**The Perils and Pleasures of Self Publishing**

**Gary Young**: Our program tonight is "The Perils and Pleasures of Self Publishing: Learning from the Experts."

Robin Quinn, who has put this together and is moderating this program—and has done so for many of our programs and is one of our board members—has been in the book business for two and a half decades. She's an award-winning book editor, ghost writer, copywriter, and book coach.

Robin specializes in self-help, spirituality, business and media, and also works with uplifting fiction and memoir. Her editing credits include the soon-to-be-released second codependency book by musician Juliet Wright, *Everything Is for My Recovery*, the June 2015 self-help title *From Misery to Happiness* by long-time therapist and life coach Carolyn Berry, and the soon-to-be released college memoir, *Heaven Plus Hell Equals Harvard*, by Jason W. Park. Robin frequently produces and moderates panels as I said, for writers’ and publishers’ organizations, not just this one but many organizations in L.A. She is our secretary on our Board of Directors and a member of our Program Planning Committee. Please welcome Robin Quinn.

**Robin**: Thank you all for being here tonight. I appreciate the fact that you came even though there is a Republican debate tonight. We will try to be educational and entertaining, as I'm sure Donald Trump will be tonight.

I'm very excited about this program tonight. This is one of the ideas that came through the PALA brainstorming dinner that we had earlier this year. We also came up with the Google Analytics panel that we had in June. We have four wonderful speakers tonight, and I'm going to introduce them all in depth right before they speak. Right now I'm going to give you an overview:

* We have **Maggie Marr**. She's an independent author of 15 books in the genre of contemporary romance and women's fiction.
* **Janiss Garza**, president of FitCat Enterprises. After publishing her own work, she went on to publish an anthology of other writers' cat stories.
* **Carolyn Howard-Johnson** is the author of the *How to Do It Frugally* series on publishing. She and I have appeared together on numerous panels.
* And last but not least is **Gerald Everett Jones**. He is the proprietor of La Puerta Books and Media, which has published six of his novels. Gerald and I happen to share the same birthday. I was actually born on Labor Day, which was September 6. Were you born on Labor Day?

**Gerald**: Yes, my mother was very proud. She did her job.

**Robin**: That's right. We also share this birthday with Julius Stewart, who's an author, and he's a central character in Gerald's most recent novel.

We're going to present the pleasures and the fun of publishing, and then we're going to talk about the pitfalls. So we're going to talk about the pleasures first. I may have questions for our panelists as we move along. We'll come back to me at the end of the pleasures and I may have a couple of questions then we'll go to you for some questions for five or ten minutes, then we'll come back and go through the pitfalls and then we'll take your questions after that. Then we're going to do the raffle at the end.

Let me start with our first speaker, Maggie Marr. Maggie was introduced to me by Angela Bole through Sharon Goldinger. She's an author of romance and women's fiction. Maggie released her 15th title in July. The book is called *Running from Love*; it's book five in the Eligible Billionaires series. You can see that she aims high. She said actually that somebody did a trillionaires book, so there are gold diggers out there still. Maggie is president of her local chapter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors, called LARA, and legal counselor for the Women's Fiction Writers Association. In addition to being an author, Maggie is also an entertainment attorney and a producer. I would love to see this woman's to-do list! Please welcome Maggie Marr.

**Maggie**: The to-do list that never ends. So, pleasures first, you said. I went ahead and was thinking about how different independent publishing is from traditional publishing. I've been lucky to do both in my career. The pleasures that I've found in independent publishing—some are the same as you'll find in traditional, and some are very different.

At the top of my list is control. I think that as authors, whether fiction or nonfiction, many of us have some control issues. I love making my characters do what I want them to do when I want them to do it and where I want them to do it. And yes, there's a little double entendre in there because I'm a romance author.

I have so much control as an independent author. I have control with regard to my publication schedule; I have control with regards to my promotions and marketing, my covers, my design. I have control over the team that I hire, the way I title. Many of you who are traditionally published, I'm sure, understand that you do not always have that much control with a traditional publisher. You don't get to choose your cover. There are times when your title might be changed. Those are some difficult things sometimes for an author to give up, but oftentimes in traditional publishing you do have to do that.

**Robin**: I actually saw a panel one time of in-house editors, and it was as if it was a favor to the author to let to let them see their cover at all.

**Maggie**: Right. I will say that is changing dramatically with independent publishing. This summer I had the privilege to go and meet with a number of houses, as part of Romance Writers of America, in New York. They've changed dramatically. The editors that we met with were now pitching themselves as something—they were lucky to be in business with the authors. Whereas ten years ago, it was pitched to me that I was lucky to be in business with them.

So number two—I know we have a lot to get through so I'll just quickly go through a few of them—one of the other great things or pleasures is that I'm a speed boat. What I mean by that is if you picture a traditional publisher like Random House—which is now Random House Penguin, because they've merged—they’re this gigantic, monolithic, titanic creature in the Pacific. To turn that thing takes a lot of time. That becomes really important when you think about marketing and promotions, because marketing and promotions change day to day. It's been my experience that what worked last week may not work two weeks from now. So when all of my friends and colleagues—because that's another great thing of indie publishing: I have a huge network of friends and colleagues; we all share information and analytics with each other—when one of us captures a moment, we quickly spread that to our friends and colleagues, and guess what? We can start doing it immediately. It can take weeks, possibly months, hopefully not years, to get a response from an editor who has to then go through business affairs or has to go through the marketing team or the promotions team or the sales team to get a yes to try something new.

I have clients—because I also represent authors as their entertainment attorney—I have clients who have been screaming, screaming, screaming in the ears of their editors for years now about certain promotions and marketing things that they want to do with backlist books that the traditional houses will not revert back to the author. They're getting nowhere with them.

So I get to be a speedboat. I get to turn on a dime and I get to try things very quickly and very fast. If it works, good for me, and if it doesn't, let's try something else. I love that.

Number three I mentioned briefly when I was talking about number two, is my community. I'm so blessed. I don't know if this is with every genre, but it definitely is with mine: I have never met a more collaborative, giving group of people than independently published romance authors. Maybe it's all independent authors, but I belong to a loop of 2,000 authors, many of whom are selling millions of books, who've been doing it much longer than I have, and they are the first people I turn to for information, for guidance, for what works for them, for referrals, for anything that I need. And in return, I give that back. I love being part of a community like that. I find it exhilarating. I find that it helps me to feel empowered. I've never learned so much as I ever have being part of a community that's so giving and embracing of other authors.

Finally, one more thing: The great thing about being an indie publisher is that not only does it feed my creative soul, but it feeds my entrepreneurial soul. I'll touch a little on this with the perils side as well, because when you independently publish a book, you're not just a writer anymore. You have two separate jobs. It uses two separate parts of your brain. You need to really split these things into two separate entities. As a publisher, you are a business person, and you look at numbers and analytics and how things work, and what the ROI–return on investment—is for any given property that you as an author, or anyone else that you're working with, has created. As an author, you don't think about any of those things. You write from your heart and you write with passion. You do what you want and you do it because you love it. That's where it starts. But then when you become the publisher you have to really try to look at this thing that you love, that you created, from an analytical and business perspective. How to give it wings? What's the best marketing plan? What's the best cover? Sometimes you'll find that those two sides of yourself will want two very different things. But that's one of the great things: I get to use the entrepreneurial side of myself as well as the creative side.

Those I think are my major pleasures.

**Robin**: In terms of pleasures, can you share your smartest move in publishing with us?

**Maggie**: I think my smartest move in publishing is to just keep moving forward. I don't ever stop. The other thing is—it's very easy, I've seen this happen—it's very easy to let the marketing and promotion side of this business take over. Because most creative people suffer from resistance. And I do. It's so easy for me to fool myself and say that I'm working on a book by doing promotions and marketing for three hours and not get my 3,000 words written.

What do I have to promote and market if I don't write every day? Nothing. So don't fool yourself. The writing has to always be first. I truly believe that. The creativity has to be first. The passion, the love for it. You've got to write, in my opinion for me, I need to write every day. Not everyone does that.

**Robin**: Our second speaker tonight is Janiss Garza. Like me, Janiss is a cat person and she's the coauthor of *Dear Sparkle: Advice from One Cat to Another.* She collaborated with her cat. Janiss impressed me when I called her to be on this panel because she had just gone to CAT-alina with her cat. She took her cat on the ferry. She said the cat was OK as long as it didn't look to see where it was. I told her that I had a cat one time, and I tried to teach it to walk on a leash. It was like pulling a brick. No way. So I'm very impressed with that.

The latest release from her company FitCat is called *Rescued*, and it's an award-winning anthology of cat rescue stories with a portion of the profits benefitting rescue groups. In addition to two books currently in release and a second volume of *Rescued* in development, FitCat has another book currently in production and a children's book tentatively scheduled for Christmas 2017. Janiss has been writing professionally since 1986, with credits that include *The Los Angeles Times*, *LA Weekly*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Cat Fancy*.She has worked as an editor since 1989 is the author of four books with topics ranging from heavy metal music to cats. Please welcome Janiss Garza.

**Janiss**: So I'm probably a little bit different from some of the other indie publishers here because the main reason I'm into indie publishing is because I've always wanted to work with other writers and not just publish my own stuff. I was really excited to work on *Rescued*. When I started the call for submissions a couple years ago, it was a niche I knew very well. I've been working as a writer in the cat community for about six or seven years. I know the market; I know the niche. I knew a lot of writers who would probably be able to contribute and who did wind up contributing.

I love writing, writing's my first love. When I started working with editors and I got hired at a magazine called *Rip* in 1989 to be their senior editor, I discovered my second love was actually editing and the production process behind the writing that all these writers were handing in to me.

So my pleasures are probably a little bit different form people that are just writers/publishers because my first one is actually the process of crafting a good-looking book. To me that is just orgasmically awesome. It really is. Looking over fonts, working with a cover designer, and having her hand in something that is just so wonderful and so perfect that it informed the interior design after that—it's that kind of thing. It’s having great photographs for my cover designer to work with, which were contributed by one of the writers. It’s the whole process of the end design layout, and having all the pieces work together really well, like a really awesome puzzle. Then doing the e-book version. I've done e-books; I've actually formatted e-books before, and I hadn't done it in a few years. A little bit different—the technology's grown. So I had to freshen up my e-book formatting abilities when I did the formatting for *Rescued.* I had so much fun doing it, I actually wound up doing it for a friend for hire, because I really liked it.

To me, that's the whole thing: watching a book come together and really crafting it, making it look good inside and out. It really frustrates me that more people don't take that kind of pride in it. The first thing I do when I open up a book, especially an indie book, is look to see what they did well and what they didn't do so well. To me the whole process is the most fascinating thing in the world, so obviously I'm in the right place.

My proudest moment in formatting the interior of *Rescued*, because I did the interior formatting myself, was creating my own glyph. I taught myself how to do that; I just looked it up. When you include a pause between paragraphs, because your story starts up somewhere else different, you put in three asterisks: they're paw prints. I made a glyph out of that and that's how I did that.

One of my other pleasures of indie publishing is—I call it being Maxwell Perkins. If you don't know who Maxwell Perkins is: he was the editor for Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe. And he is basically the guy that is responsible for them being as awesome as they are. I've always wanted to do that, ever since I started being the senior editor at a heavy metal rock magazine. I'd work with these writers on their stuff. They handed in this amazing raw material—some of my writers were just amazing writers but what they handed in a lot of times was a little bit raw, so I got to really make it what it deserved to be. That was such a wonderful process also. I got to do that on *Rescued*, and it was so wonderful being able to work with these writers. I did the call for submissions so I really knew who these writers were and what their abilities were and what their strengths and weaknesses were probably going to be when I got the finished stories from them. I was pretty much right on; what I thought I was going to get was what I got. I worked with each one of them on their own level and in their own way. It was just really great working with these writers and taking a really good story and making it be the best story it could possibly be.

And then putting the stories together in an arc, because when you put together an anthology, you don't just take a bunch of short stories and throw them together. There has to be an arc so there's a narrative going on tying all the 12 stories together, not just each story with its own narrative. There's a whole overall arc in which each story has to play a part. That was really fun too: being the editor for 12 really amazing writers who I handpicked myself; that was really great.

Like I said, this is mostly from a “publishing somebody else” angle. My other really big pleasure, which I will get to do at the beginning of October—I'm so excited about this—I get to write royalty checks! I'm so excited because this is the first time I get to write royalty checks, which means the book came into profit. I worked really hard to keep my overhead low on this book. My biggest expense on this book was actually the cover. There are some things you don't scrimp on when you’re publishing a book, and cover art is one of them. That was my biggest expense. I did a crowdfunding campaign for the book because I wanted to try and pay for some of the costs up front, like the proofs and the cover design and a first run, and that's what the crowdfunding campaign did. And it really helped the book go into the black pretty quickly early on into its release.

**Question**: Do you think being part of the cat community helped fund the book?

**Janiss**: Actually, it did but at the same time, not just me—because I had a dozen writers and they all had different parts of the cat community. It wasn't just me and my little cat blogging community and my slightly larger cat writing community. Some of the writers came from different places out of the blue. I have one writer—I don't know where she came from or how she heard about it or anything—I think it was from Facebook because the cat has a big Facebook presence. She doesn't even own the cat; the cat came through a rescue where she's a volunteer. She was like a powerhouse as far as promoting the book and getting the word out there about crowdfunding and all that, and just getting people excited because she had her own Facebook community. And another writer from Wisconsin; she's actually a big wig in her community. I mean, she founds really popular cat rescues. She contributed a story. I got a lot of people on the crowdfunding campaign from her, because she sent the word out among her little crowd. She's not even as plugged in with social media but she's really plugged into her community where she is. I knew because they give you the "thank yous" when they donate: "We're so glad you're doing this, blah blah" and a lot of them were personally written to Emily, whose cat Magoo is in the book. So it was writers who really helped a lot.

That's one of the advantages of having an anthology: you have a dozen different writers to help you promote the book—at least if you pick them well. I am doing a sequel; I have a call for submissions out for a sequel as a matter of fact. If anybody has a really great rescue cat story, they should come to FitCatInc.com and find out the instructions for my call for submissions and submit a story. I'm really open until the end of October.

**Robin:** What is your smartest move that you've ever made in publishing?

**Janiss**: Actually, my smartest move was knowing I had a niche and how to approach it. Keeping the word out on all the different avenues where that niche exists. It's a very big social media niche, and I knew where in social media all the cats were, basically, and where all the people were, and how to keep all the people excited about it. That's what you do—knowing your niche. That's it.

**Robin**: Our third speaker is Carolyn Howard-Johnson. This is the third or fourth time we've been on a panel together. She always has interesting tips and has an uplifting presence. Carolyn is the author of the How to Do it Frugally series of books. These include *The Frugal Book Promoter* and *The Frugal Editor.* You can get a free copy of *The Frugal Book Promoter* at BookBaby, and I'll let Carolyn tell you about how she's worked that campaign and how it's paid off for her. Carolyn is a poet and an author of fiction, including the award-winning novel *This Is the Place* and *Blooming Red: A Collection of Christmas Poetry*. She's been an instructor for UCLA Extension's renowned writers’ program since 2003. Please put your hands together for Carolyn Howard-Johnson.

**Carolyn**: Hi everybody. It's really nice to be here. This is our second time at PALA; I came last year so I was really eager to do it again. It's a smaller audience, probably because of Donald Trump, but it's good to have you all here.

I took this from a little different standpoint than the rest of you, but I did promise Robin I would tell you about the situation that I recently had with BookBaby.com. It's a self-publishing outfit, and they called me and asked me if they could buy this book for a two-month period to give away to all of their prospective authors and all of the authors that they already had. It's a limited time offer; it goes through September 30, I think. If you go on Twitter you can find it or you can e-mail me. My cards are here; you can pick that up and I'll give you the exact link to use. Or you can just go to BookBaby and just search around. But it was very exciting. It was nice for a self-published author to be paid essentially a second royalty after a book had been published. I don't know how long it's been out; I think it was originally published in 2003. So one of the beauties of the web is that books can go on forever. They don't get sent to the slush pile anymore. You can make it keep working for you.

**Robin**: Did you tell me that this promotion pushed sales—

**Carolyn**: Oh, yes, that was the other thing. I've always advocated free; there's something in almost all of my newsletters about giving stuff away free. You alluded to it, giving your own time back, but your book too. Even at that, I was a little bit reluctant, because this was on such a massive scale. They've already given away 20,000 books. I was afraid that that would dig in to my sales, especially because it's already been out since 2003 and a lot of people already know about it or already have it. My sales have been up, considerably, like maybe about 50 % since they started doing the marketing that they've done in order to give it away. It's been featured in their newsletter; they've done a lot of tweeting. It's been featured on blogs from some of their authors, apparently—it's kind of hard to know exactly what the connection is sometimes. Their marketers are absolutely excellent and that certainly helped. You alluded to that too in terms of your partnership to your fellow authors.

**Robin:** Today I was searching and I went to look at an article and your book popped up.

**Question**: I actually have a copy of your book physically but I got one of the e-copies so I could have it on my phone.

**Carolyn**: They're giving it away as an e-copy, not a paperback copy. So my e-copies are about the same as they were before in terms of sales but my paperback copies are way up. That's sort of one way to approach something like that if you're going to do it.

I told you that I started out a little bit differently. At the risk of sounding like Donald Trump, I'm going to tell you my four most brilliant moves as opposed to my greatest pleasures. I think within those brilliant moves, you're going to see how they were also my pleasures.

I think the most important thing for me was that I didn't think of myself as too old to start a new career. I've only been doing this since 2000. I have had a lot of writing experience and publicity experience and marketing experience. Before that I was a journalist. But I didn't start following my star until the time most people are considering retiring. And I can't tell you how glad I am that I did that. You know when you're starting something new, there's always someone—when you're going on a vacation to Europe, there's always someone who's going to tell you that you have to watch for pickpockets and take the pleasure out of it for you? There are always a few of those people hanging around, telling you that you shouldn't do it. I'm proud that I did anyway.

I have to give Deepak Chopra credit. I read one of his books when I was just getting over cancer. I was reading one of his books and he made the point that if you live to 50 today, you've already lived longer than most people lived—than the average lifespan—in the days of, say, the ancient Egyptians. And if you live to 50 today, your life expectancy is at least 20 to 30 to 40 years longer than that. Well, back in the day, that was the life span of people: 40 years. So you have a whole lifetime to do something else and something new. That really just struck home to me. I started thinking about it—I was 59 at the time—and I thought "If I'm 59, I don't have to spend the first 20 years going to college or kindergarten and learning my ABC's, right? So that gives me a head start." It truly does because all of those careers that I had before—I mentioned them: journalism, retailing, marketing, they all contributed to what I already knew. There wasn't one thing that I'd done before that I couldn't apply to the process of publishing and writing. So between all of those, that gave me a head start too. I think that was the most important, brilliant thing that I did, with Deepak's help.

The second thing was that I didn't accept the idea that I didn't have the credentials—because I'd started so late, right?—to do some of the things I wanted to do. One of those things was that I'd really, really admired all my teachers at UCLA, because I'd gone back to learn novel writing separately, which obviously is different from journalism. And somebody said, "Well, you can do it." And I said, "No, I can't." But I did. I got up my nerve, made an appointment, walked in, and told the instructor about my idea for an e-book. This was back when e-books were new. She just loved the idea and said, "Come teach a class in marketing and e-books." So that's how I got started, and I did it there for almost a decade. That took a little bit of chutzpah.

Then, another time, they had an opening at *Pasadena Star News* for a fashion columnist. When I was in publicity in New York I had worked for a fashion publicist named Eleanor Lambert, who was the founder of "The 10 Best Dressed List." So I thought I could do that, "I think I could do that." But the only clippings I had were back from—are you ready for this; it's going to tell you my age—from 1959. And they wrote columns differently in 1959 than they do now. I was using "you" like talking to the reader: you.

So I gathered them all together. They were yellow; they were tattered. I was embarrassed; I kind of glued them together in a kind of make-do scrapbook and took them in to the editor. And she said—I kid you not—she said "Oh, I love the way you address the reader! You use 'you' all the way through this." And she hired me. So I was the fashion columnist for the *Pasadena Star News* for about three or four years. That's just another example of the kind of thing that, if you don't think you can do it, you probably can't.

Number three. One of my very good friends—she's a cat lover, by the way; I'm going to nag you for one of your books—one of my good friends says she doesn't think she is by nature collaborative. That struck me as so funny because I don't think I'm by nature collaborative either. But I reached out when I decided that I wanted to start writing poetry, to a woman I'd never met. She's an Aussie; her name is Magdalena Ball and she runs [*The Compulsive Reader*](http://www.compulsivereader.com/); it's a review site. She's looking for literary work as well as genres, which is kind of unusual. Most people just want the romance or sci-fi, etc. But she's willing to look at your poetry and your literary novels if you have something like that. Her name's Magdalena Ball, and she and I got started writing one book of poetry that turned into a series of six books called the Celebration Series. They're over on the table. It turned out that I was collaborative. Like Janiss, I think the most important aspect of being collaborative is finding the right person to be collaborative with—or in her case, the right persons to be collaborative with.

There are a lot of advantages; let me get this list for you, I wrote it down. We were especially good because of the strengths and weaknesses: she had my weaknesses and I had her strengths and vice versa. You might end up with a really great critique partner and a marketing partner. We had double the experience, half the workload, twice the smarts. I also talked my husband into writing too, so I ended up with more of his support than I otherwise would. He's the one back here in the USO cap. He started writing, what, about nine years after I did, Lance?

Then my fourth thing was setting my mind to learning editing. I think this was one of the most brilliant things I did. You'll like hearing that, I'm sure. I already had most of the grammar I needed. I'd taken advanced grammar classes in college so that wasn't it. That wasn't what led me to it. It wasn't the writing. I'd already had more classes at UCLA in the subject of writing than most people have getting a bachelor’s degree. That wasn't really it. It was real editing and it made me a better partner for my editors. And I think that's one of the most important things, whether you're self-publishing or whether you're working with a publisher. You're in a better position to hire an editor, to work with an editor. It makes you less suspicious of their skills. It makes you more confident about nixing their suggestions. Sorry, Robin, but you should be confident about that. If this is something that's really important to you, or really a style choice you've made as opposed to a fast and firm grammar rule, then you should be able to say, "Let's discuss this. What do you think?" and knock it back and forward.

And it helps support my writing habit, because sometimes when my sales are low, I get really good editing jobs. It ratcheted up my copywriting and marketing skills several notches. So editing is probably a lot more than most of you as writers think it is. It's a whole world of ways to improve your writing and improve the kinds of things that you're doing. And for me it led to a book called *The Frugal Editor*, and I hope that you will go online and look for it, because that's a good place to start. My theory is if you're going to learn something the cheapest, most frugal way to learn it, first read a book about it. Then take classes after that; it gives you that foot up. So, *The Frugal Editor* by Carolyn Howard-Johnson. It's [Bit.ly/FrugalEditor](file:///F:\Bit.ly\FrugalEditor). That's it; that's my four.

**Robin**: Our final speaker on the pleasures is my twin, Gerald Everett Jones. He is the proprietor of [La Puerta Productions](http://www.lapuerta.tv/book-catalog-2/), a media consulting firm. His small press imprint is La Puerta Books and Media, which has titles in hardcover, trade paperback, e-books, audio podcasts, and DVD. Gerald is a published author himself, having written more than thirty business and technical books, including *How to Lie with Charts.* In recent years, he published six novels with La Puerta. His latest, *Bonfire of the Vanderbilts*, is about an art scandal in 1890s Paris. It's hot off the press with a September 2015 release. The central historical story in the book is about Julius Stewart's painting "The Baptism*.*" How many people have seen that at LACMA? I have seen it. It's rumored to show a Vanderbilt family event. In his new book, Gerald proves this rumor to be true. Please welcome Gerald Everett Jones.

**Gerald**: Truth in disclosure here is Robin has also been my boss at various times. I have eked out a living as a ghostwriter from time to time. So thank you, Robin, for all those nice checks, and for inviting me tonight. As Robin mentioned, I did quite a lot of nonfiction writing, business and technical writing, because I'd had a background as a computer geek, back in the day. From 1983, the time when I came to Los Angeles from back east, until the mid-90s, I made my living as a nonfiction book author, with traditional publishing contracts. That was back when you could actually get advances for doing books, so I could do four or five books a year on ten-week cycles, and I made a decent living. Before that, there was trade magazine writing. You could get $5,000 for a technical article that would go into a magazine, *IEEE Spectrum* or *Scientific American* or something like that. You've got these engineers that have got arcane things to explain, and yet you'd have to explain them for the general reader. Usually it had to do with pushing—it was like product placement; you'd push some measuring device or whatever. So I did a lot of that.

So I'm very familiar with the traditional publishing cycle. When I decided to turn fiction, which had to do with something like Carolyn's life changes, like, “What am I doing here? I'd much rather have a lot more fun!”—I would have been involved in a traditional publishing environment with that, if I were able. But I published my first novel because nobody else would. I published it in trade paperback and in Kindle. Most of my books have been in trade paperback and Kindle, but I also did Smashwords and I did a few in hardcover, because *Mr. Ballpoint*, one of the novels that I did, was actually about a family that I knew. It was a fictionalized biography, in fact, actually a comic novel. I knew the grandson of the guy who invented the ballpoint pen. I actually got the life story rights; it was originally a screenplay. I knew one of my main audiences was this family and they were going to want to pass these books out. They would want nice hardcover books so I learned how to do hardcover books.

So long story short, I did these five novels in the last four years, I guess it was, and this last January, having blown out the pipes with the stuff that I had intended to write, I had no choice but to go to the back burner and write this novel or book that had been simmering for almost twenty years. It was twenty years ago that I saw this painting at LACMA. "The Baptism" is supposed to show the Vanderbilt family but nobody knew for sure. I had kind of an art history hobby. I had been researching it on and off. I even had stack-reading privileges at the Getty for awhile. I could go in and show my badge and go down to the rare books and put on a mask. It was kind of cool, but I wasn't sure where that was going.

I had written two or three chapters come this last January, over a period of maybe ten years. I said, "OK: New Year's Resolution: I'm going to finish that book this year. I'm going to give myself the whole year, no matter how long it takes." Well, I don't know. Somehow I screwed up. I guess I trusted my subconscious in the writing, whatever, but the book was done in April. And it's not a small book.

So I said to myself, "OK, I've got this fan base. I've got a blog. I even had a radio show. I've got a pretty good case to take to some of these agents"—some of whom I knew on a first-name basis from being at places like this. And I thought, "She'll want my book! I'll just pick up the phone." So I approached the half dozen agents that I knew by name. "Maybe I can get Random House this time, Knopf, or whatever. I'll step up."

I did those six, and I got kind of impatient, waiting, and I thought, you know, I can find the e-mail addresses of a hundred other agents. So I e-mailed all of them. I found out the ones that would take electronic samples. I went to their websites, got their submission requirements. I did everything exactly the way they wanted me to. In the end, I had about a dozen agents read it. They all say "two to six weeks. " I said, "OK, I'll give it eight." Along about the fourth week, I'm going, "Isn't anybody ever going to want this? It's literary fiction; it's all the things that are picking up, not so commercial.”

And then it dawned on me. This is the point that I'm getting to: it's all about not waiting. It's all about setting your own schedule. I began to do the math, and I don't know why it took me so long. But an agent, if you're going to approach them cold—let's say the agent wants two to six weeks. Then you've got another couple of weeks redlining a contract. You've got your contract with your agent now. Then your agent is going to start sending it out, provided that they don't want changes in the manuscript before they send it out. Fiction and nonfiction have different cycles. You guys have been through it; it's a proposal for nonfiction, it's a whole manuscript for fiction. That's pretty much a hard and fast rule. It's going to take the publisher, if there's an editor—hopefully the agent has been able to prime the pump and has been able to pitch to an acquisitions editor that is receptive, whatever—but two to six weeks before you get an initial response from a publisher as to whether they *might* be interested. OK?

The other thing about traditional publishing is that it's still got one foot welded to lithographic press and to limited book runs. They don't run 5,000 copies necessarily for a first printing. They do what's called a "market appropriate run," which is usually about a thousand. But because of that, and because of the review cycle, they publish a spring catalog and a fall catalog. If you don't make the spring catalog, you're in the fall catalog. If you've got an academic book, do you want to be in the fall catalog? Actually, you want to be in the spring catalog because they're making up their minds for fall.

Basically, once I did the math I realized it was going to be two years before this was in print, even if I got lucky. So I made the decision in June to publish it. Here it is. It's already been out to 60 reviewers. It had to, because I had that many scholars, institutes, universities, foundations, whatever—I had a lot of people who had contributed the facts that went into this fiction. I wanted them all to be able to weigh in. I wanted them all to be able to hold it in their hands and say, "Well, Gerald, I don't think you really got this right."

In the review copies we give away—these are collectible, by the way; they have an errata sheet in front—I had Napoleon winning the Battle of Trocadero two years after he was dead. I had the painter Julius Stewart raving about how good Matisse was and how he envied the Impressionists, which was a little bit false, but after some checking it turns out that Matisse was a boy when Julius Stewart was alive so that was actually kind of impossible. But I had that review process during the months of July and August, and then we were actually able to hit the paperback deadline of our birthdays and the painter's birthday, September 6.

So, control. Absolutely. Not waiting for anybody! I mean, yeah, I did wait for the reviewers but if they didn't get back to me with their comments, the ship sailed. I'm sorry. Let's move on. But I did get a lot of good feedback. Some of the people that I thought would be really cooperative and really plugged in and really enthusiastic . . . weren't. "You want me to read a book? It's 450 pages? I've got a tour and I've got classes and I've got a syllabus to prepare." All that kind of stuff.

So yes, absolute control and timing. A little bit later we might talk also about things like street date and promotion and those kinds of timing things. Those are all extremely important considerations, especially if you still do paper. I think there's still a role for paper. I think you've kind of got to do both for a while yet. I know that some of Carolyn's colleagues and mine in the self-publishing world are really advocating Kindle only. I don't want to argue too strongly against that, but I have a feeling that if you want to put your stake in the ground, you really have to be on all the platforms.

**Robin**: So Gerald, what is the smartest move you've made with your novels?

**Gerald**: Well, the smartest marketing move I ever made was driving my wife to the radio station. My wife, Georgia, is an advocate for elephant rescue. And she was on a talk show one night because there was an event where they were going to have a march at the La Brea Tar Pits and carry placards. She was on the Mark Isler Show. He has two segments: he has a current events segment, and then he has a political debate segment that's kind of like Bill Maher, only he's a right winger. It's kind of a secret but he used to work for Bobby Kennedy. That's a really big secret. He's basically on right-wing Christian radio.

He said to them, "We're short one person tonight. We need someone to fill in." And they said, "We can't do it! We collect money from Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians. We can't get on the radio and take a political stand." And Georgia says, "But there's my husband. He's a Progressive." And they said, "A Progressive?" And they thought, "Huh, that'd be really cool. We can make fun of them."

So I got on the show and I've been a recurring guest on the show ever since. I do their book reviews. I put their book reviews out on podcasts. The show has been on hiatus since June and we're going to pick it up again. We're actually talking in a preliminary way about maybe a call-in program for self publishing. There's Warren Eckstein who does pet advice. Maybe self publishing in our community? Doesn't everybody want to write their memoir? So we might do that—pipe-dream concept.

**Question:** You were saying something about the release date—I'm in a situation where I'm trying to figure that out.

**Gerald**: That's probably our discussion for my next round because we can do that on the perils. In the Kindle world, it's not an issue. Actually, Amazon has made it an issue, which is not a problem. They've actually given you much more control than you need. For some reason, they won't do that for small publishers and the paper world. I've tried every trick under the sun, and I can tell you how to make it work out as well as you can without being a big publisher and having some of the tools that they have at their disposal.

And we can talk about the role of advance reviews.

**Carolyn:** I've got some information on that in *The Frugal Book Promoter* andin *The Frugal Editor,* surprisingly enough. And there's a free page on my website: [HowToDoItFrugally.com](http://howtodoitfrugally.com/), that gives you a whole list of reviewers and the amount of time they need it before publication or release date, usually 12 to 16 weeks. But there are other ways to get reviews, and my next book in the Frugal series is going to be on reviews.

**Question**: I need it now.

**Carolyn:** You need it now, I know.

**Robin**: Does anybody have a burning question in the audience?

**Question**: Yes. I was wondering what the station is that you're going to be on?

**Gerald:** KRLA, 870 AM. The podcasts are on iTunes. You just simply type in [BoychikLit](http://www.boychiklit.com/).

**Question**: What time is it on?

**Gerald:** That is on from nine to eleven on Saturday nights. Like I said, it's on hiatus. It'll be back in about a month. It is right-wing, roundtable debate. One of the things I will say about Mark is he's a really fair-minded guy. If O'Reilly gets your back up, Mark will cool you down. He's still very conservative, and some of the people who call in are way off the edge. Michael Klein, who some of you people know, who is the first amendment attorney for IWOSC, a free speech guy who defends journalists—I walked into the studio one night to be on, and here's Michael! I've known Michael for 20 years, but not really well. I said, "Hi, Michael." And he said, "You know Mark? I know Mark. Oh, we're on together." We were like the two Democrat sympathizers that night. It's a kick; I really enjoy it. I feel like, OK, I could be on KCRW and preach to the choir. What's the point? Let's let some of the liberal socialism leap over to the other side.

**Robin**: Gerald, I'm thinking with this question we just had we’re kind of dancing around the answer—why don't we start with the perils with you and you can talk about that answer?

**Gerald:** Let me talk about the street date, then. I don't have to take a huge amount of time. I did a fair amount of work actually for Disney/Buena Vista once upon a time, in the DVD department, so I know a lot about the push out to retail stores. One of the biggest movers of Disney product is Walmart. But for all the big retailers: if you've got *Pirates of the Caribbean* coming out at Christmas, and Disney decrees that the first day of sale be Black Friday, woe unto the retailer that sticks it on the shelf the day before! You will break your contract and you will probably not get to sell the next title that Disney has. You don't want to be there. You don't want to miss that boat.

**Robin**: So what is happening with Amazon?

**Gerald:** The same is true with books. In the print world, as in the DVD world, the production ready date—the production ship date—has to be some number of weeks before that street date. They call it the street date: the date that it's available for sale. That's got to be timed pretty carefully because you've got shipping, you've got print production, whatever. So the big publishers control this very routinely, and the way they do it with Amazon is through a portal called Vendor Central. No small press publisher that I've met—there may be some—can have access to Vendor Central. In fact, when Target was hacked, it was through their Vendor Central portal. They're not about to give it to little guys because it gets them into the inventory system.

Now, Amazon has Author Central and Seller Central. Author Central is for authors. Once your book is in the Amazon inventory, the author can go in and can actually enter the published reviews. You can actually type them in. You can control a lot of the copy that is on that Amazon book page through Author Central. You just simply have to prove to Amazon that you're the author of the book. They'll check, but it's not difficult.

**Robin**: That's the page where you make your own author page?

**Gerald:** It's a port. Yes, you can have an author profile page.

**Robin**: Is that what it is, though: the author profile page?

**Gerald:** No, it's a dashboard that matches your books. You can actually search for your book and come up with the Amazon ASIN or ISBN and you click it and say, "This is my book." The Amazon robot will know. Within three to five business days, if it is your book, you'll have control over part of the metadata that feeds that book page. And you can enter that directly. Now that is also subject to Amazon review, but again, if you don't abuse the rules, you're going to be able to post reviews and put nice stuff on your book page.

Now, in Seller Central, which is basically for bookstores but also for people selling brassieres and panties and all kinds of other stuff that Amazon sells, any member of Seller Center can create a new product page. You can actually create the book page. The problem is—I tried to do this—because Lightning Source, who I was using for my printing at the time, was not getting any data over to Amazon so they could create the page (and they give you a length of time; it's a number of weeks), I went in through Seller Central because I sell used books, and I created a book page. It came up in 24 hours and I go, "This was really easy." Except in another 24 hours, Amazon took the page down and they said, "Your sale date is in the future." Booksellers are not supposed to advertise books that they don't have in stock. They say, "You're not a publisher; you're a bookseller." So that does not work.

**Robin**: It seems some people get away with it, though.

**Gerald:** Well, there's a lot of stuff that can fall through the cracks, and if you want a deliberate strategy—now, on Kindle, as we were just discussing, basically your Kindle book is published a day and a half after you press the send key. The robot looks at it, and there really isn't much checking that is done and your Kindle is live. Amazon in its wisdom has decided to implement a pre-order button for Kindle. You can designate that your Kindle book will be sold sometime in the future. There's a window there; it's not indefinite, not a year from now, but the only rule is that there has to be at least a preliminary text file of your book in the Amazon queue a week before the street date. So you can put up a draft of the book knowing that you still are going to be revising it. As long as that text is there, they'll put the page up with the pre-order button.

**Robin**: We're running out of time. We have about five minutes for each of you to talk about your pitfalls. Gerald?

**Gerald**: There's a whole lot more of that but I think Carolyn's probably got some really good guidance on it. The thing is that you want to allow time for advance reviews. If you get advance reviews, you want to be able to populate the Amazon page with those before the book goes live.

**Robin**: Would those reviews be—

**Gerald**: From newspapers, from other authors.

**Robin**: When you talked about sending out review copies it sounded like it was peer review copies.

**Gerald**: Some were.

**Robin**: At the same time, you did—

**Gerald:** I didn't do every newspaper in America, but I did *New Yorker* and *New York Times*. Especially *New York Times* because the Vanderbilt story would be dear to them. It may be a cold day before the *New York Times* picks up my book, but I did send it to them.

**Robin**: Okay, Carolyn. Pitfalls.

**Carolyn:** My worst mistakes is a very short list because I don't make very many mistakes.

**Robin**: It doesn't have to be you; it could be someone you know.

**Carolyn**: No, I'll own that.Originally I worked too much of my marketing around my first book., rather than as me as a person and a writer. I still see that in a lot of my clients who come and want information on how to market their books. They think in terms of selling their books. I hate the words "selling your book." There are a million ways to sell your book without ever uttering the word "selling." So never say to anybody, on the web, any place, "Come buy my book" or "I'm selling books." You can do it a lot of other ways.

The people who are out there who *want* to give you free publicity, because that's their job, they work for newspapers, they work for magazines, they blog. They have to fill those pages with information, and they need you. They need your book, too, but it gets a little tiresome to do interviews just about books. It's gotten so that a media release sent out about the release of a book is just ho-hum. You have to show them that you have an angle, something that they can talk about, when you contact them. And for me it turned out to be exactly what I said, I think, in the first sentence when I started talking to you: that I published my first book at the time when most people are thinking about retiring. And this was long enough ago that that was news. Now a lot of people are doing it. Still, for your hometown newspaper, that might be exactly what they want to hear.

My next one was that I waited too long to start a newsletter and a contact list. I thought I needed to wait until I had a book ready to go. That is just so wrong! Because you've wasted all the time it took you to write the book when you could be building that contact list, when you could be building a following for your newsletter, your blog, or whatever it is. The time to start publicizing is not on that release date. It's too late to start publicizing yesterday but you can start right now. You can start setting up that marketing program this minute, so that you don't go by a Denny's and pass by one of those racks with all those luscious throwaway papers, that you don't pick one up and go to the list of editors and put those into an excel file that will be ready for you when your book is released, or just before your book is released, to try to get free publicity.

Notice I keep saying free publicity. Publicity is free. But I say that specifically because advertising costs, and you don't need to pay for publicity. So I'm not saying never, never, never ever advertise. But I'm saying, especially for a first book, that it's kind of dumb to pay for what you can get free. And you might not make it back. You might make a lot more than that back, but a lot of times we don't know in advance. Maybe if you've got a good long series, you've got a taste for what you're going to do, but that takes experience to have a handle on it. I hate like anything to see authors go out there and spend a lot of money, and end up spending more than they ever make back.

I think the biggest mistake I ever made was moving into a new genre, without taking new genre-specific classes. I did that with poetry. When I wrote my novel, I realized that what I enjoyed the most—it was literary too—was metaphor and symbol, and the language. So I started writing poetry. I had had a lot of poetry college classes, classes in American poetry, classes in English poetry, so *that* wasn't going to be too hard . . . Don't kid yourself, Carolyn. It was really hard. Most of all it was really humiliating, really humiliating. Because by this time we had the Internet, and I was going on and finding poetry sites where you could publish, and I didn't realize that they were not reputable sites. They took advantage of poets. I still have some very early poems, I'm sure, hanging around there on the web that are pretty embarrassing.

We have in Los Angeles people like Suzanne Lummis, some of the best poets through UCLA that will share their knowledge with you and give you the basics of poetry. That's true of any genre. It's even really dumb to switch from romance to sci-fi without taking a good class in it, or at least reading a couple of really good books on it.

Putting my creative writing on a back burner was another mistake, except I didn't just put it on a back burner; I shoved it into the oven while I proceeded to follow a divergent career. That included motherhood and a chain of retail stores. I'm not saying those were a waste of time. But I'll tell you that when I got cancer and decided to start writing creatively again, I was really, really, really feeling sorry for all that time that I could have spent on my creative writing. Because creative writing, as we all know, doesn't have to be a full-time project. It can be done part time. If you want to—and if I had really wanted to—I could've spent that time doing a lot more and been a lot further along at the age of 59 than I was. So no back burners, but especially no ovens for your writing, please. And that's my list.

**Robin**: Thank you for sharing that. Janiss?

**Janiss**: Okay, let's see if I can make this quick. *Rescued* was the first book that I'd done that I actually really had a firm schedule on. You know, you wonder why, when you hand in something to traditional publishing, it takes it so long to come out? It was hard getting that book out on time! I had a year and a half to work on it, but I had to edit all these writers and toward the end, when I was getting the book proofed, I wound up with a really big headache of a problem because of the photos. With the black and white interior, the photos came out looking really horrible in Lightning Source. They looked perfect in the CreateSpace copies. It took me a few weeks to actually figure out how to deal with that problem. Those were weeks that I really couldn't afford to lose. I wanted the book to come out in January of 2015, and I wound up having to really scramble to make that happen.

**Robin:** Was that because you wanted to get bookstores, also? Is that why you did Lightning Source as well as CreateSpace?

**Janiss**: I had an account with Lightning Source from prior books. I wanted to make them available. If my authors wanted their local bookstore to do a book buy, I wanted to be in that database. That's why I did Lightning Source. There's a specific reason why the photos looked different in Lightning Source, because I had to change the grayscale curves in the photos for the Lightning Source PDF differently than I did for the CreateSpace one, which was way more forgiving on the black and white photos.

Everything takes longer. That took longer, the process of laying out the book took a little bit longer than I expected it to, the e-book took longer—everything just takes longer than you think it's going to. If you're trying to schedule things out, give yourself more time than you think you're going to need because chances are you're going to need it!

The other peril that really bummed me out this summer was the slump. The book comes out, and it comes out with a lot of enthusiasm. Since I have a dozen writers, I assigned them each a month to promote the book. It started off for the first five months or so—the sales were really excellent; they were really good. After a while it's inevitable: sales are going to slow down. You're going to have a slump. The summer writers that I'd picked weren't as good as promoters as some of the writers I had picked out in the early months of the year. I knew that was going to happen because every book goes through a slump.

The thing is, the difference between publishing somebody else's work—if you're an indie publisher, not a big traditional publisher, but an indie publisher and you're personally involved—as opposed to your own book: your own book goes through a slump, and you get kind of bummed out. You're like, "Well, what can I do?" And you try to figure it out. If it's somebody else's work that's going through the slump and you're the publisher, you're like, "Oh my god! I've got to do something! I've got to do right by these people." You feel responsible. I was scrambling to try and figure out what I could do, throwing promotional ideas to see what stuck, all summer, to try and get sales up on the book. I really should have had a plan ahead of time, knowing that was going to come. I'm an experienced enough author and publisher. I should have foreseen that and really had more of a plan instead of treating it like spaghetti and seeing what stuck.

From the publishing-others’-work point of view, I had a couple of quirky, ego things with writers. Being Maxwell Perkins means you also have to deal with writers' quirks. For example, if everyone handed things in as Word files, I was able to do track changes and go into all the edits with everybody, see what they wanted to discuss with me, and we could work on stuff. One writer—and she was in Canada, my one Canadian writer—didn't have Word, and I actually had to have her send me the manuscript. She didn't even have the ability to send me the file. She had to actually send me a physical manuscript, and I had to hand edit it the old fashioned way that I learned in the ’80s and fax it back to her. So you have to deal with people's quirks sometimes. Everybody has weird little things.

Even if you're publishing only your own work, you wind up being a team with people. You have editors, you have cover designers. You're going to run across people that have a quirky way of dealing with stuff, and you're going to have to work with them anyway. I had one writer who—well, it wasn't her cat. It was the library cat in the book. The librarian owned the cat, but the cat's voice was written by a different person who had a newspaper column written in the cat's voice. Anyway, I handed in the edits. Whenever I handed in work I always sent it to both her, the actual writer, and the librarian who owned the cat. The librarian looked at the edits, and she said, “You know, there are a lot of edits in your book.” So she e-mailed me back and she goes, “I’m not even going to look at the edits. I hope you didn’t ruin his voice.” She got really kind of weird about it. She goes, “I’m sure you know what’s best.” She wound up being a really big supporter of the book down the line, but she wouldn’t even look at the edits. I was like, “But that’s the whole reason I handed them back, for you to tell me what you liked and didn’t like about the edits.” Anyway, it worked out. That was kind of weird. Everybody else worked with me on it. You have to deal with quirky people.

One thing, since I had a call for submissions on my book, was at the very end. I had to write rejection letters. That was kind of a downer. I almost was throwing darts at the end because there were four stories that were all equal and I only had room for two. One story wound up in the book because I realized I was heavy on male cats, and I needed a female cat, and that's the only reason the other male cat didn't get in there. So I wound up writing different versions of the rejection letter. One version was, "I really liked your story. I just didn't have room for it. Feel free to submit again when I'm having another call for submissions, or if you have another idea." Then there were a few ideas that I just knew I was never going to use that writer, for whatever reason, so it was just a polite rejection letter; I didn't invite them back. I think there was one story that was just scary, scary, scary. I made it as standard as possible, as impersonal as possible, because I felt, "Please don't contact me ever again." But that was just one out of all the submissions. Most people were really cool, really reasonable. I got a lot of really nice submissions, and I got some really nice submissions that I didn't even have room for.

**Robin**: Thank you, Janiss.

**Carolyn**: Just quickly, before Maggie goes. There's a misconception out there that with CreateSpace that you can't sell to bookstores. They actually have a distribution channel for selling to bookstores, and it doesn't cost any extra.

**Janiss:** They do. It's not as good as Lightning Source is, which is why I already had an account with Lightning Source so I stuck with them.

**Robin**: I though the problem with CreateSpace was discounts or something?

**Janiss**: Yeah, it does. I'll tell you a little secret that I found out through my little debacle between Lightning Source and CreateSpace. When CreateSpace is fulfilling a book buy, they fulfill it through Lightning Source. That's another reason why I had to make sure that my Lightning Source black and white photos looked good. Because if they were going to fulfill through Lightning Source, they had to look good.

**Question**: Do all of the print-on-demand groups use the Lightning Source technology or is there other technology? When I first started publishing this way it was with CreateSpace, which was called Great Unpublished. I was just desperate to get certain stuff into print. That's been a question in my mind. I've since used other self-publishing services, but I've wondered: Is it all Lightning Source technology underneath it all or are there different technologies?

**Carolyn**: I wouldn't want to venture an answer to that one.

**Janiss**: I don't know the answer to that, to be honest. I'd have to do research on it.

**Gerald**: From a technical standpoint CreateSpace was once BookSurge, which was a division of IBM that they bought. But the technology that's used for all print on demand is basically toner that is being laid down on pages. It's ground up plastic. It's not ink. There are different manufacturers of digital presses, and I'm not sure if Lightning Source uses the same ones as CreateSpace. But digital technology, actually, when they announced it in the Heidelberg Fair, they were printing copies of *Time* magazine. As every person walked by they would take their picture and each magazinehad a different person on the cover—it would be the person who walked by. That's how fluid digital technology is.

**Maggie**: Really quick, may I ask: How many authors here tonight are fiction authors? It's not quite half. Maybe a third of you are fiction authors. Some of these perils, I think, are specific to fiction authors. And more specifically, any genre author, not necessarily literary fiction authors.

One of the things that I would do very differently is that my first two books came out through New York, and I was able to get those rights back and so I put those two books up. I would have immediately, upon the heels of those two books, because they were the first two books in a series, instead of starting a new series, I would have continued that series. And I would have continued it to a minimum of six books. I already had a name for myself with those two books and I had a little bit of a following, and my readers would have gone with me.

The other thing that I would have done is that once that sixth book was up in that first series, I would have immediately made the first book free. Permanently free. I am a very big brand loyalist—I like my detergent, I like my ice cream, I like everything the way I like it. You are not going to get me to buy something new unless you give me a sample of what you have. I think that for a lot of readers who are voracious readers, it's a very intimate relationship between, say, Stephen King and his readers, and Nora Roberts and her readers, Jayne Ann Krentz and her readers. They know what they're gonna get. The problem that we have a lot of times as newer authors is not necessarily that people won't spend the money. It's that they don 't have the time to research if you're going to fulfill their need that they have as a reader in that moment.

So if I have a permanent free book, I'm giving you something free. If I'm not your cup of tea, that's totally fine. But here, this is my voice, this is how I write, these are the types of stories that I write. This is the first book in a series of six. If you like it, you have five more that you can buy. So that's what I would have done. I would have taken the first six, run it to a series. I would have made the first one permanently free.

The next thing is, my agent came to me. You know, in traditional publishing you used to take a year to write a book. My first two books were traditionally published. So the third book I decided I should take a year, and she came to me and said, "If you want to be independently published, and you want to do it in women's fiction or any other genre, you have to write faster. I know you can write faster. You have to write faster." And this is the thing: I would've written faster, sooner. I write 3,000 words a day. I can write 6,000 words a day, but when I do that, after about five days I become a little bit catatonic and I can't tell you my name. So I do that in very small, compressed bits.

**Robin**: Maggie, you do this and you work as a lawyer?

**Maggie**: I do. I tend to write really early in the morning and then I keep my practice very small. It's very intimate. So my legal work is done during business hours. The writing has to fit around the legal work, especially if I have clients who really need something then, because I have a fiduciary duty. I mean I have a duty to my readers, but I have a fiduciary legal duty to my clients. There's a big difference.

So I would have written faster sooner. I agree with you, Carolyn, completely: the newsletter is gold. The newsletter is gold. There is nothing more golden to an author than their newsletter, because those people want you to interact with them. They signed up to hear from you. And you can. Not, hopefully spam them—that's very important. So I think I would have started that sooner.

The other peril that I think you have to be very careful of is that you always, always, always, always want to be professional. In every single way, you present yourself as professional. For me, that means a cover designer, a formatter, two editors, a proofreader. I vet my books in the same way they were vetted when they went through New York. And I would argue that there are a lot of New York books, traditionally published, that have many, many more errors than any one of my books. Right? Because my books that came from New York had errors in them. I remember cringing. And how many eyes read those? You want to be professional in every way that you can, because you only get one shot at a reader. If they look at your book and they think the cover looks schlocky, they're not going to click the interior to see what the writing is. If on Amazon they read the first ten pages and it's just rife with errors, they're not going to buy that book. So you get one shot, and you want it to be the best shot.

**Robin**: Excellent, thank you, Maggie. We have time for two quick questions and then we're going to go to the raffle.

**Question**: How would you say you learned to write faster?

**Maggie:** That's a really good question. This is the thing: it goes back to that resistance. I truly was in book jail for awhile. They paid me a lot of money for my first two books. They did OK, but they didn't knock it out of the park like they wanted them to. I was soundly in book jail. So there comes a point where you start to say as a writer, where I would look at my work and I would say, "My work is good. My writing is solid." It took me a long time to be able to say that. *My writing is solid.* I had to give myself permission not to be so critical. Does that make sense? To just kind of say to that resistance voice in my head, "You know what? You've got to be quiet now for awhile." You really just ignore it and you just go. For me, a first draft is really bad.

**Question**: So where you sped up mostly was in first draft?

**Maggie:** I think so. But I also would slow down for revisions, and revision is a nightmare for me. I loathe it! So I changed my process a little. I will do my 3,000 words, and then the next day I'll go back and do a soft edit of those words and then go on—instead of going all the way through, and then having to be like, "Oh, my god!" I spent three days spell-checking once. Three days. But everybody's different. What works for me—I don't think it's fair to compare, because I have a friend that writes 500 words. But those are perfect words. In one day, her words are perfect.

**Ruth**: I have a quick question for all of you. On Amazon, do you routinely change your categories?

**Carolyn**: Not continually, but once in a while, if you find it wrong.

**Janiss**: I should do that more, actually. You just reminded me.

**Carolyn**: You know, all these things that you're told to do take time. If you've got one book, you can fool around a lot with that kind of thing. But once you've got 12 books, or 15 books, and you're constantly messing with the categories? So I don't think it hurts to check on kind of a regular basis, but this everyday thing and this festing over it—that's my daughter's word, *festing*—it's lost writing time. And it's lost marketing time too.

**Maggie**: I think it depends. I see somebody that has a very similar book or something that's always on my list of authors that are like me, that have books that are similar, and I'll look at their category. I'll be like, "What category did they place their book in? Why are they hitting up high? Is that a category that might be appropriate?" Because you really do want to try to be—you know those little areas underneath, like the main top 100? You really do want to try to hit in the top 100 of those. And if you can maintain a book in the top 100 of any—even like sub sub sub sub sub—category, then you're going to get some logarithm love from Amazon.

**Robin**: This is what the game is all about on the category. You try to get in the top of your categories. You try to find the category that you can get in the top in. It might be obscure, but you're still in the top.

**Maggie**: And you get a little logarithm love.

**Robin**: And Amazon will promote you more.

**Maggie**: But again I will go back to what Carolyn is saying and I agree 100 percent: the writing has to come first.

**Robin**: Let's give our speakers a hand. Can you tell us all how to contact you? I'm QuinnRobin@aol.com

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