



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 31, Spring 2009

Writing in a Tightening Market...

Don't give up your day job! If you have one, that is. If not, add to your revenue stream. Think about teaching writing courses in continuing ed programs, coaching students, editing theses, photographing, and more.

The January/February 2009 editorial in *Quill and Quire* was sobering. Derek Weiler reported "mass layoffs" at major publishing companies in the US and "radical...restructuring" at others. He wrote that Penguin and HarperCollins have implemented pay freezes. But it was his announcement that one major US house has frozen all acquisitions, that stopped me in my tracks. Yikes!

Thankfully, the picture in Canada is not so scary—fewer layoffs and pay freezes so far and, if they come, experts say they will not be as deep. However, acquisition practices are going to be affected, according to *Q&Q*, so will advances. I can hardly imagine how these can get any lower, at least from my perspective at the bottom of the pile. Celebrities' advances won't be cut much, if at all.

Undoubtedly publishers are going to acquire more books that are safe bets. They will leave risky books, highly speculative fiction, or cross-overs to another day. Unproven authors are going to have a tougher time getting their mss read and somehow will have to convince publishers they are head and shoulders above the crowd in all aspects of the business. Smaller presses with lower overheads might give you your best publishing opportunity for a while. E-books are surging too.

Freelancers are battling the decrease in opportunities at most periodicals. Editors are using mainly syndicated columns and staff writers. To have a chance, writers must add value to their print articles with photographs, podcasts, and interactive web content.

Send your ideas for surviving this market to info@beaconlit.com, and I will compile and post them on my blog at www.beaconlit.blogspot.com

Good luck!!



From the editor's desk

I hope everyone is remembering to read the *Beacon Flashes* on the Beacon Literary Services [blog](http://www.beaconlit.com/blog). Lately I have posted much of interest to writers, both emerging and experienced. If you haven't set up your Google Reader feed, the instructions are available in the Winter issue at www.beaconlit.com/newsletter.htm.

The economic downturn is biting hard into the publishing industry in the US, but less in Canada. Whether we write articles or books, it is likely to affect us all. My lead talks about what is happening and how you can cope.

Enjoy *Useful Tidbits* and pay heed to backing up your files [offline](#). I heard another horror story today—a travel writer had her laptop stolen in Tierra del Fuego with multiple articles from several months of traveling in South America. Insurance paid for the computer, but...

Julie H. Ferguson

See my newest presentation for baby boomers at www.beaconlit.com/FamilyBooks.htm

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Let's Be Plain About Plain Language

By Joyce Gram, Writer and Editor

Many writers, readers, and—sadly—educators hold misconceptions about plain language: for example, it is aimed at people who can't read well; it is about dumbing down; it is dull. None of this is true. On the contrary, plain language is about communicating clearly and persuasively, about recognizing your readers' needs, and above all about *writing to your readers*.

The *Plain Language Network* says it best: "Plain language is not a simplified style of writing. It involves more than replacing jargon and complex language with shorter sentences and familiar words. Plain language looks at the whole message—from the reader's point of view." This means keeping your reader in mind as you write and working hard to achieve clarity, good organization, and an inviting presentation.

We have all received incomprehensible letters, notices, instruction sheets, even advertising, and have faced forms that try our patience. As we grit our teeth, we wonder why the people who turn out this stuff insist on wasting our time. The problem for writers is that the style of writing that produces this bafflegab has crept into everyday speech and become entrenched, to the point where the best intentioned among us are letting it slip into our creative writing. Instead of the clear and rhythmic, we use the obtuse and clunky (*facilitate* rather than *help*). We clog our sentences with little qualifiers (*the traveller was a bit confused* rather than *the traveller was confused, poor guy!*) and tiny words (*in view of the fact that* rather than *because*). We change verbs into nouns (*the requirement of the role is that* rather than *the job requires*). We kill the action with the passive voice (*the train was missed by Joe* rather than *Joe missed the train*). We deaden our argument with unnecessary preambles (*I would argue that*).

Through diligent self-editing, we can eradicate these habits that suck the life out of our writing. This, too, is what plain language is about—its principles will help you improve all your writing.

Plain Train: Plain Language Online Training at <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/plaintrain/>

Don Watson, *Death Sentences: How Clichés, Weasel Words, and Management-Speak Are Strangling Public Language*. Toronto: Viking Canada, 2003.

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Gram Editing Services

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Spring events for Writers

(for additions, visit www.beaconlit.com/schedule2009.htm regularly)

May 2: *Pitching in a Cold Climate* (keynote) for the BC Association of Travel Writers **Gala Symposium**, 1-4pm, Listel Hotel, Vancouver. Non-members welcome, only \$20: contact Sarah Bennett at saraben@shaw.ca for information and to register.

May 9: *Book Magic: Turning Writers into Published Authors* (9am-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). Vancouver Community College (downtown campus). Register before May 3rd at www.vcc.ca/programs/pceprograms.cfm.

USEFUL TIDBITS

From Doug Matthews:

www.sendspace.com/ allows you to upload and download large files that cannot be sent via e-mail. I just downloaded a large 25MB TIFF file of an illustration...and it worked perfectly. Free for up to 300MB transfers.

From me:

- www.myotherdrive.com provides storage space for your vital files offsite at no charge. They are safe and secure, and only you can download the files when and where you choose.
- Anyone needing to convert book covers into an image of a book for a website or promotional material can get brilliant software for \$50.00 at: www.coverfactory.com. Also does CDs, thin books, spiral bound, boxes, etc. Magic!

Enjoy the BLS blog with monthly *Flashes* and much more:
www.beaconlit.blogspot.com



The Beacon is published quarterly by Beacon Literary Services and is distributed electronically free of charge to those who are interested. If you do not wish to continue to receive the newsletter, please notify the editor:

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