

I Don't Want to Be a Pirate – Writer, maybe

By Robert S. Swiatek

Table of contents

1. Don't you understand English?
2. Make some lemonade
3. Read my lips and other body parts
4. Everything causes cancer
5. Computers...you can't live with them
6. How can I be overdrawn?
7. Sign before they read
8. Don't get caught in the WEB
9. Mousse marketing madness
10. This little piggy went to market
11. Smoke peace pipe
12. Eye patches and peg legs
13. Help – I need a paddle
14. If at first you don't succeed
15. Plant the potatoes now
16. When do you two get involved in this?
17. But that would leave you with one
18. Laughter is the best medicine
19. My English ain't the best
20. Voodoo acupuncture
21. I wrote a song but . . .
22. She criticized my brownstone
23. "Are you experienced?"
24. Smile...people will wonder what you're up to

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Norie Freedman, Patty Lynch and Abbie Swierat, who left the earth way too soon and to my mom, since I'm sure her genes were responsible for this book. Also, I couldn't have made it without her.

Introduction

Children are hereditary – if your parents didn't have any, you won't either.

Langston Hughes wrote a book called, *I Wonder As I Wander*, which I thought was excellent and had a great title. The more I read, the more amazed I am by the appropriateness of the titles given to so many books. It almost seems as though there is a title meister out there who reads books and then comes up with these gems. You'll see some of the explanations for my book titles as you read on.

Once you finish reading the last chapter of *I Don't Want to be a Pirate* – you can't just skip to it without reading the rest – you should realize where I came up with my title. Being a Seinfeld fan, I couldn't resist taking Jerry's line from the puffy shirt episode. A friend of mine mentioned that he didn't think that particular show was one of the top twenty shows and though it had some good laughs, I agreed with him. But since it was memorable, I thought I would use it.

The first consideration for any writer is to have a catchy title, one that people won't forget. My title could have been *The Journey of an Author*, but that sounds boring and probably won't sell books. It's also easily forgotten. A title should hang around like a hemorrhoid; thus readers might spread the word to others – about the book, not the other thing, which I don't wish on anyone.

As you read the book, you should be amused and even have a few laughs. I'll be disappointed if you don't at least smile. My previous five books are each known for their entertaining quality – part of that is the specific connection to the title. You may not laugh as much as watching the episodes of Seinfeld dealing with the marble rye, mutton, the Junior Mint or The Cubans, but I sincerely hope that you feel that this book is almost as funny as my 2005 book, *for seeing eye dogs only*. People told me that they laughed body

parts off while reading it. Next time I see them, I'll have to check what's missing and if it becomes them.

I have been writing for some time, as you will find out in this book. You will also discover where the idea for this book originated: a literary event in November 2005, in which I came very close to not participating. I will get into the details later. I feel that what I have learned from dealing with agents, publishers, writers, book stores and marketeers – you may have a different name for them but you haven't been there – will be of some assistance to other prospective writers.

I think the word “expert” is a gross exaggeration or misnomer. I really don't believe these people can be found, at least not on this planet. For example, consider the phrase, “terrorism expert.” I feel the term is misguided, since these individuals don't exist. If they did, why do we still have terrorism? Actually, it seems like those who strap explosives to their bodies or drive vehicles loaded with bombs are the “experts.” They have short lives, but of course need not worry about retirement or paying off their Discover Card bill.

I certainly do not claim to, nor will I ever be an “expert,” despite my dealings with the industry. There's so much yet to be learned; my growth associated with the book business continues with each passing day. If writing a book is not on your agenda, then my hope is at least that you will be entertained. If authors can benefit from anything in it, this book will be a success. By the same token, this book is intended to convince people that not everyone can be an author. It's not an easy trip.

They say that experience is the best teacher. Added to that might be that it's a hell of a way to learn. Heuristic learning is probably the best way to obtain knowledge, despite what comes with it. The first book I published, *The*

Read My Lips Cookbook tells of my journey in the kitchen, cooking for myself while not poisoning others. I did make chicken salmonella once – it wasn't intentional – but I was the only victim and it wasn't fatal.

After departing my parents' home – I wasn't booted out – I was forced to cook out of necessity, which you can read about in the cookbook. This book chronicles another trip. Along the way, I have had moments of great exhilaration and joy as well as times of disappointment. Most of the despair had to do with the fact that I had to deal with people who reached a level of incompetence.

There is another connection of the title to the book business, which deals with the piracy in the writing industry. When a writer winds up with under a dollar for a book that retails for twelve or thirteen dollars and the middlemen, such as the publisher and bookseller split the rest, a great injustice has been done. After all, the author is the one without whom there would be no book! I don't feel that such a pittance is a fair compensation for the effort. You can only call the resulting scenario piracy. And these people don't have eye patches. That, by the way, was another funny Seinfeld episode.

An additional significance of the title has to do with the life of a pirate. Being on the high seas, this individual certainly experiences adventure. Invariably, there comes a time when things aren't so rosy. The fan keeps getting struck when things hit it! Suppose he boards a boat seeking booty only to find out that the people on board have no cash, only American Express Travelers' Checks. These are worthless to him, as he doesn't have the ability to match the signature. His writing hand is the one with the hook.

When he heads over to the cafeteria for some grub – the dining room and chef have been replaced because of cutbacks in the corporation – he finds the main entree is

tripe, something he can't quite stomach. The soup de jour is black bean soup, another choice he doesn't favor. If you haven't read my first book, you'll miss the laugh with this bluish gray dish, or is it grayish blue? There are times when this pirate wishes his bird friend would find another home. Life, as he knows it may have its thrills, but there are bad times as well, not unlike the world of a writer.

Another meaning of the title concerns the career paths people take. In many cases they may study mathematics and wind up as social workers. That deviation may not be all that bad and the individual may even find a great deal of satisfaction in an alternate path. Parents may put pressure on their children to become doctors or lawyers. Other parents may even say that they don't care what a child does in life as long as she is happy. The best part may be that the father and mother actually mean it. Other offspring may not be as fortunate and as a result, the son revolts and says, "I don't want to be a pirate!" He doesn't say anymore since he's not sure about writing.

After finishing this endeavor, I thought of a slight variation in the title, with the change of a mere word. I'm sure that you can guess which one. I felt it was a great alternative, but after weighing all the possibilities, I decided not to alter what I had. You'll have to finish the book to really appreciate this other option and its significance. However, once you complete the journey, I'm sure you will agree that it would have been appropriate as well. My thought was to replace "Pirate" with "Bullfighter."

1. Don't you understand English?

It's tough to determine what really gets one going in an endeavor but I believe my writing adventure started way back before I was a teenager. I lived in the city of Buffalo, not far from St. Luke's Church, where our family worshipped. I also attended the school of the same name. Today those buildings now house the St. Luke's Mission of Mercy, located at 325 Walden Avenue in Buffalo and whose most important product is love. It is run by Amy Betros and Norm Paolini, and it provides compassion, food and shelter for the less fortunate.

My mom and dad rented a place at 375 Walden Avenue for the five of us – this included my two brothers, Tom and Ken. We lived upstairs and my parents tended a butcher shop on the first floor. My Mom was the main proprietor of the store as my Dad had a few other full time jobs. The business truly was a “Mom and Pop” store – they sold soda too! Dad was a workaholic and set an example for my brothers and sister relative to the work ethic. He also inspired me to write a book on work, which unfortunately he didn't live to see published.

That's probably enough of a background so let me continue. I had yet to reach my teenage years but I can recall some really exciting and happy moments at that address. Those came about when I went down the street to the library. Our family may not have been rich enough to travel to the ends of the earth but I made my own journeys through books. That small building provided me with the means to go to Europe, Africa or Asia without buying an airplane ticket. Yes, there was air transportation at that time even though the term “concord” referred to a type of grape and not a mode of high-class transportation. I can still recall the thrill of walking into a room with so many books and so little time.

Obviously I didn't read Shakespeare and Milton in those days. I really can't recall that many of the titles, but books piqued my interest in reading, which I think is a requisite if you plan to be a writer. I'll spend more time developing this thought later. However, I did check books out and read most if not all of them. Soon I'd returned for another batch.

At that time libraries didn't have CDs or DVDs or even videos. "Uncle Miltie" wasn't a relative of mine – one of my uncles reminded me of him, or maybe it was the other way around – but I did watch his program on a black and white screen. For those of you who are not older than dirt, "Uncle Miltie" refers to Milton Berle, the great comedian on the Texaco Star Theatre beginning in the late 1940s. Television was in its infancy and there were only two major networks. ABC had not yet arrived on the scene. Maybe I didn't view that much TV because there were no "reality" shows. Perhaps my limited television viewing had something to do with a preference for the written word. One good thing about that situation is that it ingrained in my brain the conviction that books were so much better than the addictive box in the living room. Today, the gap has gotten even wider and there is no sign that it will ever get close again!

We moved from that home to the house on Borden Road in Depew that my mom sold in the fall of 2004. My siblings and I, including my sister Pat, who was born after we moved, lived there through most of our childhoods and all of our teen years while my mom and dad spent half their lives there. Though I wasn't to see that library in Buffalo ever again, I found other ones. I continued reading and towards the end of my years at St. Mary's High School in Lancaster, I got involved with the school paper. This may have been the real beginning of my life as a writer.

Senior year I was the sports editor of the paper, *The Lance* and I became an ink-stained wretch. I wrote articles about the major sports: baseball, basketball and football. When you're the boss, you can write about the sports you like and pass off the other less desirable work to your subordinates. I had a system for getting information for the games as I created a log of the game I covered. In football, I reported each play in a notebook and, in effect had a play-by-play account of the game, which went something like this. Bob Gaiek, number 16 carried the ball for a 15-yard gain; I would write "16 – 15G." Marty Scherrer, number 18 completed a 20-yard pass to Tom Schmitt, number 14; I would record, "18 to 14 – 20G." Of course, to be able to accurately note each play, I roamed the sideline. This approach seemed to work quite well until one afternoon Coach Woj needed a person to work the chains and I was volunteered. The "chains" – still in use today, despite technology – consisted of a ten yard chain connected by two poles with a third pole, all of which determines where the ball is on the field and if enough yards were gained for a first down. You'll have to look up the rest. Suffice it to say this additional assignment resulted in quite a challenge as now I had multiple tasks.

Somehow I managed, and throughout the year, I wrote the articles for these sporting events. Writing about the games was thrilling but I'm sure it wasn't very exciting for people reading about the contests. As a writer in high school in 1960, even if I had a scandal to spice up the piece, I wouldn't have added that to the article. My writing could only be described as ho-hum. It just relayed what had happened on the playing field in factual detail and wasn't very colorful. I don't recall any humor being tossed in.

However, I do remember writing an article for Mrs. Jack Cavanaugh's English class that raised a few eyebrows.

It was a humorous spoof on “women drivers.” It was tongue-in-cheek and I apologize to all the females who were or may be offended by this. We all know that neither sex has a monopoly on atrocious behavior behind the wheel. But anyway, my teacher loved what I had composed and got a few laughs. She encouraged me in my writing and this may have been the spark that really got me going in the books that I have had published so far.

I had the pleasure of attending the 45th reunion of my high school class on Labor Day weekend in 2005. I was part of the committee for the event and some of my classmates brought in some memorabilia from our high school days. This included copies of the school paper, which had articles in it that I put together. I didn’t read them as I figured I had better things to do than read boring sports features.

On that Saturday before Labor Day, I saw one of my classmates for the first time in over thirty years. This individual also shares my sense of humor. On talking to this graduate, Mrs. Cavanaugh’s name came up again. I was told a story that reminded me of the comedian Gallagher, the king of the “Sledge-o-matic.” I had the opportunity to absorb his act at Melody Fair in North Tonawanda in the late 1990s. That town is a suburb of Buffalo to the north and Melody Fair still exists but the name has been changed.

When I walked into the “circle in the round,” I noticed that every seat was covered in plastic and there was an additional plastic bag on top of each chair. There’s a very good reason for this and you know what it is if you are familiar with this comedian. For those of you who have never heard of him, he is noted for smashing watermelons with a gigantic custom-made sledgehammer, thus the plastic on all the seats. The plastic bag on top of each chair is for the spectator to crawl into when melon meets mallet. As you can imagine, this encounter isn’t necessarily that spectacular, but

it can be refined. Gallagher showed that he had made minor changes in his methods to enhance the viewing pleasure of those in attendance.

All around the performance hall stage sat perhaps a half dozen butcher-block tables. Eventually, each held an aluminum pie plate, whose contents would be introduced separately to the sledgehammer. As Gallagher got through his act, he described mixing foods to achieve better projective action and more dynamic visual effects. Of course, this would mean more people would get slimed, and with a greater quantity of whatever wound up in the pie plate. He mixed Pepto Bismol with dog food and then asked if that didn't remind the audience of Spam. He wound up mixing quite a few of these concoctions, with Ragu being thrown in to the mix. Eventually, as the show ended, with just the right lighting, the smashing began. It was quite a show. Think of it as fireworks minus the gunpowder.

If you get a chance to see him perform, don't miss the show, but wear clothes that are ready to be tossed into the laundry or into the garbage. Gallagher is very graphic, although he's not rated X by any means; he is also a great cerebral artist. I recorded one of his appearances on the Tonight Show and he mentioned that when he was in school he got an "F" on one of his papers. It was his opinion. He got an "F" on his thoughts! It was his feeling about the school. He said, "Your home economics teachers are divorced, your physical education teachers are fat and your shop teachers haven't got all their fingers."

The reason I bring the Gallagher remark up is that my classmate of so long ago mentioned writing a paper for Mrs. Cavanaugh that she raved about, resulting in an "A." However, she said she couldn't return the paper but had to burn it. She didn't want anyone else to see it as she could lose her job. What my classmate had written was a hilarious

but scathing essay on the teachers in the school. I wonder if Gallagher somehow got a hold of the piece and used it in his act!

I did graduate from St. Mary's – in four years – and went on to college. In the years after high school, I didn't write for any school paper but was forced to come up with sociology, English, theology and philosophy papers from time to time. Fortunately I didn't have to do any theses in all my years in college and at the universities I attended – undergraduate and graduate. Of course, I read extensively for one course after another, although if I had my way, I would have read books other than those assigned me. But I had no choice in the matter.

Throughout my life, I have always read a great deal: magazines, newspapers as well as books. I have subscribed to *Time*, *Newsweek* and *News and World Report* as well as more interesting publications like *Gourmet*, *Prevention* and *Conservationist*. I'm ashamed to admit I even had a subscription to *TV Guide*. If you want to be informed about what's on the tube without actually turning on your television, read the *Guide*.

Magazines and papers may be fine for information, but they are very limited, especially the latter. There's much more knowledge in the books at the library. I mentioned my early adventures at that building but, even today, I spend a great deal of time going there to borrow books. Having moved so much in years past, I have had library cards in quite a few cities – probably most if not all. Of course, today not only can you get books, you can also find music and movies to borrow. You can also find back issues of magazines and newspapers. While living and teaching in Binghamton, New York in the early 70s, I even borrowed art from the library for my apartment. At that time, not only did I rent the rooms, I also rented – the wrong word, since I

didn't pay a cent, but you get the idea – what was on the wall! Today, I need not do that. However, my time in that part of the state had a great deal to do with my writing, even though I didn't realize it at the time.

You probably figured out that the title of this chapter refers to a rhetorical question made by many parents to their kids, “Don't you understand English?” Since I talked about my youth, that specifically was the connection. However, I need to add that there is an answer to that question, although as a child you probably shouldn't utter it. It comes from the sharp mind of George Carlin. His reply: “Not completely.”

2. Make some lemonade

You have to start somewhere or more specifically, if you're going to be a writer, there has to come a time when you create your first book. Events may seem disastrous and though you might not realize it, they will lead you to happenings that will make a difference later. Though it may have taken time before I came to this understanding, my days in the Triple Cities of the Southern Tier of New York played a huge part in my becoming an author.

In the fall of 1972, I was teaching mathematics full time at North High School in Binghamton. Fran, a good friend and fellow teacher at the school, convinced me to join the male chorus in which he sang. My girlfriend had just moved back to Maryland at the end of the previous school year and I felt I needed to do something else to occupy my mind so I wouldn't jump off one of the bridges – Binghamton has a few rivers and hence those things that traverse them. Well, it wasn't that bad, but I had to keep my sanity. Love does that to you sometimes! So I decided to write a book on computer math for high school students – romance novels were out of the question, then and even now. I had been teaching mathematics for over five years and had recently received a degree in computer science from the School of Advanced Technology at Binghamton University, so I figured I had the qualifications.

The book would use the computer language, APL, which stands for A Programming Language. It is a very scientific language, not unlike C+ or C++ today and it was one of the languages we learned at the University. I got started and between teaching, writing, singing once a week and visiting friends on the weekend, I didn't have much free time. You might say I had a relatively full schedule. I also was moderator of the chess club at school and during

football season, I helped out at the concession stand and learned a great deal about popcorn. It cost a nickel to make and you could sell it for a quarter. In fact, the chess club borrowed the machine, sold popcorn and bought some nice chess sets for the group with the profits.

I really got going on the book and enjoyed every minute of writing. Sometime in the spring of 1973, the book was done. A few friends of mine at the University gave me some names of publishers that might want to print the book, so I sent off some queries. I couldn't email them as my PC had crashed. The recipients asked for the manuscript so I sent out copies of what I had written. There was interest but eventually the book didn't get published. I left Binghamton in the fall of 1973 and headed to a new teaching assignment in Wappingers Falls, New York, with the manuscript.

Despite the fact that it wasn't published, a few things were accomplished by my efforts. I did teach a class in computer math at John Jay High School in Hopewell Junction shortly thereafter, using another text but supplementing my teaching with the my computer math book. I also seemed to be cured of my "love sickness." More important, I got the opportunity to conceive a book, design it and actually write it. I found confidence that I would later use when I decided to begin another book. Without this effort, I may never have attempted to undertake that a similar project. Of course, at the time, I had not come to the realization of the benefits of my endeavors.

The moral of the story – taught by the above experience – is never give up. The connection to the title of this chapter should be quite obvious. My lemonade may not have sold, but it didn't go to waste and I got the benefit of the vitamin C. If you don't know how to make lemonade, find someone who can. It's really a shame to let all those lemons spoil.

Since the book didn't get published, I put it in a box in the closet. As you might guess, that box got moved from town to town, as I seemed to be a vagabond. Actually, that may be an incorrect term as I really wasn't "homeless" although "wandering" definitely applied. There is a bumper sticker that says, "Not all who wander are lost," and that applied to me. Since I moved out of my parents' home in 1968 until the end of 1988, I had lived in eighteen different places. I'm happy to report that since late 1988, I have only had four addresses, so I seem to be settling down.

I mentioned starting out as a high school math teacher, which I did for eight years in five schools in four school systems. While in Binghamton I taught at Central High School as well as North High, which no longer exists. The two schools were merged into one, some years ago. While teaching at John Jay High, my girlfriend at the time suggested we head over to Nestle Foods and apply for jobs since they were hiring computer programmers.

I drove her in my orange 1975 Subaru, a car I really liked and I'm sure she did too. Its predecessor was a 1971 Audi Super 90, which I'm sure she was happy never to see again. Originally the Super 90 was a four speed but at its demise, it was reduced to two gears, second and fourth. Reverse was no longer an option. The car was fine if you only wanted to go forward – something I advocate – but it was quite a challenge for parking; I had to make sure that I could always pull ahead or find someone willing to push the beast. My girlfriend wasn't too thrilled when we went to New York City for dinner and a play and reverse gear was missing. She was inside at the wheel, complaining; I did the pushing.

I did have the necessary parts ordered to bring it back to normal, whatever that was relative to an Audi. I mention that because whenever I started the vehicle, the back end

produced a puff of white smoke and no pope was being elected. Later I was informed that this was not unusual! Maybe, what I went through was routine for that car. Well, I was tired of waiting for the parts so I bought the Subaru.

Anyway, we got to Nestle's and applied for work. Shortly thereafter I was called in for an interview and hired, but she wasn't. I guess that was the beginning of the end of that relationship. Some people just can't take a joke. It probably was for the better.

I worked at the Nestle Company as a programmer analyst and eventually system analyst for almost four years. I met a guy who convinced me I should become a consultant and Sal introduced me to two brothers who ran a consulting firm. They grilled me and interviewed me on numerous occasions to see if I could fit in as a consultant. I journeyed to downtown Manhattan for an interview at Bankers' Trust Bank, across from the World Trade Center and easily got the contract. Thus began my journey as a software consultant, which lasted for over 22 years. There's an entire chapter on my consulting adventures in a book I completed in the summer of 2001, *Tick Tock, Don't Stop: A Manual for Workaholics*. There's also a chapter on management entitled, *BOSS spelled backwards is double S O B*.

It was during the time that I was a consultant in the early 1980s that I read *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* by Bruce Feirstein and Lee Lorentz. By the way, I don't like quiche. The book is very short, about 85 pages but it's somewhat amusing. It may even have made the best-seller list. After I got through it, I decided I could write a similar book. Don't forget, by this time I had already written one book, even if it was sitting in a box, unpublished. I actually felt I could write a book that was better than the one I had just read. Boy, was I naïve!

Before I tell about that idea, I need to relate my recent Amazon search for *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*. I found the book on Amazon and could have bought a used copy for one cent or a bit more. The shipping fee will be four hundred times that, although I would recommend getting the book from the library if you really want to read it. On Amazon, I saw a review of the book that used the words, "Real Men Don't Buy this Book." I guess the reader didn't care for it. Perhaps I was right when I decided that I could produce something better than the Feirstein and Lorentz effort. However, that wouldn't be for some years.

But getting back to my reading *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*, I thought about writing a book about the English language with all its expressions, sayings and clichés. It would be an attempt at humor, just like the book I had read, dealing with phrases and words through the eyes of someone who initially had no knowledge of English. However, this person would sign up for courses in the language and would eventually graduate, learning the rules as well as the exceptions in the language.

By this time, my younger brother had studied Russian while my older brother got involved with Japanese, so much so that he spent two full years in Japan learning that tongue. Personally, I had only studied Latin, German and French, none of which I found difficult. I felt Russian and Japanese were tough but I find it hard to believe that English isn't the most difficult language.

Returning to our foreigner who is ready to make it in a strange land by speaking her new adopted language, she is soon confused when she starts her job in corporate America. The employees seem to be talking in English but she has no idea what they are talking about, especially the preponderance of groups of letters that are peppered throughout the conversation. We know these as acronyms,

such as PC (Prone to Crashes) and FEMA (Forsaking Every Means of Assistance.) Her friend, who went through the same English program, is in the same boat. (No, they came here by plane and didn't have to row to make it ashore!) As he starts work in a computer job, he is baffled by what the staff is talking about. It appears that corporate America and the computer business have their very own language as well.

A similar feeling occurs when these novices to the mother tongue get involved with sports or the music industry. The words may be familiar by themselves, but combined with others, the result makes no sense to this couple whatever. When they turn on the television and listen to a politician speak, the confusion only increases as what is being offered sounds somewhat like words except they can't be found in Webster's dictionary. Some people like to create their own words. These are the very reasons why I believe English is the hardest language to learn.

Fortunately, with this difficulty and confusion comes a blessing as I can take advantage of the situation and write a book about expressions, sayings and clichés from the point of view of someone who has only a cursory knowledge of English. Comedians have taken advantage of just this scenario over the years and I was to try my hand as well. The book was to be entitled, ***You've Got My Word!***

I got started and it didn't take too long to finish. The book was rather short but I felt long enough. Nonetheless, it was missing something. I thought it could be funnier if I had some of the anecdotes and ideas illustrated. As luck would have it, a friend of mine was casually dating this woman who was a graphic artist and she kind of agreed to do what I needed in the book. However, at the end of a Sunday in April 1983, she became lukewarm to the idea and a few months later became lukewarm to my friend. Thus ***You've Got My Word*** wasn't done. I put it in the box in the closet on top of

my other manuscript. However, somehow it would be resurrected in the future.

3. Read my lips and other body parts

I moved back to Westchester County in the middle of 1988 and bought a condominium in South Salem and found a new home, although not in that same order. Actually, I rented first before making the purchase. My place was on a lake with gaggles of Canada geese – yeah, there were lots of them, although I didn't mind. My residence was close to the Connecticut border, between New Canaan and Ridgefield.

I know I'm jumping ahead, but these fine creatures bring to mind an incident that occurred in the spring or summer of 2005. My present home is very close to the Ellicott Creek Trailway, a paved path that covers over ten miles and is used by skateboarders, those on roller blades, joggers, bikers and others. I'm one of the others, as I walk about four miles each day, provided the trail is not covered with ice or snow and it's not raining. No one wants to fall on his buckles and why get wet if you can avoid it?

On the day in question, I noticed some maintenance guys with chain saws attacking a huge, beautiful willow tree very close to the path. I asked what they were doing and one of the men mentioned that they were just trimming a few branches. On my return trip or perhaps it was the next day, I noticed that the willow had been transformed into a stump about two feet high. Today, there is no sign that this tree ever existed.

The next day I noticed some other maintenance people busily cleaning up a mess along the trail. Canada geese don't have bank accounts – well perhaps in Canada – but they can still make deposits (I'm not sure about withdrawals or mortgages,) and that's just what they did. I mean, this stuff covered a good portion of the trail that I traversed. At first, I joked to myself that this was revenge against those maintenance maulers for what they had done

the day before to that defenseless willow. However, this was no gag and really seemed to be payback. The geese weren't happy about what had taken place. I base my conclusion on the fact that in my being on the trail for over two years before and after this debacle, I had never seen a doo-doo dropping development like this.

Getting back to my stay in South Salem, it was not long after I got settled in that I started to develop gastrointestinal problems. I got the name of a highly recommended physician from a friend of mine living in the area and proceeded to have a few tests done. After a few weeks of trips to medical buildings for tests, including a lower GI Joe Series, no conclusion was made and I went about my daily existence, accepting whatever may have developed in this matter. However, as I will get into later, this was only the beginning of more trouble down the road.

I was still doing software consulting and thought about buying a word processor and soon purchased one. I really liked it and someone else felt the same way because in a few years after I moved to East Aurora, a suburb of the city of Buffalo in Western New York, these same admirers broke into my house and stole it along with some other almost worthless electronic equipment. It was a good excuse to buy some new stuff. I will get back to this theft a bit later.

The reason I bought this successor to the typewriter, besides the obvious comparison of the two, was because I figured I would write another book. This was to be a cookbook, featuring recipes that tasted good, were economical, healthy and uncomplicated. These are qualities that most people look for in a cookbook, but I realized that those reasons alone wouldn't entice people to purchase it. The book was to be somewhat biographical, with eight chapters, one for each of the many places in which I lived. Each chapter would cover seven days of main meals and thus

the book would feature fifty-six meals as well as ideas for party menus towards the end of the work. The cookbook would parallel the journey I followed after I left my parents' home but it would also be a narrative of how I progressed with my skills in the kitchen, improving with each day.

Because I was to relate culinary events that I happened to be a part of, there would be a few humorous instances thrown into the book. However, it would instruct at the same time and was intended for beginners, experienced cooks and those who never intended to get anywhere near a kitchen. I would close each chapter with an anecdote or joke about food, so there would be no shortage of laughs. As I found out years later on publication, the number of laughs was beyond my wildest dreams.

I finished the book and then decided it was no benefit to place on top of the other two unpublished books in the closet, which had become a bit more permanent by this time as I stayed at this address for longer than at any other. I checked *Writers' Digest* and got the name of a few companies that published cookbooks and sent out a few query letters, probably a dozen or two. It wasn't long before I got back some replies. Actually, it would be more precise to say rejections. One of the people took what I had sent and wrote two words on it, which I couldn't quite decipher at first. After a while I determined that it said, "Not interested." Now you might think that that was bad and the person quite lazy but it was much better than the publishers who didn't even respond!

Since that wasn't working, I needed a different approach. I went back to *Writers' Digest* and thought that maybe I needed to find someone to represent me. Agents know who is publishing what and when and they have some connections in the industry, something I certainly didn't have. I found a few and decided to write Barbara Bauer in

New Jersey with a query as well as a sample of my writing. She agreed to do it, if I paid her. Nothing comes for free, so I sent a check along with the manuscript for the cookbook, with the title I mentioned earlier.

You probably have a good idea of the origin of that title, if you follow politics at all. The first President Bush, George Herbert Walker made a statement, “Read my lips...no new taxes.” Of course, he could always raise the old ones for generating revenue. He chose to raise taxes, broke his promise and eventually lost in his reelection bid in 1992. Thus, the first book I had published had some politics connected to it.

That was part of it but also remember that at this time, the country was in a recession. That meant money was a bit harder to come by and people couldn’t go out to dinner as often as they desired. They were forced to stay home and cook for themselves. The solution was my cookbook, which could result in delicious meals as well as a few laughs. Who needs dinner at a fancy café or bistro?

An idea came to me three years after the book was published. I justified the original title with some really fuzzy logic. There’s another meaning to it. Before I proceed, I should relate that the full title is ***The Read My Lips Cookbook: A Culinary Journey of Memorable Meals***. I have already alluded to the significance of the subtitle when I related the journey from my parents’ home as well as my trip becoming proficient in the kitchen. Thomas Fortenberry of Midwest Book Review loved the book but he felt that the subtitle better represented the theme of the book. He didn’t think the main title appropriate, and I can’t really blame him, as I didn’t see it myself until recently. It’s the fact that the “lips” reference deals with a part of the body which first experiences the delicacies of the kitchen. It is part of the mouth, without which we really couldn’t enjoy chocolate

mousse or a prime rib. Think of the expression “lip smacking good.” But also consider the smile on someone’s lips, as in a good laugh, and you can make the real connection to the title. I should probably use this concept in my marketing endeavors.

When I sent off the manuscript to Barbara Bauer, I could barely spell “marketer” and it was the farthest thing from my mind. At least I was on my way. However, I couldn’t wait around and had to begin another book so I decided to write a novel about the national lottery. I would use my experience with computers and statistics to create a tale of intrigue and deception with some politics, fear and food thrown in. Naturally my hero would be a software consultant from Buffalo, John Kuzinski, who would get all caught up in events.

I promised more details about the break-in at my home in the early 1990s. I had gone on a long weekend trip to visit friends of mine and when I returned on a holiday Monday in November, the day was quite gloomy. It was mid afternoon but the sun was missing and the sky was a blackish gray in East Aurora. I used my garage door opener to bring my car inside and when I opened the door leading into the kitchen, I noticed that I had left a light on in the house, something I rarely do. Before long I got to the realization that it was not a single light, as there were others.

On entering my kitchen and dining room, I felt a cold draft and saw that the sliding glass door in the latter room was slightly open, accounting for the chill. Moving over to the living room, I noticed an absence of a few pieces of electronic equipment. It was then that I realized that someone had broken into my home. An awful, horrible sensation overwhelmed me, and I injected this feeling into my novel.

That's all I can tell you about the break-in and the book. If I say too much, you won't buy it. But anyway, I finished it and called it, *Don't Bet On It*, a title with a double meaning. The first is the obvious warning about not buying those lottery tickets and the more subtle significance has to do with things not being what they appear to be, a concept called deception that is found throughout the novel. I used the food angle to tie into my cookbook, as at the end of the novel I mention that the recipes for much of the food described in the novel can be found in my cookbook. You can't do enough marketing.

Once this work of fiction was done, I figured it was much too short so I drove to the library and picked up a few books on lotteries. This gave me some new insights about the games, which I laced throughout the book, making it more informative. Thus anyone who reads it should find quite a few interesting facts about LOTTO. Much of what I added was new to me as well. Once this was done, I sent off this manuscript to my agent.

If you are wondering why I didn't ship out my first two manuscripts, it's only because they weren't quite ready for consideration for publication. The computer math text was too scientific while *You've Got My Word* still needed to be illustrated. Nonetheless, I may have rested, but it was not for long, as I soon began another book. Since I had been in the business world for about twenty years, I figured it was time to write about it. I wasn't very happy with my dealings with corporate America, so I don't have to tell you that this new book wouldn't sing its praises.

I have always found that the word, "business" seems to have bad connotations. Just consider the expressions, "None of your business," "Mind your own business," and "Business as usual," for starters. I decided on the title, *Give Him The Business*, and I related my fun times at the post

office, banks and just dealing with buying something as well as my work experience. I enjoyed my years as a teacher but I also had a few interesting stories to tell, mostly about the administration. I had plenty of examples from consulting, so I wouldn't be short of material. It's always fun to poke fun at management. Eventually I wrote another book called *They Gave Us the Business* and it's on my PC somewhere.

I finished that more personal business book and sent it off to Barbara in New Jersey and followed that up with a collection of essays on a variety of topics. Some of these were controversial, such as divorce and drugs. Since I am neither a drug user nor have I ever been married – so I could never have been divorced – you might feel that I'm have no qualifications to talk about either of these topics. However, I have seen many examples of what harm both drugs and the separation of people who were once married can do to others. It's not a way for anyone to live.

I gave this latest book the title, *Think Again, Dude*, as in, God gave you a brain, so use it. This would be a theme of a few other books that I would create in the future, especially books on missing intelligence, the first of which was published in June of 2005. Once the *Dude* book was complete, I sent it off to my agent and she now had four of my manuscripts. You might think that I was quite prolific while still having a full time job as a software consultant but these four books were written over the course of about six years. I don't write epics, as most of my books are under 200 pages, which is the length of the cookbook. Reading shorter books means you can read more of them! The book published in 2005 has fewer than 120 pages, but it has a lot of laughs.

We are now in the last few years at the end of the decade, century and millennium and I had yet to meet my agent. We had conversed on the phone on a few occasions

and I had renewed my contract with her yearly. Every so often I would get postcards from her stating that I had a “bite.” This had nothing to do with me being in the Everglades and having been attacked by mosquitoes or a croc. It only indicated that a publisher expressed interest in one of my books. The manuscripts in consideration were the cookbook and the book on business. There was hope on the horizon.

In October 1996, I signed a contract in Rochester at Blue Cross and Blue Shield to work on the Year 2000 project. They had a few systems and wanted to get a good jump on the work so there wouldn't be any problem when the year 2000 reared its ugly head. About a year and a half later I left them to do another Y2K thing for the County of Monroe, in downtown Rochester. My work on those projects triggered my next book called, **2000 Headaches**, and I don't have to tell you what it was all about. It didn't have to be a long book and I sent that off to Barbara Bauer as soon as I could. This book only would be good for a short while, unless I brought it back for Y3K!

As you can surmise, I'm fascinated by book titles. I mentioned **for seeing eye dogs only** earlier. It actually used the third idea I had for a title, but I will talk about that later. You've heard the expression, “You can't tell a book by its cover.” I certainly agree, but I do believe you can sell a book by its cover, and I might add by its title. Some of the books that I read, but may never have even considered had they had different titles, include: **Five Finger Discount** by Helene Stepinski, **Muddy Socks and Red Boots** by Malcolm Browne, **Naked in Baghdad** by Anne Garrels, **Lies My Teacher Told Me** by James W. Loewen, **If the Gods Meant Us to Vote They Would Have Given Us Candidates** by Jim Hightower, **Molly Ivins Can Say That, Can She?** by Molly

Ivins, Jeffrey Marx's *Season of Life* and *Vows: The Story of a Priest, a Nun, and Their Son* by Peter Manseau.

That brings me to the title of this chapter. By now you've figured out that the "body parts" refers to the head, brain, tongue and the mouth. I hate anything to do with plumbing, whether in my home, but especially in my body, but I'll have to add that other internal organs come to mind. They too could be implied in the title. In my case, this period would be a time when events relating to those parts of my body occurred which I wish I didn't have to relate.

4. Everything causes cancer

You may have heard of Joe Jackson and I'm not referring to the baseball player of the early twentieth century. This Joe is a musician who came into his own in the 1980s. One of his songs has the title that you see above. Most of us don't have much concern for certain types of illness since they probably won't hit us. I felt that way about cancer until Labor Day weekend of 1998.

I earlier referred to some intestinal discomfort I had at the end of the 1980s while living in South Salem. Well, I had a recurrence in early 1998 so once again I had a few more tests done. As before, the doctors couldn't find anything so I went on, putting up with my discomfort. Some days were fine and others weren't that great but I carried on. At one time I figured I had an allergy to some type of food but it seemed that everything I ate bothered me. In the days leading up to early September of 1998, the situation would get much worse.

I have never had any problem at the dinner table. You may have heard of the expression, "Don't be afraid to eat." Well, that never applied to me, ever, at least until the summer of that year. My friend Sal, the one who recommended I become a consultant, was visiting in Buffalo and we spent the Saturday morning before Labor Day at a winery in Westfield, south of the city. We then headed over to the White Inn for lunch. I ordered a roast beef sandwich but a funny thing happened: I took one or two bites and I was suddenly full. This was repeated hours later when we went to the Pearl Street Grill in Buffalo for dinner.

I survived the weekend but on Tuesday morning I wasn't feeling too good. I called in sick to work at Monroe County in Rochester and did so for the remainder of the week. I ate and drank a bit but couldn't empty my system of

solid waste. I called my doctor, we tried a few things but not much helped and he said if things didn't get better in a few days, I should check into the emergency room at Sisters' Hospital. On Saturday, I called my sister Pat and she drove me to the hospital. I hate getting graphic so let me just say that x-rays taken that night found a blockage in my colon and surgery was performed to take care of the problem, specifically a colostomy. If you're not sure what that surgery involves, you probably need to watch more hospital shows. You could also do a google search on the Internet to satisfy your curiosity.

After the surgeon was through with me, I awoke on Sunday morning and wasn't too happy, feeling like I had gotten run over by a truck. I urge you to avoid that possibility at all costs, if you can, even if it's a small vehicle. Cancer was found but Dr. Naim Dawli, the surgeon who I had not known before that day but now know quite well, mentioned that he thought he had removed all the destructive cells and I probably would need neither chemotherapy nor radiation treatments. The days and weeks that followed were difficult but I was quite lucky and blessed.

This reminds me of a song by the poet, songwriter and singer, Arlo Guthrie. In the 1970s, I had a record album of various performers, one of which was Arlo doing a song called, *The Pause of Mr. Claus*. I've been trying to locate the song without much success. The piece deals with the CIA, Santa Claus, being down on your luck and rebellion, as in the 60s. Just think about Mr. Guthrie's famous song and movie, *Alice's Restaurant*. Anyway, in the song, Arlo mentions that we may feel down and out but just consider the very last guy. There's no one who has it worse than him. I may have had a tough time but I was very fortunate.

At the end of November of 1998, I had a reverse colostomy and after a recovery of a few weeks, in the middle

of January of 1999, I reported back to work in Rochester to continue on the Y2K project that I had started months before. I was glad they kept the desk that I had occupied open for me.

This contract paid well for a task that should never have ever come up. I elaborate on that feeling in a book on work that I would write later. We had our desks in the basement, which was really quite dusty, although it was a great deal worse before major cleanup was done. When I arrived, the environment was still a good reason to leave your best clothes home. I remember wearing a sweater, which at one time was white. That was the hue it had when I first wore it there but soon it matched my gray suit – which I refused to wear to work. The sweater had really gotten filthy. I did take it to the cleaners and they did a magnificent job in restoring it. However, I never wore it on the contract again.

I had to wear this extra piece of clothing because the place was frigid. It was in the basement so maybe those in charge figured there was no reason to touch the thermostat. Some of the other people on the project discussed the matter with me. I came up with the suggestion that perhaps there was an agreement between management at Monroe County and our consulting firm. The plan was to keep the place so cold that they could freeze us and then bring us back for the Y3K project.

When I resumed the contract in January 1999, the first few days were a challenge but not unbearable. I managed to stay overnight in town rather than driving back to Buffalo, which helped a good deal. With each passing day, I recovered more and more and by the spring I was a great deal better. Around this time, I headed out to meet Barbara Bauer, my agent, for the first time. We couldn't meet at her place in New Jersey so instead got together at the Newark

Airport. Either her office was too small or too cluttered or both. I never did find out the real reason.

Barbara was pleased with what I had written and wanted me to keep up what I was doing. She insisted that I spend fifteen minutes every day writing, no excuses and no exceptions. That wasn't much but it was the key to eventual success. She set a goal of ten books for me over the course of ten years. By this time she had five of my manuscripts, not counting the two books in storage, so I wasn't far off. Before I departed, she gave me a novel or two by some of her writers but they appeared to be trash, romance books so I never opened them. Don't tell her!

I recently finished reading *Finding Fish* by Antwone Quenton Fisher, the memoir of a man who spent his youth in foster homes but overcame tremendous odds. His inspiring story was made into the movie, *Antwone Fisher*, which you may have seen. Everyone should read this book. In it, the author mentions that we all should experience being homeless and going without. It changes your perspective and gives a greater appreciation for what you have.

At the time of my surgery in September 1998, I went through a long stretch of time without taking in food. Anyone who does the preparation for a colonoscopy on the day before realizes that he might get a bit hungry as well as saddle sore. If you don't get that one, do another google search on the web. By the way, that process is painless, a pain in the you-know-what for more ways than one, but a good idea, which I really recommend. Today, going a few hours without food or even a day is no big deal for me. My cancer certainly did give me a new lease and outlook on life.

In the days that followed my hospitalization and recovery, I got involved with environmental issues that I wouldn't have been so concerned about had I not been stricken with that awful disease. I joined the Cheektowaga

Citizens Coalition (CCC), which you can read about in my book on the environment, a finalist on the Indie Excellence 2007 book awards. I hope to have it published in 2008 and I will say a few more words about the CCC later.

5. Computers...you can't live with them

The title above is a variation on the words of Ted Bundy, the husband on the TV show *Married with Children*, not the serial killer. This program didn't discriminate and delighted in deriding and demeaning all people, something like *The Family Guy*. Shots were taken at each of the family members or anyone else who happened to be nearby. It's not my favorite kind of humor as it makes fun of people, as is the case with blonde or ethnic jokes. Rather than tell those kind, change it to lawyer or politician jokes and then I can accept it. I was going to suggest "criminal lawyer" or "dumb politician" stories but those are pleonasms.

Nevertheless, despite the shallowness, the program did have a few good laughs. On one occasion, Ted said, "Women...you can't live with them." That's all he said. As you can tell, I changed one of his words. Knowing my background, you can probably see the significance of the title. By the end of the chapter, it will become even more relevant.

As the decade of the 1990s was winding down, I discovered that my niece Elizabeth had artistic talents. She was in high school and I asked her if she would like to do the illustrations for *You've Got My Word*. She figured why not and got started. She was about halfway done but wasn't really pleased with her work. She didn't think the illustrations were that good. Nonetheless, I looked at her artwork and told her it was perfect, exactly what I wanted. Now I only had to convince her to finish them.

She was going to school and soon got a part-time job that on too many weeks seem to be full-time. With school, work and partying, it's difficult to finish drawings, even if it they are for your favorite uncle. Once she enrolled at the University at Buffalo to study art, I knew that the book

would go back into storage, even though it was a lot closer to getting finished. Sometimes it's not worth coming out of the closet!

Around this time I had another idea for a book. It would be about the dumb things that people say and do. I started to collect material in a vanilla folder, as opposed to chocolate or lemon since I just love vanilla. All right, it really was a manila folder from the Far East. I had a few things already and kept adding stuff every day. As I read different things, I discovered potential laughs based on stupidity and I put it into the binder. I decided to call this effort, *(What) Was I Thinking?* I thought this was a great title as it really could be two titles, depending on whether you left out the first word. By the way, the answer to the question is *no*, if you happened to make it into the book. That's for the three-word title.

As you can surmise, this new effort would be a long process and I would add to it from time to time. Thus I decided my main thrust would be a book all about "work." My father was a workaholic, which can be good as well as bad. I tend to think that moderation is the key and I really believe that work can kill you, despite the common phrase to the contrary. This book would cover the origin of work, or at least where I thought it started. By the time the book was done, it dealt with the minimum wage, unnecessary work – a pet peeve of mine – the union that Lincoln was trying to save and labor unions. I even threw in a chapter on all the jobs I had through the years. I didn't realize that I had done so many different things to list until I put them down in writing. This included jobs that I never got paid for such as my own web design and work around the house.

There was a discussion about dangerous jobs as well as high paying jobs and how management might come up with a rate to pay people. I covered immoral work, home

work, that which involved labor in and outside the home as well as those assignments given to students by their teachers. There was a chapter on consulting, one on management – the longest in the book – and reasons why we hate work. I think you know why but if you don't, you'll have to read the book. Slavery, created jobs and an alternative to hard work is discussed, namely working smart. I threw in a great deal of my experience and concluded with suggestions for people to make their lives better since we really can't avoid work. I like to think that if you read the book, you won't be able to retire today, but you should be able to retire sooner. You won't be a millionaire, but you should have a richer life.

In August 2001, I finished it and sent it to Barbara Bauer. By this time, I had created a comedy folder on my PC. People had been sending me all kinds of stuff; some of it was even quite funny. Those hilarious anecdotes I moved to this file. I noticed that some of these were good examples of people doing dumb things. There was a collection of criminal behavior that would make Willie Sutton turn over in his grave. He would have asked, "Doesn't anyone have respect for what they do anymore?" Someone sent me some really funny announcements for the church bulletins, proof that the creator of the document didn't do any proofing, instead hitting the bottle of 100% proof. Apparently, they never heard of *spellchecker*, although it may not have helped that much.

I had read Thomas Friedman's *From Beirut to Jerusalem, Crimes And Misdumbmeanors* by Daniel Butler, Alan Rey with Larry Rose as well as Leland H. Gregory III's *Great Government Goofs*. Each of these books gave me some material that I would either put in the manila folder or into the comedy one on my PC. There were examples in each of people acting without thinking. However, what they did or said was worth a chuckle.

(What) Was I Thinking? was taking shape but was really only secondary, since it was a long-term project. I had an idea about reviving my book on computer math. During one summer Sunday afternoon, I dug out that first manuscript and thought about how I could bring it up to date. I looked it over, spent some time analyzing what to do but then decided not to proceed. However, the next day I changed my mind and figured that I would create my own computer language, using my experience from different contracts and features of languages I'd studied. I could take the best concepts from a few languages in an effort to teach others a few basics of computer programming.

Once I got cranking, it was more fun than when I first wrote the book – I wonder why. This revision would also be a lot funnier and a much better tool for teaching others. I will get into a discussion about the role of humor as related to teaching a bit later. Many of the concepts of the original work were still around, including the final chapter, which discussed a practical application for a computer system. Of course it was brought up to date, as was necessary. I included about five or six computer programs and the whole intent was to give enough information to guide people who had some interest in a career in software. It might also give people who can't program their VCR – that's most of us – some insight into computers.

The only problem was that since the language was theoretical, I really couldn't test the programs. Thus it would take a great deal of checking before publication. Every book needs at least one editor but this would also require a technical editor who knew a bit about programming. I did finish the book but as you can guess, it's not quite ready for publication. It still needs some checking and editing. At the same time, I heard about a book that was published that

would have a huge influence on me before long. But I will get to that in the next chapter.

For now, let me get to the trip I made to New York. It was a month after the terrorists flew into the World Trade Center when I agreed to meet my agent for the second time. We couldn't meet at her office, as it was still either too small or cluttered, I guess, and there were security problems so meeting at Newark airport was out of the question. She said we could meet in Manhattan if I liked, so I agreed. I saw her at one of my favorite places, the library. This was the Mercantile library on 47th Street, if I recall the location correctly. I had been in New York on numerous occasions, but this one was entirely different because of what had occurred on September 11, 2001.

My agent and I spent about an hour together and then headed over to Starbucks for coffee. Barbara mentioned that I should continue my writing and offered encouragement. Through both meetings with her, I felt like I was an English student back in college. However, I was part of a self-study program so I could work at my own pace. Best of all, there were no tests, theses or final exams, which I will get into later.

I conclude this chapter with an anecdote about mathematical terrorism. You probably never knew such a thing existed. When I initially wrote this manuscript, I had another bit here but since it can be found in ***This Page Intentionally Left Blank – Just like the Paychecks of the Workers***, which was published in October 2007, I won't include it here.

At New York's Kennedy airport today, an individual later discovered to be a public school teacher was arrested trying to board a flight while in possession of a ruler, a protractor, a T-square, and a slide rule.

At a morning press conference, Attorney general John Ashcroft said he believes the man is a member of the notorious al-gebra movement. He is being charged by the FBI with carrying weapons of math instruction.

“Al-gebra is a fearsome cult,” Ashcroft said. “They desire average solutions by means and extremes, and sometimes go off on tangents in a search of absolute values. They use code names like ‘x’ and ‘y’ and refer to ‘unknowns’, but we have determined they belong to a common denominator of the axis of medieval with coordinates in every country.”

When asked to comment on the arrest, President Bush said, “If God had wanted us to have better weapons of math instruction, He would have given us more fingers and toes. As the Greek philanderer Isosceles used to say, there are 3 sides to every triangle,” he added. “Read my ellipse.”

President Bush warned resolutely. “Sure as God gave us oil rigs, we’ll tighten the hypotenuse around their necks,” he added, reading from a note hastily handed to him.

6. How can I be overdrawn?

Since I am a prolific reader, I need to have a collection of book titles that I may someday wish to read. I get ideas from a limited amount of television viewing of shows like *The News Hour* with Jim Lehrer, C-Span2, which features writers hawking their work and *NOW* on PBS with David Brancaccio. Watching a flick sometimes inspires me to read the corresponding novel or work of non-fiction that was the impetus for the movie. Reading one book gives me suggestions for others.

Naturally, I have such a list of titles and it keeps growing, like a beer guzzler's belly. I have had this for some time now – the list not the gut – and one of the books on this list in the new millennium was a book on writing by Dan Poynter called, *The Self-Publishing Manual*.

Sometimes a book stays on my list for months without me reading it. This was the case with the Poynter creation. However, since Barbara Bauer had my books – six of them to be precise, even though one was out of date and useless, and the others weren't getting into print – I decided I needed to do something different. I went to the library branch downtown and checked the card catalogue, as it would be a short time before the library was completely computerized, and found that the Poynter book was listed there. I was even more pleased to find the book on the open shelf. Within minutes the book was withdrawn, not overdrawn, I took it home, read it and reread it – at least some parts of the book. I will spell out the significance of this chapter title in chapter 20.

Before long I discovered that Dan Poynter was the guru of self-publishing. I also learned he had a web site, so I proceeded to it and learned that he lived in California but gave presentations all across the nation. I found just such a

conference in the spring of 2002 in Kentucky, which I could have gotten to by car. But then I noticed that he would be in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania the second weekend in April for a writers' conference from Friday to Sunday. That was a great deal closer, as it was only a six-hour drive from Buffalo. As Valley Forge was the symbol of freedom for our country, it would also turn out to be the same for me relating to my agent, although I didn't realize it at the time.

The conference was sponsored by Infinity Publishing of Pennsylvania, a company that will publish your book if you pay them. They publish books through a process called POD or Print on Demand, which I will get into later. Anyway, I signed up for that weekend and drove east on the Thursday before the event, staying in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, since I didn't feel like rising at 1 a.m. to begin my drive the next day. If I did that, I would have checked into the hotel, went to my room, slept and missed the first day of the conference.

When I got to The Sheraton Hotel on Friday morning and checked in, the clerk asked me for the method of payment and I was a bit taken aback since I thought I had already paid for the weekend. I didn't feel too good at this point and asked myself what I was doing there. At that moment I felt that I wasn't a writer, even though I had written eight books, even if some had not come out of the closet.

I told the person behind the counter that I would return. I left to find someone from Infinity Publishing. After talking with one of their representatives, I was assured that my accommodations were in order there with no further need to drag out my Discover Card. If I had thought about it, maybe I should have originally given the clerk behind the counter my Nothing Card. This was a card that closely resembled the American Express Card. It was good for – you

guessed it – nothing. It had President Millard Fillmore’s picture on it. As you may recall, he was a member of the Know Nothing Party. I understand that the Republicans and Democrats may be uniting and will use that same name. As far as that Nothing Card, it was worthless but a great conversation piece, given to me as a birthday gift sometime in the 1970s. I used it a few times and it almost worked at a few restaurants.

Getting back to the writers’ conference, I soon convinced myself that I wasn’t about to get into my Saturn and head home. Eventually I met some of the people from Infinity Publishing as well as a few authors, very much like myself, as well as two editors. Everything was to be fine from then on.

Once the conference got going, I heard a few speakers and I felt at home. The final speaker on that Friday afternoon had a tough time concluding his spiel and apparently there wasn’t any hook or gong at the Sheraton. However, we did get to dinner that evening. I have to admit that the food was outstanding.

On Saturday morning, Dan Poynter gave his presentation. It went on for about three and a half hours and I found it completely boring. That’s because I had read his book and obviously absorbed what he said too well because his talk covered everything therein. The afternoon sessions weren’t much better as one presenter seemed to be from another galaxy. I’m not sure what her agenda was. It had to do with writing at some other level, which I doubt that anyone really wanted to hear. Another woman had it in her mind to really move and touch us all, but I know some of the participants avoided this session on purpose. Unfortunately, I didn’t. Happily, we weren’t going to be denied dinner and once again we weren’t disappointed.

Thus, it seemed like Saturday was almost a complete waste of time, except for the food. Sunday was another day that I could have skipped but there was a breakfast buffet to consider. Don't tell anyone from Infinity Press about my feelings. Since my cookbook was the first book I wrote that was close to being ready to go, after some discussion, Ed from Infinity and I agreed that it would be published first. Besides the food, I did get to meet quite a few people who helped me after that weekend, including some writers who could be characters in a novel if I ever chose to write another one.

I left the conference at noon and spent the journey home coming up with ideas for marketing. I felt I should create a web site with free recipes. Once the people tried and liked them, they could buy my cookbook, which I would be selling through my site. Ideas about fundraising by selling the cookbooks also crossed my mind.

I had no web design experience despite my computer degree and background but I had signed up for a two-day course at the University at Buffalo. Unfortunately, my head was spinning from the conference – I felt like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist* – but my course was to take place the following day as well as two days later. I really wished it didn't have to occur so soon. A week later would have been a much better time.

Once back home, my first priority was getting the cookbook ready for an editor. I took down phone numbers and email addresses at the conference so I contacted someone who could edit my book. Before I sent it off, I needed to format it. I also had to worry about the class in web design. I went to the class and two nights later, I was completely snowed by the presentation. It was in Buffalo, but the white stuff was gone by then, except in the classroom.

Sometime later, I talked to another writer from the Authors Guild of Western New York – charge of it was turned over to me in October 2007 – who thought that my teacher might have been her nephew. I didn't remember the name so I couldn't verify it. She said that he wasn't that caring about students. From what I saw, it probably was her relative. At the time of the classes, I wasn't too worried, as I had a Dreamweaver manual and thought I could figure things out and create my own web site. That's exactly what I did.

I failed to mention that at the end of 2001, my contract at Blue Cross in Rochester came to an end. I decided that it was time to leave the business world for good, mostly my own. On a Saturday afternoon in the spring of 2002, Ro, my last manager at Blue Cross, came over to my house for some perennials that I promised her. She mentioned that I could come back for more work as a consultant, but I told her I would think about it. However, I had no desire to return and felt that I had to stay retired after having written *Tick Tock, Don't Stop*. Otherwise I would have been a hypocrite.

In November 2002, *The Read My Lips Cookbook* was published. I felt just like a parent welcoming his child into the world. Of course, it was my creation and there would be more to follow. There's nothing like proliferation. I had come a long way since sitting down to write the book on computer math some thirty years before. I also declined to renew my working agreement with my agent. Now all I had to do was market the book. Simultaneously, I decided that the novel would be the next book published. In 2003, *Don't Bet On It* and *Tick Tock, Don't Stop* were published.

Before my first book came into print, I got to work on designing the web site. There was a slight problem since I didn't get a web host or register the site until the book was close to being published. This was for financial reasons, as

well as the fact that the cover wasn't designed. I should have known better and not delayed getting my web site on the net because then I could have had my web site listed on the back cover, something readers will see if they buy the book from me directly. I added a small sticker with the site name on the back of those copies. On all of the back covers of my other books published since, you will now find bobcooks.com. I did try to sell my books through that site, but there were few buyers.

I then proceeded to get a merchant account to entice sales. Since I had three books to sell, the whole process became a bit complicated, programming wise, but eventually it was accomplished. However, I procured another web site and soon found that the costs for the merchant account and the extra web site were mounting. At the same time my cash flow needed a boost since book sales were minuscule.

Merchant accounts are a great way for those who sell them to make money. Those who use them in their business aren't that lucky. You pay a certain amount each month for this privilege and then when you sell some books, you also surrender some of your profits, a small percentage. If you sell no books, the bank or company involved still gets cash, a fixed payment each month. When you have a good sales month, they will make even more. Piracy may be the word that comes to mind. I decided to end this contract but in the process had to pay a huge surrender fee, about \$250. It wasn't cheap to get out, but financially I still thought it was the thing to do. I also eliminated my second web site and merged the two into one. In early 2006, I revised the web site, although the flavor of the original remains – it started out as a recipe web site and it has really evolved.

Eventually I replaced my first web host with another and saved a great deal in the process. What I had paid for two months hosting initially was sufficient to cover an entire

year with my new hosts. In addition, I had to pay a fee to register my site but with my new host, that fee was included. Beware of pirates! It wasn't long before I discovered that not all pirates were banks, had a bird on their shoulder, said "argh" or wore an eye patch.

7. Sign before they read

I'll get into piracy later, and certainly more than once, but first let me tell you about another way to sell books: through book signings. Ordinarily, we read a document before we sign it. In the case of writers, we sign before the buyer reads.

There are quite a few places for writers to do this besides bookstores. In fact, probably the worst place to sell a book is in that type of venue. I was told this at the writers' conference, and I am starting to be convinced that they were right. If you go there to sell your creations, you need to be aware that you won't make much money on the sale of each book. I was fortunate to get involved with an owner who let me keep all of the profits from sales on one Saturday in East Aurora in December 2003. His thought was that since the event was publicized in the local paper, it should bring business into the store. I did sell a few books but I had higher expectations.

In most cases at bookstores, you will be lucky to make 10% of the list price of the book as a profit. That's \$1.50 if the book sells for \$15. I had a signing in spring of 2005 where I sold a grand total of one book. The store got the books from their distributor and anyone who bought any book of mine paid for it at the checkout. My royalty would only show up in my monthly statement from the publisher, which may not reflect this sale for months. I'll talk about this whole scheme on the part of publishers in another chapter.

Nonetheless, a bookseller, such as Barnes & Noble or Amazon, will get paid for a book the day of the sale but I won't see any cash for weeks. A case in point was an evening in September 2005 in which I sold six books in an hour and a half period – not bad for a short night's work at a book store in Buffalo on an evening featuring local authors. I

related this fiasco in *This Page Intentionally Left Blank*, so I won't repeat it here. This is one of the reasons why I hate bookstores.

I have had a handful of signings at stores that sell books, and I will do more, even if the sales are minimal or non-existent. From my experience, you might feel that in general, it's not worthwhile. However, it may have value for the exposure alone. Nonetheless, I have had signings at other events. In the fall of 2003, I decided to try my luck at the Octoberfest in Ellicottville. It's a yearly event held in a small town south of Buffalo. Unfortunately, it wasn't free but I thought it might be all right and could be fun.

I got the information about the weekend and sent a check that was more than \$100 for the two days for a "booth." I tried to contact the people in charge because I wasn't sure what I needed or could bring, besides my books and food. I had some questions. I didn't think of bringing an assistant, which would have been a good idea. I sent some emails and tried to call but got no response in either case.

Not getting the information I wanted, I figured I had to wing it. The Saturday morning of the Octoberfest was cool and crisp when I arrived on the scene. I figured it wouldn't be long before it was in the 70s and from the look of the sky, there was no rain in sight. I figured it would be a great day. My first task was to find where I would be situated. I walked around and before long found my "booth." It was an area of about ten feet by ten feet on the street and that was it. There was nothing there but asphalt. People were setting up the tents they brought with them along with their tables, chairs and merchandise.

Fortunately, I brought along a card table but left the cards home as well as something on which to rest my behind. I soon managed to borrow a chair from the beer tent. I promised to return it later and buy a beer. The chair I did

return but I wasn't in the mood for a beer. I set up my table, chair on loan and the books with my fliers. Compared to the other vendors, my setup looked like a single kernel on a corn cob. The rest I left up to fate and the visitors who would soon be on the scene.

For this annual event, there are people galore and you get to keep all of the profits from whatever you sell. Your hope is that you can cover your expenses. It was an interesting experience and you can probably figure out how things went. I wrote a piece about it, which goes something like this.

October Flavors

October is time for the fall festival in Ellicottville. It was a gorgeous day and I participated as a vendor, selling my books. To be more precise, I was "trying to sell them," as there is a difference. I did sell a cookbook before Oktoberfest officially opened to the public, and before long the real crowd arrived. They came in all sizes, shapes, nationalities, classes and religions. The people flowed past me like the tide at the Bay of Fundy. As I glanced around, I couldn't avoid witnessing this never-ending procession. It almost felt like I would need some Dramamine. I wondered why these people all gathered here. Maybe it was the food or the crafts. As the day progressed, I'm sure it wasn't to buy books.

The next booth was selling do-it-yourself cheesecake. To encourage purchases, they handed out samples. Besides normal flavors, they had raspberry, key lime, amaretto, Creamsicle and apple crisp. News of this concession seemed to be spreading like a wind-blown forest fire. Everyone flocked to this booth for a taste.

Besides the people, there were the dogs, every kind imaginable, and then some. If the specific variety was not there, I'm sure I saw a t-shirt displaying the missing type. I

even saw a small pooch in a backpack. In fact, I saw three canines in this mode of transport, unless it was the same dog. I doubt that one person would come back down our aisle that many times, but you never know. The hounds were behaved for the most part until late in the day, when you could hear the growling. At that point we almost had a rumble, but the owners calmed the animals down. A woman in front of my “booth” wondered why people didn’t leave their pets home. I imagine they couldn’t get a sitter.

With all this activity in front of me rather than at my table, I was thankful that I was stationary rather than part of the crowd. It’s not that I don’t like being with people. I just don’t care to be part of a huge throng caterpillaring along from one end of the street to the next on a warm day. Despite this, the event was worthwhile as I met some wonderful people, including those who delighted in the culinary arts.

I wore a WBFO t-shirt and was twice mistaken for a Buffalo radio station personality, to whom I have no resemblance whatever. Does that mean that if I wear a Jimi Hendrix t-shirt, people might think I am the late great guitar player? Or if I wear a Jim Kelly shirt, could I be mistaken for the former Bills’ quarterback? “I thought he was taller!” But I did talk to a current student at the University at Buffalo who saw my t-shirt and asked if I went to school there, which indeed I had, though some years ago.

I saw one Harley t-shirt that said, “If I have to explain, you wouldn’t understand.” There were a few others, some of which were a bit off-color in this season of brilliant orange, gold and crimson. Probably my favorite was one that was appropriate for Oktoberfest, which read, “Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.”

The multitudes made me wonder where they all parked in such a small town. People were arriving on the

scene even as I was leaving. I was told the strollers would be around until eight p.m. or later, and this would happen for two days. Would the same people be around on the second day or would there be a new batch? As I thought again what brought these visitors to Ellicottville, I believe I finally figured it out. They came for the cheesecake!

FINIS

The two words, “interesting experience” gave away the ending. In fact, after Saturday, I figured that returning on Sunday wasn’t worth the effort, so I didn’t. I certainly won’t do that again but may try similar possibilities such as the Harlem Book Fair, which I was a participant during the summer of 2005 in Buffalo. Again, the it cost more than I wanted to spend but I had a good time, sold a few books and in the future, probably won’t hesitate to be there again. However, I will reduce the cost by getting some other writers from the area to join me at the booth.

I did do signings with other authors from Lockport, New York. This was at the Lighthouse Festival at Golden Hill State Park on Lake Ontario, a yearly event that I participate in. The festival in October 2005 was a bit cool for fall but that probably brought more people inside, where we were stationed. I donated 25% of the sales of my books to the Lighthouse Fund but did sell quite a few books. I wasn’t complaining. We did the same gig the year before in the summer with more authors but it wasn’t as successful for me. In 2006, I didn’t sell as many books as the year before. In each instance, it cost us nothing besides our donation. I doubled my sales from the year before in October 2007.

I have also done more signings where there was no cost but we did contribute some of the proceeds for some cause. One instance was to help the Palace Theatre

Restoration Project in Lockport, although if they relied on what we contributed, their campaign would have been a failure. In February 2004, our writers' group was fortunate to spend a wintry day at the Power Project in Niagara Falls, talking about and selling what we had written. I'm not sure which was more difficult, driving back and forth there or selling books.

By myself, I sold my cookbook after all the masses at St. Joseph University Church in Buffalo, donating all the profits to charity. It helped fund Paul, a student at Kenyatta University in Kenya for a few years and he graduated in late 2007. You can ask him what he thinks of my books as he has them all, even my latest. I also donated cookbooks to the auction that was held each year until 2007, when it was cancelled, on WNED-TV, the local PBS station in Buffalo. Publicity is a good thing and very necessary.

A few years ago, I got involved with the group I mentioned earlier, the CCC, an environmental group in Bellevue, New York, which is part of the town of Cheektowaga, a sprawling suburb of Buffalo, where I spent all of my teen years and more growing up. Bellevue is home to a stone quarry, multiple landfills and an asphalt plant, all in close proximity to our family homestead. Unfortunately, the health of many who lived in the area was compromised by this industry. Asthma, autoimmune diseases and various cancers are extremely high in Bellevue.

I did sell a few of my cookbooks in order to raise funds for what the coalition was doing. I had hoped to sell more. Once my cookbook was published, I notified various charitable groups about the possibility of making money through its sale. Unfortunately, there wasn't any appreciable interest. Either I wasn't going to give them all of the proceeds or they figured that they couldn't make enough bucks through these sales. That appears to be the philosophy

of many organizations in their attempts to raise funds. They seem to have forgotten that every penny counts and small amounts of money add up. Just check out my monthly Visa statement.

My cousin Maria got involved in 2005 with fund raising for the tsunami that occurred in December 2004 as well as the hurricane that devastated New Orleans. I offered to sell my books and donate all the money from the sales. In addition, I sold my books for the Relay for Life of the American Cancer Society in 2004 and 2005. In each of these instances, I had hoped to raise more cash than I actually did.

I had another possibility for some fundraising through sales of the cookbook. I was told that it could happen in a few months. The bad news is that nothing has yet taken place and this offer was made to me a few years ago. I doubt that this will ever be a reality.

I did have a book signing at a location that wasn't a bookstore but had volumes around. You probably can figure what that place is. When I got to the area and looked for my nameplate to see where I sat, I couldn't find it. The staff apologized and hastily made one for me. I sold a single book that afternoon. If you still haven't guessed what that place is, you will be included in one of my forthcoming books on missing intelligence – it's a library.

I also "tried" to sell books at yard sales, twice. The good thing here is that it will only cost you about ten dollars for a table and it may even be indoors or under a tent that is provided so you need not worry about rain, wind or snow. The bad news is it might be difficult to cover costs since you won't sell too many books. People who come to these events don't want to pay more than a dollar for anything. Also, they don't really have that much time to read as they spend most of their time at garage sales! I won't do another of those as I sold two books, one at each.

I did try one ploy to sell books and it seemed to work quite well. I bribed the people with samples of food from my cookbook. On numerous occasions I have made a recipe for Irish soda bread that is really easy, but more important, delicious. Once they try it, people are sold on the cookbook, at least some of them. If you have written a cookbook, you could do buffets showcasing some of your recipes and offer your book for sale. If you haven't written one or if the recipes are dreadful, you probably should try a different approach and stay out of the kitchen for everyone's good. Depending on what you have written, with a bit of ingenuity, I'm sure you come up with some ideas.

8. Don't get caught in the WEB

Even though the writers' conference was boring for me at times, it was very useful. I absorbed quite a bit in those three days. Some of what I heard I ignored, but other words I have considered and even put into practice. It should be obvious that you can find some good ideas on the Internet. However, you have to beware of thieves, distant cousins of pirates.

One good web site has to do with just what I'm getting at, predators,

www.anotherealm.com/prededitors.

Education that comes later is better than none at all and I got a good lesson beginning in January 2005. I related this incident in ***This Page Intentionally Left Blank***, so I won't repeat it. The lessons from my debacle are: watch out for fraud, do as much research and checking ahead of time as possible and don't give up. One person can make a difference. Of course, you can accomplish more with a group of people. Unfortunately, in some cases, you may have to do it on your own.

Elizabeth Martinez wrote a book called ***DeColores Means All of Us***. In it, she relates what Rudy Acuna went through a few years ago. He is a professor of Latino Studies who applied for a position at the University of California, being recommended by a member of the faculty at that same institution. His qualifications were impeccable, but he didn't get the assignment. He was frustrated because there was no way that anyone had better credentials. He could have ended his pursuit and let it go at that.

He decided to sue the university, as he had quite a few choices for a lawsuit based on discrimination. He selected the one bias based on age, since he was in his late 50s. He was David against Goliath since he was one person

versus the huge higher institution of learning in the state of California with all its power and high priced attorneys. He found his own counsel, but would they match up to that from the U of C?

Of course, they did and Acuna won, otherwise I wouldn't tell you about this. He was victorious despite his odds because he didn't give up. He was successful as the small guy, not against one but two giants: the University as well as the three-piece-suited lawyers that tried to defend California's University in this case. My disaster, which resulted in some compensation to me, pales in comparison to his efforts.

So don't despair, but be aware! If you use the Internet, whether you are a writer or not, be on the alert for scam artists. If you are an author, no matter how many books you have had published, people know about your creations. Unfortunately, these people aren't the type who will buy your book. Rather, they will try to get money from you to peddle your stuff. But they really won't help you and only transfer cash from your pockets to theirs. You will get offers from individuals through emails as well as through phone calls, the United States Postal Service and venues you may not even have considered. If you decide to use any of these "services," do some research first. It will help your bottom line. You can't go wrong if you remember, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably isn't."

You need to realize that some email should be ignored, no matter how promising it sounds. You can sell books through web sites, bookstores, hair salons – on which I will elaborate later – and through the media. Paying booksellers to peddle your books – what faced me – is ludicrous, unless it is done without any charge. I made a mistake but learned from the experience. I have more tales to

tell about using these agents to spread the word, so you can learn from what I did. They're better known as marketers.

9. Mousse marketing madness

I'll talk about the significance of this chapter title later. After being really involved in the book business for more than five years, I have come to realize that writing a book and getting it published is a great deal easier than selling it. Getting reviews is tough too, but the real challenge seems to be letting others know about your work. I have been told that you shouldn't spend money to advertise. I feel that you have to open your wallet for this endeavor, but you must consider how much you spend and where the bucks are headed.

Fortunately, you can let others know about your books through newspapers and television, but it isn't going to be easy. If you're a known author, it won't be difficult. That's the catch-22. I was somewhat fortunate to be a part of the CCC, through which I met Barbara O'Brien, a top-notch reporter for the Buffalo News. I also got to know Sue LoTempio of the News, whom I will talk about in another chapter. The latter played a major part in my writing, though she doesn't know it.

Barbara came to my home and interviewed me for an excellent article in the News on Sunday August 7, 2005. You can find what she wrote on my web site below the recipes on the home page, by clicking on "Buffalo News article." She's a wonderful person and did a fine job in the article. However, I made one mistake: I should have read the article before it got into the paper. That is always a great idea when someone does a feature on you.

There was an inaccuracy that Barbara got from my web site, telling where my books could be purchased. It wasn't her fault and not mine either. On the day after the article was in the News, I called the person at one local bookstore, which should have had all my books. He said that

two people wanted to purchase the 2005 book but he didn't have it. He did have one copy that I gave him as soon as the book was in print. I also gave him the name and phone number of the publisher so he should have gotten the books by the time the article hit the newspaper.

Having lost a sale or two, I offered to drop off some copies but he said corporate policy dictated that he go through a specific process. I called him about a month later and he still didn't have copies of the book. Eventually, I dropped off ten copies of the book, and he finally got some from his source and I got my copies back in January 2006.

I can't emphasize enough that you should make sure to proofread an article before it hits the papers. Former Buffalo Bills coach Marv Levy used the term "ink stained wretches" when referring to some members of the media. I have to definitely agree that those words truly apply, although not to everyone. If you are a writer or are in the process of becoming one, heed my words of advice.

One writer I know was well aware of this warning and did all he could in this regard, but it really didn't make a difference. An article was to be written about his books for a small paper. He was interviewed, the piece was written and he checked it over. He found a few things he wanted changed as well as a few things that just weren't true. Facts hadn't been checked and the reporting was a bit sloppy. He mentioned this to the reporter and received a copy after further changes were made. Unfortunately, it still was not to his liking and some factual errors remained. Before too long, the composition went to press with many of the same mistakes. It was too late and he couldn't do a thing about it. Sometimes you give it all you got and pigeons still find you!

Getting back to the article by Barbara O'Brien, the people interested in buying my book may have gotten it from another store in the area, since I had dropped off copies to a

few other places. On the other hand, it appeared that people who wanted to buy the book didn't get it. Since it's hard enough selling books, you really don't want to lose any opportunity. I had been at this store doing a book signing earlier in the year. I did manage to sell a book so the afternoon wasn't a total loss.

In one week over the summer of 2005, I was on the air for two TV broadcasts. One was on *Crossroads*, a local cable program, while the other was on a local Sunday morning program called *Buffalo Matters*. Each was a great opportunity to let people in Western New York know who I am. Both interviewers praised my books and I had an opportunity to mention some of my upcoming book signings as well as my web site. I am sure that this resulted in more books sales at events where I appeared.

Earlier in 2005, I called Eileen Koteris Elibol, local TV personality on Channel 17, whom I had met earlier. The station was doing another cooking show benefit for the station. Eileen mentioned that I should call Mindy Fox, who was in charge of the guest cooks. I had talked to her before when I donated books to the station for the Annual Auction. As luck would have it, she just so happened to have an opening. I had seven minutes to make a recipe from *The Read My Lips Cookbook* on WNED-TV.

I read *Appetite for Life: The Biography of Julia Child* by Noel Riley Fitch not long ago. I highly recommend the book and it relates just what goes into a cooking show. It was noted that when Julia created a chicken recipe for her viewing audience, she needed four of those fowl, one each at various stages of preparation. Remember, her show was only a half-hour, if I recall correctly. I need to mention another great book by Paula Deen, *It Ain't All About the Cookin.'* The book is insightful, inspiring and hysterical – I guarantee

you'll have a tough time putting it down. I will talk more about the city of Savannah later.

For my cooking appearance on WNED-TV, I only had seven minutes. I was required to bring a prepared batch of moose, excuse me, mousse, as a moose wouldn't have fit inside the studio. The day before, I did create some of that chocolate delight, but it took me fifteen minutes. I didn't have a paddle! However, I figured I would have help, as either Eileen or Goldie Gardiner would be on the set with me. They don't trust cooks to be there alone.

When Saturday came and I got to the kitchen to perform, I wound up whipping the cream and the egg whites while Eileen helped by melting the chocolate and adding the rum. Didn't I tell you it was delicious? The mousse au chocolat was done in the allotted time and it was a huge hit as the people who tasted it raved and thought they were in heaven. People in Buffalo believe in an afterlife.

Those in the studio were actually fighting over the dessert. The purpose of the program was raising funds by selling their new cookbook, *WNED Cooks: Q Is For Quick And Easy*. I do believe chocolate helped make the day a success. I was on during the first part of the four-hour stint, but there was still chocolate conflict between Eileen, Goldie and Stratton Rawson, even as the show was ending, hours later. The program had a variety of dishes that day, which I'm sure were good, including a pasta dish and mushrooms stuffed with crab. However, unlike the day at Oktoberfest in 2003 in Ellicottville, this day mousse was king!

Besides my stints on the tube, I also recorded a short radio broadcast about *for seeing eye dogs only*. I checked and it's no longer available, but if you like to hear a pod cast of my appearance on the local Buffalo TV program, Crossroads with Pete Anderson from September 27, 2005,

click on *Episode 34: The Robert Swiatek Show* on the right side of the link,

<http://www.bbla.com/awol/awol.html>.

You are probably fortunate to not have to listen to the defunct radio broadcast because had you been able to hear it, you wouldn't have been able to drive a car for three hours afterward. The spiel was a bit dull and boring, unlike the pod cast and the new book. On my web site, you will also see a link for a 2005 interview I did.

10. This little piggy went to market

At the writers conference in Valley Forge I met a woman who was a writer as well as a marketeer. Once my first three books were published, I decided that she might be able to help me sell them, so I enlisted her services. When she first sent the contract, I almost declined the offer, as the price was outrageous. However, upon talking to her on the phone, I realized that there was a slight error in the numbers – she threw an extra digit in there. I was relieved, but maybe I should have had second thoughts based on this sloppiness on her part. Maybe she should have been a Mouseketeer!

Eventually, I read one of her press releases and found that this initial mistake wouldn't be the only one of hers that I would encounter. I still employed her services anyway, and though there was not an appreciable increase in book sales, she did accomplish something I couldn't have done on my own. Through her efforts, two of my books were read by professional critics. The best part was that they garnered excellent reviews. People who read and critiqued books for a living loved what I had written, but so did friends and family as well as people I have yet to meet.

Getting someone to review what you write is a challenge filled with frustration. My book on missing intelligence was reviewed by Candace K. of RAWSISTAZ Reviewers on November 9, 2005. You might feel that this took a long time but the cookbook was published in November 2002 and reviewed by Thomas Fortenberry of Midwest Book Review in August 2003 while Alice Holman of RAWSISTAZ Reviewers reviewed it at the end of October 2003 and Kevin Tipple of the Blue Iris Journal reviewed it the next month, almost a year after it came into print. For each and every one of these reviews, it was worth the wait. All the blame can't be put on the critics for the

delay, as they may not have gotten the book when it first came out. Also, yours isn't the only book they have to comment on.

If you check the Internet, you can find web sites for book reviews. One is

thebestreviews.com,

and another is

rio-reviewers.com/membership/riomembers.html.

I went to these sites and sent emails but got no response. I even tried again but still no one contacted me. Fortunately, through the reviews of my earlier books, I found that I had made a connection so that someone at Midwest or RAWSISTAZ would look at my latest offering. I should add that as soon as I had copies of a new book, I had the opportunity to contact reviewers and sent it to them.

I dealt with an organization in Buffalo in an attempt to get publicity. In this case my investment was a good deal of cash and the results proved that I had grossly overspent. I did wind up on *Crossroads* on local cable, which I mentioned earlier, on which I would appear again in 2005 without the use of a marketer. In addition I was written up in the town newspaper where I resided and wound up doing a book signing in East Aurora, which I described earlier. Through this organization I was scheduled to give a presentation on my books at our college reunion weekend but it was cancelled because only four people signed up for my session. I guess the people were too busy partying and reminiscing.

Naturally, some of these events were made possible because of connections between people. Thus my recent appearance on Adelphia cable – now it's Time-Warner, as you may have heard of the scandal – was possible because the host of the show knew me. However, I may have gotten on the program the second time without my initial visit. In

the latter case, I sent Pete a copy of the book on temporary brain deficiencies and followed up on it. When I talked to him, he said he had not read the book because they were in the process of moving but he did get to it and then I made the appearance. Better yet, he raved about the book, which sold a few copies.

One association I had was with a company in the Midwest. If you look in the dictionary under the word “thieves,” you’ll see the picture of the head of the organization. They took my money, did very little and had no shame. To illustrate how bad they were, they supposedly have a bookstore to sell books so I sent them copies of my first three books, at least ten of each. Besides giving them way too much money, I never saw a cent from the sale of these books, at least a token since I gave them the books.

With this group, I worked with a few people. At least *I* did some work; I doubt that anyone else did. The last woman I worked with could have easily been featured in my book on missing intelligence. She did get me one book signing and I did sell one book. This was at the store I discussed earlier that didn’t have the book people were trying to buy. I wonder if the book guy and this woman are related!

Since the end of my involvement, I have received solicitations in the mail from this marketing company. One stated that for a mere \$7000, they would concentrate on ***Don’t Bet On It*** and make my name familiar to households across the country. I’m sure they keep sending emails but the mailbox they send it to is defunct. After canceling our association and before changing email addresses, I sent an email to four of the people there who were supposed to be helping me. I mentioned the \$7000 offer asking, “Wasn’t that what you were supposed to be doing all the time during the contract?” I got no reply. They had their cash and my

books and they could care less. When I talked to a friend of mine and mentioned the company president's name, she mentioned that he was a crook. Not long ago they changed the name of the company. I wonder why.

Another venture of mine concerned a firm in North Carolina. Through their efforts, press releases were written for my books and an interview was done for people to see on the web. If you'd like to read it, I could present the link but I checked and it is no longer there.

If I am not mistaken, it was through this company that I did the radio interview that I mentioned earlier that was available for a while. An interesting event took place with these people that enlightened me. I will get into what I learned shortly. After my first book on missing intelligence came out, Keith Pearson of Aventine Press sent me a template for a press release. These are an important part of marketing but I am not sure how to write one that will sell books. There are no rules so just about anything might work. I have had people do some for me but they haven't sold that many books, either. I'm not sure what the secret is.

Having some experience, I started to write a press release on the template that Keith had emailed. I then sent what I had to this woman "working" for me, mentioning that I had started the release. I simply asked her to finish it, using what I had begun. A week or two later she sent me an email saying she had received a press release from Aventine Press. I asked her to send me a copy, since I hadn't seen it. It was what I had sent her earlier. Beam me up, Scotty!

I'm sure that dealing with this company had some benefit although probably not much. What I got from this encounter was that I discerned the way marketers work. They have a flowchart to follow for the books of the authors that use their services. What they do is the same for everyone, even though writers are different. Each book has

various opportunities for sales. These publicity groups don't consider this and they have no ingenuity. I also discovered that in every case, I wound up doing most of the work. I created fliers for their use, I wrote about the books and told them about the reviews and my web site. I did all the grunt work and they hardly did a thing, except for snorting when they got my check, which they had no problem cashing.

I had an opportunity for two more involvements with marketers, one on each coast but so far nothing has taken place just yet. The first person sent me a proposal and I emailed her back with some specific questions. She responded and I had more questions, which I sent. I did not hear from her in the months that followed. While talking on the phone with this person, I was asked certain questions that made me wonder if I should get involved with her at all. One was a question about my phone number or email address when this individual had initiated the call and had earlier emailed me. Maybe that was a sign.

The person from the second firm did a few things that made me have second thoughts. This promoter seemed to give good advice and I expressed some interest. Before a book signing I emailed this individual some questions about a flier I intended to use to sell books. I wanted the one that would have the most impact. There was no response and again no answer after I left a phone message shortly after that. In early 2006, I thought about using her services, so I emailed her, called and left a message. Perhaps, she will eventually respond but she hasn't done so yet. I could still hear from her since some people only answer their email every two years!

One lesson I learned is that you need to look into any company with whom you may be dealing. Check the Internet and talk to others who may be of assistance. Even if a friend says he had luck with this company, remember that you may

not be so successful. This firm may have worked wonders for a sculptor but might not do anything for writers. Another lesson is that you have to do much of the work. If it winds up that you are doing just about everything in this regard, why pay for a marketer? Above all, don't give up.

11. Smoke peace pipe

In the summer of 2003, I thought about selling my house in East Aurora. It was a nice house in the country with a wonderful sunroom but it was in snow country. I'm talking lake effect snow. When others places in the area received an inch of snow, we got a foot. Besides, I had joined the Contemporary Music Ensemble of St. Joseph University Parish, which rehearsed each Wednesday evening and sang at the 11:30 mass each Sunday morning. My commute to the church was twenty-five miles. I decided to buy a condominium not far from the church. I made an offer for it, which was accepted and then put my house on the market. This was a different type of market. My house was soon sold and in early December that sale was finalized.

On the last weekend of November, I moved from the house to my new home. On the following Monday, December 1, I had an appointment to see my urologist, whom I had yet to meet. My PSA count was high and my family doctor recommended I have some tests done. A few days later I had an ultrasound and biopsy of my prostate, something I recommend all men should avoid – women are exempt as they don't have that organ. Cancer was found and at the end of February 2004, I was no longer the owner of a prostate gland.

It wasn't an easy time, but I managed with the prayers and help of my family and friends. I was blessed to need neither chemotherapy nor radiation treatments. While I was recovering at home, I noticed blood in my stool and soon I had a colonoscopy and then got word that there was cancer in my colon – again. I was a bit distressed since I figured I would have to go through the same two operations that Dr. Dawli performed on me in 1998. I was somewhat relieved when he said that he would do a colon resection. I

was going to ask if there was enough left but everyone knows that there is plenty of colon in the human body, though no semi-colon.

At the end of April 2004, I had the dreaded surgery and once more, no other special treatments. It took some time after what I had been through, but it could have been a great deal worse. I have to see my oncologist every six months for blood tests and it appears that I'll be having a colonoscopy every year from now on. Oh, joy!

During the late 1990s, around the time of all my first surgeries, my brother and his wife were going through a nasty divorce. I wouldn't say it was bad but somehow it made the movie *War of the Roses* seem like a family picnic. However, somehow my brother received from his ex-wife a copy of a book on essiac. He let me have it for a while in 2004 and eventually I bought my own copy and returned the one he gave me. I have been taking an ounce of essiac tea with an equal amount of hot water before retiring each night. It may not make a difference, but at a prostate cancer support group meeting in February 2005, I talked to Russ, a gentleman in his early eighties, who swears by this combination of four herbs. He carries a cane but was diagnosed as a terminal prostate cancer patient in 1995. Since I talked to him not that long ago, he's obviously alive so the cane can stay. Meeting him and a few other users at this support group, as well as reading the book, led me to create an addition to my web site about essiac, which just might be a cure for cancer. The link is still there – I checked.

www.bobcooks.com/cancer.htm

While I was recovering, I decided to work on another book. You may recall the manila folder from a few chapters ago. Since I started that, I had also been adding material to the folder on my PC for comedy. There were a few files in the folder with material similar to the paper folder. People

had sent me plenty of email with funny stuff that indicated temporary brain deficiencies on the part of humans. Some were about things that criminal trainees did – really dumb stuff but hilarious. Other material sent were quotes by athletes, actors and politicians, things that children wrote, courtroom behavior and signs. Without doubt, it looked like I had enough for the book.

I got organized and decided that the title, *(What) Was I Thinking?* may have been clever but wouldn't sell books. I settled on a title that matched a sign that I had seen years ago at places that do ear piercing: *Ears Pierced While You Wait*. It's really quite dumb since you can't drop them off in the morning and pick them up after work. The book was coming along and so I needed to get an editor and a publisher. I thought about not using my first publisher so I contacted Diane Newton and she recommended Aventine Press in California. She mentioned that Keith Pearson had scruples and wouldn't just publish any book. I emailed him and sent a part of a chapter of the book, describing what it was all about. He loved it and agreed to do it.

Diane also recommended an editor in Australia and I emailed him the book. I was a bit disappointed when I got it back after his editing for three reasons: first, he sent it back too fast; second, I had to explain the humor in some of the anecdotes; third, he missed many errors. I paid him anyway, did some editing myself but realized I needed another editor, so I found one. Meanwhile, I added a page on my web site advertising the new book. The information on the upcoming book was on the site for some time before I decided to change the title again.

I thought *Ears Pierced While You Wait* would have been too difficult to illustrate. Remember my words about *selling a book by the cover*. I decided on *for seeing eye dogs only*, another sign that you see everywhere. One such

occurrence is at the United States Post Office, another great place for laughs. All I need mention is the name of Newman and Cliff Claven, but remember that they are probably the best workers there! Anyway, if I am not mistaken I heard George Carlin mention this sign at the USPS and ask, “Who is it for – the dog or the blind person?”

When I emailed Keith Pearson the finally edited manuscript, he read it and said it was “hysterical.” He sent back the proofs and I asked my sister to proofread it. At the time, Pat had just moved into a different house with her fiancé, Lou and daughter, Liz, the artist, so she was quite busy. My sister – who finally married Lou in August 2007 – agreed anyway, said the book was “hysterical,” and finished on time. I also did some proofreading and asked a friend of mine who was home after having knee replacement surgery. Mark became another proofreader. When all was said and done, my book on intelligence follies had three editors and three proofreaders, although not all could be described as competent.

At the end of June 2005, the book was published. That was the good news. You’ve already heard about the bad news, namely the bookstore stuff. So far people have raved about it, mostly describing it as a “very funny book.” CandaceK of RAWSISTAZ Reviewers loved it too, although she only gave it four stars. I was hoping for five. Reviews can be found at Amazon.com as well as on my web site.

Editors and proofreaders – there’s a slight difference – are an interesting group of people and I need to talk about their job. Not counting myself, I have had five or six editors and a few less proofreaders for my books. One volunteer was going to edit the 2005 book but was too busy. Instead he gave it to his sister, who reads a great deal and did a great job. I had two editors for the cookbook and they did fine work. I met them at the writers’ conference. For the next two

books, I found an editor in Buffalo, Gina. She did good work and was very helpful, especially for the novel.

Before she agreed to edit my novel, I talked to another editor in the area but his cost was so high that I figured he wanted to rewrite the book and take all the credit. Hence, I settled on Gina and was planning to have her edit the missing intelligence book but I couldn't reach her. That's how the guy from down under – maybe his problem was he was under the table too much – got into the picture.

You need to realize that what you write is your book and if you accept all the recommendations of your editor or proofreader, will the result still be yours or will it be compromised? On numerous occasions, my editors made suggestions, which I ignored. They might say that it would be better written a bit differently but I figured the way I put it, it had more impact. In general, editors do their part, and it is necessary to have one. As a writer, you are too close to the work to catch all the errors, even with that unreliable, bizarre tool, *spellchecker*. You can use relatives and friends for editors as well as proofreaders, but don't forget to pay them or take them out to dinner. A few lotto tickets won't cut it. I also have to mention that the author needs to edit the book more than once because there are certain errors that other people won't and can't possibly catch.

And now, I need to explain the significance of the title. Smoking may be quite pleasurable and that parallels the release of my 2005 book. On the other hand, smoking has some bad effects. Though I don't smoke, I didn't escape the cancer. I should mention that the title needs three words to create a few laughs. You may know what they are. I will mention the Smothers Brothers later, but in one of Tommy's skits, he talked about the Indians and the Pilgrims. He mentioned that the former were not that dumb when it came

to trading goods and dealing with the European settlers.
Proof of that was their command to the Pilgrims,
Smoke peace pipe...rot your lungs.

12. Eye patches and peg legs

To date, I have had two publishers. I don't mean I went to dinner and a show with them but rather that two different companies have published my books. If you were paying attention, you knew that. Before I get into my experience with them, let me describe the types of publishers that exist.

The first type is called a royalty press. These are the corporations that make money for themselves and for people like Nicholas Sparks, James Patterson and Dan Brown. When any of these people write a book, they get paid and don't have to open their wallets. They receive an advance before the book comes out and then get royalties on every book that is sold. The advance is subtracted down until the initial royalties cover it, although it probably depends upon the way the contract is worded. Without question, this is the way to get your book into print.

Of course, you'll have to do book signings and you can't write just one book. You will be under contract for the one book as well as an agreement to write more. The company will have their editors and because of this, you may need to change things that you would rather not. Even though it is the twenty first century, if you sign a contract today for a book with a royalty publisher, that book won't be on the market for a year and a half. Technology changes every day so it might not take that long, at least for some publishers.

This type of company probably won't promote your book. You will have to do that yourself. Of course, with a well-known name, your books will be sold before they even come out. As far as quality goes, you will see good, as well as bad books through these types of publishers. After all,

they will print what sells. That's what they are in business for – to make money.

To get your book into the hands of a royalty press requires that you query them first with your idea, even if the book is complete. It may be a great book with tons of potential, but they may not even want to read it. You may need to get an agent. However, as my experience shows, that may not be enough. It's an almost impossible task. There may be hope for you if you publish your own book and it does well, and then some royalty press decides to republish it. That might pose some other problems, which I will get into.

The other type of publisher is referred to as a vanity or subsidy press. If you merge the two words, you get "insanity." The meaning of the words, "vanity" and "subsidy" should be obvious. The first term is used because people have all kinds of cash and desire to have a book with their name on the front page. This precludes felons, criminals and politicians who have been arrested. These are not really writers if they stop at a single book. A quarter century ago you could get your book in print by paying a vanity or subsidy press a fair amount of cash, for example, \$20,000. Of course, you would have 6,000 copies of your book with no place to store them, so you'd have to rent a self-storage area and hope it doesn't leak when it rains.

"Subsidy" implies that you pay to have the book published, not unlike "vanity." Fortunately and also unfortunately, technology, along with greed, has changed things. Now you can have a book published for under \$1000. This includes the cost of the editor for a book with 200 pages or less. Self-publishing has really made its mark. Along with this has come a good thing, sort of, called POD or Print On Demand publishing. POD is really subsidy publishing since you pay the company, but they only print books if people ask

for them. This means you won't have to store books in your bedroom and the environment gets a reprieve.

The not so great thing is that in some cases, anything that resembles a "book" winds up in print. It need not be that way. I mentioned that Keith Pearson had some guidelines for what his company published and he read my book when I sent it. I didn't mention that he read it again after it was proofread. By the way, he still thought it was hysterical. His actions indicated to me that he wanted to prevent puke proliferation. I wish I could say the same for some of the other subsidy companies as well as some royalty companies.

I have to return to the writers' conference. I mentioned that I received some good advice that weekend. However, there were a few things that were misleading. One argument to entice the attendees to use their company as opposed to a royalty press was the idea of marketing. Anyone there may have surmised that a royalty press did no marketing while a subsidy press did, or at least the company sponsoring this conference provided that service. Maybe so, but you had to pay for it and if *Print It Press* did your book, they really did nothing to help you sell it. Yet, doing so would have brought more money into their pockets.

Thus it would have been beneficial not only to print the books but also to market them. They didn't do this because they would receive money up front from the writers, so why worry about selling the books. I soon discovered that once my books were printed, my first publisher could care less about selling them or helping me to get sales. Their attitude was that they would fill the orders if they came in but offer me the minimum amount of assistance in order for the books to get sold.

Specifically, I asked their web master to add some reviews of my books that the critics had provided to their site. I was told that it couldn't be done. By this time I had

developed my own web site and so knew a bit about what effort would be involved. It's a simple task and there's no reason for this not easily being accomplished. Eventually, that procedure changed so the reviews got to the site, but what I experienced only confirms what I pointed out earlier about publishers' lies.

An author that I know recently received his royalty statement from the publisher, another POD organization. For a total of 82 books sold that averaged a list price of close to \$15, he received a check of \$55.02. That averages out to 67 cents per book or less than 5% of the list price. He wrote another book with a list price under \$12 but used a different publisher. His royalty statement from them was for sixteen books and his check was \$32.77, almost 18% of the list price. Which company would you rather have publish your books? Granted, it costs money to print books and if the book is sold via Amazon, which I will get into later, these people need to make some money. I don't think that royalty publishers offer writers that high a percentage either. Considering that the person mentioned wrote the book, this can only be described as piracy on the part of the first publisher I mentioned above.

Another devious practice by pirate publishers is the way royalties are paid. This applies to any type of publisher. Let us say that a book is sold on the first of April, through Borders Books online. That seller gets the book and ships it within a few days but the sale may not get reported to the publisher for some time. This is despite the fact that the publisher prints the book and is well aware that a sale was made! Either Borders delays or the publisher holds off, maybe both. Consequently, the sale doesn't show up on the author's royalty statement until a month later. It may even get much worse as the sale doesn't show up on the statement until August, four months after the sale. In each case, the publisher and the bookstore get paid for the sale right away.

Unfortunately, there is still more piracy as the publisher won't send out a check for the book sales until another two or three months has passed. That's because there is another delay that routinely takes place, and that applies to all books. The person I described earlier who received the check of \$55.02 mentioned that his company wouldn't send him a check if the payment due him is less than a certain amount. Instead, it would accrue. That last word rhymes with a five letter word ending in "w," which applies here. So, if he doesn't sell many books, he may not get paid for sales for months. You need not transport a bird on your shoulder, have a peg leg or a hook to be a buccaneer.

I have already mentioned the lack of standards for some subsidy companies, but there are plenty of other opportunities for piracy. Consider a company that sells some books because someone ordered them. However, through some corporate snafu, the sale doesn't get reported to the author. It shouldn't happen but unfortunately it does. It can be intentional or accidental but in either case, the writer sees not a penny from the sale of some of his books.

I should add a few words about some subsidy publishers and they aren't favorable, but the company deserves them. In many cases, I doubt that anyone in the company reads some of the stuff that eventually becomes a book. This means that trash will be produced, unless the writer really makes sure that his book is top notch regardless of those publishing it. I have heard of situations where covers were designed by artists who had not read the books. I don't see how they can come up with anything unless they know what the book is about. The excuse might be that they don't have the time, a rather lame one, I feel. Of course, the writer could provide a synopsis for the cover creator, provided that the graphic artist reads that.

Recently someone mentioned that he wouldn't buy my cookbook because of the cover. He had a great point because it wasn't reflective of the flavor of the book. If you read some of the reviews, especially Thomas Fortenberry's, you will see that the design really missed its mark, as I pointed out earlier – except for my unusual far-fetched justification. It may be too late now, but I could have it redesigned and republished. My other covers were much more appropriate.

I alluded to problems that could occur if a self-published book got republished by a royalty press. Suppose Random House decides to bring my highly praised cookbook into print. One problem might be that I have to compromise part of the writing. I will have to make some changes, but I don't see that as a problem. I can correct the few errors – found in any book you read, no matter who edits it but some of their suggestions I may be reluctant to accept. The second difficulty is that during a part of the publishing process, I don't believe I will be able to sell my cookbook, nor can Amazon or any book store for that matter. Thus there will be a gap before the revised book comes into print.

As far as royalty presses go, the same problems exist that will you encounter if you self-publish. For example, in the summer of 2005, I talked to a journalist who mentioned that she read the latest Harry Potter book. She said that she wasn't that impressed with the writing. I haven't read the book but I will take her word, since I have other books that I want to read. I added that I wasn't surprised, though. Publishers only care about green and the artist comes secondary. Fortunately, there is a good side to the Potter phenomena. It doesn't matter how inadequate the book is, as long as it encourages children to read. Then, it becomes a great thing when youngsters obtain more books and continue and find even better stuff to read.

I have always felt that even though a book sells a million copies, it's not necessarily a good book. The various trash escapades are proof of that. But even a Potter book or a presidential biography with high sales may not be in the class of one that is struggling to get exposed to the public. I think you will agree that there have been best selling books that in many cases have never even been opened. There might be a reason for that.

13. Help – I need a paddle

From the previous chapter, it should be clear that the number of books on the market is almost unlimited – I have to add the word “almost”, having been a math major in college. Certainly, they are not all worth reading. So then the question becomes, how do you sell a book that has gotten great reviews? If you find the answer, let me know. I’ve been working at it for years.

There are a few reasons why it’s almost impossible to sell books. First, many people don’t read. They don’t for a number of reasons: either they don’t have the time or they make excuses to that effect, or they really can’t read and need to learn how. Just because you have a high school diploma or a degree from some university doesn’t mean you can pick up a book and understand what’s there.

I was at a workshop on writing humor in November 2005 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. I’ll get into more details about that evening later. One of the participants mentioned a book by Anders Henriksson called *Non Campus Mentis*. This book is a great example of “truthiness,” the quality of stating concepts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than the facts. The word was used by a panel of linguists, the American Dialect Society, to best reflect the year 2005. If you really want to be intellectually discouraged, check out the word for 2007. I will mention it in a future book if you can’t find it.

Non Campus Mentis is world history as seen through the eyes of college students who apparently fell asleep during the lecture. Fortunately, I got a copy from the Buffalo Public Library and read it and laughed so hard I cried. I then shed tears again because these students would eventually be leaders of our country. Actually, this scenario has already happened!

You will be even more depressed when you realize that the students with a similar view of world history are attending our colleges and universities today. What does that say for our high school people? What is being taught to the children? Kids today know a great deal about technology, which I'm not sure is a good thing. By the way, the word for 2007 is closely related to that field. However, reading, writing a sentence and solving simple math problems may escape these students. What good is it if you are the engineer on a mission to Mars but can't read the manual to solve a problem that occurs while on the flight?

Don't give up on our youth, though, as there is some hope. Not long ago I watched the movie, *The Yes Men*. If you haven't seen it, do so. The heroes of the movie created their own web site called GATT.ORG. It appears to be legitimate, but it's a huge scam. However, it did fool some individuals and the duo were asked to give a presentation at one of the meetings of the World Trade Organization. What these two came up with was outrageous, but funny and very entertaining. What was more unbelievable was the ludicrous acceptance by those in the audience of the ideas presented. This is where the title of the movie originates. By the way, I checked and the site is still there, and the two presenters haven't been arrested yet!

If that wasn't maddening enough, the scammers continued their efforts and more people fell for their presentations. You really need to see the movie to find out all the specifics. However, when our heroes attempted a similarly ridiculous program at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, the students got wise to the charade. The two idea guys were glad that there were some people with more intelligence than yams. They only wished that others had uncovered their dastardly deeds.

Our society should be more perceptive and have more smarts if only they read more. People say they don't have enough time. Is she working sixty hours a week at her job? I hate to clue her in but she can't do that since she won't be productive for more than about 25 hours, if she is lucky. Her boss should realize this but he's probably clueless too – that's why he's in management! Anyone stuck at a job of this nature should get out and find a different one. It will be beneficial to that person's health and the well being of the family as well. It may be a great idea to pick up and read one or both of my books on work. For less than \$14, this could be the best investment you ever made and you'll get a few laughs at the same time.

We don't read because we spend too much time in front of the boob tube, despite the fact that there is more crud on the airwaves than in the bathtubs of hippies. A good comparison is comparing TV to a landfill: there's a great deal of crap and toxicity in both environments. Even watching the evening blues can be hazardous to your health and you won't learn much from sitting down watching *Fox News* or *CNN*. And yet, there is great potential when it comes to that box – in some cases now, it's a very narrow box, but it's huge – found in every living room, especially for the purpose of teaching. *Reading Rainbow* and *Sesame Street* are great examples of what good programming can accomplish.

So, rather than turn on the set when you first arrive home in the late afternoon, either put on some music or rest with the sounds of silence. It will do a lot more good. I suggest a new approach to television viewing that will give you more free time. When the TV Guide or TV Topics arrives, find the programs you care to watch and set the VCR to tape them. If your machine shows the time blinking, you may have to read the manual or talk to one of your kids for

help. Don't tape every show that's broadcast but limit it to an hour or less each evening. You can make an exception during broadcasts of Ken Burns' specials. By doing this you will only spend about twenty minutes per half hour program and less than forty-five minutes per hour show. That's a saving in itself. Moreover, by only watching one program a night, you will have the opportunity to do some reading.

This approach will make some time available to you. There's even more for your use if you lose the remote. Throwing it in the trash is a great idea. By the time most people figure out that they can turn on the set without it, they would have had enough time to finish reading a book. Television has great potential, but over the years it hasn't been realized that much. News has been replaced by news / entertainment. Sports have become a big business and an oxymoron of one word. Today, there seems to be no "sport" involved, only steroids, cheating, hype and too much unneeded before and after game analysis.

Because of its addictive nature, television still has great potential. First, the networks need to stop being so greedy and produce decent, instructive entertainment. My suggestion is that they follow the lead of PBS and some of the other cable stations that have been doing it for years. Outstanding programs like Ken Burns' *Baseball* or *Jazz* can be so enlightening that they lead viewers to read more about the subjects. As I write this, I have all episodes of his 2007 epic, *The War* on tape, but have yet to begin viewing it. Any program, whether a series or a half hour episode can teach as well as delight an audience, thus serving a double purpose. I will get into the benefit of humor in education later.

You can see what writers are up against in their efforts to sell their works. People who don't read have no reason to buy books, unless they have a lot of pictures. Most good books aren't illustrated. The other catch-22 has to do

with the fact that people don't buy books unless they are "best sellers." But how do I get my books on that list if people won't buy them? I talked to someone at a book club in order to get exposure by selling what I wrote but I was told that she generally picked material from the best seller lists of the New York Times. No one said that selling books was easy!

I can recall a few books that were best sellers but they didn't impress me in the least and I wouldn't recommend them to others. I might tell my friends that I didn't like them. I won't get into specific titles but you have probably come across similar works that just weren't good reads. If you'd like some suggestions for good stuff, go to my web site. Besides my books, there is a link for "recommended reading," listing books I have read over the last few years, which grows with each passing day. You should be able to find something that you'll like.

There are many obstacles for writers selling books. Besides the television, bestseller lists, publishers and illiteracy, there are also the bookstores. I discussed one earlier but my books are in a few other places. One big-name place has the cookbook and I have spent months trying to get the book dude there to stock the others. Shortly after *Don't Bet On It* and *Tick Tock, Don't Stop* came out, I asked him about adding those two to the shelves. He mentioned he was clearing out space for books. But that was over two years ago.

Just before my treatise on brain flatulations – if you have to, look it up – came into print, I handed him my business card heralding its arrival and asked about the possibility of stocking it, when I got copies, as well as my other two books. You probably have a good idea what he said. I'll give you a hint: it has to do with clearing and nothing whatever about pimples. I said I would call when it

was available and a few weeks later I was in the store and I handed over a copy of each of my last three books. That was in the summer of 2005 and I assume he is still alive but he didn't contact me, so I called him. As far as I can tell, not only will my other books not be added to that store's inventory, my cookbook will probably be removed. I'm not sure why I even bother with this guy.

Another store has all four of my books but has yet to sell a single copy, unless one sold recently. This place looks like a bomb hit it, so maybe I should remove my stuff from the premises before another one graces the store. I use that verb in a feeling of "doing some good." There seems to be no order to the store – think "clutter" and Oscar Madison – and I doubt that anyone would spend more than a couple bucks for any book there. I won't reveal the name of the bookstore but it certainly seems like its name fits perfectly. I'll probably get sued or at least booted out with my books on the next visit. Of course, they'd have to read this book first.

There are a few more places in Western New York that sell my work. The first is an establishment that has two bookstores in the Buffalo area. So far they have gotten me some sales. The other is a gift shop that I just got involved some time ago. They only have my cookbook and the missing marbles book. They have sold a few books to date and until recently were the only business in the area that actually bought what I wrote. The others have the books on consignment, except for the one store that I referred to earlier that got the first three of my books from their distributor. This was the store where I dropped off ten copies of stupidity personified and eventually retrieved.

Consignment means the bookstore takes no risk since they don't buy the book from you. They merely stock a few copies and when someone makes a purchase, you get a cut of

the profits, usually 60%, but it might be less and they get the rest as well as a replacement. The better choice for a writer is to sell the book outright to a store with the option for a full refund, assuming the book returned is in good condition. With that approach, the store may have more pressure to make an effort to push the books. Otherwise, there is less of a concern about sales. Of course, the books do take up space so the store should try to get rid of the books under either situation.

I like to compare book placement in a store to a date for a testimonial dinner. Your black book lists two individuals as possible escorts, choice number one and a secondary and less preferable, number two. Think of selling your books to this business as the former and consignment as your second choice. Obviously either will get you inside the door but that may not be your first pick.

Whether a store has my stuff on consignment or not, I usually pass out promotional material to entice sales. I have a few fliers that I keep constantly updating, hoping the change may help to move books off the shelf, but not in the way that the one bookstore dude proceeds to “make space.” I use at least one flier at book signings and it seems it is always different from the previous gig. I mentioned some of the ideas I have had in order to market books earlier. However, I have an almost endless source of ideas. Some of these I have tried and so I should make them known to you.

14. If at first you don't succeed

If you care to be a successful writer, the correct phrase to complete the chapter title isn't, "Don't become a bungee jumper!" You need to come up with plenty of ideas. Don't limit yourself to only what others suggest. The sky's the limit. I mentioned my thoughts driving home from the writers' conference in Valley Forge. Unfortunately, none of them worked. My web site has had hits but not much financial success. In some ways though, the site has been beneficial and I hope it will eventually lead to an increase in book sales, even if people buy from Amazon.

WWW.BOBCOOKS.COM is the main approach to getting others to see what I have done. It has a great deal of information, including recipes, book recommendations, cancer cures and reviews of my books. There's more than that. I described the scam, which wouldn't have occurred without my site. I also received an email one day from an individual who got wind of my books and was interested in republishing my cookbook. The best part was that he said he had a marketing staff. When I heard that, I was thrilled. I had high hopes and it has been some time since this person contacted me so it hasn't happened yet. I haven't completely given up but with each passing day, hope seems to be fading, as recent attempts to contact him has produced no response.

Early in the year 2005, I decided to get my hair done at a friend's place not far from my home. Michele not only does hair – she doesn't just cut it – she also has a great voice and is a part of the Contemporary Music Ensemble, which I mentioned earlier. A few days after my encounter with her scissors, I asked if she'd like to sell my cookbook in her salon – I don't think it would sell in a saloon! I told her I'd give her five books and she could keep 40% of the proceeds. She agreed.

Not long after that I stopped in to the boutique for another visit. When I gave my name to the woman behind the counter, she asked me for my autograph. I actually signed two that day. This was before *for seeing eye dogs only* was published, so I mentioned that book and was told that she wanted it too, as did another employee. A short time later, Michele handed me cash for the sale of five books.

I then proceeded to three other hair salons in the area with the same offer I made Michele. They all took on five copies of the cookbook and in the course of a few weeks, I sold a few copies. There was interest in the book and I even provided a brochure on all my books to entice sales. In November 2005, Michele saw that book sales were stagnant so I removed them from her establishment, which I had also done from the other three hair places. In the course of two months, I sold more books in three hair salons than I did in two bookstores over more than two years. Who said you have to sell books in a bookstore?

I have had many other ideas for selling books. When I told others, they remarked that what I came up with was a great idea. For example, I considered taking advantage of the characteristics of the recipes of my cookbook. Since not only are they are delicious, but also easy and healthy, why not try to market the book to vitamin and health food stores? I surfed the net and found some possibilities and sent emails and got a few responses. I sent out two or three copies of the book and got great feedback about my writing but no takers for adding the book to their establishments. I even went to a warehouse in the area that supplies a host of health stores. That sounded like a great opportunity. I dropped off a copy of the book and was assured that the person whom I was told to contact would get it. Somehow, that didn't happen, so I dropped off another copy. I then tried to contact this guy but

had no luck after leaving messages. I did this many times but you can only try for so long.

I still had the phone number of this individual who I couldn't quite reach, but I wondered if I should forget this possibility and work on other ideas. There really was no reason to continue my effort to reach him but I dialed the phone anyway. He wasn't there but the gentleman answering recommended that I send him an email, so I figured it wouldn't hurt to try. It was the right thing to do because within a few days, I dropped off twenty-four copies of *The Read My Lips Cookbook*.

Not long after the cookbook was published, I tried to get it into one of the grocery chains that has stores not only in Buffalo, but also in Rochester and a few other states. My creation had everything you could want in a cookbook – think healthy and delicious but don't overlook selling power because of the humor. I sent the book out and then checked up on it, but no one knew where the book had landed. Then I was told to send it to a specific individual and I dropped it off to her. Unfortunately, I didn't meet this person, although I tried. On calling and leaving messages for this human, I never heard back.

I didn't give up but sent a copy of the book to an individual who writes a weekly food column for the corporation and thought she could be of some help. I wrote a letter to the company president, even sending him a copy of the book. I got nary a reply from either but finally, I got a phone call from a woman who wanted a copy of the book, so I sent one off. That was in November of 2005 and at this point, I had not given up. I finally talked to this woman and there seemed to still be a possibility of something happening. As a writer, one thing you need to do is never give up hope.

Fast forward to the end of the year 2006 and I'm doing a few exercises when the phone rings. It just so

happens to be the woman I mentioned and she relates to me the fact that at this time, they won't be selling my cookbook in their stores. I should add that this phone call came about because I sent another letter to the company president, about a month before. I was disappointed, but somehow accepted this fate. I asked her if she had read the book and her answer was in the negative. I can only ask how someone can make a decision on a book without reading it? C'est la vive.

Despite this, I didn't give up and implored her to read the book and maybe the future might see my book in these stores. That reminds me of a time over a quarter a century ago when I was in Central Park in New York for a concert. I recall that the *Brooklyn Bridge* with Johnny Maestro was one of the acts but I can't recall any of the others. Halfway through the event, the emcee came on and introduced John Lennon. He asked John if there would ever be a Beatle reunion. The singer replied, "You never know." The emcee then questioned the celebrity as to the hope for such a future event. The former Beatle said, in the voice of a true politician, "There's always hope!"

After my novel came out, I headed over to the casino in Niagara Falls. At that time this was the only casino in the cataract city and it was in New York. Now, Canada has the Fallsview Casino on their side of the border, among others. Actually, the book would be great for casinos since anyone reading it might stop buying lottery tickets and instead head over to these gambling places. I asked about getting the book into the gift shops but was told I had to call someone for information. I wrote the number down, went home and a few days later called. Unfortunately, they didn't carry many books so that idea didn't pan out.

At the same time I got in contact with a few gambling magazines in the hope of spreading the word on the novel. I emailed a woman named Monica, not Bill's acquaintance.

By the way, my mom's middle name is also Monica but she was never an intern. This Monica was in Las Vegas working with some publishing company and I sent her a copy of the book. She said that even though they didn't publish the book, they might try to sell it. However, that never happened. I tried to reach her again after that, but the person I talked to wasn't interested in my book on dumb things that people say and do either. She said that Monica had left the company.

I mentioned the author at the writers' conference who wouldn't stop talking. He had written a cookbook or two so I listened to some of his ideas. His books were at some of the gift shops in the National Parks and he had plans for more, so I thought about that possibility. His cookbooks are theme related, i.e. historical, unlike mine but I figured I wouldn't let that stand in my way. I secured a list of all the state parks in New York and sent out feelers for my cookbook in those locations. The response wasn't very good although I did send out a few copies. One woman read the book and loved it but said that they wouldn't carry it at that time. In fact, I added her kind words about it on the information page for the cookbook on my web site.

Because of the nature of the book with its eight chapters, I thought about the possibility of it becoming the New York State Cookbook. There are chapters in the book that talk about my living in various places in the state. In all there is a concluding chapter on Buffalo, two chapters on Westchester County as well as chapters on Binghamton and Syracuse. With that thought in mind, I sent a copy of the book to Governor George Pataki. He never warmed to the idea and perhaps never even opened the book. I did repeat the exercise with Governor Eliot Spitzer and he thanked me for it, but that was the last I heard. When we have a new governor, I'll send it to that person too, and it doesn't appear that I'll have that long a wait.

When my 2005 book made the scene, I went to the National Park Service web site and sent an email about it. I got a very favorable response from a gentleman named David who thought that the book would do very well in the gift shops of the parks. He made this conclusion just from my description of the book and what he found on bobcooks.com and he gave me the phone number of a woman to contact who then passed on to me an email address of another woman. I emailed the latter but got no response so I got her phone number and called. It was obvious that she had not read my correspondence and had not been to my web site. She asked what the book was about and I told her but she figured that it didn't fit in to the themes of the park. I thought people went on vacation to get away from the troubles of the world. Thus my book was perfect for every gift shop. Besides, wasn't one of the themes of the park to make money? I didn't relay those thoughts to her, though.

Somehow I convinced her to at least look at the book and sent her a copy. One thing David did mention was that the person whom I was to contact dealt with about 150 gift shops, which seemed promising and something that I should seriously pursue. David's words were really encouraging but it was up to the woman, whose name escapes me. I got no response after a few weeks, so I called or emailed and her feelings hadn't changed and needless to say I was very disappointed. I emailed David again with the tale of his fellow worker but he didn't reply.

Before I got the bad news from this woman, David mentioned that I should contact the National Parks individually because of the way they are run and I started to do this. I sent out emails but the response was not very encouraging, so in December 2005, I sent out mailings with a query letter and two pages of book reviews that might

entice gift shops in the parks to stock my books. I have not restricted consideration to a book or two as I feel that every one of my books has potential for sales in these places.

In January 2006, I began follow-up on these mailings. If you work with the National Park Gift Shops – and that may be a stretch – you must remember that the people you talk to work for the government, if I’m not mistaken. That’s the bad news. The good news for me is that I have written another book on comatose happenings – I will try to get it published in 2008 –and have gotten some material from my dealings with these people. So far, it looks as though I have wasted my time with regular mail when I should have just gone to the phone. Mail gets lost and never reaches the right person but the other option means you have to deal with “voice maze.” Email isn’t any better.

Using the telephone and getting through to the person you need to reach still has its problems, although some people might return your call. They may also say they are not interested. I talked to one woman who mentioned something I hear day after day in my endeavor with these gift shops: the books don’t relate to the theme of the park. She also mentioned limited space on the shelves for books. I thought about recommending the shelf space clearer whom I described earlier, but I thought better of it. Nonetheless, I must have said something right because I sent out two books to her that same day. Unfortunately, that was the last I heard from her.

A day after this conversation, I heard from a woman at another National Park to whom I had sent all four of my books. She said they were being reviewed and I should hear from the committee soon. I didn’t get my hopes up too high, even though she said she was reading one of the books and liked it, but I never heard from her again. Making phone calls may be the best approach, and you will get rejected by

some, but you could have luck with others. You can't succeed if you don't try.

I had another strange adventure in the city I mentioned earlier, Savannah. To really get in the mood for this experience of mine, you should see the movie, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and I also recommend the book by John Berendt – one of the best books that I read in 2007. I did both and then saw the movie again and things were clearer to me.

This all started back on the Friday after Thanksgiving in 2005. I visited that same city on a business trip / vacation – I included the former description to get deductions for my taxes – and thought about visiting gift shops to place my books. I stopped in to three of them and asked if they carried authors other than local ones there. In each case I was told, yes, and given a business card since the person I should talk to wasn't there. There seemed to be some hope and I enjoyed a delicious meal of blackened mahi-mahi over angel hair pasta at the *Shrimp Factory* on River Street. I had the shrimp at *Bubba Gump* in Daytona Beach the next night. I recommend both establishments.

Eventually I contacted the three gift shops by mail, but nothing came of it, but one day I got a phone call from Mohini Bhowani, owner of *Gift World*. She wanted to buy copies of the cookbook and book on missing intelligence capers. I shipped them and received her check shortly thereafter. I sent a letter a few months later asking if she needed any more books and if she wanted me to come and do a book signing. I didn't hear anything but in early 2007, I decided to escape the cold of Buffalo and head south. One destination that I thought about was Savannah, possibly doing a signing on March 1.

I called the store ahead of time and when I told her who I was, the woman answering said I needed to talk to

Mike, but he wasn't in. She told me to call back, which I did and I had a conversation with him. He thought that would be a good time for a signing, as it would be warming up a bit. I sent him a flier and thought he'd email me, but I heard nothing. I called back again, but too late because the person I conversed with said Mike wouldn't be in until Friday. However, I hoped to be in Mississippi by that time, away from the snow. She nevertheless encouraged me to come by anyway on my trip.

On March 1, 2007 just before noon I stopped in to *Gift World* and asked the woman handling t-shirts if the man I was looking for was in. She said, "Not until four o'clock," but she said I should come back at 12:30 in the afternoon. I left and returned shortly as she directed, but was told that he wasn't in and I had to come back at four. When I did so late in the afternoon, I met Hareh, the son of the owner and we talked and concluded that the signing would be more successful in a few months. I dreaded the heat of the summer but he said that the middle of May should be fine. I then mentioned that I had sent a flier and talked to Mike, but he replied that no one named Mike worked there. We agreed on May 15th or thereabouts, so I promised to send a flier and he in turn gave me his email address. I had a fine meal there that night at another restaurant, but not Paula Deens'.

I sent the stuff and emailed him shortly thereafter, but I didn't call. Maybe I should have since he never contacted me. I didn't return that spring to *Gift World* and I'm not sure what to do about the whole thing. Should I go back? Perhaps, the owner truly wanted to sell books, whereas her son wanted quicker and larger profits, such as from t-shirts. From the book by John Berendt I just described above, the citizens of the area want your tourist money but not for you to set up a business there. Toss into the mix the weird stuff that happens in Savannah and I think I figured it out – almost.

You can see from what I have been through that people don't usually give authors a break or any help. I have put ads in magazines, such as *New York* and either *Woman's Day* or perhaps *The Ladies Home Journal*. I forget which; it was quite a while ago. The latter ad resulted in fifty hits a day to my web site but unfortunately, very few sales. Had I waited until I had a bit more experience selling and some good reviews on the cookbook, the outcome may have been different. I will probably get a few more ads placed in magazines that can produce results without a huge investment. An ad in *Oprah Magazine* will reach millions, but you'll spend thousands of dollars.

The key here is not to spend a great deal of money to do this. Any free advertising is well worth it. I thought about advertising my web site, with a special emphasis on the recipes and my 2005 book, in the parish bulletins of churches in Western New York. My plan was to do it for a year but cover a few churches, say four churches for three months each. When I got material on the procedure, that idea seemed doable. However, the woman in charge mentioned that I could only have my ad in one church bulletin and I would have to do it for an entire year, with no splits.

I tried to explain that my approach would still give their organization the same amount of cash, with a bit more work but there would be an advantage, insofar as the blank spaces on the back page of the bulletins would be minimized. This would actually be beneficial to them. Logical as my argument was, she didn't buy it. I decided to try it anyway and in December 2005, I had my ad, which would be the same week after week in a parish about five miles from my home for one whole year. That turned out to be money I could have used to buy beer.

I also got involved with Val-Pak, which is a means of spreading advertising for various companies in the area

through mass mailings. Basically each business has a coupon that tells of their product and offers some kind of discount in order to get a sale. It wasn't cheap and I was required to do it for multiple months. After the coupons were created, I received some of these extra ones so I figured, why waste them? I put the surplus around the mailboxes of some of my neighbors, but not in them because that's illegal. I did get a few sales from the Val-Pak attempt but it really wasn't that successful an endeavor, as I didn't get back my investment.

This came about when I lived in East Aurora and for daily exercise, I used to walk down the roads near my house. I was a bit leery during hunting season when the air was filled with gunshots. I've heard of cows being shot accidentally and am allergic to bullets in my body. I didn't really want any more surgery. I had enough already. However, one day while I strolled down West Blood Road, one of the neighbors doing some yard work, asked if I was Bob Swiatek, and I replied that indeed I was. It doesn't take long for word to get out. We talked for a while but he didn't buy any books.

Somehow, my effort was introducing me to the public. I was getting experience, costly as it might have been. I didn't really see the big picture of what was going on. And yet that happens to each of us. A few things that occurred years ago would not really have meaning in my life until the new millennium. There are two slightly different words for this occurrence of events in our lives: serendipity and synchronicity. Some events almost didn't occur, as the next chapter will explain.

15. Plant the potatoes now

An old man lived alone in the country. He wanted to dig his potato garden but it was very hard work as the ground was hard. His only son Fred, who used to help him, was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his son and described his predicament.

Dear Fred,

I am feeling pretty bad because it looks like I won't be able to plant my potato garden this year. I'm just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. If you were here, all my troubles would be over. I know you would dig the plot for me.

Love Dad

A few days later he received a letter from his son.

Dear Dad,

For heaven's sake, don't dig up that garden! That's where I buried the BODIES.

Love Fred

At 4 am the next morning, FBI agents and local police arrived and dug up the entire area without finding any bodies. They apologized to the old man and left. That same day the old man received another letter from his son.

Dear Dad,

Go ahead and plant the potatoes now. That's the best I could do under the circumstances.

Love Fred

I hope you enjoyed this heartwarming story and got a good laugh. You may have wondered where it was leading and that is precisely why I included it. Over the course of our lives, events occur that we really wonder about. There I go again ending a sentence with a preposition! These happenings may make no sense for many years. Some of them may be painful, physical as well as mental but eventually, we see the light.

In an earlier chapter, I mentioned Antwone Quenton Fisher's book, *Finding Fish*. One of the quotes you will read in this book by a young man facing difficult odds growing up is, "Everything that happened did so for a reason, at exactly the right time, in exactly the right way." I'm sure many people agree with his assessment and I am no exception. I already mentioned what led me to write my first book, but a few other events occurred and certain individuals came into my life over the years that played a huge part in my becoming a writer.

Had I not ventured off to Binghamton in the fall of 1970, I may never have gotten my four books published. I may never have even started any of them. That should be quite clear. There were people and events that brought this move about. I recall one day in 1968 that I received two pieces of mail. The first was a notification that I had been granted a teaching assistantship at Seton Hall University. The second wasn't anywhere near as welcome – my draft status had been changed to 1-A by the United States government. This meant I could be drafted into the U.S. Army, see the world – at least Vietnam – courtesy of Uncle

Sam. I thank God that I never had a chance to be any part of the military service. I like to travel, but not to ‘Nam in the late 60s! Besides being allergic to *el toro crappo*, I had more than my share when I spent two long, never-ending years in ROTC at Canisius College, all because the school had no physical education classes. This mail had a great deal to do with my leaving Buffalo that fall.

Yet, there were other events and people that affected what I am doing today. I have mentioned some of them but not all. There are days that we experience and people who sneak into our lives and then leave just as mysteriously that become part of the big picture and we don’t realize it. What would have happened if I had not written down the name of the book by Dan Poynter? I may never have had my books published. On the other hand, perhaps a royalty company may have gotten my career as a writer started. From my experience throughout the early part of 2007, I don’t believe that would have occurred.

An event happened just after my 2005 book was published that I should relate. I have an email list of addresses. I don’t spam people but every so often may send out a mass mailing, for some good reason. If I send jokes and the like, they have to be gutbusters, not to be confused with ghostbusters. I don’t recommend this type of communication. Instead, if you can, take advantage of your service provider to accomplish the same feat by individually emailing one person after another the same material. It will take longer, but it should be beneficial, and if you get into a rhythm, you can do a lot of copying and make it appear to be personal when every gets the same email.

One of the people whose address I had was Sue LoTempio of the Buffalo News, whom I mentioned earlier. She has a great deal to do with writers and the literary community in Western New York, although I didn’t realize it

at the time. I don't recall how I initially got in contact with her but I had sent her emails about some of my book signings, especially a fundraiser for tsunami relief. I didn't hear from her and I was about to delete her email address from my list of people, but somehow, I didn't.

When my book came out in June 2005, I emailed her about it. About three weeks later, she sent me information about *Gusto* at the Gallery on Friday, November 4, 2005, a free event at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery that would showcase local authors. Sue asked me if I wanted to get involved as well as provide the names of other Western New York writers who would like to be a part of that evening. I responded by saying I would be interested and gave her the name of Diane Newton – who I mentioned before – an author of award winning suspense from Lockport, a town northeast of Buffalo, as well as founder of the Authors Guild that I mentioned earlier.

Diane helped immensely by providing the names of people who should be invited and the Authors Guild became a main part of the evening. There were a host of local authors that night and in addition a group of work sessions were set up, each being an hour. There was a panel discussion in addition to stints on writing children's books, how to publish, a non-fiction workshop and mystery writing. I got roped into a session on writing humor. If you've gotten this far in the book, you can probably figure out why I was assigned that hour slot. There was a great deal of interest in these sessions and overall the night was a huge success. I may not have been a part of the evening had I dropped Sue LoTempio from my email address list. You never know – I'm not talking here about LOTTO tickets!

The story doesn't end there. At first I was reluctant to do the gig, at least the work session, but then I figured I can do it. I started writing about the role humor plays in books

and I had quite a few ideas, which developed into a number of pages on the subject. In fact, I got so gung-ho that I put a page on my web site about writing humor. You can't miss it if you go to my home page. Before the big night, I decided on a different approach. Instead of giving a boring lecture, followed by a time for questions, I decided on starting with the latter. Since this was supposed to be a "work session," I figured it was for the people, so I would get them involved right away. After an hour had passed, I would probably have talked about most of what I had initially written anyway. In fact that was the case.

Those of you who use your heads for more than keeping your ears apart and never became a part of *for seeing eye dogs only* or any of its coming sequels – there seems to be no absence of material – have probably realized that this book evolved from that work session. One thing you don't know is that I met some great people in the session, even had my groupies there and that night, sold a few books besides. Had I not done the hour, I probably would never have heard of *Non Campus Mentis*, which I described earlier. Moreover, the gentleman who talked about that book and was kind enough to email me its title, since I probably wouldn't have remembered it, has the same last name as mine. His first name is Ken, the same first and last name as my younger brother.

I could go on, so I will, since you can't stop me. I liked the book by Anders Henriksson so much that I went to the web site on the back cover of the book and ordered two copies of it from a bookstore in Brockport, New York, about fifty miles from here. I also sent out two emails in the hope that I might be able to peddle some of my latest book, since it too is about missing intelligence. So far, I got one response and before long I dropped off copies of all my books at the *Lift Bridge Book Shop* in Brockport. Perhaps I can sell a few

books there, and remember, most stores won't sell your books if they aren't on the premises. I have included a sample of *Non Campus Mentis* in the last chapter.

Little things can make a difference and you can't despair despite all the *el toro crappo* thrown at you. Just make sure you wear a raincoat, or the clothes you plan to wear to the Gallagher concert. As bad as it seems, it might get worse, but don't lose hope. More likely, your perseverance will eventually reap dividends.

Don't give up even if you think something isn't working. In my cookbook, I describe what to do if a recipe fails. Despite the humor in the book, these suggestions are serious. You have a few options. You can say *sayonara* and never make that dish again or you can try to make it work, by incorporating some changes. This applies even to recipes that aren't Japanese. You can use this same advice when failure rears its ugly head in your endeavors. If you are a writer, you have to try and try again. From this chapter, you should be convinced that as something is happening, you may not see the significance for some time, maybe even years. It could even pay dividends. Even if something may not appear to work at the time, it just could have an influence on book sales somewhere in the future. The next chapter relates one thing I didn't try but another that I did.

16. When do you two get involved in this?

The significance of this title will be clear in chapter 20. It's really only part of a quote but what it emphasizes is the fact that we can't do it alone. We need to talk to others and I hate the word but will use it: network. There are resources out there, so take advantage of all you can.

Other than my classes in English in high school and in college, I have had no formal training in writing. I described my journalistic jaunts for the high school paper and later, the writing of required boring papers, but that was the extent of it. Of course, in my involvement in the business world with computers, I did do some documentation of systems so I needed some writing skills. Somehow I feel that writing classes can be helpful but there are many successful authors who never enrolled in these sessions. Simultaneously, there are people who took writing courses but are struggling in their careers as writers.

To be successful, there's no magic formula, whether you are a writer, actor, sculptor, painter or musician. Not long ago someone recommended the movie, *The Basket*. I saw it at the library in January 2006, so I withdrew it and viewed the DVD at home. It was made at the end of the twentieth century so it's not that new and I don't know who told me about the flick, but they were right. I really enjoyed it.

I liked it even more when I viewed the special features, which I usually do for any movie I see on DVD. The discussion by the people who brought their idea to the screen indicated that they had no movie experience before they did the film. Nevertheless, I thought they did an outstanding job and it just validates what I said about classes and experience when it comes to the arts.

Once my books were published, I joined a writers' group, the Northside Writers. At the time I was living in East Aurora, a suburb south and east of Buffalo while the meetings were held at the Barnes & Noble in a suburb north of the city. As a result, I had about a half hour commute to get to the meetings, which were held twice a month on alternate Thursday evenings. My involvement with these people led to my membership in another writers' group, The Authors Guild of Western New York. There's a link on my web site with information about it. This connection has been very important to me.

In certain months with three Thursdays, the Northside Writers Group will meet for a third time at a restaurant over dinner. I made one of those rare nights where we ate and talked a bit about writing. In general, I did not care for the bi-monthly get-togethers because of the nature of the meeting. I will get into my reasons shortly. First, let me say that once I moved to a condo, which is less than five miles from the Barnes & Noble Store, I have yet to attend one of the sessions of this group.

The reasons I stopped going, when I could have attended because of the proximity of where I lived, had to do with the format. Anyone could bring in some of his or her writing, read it to the group and then the attendees would critique the writing. This would cover the entire two or three hours of the meeting. On a few occasions, the writer would pass out what he or she wrote and then the group would read silently. There were ground rules, such as the number of pages of writing being limited to about five pages; I am not sure what the exact count was. On one occasion, an author brought in a poem of two lines while other writers would pass out over ten pages of material, which I know was against the rules. In general, I didn't care for these never-ending pieces.

Had this procedure been limited to half the time and the rest for marketing ideas, I may have kept on attending. Another reason for being a no-show had to do with the idea of critiquing a chapter of a book. Without the entire manuscript, it might be a challenge to give an objective review of the work. If the offering was a short essay, it could still be vexing since reviewers in general are subjective. I don't care for certain types of writing so I could never say anything positive about it. I may be able to offer comments about punctuation, spelling or grammar, but that really wasn't the purpose of these evenings. And yet, we seemed to be doing just that on too many occasions.

This is what these get-togethers came down to: was the writing good, that is, would people read and enjoy it? Some I truly liked, mostly the short humorous essays by published authors in the group, my friends. Other stuff was too long and I couldn't get interested in it or the material was offensive to me. In either case, I couldn't make an objective statement about what had been read.

I never brought in any of what I had written for criticism. However, the group did publish a collection of the members' stuff, once a year, so I submitted an essay on "passwords," as in the unlimited number that each of us needs to remember to use the Internet, for email and bank access, to name only three. That's only the tip of the iceberg, the place where all passwords should be sent. The short piece was actually a part of a chapter in one of my published books, *Tick Tock, Don't Stop*, which had already been scrutinized by an editor. Well, the person who looked at it really had a few things to say about it, none of it favorable. I simply ignored him and never bothered to correct it the way he wanted and decided I didn't have to be a part of this coffee table publication. I don't drink that much coffee. Maybe they should have put Kramer in charge.

I had a brainstorm and almost submitted a few pages of a book. It wouldn't have been something I wrote but rather some semi-obscure work by a great author. I was just curious to see what this group would have said about this work of classic literature. I'm sure it would have been very interesting and I would never have to worry about ever going to one of those meetings again. Of course, maybe they would not have known that I didn't write it and they would have torn the author apart, even though he was dead. I didn't mention that this was group of cannibals.

Actually, I am somewhat of a critic insofar as I did add those web pages of books that I have read and recommend. It goes back about five or six years, but I don't include just any book I get through. One requirement is I have to have read most of the book, like what I read and felt others might enjoy it. Those criteria are rather subjective but people who read a great deal recommend their favorite authors and the books that these critics talk about have appeal. I will discuss why people like a book and tell others about it shortly.

I have read an author and loved what he or she wrote and sometime later started to read a book by the same person and never got past the third page. However, if I enjoy one or two of a person's books, I probably will read more. I tried to read a local author who is quite famous nationwide, and got to about page 75 and stopped reading there. The book seemed to me too much like a soap opera. I even started one of the classics and never finished it. I'm not crazy about Shakespeare and feel his books should have sub-titles! Still, what I point out just emphasizes the fact that best sellers are only that and not the "best" books that you will find to read. The only way to nudge these latter works to become better sellers is to spread the word about them to others.

17. But that would leave you with one

The significance of the title above has to do with show business and will be clear in chapter 20. Sometime before my first treatise on work came into print, I thought about using the lyrics from a song in the introduction. The first words you heard on the vocal were, “Tick tock, don’t stop,” they fit perfectly and were from *Back Where We Started*, a selection on the album *Simply Said* by Kenny Garrett. My CD collection is quite extensive and this particular song is by the fine jazz saxophonist, with whose music you may be familiar. However, before I could use it, I needed to get permission.

At first I thought that wouldn’t be hard as the CD had a web site listed, a good starting point. Maybe if I could have been in direct contact with Mr. Garrett, I would have had less difficulty. As it turned out, I had to deal with his agent / manager. I did talk to him and even sent part of the manuscript to show what my intentions were. I did what I had to do and waited. I called, left messages and waited, and eventually, I decided that I wanted the book published before the end of 2003. I concluded I had two options: either use the lyrics without getting approval or don’t use the words of the song. I chose the latter option.

That’s why you won’t find either Kenny Garrett’s name or the words of *Back Where We Started* anywhere in the book. This was my first encounter with a star in the entertainment business. Eventually, I did send the saxophonist a copy of the book. At the time, I didn’t realize that this attempt at contacting a famous person would not be my last.

You’d think that people would learn from experience, but sometimes we try with the hope that something might happen. In early 2005, when I was getting my work on

temporary brain tumors ready for publication, I had an idea. Why not contact some famous comedians and political satirists and ask if they would like to review my book before it was published. If so, and if the words were favorable, I could include them on the back cover. You can't say enough good things about a book.

Some comics have web sites and you can contact them, or at least try. I also found a web site that had the addresses of the stars. So, I sent a few sample pages of the book as a query along with a complementary copy of my cookbook, so they could get an idea of my writing. I got a few responses, but not many. However, no one chose to review the manuscript, mostly because of contractual obligations. It appeared that most of the correspondence I received was written by an assistant of the celebrity. One reply resulted in everything being returned to me, but there was a line saying that the manuscript was being forwarded to the appropriate person. I couldn't figure out how these pages could have been sent to someone else since I didn't send a manuscript and what I sent was returned.

When the book came out in June, I managed to send each of the same people a copy. I could only hope that some secretary to a celebrity would open the book and read it, die laughing and eventually someone would figure out the cause. I wouldn't get sued and would have some exposure. So far, I have not heard from anyone indicating that they have read the book. I did receive a nice note from Bob Newhart, thanking me for what I had sent.

Newhart originally was an accountant who later found his niche as a great comedian. He was not flamboyant like other comics but very observant and his style of comedy was innovative and hysterical. His albums, one of which is ***The Button-down Mind of Bob Newhart***, feature skits where the listener only hears half of a telephone conversation. That

is more than enough to generate laughs galore. One of his pieces involved a conversation with a boss and his subordinate, who found a “shell” on the beach. All you heard was the conversation of the former person, who said, “Oh, it’s not that kind of shell – it’s ticking. Well, as long as it keeps doing so, you’ll be all right.”

Bob Newhart was special and separate from many of the people in the business and I highly recommend another book with a great title, *I Shouldn't Even Be Doing This!: And Other Things that Strike Me as Funny*, which he wrote not long ago. Getting back to the stars, I realize that these people have busy schedules and probably get so much mail and books sent to them that they need to hire someone to keep up with all of it. I also respect their privacy, something that the press doesn’t do in many cases. There is always the possibility that one of these stars will actually open the book, read it and tell others about it.

I should add that as much as possible, I do keep up with what the different comics and satirists are doing. In 2007 I observed that some of these individuals may have read my book on missing intelligence. One took a bit and tweaked it for his comedy act – which I caught on one of the late shows – and another used at least two pieces from the book in a movie he did. In the latter case, this turned out to be the individual who returned the material I sent initially, including my cookbook, but not *for seeing eye dogs only*. I thought that was unusual, but of course, some of this material that I used in my book had been circulating on the WEB, so maybe I’m rushing to judgment. I had to pass this along, anyway.

I have been in contact with other authors through email but none as famous as Anne Rice or John Updike. If I read a book and it impresses me, I may send out a note, provided there is a way to contact that writer. On a few

occasions, there has been a response. These people may be good writers, but celebrity status has yet to hit them.

I did have the pleasure of meeting Mark Twain in the fall of 2005. And you thought he was dead. Actually, the person I met after the show is a local weatherman who has been impersonating Samuel Clemens for many years. He does a great job. I will get into more detail later in the book about his show. I did send him a copy of *for seeing eye dogs only* and he really liked it. In fact, you can find his *four cents* about the book on my web site. Think inflation and the fact that weathermen don't get paid much.

I didn't mention that not too long ago I began to do underwriting for WBFO-FM, the NPR station of the University at Buffalo. Everyone who has heard of Terry Gross knows the station as well as the school. Mike McKay, the person whom I got to know in this endeavor, also read the book, took it on a family camping trip and he and his family had a few laughs. His comments are on my web site as well.

When the book was released in June 2005, Mike suggested I drop off a copy with a local comedian who also hosts a morning show on one of the local radio stations. I delivered it personally after talking to him on the phone but he seemed to be in a class with all the other Hollywood Hermits, even though I know he lives neither on the West Coast nor in a cave. I have yet to hear from him. I'm not holding my breath.

The remainder of this book is the basis for my presentation on "writing humor" on the evening of November 4, 2005 at Gusto at the Gallery, which I didn't exactly give. Much of it can also be found by clicking on "writing humor" once you go to the home page of my web site. Of course, you may find a few mistakes there.

18. Laughter is the best medicine

The title above is the beginning of my quote, which can be found on the dedication page of my 2005 book. The complete quote is *Laughter is the best medicine and it's available even if you don't have health insurance.*

I won't tell you what else is on that page but the book title is intentionally not capitalized. I didn't come up with the idea; the gentleman who designed my cover did. I like the lower case letters! If you haven't read the book, it's a humorous look at missing intelligence, just what we all need to get away from this crazy world with all its problems. Please don't read it after surgery. Wait until the stitches are removed. I don't want to be liable.

Laughing is really important for good health, and it can be a lifesaver. The more you laugh, the less stress you will have. It can also prevent heart attacks, stomach disorders and help lower your blood pressure. It can even help you heal better after surgery. It costs nothing but can be the cure that you need.

You can improve your life and your sense of humor in numerous ways. I was driving home from a conference in 2005, when I thought about a couple, Dan and Norie Freedman, with whom I had the pleasure of studying while at the State University of New York at Binghamton. We enjoyed quite a few dinners together but many laughs as well. There were times when we were laughing so hard we were crying. That's the kind of time we should all engage in, as it really will prolong our lives.

I sent Dan a copy of my 2005 book and he enjoyed it immensely. He's the kind of guy with whom you should associate. You'll live longer in the company of people with a sense of humor, and Dan just so happens to be in that class. His wife died in the late 1980s of a brain tumor, but I'm sure

she approves of all my books, as do Patty and Abbie, to whom I dedicated that book.

Hanging out with people who have a sense of humor can only benefit you and embellish your sense of humor. Even if your friends are not blessed with this comedic gift, you can have an effect on them and spread the laughter around. As it makes its way to them, they will in turn make you chuckle as well. There's not a thing wrong with that.

Besides good health, humor plays another role. As a writer, your mission is keep readers turning the pages. That's how you get to sell books. You have two interrelated goals as a writer. The first is to have readers pick up your book and the second is to entice them to not put it down until they have finished it – of course, I'd prefer that they paid for the book, but not necessarily the list price. If they start at 11 pm, finish it, miss work the next day and are subsequently fired from their job, that's not your problem. You have succeeded as a writer.

You can certainly have readers in your grip if you write suspense or intrigue. That may not be easy if you write non-fiction, unless you are writing exposes. Most of the books I read are non-fiction and in many instances I keep reading. Suspense and humor may have something to do with it. One piece of non-fiction I read not too long ago was *Lab 257* by Michael Christopher Carroll, the disturbing story of the government's secret Plum Island laboratory. And you thought that Nelson DeMille's *Plum Island* was all fiction!

Even more recently, I read *The Storyteller's Daughter* by Saira Shah, a journalist's extraordinary journey to find her home in Afghanistan. You'll find it difficult to put either book down, once you begin them, and they are both non-fiction. My web site mentions a few other books that fit into this same category, so check them out.

A few other topics sell books, such as trashiness, eroticism, conflict – which includes war – food, politics, suffering, music and hope. If you are a writer, you may not want to lower yourself to some of these categories, just to make a sale. I know, I won't. I have certain standards. Unfortunately, these are some of the books that people buy.

Humor added to any book can achieve the same result. It may even give you an added advantage in your novel. As you read one book after another, you will notice that without exception, the good writing is such because of the humor present. Besides this edge, laughter can accomplish something else that is very important.

While studying for my degree in Computer Science at the School of Advanced Technology at Binghamton University, I had a professor who was unforgettable. His name escapes me but he lived in the City of New York and commuted to Binghamton each week, arriving on Monday or Tuesday and returning home at the end of each week. Usually he flew, but occasionally he drove. Besides his involvement in the computer science program, he was also the director of the symphony orchestra at the university. I went to a few of those performances and he was as good a conductor as he was an instructor.

He taught us logic, and on the day we met him, he announced that his class would not have a final exam, mid term, tests of any kind or papers. There would be rare homework assignments, which would be mostly reading. This sounded like a class for me!

He said we could smoke in class, cigarettes or otherwise. I believe snuff was allowed too. He didn't say anything about beer or moonshine in the classroom, though. I don't think the Attorney General heard about this class. Nevertheless, as you can tell from my short narrative, he was so interesting a person that I didn't want to miss any of his

classes. I'm sure a few other students felt the same. He was entertaining but we learned as well and weren't burdened by testing. I really do remember his name but I didn't include it because I want to protect his identity – I'm sure you've heard of the Patriot Act.

Education is best achieved by making it enjoyable. Adding humor not only helps, it is more effective. Just consider two books dealing with gambling. The first is a cut and dry self-help book about that topic. The same book done with a comedic tone will probably attract more attention. Even if both books are equally read, the latter will be a better teacher because the reader will remember what he read because of the tone of the book. Even a month or two later, one reader will probably forget most if not all he read while the other, who was showered with a few laughs, will have the lesson in his mind for a long time afterwards.

My cookbook mentions my first attempt at baking bread. I saw the recipe in *The James Beard Cookbook*. All good cookbooks start with the word, "The." This was the first cookbook I had and though it's showing its age, I recommend it very highly. Anyway, I decided to make Cuban bread. It didn't come out the way I had planned. Well, it was a success if you are into creating paperweights. The problem was that I burned the yeast, and that means the dough won't rise.

When you "proof" the yeast, or dissolve it in water or milk, make sure the liquid is not too warm. It can't be hot and should be a bit cooler than tepid. If the liquid is barely warm or cool for that matter, the yeast will do its job. I failed in this respect, created the blob and learned a good lesson. Whatever, you do, don't burn the yeast! Also, yeast from the 19th century probably won't work.

In my book, I could have merely mentioned this warning, but it may not have really registered with the

reader. Had they attempted to bake bread, they may have encountered the same difficulty. The experience I related not only generated a chuckle on the part of the reader, it almost assured that a paperweight wouldn't be created if this person decided to make a loaf or two of bread. This reinforcement of knowledge has to do with the power of association.

Humor can be a powerful tool no matter what the subject matter. You can even apply this principle to a subject like *nuclear* physics. I spelled it that way on purpose to get a laugh and see if you were paying attention. But seriously, you and I probably would read neither book on this subject – one with humor and one without – as we probably wouldn't understand the jokes in the one book. They'd really be “out there.”

19. My English ain't the best

Spellchecker won't be very happy with the title of this chapter. I could care less! I had the pleasure of working with Harry McLaughlin at Mahwah Jr.-Sr. High School in New Jersey in the late 1960s. He was a down to earth person who cared about the students and I'm sure was an exemplary teacher. I never observed his classes so I really don't know, but you can tell from knowing a person. I am grateful to him for having me over for a delicious dinner that I believe his wife cooked. The title of the chapter is one of his quotes.

Math teachers don't need to be able to speak perfect English. Thus I was off the hook while I taught and while I consulted. Matters changed when I got involved in writing. From that point on, I had to proofread carefully to see if I any words out. I learned that prepositions are not words to end sentences with. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction. Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.

No matter who you are, you need a sense of humor. It just differs from one person to the next. I hope I have convinced you that humor is a part of everyone, but one very important characteristic is also needed. I will get into that shortly. There are various types of humor, as Chris may have a warped sense while Pat is a political satirist when it comes to comedy. Rene may throw out lines that are gross and disgusting but they still might be funny despite the shallowness. None of us was born with a sense of humor. A baby entering this world may have a smile on his face but he won't laugh at Uncle Bubba's jokes since he won't understand them. Time will change that though.

If you are a writer or wish to be one, you will soon discover that what you write reflects who you are. If you write a novel about the CIA, you probably won't do too good

a job unless you have spent some time with the bureau or did a great deal of reading. Basically, you write what you are.

You really produce what you know or at least what you research. Thus if each of us has a sense of humor and our writing reflects our own lives, there's bound to be some laughs in what we put into our books. There's just no escaping that.

Hence, much of what is required to be successful applies to anything that we write. It can be humorous or not but remember, without a few laughs, your book will be ordinary and humdrum. People may not want to read it. You get an edge by using your ability to entertain when you can.

Earlier I mentioned another characteristic was needed, and that happens to be brainpower. There's a definite correlation between intelligence and being able to see the humor in a situation. Recall the newborn baby already discussed and you should be convinced. I hope you caught that spelling mistake in the last chapter. Hint: the word should be nuclear. *Spellchecker* would probably have picked it up. That may not be true in a few years, as it will be an acceptable word. Oh, the power of politicians! Speaking of which, there are a few programs on the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) network that you may have seen: *Royal Canadian Air Farce* and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. Each covers news and political matters of the world, with special emphasis on Canada. If you have no knowledge of the politics of that country, you certainly won't laugh that much at either program. Fortunately, the United States is not spared so you'll get a few chuckles. Nevertheless, the more you know, the more you'll laugh. I will describe how to advance your sense of humor in the next chapter.

One thing you will need is to keep up the good work in your writing. It won't be easy but eventually you will be

rewarded for your efforts. I dealt with an agent for some time until I got my first book published. Even when she had six of my manuscripts and there was interest by publishers, she was very positive that my persistence would soon lead to success. Her recommendation was something I will pass on to you.

Actually, it's more of a demand. If you want to be a writer, you need to spend fifteen minutes each day writing. This does not include thinking about what you will write or marketing your books, although each is something that has to be done. It really isn't much to ask – it's not as easy as it sounds, even if you are retired – and I will have some suggestions later to make sure you are diligent in this task.

There will be plenty of pitfalls and at times you will be disappointed and dejected. Throw them aside and continue writing. Don't get too upset and disgruntled when people don't answer your emails or phone calls. It's going to happen. You may recall the rejection letters I received as well as the lack of responses when I queried about my cookbook. On many occasions, you will get disgusted and not know what to do next. The hardest part may be deciding when to give up on an idea and try another. You will have to decide when to keep trying to reach someone without annoying them, losing all chances of success with them.

I was faced with just this dilemma not too long ago. I mentioned the email address of Sue LoTempio of the Buffalo News that I almost deleted and my later involvement with *Gusto at the Gallery*. I didn't mention that I sent my blurb on ***Writing Humor*** to a few magazines for publication. If they published them, they never let me know.

I have already pointed out the value of being able to laugh. As an author, you will need this no matter what you write, fiction or non-fiction. However, because of what I pointed out earlier about perseverance, it will be a requisite for your sanity and good health. Your dealings with

publishers, book stores, distributors, reviewers and even other writers will demand it. You will get along better if you can laugh at some of the absurdities and lunacies in the business. Since you have a full time job, you probably will agree that humor in that situation will be beneficial as well.

No matter what you write, you need to read as many books as possible, and don't limit yourself to non-fiction even if you only write self-help books. You can read the newspaper but you won't find as much truth there as in most books. You need not go to *Borders* or *Barnes and Noble* and actually purchase books to take home. I'm not suggesting that you use a five-finger discount, since I don't want to bail you out of the slammer. However, if you haven't read ***Five Finger Discount*** by Helene Stapinski, I recommend it for a few laughs. It's an entertaining and at times, hysterical biography of the maturing of a journalist from New Jersey. I try to view any movie or read any book that comes out by or about writers.

To find some of the books I mentioned, head off to the library for your reading pleasure. Grab as many as you can and if you can only carry three or four, bring a bag to put them in. Not long ago I gathered six books, a DVD and three CDs from the library and realized I should have brought something to carry it in. By picking up seven books, you won't have to worry if you begin reading one and don't like it. Start another. If you had bought the books, you would have spent a great deal of money and gotten a book that you would never finish. Also, you won't have to buy more bookshelves if you only borrow reading material.

The more books you read, the more you will know. Think back to that intelligence / sense of humor correlation. Reading will provide what you need as an author. Read books by Rita Rudner, Steve Martin, Mark Twain and Jim Hightower, a sample of whose writing I have included in the

last chapter of the book. I suggest picking up any book that looks interesting. You may be attracted by the title, so turn the book over and read the back cover. That will give you a good indication if you might like it. This process works for me so I use it to find books, usually going to the new non-fiction section at the library, in addition to my list of book titles and authors that I keep updated.

You can't read too many books, as you'll gain a lot of knowledge even if you aren't doing research for what you are writing. The more you read the more your writing will improve. Accuracy and creating a top-notch product is one of your goals as a writer. Along the way, you'll learn more and be entertained as well. You will know when you have read enough books on a topic because you will be sick of the subject.

I'll again emphasize that you can read newspapers and magazines, but there's more truth in books. I only buy a newspaper once a week on Sunday and even then I don't read every word, but I do get material for books. From coverage of recent events as well as from the distant past at such renowned papers as the New York Times and The Washington Post, you can see why I feel that way in this regard. And they're supposed to be the best!

To be successful as a writer, you must be able to accept rejection. There have been numerous writers who were turned down by many publishers but they still wound up selling thousands of copies of their book. Don't despair but have a positive attitude with a great deal of hope. Remember that artists always have difficult times with their craft, whether they are musicians, painters or writers.

A good example of this is the first book of mine that was published. My agent pedaled the manuscript to various publishers and there were even a few that expressed some interest. However, it didn't get into print until I took the

initiative to have it self-published. If you don't think that book has been a success even though it hasn't sold many copies, check out the critics' reviews as well as the words of the people who have read it on my web site. One reader, whom I have yet to meet, said, "I got a kick out of it – couldn't put it down until I finished it." This remark may be expected about a suspense novel, but she was talking about a cookbook! From her remarks and other reviews, you may even want to buy it. Her name is Monica so you know she can be trusted.

Don't forget that the number of copies of a book sold doesn't necessary translate into success. If your book sells a million copies, you may be rich, but that doesn't mean you'll be happy. From the way the publishing business is going today, you'll probably have to compromise what you write to sell thousands of books. If you do, the book will no longer be what you intended. If you are an artist, I don't think you should sell your soul to make it big.

Along with perseverance and dedication, you need to be aware of the fact that you won't be successful overnight. It will take time and effort. You won't be able to write just one book. If by chance you do only put out a single book and it sells a million copies, you will have to write more because your fans and publisher will demand it. But you need not worry about that scenario since it won't happen. Fortunately, with each book you produce, you will become a better writer.

I finished my first effort, a book about computer math in the spring of 1973. The first book of mine that was published in November 2002 was the cookbook, so it took a few years before I got published. It was the third book I wrote. Of course, I was working as a teacher, programmer analyst and software consultant during the time I wrote these books. Needless to say, I was patient and full of hope. As I

mentioned, my agent wanted me to write about ten books over the course of ten years and I was definitely on target. She said if I was dedicated and continued what I was doing, I would be successful. Of course, she was right, although I'm sure she would have been happier if I had gotten published through her efforts, as she wasn't my agent when my books came out.

If you are serious about your writing endeavors, I shouldn't have to remind you of my suggestions about the television set. Learning how to program the VCR will give you more free time. TV management will be of a great benefit to you and to your family. Today, people buy wide screen televisions, flat screens and high definition models and the picture is perfectly clear. Unfortunately, what they are watching is still junk, except the images are more vivid.

Speaking of crap, limit yourself to one "reality" show if you must watch that garbage. Also limit your viewing of other programs such as the news and the weather. Watching the Weather Channel three times a day won't prevent showers if they are on the way. It won't give you much more information than if you had the set off all day. If you want to know what the weather is at the moment, look out you window.

I promised some suggestions about getting time to spend 15 minutes writing each day. Keeping the television off will give you more than enough time. Of course, you can still watch some programs. You need not stay tuned to Fox News or CNN. After all, you want the truth. All you will get there as well as from watching the network news and the "news shows" will be spin and a great deal of repetition. If you want the news, I suggest the News Hour on PBS as well as the program NOW with David Brancaccio, which I mentioned earlier. The former is on five days a week for one

hour each day while NOW is only a half hour once a week. That time you can afford and you will be better informed.

If you haven't seen *Everybody Hates Chris*, check it out. It's the sitcom that appeared in late 2005 that Chris Rock developed and I find it hilarious and worthwhile. I mentioned *Royal Canadian Air Farce* and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* earlier but you'll have to learn a bit about politics across the border to our north to laugh at all the jokes. However, that knowledge won't hurt you. You'll also need to be able to get it on your cable station or live in Canada or close by.

I tried on a few occasions to watch *Saturday Night Live* recently but didn't survive past forty minutes. You might find it entertaining, though. Back in the mid 70s when the show first came out, it was a lot funnier. It was comedy at its best and it wasn't taped. I lived about forty miles north of New York City and tried to get tickets but they just weren't available. Fortunately, I got passes to the dress rehearsal in the afternoon. That was better since we got home at a reasonable hour even after having dinner in New York. Also, we saw two hours worth of skits. The guest host was Steve Martin with Randy Newman and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band as musical performers. All the original cast were on stage except for Chevy Chase, who had already departed the show. We saw Gilda Radnor, Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, Garrett Morris, Lorraine Newman and Jane Curtin. I don't believe Bill Murray was part of the cast at that time.

I don't recall many of the skits but I'm sure we saw *Weekend Update*. I can't tell you what the news headlines covered. There was a piece with the two wild and crazy guys, naturally, and one with Aykroyd doing President Jimmy Carter. The skit began, and after a few minutes we heard a voice over the sound system saying, "Please stand by." There was a hush and after about a minute, Aykroyd in

his perfect imitation of the president said, “What the blank is going on?” Only he filled in the blank! That bit was on the show later but not the ad-lib that we saw in rehearsal.

Another performer who I used to watch on PBS is Mark Russell and his *Comedy Special*. Unfortunately it hasn’t been on for some time, unless he said something to annoy the Buffalo station and has been banned in his hometown. I’m sure Mark must have some great material, considering all that has been happening recently in Washington, D.C. as well as in the rest of the world. I also must recommend *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart on Comedy Central.

I mentioned that I began serious writing while still working as a consultant. That illustrates another suggestion to not quit your day job. Unless you’re rich or retired, you will need bread on the table and a place to sleep. However, as I said earlier, if you want to be an author, you will need to be dedicated and do the fifteen minute thing. Do that every day, even on Sunday and don’t make excuses for not doing it, such as being tired. You’ll have to be dedicated and setting up a scheduled time during the day to do it may keep you on track.

By not altering your employment status, not only will you have food and shelter and be able to make the mortgage payments as well as car payments, you may also get more ideas for your next project. Heaven knows, I did from many years as a consultant. Managers and the business world give you an unlimited amount of material for your books. It comes with plenty of laughs so you should be able to actually sell what you write. Banks and the post office can provide material and laughs as well. Just be leery of lawsuits!

The next suggestion is for you and others that you hold dear. Don’t divorce your wife. If you’re not married,

you won't have this worry but you still have a family and friends. It's a good idea not to lose any of these, as you need a support system. Beside, you can't spend all your hours writing nor do you have to. Keep a balance between work, play, family and writing. It will have to be a part time thing but you can still succeed at it. This could be the reason why it took me almost thirty years to get published. However, once the initial book comes out, the others will be easier.

20. Voodoo acupuncture

By reading as much as you can, you can develop a great sense of humor. First, you will have more knowledge and intelligence. As I mentioned, without brainpower, you won't laugh at the jokes because you just won't get them. Second, your reading will fill you with ideas and laughs from various writers. You can do other stuff as well.

Getting out to see stand-up comics could be a good diversion and give you a few laughs. Unfortunately, you might have to put up with some true amateurs and it could be boring. I have been to a few of these venues and had the pleasure of seeing Pat Paulsen at one of these clubs a few years ago. He was worth the price of admission and he was just as funny as he was when he appeared on the ***Smothers Comedy Brothers Hour***. For those not familiar with that program, the juxtaposition in the title is not an error.

You may remember Paulsen's skit with the oil well. If not, or as a refresher, he pointed to it as the resourcefulness of this country. The oil symbolized the huge profits that the corporations made and the people, well they got the shaft. I still think he would have made a better president than we have now, even though he died years ago.

You can also get a few laughs by watching some good movies. You may want to stay away from the ***Terminator*** and ***Lethal Weapon*** movies despite the fact that there is some humor in them. Personally I don't think putting up with the violence and explosions is worth waiting for the laughs, which are few and far between. There are many movies that should make you laugh and which are more entertaining. Some of my favorites are ***The Milagro Beanfield War***, ***Local Hero***, ***National Lampoon's Vacation*** and ***Funny Farm***. I'm sure you have your favorites as well.

If you haven't seen the 1983 movie, *Never Cry Wolf*, I'm sure you will like it and tell others. It's a great adventure movie with a few laughs. After you watch it, pick up the book of the same name by Farley Mowat. I also suggest anything else he wrote, especially *Born Naked*, the story of his youth.

Some flicks may not be all that humorous but there may be one line that you can never forget. In the 1995 movie, *Forget Paris*, I roared when Mickey, played by Billy Crystal, is arguing with his wife Ellen, played by Debra Winger, in front of two silent marriage counselors. In disgust he utters, "When do you two get involved in this, when there's gunplay?"

Another classic moment comes in the 1981 movie *Arthur* when the inebriated Dudley Moore character is in a restaurant with his fiancé, played by Jill Eikenberry. She asks him to take her hand and he replies, "But that would leave you with one!" The punch lines to the titles of chapters 16 and 17 have now been revealed.

In April 2005, I had the pleasure of seeing the Smothers Brothers in concert at the Fallsview Casino in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Their show was a bundle of laughs and my only complaint was that the show was too short. Of course, they are getting up in age, but aren't we all? They needed their beauty rest. I had seen them back in the late 1960s at Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo.

This recent performance reminded me of the CBS show they did in the 1960s, to which I alluded earlier. I watched it religiously. It was on Sunday, wasn't it? The only thing that disappointed me was that the show flew by. You would be sitting in front of the TV enjoying it when either Dick or Tom would say, "Well, that's our show for this week." I couldn't believe an hour had already passed. Of course, that illustrated that it was a topnotch event.

They were bounced from the station because of their political commentary. They were censored and you can watch the DVD about their adventures, *Smothered*, an appropriate title. I do remember one incident when they needed to say BS, and this doesn't refer to a bachelor of science degree. But they couldn't utter it because of censorship. Instead they used the more hilarious phrase, *el toro crappo*, which I have used before in this book. I'm not sure if there are two 'p's in that last word! I don't think this use of those three words happened on one of the shows in the 1960s but rather on a special many years later.

This replacement of words by the Smothers Guys was pure genius. First, they got their point across; it got on the air, past the censors. Over and above that, I thought their choice was worth a great deal more laughs than the alternative. Chris Rock got into George Carlin's seven words you can't say on television on *Everybody Hates Chris* without uttering them. You can do the same as a writer, whenever humor is intended. Rather than spouting obscenities, of which I don't approve, since they show immaturity, do what these comics did. It shows a great deal of class and sophistication.

For example, to your book you could add a classic limerick about a guy who lived in Nantucket. It might be funny, but it's off-color. On the other hand by just mentioning the idea as I have done here, you probably will get many more laughs. Your mother won't get upset either, although she may ask you what you meant. I can't help you there so make up a PG limerick!

Be creative. You can mention a famous clean punch line, without telling the entire raunchy joke and get tons of laughs. Of course, people need to know the joke. There are plenty of opportunities for humor, so use your brain and you will succeed.

More recently I had the pleasure of seeing Mike Randall, the meteorologist of Channel 7 WKBW-TV in Buffalo in his presentation of *Mark Twain Tonight*, which I mentioned earlier. He does an excellent job and all those present had some great laughs. I find reading Mark Twain rather difficult, but that evening was worthwhile, as Mike did the translating and I recommend it very highly. Even though he repeats pieces of shows from one performance to the next, I probably will see him on stage again.

I mentioned seeing Gallagher at Melody Fair earlier in Buffalo with his “Sledge-o-matic.” If you like people who smash watermelons with sledgehammers, you’ll like his show. Just don’t wear your Sunday best. It was a worthwhile evening but weird and I only got a bit of Ragu sauce on me. Nonetheless, I really prefer his intellectual, humor. He gets into some great insights and funny observations about the world around us. Fortunately, his show had some of those bits thrown in along with the splattering of food products.

The performance was filled with suspense and you may have been wondering about the significance of the title of chapter 6, so many pages ago. It’s not quite complete and comes from the comic mind of this same comedian. It was on a favorite cassette that I no longer possess, and it goes, “How can I be overdrawn? I still have checks.” He didn’t bring this line up on that particular show.

About a year or two after that, I was in the audience at the Erie County Fair in Hamburg for Carrot Top. He is another prop comedian with an ingenious sense of humor. My sister, niece and I were thoroughly entertained that night. If you get a chance to see him in action, don’t hesitate. You can wear good clothes. He won’t slime you.

You don’t have to pay for a ticket as you can see comedians on television as well. The Comedy Channel has

movies and almost endless comedy but don't forget your wife and kids. You'll become a zombie if you spend all day viewing that station. However, if you get it in your home, you can tune in every so often.

The CBC has an hour of standup comedy weekly and you may get to see some funny people. At times though, the comics resort to bathroom humor and you may not want to put up with that for an hour. One of my favorites that you may catch from time to time on different comedy specials is Russell Peters. He is Canadian and his parents hail from India. Consequently, he can sound like an American or an Indian. Because of this, he can be quite funny. His great insight only adds to the hilarity.

You can also listen to comedians on CD or view them on DVD. Besides the already mentioned people of humor, some of my favorites include Jerry Seinfeld, Steven Wright, David Letterman, Henny Youngman, Rodney Dangerfield and Eddie Murphy. I don't collect comedy CDs in general, but I do have some instances of humor in song by various artists in my collection of music. I had a collection of great humor on that cassette I mentioned earlier, but made the mistake of not copying it before letting someone else listen to it. I never did get it back.

The comedy on that medium included some great lines of Carlin, including his news headlines. One was

Terrorists blow up South America...leave a note.

Probably my favorite was

Off-duty cop shot by on-duty criminal.

Another of his headlines went something like this:

In Chicago, police arrested a one-armed man in the park today for bothering others by continually rowing in a circle.

I know, that's sick but it's funny. There were a few more humorous, memorable lines of his. One you'll find in

my cookbook. Besides his outrageous humor, the tape had a ton of hilarious stuff from the brilliant mind of Steven Wright. One of his offerings that was on that cassette goes something like this:

A friend of mine does voodoo acupuncture. You don't have to go. You'll be walking down the street and then realize that it feels so much better.

Somehow I feel Steven Wright would be proud of me for the last chapter of **for seeing eye dogs only**, which is modeled on his creations. I have included a sample from that book in the last chapter here, and there'll be more insane, dumb questions in the sequels. You'll have to catch his act in person or on television.

The cassette also had material from Letterman's **Top Ten List** and some other humor as well. I found a book at the library on that renowned list. One had to do with the top ten things you heard at the Panamanian elections. The words that follow weren't number one but they were high on my list:

With 150% of the vote in, the government is ready to declare a winner.

A puppet government...the kids will love that.

The never to be recovered cassette had some miscellaneous thoughts by other comics, while the major part was monopolized by the Smothers Brothers, simultaneously featuring their wonderful voices. That is the part that I miss most and just recently I bought one of their CDs, which has most of what was found on that cassette.

Besides some of the comics I already mentioned, I also saw Johnny Carson in Las Vegas. He had me laughing. You may recall my friend who suggested we head over to Nestle Foods. A few months before that, we had the pleasure of stopping at Rodney Dangerfield's Night Club in New York City one evening. We saw the master at his craft

and he didn't disappoint the crowd. I don't remember any of his act, but I do have a few favorites. I include them here for your amusement.

I get no respect. I wanted to go ice-skating. My father said, "Why don't you wait until it gets warmer."

My wife's cooking is so bad the flies chipped in to fix the holes in the screen in the kitchen.

21. I wrote a song but...

The comedian Steven Wright completed the above title with the words, “I can’t read music so I don’t know what it is.” I wish I had written that line, and one thing I don’t write is music, but here goes anyway.

Woke up this morning,
My idea is dead,
Technology came down
And stomped on my head.

By the way, the Wright comment above was on that cassette that I described in the previous chapter. Also on the tape were a few funny observations by Darryl Sivad, a comedian I saw on the Tonight Show and video-taped many years ago. He eventually went on to a short-lived sitcom on television and had small parts in a few movies, including the updated remake of the classic tale, *A Cinderella Story*.

In his act he was mentioning that there are very few blues Christmas songs, so he decided to write one. It was similar to the four lines above except that he used *woman* instead of *idea*, *Santa’s reindeer* instead of *technology* and *her* instead of the last *my*, thus composing a Christmas blues number.

Elvis sang *Blue Christmas*, which I think is a perfect title to describe what writers go through on too many days. *Christmas* is a happy, joyful and peaceful time but *blue* reflects sadness. An author may get some good news about one of his books but before long discovers that the opportunity for him has slipped by the wayside. In the course of a few hours, two contradictory emotions are felt. That is exactly what the content of this chapter will be. As you may guess, modern advances in technology will be part of the consideration.

You have already seen a few examples of just this scenario in the pages before this discussion. Unfortunately, there are many others. I'm not the first author to face this situation. You are at a party and talk comes up about your books. There's great feedback and one or two individuals express interest in one of your babies, with a semi-promise of an email. However, as the weeks pass, you hear not a thing from any of these people, even though you passed out your business card, which had your web site listed.

I mentioned the book signing that resulted in the sale of a single copy. I didn't tell of the people who dropped by to chat. They too said they would browse my site and were interested in purchasing one of my books. I mentioned that they could save the cost of postage by buying the book right at that moment. I never heard from them after that. On the brighter side, I was at a book signing and someone wanted to buy my cookbook but didn't have cash. I gave the woman the book and told her to send me a check. She departed but before long she returned with enough money so she didn't have to mail a check.

Just after Thanksgiving in 2007, I was at the Broadway Market Food Fair for a book signing and I talked to a young man who was interested in my books. He didn't buy any that day, but took my card. Two weeks later he called and ordered the latest two books. I sent him the books and since the United States Post Office got involved, there will be more about this adventure in a future book of mine about temporary brain deficiencies. Sometimes people are sincere, as was this person but I have heard the same story before, without any sales.

I was at a party during the summer of 2005 and one gentleman asked where he could get a copy of my latest book. I mentioned that I could send him a copy or he could get one at Amazon as well as at a host of stores in the area.

What I should have done was gone to my car and brought him a copy. I always carry books in my vehicle. I wonder what he would have done then. Better yet, I should have brought the entire bag with my books and set up a stand. I couldn't do that because I didn't have enough change.

Before my cookbook was published, I bought a copy of another writer's novel and mentioned my forthcoming venture. He said that my book could make a great holiday gift and he would remember that. I did send him some reminders about the cookbook when it came out, but if he got copies, he certainly didn't get them from me. Too often, all we seem to get is lip service. Granted, that part of the face is in the title of my book, but I would rather make a sale than be patronized.

Speaking of food, when you think of it, these instances might be considered "small potatoes." It's discouraging when an apparent sale doesn't happen, but there are worse things that can happen. You hear that a company is interested in your book and they have a hundred stores, but then no one ever contacts you again, even though you try to reach them. I related not one but two such disappointments with the republishing possibility of my cookbook and the National Park gift shops deal. Such is life!

Another writer, with whose work I am quite familiar, hit highs and lows when he was asked to ghost write a book. He spent quite a bit of time meeting the individual, transcribing notes from a cassette onto a word document to give a sample of what he could do for the project. I found out that his initial meeting seemed to go quite well and the ghost writee – that will be a word soon – appeared pleased with the get together and the idea seemed like a worthwhile one, even from a financial point of view

The writer informed me that the work seemed to be intended as a memoir for family members. His sample writing included some of his humorous style to help sell the book. Unfortunately, when the character being written about read the manuscript, which was just a beginning, the project came to an abrupt end. The writer was notified that the writing was incomplete – of course, it was, since it was nothing more than a start – and filled with errors. It couldn't have had too many mistakes if it was basically a transcription of notes, based on the individual's words.

The writer was disappointed but somewhat relieved. He didn't feel like working with a partnering nazi – I use that term in a Seinfeld sense. The author felt that in this adventure a ghostwriter wasn't what was needed but rather a ghost stenographer. Of course, you'd never know when this person left the room. He also thought that getting out at that time was like a woman leaving a relationship before the marriage, figuring that there would be some pain at first. However, it would be a great deal better than departing after the knot was tied.

There was something else that came up for discussion with this episode. Writing a biography may not be the best kind of book to write. I qualify that: you can write this type of book, but only about a deceased person or about yourself. Note that those two choices are mutually exclusive. If the person has living relatives, it won't be as difficult in some respects, but it could have other headaches for that same reason.

Ghost writing and having to rely on the approval of others may not be difficult. They could be quite cooperative, but on the other hand, you might have to leave out the best parts of the book. This could be what really sells the book. Dealing with others could mean you'll have to compromise your writing. There are some other ideas to

remedy this dilemma that could work but they involve hit men and I'm not crazy about going to jail just to get a book in print. On occasion something sounds like it has great promise but turns out quite the opposite.

These ups and downs remind me of my days as a consultant. The last few years I was involved had me driving between 70 and 80 miles to Rochester for contracts. In the winter it can be quite a challenge but even in the other seasons, it will wear you down. I alleviated the problem by working a four-day week. I also stayed overnight either at a motel or at a friend's apartment. That made a difference.

I worked from Monday to Thursday and as the end of the week approached, my disposition improved. By Thursday afternoon, I was in heaven. However, on Sunday evening, I couldn't have been more down, thinking about the upcoming week. It was really bad because I had to rise on Monday morning at an ungodly hour. If I got up at 7, I wouldn't be at my desk until 9 and this made for a really long day since I had to work ten hours. I put in forty-hour weeks, so do the math. Going to bed at ten on Sunday night is a drag but it allows you to rise at 5 the next morning – also a drag.

With writing and all the joys of working with publishers, book store and marketers, the emotions are exactly the opposite. You begin the week on a high with all your new ideas, hopes and dreams. Usually, it gets worse with each passing day. By Friday you say the hell with the rest of the week. Check and see what a new week brings. I do try to accomplish something on Friday and I even do stuff on Saturday, mostly writing, but there are some ends to the week when I just close down sooner than I should and figure the beginning of a new week is just around the corner.

I didn't mention another pain in the Adam's apple: technology. There used to be a saying, "If you really want to foul things up, buy a computer." The Internet helps cause confusion and only makes things infinitely worse. I'm probably more critical because I have a degree in computer science. For those of you who design computers and software, I shouldn't have to mention that it's a *science*, not an *art*, even though the latter has its place.

Nonetheless, if you are a writer, it's almost impossible to exist in the environment without using a computer, even if you didn't design your own web site. You still need that word processor and, my favorite, email. I think it should be called, "ugh mail," or maybe "eeee mail." If you are an author, using a pen or pencil – or the word processor I had before someone pilfered it – probably won't do. The world of technology has got us and I don't have to mention where.

The "joke" about technology that you can find in a previous book and which I left out of this book, unfortunately is not funny, but right on the money. Who said I wasn't a poet? The monopoly of technology by two monopolizing lightweights doesn't help. What we all would relish – which would sell and undermine what we have today – is a user friendly computer that doesn't crash and does what most people want without concerning itself with potentialities that no one will ever use. It would also help if some reasonable rules were set up and followed. For example, if an error just happened to occur, a meaningful message would result. Also, the machine you buy as well as the software should not have to be upgraded every few minutes. All right, I'm exaggerating a bit, but you get my point. Also, it shouldn't have bugs when it is installed and when users report them to the manufacturer, they shouldn't get charged for service to repair.

In the summer of 2005, my computer crashed. It was nothing major – the startup file was either missing or corrupt. Both choices sound like our government. In late December 2005, I finally got my PC back to where it had been before the disaster. I won't bore you with all the details. Rather, you can find the full story in ***Press One for Pig Latin***, a book I hope to have it published in 2008. The book is – what did you expect – my humorous treatise on the failure of one aspect of our lives, describing my adventures as well as relating what's wrong with technology and what can be done to remedy the problem. There may not be enough intelligence in the industry to correct the problems they themselves create.

22. She criticized my brownstone

The correct response to the words above is, “So I knocked her flat.” That’s old but you’ll note that I updated it somewhat. One thing you shouldn’t do is try too hard to be funny in your writing. Don’t force the humor. As you write, you should have a good idea of what will fit in with the subject matter. For example, in my cookbook, I added some laughs without disrupting the cookbook. Each chapter ended with a joke, but it had something to do with food. Thus, it fit. In addition, I injected anecdotes that were entertaining but they were all culinary related. The comments all came from my experiences in the kitchen and each was meant to instruct so that the cook wouldn’t have to face what I went through in my trials over a hot stove.

If you wonder if I was successful in this endeavor, check out what the people say who bought the book. You also can find comments on my web site from those who read it but didn’t pay for it. Unfortunately, you have to spend money to make some and the writing business is no exception to that rule. Thomas Fortenberry of Midwest Book Review describes it as “a very highly recommended addition to any kitchen cookbook collection.” Lois Marie Gibbs of Love Canal fame and author of *Love Canal: The Story Continues* described it as “a great, funny cookbook.” I met her a few summers ago and recommend her book.

If you want to “write humor,” you must remember that as an author you need a subject to write about. The humor will come later, once you make that first decision about a topic. My 2005 work may be a humorous look at missing intelligence but it is first and foremost about the dumb things that people say and do. Fortunately, as you can see from some of the excerpts that I have included at the end of this book, they just happen to be funny.

That will be true no matter what you write. The second book I wrote but didn't completely finish was also intended to be funny but it was about language, specifically English and all its expressions, clichés and sayings. In fact some of that book was incorporated into my 2005 book since it fit quite well and some more of it can be found in the sequel, *Wake Up – It's Time for Your Sleeping Pill*, which I hope to have out in 2008. Nonetheless, anything that you write can be funny and entertaining but it needs to have a topic. You can't laugh if you haven't got something substantial to chuckle at. I know I shouldn't end a sentence that way but what the heck!

One of the guys whom I sang with told me I should do stand-up humor. I think he was kidding but I have no intention to enter that venue. My apprehension about the work session on *writing humor* for *Gusto at the Gallery* should have convinced you that I'm not crazy about the stage. Thus I don't make a habit of telling jokes and you shouldn't sprout one-liners in your writing, either. They probably won't work. Of course you may be able to squeeze in some laughter at an appropriate moment, provided it fits. To convey humor, you don't need a punch line. Recall what I said about putting who you are into your book and you can see that conveying hilarity may actually come quite easily for you.

As great as humor is, sadly it can lead to the end of marriages. It really shouldn't. If two people are relatively compatible but there is a wide discrepancy in their laughing habits and pun proliferation, these disparities could spell trouble. My only suggestion is that the humorist does all he or she can to not drive the spouse away. Above all, communicate and put yourself in your partner's shoes.

One habit that I changed recently was asking for feedback. In some ways, you need it and some people won't

provide it unless they are poked and prodded. I no longer ask people what they think of my books. It really isn't necessary and probably not a good idea for a couple reasons. First, people will tell you anyway without solicitation, so save your energy. You'll need it for writing. This spontaneous response will have more value because it will be honest and forthright. It's really what you want to hear anyway. High praise may be great but criticism will make you a better writer.

Second, if you ask someone for his thoughts, he may patronize you, not want to hurt your feelings and not really tell you what he thinks. Also, she may not even have read the book. In either case, the feedback won't benefit you at all.

Even if someone is a professional reviewer, be patient and don't ask if they are through with your book. They'll let you know in good time. You won't like to hear this but it takes quite a while to get back comments for your books, even if they are only 120 pages. I found that out with my first few books. However, getting a book or two reviewed means you have a connection to the critics.

If you ask people for comments because of marketing purposes, this poses a huge problem. If you send someone the book because you want it promoted, the recipient won't be able to make any kind of decision unless she at least opens it. Of course, she can't just stop there either. But that poses a dilemma. As I said, it's a tough business.

23. “Are you experienced?”

Over the Christmas season of 2005, my friend Mark gave me a DVD of the greatest guitar player that ever lived. You’re obviously not into music if I have to tell you who that is, but the title of the chapter should give you a good clue. I’m talking about Jimi Hendrix, of course. After watching the DVD, I got a copy of the book, ***Hendrix: Setting The Record Straight*** by John McDermott and Eddie Kramer, no relation to the dude on *Seinfeld*.

The book was very informative but I found it a bit long. Considering the fact that Hendrix kept to himself, there was no need for the book to be that many pages. Though I recommend it, you have been forewarned. However, the title of the chapter reflects the question about what you need to become a writer. Do you have the credentials? From what I have written so far, you can see that there’s nothing mysterious about writing fiction or non-fiction. There’s no secret formula to success. There are some basic qualities that you will need, which I have already described.

Despite that abomination called *spellchecker*, you still should know how to spell words and what they mean. For another thing, you need to put words together to form sentences. Even if you can do that, you have to successfully group them into paragraphs and the latter into the final product, a book. Of course, it has to be readable. You can write it, get it published and get good reviews but that still doesn’t mean people will buy it. If you’ve have gotten that far, you’re definitely a writer in my book, no pun intended.

Experience is the key. As I mentioned earlier, you won’t be able to succeed by writing only one book. As you write more and more, what you are doing will become easier, better and you will enjoy the process more. That’s true even if you don’t sell many books. Since there are so many books

for sale, you will have endless competition. Don't let that discourage you, though.

Being able to construct flowery passages may not be good enough. I have been told that you need to do that in writing a breakthrough novel. I'm not convinced of that. I recommend James Michener's *The Novel*, which is gripping and confirmation that writing appears to have few, if any rules. Proof further was shown to me when another writer who read my novel added that I needed more sex in the book, it didn't matter which kind. I think you can figure out what he meant. I listened to him and thanked him for his advice but I didn't agree, although I didn't relate that thought to him.

You can certainly have character development without an abundance of adjectives. Speaking of plenty of character, I met a gentleman at the writers' conference who described his author adventures. He mentioned that all these characters were sneaking into his book and it became so long that he decided on a trilogy, splitting it up into three novels, each 500 pages. I don't read many books over 500 pages and I can't picture myself reading a novel of 1500 pages, or close to that length. From his description of the book, it sounded like a soap opera – excuse me, three soap operas. I thought his comment about “sneaking” was interesting as he was doing the writing. He should have locked his doors.

You need not have blood, guts, violence and mayhem in your book for it to be a success. Alfred Hitchcock was a master of the cinema and his movies usually had at least one murder – *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* didn't – but he spared the audience the disgusting details. All right, there was one shower scene but even then he did the movie in black and white. He used tact and people flocked to his movies. You can do the same in your writing without trash and grossness.

People will still buy and actually finish reading what you write.

One book I almost didn't finish was ***Bushworld: Enter At Your Own Risk*** by Maureen Dowd. Unfortunately, we have no choice – that refers to the subtitle. The book is rather lengthy but because of the humor, I stuck with it and managed. It should upset you, inform you and make you laugh. As far as long novels go, I already mentioned Nelson DeMille's ***Plum Island***, but I also liked ***Word of Honor*** and ***Up Country***. One of his more recent books, ***Night Fall*** – my favorite so far – is described as a page and a half turner, probably because of the laughs. It's all about flight 800 that blew up in the summer of 1996 over the eastern shore of Long Island – or was it shot down? This Vietnam veteran is noted for long books, but they will keep you reading.

I'll talk about a few other favorites of mine shortly who are top-notch. But how can you make the grade if there are no rules? Well, you need an edge or something that stands out above the rest. I bring up Gallagher once more, one of the few people with one name, because of what that giant wooden mallet did to his career, despite his brilliance as a comedian. Without it, he may never have achieved all the success he enjoyed. He had a gimmick and you certainly need one to be successful as a writer. You'll have to come up with something other than "Sledge-o-matic" – it's been reserved.

I mentioned reading as much as you can and once more I emphasize its importance. Besides bestowing intelligence on you and some sense of humor in many cases, you will see what works. If a reader puts your book down after ten pages, something is missing. On the other hand, if she is intrigued, gets to the last page without effort and wants to read another one of your books, you have found the answer. My web site lists a myriad of authors whom I have

enjoyed reading. I read mostly non-fiction but I don't limit myself and you shouldn't either.

David McCullough has written some outstanding books about boring historical figures, such as *Truman* and *John Adams*, both very long. However, I finished each of these and you will too because his writing has something special. More recently I finished reading another of his fine works, *1776*. Another historian that I believe you will enjoy is a friend of mine. John Marszalek is a distinguished professor at Mississippi State University, now retired but still writing. One of his latest efforts, *Sherman's March to the Sea*, is a short treatise on the famous general and his point of view about how to end the Civil War. His early work, *Assault At West Point* was made into a Showtime movie and I'm sure you'll enjoy the *Petticoat Affair*, a true story of a woman way ahead of her time. John grew up less than two miles from where I spent my childhood and we both graduated from Canisius College, although not the same class. Who said Pollacks can't become authors?

The key point about writing is that you shouldn't read a John Grisham or Stephen King novel and then copy what they wrote. Rather, see what they did that works and go from there. Be yourself. You are unique, you have a story to tell and you have a great deal of knowledge about many things. Use that to your advantage. Taking courses might help you become a writer, but it might not. Not everyone wants to or can become a writer. Even the strong desire and dedication to be one won't guarantee that you will make it. As I have stressed, there is no magic formula for success. The various styles and works of writers prove that. However, once you get in the groove, you'll have your niche and should be on your way.

24. Smile...people will wonder what you're up to

I changed the last title somewhat. Originally it was going to be, "Smile...it increases your face value." That would have been very appropriate, considering what it is about, but I think Jim Hightower, whose few words end the chapter, would have concurred with me on my choice. It has more of an agitator ring to it, which is what he encouraged me to do. I urge you to do the same when things aren't right and could be better. However, I will leave those sentiments for another one of my upcoming books – into which I'll inject some humor, so you'll buy it.

Smile is the name of a song composed by one of the greatest comics of our time, Charlie Chaplin. It was written for the movie, *Modern Times*, which came out in 1936, in which he stars but doesn't talk. It's an outrageous comedy in black and white that was way ahead of its time. It illustrates the fact that you don't need color and special effects to make a great movie. Heck, you don't even have to hear the actors speak! A smile is the beginning of a laugh, which can lead to better health.

I thought I would close the book with a bit of humor. The last piece on "intelligent design" is by Jim Hightower and I have included his web site. Jim is a former politician turned advocate of the people. I recommend his books for a few reasons. First, he mentions the state of the economy and what the Bush administration has done in a few years to destroy all hope in the United States. Second, he offers optimism, and last but not least, in the process, you should get some really good laughs, something we need because of what is happening in the world today.

I begin with a few excerpts from *Non Campus Mentis*, as promised, which as far as I can figure translates

roughly into “No brains on campus!” My comments are in italics.

Hitler’s instrumentality of terror was the gespacho.
I didn’t think he was Spanish or a gourmet!

The Parthenon was Pericles’ greatest erection.
Cleopatra never complained.

Rasputin was a pheasant by birth.
His mother had a tough time in the delivery room.

Marie Curie won the Noel Prize for inventing the radiator.
It came in handy around the Christmas season!

The Civil Rights Movement turned around the corner with
Martin Luther Junior’s famous, “If I Had a Hammer” speech.
That’s how Peter, Paul and Mary got involved.

St. Theresa of Avila was a caramelized nun.
She should never have taken that job at Hershey’s.

One of Rome’s early victories came against the Samsonites.
The victims were prepared for travel.

The Prussian army would surprise young men by grabbing
them in unfair places.
This was way before Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

Magellan circumcised the glob.
Nevertheless, he had a tough time finding a mohel to do it.

Margo Polo visited Kukla Kahn, who rained in China at the time.

Fran and Ollie were on vacation.

The three gods were “Good,” “Bad,” and “Indifferent.” These beliefs later resurfaced among the Manatees.

They may have been from Atlantis.

The Book of Exodus describes amazing things that happened, including the Ten Commandments, various special effects, and the building of the Suez Canal.

This was even before Cecil B. DeMille.

Arranged marriages required women to accept a kind of mate accompli.

Once chess was invented, it became checkmate accompli.

Archimedes made the first steamboat and power drill.

He still had trouble keeping his business afloat.

The Roman republic was bothered by intestinal wars.

And you thought proctology was a recent development!

Augustus did have to leave the Roman Catholic Empire due to his death.

The Church was always very strict.

Castles became more elaborate with thick walls, moats and towers topped by a row of crustaceans.

There was a Red Lobster nearby.

During the Dark Ages, it was mostly dark.

Bud Lite wasn't around either.

During the Middle Ages everyone was middle aged.

Gerber and Pampers would have gone out of business.

If you disagreed with the church you were accused of heresy and treated to excommunication. An important example of this was the Cathar movement in southern France.

That's the last movement I want to hear about.

Dick Cavett was the first European to visit Newfoundland.

I thought it was Shirley MacLaine.

The Thirty Years War began with the Defecation of Prague.

And you thought it was bad when the pigeons were overhead.

When not working in the church, Bach composed pieces on a spinster in his home.

The pastor had rules.

The airplane was invented and first flown by the Marx brothers.

They didn't like taking the bus to their gigs.

Florence Nightingale was a singer who became involved with the American flag.

I wonder if she knew Carol King.

Ataturk required his people to catch up with modern times and therefore stop wearing turbans.

And he wondered why so many of them had headaches.

When things didn't go as planned, Stalin used the peasants as escape goats.

I didn't think he liked mutton.

The Allies landed near Italy's toe and gradually advanced up her leg, where they hoped to find Mussolini.

They kneed to do this.

The following is a taste of my book, *for seeing eye dogs only*, which people have described as “very funny.” I hope what follows convinces you that those who raved about the book are justified in their comments. As far as the book goes, I should add that I changed the names of those involved as victims for a few reasons. You can read about three of my considerations for doing this in the introduction. One reason was I thought the names I created would make give you more laughs. Also, my comments follow in italics.

Congress allocated \$19 million to examine the amount of methane gas emitted from cow flatulence.

I don't think the problem should be blamed on the cows.

The instruction “Do not use while sleeping,” can be found on a Sears’ hairdryer.

I was wondering why my hair looked so disgusting in the morning. All this time I thought my wife had something to do with it.

“Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.”

For those of you single women, you can rummage for a mate.

Question in court: What gear were you in at the moment of impact?

Answer: Gucci sweats and Reeboks.

Is that between second and third gear?

“I know how hard it is for you to put food on your family.” –
President Pas dePotatoes

And he wonders why his grocery bills are so high.

After stopping for drinks at an illegal bar, a Zimbabwean bus driver found that the 20 mental patients he was supposed to be transporting from Harare to Beltway had escaped. Not wanting to admit his incompetence, the driver went to a nearby bus stop and offered everyone waiting there a free ride. He then delivered the passengers to the mental hospital, telling the staff that the patients were very excitable and prone to bizarre fantasies. The deception wasn't discovered for three days.

It would have taken longer than three days if the staff at the hospital were the passengers.

I live in a semi-rural area. We recently had a new neighbor call the local township administrative office to request the removal of the deer crossing sign on our road. The reason: too many deer were being hit by cars and he didn't want them to cross there anymore.

It's good to see that someone is concerned about wildlife!

Not long ago, some Boeing employees on the airfield decided to steal a life raft from one of the 747s. They were successful in getting it out of the plane and home. Shortly after they took it for a float on the river, they noticed a Coast Guard helicopter coming towards them. It turned out that the chopper was homing in on the emergency locator beacon that activated when the raft was inflated. These individuals are no longer employed at Boeing.

“Politics” is the phrase we use in this country to describe the process so well. In Latin, “poli” means “many” and “tics” is another name for bloodsucking creatures.

That word fits perfectly.

Moses led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread without any ingredients. He went up Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Amendments. He died before he ever reached the UK. Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the Battle of Geritol.

The above is from the mouth of a child and not a congressman.

According to the Washington Post of June 6, 1996, Harry Numnutz, 19, and an alleged accomplice, were arrested in West Lafayette, Indiana the previous month on theft and fraud charges. Numnutz allegedly cashed checks that he had written with disappearing ink, apparently believing the checks would be blank by the time they were presented to the bank for collection. However, traces of ink remained and police said Numnutz would have had a better chance of getting away with his plan if he had not used pre-printed checks with his name and account number on them.

He should have used stolen checks.

You’ve heard the expression, “He comes from a broken home.” I guess that’s what you get for living in San Francisco. One of the features of that house is a sunken living room, although yesterday it wasn’t. Talking about homes brings to mind real estate and the house on the lake with 3 bedrooms and 2 1/2 baths. Who are the people that need that 1/2 bath? Maybe it’s good if you get a visit from your half brother. Then again it may just be the result of a broken home.

I conclude with questions found in the final chapter.

If blind people wear sunglasses, why don't deaf people wear earmuffs?

If I am playing horseshoes and throw a ringer, why don't I hear bells? Maybe it's a dead ringer.

Are you in the wrong church if the person at the pulpit does a reading from the book of "suburbs?"

If I'm "put through the wringer," should the setting be permanent press?

If four out of five people suffer from diarrhea, does that mean that one enjoys it?

If people from Poland are called Poles, why aren't people from Holland called Holes?

Is a head gasket used to fix a broken toilet?

Why is Chopin's Minute Waltz one minute and forty-three seconds? I thought musicians were good mathematicians.

What do you call male ballerinas?

This last question will be answered in the sequel.

Unintelligent design

This last piece was created by Jim Hightower. If you like it, check out his books.

“Intelligent design” is the latest buzzword of the right-wing, Bible thumping cultists who keep pushing to Christianize our public schools. But I ask you: How intelligent is the design of our world, really?

Well, why teach only two beliefs? I submit that our world is pretty chaotic, often reflecting neither intelligence nor progressive evolution. “Unintelligent Design” is my theory. For example, here in Texas, we can get six inches of rain in an hour, then go six weeks without a drop. First we’re drowned, then we’re parched. Who planned this? Or, take tornadoes – does God hate trailer-park people? Why not hit some of those rich, gated compounds every once in a while?

Why are there ticks and mosquitoes? Dogs are good, but why must they drool and have bad breath? Why haven’t we evolved beyond the madness of war? And here’s a big one: Why would an intelligent designer produce Tom Delay?

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