



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 1, Fall 1999

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## The Canadian publishing scene: What you should know....

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Aspiring authors need to know about the trends in publishing that are occurring in their home country, first and foremost, and then what is happening worldwide if they are hoping to break into overseas markets. For us in Canada that overseas market usually means the United States. The reason we need to know is because the information assists us in approaching the right type of publisher with the right kind of idea. But most of all, we need to know because the news is encouraging, especially for non-fiction writers. This month we will focus at home.

Over the last ten years the percentages have swung in favour of non-fiction writers in Canada. 75% (8550 titles in 1997) of all books published here are non-fiction and, of those, 90% (7695 titles) are by *first time, unagented authors*. These percentages are high because non-fiction books sell better and, most importantly, sell longer than fiction

There are 511 publishers in Canada generating revenues of nearly \$2 billion a year. They range from 1 title/year operations to those producing 100 titles/year. In Canada over the last five years, sales of "trade" books has grown 36% and text books by 19%. Trade books are all the hard cover and paper backs (excluding the mass market paperbacks you find in the racks) published by commercial publishing houses.

Women read five times as much as men and extract more application from their books than men. Women buy 70% of all books that are published and 46% of all paper-backs. Men read more biography, history, and other types of non-fiction than women.

It is important for authors to know that 71% of all Canadian publishing activity occurs in Ontario (371 publishing houses), whereas BC accounts for only 2.9% with 47 houses. */...overleaf*



### From the editor's desk

For many months I have been inspired to start a simple newsletter for writers. Ninety percent of us dream of writing a book or articles, but less than one percent of us who complete a manuscript manage to get it published. There is a vast chasm to be negotiated betwixt inspiration and publication....

I hope that *The Beacon* will go part way to get you over that chasm safely. Every month I will bring you the information, tips, and encouragement that you need. Sending your comments and questions to me will assist in making it your newsletter, not mine. To that end, I welcome e-mail, phone calls, and even letters telling me what you are seeking to reach your writing goals.

The future contents of *The Beacon* depends on you, the reader.

May the muse be with you!  
Julie H. Ferguson

## The six great publishing myths ...don't let them get to you!

Who knows how myths develop, but there they are influencing our actions, feeding our insecurities, and always whispering to our subconscious that we should not believe that we can get published.

Here are the six greatest myths that I had to grapple with when I was deciding to write my first non-fiction book:

1. *Publishers prefer good fiction;*
2. *The competition is too fierce;*
3. *You have to be an expert in the field;*
4. *You MUST have an agent;*
5. *All you need do is write a query letter; and*
6. *Never phone a publisher.*

In Canada these myths are no more than myths – unsubstantiated and proven untrue almost every day at our larger and smaller publishing houses.

The lead article has exploded Myth #1 this month. In the next issue, we will examine Myth #2 – the competition is too fierce.

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### Upcoming events where Julie Ferguson is appearing

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|---------------|---|
| October 22-24 | Surrey Writers' Conference: <i>Getting Your Canadian Non-fiction Published: a Canadian Writer Explodes Some Myths!</i>                |
| November 2    | Coquitlam Business and Professional Women's Club (keynote)  |
| November 6    | School District 43 Secondary Teachers Professional Development Weekend at Douglas College:<br><i>Get Creative...with Power Words!</i> |
| November 17   | Birchland Challenge Centre (Elementary), School District 43:<br><i>Get Creative...with Power Words!</i>                               |



### The Publishing Scene

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Both the Canadian-controlled and foreign-owned houses are making a profit, but publishers in the Maritimes and Prairies are not.

Overall the publishing industry's profits have dropped from 7% to 4% since 1995 with a 1% reduction in the number of titles published. However the market has increased significantly in trade and text books.

Unglazing one's eyes from the impact of the statistics, we realize that the time in Canada is just right for non-fiction and first-time, unagented authors.

*Sources: 1994 Literary Market Place and The 1996-97 Survey of Book Publishers, Statistics Canada*



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