queries. I deliberately don't have a fax machine (yet). Again, I do not publish my phone number. If we are an e-pub, we need to work in that medium and the authors need to become used to that as well. I get about twenty-five to thirty-five queries a week at this time (the number seems to be increasing); fewer in the summer months.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the

manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

I read and reply to all queries. If just a query letter is written, I invite an excerpt or direct the author to our authors submission page for directives on sending me the excerpt. If we are not publishing that type of book, I say that and request that no excerpt be sent. Usually I receive the excerpt and a synopsis within a day or two or three. I try to read these as soon as I have the time. Sometimes I do get backed up. I tell authors what time frame I'm working in and ask for their patience if I'm behind. I save the original e-mails in a file so that I can re-contact the author. After reading the excerpt, I either turn down the work or ask for the complete manuscript. Again, it can take a couple weeks for me to get to the complete manuscript. Sometimes longer. I try to tell the authors that so they don't get too nervous. If it really takes a long time for me to get to their manuscript, I write them a status e-mail and let them know that it's at least moving to the top of my "to read" list. They appreciate the contact. Silence is hard on authors and I can appreciate that. I am on the creative end at times myself, and I like to know where I stand. Authors, I think, are afraid that we might "lose" their stuff. If I can't read the excerpt or convert it from rtf, I re-e-mail and we figure out how they can send it to me. Some authors need some help with this, and I have no problem helping out; Dick, the co-publisher, is very helpful

in that regard.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

I read the thank you's but don't need them. Sometimes I give a pretty detailed critique of the novel when I turn it down. I have a hard time just saying "sorry, can't use this—goodbye," so I like to give some indication as to why I'm turning a good book down. I get some "thank you for your commentary" e-mails. I don't notice if an author doesn't send one. Most authors are sim-subbed. They are busy, too. Again, the publisher is not the Pope. We don't need a lot of ring-kissing. (That sounds really crass, doesn't it?)

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

No. I don't ask the contracted writers to do anything but promote their books. Their contract doesn't make them an editor. Sometimes a relationship with an author is such that I bounce ideas off them. There are two authors under contract with us who have become

writing 'teammates' because of the amount of work we have done together. I sometimes ask an opinion of them, but I don't show them the manuscript. And I don't ask them to do my job. If I need another editor, then it's my job to hire one. Besides, if I were an author, I'd want a bonafide editor to read my work. That manuscript is not mine to send all over the place. I really respect the fact that I am reading something that is not mine. I don't have the rights to it yet. (Do some publishers DO this sort of thing?)

Kathryn D. Struck has a bachelors degree in theatre and a masters degree in Twentieth Century English and American Writing and Literature. She has been a teacher of high school speech, drama and English for twenty-four years.

Coming on-board in 1995, Kathryn co-authored with Dick Claassen *The Dark Ships Trilogy* under the name Diane Drury. She had been wanting to try her hand at fiction writing beyond poetry and short pieces. Initially, she acted as the series editor, but soon became a co-pilot. "Dick has the stories; he's a wonderful storyteller. I have the red pen," she admits. Nonetheless, through her association with Dick, she has started several projects of her own: a novel on psychometry and a collection of pieces by and about wives of Vietnam veterans. Kathryn has free-lanced for W.C. Brown Publishers and studied writing at the

University of Iowa. She has recently been published in Little Read Writers' Hood, an on-line magazine.

<http://www.awe-struck.net>

Now offering Flopp-e-books by mail.

Just released: *A Breed Apart*, by Charlotte Raby.

In August: *The Hollow* by Cathy McCarthy, and *Passion's Vision*, by Mary Adair.

Starlight Writer Publications

Lorraine Stephens, Senior Editor

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

I will list what I like to see and then follow with what I do not like to see.

I prefer a log line of approximately twenty-five words, that will give me an idea of the conflict and motivations for the H/H. In other words, boil down the plot to the bare essence. Many young writers don't know how to write a log line but it is a skill they should learn. The best of all possible log lines is one sentence of twenty-five words or less. I don't adhere strictly to this rule. If an author sends me a query with the plot boiled down to the bare essence in a couple of short sentences that total about thirty to thirty-five words, that is fine.

Following the log line I want to know the genre, the word count, and whether or not this is a completed novel.

The next thing I look for is a longer version of the log line with a few more details, but I do not want a full synopsis as part of the query letter.

What I do not want to see is an e-message with an attached file, with no query letter and no invitation. Or an e-message with a query letter listing all the authors credits and to which s/he has attached a file. An author should check out our guidelines on the site. If they do, they will see we are only accepting submissions by invitation. They should send a query letter and wait for an invitation.

As stated above, we accept submissions by invitation only. If I receive a query letter with the log line and very brief description of the story, the chances are very good that I will send an invitation. The invitation from me is not a guarantee of publication but it is an opportunity. I do NOT accept unsolicited manuscripts, and all submissions cross my desk.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

I think those listed above fit here as well.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

Yes, I can. And the following is a description of what NOT to do. It really pushed some buttons for me.

We received an e-mail with no message. Just an attached file. The author sent the full manuscript. I had issued no invitation to this person, but it was possible someone else had done so (Our editors can also issue invitations). So, thinking this was a requested manuscript, I sent it to the managing editor of the department in which it would fit. The next day another full manuscript came in from this same author. No message in the e-mail. I checked out the manuscript to see the genre and sent that one to a different managing editor. This continued for five days. Then I called a halt, telling her that we restrict submissions to three per author at any one time, and she was already over that limit. Every one of her manuscript was rejected by the readers, and the managing editors sent out rejection letters. I was told they were all incredibly bad writing.

So, having received rejection letters from the managing editors, this author then had their personal e-mail addresses. They were bombarded with manuscripts sent to them personally. When I first learned of this, I told them to just dump the manuscripts. Then the author began to bombard me with e-messages containing a list

of credits which included information that she teaches writing. After hearing the reports of all the managing editors who had seen her work and reported that her writing was “incredibly bad” I decided to check this out. I went into the files and looked at her submissions. The readers and the managing editors were absolutely correct. The writing was so bad I was shocked that this person is teaching writing anywhere let alone at college level as she stated in her e-messages. After two months of this she finally stopped harassing us but the above method is NOT the way to win friends here.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

I read query letters when they arrive. My e-mail is up and running from the time I rise in the morning until just before going to bed. Usually from about 8:30 a.m. to around 3:30 a.m. CDT the next morning. That is seven days a week. We don't accept any queries by regular (snail) mail.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the

other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

Actually, with e-publishing I don't see that an agent will be of benefit. Where an agent would be good is in negotiating with a paper-print house for the print rights. E-publishers only lease the rights for e-publishing. All other rights remain with the author. Print, movie, audio are all still the authors. An agent would be useful in finding a publisher for those rights.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

We receive only e-queries so I have no way of responding to this as a comparison. Some weeks we receive quite a few queries, other weeks it is slow. I have not kept a record on a week-to-week basis, but I can tell you that we only opened our doors in June, and we already have sixty books under contract for this year (through December) and approximately thirty others that are under contract and will be released in 2000 . . . and the calendar is not yet full.

Other manuscripts are going through the process and some will be contracted while others will not. We have a

fairly high percentage of contracted vs. rejected manuscripts because we do NOT have a slush pile. All of our submissions are by invitation only and many of the books we have under contract were seen and read by someone on our staff either as critique partners or friends of the author. An invitation was issued and some really fantastic books are now being published. But, not without an evaluation from our Readers and Editors.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

A query comes in and I read it. I either issue an invitation or not, depending on whether or not the authors query letter hooked me and made me want to read the rest of the story. When the submission is sent, in response to my invitation, I then send it to the managing editor for the department in which it belongs.

The managing editor strips the name of the author from the submission and then sends it out to two readers. If the readers agree it is good, then the ME tells me she wants a contract issued and an editor is assigned to the project. Please note that the readers do not know who's manuscript they are reading. If the two readers disagree on the merits of the story, the managing editor

asks an editor to give an evaluation of the submission. The managing editor also takes a look at it and makes up her own mind. Ergo, a manuscript is given every consideration possible before a rejection letter is sent out. We know this is a very subjective thing, as is all forms of art, so we want to be as fair as we can possibly be.

If a manuscript is contracted, the ME assigns an editor to the project, and the editor and author have thirty days in which to complete any editing on the project. When the editing is finished, the manuscript is sent to the managing editor.

During this period the author decides what she would like to see on her cover and fills out a form which goes to the art department. We have a wonderful group of artists who produce beautiful covers for our books. I can't give them enough praise. If you go to our site, you will see some of their work and know why I am so proud.

The ME assigns a copy editor and the manuscript goes through copy-editing. After that, the CE returns the manuscript to the ME who checks it out one more time.

The managing editor then sends it to the senior editor. I read through every manuscript when it gets to my desk. I want to know that it is the best it can possibly be. When I have read through it, I send it to production. It is put in PDF formatting and put up on a special place on the site. The editor and author can go to the site and

read through the book to make sure all typos have been caught plus any formatting problems that crop up because of the shortened line length on the pages.

In addition we have proof readers who go in and read the manuscript to check for these things.

Finally, the finished book is put up on the site and on the publication month it is available for sale.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

Thank you notes are never amiss but we don't expect them. However, those we DO get certainly mark the author as a professional in our minds, and when s/he sends something else to us we are certainly going to pay attention. In other words, those authors who leave us with a good feeling are remembered. Conversely, we also remember those who leave us with a bad taste in our mouths. (See the above description of the unsolicited manuscripts.)

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

Several of our editors, readers and copy editors are published with us. We do not see this as a conflict of interest because, as stated above, the way we select those manuscripts for publication ensures us that there is no bias attached to the manuscript one way or another. The readers read the submission without knowing whose manuscript it is. They judge it on the merits of the story, characterization and writing ability only, and not on who wrote it.

Having worked at a number of different jobs in her life, Lorraine Stephens has had a varied and interesting career. Early on, she tried everything from secretary to office manager to executive assistant. There was even a short stint in there somewhere as a market research interviewer. In addition she spent several years as a counselor and advocate for victims of rape and domestic violence.

Lorraine thought herself ready for “the good life” when she “retired” as editor of the newspaper in the town where she lives. She stayed busy with club work and her quilting, but it became obvious something was missing from her life. A sense of purpose. A friend encouraged her to write. Thus began a journey that still soothes her soul.

In October of 1998, Gina Haldane, CEO of Starlight Writer Publications, came along with an offer that turned into a dream ride on a rocket ship

to the stars. Lorraine has yet to catch her breath. As Senior Editor for SWP, she says she now understands what a surfer feels when riding the Bonzai pipeline. Life is full of excitement, and seeing really good writers achieving lifelong dreams of becoming published authors, being on the cutting edge of new technology, and riding the crest of the wave of the future is the most exciting job anyone could have. Each morning she faces the day with a feeling of exhilaration, looking forward to see what wonderful story will be waiting for her in the IN box. She recently told a friend that she is working harder than she has ever worked in her life, but the other side of the coin is that she's having more fun than at any other time. How can that be a bad thing?

Dreams Unlimited

Bonnee Pierson, Senior Editor

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

The writing quality and the "personality" of the sender. Can they construct a good sentence? Is there a smooth flow to the letter? Are they personable and professional? Short and to the point? Believe it or not, a lot can be construed from a simple query.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

Be professional but personable. This is the time to let your "voice" shine through. Good writing ability. Good spelling. I can honestly say that I've received several top notch queries. Friendly without being invasive. In other words, treating me like a person and not just a paper pusher. Professional without viewing me as their new best e-mail buddy, either.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

There are a few I've received that simply demanded I drop everything to read their book now. They know it's the best book since Hemingway, and I've got to buy it now. Er . . . yeah. One of the worst I received was from a writer who asked if I could critique his work so he could send his book to a real editor. Needless to say, I did reply, but it was very short.

The worst thing a writer can do is be discourteous. I'm doing a job just like any other editor. Treat me with a little courtesy and a large dose of professionalism.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

I treat both of them equally. There's no difference. On the other hand, because I spend so many hours on my machine, I tend to read e-mail queries as they come in. Paper can often be shuffled from one end of my desk to another a few times before I get to it.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

"C" is the answer I'd use. Agents can help a writer in determining a good avenue for their career as a whole; I've had no bad experiences with the agents I've dealt with. In fact, they were all very positive. So, it's really an author's decision, not mine.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf

of a client?

E-mail far outweighs paper. I can get anywhere from three to seven queries a week. I do try to handle them as they come in, so I don't always keep close track in terms of number. I've had only one agent who called to pitch on behalf of a client, but I'm hoping that number will someday increase as e-publishing gains more acceptance.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

I read all the queries which should include a synopsis per our guidelines . . . and also all submissions. From a query, if I decide I want to read the entire book, I'll ask for the complete. To be honest, I don't care for partials. If I'm really enjoying what I'm reading, I want to continue, not have to wait until the whole thing shows up.

Once I read the complete, I make the decision on whether to go to contract or reject. I do make an effort to make the rejections personal and specific rather than the generic "Dear Author . . ." Should we go to contract, I'll negotiate with the author at this point.

I currently have two people who do the actual

editing. Then I do a visual scan once those are done and before the edits are sent back to the authors who then have a chance to go over what's been done. Then we design the cover, finish off the edits, design their author page and send galleys for review, hopefully with enough time to get reviews back before the book goes "live."

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

Yes, I do. Because I try and make the rejection letters personal and specific, overall, the thank you notes have been positive. Though that's not always the case, most authors are pretty grateful for the time I invest. On the other hand, I don't notice when someone doesn't send a thank you. We all tend to live on limited time schedules, so it's not a really necessary part of the protocol. Nice when it happens, but not necessary.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

Only one of our writers "works" for us. Rickey

Mallory does a number of our cover graphics. She was doing that before she submitted to us, so I don't see it as a conflict of interest. Once I asked one of our writers to read a submission. I was really interested in her opinion, but she wasn't contracted with us at the time, so again, no conflict of interest. Though a few of my authors have offered to read/edit for me, I don't know if that would be in the best interest of the company so I've tried not to resort to that. The editors I use are independents. Any readers I use are independents. And I would never let authors deal with contract issues (outside of their own, of course). Though our authors seem very happy and are quite free to discuss clauses among themselves, that's confidential information, and I would never discuss an author's contract with someone else. I see it as unethical, let alone creating a conflict of interest.

Before joining forces with Silke Juppenlatz to create Dreams Unlimited, Bonnee Pierson was a two-time Golden Heart finalist, the Executive Sysop for the Romance Forum on CompuServe, and served two terms as president for the RWA Online Chapter. Now, when she's not chained to her computer as both the Senior Editor and Partner for Dreams Unlimited, she's a full-time wife and mother, a part-time Girl Scout troop leader and a volunteer fireman and emergency medical technician in the town of Northford, Connecticut. Sanity no

longer has meaning in her vocabulary.

<http://www.dreams-unlimited.com>

Winner of SFWA's 1998 Predator & Editor's Poll
Best E-Publisher in the Universe

Red Sage Publishing

Alexandria Kendall, Publisher

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

I really don't like queries. If the writer knows my market and has done her homework, she knows the Red Sage audience and has a story idea that will fit the market. If the author just has a question, it doesn't need to be a query.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

Truthfully, no.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an

example of a really hideous query?

Asking if they can send a story about a man in his seventies falling in love with a twenty-five year old.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

I don't do e-mail queries. If I had to answer e-mail queries, that's all I would do all day. If an author doesn't understand the publisher's market, they are not doing their job.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

C, but I love D's visual.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

I think it is known, I don't want e-mail queries. I really don't need an agent for an author. The author's work should stand on its own.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

I really don't get that many queries. Usually the author sends a synopsis and the first ten pages of the story. If it interests me at all, I send it on. Then we discuss the story and the writer's potential. I believe this business is too subjected to let one person be God, but one person does have to make the final decision. So I guess that throws my God theory out the window.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

I don't need a thank you note from an author. I understand the hurt and rejection they must go through.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or

update contract information for your other writers?
Does this create a conflict of interest?

No, I do not do any of the above.

All Red Sage stories are written for women, by women. Our authors have the freedom to write creative sensual romances which break out of the cookie-cutter mold. And each story is just the right length for reading after a long and hectic day.

Each volume of *Secrets* is a collection of four diverse, ultra-spicy tales—sexy romantic novellas brimming with sensuality. And one story each time is a walk on the wild side—a more adventurous tale for the more adventurous reader. Our stories can fall anywhere in the romance genre; from historicals to contemporary, from fantasy to science fiction. There's something for everyone.

www.redsagepub.com
New Concepts Publishing
Andrea DePasture

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

The first thing I look for is if they've paid attention

to our submission guidelines. What is the name of their book, what is it about, have they had any books published, how many they've completed and in what genre.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

I think the best thing a writer can do is to be direct and concise—try not to go over a page with their query. We receive a lot of submissions, and it really helps us if we don't have to take a lot of time reading query letters so that we can sort them.

The most memorable query I ever received? It was for a historical romance. The letter was a little longer than I liked, but she grabbed my attention immediately. She began by using a sort of quote from the heroine of the story. It was filled with so much emotion that I read the book that same day and enjoyed it immensely. I ended up sending her a contract, and we published it.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

Having bad punctuation and not giving a clear idea of what the book is about definitely does not go really

over well. The worst query letter we received was written by hand—not that we really object that—but the handwriting was not legible at all. Printing instead of cursive handwriting would have been better.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

We really prefer queries by regular mail. Surprisingly enough, it takes us longer to get to queries sent by e-mail. We spend so much time on the computer running the company that it is difficult for our readers to get to them.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

It really doesn't make much difference. Some of our well-published authors deal with us through their agents, but we don't have a problem with this.

How many queries do you receive each week?

What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

We usually receive at least ten new books each week, though lately it has been more than that. E-queries? About seven a week.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

I read and answer most of the queries. Most are really interesting, and I ask for the full manuscript since it is easier for us to make a decision based on an entire ms. It also takes up less time for both us and the author.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

We haven't received many, but they do get read. It somehow makes everything seem more personal, and I really like that—it keeps us focused on what are goals are around here.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

It really doesn't take that long to read them, and if they went to the trouble of sending it, the least I could do is read it. I read several hundred books last year and out of those only a handful sent thank you notes. I can still remember those authors who sent notes. Though I suppose if everyone sent one, I probably wouldn't!

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

We do not do this. I really feel like this can get to be a conflict of interest, especially if they send you a book that you do not want. Hard feelings seem to be caused so easily that I wouldn't want us to ever get into this practice.

Andrea DePasture has been editing professionally for over six years, and has worked with New Concepts Publishing for nearly three years. She was salutatorian of her graduating class and went on to major in literature, one of her passions. Having

always excelled in English, grammar, and spelling, she embarked on her career as an editor of a small town newspaper. But it was when NCP was founded that she truly began the career of her dreams, working with authors she has always admired for their talent and meeting promising new authors as well.

MountainView Publishing Company

Susan Johnson, Founder

<http://www.whidbey.com/mountainview>

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

Punctuation, grammar and spelling. It's a very good indicator of what the mechanics of the manuscript are like.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

Get right to the point. I like it when they can condense their entire book into back-cover-like copy and still make the book sound interesting. It's also interesting to read about the author— many include bios. It's not

required, of course, but it is interesting to get a sense of the writer's experience and other projects they're working on. In one case, I wasn't interested in the book the author sent, but was very interested in another book she described that she is currently working on.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

Let's see. Sending strange things in the mail is definitely out. I have received some very strange items. Too strange to be believed, so for the moment I'll refrain from describing them. Keeping in mind that my main focus is Christian fiction . . . I happen to have a query right here that says, in effect, "I have eighteen manuscripts ready for sale. They range from paranormal to occult. This can be a real gold mine for both of us. Please let me know if you're interested." Aside from the fact that I don't publish paranormal or occult, there is nothing here to let me know whether a storyline might be interesting to me. I don't know what one single book is about. I'm not going to just randomly say, "Okay, send me the paranormal." This is too vague. And aside from the very important first thing that caught my eye, poor punctuation, this is a most unprofessional type of query.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from

paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

Queries . . . no. I read both equally as fast. Submissions, that is different. It is much easier to read paper submissions because I don't have a laptop. Paper goes everywhere. The computer doesn't. Of course, this is before the Rocket-eReader. That goes everywhere! So things are changing around here, and I am starting to request more e-mail submissions vs. paper.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

Four of my authors have agents. Three names would be very recognizable in the publishing industry. Three of the authors used their agents for the contract process. The fourth did not. The agents were never part of the acquisition equation. Meaning, I don't require agents. I would have bought the book had the author not been agented. The agents have been very easy to work with. Pleasant, not tough at all. They were, of course, curious

and asked questions about the e-publishing industry and how it all works. I was nervous at first, but my contracts have all passed muster.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

I get about the same amount of e-queries vs. paper. Currently, I'm getting approximately ten a week. This is up considerably from the last time I was asked this question. I haven't had any agents call me. I have had several authors call me, and let's just say I prefer paper queries to phone calls.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

I read them all myself. If I read a query I like, I contact the author to make sure they realize I am an e-publisher before I request anything. Believe me, not everyone knows they are submitting to an e-publisher, and I have no more time to waste considering something only to be told, "Oh. I didn't know you were an e-publisher," then

to be dismissed like a naughty child.

Lately, I've seen so many wonderful first three chapters, and not so wonderful rest of the books, so I've begun asking for the first three chapters via e-mail, and if they're good, asking for another few chapters, before asking for a printed copy of the complete manuscript. This saves the author printing and postage.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

I've received wonderful thank you notes. Yes, I read them. I save them. They mean a lot to me because I'm always curious if an author has been helped by any of my comments. Do I notice if they don't send one? Only if they've asked for specific feedback and I've gone out of my way to give them above and beyond the normal amount of feedback. Let's say like critiquing their first three chapters line by line. Which, by the way, is not something I normally do. I've done it a few times because the author just didn't understand what I was saying about punctuation, viewpoint, or some other comments I may have made. I do like to give feedback, but my time is becoming more and more. Oh, but back to that question of noticing. I certainly don't sit around thinking evil thoughts about someone who didn't send a thank you note. It's not expected at all. We're all busy,

and I certainly understand that.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

No. I have no writers reading submissions or editing work or doing any of the other things mentioned.

Is it a conflict of interest? Well . . . some may disagree with me, but . . . I have seen this done somewhere, I won't say where, and I do believe it created a huge conflict of interest. The author who was edited was not treated fairly by any stretch of the means. That doesn't mean it has to be a conflict, I guess, but it is something to be cautious of. It's not something I would consider doing because I saw first-hand the hurt that was caused by it.

MountainView Publishing, located in the San Juan Islands in the Pacific Northwest, was founded by Susan Johnson. Susan, a long-time book reviewer with a great love for inspirational romance, decided it was time to introduce inspirational romances to the e-publishing industry. MountainView Publishing just celebrated its first birthday in July, and remains dedicated to bringing the very best

inspirational romances to readers. MountainView has also recently added some sweet romances and mysteries to its list.

JB Books

Julie Bauer, Owner, Managing Director

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

I look for relevant information straight away. Is the query short and to the point? What genre is the book? What is the word length? What background does the author have for writing it, and who is their target audience? I am amazed that more than ninety percent of the queries do not address these questions even though they appear on my guidelines, which is an indication that the authors have either not read the guidelines or haven't followed them.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

Being concise, direct, and professional is always best. It not only shows that the author respects my time but

helps to convince me that they are going to be a worthwhile addition to my stable. It is a good indication to how they will respond to publicity and interacting with the media. A good query may also include any media experience.

One query that stood out started off with:

*RE: (story title) —Crime—
110,000 words.*

I immediately knew what I was looking at and under which slush pile to file it. The query was less than one page but precisely contained everything I needed to know about the book and the author to process the submission.

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

The worst thing that a writer can do is apologize for their work, or for being a new writer or for being ignorant about how to approach publishers. Writers should never apologize for their work. If they have no confidence in it, how do they expect a publisher to? Writers sometimes forget that writing is a business and publishers are in it to make money. They should endeavor to be as business-like and professional as possible. Pleading

ignorance or being new to writing doesn't excuse them for not following the guidelines.

The worst query I ever received was typed on an old typewriter, was covered in red pen, white-out and yellow highlighter. It even had an scrawled addendum stapled to the side of the fourth page—pages and pages about the author's family and his singing dog but contained no information about the accompanying manuscript.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

E-mail queries are treated in exactly the same way as paper. However, e-mail queries have distinct advantages and disadvantages over snail mail. An advantage is that e-mail can contain active links to websites. I'm usually online when I first read the e-mail so I'm likely to click on it for more information. A web address on paper is unlikely to be followed through because I handle snail mail at different times of the day to e-mail. I usually answer e-mail queries more promptly because I can simply hit the reply button.

The disadvantage lies in the fact that I receive hundreds of e-mails every day and have time to answer only a certain number. It is easy for me to miss a query if it

is downloaded amid e-mail from lists or newsgroups. Queries should always be marked as high priority to distinguish them.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

I would have to say (c). There are times when agents have been a hindrance and others when I have dearly wished an author had one. Some authors fit your description (d)! Being a small publishing house, I prefer to deal with my authors directly. My authors have a great deal of input to the entire production process of their book, and it is essential that authors be involved in marketing and publicity simply because I do not have a marketing department—at least not yet—and there is only so much one person can do. All of the authors that I have contracted so far, with the exception of authors commissioned for anthologies, have not been represented by agents. In fact many of the titles in my list are first novels.

How many queries do you receive each week?

What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

On average I receive about fifty paper/fax queries per week and almost double that in E-queries. Most of the E-queries are from outside Australia. I receive about two queries a year from agents. Yet many of the queries I receive are from authors who have agents but are pitching their own work.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

While JB Books has grown rapidly over the last few years, the business hasn't experienced sufficient growth to hire staff other than a freelance editor and graphic artist. The entire internal process is handled by one person—me. I read all queries myself and reply. If the manuscript fits my guidelines, I will request a partial. I usually have a good idea from the partial whether to accept or reject. If in doubt, I will always request the full manuscript. When rejecting manuscripts, I try to offer feedback where I can, but this may mean long response times. Acceptance is usually done with a phone

call or e-mail if outside Australia. I also do the first edit, work with the author on revisions, help them put together their publicity material and help market and distribute.

I have in the past used proof readers, but this means that very little of the manuscript is read and form rejections are necessary because the proof reader has insufficient knowledge of the story to provide feedback. I prefer to deal with authors on a more personal level.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

Not only do I read them, I treasure them! I can't speak for every editor out there, nor can I compare my company to a large, multi-national publishing house. But thank you notes are invaluable. They indicate to me that it was worth my time to read the entire story and supply feedback. They indicate that my feedback was constructive and not offensive. They lift my spirits on days when I've had to deal with difficult authors or print problems, and I will remember the author's name. I don't particularly notice if an author doesn't send one, but sometimes I'm left wondering if my feedback was helpful or a waste of time. We need feedback on our feedback, or it dries up and form letters take over.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

No, it isn't customary and in my opinion creates both a conflict of interest and an unhealthy competitiveness. If my authors are doing their job correctly, they are too busy promoting, attending scheduled events, or writing their next book, to read and edit my other authors. Contract information is usually confidential between publisher and author. I can't imagine one author updating a contract for another within the same house. I try to foster a sense of unity, and I am blessed with authors who help and support each other, regardless of genre, because they know that they are all equal. This could not be achieved if I tipped the balance by allowing some authors to edit the work of others.

I have always been an avid reader and book collector, from Little Golden Books on Grandma's knee to joining my first bookclub at age nine. Over the years, I have written over sixty articles for journals and newsletters, have written geological reports, and have one nonfiction title in print. I don't have a background in publishing; I am a geologist by profession, but I do learn fast. Apart from

my honours degree in geology, I have also completed a diploma in commercial art, a diploma of professional romance writing, and am currently undertaking a comprehensive writing course in between writing my next book and managing JB Books and my family.

Dark Star Publications (Successor to Twilight Times Books)

Modean Moon, Executive Editor

<http://darkstarpublications.com>

You have a query in front of you. What's the first thing you notice, good or bad?

I notice whether the query letter is professional in tone and format. Too often writers submitting to electronic publishers attempt a level of familiarity and informality that is completely inappropriate in a business setting. A query is, after all, the author's sales tool. It must present that author in the best light possible.

What are the two or three BEST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really top-notch query you got once, and that you still remember?

The writer can polish the letter with the same care used in polishing the proposal. It should be concise and to the point. Not much more is required than would fill one typewritten page.

For example:

Dear Ms. Moon:

Included in the body of this e-mail, as your submission requirements state, is the synopsis and first chapter of my (vampire, science fiction, horror, fantasy) novel, TITLE, which is complete in XX,000 words.”

Then a brief paragraph about the author’s credentials or background, as it pertains to the novel, would be appropriate.

“I have written twelve vampire novels after having become intensely interested in the vampire mythos during a vacation in Transylvania in 1865.”

“Joe Author” (This is important; too often e-mail addresses don’t have complete names.)

Then, as our guidelines state, the writer should cut and paste the synopsis and first chapter into the body of the e-mail.

I'd also like to see in the subject line of the e-mail, the words "Submission: TITLE OF THE WORK"

What are the two or three WORST things a writer can do/say in a query? Can you describe an example of a really hideous query?

The worst things . . . be ungrammatical, unprofessional, and unspecific. And ignore our guidelines:

"Hi there, I've written a couple of books you might be interested in, one's a vampire story and the others a really great chost (sic) story, and I know you said you wanted the first chapter and an outline or some such but chapter two's so much better I know youll wanna read that first. Let me know shich (sic) one you ant."

And yes, while that is not a real query letter, it is appallingly similar to some I have received.

Do you treat e-mail queries differently from paper? For example, does your working style lend you to easier reading/faster response one way or the other?

All our submissions are electronic. While I read all submissions, I admit to finding time more quickly to read those that impress me with a professional query. I

want the same quality in our books that readers expect from paper-published work; I want the same professionalism from our writers that print publishers demand.

For your publishing house, how do agents factor in: (a) are they absolutely necessary for a book to be considered; (b) are they preferred but not required; (c) do they make no difference one way or the other; or (d) are they money-hungry leeches who suck the creative soul out of writers and give editors gray hairs?

I have been agented for twenty years and find my agent to be invaluable in my writing career. However, at this point, an agent is not necessary for submission to Dark Star. Our contract provisions are fair and firm. Our reading time is approximately four weeks to two months. Our acceptances are based on the quality of the material and whether it fits into our overall needs.

How many queries do you receive each week? What is the proportion of e-queries vs. paper/fax queries vs. agents calling you to pitch on behalf of a client?

So far all of our submissions have been electronically received by e-mail.

Because we are a relatively new house, and because

we are not actively soliciting submissions at this time, the quantity has been manageable.

What is your internal process (that is, do you read the queries yourself? Or who screens them for you?) Can you give us some insight into the process—from query to request for partial or full to reading the manuscript to rejection letter or contract offer?

Because I am interested in shaping the content of Dark Star, I read all queries. If I am interested, I will request up to three chapters and perhaps a more involved synopsis. If those three chapters hold my attention and interest, I request the complete manuscript, at which time I assign it to one of several readers we have on staff. When I receive the reader's report, I scan the manuscript myself. After that, I will either send a rejection or ask legal to issue the contract.

Do editors read thank you notes from authors they've had to reject? Do they have the time to read them?

I would never be too busy to be the recipient of a thank you note; however, I don't believe it is necessary for an author to send one, and I certainly won't notice or keep track of who does not.

Is it customary to use writers contracted by you to read submissions, edit the work of other writers who are also contracted with you, serve as webmaster, or update contract information for your other writers? Does this create a conflict of interest?

We have staff members who are writers and staff members who are competent editors and copy editors but who do not themselves write. I see no basis for a conflict of interest. I'm interested in locating the best person for the job; if that person happens to be a writer, and we are lucky enough to be able to contract that person, I'm well pleased.

Modean Moon assumed the position of Executive Editor of Dark Star Publications July 1. She brings to the job her experience as a writer, and her experience as a free-lance editor.

She is the author of sixteen novels and has won the RITA and the National Readers Choice Award. She has been a finalist for the Holt Medallion and has several times been nominated for *Romantic Times Magazine's* Reviewers' Choice award.

Chapter Five

A Few Words on Submission Etiquette

There are obvious courtesies in contacting a publisher, things like checking and double checking the spelling of the editor's name. Make sure you're sending your query to the right address. Make sure you've printed your letter on clean white paper and not hot pink stationery with a green border, etc.

A good resource for this is the *Writers Digest Guide to Manuscript Formats*, which can be found in most bookstores.

There are a few newbie mistakes to be avoided at all cost . . . and one "mistake" I recommend you make.

Unless invited, don't call an editor. Even when invited, don't call an editor. These are people who are so busy during the day with phone calls, meetings, and a thousand other things that they don't actually edit at work! They have to take manuscripts home, and home is where they'll usually read your query letter or sample chapter. So don't call 'em. Think of it this way: editor on phone equals editor not reading your future bestseller.

And never never never call editors to ask if they've

gotten to your manuscript yet. You might as well drive down to their main office and take your manuscript home.

That said, I have done this. I don't mean I've driven to the main office to fetch my manuscript. But I have called an editor to find out the status of my work. At the time of this writing, I've sold nearly a dozen book manuscripts (and pitched more than three times that many), but I still broke a cold sweat when calling Jennifer Tam at Harlequin to check on the status of my submission. The reasons for my terror were many: one, I knew I shouldn't be bugging this woman at work. The only reason I was? Susan Shepherd, another Harlequin editor, told me to call her. She even gave me Jennifer's number. Two, I'm lousy on the phone when talking to editors, as you'll see.

Desperation was my motivation. (Let me back up a bit and tell you it's my dream to sell a book to Harlequin. Preferably four or five books, actually.) Jennifer had asked for a partial based on a query letter. Great, huh? I mailed a partial and promptly went on to other projects. I was waiting for a rejection letter (to add to my bulging file) or a request for a complete. Nine months went by with no reply. I wasn't interested in adding to the paper pile on the editor's desk with a polite follow-up letter, so I contacted a Harlequin author and asked her (Lori Foster, as it

turned out) for her editor's e-mail address. Which Lori kindly provided (after checking with her editor, of course). So I politely e-mailed Susan Shepherd, asking her for Jennifer Tam's e-mail address. (See the lengths I'm going to in order to avoid a phone call? It's a phobia, I swear.)

Susan sensibly replied, "Why don't you call Jennifer and ask her?" (Aarrghh!) "Here's her phone number."

So I called. A week later. That's how long it took me to decide, nope, I definitely am not hearing from Harlequin about the status of this submission anytime soon, and I'm too darned fond of this manuscript to just give up on it. (I had, in fact, written this book specifically for the Harlequin Temptation line.)

I got Jennifer's voice mail and left an unbelievably garbled message: "Hi, Jennifer, this is Mary Alongi . . . MaryJanice Davidson (I write under my maiden name), calling to check the status . . . to check . . . you had asked me to send a partial after reading a query letter for *Love Thief*. I mean, *Thief of Hearts*. It's the story of Kara-the-vigilante and the doctor who falls in love with her while she's his bodyguard. Anyway, you'd asked to see a partial nine months ago, and I was just calling to follow up and see if you'd be interested in seeing the rest. Reading the rest, I mean. Anyway, you can call me at 612-830-no, wait, that's my old work number. Well, my

home number is 651-438-9320. Thanks, and I look forward to—” BEEEEEEEEEEEP! Her machine cut me off.

Big surprise, she hasn't called me back. Can you blame her? I sounded like a moron. A dangerous moron! Didn't know the name of the manuscript I had sent, or my own name, for that matter. Every time I think about that phone call I feel like having a drink or ten.

I decided to call one more time, but this time I wrote short script, from which I planned to read. Why am I doing this to myself? The dream, of course, of selling to Harlequin. And because, hey, she's had the partial for practically a year. She owes me an answer, one way or the other.

If I got no answer, I planned to send a(nother) letter. Or contact Susan Shepherd, whine that Jennifer hasn't returned my call, and try to finagle the woman's e-mail address, heh, heh, heh. But I'm not giving up on them, not until I've made every effort to contact them to find out the status of my partial. Learn from my various idiocies: never let humiliation keep you from your goal. (I should put that on a t-shirt.)

Before I could put my new plan into action, I received a polite letter from Jennifer herself, explaining about Harlequin's huge glut of manuscripts, and assuring me of an answer soon. That

was . . . uh . . . six months ago. Almost two years to wait for a decision on a partial (and people wonder why I've sold so many books to electronic publishers). A partial! Fifty lousy pages. To put it another way, I wasn't yet pregnant when I first sent my query to Harlequin, and now my baby is walking and has learned to speak.

I'm not complaining. Okay, I am, but they're worth the trouble. They're (da-dum!) HARLEQUIN, and I've been reading and admiring their books for years and years. I won't rest until I've broken them to my will . . . uh, I mean, until I've gotten a favorable response.

I recently heard, via one of my e-mail lists, of Harlequin's new contest. Here's the message, verbatim:

It's going to be a BLAZING summer! And Harlequin is looking for new writers to help us turn up the heat! In 2001, we will be launching Harlequin's newest—and hottest—series yet! BLAZE is bold, brash and provocative. And we're looking for new authors who write the same way—authors who aren't afraid to take their characters to the bedroom and beyond. So, we're holding a contest. In ten pages or less, show us a scene where your hero and heroine are doing what they do best—making love! And don't leave us frustrated—please include a synopsis (no more than 5 pages) to let us know how these two make it from between the sheets to down the aisle.

The contest is open to published and unpublished authors alike (please indicate your publishing experience in your cover letter). First and second place winners will receive a critique of their manuscripts and a year's subscription to the upcoming BLAZE series. Entries must be postmarked by August 30, 2000, and the winners will be announced September 30, 2000. Make the summer of 2000 the steamiest one ever!

Note—The length of a BLAZE novel is between 70,000 and 75,000 words. So make sure you've got plenty of story to complement the fabulous sex!

Ah-ha! It just so happened the book I had written was targeted specifically for the *Blaze* line. And had plenty of steamy sex scenes. So I dusted off the requisite love scene, tightened the synopsis, and off it went. Even if I don't win the contest, it's a guarantee someone at Harlequin is going to read my partial within thirty days. And if they like what they see, things might speed up a bit. Frankly, I've got this whole fantasy set up in my head: I win the contest, and then smilingly explain that they've had that same manuscript for two years. Then bask in the apologies. Then I win an Oscar, and cure leukemia.

I don't know if a contract will come of this or not. My point (and there is one, yes, indeed) is that if I never sell to Harlequin, it won't be because I gave up too soon. If you have a specific goal, don't let rejection stop you. Keep plugging away. You

won't be sorry.

Back to the no-no's of submission etiquette: never call an editor. Unless you really really have to. Or feel you have to, which is often the same thing. And if you have to, try to keep your wits about you. You'll have to call publishing houses sometimes, if not to check manuscript status (which I've explained you shouldn't do, anyway. So maybe I oughta take my own advice!), then to check the proper spelling of an editor's name.

Sometimes receptionists are wicked and, when you politely call a publishing house's main number to ask for the spelling of a certain editor's name, the trickster who answered the phone will transfer you directly to that editor. Aarrgh! This happened to me a few months ago. Don't panic. I panicked. I nearly dropped the phone, in fact.

The editor (Gail Fortune at Berkeley) answered her phone in a pleasant contralto, "Gail Fortune" and I, who had been half-dozing, wishing I was home playing with my kid rather than sneaking a long-distance call during the day job, sat up so quickly I nearly toppled out of my chair. At the time (and, I believe, still), Gail Fortune was Senior Editor at Berkeley Books, and I'd been trying to break into Berkeley for six months. Simply put, I had somehow blundered into a conversation with a woman who could squash me, career-wise, like a tick.

“Oh!” I said intelligently, followed cleverly with, “Uh! I was—I was only—I asked the receptionist who’s editing the Magical Love book line.”

“That’s me,” she said pleasantly.

“You. Ah. You? Okay then. Well, thanksforyour-timegoodbye.” Click.

Not surprisingly, I got a rejection slip about two weeks later. Not that I’d ever told Gail Fortune my name. But somehow she knew. I’m sure of it.

If I’d been thinking instead of panicking, I would have said, “Thanks very much, Ms. Fortune, just wanted to make sure I got your name right.” (Insert chuckle.) “I’ve got a great idea for your new line. Do you have time to hear about it now, or should I just pop a letter in the mail?”

Chances are, as she was already on the phone, she would have asked me to run it by her. Who knows where the conversation could have gone? But I panicked, and I lost the chance to really stand out in a senior editor’s mind. Well. I stood out, but not the way I’d planned. Learn from my mistakes!

So, don’t call ’em. But if you find yourself unexpectedly on the phone with one due to those sneaky receptionists, try to take advantage of the situation.

Simultaneous submissions are a risk. Some authors take that risk. A lot of publishing houses don’t tolerate simultaneous submissions. They want

the freedom of taking eight months (or, ahem, two years) to give you a yes or no answer without feeling the pressure of knowing other publishing houses are looking at the same submission.

Frankly, I think this is a bit unjust, and I don't pay any attention to the No Simultaneous Submissions notation in my *Writers' Market*. Things would be different if a publisher could get you an answer within, say, three weeks, or even a month. But they can't. Publishing houses still expect you to slow your career by years by trying one publishing house at a time. That means you can only submit one work to three houses a year! (One house every two years, if you submit to you-know-who.)

For their part, publishing houses hate making an offer only to find out suddenly they're in a bidding war with a competing house. Or, they make an offer only to hear the author say, "Gee, sorry, I signed a contract for that book last week with your competitor." So they try to avoid the potential problems by implementing a no simultaneous submissions policy. (The definition of no simultaneous submissions varies by publisher. Most of them wouldn't mind if you were querying other houses, but when they ask for the complete manuscript, they usually want to know they're the only ones reading it.)

Some time ago, I sent sample chapters to a Well-Known Publishing Giant (I'll call it WKPG) with an

obscenely slow response time (no, it's not Harlequin). Six months later, after no response, I sent the same sample chapters to Another Publisher (AP), who loved what they saw and asked for more, pronto; we're in the preliminary stages of negotiating a book contract.

If I'd waited for WKPG to finally get around to replying to my submission, I might have missed my shot at AP. And if my biggest problem is that because of a simultaneous submission I have two contract offers on the table . . . well, as my father likes to say, it's better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.

I recently asked a publisher to clarify the no simultaneous submissions thing. She explained that by the time a publishing house can make an offer, no less than three (and often more than half a dozen) people have read it, discussed it, passed memos or e-mails back and forth on it, and have held meetings to discuss it. So after the several dozen man hours invested in acquiring the book, it's really annoying to make an offer to the author, only to be told, "Oh, that? I sold it to HarperCollins last month." This publisher then added darkly, "The publishing community is small. We remember the authors who do this."

While she has a point, I remained unmoved. If it takes a year to make a decision, the publishing house needs to hire more staff. If they won't, or can't, I don't

think they should cry or blacklist an author for moving to another house. Again, this is my opinion only, but it's based on dealing with publishers for more than ten years.

Some writers follow up with a polite letter ("Could you or your assistant please let me know the status of my submission?") but I never bother. If it takes them eight months just to read their mail, I don't want to work with them. Think how long it might take them to get your royalty check in the mail!

Another option is simply to drop the house a short letter stating you are withdrawing your manuscript from consideration. No explanation necessary.

Some publishers are open to simultaneous submissions. Good for them. And when a house is okay with that, I let them know in my letter if I've sent the manuscript to anyone else. (If they're not open, I don't mention it.)

For example: ". . . don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need anything else. For your information, Stephanie Kip at Bantam has also requested this manuscript. Thanks for taking a look, and I hope you enjoy *Love Lies*." Just a simple courtesy the editor appreciates and she'll pay close attention to your submission, knowing a competitor is also checking it out.

It's not a bad idea to follow up with the first

editor, informing her the manuscript she requested a month ago has been generating interest with another publisher. Just a quick note is fine (“I hope you are enjoying *Love Lies*. I just wanted to drop you a line and let you know Gail Fortune has recently requested to see *Love Lies*, as well. If you have any questions or need anything else, please don’t hesitate to blah-blah-blah”). Here’s where you need to take some care, though if either editor nixes simultaneous submissions, you certainly don’t want to go out of your way to let them know you’ve sent your manuscript to another house.

I’m sure some writers (and many editors) out there are horrified because I’m urging you to ignore the no simultaneous submission commandment. You certainly don’t have to. I’m just explaining that I have suffered no adverse consequences (so far) by daring to run my career in a fairly efficient manner.

Chapter Six

E-mail queries

While most editors (most of the ones I'm dealing with, at any rate) prefer snail-mail, some are open to e-mail queries. I got a book contract this way; the e-mails flew back and forth for about two weeks and when the dust cleared, I had a contract for a young adult novel—due to the editor in three weeks, but that's another story.

An e-query works just like a snail-mail query, except e-queries tend to be shorter and punchier. Below is most of the correspondence between my publisher at The Fiction Works and me. It took place in eight business days. I found The Fiction Works while surfing the web, heard they were looking for new writers, and pitched my idea.

Dear Ray:¹

Many thanks for your previous e-mails; they were very helpful to me. I've attached the first two chapters of my young adult novel, *Forget the Shrink, Come Play With Me*; below is a brief synopsis.²

Austin Robinson wouldn't have been in the adolescent therapist's office at all if not for accidentally setting the

school's theater curtains on fire. It was an accident, but pubescent setting fire spelled "trouble" to the school authorities (and his parents!) so off to the therapist he went.

While waiting for his appointment, he meets a shy girl, his age but quite small, almost frail, with the face of an angel and a voice so soft he can hardly hear it. She never speaks save when spoken to, and instead of dismissing her as a bore, Austin is intrigued.

It turns out the girl, Sara Coolidge, is recovering from a bout with leukemia. She attends therapy sessions to cope with what is happening to her. But once Austin—well-meaning, magnet-for-trouble Austin—enters her life, Sara will never be the same. The two have some rollicking good times, most of which goes unnoticed by the adults in their lives, and Sara begins to come out of her shell.

But when her condition worsens, Austin pulls away. Will he be able to support his new friend during the most difficult, dangerous time of her life? Will Sara keep the confidence she's newly earned, or climb back into her shell?

Check out the first two chapters, and let me know if you think it'll be appropriate for *The Fiction Works*. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I loved writing it.

Sincerely yours,
MaryJanice Davidson³

¹Ray Hoy, the publisher, sent me info on his company and signed it "Ray", which is the only reason

I'm using his first name on such short notice.

²Polite paragraph, and notice I get right to the point. Always vital in a query, electronic or otherwise.

³Close professionally, even though it's the more casual electronic query. And watch your signature line . . . if you're writing him an e-mail from the day job, be careful a lot of your company jargon doesn't get sent along with your message.

Thanks to the wonders of electronic mail, Ray received my letter the same day, and the next day he got back to me.

Hi MaryJanice,

I am attaching a copy of our latest guidelines in "RTF" format, which you should be able to open successfully with nearly any word processor. Let me know if the formatting holds up (indentations, bold face, etc.).

We'll take a look at the first two chapters of *Forget the Shrink, Come Play With Me*, in our editorial meeting this coming Monday. I'll get back to you.

All the best,

Ray Hoy, Publisher

[Ray also sent an attached file with the sample chapters from a recently published book about a

little girl with leukemia.]

Ray,

Many thanks for the guidelines and sample chapters. Their practical use aside, I found the story riveting (I've got a two year-old daughter) and it hit me hard. Whoever did that for you was fabulous.

However, I have to wonder if you want another "kid with leukemia" book (which is the story behind *Forget the Shrink, Come Play With Me*). If not, we can fix it so Yvonne is a recently diagnosed diabetic. Hundreds of thousands of kids get diagnosed every year (and hundreds of thousands more are diabetic and don't even know it) and it's tough on them and their families. Not only do they find out they have to severely curtail (or even stop completely) their sugar intake (no sodas, no chocolate, no candy, no cookies, no sauces, etc., etc.) but that sometime in the near future they could suffer infertility, kidney shut-down, blindness, gangrene resulting in amputation, and/or death. It's tough for anyone to accept, much less a teenager. Who wants to face their own mortality before they've been to the prom?¹

Rather than have the leukemia worsen, Yvonne could suffer insulin reactions or even go into diabetic shock; the climax of the book could be how she and Austin deal with that, and where they go on from there.

Whew! Digressed a bit, sorry. Just wanted to throw out another idea if you were worried about putting out another leukemia story. Hope you and your staff get a chuckle out of

my sample chapters.²

—MaryJanice

¹Thanks to the Internet, I was able to research diabetes and came up with the above facts. It took about five minutes of my time . . . if that.

²Since Ray had enclosed sample chapters from The Fiction Work's novel dealing with leukemia, I figured he'd have to blitz my book idea, so I took steps to anticipate him.

Hi MaryJanice,

Yes, *Angel, Mine* nearly tore me up just editing the thing. What a powerful, well-written story. We'll do very well with that one.

I agree with your assessment. Go with the diabetic storyline. I definitely want to see the finished manuscript for this story. You can send the entire things as an e-mail attachment, in text.

Incidentally, I also uploaded the guidelines to our Internet site today. Check it out.

Looking forward to seeing your entire story.

All the best,

Ray

Hooray! He liked my idea! But wait . . . I hadn't written the book yet. I was happy he liked my idea,

but maybe I could push for a bit more. Hey, you never know until you ask, right?

Ray

Just visited your web site—the guidelines look great, very easy to understand.

I'm glad you liked my diabetic storyline, and I'll be glad to send you the finished manuscript . . . as soon as I write the rest of it. I estimate it'll take about three weeks, including edits. Any chance of doing so on contract?¹

—MaryJanice

P.S. A couple facts on diabetes: in the U.S., 16 million people (of all ages) have diabetes. But only 8 million know it.² In the last twenty-five years, the U.S. government has spent over 300 million dollars trying to find a cure.

¹I was too chicken to be really aggressive in pursuing a contract. It was my first try so I kind of downplayed it.

²Popped a few more facts into my letter, telling him I'm serious about the subject.

Hi MaryJanice,

Yes, I'll send an agreement for *Forget the Shrink, Come*

Play With Me. I think it will fit very well in our young adult lineup.

Please e-mail your physical address, and I'll get the agreement to you immediately.

Incidentally, when you do send the finished manuscript, you can send it as an attachment to your e-mail, in "RTF" format. Thanks, and have a great weekend.

Ray

It worked!

Ray—

How exciting! "Have a great weekend"? After your e-mail, how could I not? :-)

My address: MaryJanice Davidson, P.O. Box 100, Eagan, MN 55334.

I've spent the day on the Web, getting more interesting facts on juvenile diabetes (so your e-mail was well-timed). It's my hope that *Forget the Shrink* will educate as well as entertain.

Many thanks for the contract offer. I'll look forward to receiving it.

—MaryJanice

As of this writing, The Fiction Works is doing very well. They're distributing through Barnes & Noble and other national and semi-national chains,

with plans to take the company public in the fall of 2002. In addition to the best audio books around (okay, I might be a little biased), they've recently moved into electronic books and print on demand. Several of their books were nominated for the Franklin (remember, the \$100,000.00 prize for best e-book?) and the Eppie (the electronic version of the Rita, the Hugo, or the Newberry Medal).

The Juvenile Diabetes Association International has expressed interest in helping me market my book. And I've since sold Ray three more manuscripts (including, of course, this one). All because of that wonderful invention called the World Wide Web. And e-mail, of course!

Remember, it never hurts to ask. I wasn't sure Ray would give me a contract without seeing the book first, but he liked my queries and my sample chapter, and for him it wasn't a problem. It never hurts to ask.

I know it's a scary idea. And you probably can't help thinking, "But if the editor thinks I'm pushy, they'll withdraw their offer/won't be interested in reading the rest/will hate me forever." No, they won't.

Midwest Today is a semi-national magazine which is always on the lookout for good writing, especially columns. I visited their web site, saw they encouraged e-queries, had an idea for a column, and pitched it.

Attn: Sally Knight, Lifestyles Editor

Ms. Knight:

As a born-and-bred Midwesterner, I've noticed a common phenomenon when the weather turns cold. Rather than hauling out bulky jackets, ski masks, and mittens when the temperature begins to drop like a rock, Midwesterners pride themselves on how long they can go before succumbing to down-filled parkas.¹

I thought it was just a high-school thing (It was considered extremely uncool to be warmly dressed, and as for hats? Forget about it!), but now that I'm a full-fledged Grown Up (I just turned 28) I've noticed the same thing. At my husband's nagging—err, insistence—I put on his parka to go to work the other day. I was the most heavily dressed person on the bus, even though the temperature was in the low 30's. I got a few funny looks in the elevator, too. I guess it's still uncool to be warmly dressed.

I lived in Boston for six years, where I observed the opposite phenomenon—at first frost, Bostonians hauled out the ski pants. I admit I did some sniggering in their direction while running around in my Thanksgiving Day tank top. I once offered ice cream to a homeless man the week before Christmas; he shooed me away with a “What are you, crazy, lady? It's freezin' out here!”

I'd like to do a humorous essay for your magazine which explores the hardy Midwesterner stereotype. Stereotype, nothing—I have yet to meet a Midwesterner who didn't laugh at

the elements. And when I lived in Boston I was accorded the due respect of someone who knew what REAL winters were like. (I'm sure when they referred to me as "Nanook of the North," they meant it as an affectionate nickname.)

"It's Not Cold, It's Brisk" can have a word count of whatever you require, but I envision it as being around 800-1000 words. I have sold three book manuscripts, my first novel will be out next month, and I have pitched and sold articles to *First for Women* and *Storycrafting Magazine*.²

May I have this assignment?

—MaryJanice Davidson

¹It's usually a good idea to match the tone of your query to the tone of your manuscript.

²This query worked because of a combination of humor, my personal experience, and, though I didn't know it at the time, the next-to-last paragraph, which highlighted my experience, flexibility, and professionalism. I also didn't know that this magazine is always looking for columnists with lots of ideas and who can deliver on time.

Not only did Ms. Knight like my query, she liked it enough to pass it on to her boss, Larry Jordan, the publisher.

Dear Ms. Davidson:

Thank you for your amusing letter. Sally Knight referred

it to me for answering. Your idea sounds very appealing—but I have to be honest with you. The economics of our publication are such that we generally buy reprints, not first-right material, and the reason is that we can't pay a lot. Forty dollars is a typical fee for a column length such as you propose (800-1000 words).

If, however, you have ambitions to write such a piece that you could then re-sell to several publishers—and would like to appear in a Midwest mag that has some really outstanding writing and a good circulation—then we would be happy to consider your submission.

Thanks again for your interest.

Larry Jordan, Publisher
Midwest Today

Did I care that I wasn't going to make a thousand bucks off this article, something it would take me all of half an hour to write? I did not. But it was nice of him to be up front about the pricing.

Mr. Jordan:

Many thanks for your speedy reply. I was crushed to read that you won't be paying me \$4,000 for an 800 word article, but I quickly rallied.

Seriously, I would jump at the chance to appear in

Midwest Today. I'd like to go ahead and write "It's Not Cold, It's Brisk;" I could have it turned in by November 26. I can attach it as a Microsoft Word document or enclose it in the body of an e-mail.

Forty dollars sounds fine; could I cadge some reprints off you, too?¹ :-)

—MaryJanice

¹As you can see, after my terrific experience with *The Fiction Works*, I'm now shameless about asking for extras.

Dear MaryJanice:

If you'd like to send some samples, our address is as follows:

Midwest Today
P.O. Box 685
Panora, IA. 50216

The soonest that would run would be in the February issue It's too bad we weren't in touch a little sooner. I might have been able to run it in the issue that closes this week (on Wednesday 5 p.m.) as I happen to have some space left

LJ

Did I just say I could bang out that article in half an hour? The guy is telling me he's got space left in

their holiday issue! *Carpe diem!*

Mr. Jordan—if you're looking to fill some space NOW with 800 words, I'd be glad to take a crack at it. I could e-mail you "It's Not Cold, It's Brisk" tomorrow morning.

Let me know. Glad to help out.

—MaryJanice (I wore my parka again today, and was repeatedly snubbed.)

MaryJanice—Okay, let's try it. This will be awfully close to get it in, but I'd say the odds are about 80-20 that we can do it. I'll look for the column by tomorrow morning. What about a picture of yourself to run with it?

From that point, it was pretty much a done deal. I wrote the column, edited it, had my husband give it a cold read, brought it back to the office the next morning, and sent it off. Mr. Jordan loved it, bought it, and it appeared in their holiday issue. And then I got this e-mail

MaryJanice,

Do you have other columns written or ideas for same? To be honest with you, even with the columnists I run routinely, I sort through several of their reprints before finding one I like, or feel is actually relevant to my audience. If I apply that

same policy to you, I would want to see several items you've done for others that you might have available.

I pitched three other column ideas; he went for two. And the above took place in less than two weeks, despite all the back-and-forth.

A note about pay rates: even if the market you're querying pays low or not at all, if you're inclined to write the article, go for it! If nothing else, you'll have tear-sheets (your article, pulled from the actual magazine) to insert into your next magazine query, which editors really like. I currently write book reviews for a print magazine for free (although I get to keep the books). My name is on the masthead of a national magazine, authors quote me on their national print ads, and the reviews only have to be 150 words long. Every month I have more tear sheets, and it takes only minutes of my week to write my reviews. Just because you're not getting \$\$\$\$ doesn't mean you're writing for free.

Sadly, as of this writing (more than two years after the first column was published), I haven't been paid for the three columns *Midwest Today* published, despite several requests for payment. At last count I had sent Larry Jordan four letters, and cc'd two of them to the accounts payable department.

I thought about leaving this section out of the book, but ultimately decided not to. For one thing,

this section is a reasonably good example of e-mail queries and how to get an editor's attention. It's also an example of a sad axiom in a writer's life: sometimes, publishers welsh.

Chapter Seven

Synopses That Sold, and Why

I'll come right out and say it: I hate writing a synopsis. Some writers come up with the synopsis first and then write the book; some do the book first and then the synopsis. I hate it both ways. I once sold a novella based almost entirely on the strength of my synopsis, but that didn't make me like synopsis writing any better.

But . . . like the query, it's another skill you must learn. In fact, many established authors get book contracts based on a good synopsis.

I'm going to show you two synopses of mine that landed book contracts. They're different in style because the two books, one a young adult novel and one an erotic romance, are different. And that's the key to good synopsis writing: make it your book, only littler. (Real meaningful, huh? Don't worry, I'll demonstrate.)

This synopsis, along with the first ten pages of the novella, sold this project for me. This publishing house publishes highly sensual romances, so I needed to make the language of my synopsis lush and moving.

As I hadn't written the novella yet, I had to feel

my way through the plot via the synopsis. That's what a good synopsis does. It takes you by the hand and shows you the short cut through your book.

Like a book, it has a definite beginning, middle, and end. No teasers allowed in a synopsis; you'll only irritate the publisher.

LOVE'S PRISONER

by MaryJanice Davidson

Jeannie Lawrence has a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. So she's not entirely surprised when the elevator lights go out and she finds herself stuck between floors with a mysterious stranger. She is surprised when the man trapped with her begins talking strangely, saying fantastic things she can hardly believe. Though she can't see his face in the perfect dark, she is drawn to him nonetheless.

Attraction turns to fear, however, when the man—charming, urbane, and charismatic—seems to be deranged. How else to explain his calm assurance that he is a werewolf, the moon is on the rise . . . and she is ovulating. He must take her, at once. He can't help it, any more than he can help shifting form within the hour.

Jeannie resists with all she is, fighting both his overpowering strength and her unwilling attraction to him, for naught. In the warm dark of the elevator,

he forces pleasure on her again and again. To her shame, Jeannie surrenders completely to the powerful stranger, never having known passionate joy like this before. At lovemaking's end, Jeannie is bewildered, sated . . . and infuriated, both at herself and her passionate tormentor. She still can't see him, she can only sense his size in the dark and hear his voice, which has become rougher and more strained as the hour grows old. She ignores his hoarse apology and tries to put herself back together as best she can—her clothes are a shredded ruin. Curiously, though he tore through her garments in his need, she doesn't have a mark on her. For all his urgency, he took great care not to hurt her.

The man forces the roof hatch of the elevator—how, she can't imagine, unless his fevered nonsense about being a werewolf has some truth to it—and boosts her up. Jeannie can hear the elevator cables groaning from stress and realizes she's in danger of more than forced sex. Never was the dark more terrifying. She hears the man's rapid movements, hears twangs as parts of the cable give way under the stress, hears the elevator doors two feet above her head groaning as they are forced open. Suddenly, his hands are on her again, and she is boosted and shoved through the open doors . . . just as the cable parts and the elevator car plummets five floors into the basement. Her rapist has become her savior . . . and paid

the price with his life.

Three weeks later, about the time she notices her period is late, the man—who introduces himself as Michael Wyndham III—shows up at her door. At first she is so astonished to see him, alive, she can barely comprehend what he is telling her: they are mated for life, she is carrying his child, and she may well be pregnant with the next pack leader, a boy-child who will grow up to safeguard and lead the pack, said “pack” consisting of about 300,000 werewolves across the globe. The Wyndham dynasty controls more than shipping lanes and shopping malls, it seems.

As before, Jeannie fights her destiny—and Michael. As before, she finds herself helpless in the face of his passion and determination. She is whisked away to his Cape Cod mansion, where, she is gently told, she will remain until she accepts her destiny and freely agrees to stay with him.

But never was a prisoner treated so well . . . or loved so thoroughly. For Michael is as unable to resist Jeannie now as he was in the elevator. Passion quickly grows to love as Michael comes to admire Jeannie’s strength, spirit, intelligence, and beauty. What’s more, his people treat her like a queen which, to them, she is. Has their leader not taken her to mate? She will be consort to their current pack leader and mother to the next, and because of this they hold her

in high regard.

Eventually Jeannie realizes that she is hopelessly, madly in love with the charismatic werewolf. A true test of her faith comes when she unwittingly sees Michael shapeshift . . . and is fascinated rather than frightened. For even as a wolf, Michael can no more harm Jeannie than he could stop breathing. Jeannie's acceptance of his love and his nature brings her great happiness, for it only echoes her own feelings for him. And so they live happily—and passionately—ever after, joyously waiting the birth of their son.

A good synopsis will tell you the whole story, but still leave you wanting to read the book. Here's my synopsis for one of my young adult novels. *Adventures* has been getting excellent reviews from critics and, more important, from readers. But it all started with these two pages.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE TEEN FURIES by MaryJanice Davidson

Sixteen year-old Andrea Grouper, Air Force brat and chronic wiseass, has some pretty interesting friends. There's Meredith, recovering from a nervous breakdown, who changes her mind and hair color on a daily basis. There's Trisha, that rare high school bird: pretty, popular, and smart. There's Brenda,

who's so pleasant and friendly she can give Mary Poppins nice lessons. And there's Brenda's exceedingly weird friends, Kyle, George and Terry. These teenagers are hyper-intelligent, self-absorbed, and obsessed with sex. In other words, they're typical adolescents.

Andrea and Meredith start seeing more and more of Brenda's friends, who introduce the two girls to the wonderful world of role-playing games. Cocky and witty on the surface, these young people all have gaps in their lives that "gaming" helps fill. And their imaginations are so rich it seems as if these exciting adventures really are happening.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE TEEN FURIES is a different kind of young adult novel. The reader is drawn into the Furies' day-to-day lives of school, family life, and socializing, as well as their evening adventures as super-powered villains or vigilantes. Along the way, Andrea falls in love (with Kyle), Brenda falls in love (with Kyle), George falls in love (with Andrea), and the group's major weirdos (Terry and Meredith) mercifully fall for each other. ADVENTURES is full of laughs, adventure, and romance . . . and it all turns out all right in the end.

This synopsis doesn't really dwell on the minute-by-minute happenings of the book, but still leaves the editor with a good idea of the type of book it is,

as well as the ending (a must in a synopsis).

After you've written and re-written your synopsis, have a friend give it a look. When they're finished, ask them: does this sound like a book you'd want to read? Is there anything missing . . . the villain's motivation, the climax, whodunnit?

Remember, it should be a mini-book, so if you're writing a young adult romantic comedy, make the synopsis funny. If you're writing erotica, make the synopsis hot. If it's a tearjerker, make it sad.

Synopses are hard for me because it seems like they're forcing me to "tell, don't show." But the rewards for synopsis mastery are great.

Chapter Eight

Why the Internet Rocks

The Internet did more in one year to advance my writing career than I did on my own in nine years and that's with an agent. Even if you never use it to get a contract, it's an invaluable research tool. As I mentioned in the last chapter, I was able to use the Internet to research juvenile diabetes, and the facts I dug up in five minutes helped me land a book contract.

I made many contacts and found many publishers (book and magazine) on the Internet. A good way to start is to go into Yahoo! (or any search engine) and type in "writer's groups." Or "mystery writers." Or "romance publishers." Or whatever kind of writing you're interested in. From there (and search engines will present you with many, many web sites, trust me) you surf.

I'm not going to go into a whole "here's how you log on and surf and find stuff" thing, because there are about a thousand books on the subject already. Check one of them out of the library as a way to get started, or ask a web-experienced friend to help you out the first time.

I've listed my favorite web sites below. Many of

them are geared toward romance readers or writers, because that's what I like to write, but there's something here for everybody. Please keep in mind that websites change constantly; some of these, while perfectly good at the time of this writing, might be out of date by the time you read this.

For a really fabulous resource of writer's web sites, search engines, etc., check out Gary Gach's Writers.net by Prima Publishing.

www.inkspot.com/

Great on-line magazine for writers. Lots of market info. Yours truly has a monthly column there, Book Promotion on a Budget. There are also dozens of columns for the beginning, intermediate, and advanced (multi-published) writer. Without a doubt, my favorite writing website.

www.TheInkwell.com/guide/index.html

See www.inkspot.com, above.

www.newswise.com

Huge database of news releases from all aspects of research: scientific, medical, business, etc.

www.theromancereader.com/review.html

Tons of reviews, interaction with authors, info about the romance industry.

www.affairedecoeur.com

Reviews hundreds of romance novels (and a few outside that genre) a month. Great place, if you write romances, to “scope the competition!”

www.rt-online.com/

See affairedecoeur.com, above.

www.sfwa.org/Beware/Warnings.html

Writer Beware excellent site warning us away from the many sharks ever circling (vanity publishers, fraudulent book doctors, etc.).

www.familyfun.com/filters/writegd.html

Great magazine for families, always looking for new freelancers.

www.nwu.org/nwu

National writer’s union. Outstanding group, lots of benefits for writers, job listings, on-line magazines, contract advice terrific site.

www.romance-central.com

Another great romance site for readers and writers.

www.bookdoctor.com/supersite.html

Fabulous site for the freelancer; gobs of free information.

www.fictionnetwork.net

Free exposure for your short stories and novels.

www.write4kids.com

Children's Writing Resource Center

www.rdz.stjohns.edu/lists/rw-1/

If you have any interest in ever publishing romance, you must sign up with this list. It's made up of hundreds (over 800 as of this writing) of romance writers, published and unpublished. I found out about The Fiction Works through these guys (That's three book contracts I wouldn't have gotten without this list), and have gotten invaluable market info from them. You can pose a question to the list about any aspect of writing: pacing, plotting, publishing houses, specific editors, specific agents, etc., etc. and usually have an answer within two hours. They're wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, and unlike some writing lists which I will not mention to avoid a slander suit, they aren't the slightest bit snotty or pretentious.

<http://Authorlink.com/>

Authorlink! You can post (or check out) pre-screened manuscripts by writers seeking publishers or agents. Also lots of industry news.

<http://www.eclectics.com/epic/index.html>

Website for E.P.I.C., the association for electronically

published writers. A valuable group, one well worth joining if you have any interest in e-books or e-publishing.

<http://writing.shawguides.com/>

This site has writing conferences by date, state, or genre. Its terrific: just type in what you want to learn, or where you want to go, and the site will spit out writers conferences to suit you.

www.bridgesmag.com

Website for print magazine geared toward writers and readers. In addition to book reviews, Bridges also prints articles on authors as well as how-to pieces for writers.

<http://www.writerspace.com/>

Writers website which designs and hosts websites for writers. Great site for promotion, also provides on-line workshops for writers.

www.paintedrock.com

Terrific site for writers, offering workshops, columns, author pages, reviews. Sign up for The Rock, which showcases markets. I heard of a new publisher through The Rock and landed a four figure advance because of it. Best of all, its free!

These are just a few of the sites I found tremendously helpful. With a little surfing, you'll find more sites to help you, no matter what your skill level.

Chapter Nine

Do You Need an Agent?

Well, no, you *don't* need an agent. Not really. I had one for two years and never sold a thing. I let him go and within two months had sold two book manuscripts. Editors want good books, not agented writers.

I write primarily romance novels, young adult novels, and articles, so I don't really need an agent yet. The romance novel industry is remarkably open to unpublished and/or unagented writers. But someday I imagine I'll get an agent again, simply because I'm not interested in the business side of writing, just the writing.

Querying an agent is basically the same as querying a publisher, with one difference: you tend to pitch yourself more than an individual book. An agent wants to take on a writer, someone in it for the long haul, not a one-book wonder. So dazzle her (or him) with your opening paragraphs, and end by telling her about yourself and your plans for other projects.

Date

Jean Price

Agent

Kirkland Literary Agency

P.O. Box 50608

Amarillo, TX 79159

Dear Ms. Price:

Do opposites really attract? And how much should you risk to find out? That's what Amelia O'Malley discovers in *Outlaw*, an approximately 104,000-word historical romance which I'd like you to consider for representation by the Kirkland Agency.

Traveling alone in 1870s Arizona Territory, eastern book agent Amelia O'Malley vows to deliver to Tucson the orders entrusted to her care. She hopes, in the process, to make her father proud enough of her to finally admit her into the family business. The last thing she needs is to be abducted by the dangerous desperado who stops her stagecoach in the middle of the desert. Surely, she can escape from the outlaw somehow. But the more time Amelia spends with him, the less she wants to leave.

Wanted man Mason Kincaid is more than he seems. Set on the run by a trail of lies, he's determined to prove his innocence and reclaim the son who's been stolen from him. The

last thing he needs is a beautiful greenhorn to take care of, especially one who proposes the kind of outrageous deal Amelia does: She'll help clear his name, if Mason will escort her safely to Tucson.

I hope you'll enjoy reading *Outlaw* as much as I enjoyed writing it. I'm a member of Romance Writers of America's Published Authors Network, and my work includes both historical and short contemporary romances. My latest book, a contemporary romantic comedy from Kensington Publishing, is scheduled for release this summer.

With *Outlaw*, I've taken the opportunity to return to historical romance, one of my favorite sub-genres, and I've loved every minute of it! Because today's publishing market is so competitive, I intend to query multiple agents with this story, and I've enclosed a brief synopsis and the first three chapters for your consideration. If the book's premise appeals to you, I'd be glad to send you the completed manuscript.

Thank you for your consideration. I'm eager to hear your response to my work, and look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Lisa Plumley

member, Romance Writers of America

Ms. Plumley landed the agent with this letter. As you can see, it contains all the elements of a great query and within two months, her agent had sold

Outlaw to a publisher.

Ms. Plumley also left her mark as a pro by mentioning this letter was a simultaneous query (read: Act fast or you'll lose the chance to represent this author!). As with publishers, some agents hate simultaneous submissions, some don't mind. Do your research and act accordingly.

A good resource for agents is *Literary Market Place*. You can also ask the editor whom you're aiming for if he or she has any recommendations. You can also wait until you have a contract offer, pick your dream agent, and call her up. If the agent can't take you on (and who's going to turn down an easy commission?) she'll have a good recommendation for you.

My best advice for getting an agent is to concentrate on writing a fabulous book first. Then worry about the agent.

Chapter Ten

Network, Network, Network

I know it sounds like a drag. Networking—ugh, that’s something “suits” have to do. Not me! I’m an artist.

Wrong! I’ve gotten invaluable writing ideas (and book contracts) just by networking with the Romance Writers’ List (the RW-L, recommended in Chapter Six: *Why the Internet Rocks*). I also joined the RWA (Romance Writers of America) and the local chapter (Midwest Area Fiction Writers). I’ve since un-joined (We’re currently not speaking due to their odd stance on electronic publishing, and I’m sure any minute they’ll notice I’m ignoring them. Any minute now.), but I learned a lot while I was with them, and I hope I can come back someday.

(If you want to have some fun, get on a writers list serv, preferably RW-L or EPIC, and type in the question, Hey, whats with RWA? Do they like e-books or not? Then sit back and watch about a thousand e-mails fly back and forth. Its a great way to fill a Saturday afternoon. But I digress. Again.)

Back to networking. Every time I left a chapter meeting I’d be energized, determined to snag ten more book contracts by the end of the week, itching

to write. I'd meet other people struggling to cram their writing between day jobs, kids, spouses, chores, doctor's appointments, vacations, the flu, etc. I've met best-selling authors at these meetings, authors who have more than a few pieces of advice. I bought their books and grilled them on plotting, pace, setting, style. And that's just my local chapter!

I used to turn up my nose at writing groups. "I don't have time to hold hands, and I don't need mine held. I have to write," I would sneer. For ten years, I resisted joining. I was a lone wolf. Me against the world!

Boy, was I an idiot. I knew twenty minutes into my first chapter meeting that this was the place for me. Where else can you get advice like, "You write contemporaries? My editor is looking for contemporaries! Why don't I give you her address?" Yeah, why don't you? And thanks very much!

No matter what genre you're interested in, there's a writing group for you. Or a conference. Or five of each, or ten of each. Please join something. I'm begging you. You'll be glad you did. By its nature, writing tends to be solitary work. It's unbelievably wonderful to get together with others who know what it's like to be staring at a computer screen at 2:00 a.m., caught in the grip of a fiendish muse who won't let you quit. Or worse, staring at a computer screen at 2:00 a.m., trying to think of something (anything!)

to write because your deadline is in six hours.

Conferences are another kettle of fish. I've haven't been to many. While I learn quite a bit, conferences can be pricey. It was cheaper for me to join the RWA and my local chapter. They have members who go to seven conferences a year and come back to tell you everything you missed . . . and give you lots of juicy industry gossip.

But if you can afford it, go! Conferences tend to be populated with agents and editors hungry for new talent. It's a great way to establish a relationship with an editor. I know many, many writers who got their manuscripts past the slush pile by meeting an editor, pitching her (or him) a story, and being invited to submit. Zip! Right past the slush pile onto the editor's desk, no waiting. Nothing like being able to write "Requested Material" on your submission.

I went to the National Romance Writers' Convention in Chicago, my first one ever, and came away with:

A suitcase full of free books (I'm not exaggerating. I stuck my clothes in a box and packed my suitcase full of paperbacks and hardcover books, all freebies).

A thick binder full of writing advice.

A pile of business cards from writers, editors, agents, web page designers.

An offer from a fellow writer who charges \$500/hour for web page design; she offered to do

mine for \$25/hour.

Stories for this book.

A tentative contract offer from a publisher (which later turned into an actual contract).

Dozens of ideas about how to manage the mechanics of my next two books.

A full stomach (conferences are pricey, but lots of that money goes toward feeding the attendees).

Conferences offer an opportunity to talk to an editor or agent face-to-face. This is nerve-wracking to contemplate, but invaluable. I made an appointment with Barbour Publishing to pitch a novella idea for their spring collection. And as soon as the appointment was confirmed, I asked myself, “Aw, nuts, why did I go and do that?”

The thought of sitting across from someone who can make all your dreams come true with a sentence or two is frightening. But what’s the worst that can happen? He or she will say, “No thanks. Any other ideas?” That’s all! She won’t lunge across the table and slap your face for wasting her time. She won’t use your manuscript to blow her nose while you’re sitting there. And she won’t make doggy noises during your pitch. She’ll listen and, if the idea grabs her, she’ll go for it. And if it doesn’t, she’ll say, “No thanks.”

That said, I was still scared bloodless while waiting for it to be my turn to pitch. I was sitting next to

two other writers, both unpublished, who looked even more terrified than I felt. One of them saw all the badges from my various publishers and asked what I had sold. I told them about my fiction books and about this book. I had just finished compiling the publisher interviews and was amazed at how friendly and accommodating all the editors had been. I told the women this and added, trying to reassure them, “You know, it’s no big deal to pitch. Editors are human, they’re nice people. They want to hear what you’ve got to say. This is a great opportunity!” (Rah-rah-sis-boom-bah.)

This would have sounded much more reassuring if I hadn’t forced it out of a mouth gone dry with panic. I coughed (which sounded awfully like a rooster getting his neck wrung) in a desperate attempt to work up some saliva before my appointment. As a result of my tortured hacking, I missed my number being called. So I was late for my appointment (strike one). And tripped over the carpet runner on my way in, nearly knocking the room hostess into a pillar (strike two).

Several millennia later, I found myself sitting across from Tracie Peterson, editor for Barbour Publishing. There were four of us at the table: Tracie, her boss (gulp!) Rebecca Germany (the senior editor), me, and another writer, this one pitching to Rebecca. The meeting took place in a

giant underground expo room with a leaky ceiling. Thus, every time I started to really get into my pitch, a big drop of water would hit my table (*Plop!*) and startle me into flinching (Tracie must have thought I suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Which, after this appointment, I do.). I kept waiting for the drops to turn into a deluge, and nervously wondered if the ceiling would hold, or if I would soon be picking chunks of it off of my lap.

Then, as I was winding up to the climax, Tracie hanging on my every word (or appearing to), the room coordinator came over and interrupted me: “You’ve got five minutes.” As it turns out, she was mistaken (she’d gotten her times mixed up), but it threw me completely off my stride. I rallied, finished the pitch, and waited dully for Tracie to start laughing derisively.

Instead, she turned to her boss and said, “Rebecca, you’ve got to hear this idea.”

They asked for a partial and a synopsis (aargh, a synopsis!). The next day I went home, banged out thirty pages for them in a week, mailed it, and three weeks later had a contract offer, the best one yet.

One thing: the hour before my appointment, I crept up to my hotel room when I knew my roomies would be out at workshops, sat on my bed, and practiced, practiced, practiced. I must have done that pitch eleven times. I got so that I could reel it off in

my sleep, and interruptions didn't make me forget my place. I got so darned sick of that story idea that I was practically yarking by the end of my hour, but I was prepared. I was nervous about meeting Tracy, but I had supreme confidence in my ability to tell the story without too many stumbles.

A pitch is quick, punchy, and leaves the editor wanting to read more. Picture your book as a movie, then picture a preview to your movie. Tell the editor all about the preview. Then tack on an ending (“. . . but he tells her at the end that he knew all along that she's addicted to basil leaves and that he loves her anyway. Best of all, he's head of the Stop Sniffin' Basil Leaves Clinic and can help her fight her addiction. They get married in the Clinic chapel and she manages to avoid the pesto served at her own wedding reception, the end.”).

And then practice. Practice. And practice some more. You'll be nervous no matter how many books you've sold (while I was coughing to work up spit, I was thinking, “Eight books sold and you're a nervous wreck, you putz.”), but if you know your stuff, it'll be a breeze.

And it was. It really, really was. Or so I told myself as I staggered out of the leaky basement room on shaky knees.

Other ways to network are to do internet chats. Visiting a chat room is great for your career, but

what's even better is being a guest speaker. I found out that www.inkspot.com was looking for guest speakers for their chats, and sent them an e-mail suggesting I talk about (what else?) *Escaping the Slush Pile*. Inkspot agreed and scheduled a chat.

I had never done a chat before and was instantly struck with stage fright. I was really scared and almost cancelled the whole thing. Why? I don't know. But I'm glad I didn't. Not only did the hour fly by, but Inkspot promoted the heck out of it before, during, and after the chat. Even now, a month later, the transcript of my chat is still on their site, and I've gotten e-mails from people who read the transcript and decided to contact me. Most of these e-mails start out with the magic words, *Where can I find a copy of your book?*

Even if you don't have a book to push, chats are great for meeting people. So sign up for one as quickly as you can.

Best of all, after the chat Inkspot offered me a job as a monthly columnist. So get out there and network. It can be scary, but you'll be amazed where it can lead.

Chapter Eleven

Boldness, Boldness, and Ever Boldness

(I had a much better title for this chapter: Chutzpah Pays Off. But that would have meant blatantly plagiarizing fellow writer Nic Simpson, which I would never never do. Thus, the less cool title (but more legal) of Chapter Ten.)

You have to be brave to be in this business. I can't put it any plainer than that. (I could, actually. I could say something like, "You've got to be a bleeding idiot to be in this business," but my job is to encourage, not derail.) If the end of the last chapter didn't bring that home, I'm spelling it out for you right now. Writing with an eye toward publication is, pretty much by definition, bravery in action. If you're going to put your heart and soul into a manuscript, and then mail it to strangers asking them to read and publish it, you've got to be brave.

More, you've got to make your own opportunities. I've managed to make a few of my own (probably more despite my ambition than because of it), and I've talked to some other writers to hear their tales of courage. They're inspiring, to say the least.

The below message was from Nicola Simpson, which I've reprinted here with her kind permission.

——Original Message——

From: Nicola Simpson

To: RW-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU

Subject: [RW-L] MISC: chutzpah pays off!

It's been kinda quiet around here lately, so I thought I'd share some of what's been going on with me to hopefully inspire some souls out there. :)

A couple of weeks ago I decided to withdraw my first ms. from consideration at Silhouette. It had been requested a year ago, and I was convinced that it was just terrible, and not right for the line to which I submitted. I was planning to take it back and revise it to submit elsewhere. So I decided to bite the bullet and call the editor, and ask her not to bother reading it if she hadn't gotten to it yet. As soon as I said my name, she replied, "Oh, *The Big Uneasy!*" After I picked my heart up off the kitchen floor, it took another nosedive when she said that she "really liked it" but that she didn't know what its "fate" was. We chatted a little and she told me to call her anytime.

Today, when I was talking to her again, she mentioned that the manuscript was on the senior editor's desk, but that she was out of town currently. She also said that she was "very hopeful" about its acceptance. I asked her if she'd be interested in looking at something else. After I pitched her a

one-sentence logline, she asked me to send her a complete ASAP. I also mentioned that I would be in New York in May, and now it looks like I'll be meeting her then.

So, the moral of the story is: sometimes it pays off to call the editor instead of sending impersonal follow-up letters. I tried to be brief, friendly and professional, and to always have a purpose to my call (I've only spoken to her a few times).

Even if the ms. (or mss.) are ultimately rejected, my self-confidence has been restored by her enthusiastic response and friendliness. Sometimes it seems as though editors are omnipotent beings ready to reject us at every turn. But this is a shining example of how wonderful they can be. Even if she rejects these mss., it's been fantastic talking to her and a totally positive experience.

When I asked Nic's permission to reprint her message, she responded:

Sure! As an addendum to that story, I've since been taken out for lunch by her (as you may have heard). She has asked me to start running ideas past her now, and I sent her a query letter for another project a few weeks ago.

"I got an e-mail from her last week—she loved the idea, and can't wait to see the complete as soon as it's ready. In the meantime, she's in the middle of the last ms. I sent her, and she's really enjoying it. So soon she'll have three mss. of mine, and we have a terrific relationship. Hopefully I'll sell soon—it wouldn't be too inspirational if I crashed and

burned, huh? <g>

I wouldn't worry about that happening, Nic.

One final note on meeting an editor face-to-face: my husband came up with an analogy useful for battling terror. He said, "In any other business, people aren't scared to meet with others in their industry. A plumber isn't worried about talking to the owner of a plumbing supply house. A chef isn't worried about having lunch with the owner of a chain of produce markets. They're professionals in the same industry, meeting to see how they can help each other. Why should writing be any different?"

Easy to say, tough to implement. So my advice when you're enduring a face-to-face with an editor is to picture the person as a plumber or a chef.

Our next tale of courage comes from Melinda Rucker Haynes, best-selling author of *A Wing and a Kiss* and *Ghostly Acts*, a Golden Heart-Winning Award Thriller. She was the keynote speaker at the first E.P.I.C. writers' conference, and is one of my writing heroes.

I started my writing career as a university grant writer. Every grant proposal I wrote was funded and my research published. I expected fiction writing to be the same—I write a

proposal, get money and get published. Okay, so I was a tad naive, like seven years worth of naive, but I kept trying to sell on proposal. Of course, I did finish a bunch of books too, but the selling proposal thing was a goal for me.

I cleverly realized editors weren't grant committee members who existed solely to wade through pounds of pages. I learned that when you came face to face with editors or your query hits their desk, you had sixty seconds tops to hold their attention. Consequently, I learned the art of quick, high concept pitch. I got so good at it that editors of category romance lines demanded to see my books even though they were paranormal, historical, romantic suspense or young adult. I'd send the book and it would be rejected of course, but always with a note that the editor enjoyed it but it wasn't right for their line. Well, I told them that, but it wasn't postage or time wasted. I was and still am relationship building. Those editors and I keep my project ideas going back and forth even now.

After I watched the electronic market improve and grow, I decided to take a big chance and approach an electronic publisher about one of my books. Since I had to do it by e-mail and to someone I didn't know, I decided to make it short and quick: Would you be interested in a Golden Heart-winning young adult paranormal romance? The answer flashed back—Yes!

Twelve days later they bought the book. Since then, June 1998, I've sold eleven books to three electronic publishers—three were complete and the others were sold on proposal or concept. By stepping out of my comfort zone and taking a

chance, I've reached my goal to sell on proposal.

Melinda Rucker Haynes

www.melindaruckerhaynes.com

Here's a published author whose bravery directly resulted in publicity and sales.

Hi, MaryJanice,

I don't have any wonderful "editor" or "agent" stories, but how about a bookstore?

My local bookstore was less than enthused about doing a book signing for my first book. They didn't seem to be interested in dealing with my small press publisher (Petals of Life). They kept saying, "Sure, we'll carry the book and do a signing," but somehow, it never happened. I reached the point where I didn't want to go in there anymore.

About the time my second book sold, I discovered that a group of e-authors were doing multiple location, multiple author signings at Hastings bookstores in the Midwest. I asked to join in on several in my state (Kansas), and was put on the roster.

One day when I was in the mall where the bookstore is located, I was seized with a sudden burst of courage. Dressed in shorts and a t-shirt, with no makeup on, I charged in and confronted the owner. "I've sold a second book to a different publisher," I told her. "I already have

book signings lined up in Hutchinson, Garden City and Dodge City, but I'd like to do one here, and I'd like you to have the privilege of being first."

She was thunderstruck, but she managed to say, "Well, all right . . . I guess we could do a signing."

I suggested we set up a date right then, "while I'm here in the store," so she set up the signing for Oct. 23.

When I left the store, my hands were shaking; but I was wearing a huge grin!

Elizabeth Delisi, delisi@dailynews.net

<http://members.tripod.com/~ElizabethDelisi/>

FATAL FORTUNE, Sept. 1998, *Petals of Life*

SINCE ALL IS PASSING, Oct. 1999, Avid Press

Here's a published author who broke another of "the rules" and reaped benefits.

Bobbie Terry and I, Linda Campbell, write together as Terry Campbell and love it. Unfortunately, there's a fly in the ointment. We write romantic comedy, specifically screwball comedy. Which means it's outside the box of what's considered acceptable. To that end, and because we believed in our writing and story-telling skill, we stepped back and studied the marketplace. During research, we kept reading about electronic publishing.

It seemed to have everything stacked against it: it's in its infancy, there are no advances, and to date, Romance Writers

of America does not recognize any electronic publishers. (We figured this was a great opportunity. For once, we were getting in on the ground floor and would be able to build a readership before everyone else jumped on board.) Oh, yes, I almost forgot, another strike against electronic publishing, at least according to the sages, is that once an author sells to an e-publisher they will never sell to a traditional publisher.

[MaryJanice here: BWAH-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!]

Well, Terry Campbell is here to tell you that isn't true. Our second electronic book, *Mr. Wrong*, is available from an audio publisher, Books-in-Motion, and from Five Star in hardcover. How did we do this?

Simple. I brazenly called both the senior editors at the audio company and Five Star. I pitched the book over the phone by asking if they would be interested in seeing a query about *Mr. Wrong*. Both senior editors told me to give them the pitch then and there. I also told them the book had received great reviews. They asked to see the galley my electronic-publisher, Hard Shell Word Factory, had sent me plus copies of all the reviews. The rest, as they say, is history. Needless to say, I sent it express mail with a boldly written "Requested Material by (editor's name)." Within three weeks of receiving the galley, both publishers called me at home with offers of a contract.

How was I able to call someone I don't know? Easy, if I didn't, no one else would. It's Bobbye's and my philosophy that if you ask, all they can say is no. But if you don't ask, you've already received the answer of no. Of course, it also

helps to have faith in your story and the courage to chase after that gold ring. By the way, having those great reviews helped make pitching the book a lot easier.

Linda D. Campbell; <Ldcwriter@earthlink.net>

<http://terrycampbell.com>

MR. WRONG by Terry Campbell; Five Star, Hardback
Edition 9/99, ISBN 0-7862-2154-2

INTIMATE INVESTOR, MR. WRONG & FAT
CHANCE; Terry Campbell; HSWF

<http://www.hardshell.com>

Finally, my writing partner and all around wonderful person, Carol Givner, had this tale to share:

I was thinking of an experience I had at a Leno taping a couple of years ago when Bryan [MaryJanice here: that's Bryan Adams the rock star; Carol wrote a fantasy novel about him that was very well received] was a guest. I'm in LA, and his fans follow him around the world, so tons of them contacted me wanting to meet before the show, which tapes in Burbank starting in the afternoon and running for many hours. I thought it would be fun to meet some of my readers, but I wasn't prepared for what happened!

By the time I got there, the lines were packed, and when we started introducing ourselves, and they found out that little me was Goldduets (my aka for the novel), I was mobbed for autographs of hardcopies these wonderful readers had

printed out! So much so, that security was alerted, and I had two of my very own guards while I signed Rock-A-Bye, Babe.

And Leno quipped during a commercial break that it was harder to get my autograph than his own!

So, just in case anyone doubts the power of the internet...!

Best,

Carol Givner (<http://www.goldduets.com>), author of *Kiss and Don't Tell* and *Bing, Bang, Boom*, the first e-book to be carried in physical Barnes & Noble stores.

So there you have it. If you can stand trembly knees and clammy palms, it often pays to screw up your courage and jump. The worst any agent/editor/bookstore owner/would-be-customer can do to you is say No. Compared to cellulite, computer crashes at inopportune moments, and childbirth, hearing, "No," doesn't seem so bad.

Right?

Chapter Twelve

Self-publishing: Yes or No?

Self-publishing has an undeserved bad rep. I imagine it's because there are some unbelievably bad books out there that were self-published. This makes people think the only way a writer could get his horrible book published was by paying to have it done. Thus, a self-published book is synonymous in many people's minds with "a piece of crapola".

However, I've read (and I'll bet you have, too) lots of really awful books published by "legitimate" publishers. Self-publishing doesn't guarantee a bad book, just like having a publisher doesn't guarantee a good one. Publishers are only human—at one time or another, *Moby Dick*, *The Fountainhead*, and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* were all rejected by legit publishing houses.

So were some modern best-sellers. The *What Color Is Your Parachute?* series was originally self-published. So was Pat Conroy's first book, and dozens of others too numerous to mention here, books that made such a splash when they were self-published that publishing houses fought to buy the rights.

The industry is at last acknowledging the worth

of self-published books. There are frequent articles on self-publishing in *Writer's Digest*, www.inkspot.com, and dozens of books on the subject, as well as conferences and seminars. In addition, there are annual awards (read: big bucks!) for self-published books.

The only problem with self-publishing is that you must do all the work yourself, including marketing and distribution. The nice people who published my first young adult book, *Adventures of the Teen Furies*, worked tirelessly on a promotion schedule, cover design, distribution, scheduling the book for review, and all sorts of helpful things. Which is why they kept seventy percent of the profits, and I got thirty percent. When you self-publish, you keep everything. It's a powerful motivator.

If you have an idea for a book, particularly non-fiction, and you keep getting rejection letters (not slips or form letters—not after I've shown you how to avoid the slush pile), or you don't think one of the big houses would "get" your idea, or if you're not sure e-publishing is for you, or if you want to keep a hundred percent of the profit, consider publishing your book yourself. Check out the *Complete Guide to Self-publishing: Everything You Need to Know to Write, Publish, Promote and Sell Your Own Book* by Tom and Marilyn Ross, published (now) by Writers Digest Books (but originally the Rosses self-published). The

book, widely acknowledged as “the bible” of self-publishing, has done so well through the years it’s in its third edition.

I’ve read it, and they make a powerful case for eschewing the New York publishing houses and going it alone. It’s a good resource even if you’ve signed with a commercial publisher, containing lots of valuable tips on marketing and self-promotion which, in my opinion, authors don’t do enough of, anyway. (Learning to toot your own horn is hard work.)

Bottom line: if you’ve got a great book, self-publishing isn’t going to make it bad. Successful self-publishers (the Rosses in particular) all say the same thing: make your self-published book a success and then, if you’re inclined, sell the rights to an established publishing house. Or don’t . . . and give yourself a one hundred percent royalty check.

Chapter Thirteen

Suggested Reading

A few tomes for any writers' library. I've been re-reading some of these, and buying updated editions, for years.

Writers' Market, *Writer's Digest Books*. It's a gigantic book, makes *War and Peace* seem the size of a take-out menu, and weighs a ton. If you sneak it to your day job to read on your lunch break, it's impossible to hide. Then co-workers sidle up to you and say, "Oh, you're a writer? What do you write?" (I've always hated that question, being alternately proud and shy about my writing.) But you gotta have it. And you gotta buy the new one every year. It'll hurt (to the tune of almost thirty bucks), but you can't get very far without it.

Simply put, it's the source of thousands of places to sell your writing. Fiction, nonfiction, magazine articles, short stories, screenplays, plays, contests, comics, poetry, training film scripts, songs, columns, comic strips, film strip scripts, high school textbooks . . . if you wrote it, you can find a market for it in this book. The new one comes out every September. Once the new one is out, you need to stop using the one you already have. I'm serious.

Editors house-jump every year, publishing houses go out of business, previously open markets shut tighter than a clam, clam-like markets open wide and say “ah.” You need to know this stuff. The *Writers’ Market* has it.

How to Write Irresistible Query Letters, Lisa Collier Cool, Writer’s Digest Books. I stumbled across this a few years ago, and it was a good start toward helping me get my query letters on the right track. This book’s focus is on pitching articles and nonfiction books, but it’s a valuable resource for any writer and has good examples.

Writers.net, Gary Gach, Prima Publishing. Lots of information on the Internet, instructions on how to get started, info on chat rooms, sign-up lists, search engines, and tons of web sites. I referred to it in Chapter Eight: Why the Internet Rocks.

How to Get Happily Published, Judith Appelbaum, HarperCollins. A must-have, if for no other reason than you finish reading it with the clear thought, “Yes, I can do this!” Lots of great insider’s advice, from manuscript format to submission protocol to what to do after you’ve signed the contract. Many editions (I think they’re on number five), but if you can’t find the most recent one, any edition is

a great find.

How to Be Your Own Literary Agent, Richard Curtis, Houghton Mifflin. Another must-have. Invaluable advice should you decide to negotiate your own contract. Tips on sneaking past the slush pile. The inside scoop on what the editor is thinking while you're negotiating for a bigger advance. If you hate the idea of someone making ten percent on your writing, or you despair of getting an agent on your own, this is the book for you. Curtis runs a prestigious literary agency; he knows of what he speaks. As with Ms. Appelbaum's book, this one has gone through many editions, but grab whichever one you can.

Rotten Rejections, edited by Andr Bernard, Pushcart Press. A writer's best friend; I never tire of flipping through it. It's a collection of rejection slips received by some of our society's greatest writers. Who wouldn't feel so bad about a rejection after reading H.G. Wells' rejection slip? Or Gertrude Stein's? Hemingway's? Ayn Rand's? *Moby Dick* and *Lord of the Flies* (and *Lolita!*) were all rejected. Dr. Seuss knew the pain of getting his SASE back. So did Stephen King. We're in good company.

The Bestseller, Olivia Goldsmith. Fiction, but only

the coolest insider's view into the world of publishing. Goldsmith went from being a nobody (Olivia who?) to a best-selling author in less than three years. And she gets all the good industry gossip . . . this book lets you peek into editorial meetings, book tours, and *The Life of a Best-Selling Author*. Anybody interested in a) being published, b) good writing, or c) seeing the bad guys lose and the good guys kick butt must read this book.

Love Lies, MaryJanice Davidson. Okay, okay, this is a blatant pitch for one of my books. But hey, if you like to read sizzling romance, and you like comedy, and you like electronic books or paperbacks, you'd really like this. I swear! You can order it through www.barnesandnoble.com.

Well maybe it's not a must have for your library but it's a pretty good book, if I do say so myself.

Chapter Fourteen

No More Reading, Time to Work

The writing business sucks. There's no pretty way to put it. Editors (often) take months (or, in Harlequins case, years) just to tell you "Thanks, but no thanks." Incredibly, many of them get pissy when you have the nerve to send your manuscript to more than one place at a time.

When you do sell a manuscript, it takes months/years to see it on the stands. Editors call you and complain about your book length ("You have to cut 4,000 words by Wednesday. No, *this* Wednesday. As in tomorrow. Hello? Are you there?"). Often you won't get paid until the book is out. Your book is set to sink or swim on its own next to Stephen King's seventy-third best-seller. When you sell a few copies, it takes your publisher six months to get you a check. Meanwhile, your friends and family want to know when you're going to get a real job.

Yep, the writing business sucks. There are few advantages to the authors, unless your name is Tom Clancy, or you self-publish. But writing itself, if you love it, if you've gotta do it, if you can't wait to sit down and pound something out . . . there's nothing like it. So do it. And polish it. Make it pretty. Then

work on selling it. Because as thrilling as writing is, wait until you see your name in print. Or get your first review.

Good luck and drop me a line! I want to know how it's going for you.

MaryJanice Davidson

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www.usinternet.com/users/alongi/index.html