



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 33, Fall 2009

## E-books are catching on ... fast!

by Debra Purdy Kong

Five years ago, many writers and publishers were convinced of three things:

- books wouldn't be read electronically for another generation
- only young people would buy them, and they'd prefer textbooks rather than fiction

Those people were wrong. Studies reveal that plenty of folks age fifty and over are buying electronic readers such as Amazon.com's Kindle (unavailable in Canada) or Sony's 505 reader. Although e-books represent only 1.5% of all books sold, sales grew by 125% in 2008. A whopping 183% of those sales were made by people over sixty-five. (Ed: over 340,00 titles available at last count)

I asked Kindle users what type of e-books they buy and the answer was fiction. Those who once bought print books now only purchase fiction for gifts. They also buy nonfiction containing illustrations, photos, or maps because Kindle technology can't yet reproduce the quality of print.

The main appeal of e-books is price and practicality. E-books sell from one penny to \$9.99, although most sell for half that price. My mystery, *Fatal Encryption*, is a 370-page trade paperback selling for \$19.95. The Kindle version is \$6.99. Kindles are the size of a paperback, yet can store up to ten thousand books. Readers also say they don't have room to collect books and don't want more trees killed. Also, print size can be adjusted.

Book buying habits are changing. Buzz is still created by word of mouth, but those endorsements now mean that an individual can buy and download the book his friend's talking about instantly, and this is exactly what's happening.

The ramifications for writers are huge. If your publisher doesn't plan to release an electronic version of your book, don't give up electronic rights. On average, e-publishers pay a 30% royalty of a book's retail price, and who wouldn't want more royalties and readers?

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Debra writes white-collar crime mysteries. She is the author of *Death by Taxes* and *Fatal Encryption*, both available for Kindle and, soon, Sony readers. Visit her at [www.debrapurdykong.com/](http://www.debrapurdykong.com/)



### From the editor's desk

Labour Day is hurtling at us and I have been so busy, that I didn't even open my WIP. How about you?

I am pleased to welcome another guest columnist, Debra Purdy Kong, who is a mystery writer and a colleague in my writers' group. Debra keeps tabs on everything online and has excellent promotion skills. As I always listen to what she has to say, I asked Debra to write the lead on how novels are now outselling non-fiction as e-books. It's quite a turn around and her piece is a must-read for both unpubbed and established authors. Thank you, Debra!

The last *Beacon* discussed the value of Facebook and Twitter for writers. I can now report an excellent increase in book sales, not through Amazon, but through traffic to my website. The increase has been over 100% from June to September. These satisfying numbers stem from **Tweeting** and not from FB.

If you're gearing up for a prolific fall, consider attending SiWC in October. (See Events, p2) or some workshops at the new Surrey Writers' School. Visit them here at [www.surreywritersschool.com](http://www.surreywritersschool.com).

**Julie H. Ferguson**

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## Creative Nonfiction: A Tricky Business

by Joyce Gram, writer and editor

In the last *Beacon*, I introduced you to creative nonfiction, that apparent oxymoron so beautifully explored by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola in *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction*. Creative nonfiction poses particular challenges; Miller and Paola call it “a tricky business.” On the one hand, the writer is striving to turn real life into art. On the other hand, she must deal with the issues that come attached with that “real life.” Can you, for example, when writing from your own memory, place a character in an imaginative place because you don’t exactly remember the scene? Can you, in order to set up the scene properly, simply create the characters you need? Can you, because you don’t remember the dialogue verbatim, put words in a character’s mouth? In short, how much of your imagination can you use?

*Tell It Slant* spends many pages on these basic questions of creative nonfiction. Central to the issues is that, whatever you are writing about, it is “the self that inhabits the prose of creative nonfiction.” This “I” picks and chooses among the facts, re-creates the essential scenes, makes crucial decisions about what to include and what to exclude, decides on the opening line that will set up the voice of the piece. Say the authors, “The ‘I’ gives the essay its *personality*, both literally and figuratively.”

But, as you create this persona for your piece, you are establishing a relationship between yourself and your reader, a relationship that goes to the heart of creative nonfiction: “In creative nonfiction—more so, perhaps, than in any other genre—readers assume a real person behind the artifice, an author who *speaks* directly to the reader.” For this relationship to work, the writer must establish a level of trust—a “pact with the reader.” Your reader will assume, because you are presenting your work as a piece of nonfiction, that this is a “true story,” rooted in the real world. In return for this assumption—this faith in you as a writer—you must “pledge ... both to be as honest as possible with the reader *and* to make this conversation worthwhile.”

Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola, *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005. See especially chapter 8, “The Particular Challenges of Creative Nonfiction.”

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### Fall/Winter events for Writers

(for additions, visit [www.beaconlit.com/schedule2009.htm](http://www.beaconlit.com/schedule2009.htm) regularly)

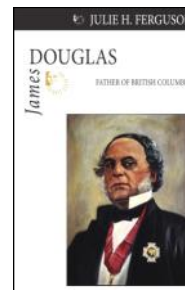
**Sep 12:** *Pitching in a Cold Climate* for the Whistler Writers' Festival, 8:30-11am, Legends Hotel, Whistler Creekside. Details at [www.theviciouscircle.ca](http://www.theviciouscircle.ca).

**Oct 3:** *Book Magic: Turning Writers into Published Authors* (9am to noon) and *Crafting Irresistible Query Letters* (1-4pm) for all fiction and non-fiction writers who want to learn more about getting their books published (unsuitable for poets and screenwriters). VCC downtown campus. Register early [here](#).

**Oct 7-9:** *Create Gorgeous Family Memory Books*. A three-day course at Painter's Lodge for amateur photographers, family historians, and proud grandparents, etc. Details at [www.beaconlit.com/FamilyBooks.htm](http://www.beaconlit.com/FamilyBooks.htm); book at 1.800.663.7090.

**Oct 23-26:** The Surrey International Writers' Conference. [www.siwc.ca](http://www.siwc.ca).

**Nov:** *Book launch* for *James Douglas*, TBA



My latest book will be in the nation’s bookstores in late October. *James Douglas: Father of British Columbia* (Dundurn) is a young adult story of high adventure and extraordinary success

Part-Black and illegitimate, 15 year-old Douglas sailed alone from Scotland in 1819 to join the fur trade. He rose through the ranks to become the governor of two new Colonies - Vancouver Island and British Columbia .

Discover how the Father of BC achieved his legacy in this fast-paced biography for teens that reads like fiction.

For details and advance orders, please visit : [www.beaconlit.com/JamesDouglas.htm](http://www.beaconlit.com/JamesDouglas.htm)

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