

The ASJA Monthly

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Writing for Women's Magazines

by Sherry Suib Cohen



Under the Tuscan Sun
with **Frances Mayes**

Saying "I Do"
to **Bridal Markets**

Tax Breaks
for **Writers**

The Subtle
Plagiarism

— "We Write What You Read" —

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ASJA Confidential

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

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The ASJA Confidential is a special section for paid ASJA members only and contains exclusive industry information. We ask that members who receive the Confidential section keep the information contained therein confidential.

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The Writers Emergency Assistance Fund

Help for all writers

by JIM MORRISON



Several weeks ago, I e-mailed a writer whose essay I'd particularly enjoyed. She had written with rare honesty about working while dealing with a chronic, progressive disease.

I expected no more than a *pro forma* thank you for my praise. I certainly could not have anticipated the remarkable, rewarding reply I received several days later.

My note, she said, would join others in her Day Runner, where she keeps letters, notes and cards, and refers to them during difficult times when sitting in her doctor's office or waiting for a test. Among her collection are congratulations for her work being chosen for several *The Best American Essays* anthologies, a note from a famous author and a letter from ASJA's Writers Emergency Assistance Fund (WEAF), formerly known as the Llewellyn Miller Fund.

A couple of years ago, she lost her insurance coverage. Her new policy did not cover acupuncture, the one treatment that helped her continue to write through the pain. So she applied for a grant from the WEAF. She was fairly new to nonfiction writing and had only nine published essays. After originally turning her down, the assistance fund's board requested copies of all her work. After being moved by her writing, they reconsidered and awarded her a grant.

Of course, I had no idea she was the recipient of emergency assistance when I praised her work. The Writers Emergency Assistance Fund operates without interference by me or anyone else in ASJA's hierarchy. The fund's awards are confidential. The writer knew that, hence her letter.

"Rather than just send you a quick e-mail of thanks," she wrote, "I wanted to write this letter and tell you how much ASJA has meant in my life. The grant did so very much to give me—

at a very low time in my life—the spirit to keep going."

A few days later we spoke by phone. I wanted to ask her permission

There are always those facing greater challenges,
unexpected obstacles. They are obstacles that any
one of us could face tomorrow.

to tell her story anonymously in this column. "I can't tell you how much it meant to me to be given that grant," she said. "It wasn't so much the money. It was what it meant. It meant my peers had read my work, appreciated my work and appreciated what I was trying to do."

The dollars helped, too, allowing her to get treatments for six months and giving her time to make other arrangements for continuing treatment. When she wrote seeking the grant, she had just begun to believe writing nonfiction was the right course for her career after years of writing fiction. She was also just beginning to think her work might be worthy of collecting in a book and she promised the awards committee that if they gave her money, she would one day come back with a book contract.

Now, partly thanks to the treatments, she has been able to continue to write and publish. She's added five more essays, including a searingly honest piece about realizing that she will never escape the pain of her illness. She has earned more critical plaudits. And she has enough material for a book. "I sit down each day at my PC, and through the pain, write in the hope that I might touch just one life," she told me.

For me, her story is a reminder about why we do what we do when we're at our best.

So I write this column in the hope that you will reach into your pocket over this holiday season and make a tax-deductible contribution to the

Writers Emergency Assistance Fund. Voices like hers are needed. Her story is renewed testimony to the power every writer has to touch so many lives.

It has been a difficult year for many of us. But there are always those facing greater challenges, unexpected obstacles. They are obstacles that any one of us could face tomorrow.

So whether you have an extra \$5 or an extra \$500, please take the time to write the fund a check. Your voice may be the one we help continue to publish next year.

Mail your donation to the Writers Emergency Assistance Fund, 1501 Broadway, Suite 302, NY, NY 10036.

Thank you. **ASJA**

Jim Morrison, of Norfolk, Virginia, is president of ASJA.

SHOULD YOU BECOME AN ASJA MEMBER?

"This morning, I got a WMFH contract. I checked out the PayCheck report and saw others had negotiated and got the FNASR contract. I asked for it and ten minutes later it appeared in my mailbox. Between this and the great magazine subscription offers, my ASJA membership fee has paid for itself."

—Karen Bannan

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, E-MAIL

STAFF@ASJA.ORG

The Society Page

Member happenings

Lisa Collier Cool was profiled by *Freelance Success* in October. The story appears at www.freelancesuccess.com/profiles/profile1002.shtml...

Timothy Harper's *Atlantic Monthly* story, "Shoot to Kill," a 2001 ASJA magazine story-of-the-year, has been reprinted in the third edition of McGraw-Hill's *Patterns For A Purpose: A Rhetorical Reader*... Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc., chose **Russell Wild** as winner in its Consumer Publications category for his article, "The ABCs of Money," *Modern Maturity*, July-August 2002. Russ will receive \$1,000... **Jill Amadio's** latest book, *Gunther Rall: Luftwaffe Ace and NATO General* (Tangmere Productions, 2002), was published in July and a second printing is in the works...



Tina Tessina, Ph.D.

More foreign imprints for **Tina Tessina, Ph.D.** *The Ten Smartest Decisions a Woman Can Make After Forty* is now published in German as *Wenn nicht jetzt, wann dann?* (If not now, when?)...

Karen Dustman is happy to report that she passed the Nevada Bar exam. She is also licensed in California...

Judith Mandelbaum-Schmid, who moved to Switzerland last year, has been appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Maryland University College. She teaches magazine writing for the university's distance education program.... **Claire Walter** received Colorado Ski Country USA's 2001-2002 Lowell Thomas Award for Print Journalism for her article, "Colorado's Quiet Slopes," *Sunset Magazine*, February 2002, and **Mitch Kaplan** scored the Lowell Thomas Award in the Electronic Journalism category for his story, "Steamboat? Why Not?" featured on www.kidzn-snow.com in March of 2002.... **Robert**



Lisa Collier Cool



Claire Walter

Bruce Woodcox, author of the best selling *The Golf Gods Are Laughing* (Seven Locks Press) has a new novel, *The Prodigy* (Literary Press, Inc.), a story about life and golf...

Bruce Shenitz has edited *The Man I Might Become: Gay Men Write About Their Fathers* (Marlowe & Company), the first anthology on the subject. He is currently executive editor of *Out* magazine, where he oversees coverage of social, cultural and political issues.... The second and third **Dia Michels'** series of photographed children's books have just been released by Platypus Media: *Look What I See! Where Can I Be? At Home*, and *Look What I See! Where Can I Be? With My Animal Friends*...



Bruce Shenitz



Dia Michels

Marie B. Maher recently published *Gifts from Shane* (iUniverse) about her son's 18-month battle with severe aplastic anemia. The book's foreword was written by Winston Groom, author of *Forrest Gump*.... **Michael Frome's** new book, *Greenspeak—Fifty Years Of Environmental Muckraking And Advocacy*, was just published by the U of Tennessee Press.... Psychoanalyst **Alma Bond's** tenth book, *Tales of Psychology: Short Stories to Make You Wise*, has just been published by Paragon House.... **Sue Russell's** new true crime book, *Lethal Intent*, (Kensington Book Publishing/Pinnacle Books), about serial killer Aileen Wuornos, was published in November. Just weeks earlier, on October 9th, Wuornos was executed in Florida for the murders of six men. The timing certainly wasn't on agent and ASJA member **Linda Konner's** mind when she sold the book back in the summer of 2001. **ASJA**



Alma Bond

Send your news and digital photos to newsletter@asja.org.

Top 10 Reasons To Write for *The ASJA Monthly*

10. The contract is the best around (except for the money part!).
9. You may be able to sell it elsewhere for cold, hard cash.
8. You can get the inside track with an editor and/or magazine.
7. You'll know what's coming up before anyone else.
6. Your ideas will help keep *The ASJA Monthly* fresh.
5. We need your intelligent, witty and insightful writing to make *The Monthly* great.
4. Writers and editors will be impressed when they see your name in *The ASJA Monthly*.
3. You are a helpful, generous and benevolent person.
2. We'll appreciate you and treat you with respect.
1. If you don't do it, who will?

If you would like to hear what we need, pitch an idea or receive a copy of our editorial calendar, e-mail newsletter@asja.org.

Frances Mayes

Author of *Under the Tuscan Sun* on the various genres

by BARBARA DEMARCO-BARRETT

Frances Mayes was working on what would become the bestseller *Under the Tuscan Sun* when House Beautiful editor Elaine Greene asked her to write an essay for the magazine's "Thoughts of Home" column. Mayes' piece ran in the December 1993 issue and was later included in House Beautiful's anthology, *Thoughts of Home*. Although Mayes was deeply engrossed in her project, and as motivated as any writer needs to be, Greene's request became an added incentive to finish the book.

Under the Tuscan Sun was published in 1996. Shortly after the paperback was released in 1997, it vaulted to number one on The New York Times bestseller list where it remained for more than two years. She published *Bella Tuscany* in 1999 and *In Tuscany, a photo-text with Bob Krist and her husband, poet Edward Mayes*, in 2000. Her first novel, *Swan*, was released in October to reviews any writer would covet.

Long before Mayes turned to narrative nonfiction and fiction, this former San Francisco State (SFS) creative writing professor, Poetry Center director, and Department of Creative Writing chair, wrote and published six volumes of poetry (1977 to 1995). In 2001, *The Discovery of Poetry* was released, first as a textbook, and more recently, as a trade paperback.

We spoke two days before she left Northern California for Cortona, Italy, her second home, to visit the movie set of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, now in production by Disney.

Q: What's it like having *Tuscan Sun* made into a feature film?

A: It's been fascinating. It's not often Disney makes a movie of one's life. The people of Cortona are having a good time. Half are in the movie and the other half are *working* on the

House did. What's happened in publishing has left only about six publishers worldwide. It's important what editor you get, their influence in the publishing house and how they relate to you. I have a great editor, Charlie Conrad, and a fantastic agent as



Find something you're passionate about; ideas only you can write. Find those threads that run through and tie things together for structure.

movie. I'm in a little scene. The screenwriter/director, Audrey Wells, cast it as a romantic comedy. It's not exactly what I wrote. My character, played by Diane Lane, has an Italian lover—which is all right, I suppose.

Q: Did you ever dream the book would become so popular?

A: No! It happened so gradually. I wrote for my own pleasure and as though I were addressing a friend, never toward publication. *Tuscan Sun* was first published in an edition of 5,000. The publisher thought it was a literary memoir that would sell as my poetry did, in the 1,000 range. There was no book tour, no publicity. The independent bookstores hand-sold it. My students were pleased that a miracle could still happen. The publisher kept calling me, saying, "This book is really selling. I think it's because of the cover."

Q: Have you found a great difference between publishers?

A: Chronicle is more geared toward illustrated books. They didn't know what to do with the success of my book, whereas Broadway/Random

well—Peter Ginsberg, from Curtis Brown.

Q: What's it been like, going from poetry to nonfiction to fiction?

A: I had a whole career as a different kind of writer. The memoir shift was an easy one. Along with writing poetry, I'd written autobiographical essays and prose, but writing *Tuscan Sun* was my first experience with extended narrative, a memoir in progress, writing as things happened. Writing a novel was a harder task ... dealing with plot. When you write a memoir you have plot: It's your life. But the intricacies of plot, character development ... I loved the learning curve of it. I've read a million novels, and you always think, if only I read one more, I'll know how to do it. I felt my way through it, and it was quite hard.

Q: Do you believe poetry is important to writers who have no intention of ever writing it?

A: I've always thought poetry was absolutely the best training for any type of writer. You learn so many things—imagery and the precision of language. In poetry you have to lift



BARBARA DEMARCO-BARRETT is editor of *The ASJA Monthly* and is Southern California chapter president. Her show, "Writers on Writing," airs on KUCI-FM in Southern California, and on the Web at www.kuci.org.

something off the page. It can't just sit there. It's got to keep moving. There's something in poetry for journalists. Through the language, you can write memorably rather than just communicating.

didn't dare. My family worried about me writing a novel. Now, I think they're disappointed that they're not in it! *Swan* is not autobiographical. By waiting as long as I did to write a novel, my interest in my own family

Q: In writing, is it more important to focus on your strengths or weaknesses?
A: Both. It's how you envision your style. I work toward a style that was balanced with dialogue and description. The hard part for me is always the plot. I don't get very excited about plot. The European novels are more about the writing. The reviewers write as if plot is what it's all about. They pay hardly any attention to the writing. We don't have many good critics anymore. I have begun to loathe the book review section of *The New York Times* because all they print are plot summaries.



Q: Was *Tuscan Sun* your first published nonfiction?

A: I published eight or so autobiographical essays in some of the same magazines where I published poetry: *The American Scholar*, *The Southern Review*, *VA Quarterly*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Ploughshares*, *American Poetry Review*. I abandoned the essays when I began to write *Tuscan Sun*, and stopped writing poetry then, as well. One curious note: When an essay, "Islands in Summer," appeared in the *VA Quarterly*, Jacqueline Onassis wrote me a letter saying if I ever wanted to publish the essays in a book, she would love to publish it. She invited me to lunch but I was going to Italy and did not accept. Shows how bent I was on getting to Italy as soon as school ended.

Q: You've written poetry, nonfiction, fiction. Do you prefer one form over another?

A: In terms of career, perhaps I should have focused on just one. At different times of life there are different rhythms in your brain, and I've gone with different genres as those rhythms shifted. Writing a novel set in the south has been with me since high school. I wanted to write one when I was reading James Agee and Flannery O'Connor, but I was in such awe, I

drama, family romance, just wore out. Newspapers in south Georgia call and ask what the novel is based on. There's a lot on my hometown but the characters are not my family. They *could* have been; they're those kinds of people.

Q: Where did the idea for the novel come from?

A: I wanted to explore several things, such as family secrecy and how in a small town, there's a web of connection and how your neighbor knows what you're going to do before you know it yourself. Then there was the violence and romanticism of the southern landscape...the Spanish moss, the strangeness of patches of white sand and seashells in a red clay area. It's a hard landscape because it's so torrid. The land can sink and take your house with it. The third thing was suicide and how it affects family. I've always been interested in suicide because it's an act that has no end. Generations later still feel the effects. Also, the sense of the family relationships. Southerners still have a sense of time that we don't experience in California. We're present-tense people. In the south, your dead grandmother could walk into the room at any time because she's talked about as if she's still alive.

Q: How was it to edit the *2002 Best American Travel Writing*?

A: It was so hard to select from the 100 essays I read. I looked for a real sense of place, places the writer had made their own. I didn't go for the essays that were dreamed up for publication. I don't like faux adventure travel. We live in America; it's already dangerous; we don't need to seek it out on some river in Brazil.

Q: Do you consider yourself a travel writer?

A: No, although I'm writing a book-length narrative right now about being at home in many places. I'm traveling to eight countries and living there, going to the local markets, settling in and seeing what it's like, instead of passing through.

Q: Any tips on writing narrative nonfiction?

A: For magazines, it's more about subject matter because they're trying to accommodate the attention span of the world in 1,000 words or less. In terms of longer narrative, find something you're passionate about; ideas only you can write. Find those threads that run through and tie things together for structure. For a memoir, look at the threads in your life and develop them in an interesting way. It's not about climbing Kilimanjaro. If you write well, any childhood, any life, can be fascinating. [ASJA](#)

Frances Mayes will be a guest on "Writers on Writing" on January 9, 2003.

News from the Front

Southern California Chapter News

Our October 5 conference, "Take Your Writing Career to the Next Level," co-sponsored with the University of California Irvine Extension, turned out great. We had more than 160 paid attendees and after paying UCI back for hard costs and splitting the net, our chapter walked away with almost \$7,000 (a portion of which we've donated to the Writers Emergency Assistance Fund).

It was a lot of work for a few, but we pulled it off. The wonderful thing about chairing a conference, as opposed to organizing a smaller event, is the size of the canvas. Huge canvases can be great fun.

Thanks to committee members Kathy Sena, Scott Smith, Tina Tessina, and Roberta Wax; to Julie Bawden Davis for overseeing book sales; and to the numerous other helpers, volunteers and ASJA members who pitched in.

Here's what a few members had to say.

ASJA member Marty Zucker said, "Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? I attended a panel discussion on how to write book proposals, even though I arrogantly entered the room feeling I could probably provide more information than I would receive. Yet, I left the room bearing several good tips that will make my proposals even more irresistible (I hope). At another panel I met an editor from a leading magazine, and a conversation and follow-up e-mail between us resulted in an assigned article. I had never attended an ASJA writer's conference before, or any writers conference, for that matter. I can now see the great value of these gatherings. I may even be hooked."

ASJA member Beverly Gray said, "Appearing as part of a panel on writing for specialty markets, I shared the stage with editors from such publications as *Gourmet*. While describing insights gleaned from my own idiosyncratic freelance career, I was pleased to discover how much I have learned over the years. A rapt audi-

ence seemed to hang onto my every word, which was a wonderful boost for my morale.

"That afternoon, it was my turn to be awed, as I listened to award-winning journalists Ed Hume, Martin Smith and Robert Masello describe how they use their lives as the basis for articles and books. Behind the scenes, the conference also gave me the chance to meet other ASJA members whom I formerly knew only as bylines."

Brand new ASJA member Scott Hays said, "The conference exposed me to the world of ASJA. I've never been much of a joiner. I used to believe whole-heartedly in Groucho Marx's oft-cited quip that I don't want to belong to any club that would accept me as a member. My attitude has since changed. I like the idea of belonging to a group whose members are as passionate about their craft as I am. Had it not been for the Southern California writers conference, I might never have come to appreciate the true power of an organization such as ASJA."

We've already started talking about next year's conference. And many of us are looking forward to the New York conference in May. Our appetite has been whetted, once again.

Barbara DeMarco-Barrett
Southern California chapter president

Washington, D.C., Chapter News

"It's the biggest game in town, you always get paid and you can touch the whole world." That's why member Shirley Sirota Rosenberg writes for the government. Rosenberg and four other ASJA members drew a crowd of 60 people to a Washington, D.C., branch library on the cold, rainy night of October 29 to talk about the overlooked opportunities they've transformed into thriving livelihoods. In a tight market, these professionals have found creative outlets for their work.

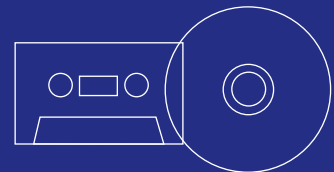
"My teaching and writing feed on each other," said panelist Mary Collins,

who teaches at the Johns Hopkins Advanced Studies Program. Panelist Pat McNees said that writing personal and corporate histories pays well enough that "you can do the books you want to do." She says she turned away from magazine and newspaper work in part because of the "rights grab." Jill Wechsler, Washington editor for a group of healthcare trade magazines, advised beginners to start writing for newsletters. Peggy Eastman noted that for years her medical writing and her spiritual writing went along on separate tracks, but now the country is taking a much more holistic approach to health and spirituality so she can integrate these two segments of her career. She said freelance work is "the best continuing education program there is."

The panel was produced by the Washington, D.C., ASJA chapter and the Washington Independent Writers. It was co-sponsored by the National Writers Union and the Coalition of Freelance Organizations.

Anne Cassidy
Washington D.C., chapter president

Writers Conference Tapes/CDs Available



If you missed the conference last April, or missed panels you wanted to attend, don't despair. You can order recordings on audio cassette tape or CD (yes!) by calling (888) 522-5023 or log onto www.nrstaping.com/asja/asja2002.htm. ASJA members, log onto www.asja.org/members/wc/wcaudio.php.

The Freedom to Say What You Think

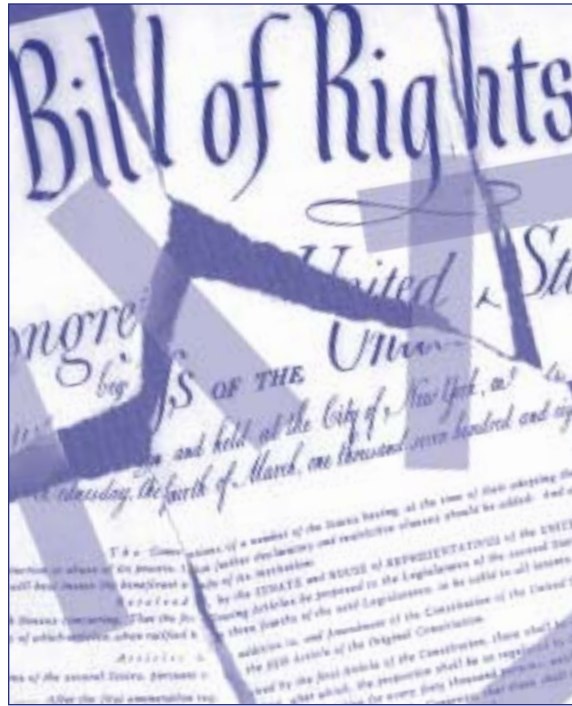
Do you know where your democracy is?

While America will never forget what happened September 11th, 2001, it seems as though many people are starting to forget about the freedoms that our country stands for, particularly, freedom of speech. Fortunately, the Bill of Rights is not a popularity contest like *Survivor* or *American Idol*.

As reported by the Associated Press, a recent poll commissioned by the First Amendment Center in Arlington, Virginia and conducted by the University of Connecticut's Center for Survey Research and Analysis reveals that 49 percent of the 1,000 adults polled between June 12 and July 5 believe that the First Amendment goes too far, compared to 39 percent in 2001. Nearly 50 percent of those polled stated that the media has been too aggressive in asking the government questions about the war on terrorism. As for the number of people who believed that newspapers should freely criticize the United States military about its strategy and performance, 57 percent of those polled were supportive in 2002, compared to 69 percent in 2001. 70 percent agreed that newspapers should publish freely, and 46 percent supported amending the Constitution to prohibit flag burning. Among those less likely to support freedom of the press were those without a college education.

This recent poll indicates that school systems and the government need to do a better job teaching school children about the First Amendment and our other constitutional rights. Visits to the Newseum, which will reopen in Washington, D.C. in 2006, and the National Constitution Center, which will open next summer in Philadelphia, will increase awareness and understanding of the Con-

stitution's relevance to our daily lives. However, there needs to be more of a nationwide effort to teach the importance of our constitutional rights in schools.



Unfortunately, many people support the First Amendment only when it fits their particular purposes. Many organizations that advocate First Amendment rights, such as the ACLU, are demonized by many people. Being a card-carrying member of the ACLU has been made the equivalent of wearing an "I luv Osama" T-shirt.

Before Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes set forth the "Clear and Present Danger" test in the early part of the 20th Century, speech advocating unpopular ideas could be made a punishable offense. Under this test, speech may be restricted only if there is a clear and present danger that the speech will lead to an evil that government may prohibit. For Holmes, the key constitutional principle was free thought—"not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate."

Most people are repulsed when they see the Ku Klux Klan stage a march in public or a person setting fire to the American flag. Yet, the fact that such incidents can occur in this country shows what a great country we are. Other countries ruled by dictators or communist regimes do not tolerate dissent or a free press. Imagine many of America's political commentators in Cuba, China, or Iraq—they would be taken off the air, removed from their jobs, punished, or jailed.

Some of the worst incidents in our country occurred when the government did not respect First Amendment rights—i.e., the shootings at Kent State in 1970 and the police resistance to Civil Rights marches in the South during the 1950s and 1960s.

We need a free press to keep the government honest, respectful of citizen's rights, and on its toes while it conducts its war on terrorism. We need it to question policies about the invasion of Iraq, the adequacy of homeland security, and whether mistakes were made during the search for Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. A free press also is needed to maintain our identity, as it keeps our institutions vital and our citizens informed.

Our country has changed a great deal during the last 16 months. Something that should not change, however, are the values that our country is based upon. Freedom of speech is perhaps that greatest value. Despite that value's low poll numbers, just think about what life would be like without it.

Larry Atkins, Philadelphia, PA
ASJA, First Amendment Committee

Originally ran in the Cleveland Plain Dealer (9/21/02) on behalf of ASJA's First Amendment Committee.

Ruth Gruber

At 91, this ASJA member just keeps producing

by MELBA NEWSOME

Several months ago, when I called Ruth Gruber requesting an interview for *The ASJA Monthly*, I half-expected to hear Dr. Gruber was retired and no longer doing interviews. She'd done her time as a scholar, journalist, photographer, government official and, most importantly, a humanitarian.

After seven decades of breaking new ground and old rules, she's certainly earned a rest.

"That's wonderful news," she said, in a voice that sounded much younger than her 91 years. "My sixteenth book will be published in December." A book she'd written in nine months, no less.

Inside of Time: A Memoir (Carroll & Graf, 2002), the second installment of her autobiography, covers 1941-1955. The first, *Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent*, was published in 1990. She knows the titles for the third and fourth volumes: *In Spite of Time* and *Time Out*. "But don't tell anyone because I don't plan to write them," she jokes.

Ruth Gruber has been described as flamboyant, stylish, fashionable—words that don't ordinarily fit the work for which she's most noted. In the 1930s and '40s, she traveled the Alaskan tundra by plane, truck and dogsled, spent 18 months in Siberia and weeks aboard crowded refugee ships. But, according to her niece, Dava Sobel, "Even when she rode in a military convoy with a machine gun on her lap, Ruth had her nails polished and her lipstick in place."

That hasn't changed. The diminutive, twice-widowed mother of three greets me at the door of her expansive Central Park West apartment dressed to the nines. The apartment resembles a museum, filled with books, memorabilia and honors. Photographs capture her with David Ben-Gurion, Golda

Meir, Harry Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt.

It's hard interviewing a journalist. They want to ask the questions instead of answer them. I want to know



why a 20-year-old American Jew would choose to study in Nazi Germany; how she fared in the 1930s male-dominated newspaper world; how she had the courage to keep her maiden name fifty years ago. But Gruber quizzes me about my comparatively mundane life. When she focuses on herself, she downplays her history-making accomplishments with her wry sense of humor.

On graduating high school at 15: "They skipped you a lot in those days. The classes were so big."

On being the youngest person (20) ever to receive a Ph.D.: "I never researched it but *The New York Times* says so and that's good enough for me. Still, I couldn't get a job." She ultimately became special correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and the first foreign journalist allowed into the Soviet Arctic.

Gruber's most famous mission began as a secret government assignment in 1944 when she escorted 1,000 refugees—Catholics, Protestants

and Greek Orthodox but mostly Jews—from war-torn Europe.

During the 13-day voyage to America, she captured their stories of survival and courage in German, Yiddish, and Russian. Upon their arrival, the refugees were interned in an abandoned army camp in Oswego, New York, and told they would be sent back to Europe once the war ended. Gruber fought for their rights to citizenship and decent treatment under the law, and won.

It took nearly 40 years to get a book about the ordeal published. "I'd say 'there's a story about the only refugees the U.S. government rescued in WWII,' they'd say 'WWII? Refugees? Who cares?'" *Haven* was finally published in 1983 and in 2000 became a four-hour CBS mini-series, starring Natasha Richardson as Gruber and Anne Bancroft as her mother.

For most people, shepherding 1,000 refugees to freedom is a cause for pride; Gruber sees it as a bitter-sweet accomplishment. Yes, the U.S. rescued 1,000 people but the U.S. rescued *only* 1,000 people. "We could have saved 50,000, 100,000, half a million," she says. It is a failing that still haunts her.

Her work and courage have not gone unnoticed. Her awards include the LBJ Award for Moral Courage and the 1998 ASJA Career Achievement Award. Her 1978 book *Raquela* received the National Jewish Book Award and she received five honorary doctorates within the last year. Despite her accomplishments, it's easy to see why the refugees dubbed her "Mother Ruth."

Just before I leave, she shares her work philosophy—never, never retire—and a little motherly advice: "Marry a younger man. Women should because we outlive them." A woman after my own heart. [ASJA](#)

Melba Newsome is ASJA Publications Chair.

Avoid Plagiarizing Yourself

Self-theft is a real threat to writers

by ERIK SHERMAN

Plagiarism's easy shame stumbled across headlines this year in the guise of popular historians Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin. The media's fascination was not about public outcry, but the personal interest of writers. Literary thief—accidental or not—belongs in the writing section of Dante's ninth circle. It is a dual betrayal of the principles of the craft and of colleagues who often struggle to make ends meet.

There is a more subtle plagiarism, though, that stems from business demands. It violates no laws, often goes unnoticed and can mistakenly be taken as an integral part of professional development. The problem is self-theft.

The term may seem oxymoronic: if I choose to relocate paragraphs from one of my copyrighted works to another, that is my right. Reuse has noted pedigree in all creative endeavors. Composers reuse melodies and artists have "periods" in which their work follows a particular direction. Some authors, like Hemingway, have distinctive styles that are parodied for decades. (I woke. The day was cold. I wanted coffee. It was black and hot. I drank and went back to bed. The end.)

Such repetition mines technique for artistic insight. Most of us repeat ourselves for more prosaic reasons. Writers find a collection of mechanisms to tell a story. Unfortunately, the need to finish an assignment can control the writer, who now concentrates on finishing the damn thing. Personal quirks and predilections push decisions into predictable directions under given circumstances.

Over time, repeated choices gather the force of habit, even when it becomes painful. A colleague said how she found herself repeating the structure of one opening in many of her articles. Starting in the identical

way, the pieces would then develop similarly, leaving her unhappy even while receiving praise from editors and readers. She had begun copying something that was successful to the point that she felt she was in a rut.

ing to the chance result of verbal accident, which runs counter to the development of that personal approach to storytelling called "voice." I think of another friend who often in her articles uses a very particular opening she

I have found that the only way to keep my writing honest is to become my own personal postmodern literary critic and to deconstruct each word as it hits the page.

The intricate interplay of structure, words, and technique offers many havens for the self-plagiarist. Some years ago I reviewed an article draft and suddenly noticed that many of my paragraphs sounded similar. Each developed through the opposition of images or ideas: *this but that, here nor there, neither back nor forth.*

The narrative became a series of conflict resolutions, each leading to the next. Used sparingly, it was an effective technique, but my continuous reliance on it was droning, lulling readers to sleep instead of snapping them awake.

I have found that the only way to keep my writing honest is to become my own personal postmodern literary critic and to deconstruct each word as it hits the page. Every assignment, no matter how humble, becomes an opportunity to stretch and try new forms. Is a lead comfortable? Toss it and start over. Repeating structures? Snap them into pieces and distill the thought through new words. It may be a reality that publications often demand formulas, but that is no excuse to develop one's own.

A mantra of "do everything differently all the time" also is not an answer in itself, because not all repetition is bad. To have everything up in the air is to reduce any piece of writ-

ing to the chance result of verbal accident, which runs counter to the development of that personal approach to storytelling called "voice." I think of another friend who often in her articles uses a very particular opening she

has developed over decades—snappy, witty, and dramatic. It fits her personality and she has christened this lead after herself. Perhaps the most prevalent type of self-copying, though, is over-specialization. Market reality offers rewards to writers who repeatedly do the same sort of work. That path, however, is like driving the same route to work every day. Familiarity dulls the mind to the variety and detail that pass the eye. Even more troublesome is that the challenge of writing falls away, turning into the same type of daily problem. My own relief comes when I stretch beyond what I normally do. Whether working on a topic unusual for me, or even experimenting with poetry and fiction, I must shake the routine to the core.

Yes, at the end of the day, writing must be a business. As Dr. Samuel Johnson said, no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money. However, only a fool writes just to be rich. Writing is a demanding craft, and we must be willing to give our best, not remembrances of yesterday. **ASJA**

Erik Sherman, ASJA, is an independent journalist whose work appears in Newsweek, US News & World Report, Continental, Men's Journal, Technology Review, and The New York Times Syndicate. He is the author of three books, with his upcoming book on the new sport of geocaching to come out sometime next year.

Big Break for Freelancers

It's that time again

by JULIAN BLOCK



Tax-savvy freelance writers and other self-employed persons know they have two choices on how to write off their outlays for purchases of equipment and other kinds of personal property. But because of their mistaken belief that there is only one way to deduct equipment purchases, countless freelancers pay way more in taxes each year than legally required.

Depreciation. When Form 1040 time rolls around, freelancers go the "standard route" that allows them to recover their expenditures through depreciation deductions over varying periods. The general rules for depreciation specify periods that range from as low as three years to as high as 39 years, with the majority closer to three than to 39.

Freelancers get to depreciate most of their equipment over five years (computers, copiers and the like) or seven years (furniture and fax machines, for example). That usually translates into a cap on the first-year deduction of only 20 percent for five-year property and about 14 percent for seven-year property.

Expensing. What freelancers overlook is that Internal Revenue Code Section 179 authorizes an important exception to the general rules for depreciation. This exception bestows an option on businesses, whether full- or part-time, that qualify as "small businesses" (typically, freelance writers do). Qualifying outfits can dispense with depreciation and elect "expensing," if that is more advantageous. This tactic entitles them to write off the *entire* cost in the first year the equipment is "placed in service" (IRS lingo for made ready and available for a specific use), rather than the year it's purchased or paid for.

First-year expensing is subject to several limitations. However, in my experience, few freelance writers are

going to spend sufficiently to run afoul of the limitations.

The key stipulation sets a dollar cap on the deduction. As the law now stands, the ceiling is \$24,000 for 2002 and rises to \$25,000 for 2003 and later years.

Example. Here's how opting to immediately deduct outlays will work wonders for the overall tax picture and cash flow. Freelancer Karen Reiter falls into a top federal and state tax bracket of 35 percent for 2002 and needs to spend big bucks for equipment, which can be new or used, but can't be acquired by a trade-in or leased. Her purchases include \$24,000 for computers and peripheral equipment such as printers and monitors, as well as desks, appliances and carpets. Karen needn't depreciate these items over five- or seven-year periods. Assuming it proves advantageous for her to immediately expense the \$24,000 expenditure, that trims taxes by \$8,400. It makes no difference that Karen's purchase payments extend beyond 2002.

Other fine print imposes a spending cap of \$200,000 on property for the year in question. As soon as acquisitions surpass \$200,000, the deduction for first-year expensing begins to phase out on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

To illustrate, Karen purchases and places in service \$210,000 of property. Her deduction ceiling drops from \$24,000 to \$14,000 (\$24,000 minus \$10,000, the excess of \$210,000 over \$200,000). The phase out is complete once expenditures exceed \$224,000.

Caution. The amount you expense cannot exceed the taxable income from your business. Put another way, the first-year deduction cannot create a loss. But for purposes of this limit, taxable income has its own special meaning. Because, among other things, wages and salaries can be included, and because couples filing joint returns are allowed

to use their combined income, this requirement can even be met by a start-up operation that shows little or no profit this year.

Tip. Write-offs for equipment purchases enable self-employed to save more than just income taxes. They also reduce self-employment taxes owed for 2002 on the first \$84,900 of net (receipts minus expenses) earnings, as calculated on Schedule SE (Self-Employment Tax) of Form 1040.

Help From The IRS. For more information, take a look at IRS Publication 946, *How To Depreciate Property*. Publication 910, *Guide to Free Tax Services*, lists all of the IRS booklets. Get free copies of the booklets by calling 1-800-TAX-FORM, call (703) 368-9694 for an automated fax service, or download copies from the IRS Web site (www.irs.gov). **ASJA**

Julian Block, ASJA, is an attorney and former IRS investigator cited by the The New York Times as "a leading tax professional" and by The Wall Street Journal as an "accomplished writer on taxes." His book, Year Round Savings, shows how to legally save big money on taxes and explains how to reduce taxes for this year and gain a head start for future years. Cost: \$16.00. ASJA members: \$9.95 for an e-mailed copy, \$12.95 for a postpaid copy. Mail your check to Julian Block, 3 Washington Square, #1-G, Larchmont, NY 10538-2032.

KNOWLEDGE is Power

If you or your writing group has questions regarding contracts in this post-Tasini world, ASJA's Contracts Committee has answers. The Committee has assembled a crack team of knowledgeable members throughout the country willing and able to address your group on contract matters large and small.

Addressing challenges like work made for hire, indemnity clauses, making unfair contracts palatable, and negotiating strategies, we can give you the kind of nitty-gritty, timely information you need to protect your rights and improve your bottom line.

for more information,
e-mail contracts@asja.org



Say “I Do”



Writing for the bridal market

by Kelly James-Enger

More than two million Americans do it every year. Most of us will do at least once in our lifetimes, and some twice, three times, or even more. But you needn't be a newlywed to write for bridal magazines—and with dozens of national and regional publications published throughout the U.S., there are plenty of markets that need freelance material.

Breaking into this niche area requires thinking beyond story ideas like “ten things every bride must know” or “how to plan the perfect wedding.” Here's how to crack this lucrative field whether you're male or female, engaged, married or even happily single.

Look to Your Life

While you needn't have a spouse to write about weddings, if you've recently gotten engaged or married, you do have the advantage by virtue of your real-life experience, and you can even use this fact to get your foot in the door for certain types of stories—like “The Confident Bride,” a *Bridal Guide* column that focuses on wedding planning problems.

“The column benefits from a personal anecdote to start with, and a

personal voice throughout,” says Denise Schipani, former executive editor at *Bridal Guide*. “What we've found through trial and error is that writers who are currently going through the planning process themselves, or who have done it within the past year or so end up doing the best job.”

However, most editors won't hold your single status against you as long as you research and write interesting, compelling stories. “Writers need not be married to apply. I believe a good professional writer can tackle any subject matter with finesse,” says Patricia Canole, editor in chief at *For the Bride*. “Today, writers are open to many resources, the Internet being the most utilized. My only contention is that you make sure your resources are factual and timely.” While you're likely to see more female bylines than male in most bridal magazines, editors are open to hearing from male writers as well, and in fact actively seek a groom's perspective.

Give it a New Spin

Just because bridal magazines tend to rehash the same types of stories—wedding planning, decorating and furnishing your new home, getting along with your in-laws, budgeting and financial topics—this doesn't mean they want to use the same approach over and over. The more creative and original you are with your query, the better.

Nicole Burnham Onsi, a Boston-based freelancer who specializes in bridal-related topics, makes an effort to keep up-to-date on the bridal

industry by reading magazines and lurking on message boards where soon-to-be and recent brides post their experiences. She then often takes an “evergreen” type of topic and gives it a new twist.

“You'll notice that most bridal magazines do all the basic planning articles in-house. If you pitch a story on the different types of invitations brides can order, how to select flowers, etcetera, you're likely to get a rejection letter,” says Onsi. “Look at the less obvious issues brides face, then be as specific as possible in your query. For example, ‘Getting Along With His Family’ might not work, but ‘Five Strategies for Getting Along Better With Your Future Mother-in-Law’ might.”

ASJA member and freelancer Leslie Gilbert Elman, who writes about bridal and travel topics, agrees that coming up with unique story angles is essential. “In a sense, you're not coming up with new ideas. You're repackaging the ideas that work,” says Elman, who lives in Manhattan. “Say you're writing about managing money as a couple, which is a perennial bridal magazine topic. One time you might cover the subject using real-life case studies of three or four couples and how they handled their finances after the wedding. When you're asked to revisit the subject, you might repackage it as a his-and-hers money management quiz. For a third time around you can spin it in another direction by writing a Q&A with a financial expert. The information in the article won't change substantially, but your treatment of it will.”



KELLY JAMES-ENGER'S book, *Ready, Aim, Specialize! How to Create Your Own Writing Specialty and Make More Money* will be available in March, 2003.

Target the Market

While they may look similar, each bridal magazine has its own unique voice. Show that you've captured the magazine's essence in your query and you're more likely to nail an assignment. "I like to see that the writer has taken the effort to look at the magazine and study the material and style to see what we're all about," says Canole. "So many times, writers propose articles which are inappropriate for this magazine."

Most editors prefer queries over finished manuscripts—they simply don't have time to read them. "The best way to break in is to be targeted, specific, and persistent," says Schipani. "For example, a writer might see that we have done features using real brides to illustrate a point—say, on how brides have planned their long-distance wedding. Using that info, she might query me on a story to do with saving money for the wedding, and propose an idea in which she talks to four recent brides who have spent varying amounts on their weddings, and will profile them as well as write a sidebar on wedding budget tips. After a brief description of how she would handle the story, she should then tell me what her experience is, and then enclose clips. That's the perfect query!"

Track Down Compelling Sources

Editors at bridal magazines expect you to come up with both expert and "real people" sources. You may interview former and future brides, wedding consultants, psychologists, financial professionals, religious officials, and vendors like caterers, florists and musicians. Finding the best sources may also require a little legwork, depending on the nature and complexity of the story.

"This can be tough—in the past, I interviewed friends or friends-of-friends. However, now that I'm at the age where I don't know too many newlyweds, I have to be a little more creative," admits Onsi. "I talk to bridal consultants to see if they've had clients who fit the profile I'm looking for, I occasionally ask people I've met online on bridal message boards if

they're interested in being interviewed, and finally, I ask neighbors and relatives if they know someone who fits my criteria."

Elman also casts a wide net to locate sources. "I always try to find a geographic mix of interview subjects. Weddings, and attitudes toward weddings, are quite different from region-to-region throughout the U.S. For experts, I go to groups such as the

ning events, they are faced with planning the biggest event of their lives," says Elman. "They have to manage their stress. They have to cope with difficult family relationships (which seem to become ever more difficult in the months leading up to a wedding). They have to set up house—maybe even buy a house—decide how to manage money as couple, and plan for the future."

One of the benefits of writing for bridal magazines is that many of the articles are evergreen, or timeless, and offer reprint opportunities.

American Psychological Association. They generally provide lists of experts who are good interview subjects and amenable to talking with the press." There are also similar associations for financial planners, wedding consultants, florists, photographers, and other wedding professionals; try searching on the Internet or check *The Encyclopedia of Associations*, available at your local library, for relevant groups.

Pulling it Together

When you're writing the article, keep the bride's perspective in mind. Don't be preachy or suggest that there is only one right way to do things. While you'll want to offer plenty of service-related information, for the most part, keep the tone of your articles light. "Brides are stressed out as it is," says Canole. "Adding some humor to an article, whether it's dealing with relationships and in-laws, planning a reception when your parents want to invite everyone and his mother, and even a honeymoon travel piece can reveal that it's okay if some things don't go as planned."

Be aware of the stress the typical bride is under and what she wants and needs to know. "Brides face the same problems year after year, generation after generation. Though most of them have little experience in plan-

Consider Reprints

One of the benefits of writing for bridal magazines is that many of the articles are evergreen, or timeless, and offer reprint opportunities. (Make sure you read your contracts carefully to confirm that you're retaining reprint rights to your work first, of course.) Smaller circulation or regional publications may be interested in purchasing reprint rights to stories originally published in national magazines—I've resold many articles this way. While reprint fees are usually lower than what you were originally paid, it's easy money for little additional work.

As a bridal writer, you may be constantly covering the same ground but don't forget that your audience is always new. "Most women read bridal magazines only in the 18 months or so leading up to their weddings," explains Elman. "After they're married, they're pretty much through with bridal magazines, and a new crop of readers take their place."

Even if you're dedicated to a single lifestyle, you must enjoy writing about weddings and bridal topics to succeed in this field. "Your readers consider this the most important time of their lives," says Elman. "You have to feel the same way." **ASJA**

Originally published in The Writer, January, 2002.

What's In Store

Troublesome words and legal information for writers

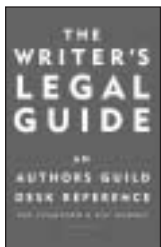
by KATHRYN LANCE

Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but despite the ease of re-searching on the Internet, I like being surrounded by reference books.

One whole shelf of my office bookcase is devoted to references I've used on past projects, and I have several dictionaries and quote books placed around the house. In various rooms are guides to everything from knitting and crocheting to movie videos to instructions for bicycle repair and soap-making.

Close by, on a shelf above my desk is the *ASJA Directory*, the *Chicago Manual of Style*, two medical dictionaries, a poison reference (for a mystery I've been working on for four years), and two guides to the birds I watch outside my window when I look away from the computer.

Do I need more reference books? Yes—you can never have too many. This month I want to recommend two new references (one is a revision of an old standard) that belongs on every writer's bookshelf next to the bird guides.



***The Writer's Legal Guide* by Tad Crawford and Kay Murray. Allworth Press/Authors Guild, third edition, 2002. 309 pp. \$19.95.**

Because legal writing makes my eyes glaze over, I approached this book with trepidation. Yet, as every professional writer knows, understanding legal-ese is essential to our business and our livelihood—now more than ever.

This volume, originally published more than a decade ago, is a joint production of the book's authors and the Authors Guild, and has been updated to reflect such trends in the industry as e-publishing and rights grabs. It is more than a legal guide—it is essentially a manual for conducting all aspects of the business part of writing, including copyright, contracts, freedom of expression issues, liability, taxes, and estate planning. The authors offer advice on negotiating and include an enlightening section on the different types of self-publishing.

Each chapter is dense with information, yet its examples of real-life situations make for easy reading. (The fair



KATHRYN LANCE, a member of ASJA since 1979, is the author of more than fifty books of nonfiction and fiction.

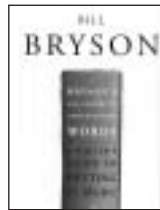
use/parody section features such timely legal cases as a recent suit involving Roy Orbison's song, "Pretty Woman.")

Much here will not be new to long-

time writers, but even a seasoned hand may be surprised to learn the legal differences between an employee and an independent contractor, as well as what exactly you are giving up when you sign a work-for-hire agreement.

For new writers, the advice in the book will be invaluable. While much of the material is available through various sources, including ASJA's Web site, it is helpful to have it compiled in one place.

My fiancée, a lawyer, also read the book, and was impressed with it from a legal standpoint. He particularly liked the way the book shows writers how to avoid being hurt while going about their business. We agreed this book was a must-have.



***Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words* by Bill Bryson. Broadway Books, 2002. Approx. 232 pp. \$19.95.**

This handy reference is a rarity: a useful guide that's also fun to read. Covering much more than "troublesome words,"

Bryson's Dictionary offers concise help on punctuation (the comma, according to Bryson, is "the most abused of punctuation marks"); clear writing ("readers should never be required to retrace their steps"); commonly confused words ("acidulous and assiduous"); frequently misspelled words; irregular plurals; and other thorny issues that arise in writing.

What makes this book useful is that Bryson doesn't dictate. Rather, he persuades, and whenever an issue is even remotely questionable, he cites respected authorities (most frequently Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*) to confirm or point out alternatives to his conclusions.

Believing that English is a living, changing language, Bryson dismisses a number of bugbears that plague the grammarian in all of us. Thus, he has convinced me that under most circumstances it is all right to use "beg the question" in its current colloquial sense (meaning to raise a question, rather than in its stricter sense, which derives from formal philosophy), but he stands firm against the current widespread misuse of "hopefully" as something to be desired.

All of the entries are concise, some extremely so. And all are witty. If you ever become confused about common pairs of words such as lie/lay, which/that, or which verb to use with "neither," or if you just want an entertaining and informative book about words, *Bryson's Dictionary* is for you. **ASJA**

Building Your Platform Marketing Yourself as an Expert

Moderated by Diane O'Connell

In today's tight book market, publishers demand that authors have a "platform"—an already-established audience for the book. This panel will tell you how to build your credentials as an expert to give your book proposal the best shot possible. You'll hear from an in-house director of publicity, a best-selling author, a media maven, and an identity and marketing consultant.

Tuesday, January 21, 2003 • 6pm
Roger Smith Hotel
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An Evening with Jim Bellows

Author of *The Last Editor*
Free book signing and talk open
to the public



The ASJA Southern California Chapter partners with National Writers Union and the Independent Writers of Southern California to bring you Jim Bellows, the legendary editor of underdog papers *The Herald Examiner*, *The Washington Star*, and *The New York Herald Tribune*. Bellows is currently editor of *Helen O'Donnell's Common Ground*. Among the dozens of famous writers whose careers he launched or cultivated are Jimmy Breslin, Tom Wolfe, Gail Sheehy, Art Buchwald and Maureen Dowd.

January 22, 2003 • 7pm

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2003 ASJA Writers Conference

Keynote Speaker :

Barbara Ehrenreich



Author of
Nickel and Dimed:
On (Not) Getting By In America

May 2-4 • Grand Hyatt Hotel
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Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* was named a *New York Times Book Review* "Notable Book, 2001"; a *Los Angeles Times* "Best Book, 2001"; and a *Business Week* "Best Business Book, 2001." Her experience as a journalist is also stellar: since 1990 she has been a contributing writer for *Time Magazine*, is contributing editor for *Harper's Magazine*, and has written for *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, *Ms.*, *Esquire*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Social Policy*, and *Mirabella*. For a conference preview and to receive e-mail updates, visit www.asja.org/wc/2003/2003prev.php.



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Calendar

Calendar events are open to the public.

2003 ASJA Writers Conference

Keynote Speaker

May 2-4 · Grand Hyatt Hotel

New York City

Barbara Ehrenreich



Author of

Nickel and Dimed:

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Huntington Beach, CA
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Join your colleagues and bring your friends to ASJA's annual holiday party on Tuesday, December 10, 6 to 8 p.m. at the Roger Smith Hotel, Lexington Avenue and 47th Street in New York City. \$35 in advance; \$40 at the door.

Details about the Lunch-With-an-Editor Raffle to be announced. For reservations call (212) 997-0947.

Coming
Next
Month

- ◆ Dream Bylines
- ◆ Literary Agent Al Zuckerman
- ◆ Tax Advice for Writers

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