



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 30, Winter 2008-09

## The Crystal Ball

I spent the third weekend in October at the Surrey Writers' Conference talking to Canadian and US agents and editors. I was eager to find out which book categories are hot ticket items for acquisition.

There has been quite a change from two years ago. Creative nonfiction is the most sought after category. It is so hot this fall, it sizzles. Agents tell me the desire for it will not fade fast, like chick lit did.

Fiction is still selling but publishers are demanding books with huge characters, intricate plots, and perfect pacing and tension. Editors and agents inferred that as long as the above are present, lengthy novels are still a good bet. Agents also said that if the above criteria are met, editors will only consider perfectly polished manuscripts.

The economic meltdown has already hit US publishers and it has made them very, very selective and slower to decide. Canadian publishers were not much in evidence at this year's conference—only two were listed in the program and one was a small local publisher. He did not want to tell me what he was doing, buying, or planning.

Books for boys continue to be popular with publishers for ages 8 to young adult. Of great interest are books for boys who are reluctant readers. This is not new and the need remains strong in Canada, the UK, and the US.

I hear that some print-on-demand companies on both sides of the border are downsizing. Whether or not this is true, I have not been able to substantiate, but it needs to be watched if this is your chosen publication route.

The effect of the economy on publishers will play out whether we like it or not and we need to be mindful when choosing the perfect one for our books.

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### From the editor's desk

I have decided to make a change to the way Beacon Literary Services delivers its monthly e-tips, called *Flashes*.

**Starting on January 1, 2009, these email *Flashes* will be available only on my blog at [www.beaconlit.blogspot.com](http://www.beaconlit.blogspot.com).**

The time and expense of using a bulk emailer no longer makes sense, especially given that news feeds make checking blogs as easy as reading emails. I have explained how to set yourself up on Google Reader overleaf. It's worth doing.

With the festive season hurtling towards us, I am offering some ideas for writers on your shopping list:

- *Manuscript Makeover* by Elizabeth Lyon
- *Book Magic* by me(!)
- Printer paper/cartridges
- A digital recorder; they're so cheap now
- A new journal for ideas
- An annual subscription to the Federation of BC Writers or a registration for a writing course
- A pedicure...

Have a great holiday!

**Julie H. Ferguson**

## Listening to Your Voice

By Joyce Gram, Writer and Editor

In the last *Beacon*, I talked about style and voice, and the difference between them. Style, I said, quoting my own writing teacher, Eileen Kernaghan, involves the structure and rhythm of the sentences, choice of words, use of metaphors and images. Voice is the disguise you wear when you write. The disguise cannot be taught: it is something you bring out in yourself by working on your manuscript.

Nevertheless, most of us beg for guidance on how to cultivate our writing voice. Constance Hale, in her book *Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wickedly Effective Prose*, offers the best I have found. "Voice," writes Hale, "is the *je ne sais quoi* of spirited writing. It separates brochures and brilliance, memo and memoir, a ship's log and *The Old Man and the Sea*. Strong voice is conversational: The writer leaves us with a sense that we are *listening* to a skilled raconteur rather than *passing our eyes* over ink on paper." As writers, we are often admonished to write the way we talk, but voice, says Hale, involves more than accurate transcription. The true zing of conversation comes from attentive listening and painstaking revision.

Hale offers an exercise to get us going, which she calls "Ode to a tape recorder." It is the very technique I recommend to my editing clients to help them decide if their dialogue is working, but it is essential to perfecting *all* your writing. Read your lines aloud, over and over, and recast any word or sentence that does not roll off the tongue. You can start, if you wish, by speaking your ideas into a tape recorder, to let your voice flow and to hear yourself. Transcribing talk, Hale is quick to point out, is not tantamount to writing, but it's a technique to cultivate voice. Anything that stops you or makes you cringe when you read it aloud needs rewriting. In early drafts, that's a lot of what we write.

Recommended: Hale, Constance. *Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wickedly Effective Prose*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.

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Contact Joyce Gram for all your editing needs:  
[gramkend@shaw.ca](mailto:gramkend@shaw.ca)

### Winter events for Writers

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

**Dec 6 - Self-editing for Writers** (Joyce Gram, instructor) for writers of novels, nonfiction, business, and technical. Register immediately at [www.ce.sd36.bc.ca](http://www.ce.sd36.bc.ca).  
**This is a MUST-ATTEND.** To heck with Christmas shopping!

**Jan 24 - How to Create Stunning Family Memory Books and Have Fun Doing It!** (Julie Ferguson, presenter) at Port Moody Public Library, 9:30am to 12:30pm. **Free**, but you must register at 604-469-4577 to reserve your seat.

**Feb 7 - 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 at [www.vcc.ca/programs/pceprograms.cfm](http://www.vcc.ca/programs/pceprograms.cfm)

## Setting up a news feed for your favourite blogs

I have about 12 blogs that I like to follow at least three times a week. As the number increased, the time it took to call them up individually got out of hand. I stopped bothering, until a colleague told me to use **Google Reader**.

Here you collect your favourite blogs and can read the posts in one spot with one click. Google Reader checks the blog sites you follow for new content saving you the time and effort. Take a tour at: [www.google.com/help/reader/tour.html](http://www.google.com/help/reader/tour.html)

If you don't have a Google account such as gmail, you need to sign up for one. You can do it from the above website. Then follow the instructions to set up your Google Reader and you're done.

It is a good idea to bookmark your Reader page and then all you have to do is click on it once a day to see all the new posts on the blogs you have chosen.

If you have a blog, be sure to link it to Google Reader or add "Follower," then your visitors can simply click on either icon and they list it automatically for them. MAGIC!!

Please visit the Beacon blog at:  
[www.beaconlit.blogspot.com](http://www.beaconlit.blogspot.com)



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Julie H. Ferguson  
#5-300 Maude Road,  
Port Moody, BC  
Canada, V3H 2X6  
P: (604)469-1319  
F: (604)469-1316

[info@beaconlit.com](mailto:info@beaconlit.com)  
[www.beaconlit.com](http://www.beaconlit.com)

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