



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 31, Summer 2007

## Online book builders

My mother-in-law turned 80 in September 2004 and the family was stressing over a suitable present. What could we possibly give someone who had everything and that also fitted the auspicious occasion? I suggested a legacy book and everyone loved the idea. The only disadvantages concerned me—I was the one to do it and I had to find a way that we could collaborate in different cities in real time. Then, three years later, I decided to produce a travel journal about an unusual trip to Paris, which had different requirements. What to do? How to do it?

After some sleuthing on the Web and recommendations from a writer colleague, I found solutions for both projects that turned out to be excellent. I call the companies I used “online book builders” to distinguish them from print-on-demand firms, but this term will not locate their websites using a search engine. These companies specialize in producing books in small numbers, say one to six copies only, with no set-up fees. I had another requirement too—both books had to accommodate many photographs and reproduce them in high quality without breaking the bank.

I chose [Sharedink.com](http://Sharedink.com) for the legacy book, a company that uses web-based software to produce all kinds and sizes of books, as well as photographers’ portfolios. They offer “web books” that never need to be printed, hard and soft cover books, myriad templates, and excellent instructions. Their customer service is phenomenal. The web-based program allowed our family to work together simultaneously, although we lived 2000 miles apart. We designed and wrote a web book first, then Shared Ink printed us one hard cover book with 120 glossy pages and sent a free .pdf file of it to each family. Our cost: USD\$150.00, which is not indicative of the typical books Shared Ink produces. We wanted a one-off humdinger with all the bells and whistles for the 80th birthday. It did the trick too—my mother-in-law was speechless as she leafed through the pages. In 25 years, I have never seen her at a loss for words.

My travel journal did not need collaboration, so I chose a different route and firm—[Blurb.com](http://Blurb.com). This company uses downloadable, free software called *Book Smart*. Again the program has myriad choices of book sizes and types,

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**Book Magic:**  
*Turning Writers  
into Published  
Authors*

For details, visit  
[www.beaconlit.com/](http://www.beaconlit.com/)



### From the editor’s desk

Subscribers often ask me why I don’t include markets and contests for writers in *The Beacon*. My reasons: other regional, national, and international publications and websites cover both extensively. This newsletter focuses on the business of getting published, whether it is an article or a book.

Since the March issue and after I had finished *Book Magic* (see below), I started looking into self-publishing options other than print-on-demand. I was hunting for short-run printers that could print 500 or less, perfect-bound books. A representative of a large and reputable Canadian printer recommended Blitzprint to me ([www. blitzprint.com](http://www.blitzprint.com)). Its prices were less than half the other quotes I received and the materials they use are better than most POD firms. Blitzprint (Calgary) accepts orders from all over the world—authors submit books electronically, either in a word-processing file or camera-ready .pdf. I plan on using them for three of my books.

For those of you who want to publish family histories, legacy books, travel journals, etc. for your family and friends, the lead article discusses my experiences with two online book builders.

Summer is the time to drown ourselves in good books for three months. Enjoy it!  
**JHF**

## I'm Sorry, Mrs. Willan, But You Were Wrong

By Joyce Gram, Writer and Editor

It's always a little painful when the myths we hold dear explode, when the words of our grade three teacher—as clear now as the day they were spoken—turn out to have been, well, just wrong. So it goes in life, and so it goes with one of the most deeply entrenched writing myths you're likely to find. No, it is not an error to begin a sentence with a conjunction such as *and*, *but*, *however*, *so*, or even, God forbid, *because*.

Bryan Garner, America's grammar guru and writer of the *Chicago Manual of Style's* chapter on grammar and usage, appears to be on a bit of a mission to disabuse us of this widespread belief. He says there is “no historical or grammatical foundation” for it. “In fact,” he goes on, “a substantial percentage (often as many as 10 percent) of the sentences in first-rate writing begin with conjunctions. It has been so for centuries.” He doesn't stop there but quotes a famous grammarian of old who calls it a “groundless notion” and says not-too-kind things about English teachers who “go out of their way to handicap their pupils by inculcating it.”

A conjunction at the beginning of a sentence is an effective way to link ideas, to draw the reader along your line of thought, to connect what is coming with what went before. The *Oxford Guide to Plain English* says that *however* at the beginning of a sentence is “often the best position, since it tells the reader immediately what sort of point is coming up.”

Sadly, there is one style bible that disagrees. Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, which I recommended to you in my last column, advises against starting a sentence with *however* when the meaning is “nevertheless.” But, I can say—with confidence—Strunk and White are all alone on this one and seriously out of step. Pick up any well written book or article and see for yourself.

Hmm, I wonder if Strunk and White and my grade three teacher, Mrs. Willan, had something going.

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### Next live workshops for writers and teachers

(for details, see [www.beaconlit.com](http://www.beaconlit.com))

**June 2 - Crafting Irresistible Query Letters** (9-noon) and **Book Magic: Turning Writers into Published Authors** (1-4pm) at VCC downtown. \$53.00 each. Register [here](#)

**Jun 14 - Rev-up your Writing!!** for the Post-Secondary Support Staff Conference, **Building Connections 6**, at Kwantlen College, Langley.

**Aug 29/30 - Reaching Reluctant Writers and Writing with Power for Success!!** for the Okanagan - Skaha Teachers' Union conference, Penticton.

**Sep 30 - Word on the Street**, a festival for writers and readers of all ages, Vancouver Public Library Square, 11am-6pm, free.

### Online book builders (cont)

templates, colour schemes, etc., and it's a little easier to use than Shared Ink's. My book was on my doorstep less than three days after I uploaded it. I marveled at its luminous, glossy jacket and the superb photo reproduction that met my high standards. Cost: USD\$29.95 + \$12.00 s&h. Wow!

Any family or organization wanting up to six copies of a book would do well to consider these companies that charge no set-up fees. The biggest bonus is that you don't have to know how to prepare camera-ready copy either. Both systems are a snap to use and ideal for genealogies, stories for grandchildren, memory/legacy books, company or church histories, etc. Test drive them this summer!

Please visit my blog for writers and join in the discussion at:

[www.beaconlit.blogspot.com/](http://www.beaconlit.blogspot.com/)



For more about Beacon Publishing and books for writers, go to:

[www.beaconlit.com/writerstools.htm](http://www.beaconlit.com/writerstools.htm)

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