



May 2017 Jim Cox Report

1 message

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Dear Publisher Folk, Friends & Family:

Being the editor-in-chief of the Midwest Book Review, from time to time I get requests to be interviewed for publication in some magazine, journal, newsletter, book, or blog.

I'm always happy to oblige for two reasons. Firstly, it's an opportunity to promote the Midwest Book Review and Secondly, I have a pretty healthy ego and enjoy the attention! :-)

Here's the latest one:

SHELBY LONDYN-HEATH INTERVIEW WITH JIM COX

Q. Jim, you started Midwest Book Review in 1976. That is over forty years ago. Why do you think Midwest Book Review has been so successful?

A. The three key elements to the success of the Midwest Book Review are:

1. We always provide authors or their publishers with a copy of our review of their book and an accompanying cover letter telling them all the places we have posted or published that review.
2. We give special consideration whenever possible to self-published authors and small press publishers.
3. We do not charge authors or publishers for reviewing their books as long as those books or published print editions (hardcover or paperback) and the book is in print and available to librarians and the general reading public.

Q. What was the original mission of your business and what drove you to act on it?

A. The original (and continuing) mission of the Midwest Book Review is to promote literacy, library usage, and small press publishing. My motivation for these past 40 years as the editor-in-chief of this enterprise derives from my life-long love of books, the personal importance libraries have played in my life, and the continued expressions of appreciation and support I receive from librarians, booksellers, authors, publishers, and the general reading public.

Q. Did you have money and backers when you started out?

A. I received a \$1000 loan from my father-in-law which I used to buy stationary and postage stamps. Everything else was provided free of charge (such as the radio station from which I broadcast my two weekly shows (Madison Review of Books; The Science Fiction & Fantasy Hour), and the labor of unpaid volunteers.

Q. Did family members help you get started? If so, do they still help you? What is the advantage of having family members involved with your business?

A. Other than a loan from my father-in-law (which I paid back in full some six months later), I wasn't helped by family members -- but I did get a great deal of help from a large number of volunteers.

It wasn't until a decade or so later that my daughter came to work for me as my Managing Editor, and then my wife eventually began to review books for two of our monthly book review publications (MBR Bookwatch & Children's Bookwatch).

Occupations and services that they continue to provide to this very day.

Q. Jim, did you experience skepticism when you began your business— people who wanted to talk you out of your foolish idea?

A. Not really. I started out as a 30 hour a week unpaid volunteer myself in 1976 and it wasn't until 1980 that I turned into a full time paid professional. My book review operation was a success from the very beginning in terms of attracting publishers wanting to submit books for review and being able to pay any overhead expenses using review copies as a source of income by selling them to local bookstores and community libraries in Madison, Wisconsin and other surrounding small communities hereabouts.

Q. What is the best part of owning a book review business?

A. Being my own boss. I had spent 21 years as a social worker laboring away in bureaucratic systems and it was a special joy being able to make my own unimpeded decisions.

Q. What is the worst?

A. The hours I had to put into the Midwest Book Review when I 'turned pro' jumped from 30 a week to 70 or 80. There was no taking time off, no weekends, no holidays. I had that kind of schedule from 1980 to 2001. It got a little better after that, but it wasn't until I got old enough for Social Security and Medicare that I was able to semi-retire and now only work 2 to 3 hours each morning -- seven days a week.

Q. Jim, for many years you did not charge for book reviews. How did you survive financially? Did you ever come close to shutting down your business because of limited finances? What has kept you committed to Midwest Book Review, when you could have done something more lucrative?

A. Quite early on I started to receive two annual foundation grants to support our mission statement.

We were able to cover expenses quite nicely given that all of our reviewer's are unpaid volunteers, and the disposal of review copies generated enough revenue to take care of our budgeted outlays (utilities, phone, stationary, etc.).

Thanks to author and publisher donations to our postage stamp fund I haven't had to buy stamps for more than 30 years now.

While I started out with print editions of our book review publications, when we switched over to on-line editions of those same publications I was relieved of an enormous monthly printing expense, -- and never received a single complaint from the publishing industry. Up to that time, printing our book review publications was the single biggest monthly expense by far.

It also helps that I own the building that houses the Midwest Book Review so there are no rent or mortgage expenses.

I was never was in danger of having to close down the Midwest Book Review because of financial issues. Not even when the Great Recession hit. By that time we were down to two paid employees who worked 35 hours a week for minimum wage (which in Wisconsin is \$7.50 an hour).

I've been a book person all my life. I'm also a successfully published author in my own right. For many years (until my semi-retirement) I gave talks and did workshops at publisher conventions and for author groups.

I never wanted to do anything else no matter how lucrative that something else might have been. It has been an interesting serendipity how my social work skills transferred so effectively and applicably into my editorial responsibilities.

Q. Before we move to authors and books, do you have a word of advice for business owners such as bloggers, publishers, and writers, as they step into the business world?

A. Yes! Please spend some time reading basic 'how to' books on successfully operating a small business venture. You can find them in any public library. There are reviews of a great many good ones on the Midwest Book Review web site at:

http://www.midwestbookreview.com/bookbiz/pub_shlf.htm

Keep careful records of all your income and expenses. Become knowledgeable of all possible state and federal tax deductions.

Strive to expand the audience for your reviews at all times. For example, of the 81 reviewers I have currently on our roster, about 1/4 of them utilize the Midwest Book Review as a secondary forum for their work. Their primary forum being their own newspaper column or blogg. This allows them to expand their original audience to include the librarians, booksellers, and general reading public that are my audience.

Q. As you know Jim, many authors, even those who are traditionally published, have to promote and market their books. This does not come naturally to people who spend a long time dreaming in front of their keyboards. What advice do you have for authors who need to build platforms for their books? What steps should they take to market their books?

A. There are a great many 'how to' books devoted specifically to this issue. My advice is to read at least one of them every month. You'll find scores of them reviewed and recommended on the Midwest Book Review web site at that same link:

http://www.midwestbookreview.com/bookbiz/pub_shlf.htm

My advice is to jot down the titles of 3 or 4 of them, then go to your local community library and ask that they be procured for you through your public library's free Interlibrary Loan System.

When you get them, read them with pen and paper at hand to make notes and jot down ideas.

If you find one that is so useful you want to have it for your own personal reference shelf you can then buy it from the publisher or order it through your favorite bookstore, or even go up onto Amazon to buy it.

Q. Jim, let's talk about your review process. Books arrive by mail to Midwest Book Review. How many arrive in a month?

A. We receive an average of 2,000 titles a month from the publishing industry.

Q. Out of all those books, how many actually get reviewed?

A. 600 to 700 a month on average.

Q. Who opens the packages and reads the books when they arrive?

A. My mail room guy. He pops them out of their packages and boxes, puts the accompanying paperwork (cover letters & PRs) into the book, then stacks them on my desk to be screened and sorted out by me.

Q. What are the biggest reasons books get rejected after their first readings?

A. Here are the reasons for rejection:

1. It's a pre-publication manuscript, a galley, an uncorrected proofs, or an advanced reading copy (ARC) and we require a published, finished copy the way it would be encountered in a bookstore or a library.
2. It is disfigured by being stickered or written on -- most often with the message 'Review Copy - Not for Sale'.
3. The cover art is atrocious and renders the book uncommercial when competing with other titles in the same genre.
4. There is a serious production flaw with the books such as the binding, or the print is too small for the intended readership.

Q. What are the qualities of a book that drive it deeper into the review process?

A. Here are the reasons for passing the initial screening and being eligible for a review assignment:

1. It arrives with the proper paperwork
2. Attractive in appearance making it visually competitive in its genre or subject
3. It's in a genre or on a subject that is of interest to one or more of my reviewers
4. It's by a self-published author or small press publisher
5. It's from a freelance publicist that I have good experience with and respect their judgement
6. It's of a unique or new to me subject matter or something that is currently a hot topic

Q. Are there differing levels that a book goes through to get to a final review? If so, what are the levels?

A. It's all pretty simple and straight forward. There are no levels beyond the initial screening. Once a book has passed my initial screening there is a 4 to 6 week 'window of opportunity' for it to be assigned out for review. When a book is assigned out for review the reviewer has 30 days in which to review the book and submit their review to me.

Q. Do you have an editorial team that agrees on final book reviews? If you do, what happens if the members have varying opinions on a book?

A. I don't operate on a team consensus basis. I am the sole arbiter of whether or not a book will become available for review and to which reviewer it will be assigned. Reviewers can express their preferences and they will be adhered to as much as possible.

The Managing Editor decides which review will go into which of our nine monthly book review publications.

Q. Do you have affiliate book review sites or alternative channels, where authors may fish for book reviews if they don't make it through Midwest Book Review?

A. No. But I did create "Other Reviewers" as a section of the Midwest Book Review web site. "Other Reviewers" is a database of freelance book reviewers, book review magazines and publications, book review web sites and blogs. The database link is:

http://www.midwestbookreview.com/links/othr_rev.htm

Click on "Other Reviewers" and it opens the database. The trick is to go down the list (and it's a long list because it is a huge database). When you seek one that looks promising, click on it and you'll be zapped to that particular web site. Read through that other web site and you'll be able to determine if that reviewer or review resource is thematically appropriate for your particular book -- and if it is, what their book review submission guidelines are.

Q. What about interested book reviewers? Do you have open spots for them, and how do you determine the quality of their reviews?

A. We always welcome new reviewers. I have a form letter I send out in response to such inquiries called "Reviewer Guidelines" which lays everything out that they will need to know to be a volunteer book reviewer for the Midwest Book Review.

Their first few reviews pretty much will tell me how good they are at it. Sometimes, if it would be helpful, I give a word of advice or counsel as to what might improve their work. I see that as part of my job as a book review editor.

There are no word limits to a review. My advice is for reviewers to say everything they think needed to be said in their critique of a book.

Q. Jim, I notice you send out reviews electronically to bookstores and libraries across the U.S. and Canada? What does this process involve? What do the agencies and companies do with the information you send them?

A. The Managing Editor takes care of electronically posting the reviews to authors, publishers, subscribers to our publications, and Gale Cengage Learning (for their Book Review Index data base program for library systems throughout the U.S. and Canada). We have a database of email addresses so it's just a matter of plugging an email address into an email confirmation notification letter and hitting 'Send'.

What the recipients do if so motivated by the review we send them is use the reviews to make out purchase orders. Authors and publishers utilize the reviews in the context of their own publicity, promotion, and marketing campaigns.

Q. Do you have catalogs and print-out reviews that you mail out? If so, who writes them and where are they sent to?

A. We don't have catalogs. For those authors and publishers who would like to have a hard cover of a review on our letter head stationary we print them out, put them in an envelope, add a stamp, and snail-mail them along with a form letter. All our reviews are archived on the Midwest Book Review web site for five years.

Q. You have a review section called Reviewer's Choice. What is that?

A. Reviewer's Choice is a monthly book review column that is reserved for:

1. Reviews of books that cover more than one subject area (e.g. biography & military history; or photography & wildlife).
2. A given reviewer who only has one review submitted in a given month (it takes 2 or more reviews to have your own byline column).
3. The review is one furnished by the author or publisher by a non-Midwest Book Reviewer because, while the book passed my initial screening, it didn't get a review assignment in the allotted time frame only because of 'too many books, not enough reviewers'.

This is a 'safety net' idea I came up with so that we could provide some modicum of value to authors or publishers who made an investment in submitting a copy of their book to us. This at least gives those folk access to our audiences and the review is posted in the "Reviewer's Choice" column in their behalf and under the reviewer's byline.

Q. Is there a category of books that you do not accept? Why not?

A. Pornography. We only review books that you would find in a general bookstore or a community library.

Q. What do you think is the most popular book genre or book category in today's market?

A. Adult coloring books are hot right now. Other enduringly popular categories include: cookbooks, art books, military books, needlecraft books.

Q. What is your favorite kind of book to read when you are not working?

A. My personal recreational reading is currently dominated by Large Print Editions of western novels distributed by Ulverscroft. I also am partial to graphic novels and science fiction/fantasy.

Q. Jim, what do you think about the decreasing role of book critics in newspapers and other journals nowadays?

A. I have mixed emotions. One the one hand it saddens me because it is a reflection of how the reading of books as a pastime pursuit has been a diminishing trend over the last 30 years. On the other hand it has benefit the Midwest Book Review immensely because many of those book critics who lost their newspaper or journal columns now send their review to me!

But one only has to look at the growing number of book review oriented blogs and Amazon comments on line to realize that there is still a huge number of people who enjoy sharing with others their opinions, comments, and recommendations on what they've been reading.

Q. What do you believe is causing this decline, and what do you predict the literary consequences will be?

This decline is directly related to the advancing popularity and increasing 'market share' of electronic based pastimes. It all began with the advent of television in the homes of America. Nowadays it's the rise of the Smart Phone and all those apps that are further eroding the reading of books for recreation and continues to shrink the percentage of the population that reads/buys books -- and therefore decreases the revenues that magazines and journals can derive from the publishing of book review columns.

Q. What is your opinion of the current trend of laypersons doing reviews for books on sites such as Amazon and internet bookstores? Do you think this is a fair way to determine the quality of a book?

A. You are talking to a man whose mentor (John Ohliger) first brought me into the book review game because he wanted to take what had been a kind of academic white tower of book reviewing reserved for the literary elites into the province of the common folk -- housewives, cab drivers, students, (and in my case) social workers. Ordinary folk who wanted to share their opinions about what they were reading but otherwise had no forum to do so until our little weekly radio show came along.

The 40 year success of the Midwest Book Review and our continuing popular reputation within the publishing industry is a very positive reflection on the contention that having 'laypersons' reviewing books is a very fair way to determine the quality of a book for its intended readership.

Q. Have you ever been the first to spot a book or author that would become a huge success during your company's review process?

A. There is a very successful science fiction author by the name of Kevin J. Anderson. He was a teenager attending the Oregon Highschool here where I live and had written a science fiction story and wanted my opinion. I had him as a guest on my radio show and told him based upon what I had read that he had talent. That was more than 35 years ago.

And there have been others down through the years -- but Kevin was the first.

Q. Do you still personally review books?

A. Every day.

Q. What has been the most dramatic aftermath of a book review you have ever experienced at Midwest Book Review?

A. For me personally it would be receiving the 2012 Lifetime Achievement in Publishing award from the late Dan Poynter and his publisher association out in Santa Barbara, California.

For the Midwest Book Review it would be opening up an author 'thank you' letter about twenty years ago and finding an unsolicited check for our Postage Stamp Fund in the amount of \$1,000.00 -- it was from a lady in New York whose three self-published books I had reviewed. It turned out I was the only one she had approached (and apparently there were a lot of them) that had done her that service -- and not asked anything of her.

Q. Okay, let's get to the topic everyone is talking about nowadays: self-published authors. Why do you think there is a growing influx of Indie authors, and how are they impacting the publishing world?

A. The numbers are proliferating because of the ease at which POD (Publishing On Demand) companies can turn a manuscript into a book; because of the rise of the Kindle and such publishing sales outlets as Smashwords; because of the increasing difficulties of an unknown author being able to persuade the established major publishers into accepting them.

Being a self-published authors, and putting in the work of effective marketing, thereby being able to secure potential buyers through the use of social media and the internet is what is driving their numbers up.

Q. Do you have an opinion about authors and traditional publishers? For instance, do you think it is fair for authors to give away 90% of their royalties to publishers?

A. Traditional publishers have been squeezing authors since the invention of the printing press. What's going on these days is that Amazon is squeezing publishers just as hard as publisher squeeze authors.

By way of an example, here is my view on what a break down for a \$10 book should look like:

\$3 for the publisher manufacturing the book
\$1 for publicity/promotion/marketing
\$1 for distribution/wholesaling
\$4 for the bookstore
\$1 for the author

Q. Do you think the rise of Independent authors will change the ratio of royalties between authors and publishers in the future?

A. No. I'm afraid not. Unless an author is willing to learn how to market a book -- and put in the time necessary, the advantage will always be on the publisher side of the financial equation.

Q. Jim, I notice your company reviews self-published writers and also reviews books from small presses. Why are you so supportive of the lower hierarchy in the publishing world?

A. There are two reasons: One professional & One personal

1. I needed a niche, something that would help the Midwest Book Review stand out against such book reviewing competitors as the Publishers Weekly, the Library Journal, The New York Times Book Review, etc.

That niche turned out to be an emphasis on self-published authors and small press publishers that the other established book review publications routinely ignored.

I've never had a problem getting books from the big publishing firms, but it was the job that I was doing (in terms of the quality of the reviews I and the other volunteers were personally churning out) of the little guys (and the audience for those reviews that I was also generating and expanding) that demonstrated to the publishing industry that I was a legitimate and desirable person to send review copies too.

That's the professional reason. Here's the personal reason:

I am myself a self-published author. When I was in college I wrote a book called "The Social Contributions of Joseph Smith to Plural Marriage". My stepfather owned a hand operated printing press as a hobby. I printed out, collated, and bound 1,000 copies (which sold out in six months).

I had to hawk copies to bookstores in Salt Lake City, as well as the campus bookstore at BYU (where I was a student).

So I got a first hand exposure to what it was like to be a self-published author and have to market my own wares.

That left me with a life-long appreciation for what self-published authors have to go through and a firm desire to help them out whenever and however I could.

Q. There are still companies that will not review self-published writers. Why do you think some literary doors remain closed to independent writers? What do you think it will take to change the reputation of Indie authors?

A. A lack of proper editing is what created a negative image of self-published authors that still exists to this day. To change that reputation only an emphasis on editing what you publish will help.

Q. I know from reviewing books myself, that there are many poorly-edited books, but I have also read self-published books that are superbly edited and are literary gems. Do you think there will ever be a self-published book that wins a Nobel Prize?

A. Yes. The means and process of turning a manuscript into a book by an author working on their own is improving year by year. In my opinion it is only a matter of time before a self-published book wins a literary award as prestigious as the Nobel Prize.

Q. Will it take something that drastic for closed literary doors to finally swing open for independent authors?

A. No. What it will take is for great literary works having been self-published raise an awareness among librarians and the general reading public that they exist. The means to do so is improving annually through the means of social media and the internet -- and (all modesty aside) the organizations like the Midwest Book Review.

Q. Although Indie authors are left out of book reviews and grant opportunities, there are still places where they are welcomed. As mentioned before, Midwest Book Review accepts Indie authors' books and so does Publisher's Weekly. At the same time, independent authors cannot apply for the National Endowment for the Arts, although they can apply for the Pulitzer Prize. Do you think literary discrimination exists against Indie authors? If so, based on your experience, is it warranted?

A. Of course there is literary discrimination against self-published author. Of course it is not fair. But it is based upon the personal and professional experience of reviewers, editors, and publishers having waded through a great deal of self-published books that are poorly written and badly in need of even the most basic editing.

I think this will change as self-published authors get more sophisticated -- and as more sophisticated software (beginning with simple spell checkers and evolving into manuscript editing programs) become available and easier to use.

Q. Jim, I am aware that you won a Publisher's Lifetime Achievement Award. Will you describe what that is and what the experience was like for you?

A. The late Dan Poynter was an icon in the self-publishing community. He and I knew each other, and worked with each other for decades. The group he started was for ebook publishers and

authors. Both myself and the Midwest Book Review were very well known in that community on a national basis.

In September of 2012 I was invited to be a speaker at their convention in Santa Barbara, California. When I got there I was given the award in recognition of my work in behalf of self-published authors and small presses. As was usual at such conventions, I was provided with a room in which to give a workshop (How to Get Your eBook Reviewed).

That rather large room was packed with people. There was, quite literally, standing room only with folks lining the two side walls and the back of the room. I understand that even then some folks had to be turned away because of a lack of room for them to even stand.

It was particularly memorable for me because attending that same event was my West Coast Editor, Diane Donovan, a volunteer reviewer with whom I had been working for at least 25 years up to that time -- but I had never met her in person! She lived in California, I live in Wisconsin. In all that time (she is co-editor of three of our monthly publications in addition to having her own monthly bylined review column) she had only been a voice on the phone or an email correspondent.

It was a thrill of a life time. I still have that award hanging on a hook in my office. Dan Poynter is gone now -- but I still remember him and honor him as one of my most important mentors in those early years of the Midwest Book Review.

Q. Usually, when someone wins a Lifetime Achievement Award, it is because they never stopped doing what they were passionate about and they kept moving ahead— even if it meant breaking cultural boundaries. It takes courage not to quit. What challenge did you have to meet to keep Midwest Review evolving on your terms?

A. If I had any challenges to keeping the Midwest Book Review running, I don't seem to be able to recognize them as such. I get up in the morning and every morning is like Christmas as I see what books the mails have brought. I enjoy answering the phone myself and talking to people about their books, about their publishing houses, about the Midwest Book Review.

I deeply enjoyed going to conventions and giving talks or holding workshops. I can't do that anymore because of age-related health issues. But I still enjoy puttering in the office every morning. Dealing with the snail-mail and the email. Reading and writing opinions of what I've read. And generally striving to help writers to write better, publishers to publish more profitably, and being instrumental in bringing to the attention of librarians (as well as the general reading public) good books that they might otherwise never know existed.

Q. Jim, what did you grow up thinking you would do with your life?

A. I grew up the product of a broken home. My teen years were those of a delinquent. The significant people in my life were cops and social workers. The local library was my place of refuge and sanctuary.

I knew I wanted to be a Social Worker -- and was one for 21 years.

I didn't even now that being a book reviewer could be an occupation. I stumbled into that as first a hobby, and then as a career as an unexpected and unintended surprise. Just one of life's lucky little circumstances!

Q. What is your definition of success?

A. Living a mellow life with enough revenue to cover the basics. Having something interesting to read, something interesting to do, something worthwhile to strive for, someone to love and be loved by.

Q. Have you achieved your version of success?

A. In a word -- YES.

Q. What are your interests and hobbies?

A. Playing poker, reading, watching old movies on TV.

Q. Did you always like reading books?

A. As far back as memory goes. I think I was born a book worm. Before becoming a book reviewer I would spend about 1/4 of my income on books and magazines. When I found that by being a book reviewer I would get them for free it was as if I'd gotten a 25% raise of my disposable income.

Q. Did you ever want to be a writer? If so, what would you like to write about?

A. I never wanted to write the Great American Novel. My ambitions were always far more modest. I merely wanted to achieve the power of life and death over those who did! :-)

As I've mention earlier I am a published author. But beyond that, I write a monthly column of advice, tips, tricks & techniques for authors and publishers called the "Jim Cox Report". They are all archived on the Midwest Book Review web site at:

<http://www.midwestbookreview.com/bookbiz/jimcox.htm>

Q. When you look back, did you achieve the business mission you envisioned when you were a dreamy-eyed man four decades ago?

A. The historical reality has far exceeded my expectations. The Midwest Book Review, as a business, has operated in the black without exception in the entirety of its 40 years. One of the fundamental financial underpinnings are the grants, another basic source are the donations from authors and publishers, a third revenue source is in the form of twice yearly royalty checks for my reviews, fourthly are the volunteers contributions of their time and effort, and fifthly is the revenue derived from the sale of review copies to two local Madison, Wisconsin bookstores.

Q. Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

A. Nothing comes to mind.

Q. What are you most proud of?

A. All the people that have made the Midwest Book Review such a success within the publishing industry down through the years.

Q. What do you want the legacy of Midwest Book Review to be?

A. A source of recommendable value for authors, publishers, librarians, booksellers, and the general reading public, long after my time on Earth is done. I take a measure of immense

satisfaction in knowing that my daughter (who is our Managing Editor) will continue the Midwest Book Review when I no longer can.

Q. Is there anything I have left out or anything you would like to add to this interview? Do you have parting advice for aspiring writers?

A. There are three fundamental reasons to write a book:

1. You have a compulsion to put your ideas or stories down on paper and yearn to have others read them.
2. You want to financially support yourself by writing as a career.
3. You have a cause to promote.

No matter which of these (or any combinations of these) applies to you, be aware that none of them will materialize unless you learn how to publicize, promote, and market what you have written, what you have published, what you have to offer the readers of your work.

Thank you for this interview, Jim. I appreciate that you remain down-to-earth and are accessible to writers and reviewers. You are an asset to the world of authors and books. I personally thank you for your many years of devotion and hard work.

Now on to some more current reviews of new titles that I recommend for authors and/or publishers:

The Writing/Publishing Shelf

Writing Without a Parachute

Barbara Turner Vesselago

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

400 Market Street, Suite 400, Philadelphia, PA 19106

9781785921711, \$18.95 PB, \$9.99 Kindle, 192pp, www.jkp.com

Writing Without a Parachute: The Art of Freefall comes from a writing teacher who shares the method she's used for almost 30 years to help hundreds of writers publish their works. If this sounds daunting, it should be advised that only five simple ideas are involved for the success of this process, called Freefall - the art of writing without logic parachutes couching or limiting words. Chapters discuss specific detail, the overriding fear of work being 'publishable' or not, the challenge of moving from fact to fiction, the importance of perseverance in the writing process, and much more. No aspiring writer should be without these words and this process.

5-Minute Book Marketing for Authors

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book marketing by even the most novice of authors is just a 5-minute incremental work and includes instructions for when an author is ready to spend even more time in their efforts to bring their books to the attention of their intended readerships. With "5-Minute Book Marketing for Authors" authors will learn: How to Optimize Amazon in only 5 Minutes a day; How to Power up a Goodreads profile; How to Create eBook Promotions that sell digital copies of their books; How to Simplify social media; How to Sell more books on Amazon! -- And so much more! Thoroughly 'user friendly' in organization and presentation, "5-Minute Book Marketing for Authors" should be considered a 'must' for authors (especially self-published authors!) and small press publishers, and will prove to be an enduringly popular addition to community and academic library Writing/Publishing instructional reference collections.

Naked Truths About Getting Book Reviews

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<http://www.giselahausmann.com>

9780986403439, \$12.99, PB, 106pp, www.amazon.com

Book reviews are an essential, core, fundamental part of every successful marketing plan specifically designed to bring the book to the attention of the librarians, booksellers, and the reading public. In "Naked Truths About Getting Book Reviews", one of the most prolific and respected reviewers who posts on the Amazon.com web site has now written a 'how to' instructional guide for authors, publishers, and reviewers on how to successfully obtain and effectively employ reviews. "Naked Truths About Getting Book Reviews" also includes a wealth of practical information on a number of related issues including the dispelling of misunderstandings about reviews; contacting foreign reviewers; getting reviews from Amazon's top reviewers; getting reviews from friends and colleagues; buying reviews from paid review services; common mistakes authors make with respect to the book review process; how seeking reviews has changed since 2015; and so much more. Impressively informed and informative, thoughtful and thought-provoking, "Naked Truths About Getting Book Reviews" is also exceptionally 'user friendly' in organization and presentation. While very highly recommended for community, college, and academic library Writing/Publishing instructional reference collections in general, and Book Marketing supplemental studies reading lists in particular, it should be noted for personal reading lists that "Naked Truths About Getting Book Reviews" is also available in a Kindle format (\$4.89).

Writing Hard Stories

Melanie Brooks

Beacon Press

24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210

www.beacon.org

9780807078815, \$16.00, PB, 248pp, www.amazon.com

Write an honest memoir is one of the most difficult tasks any writer can undertake. The more complex and multilayered the life, the more difficult it is to candidly and uncompromisingly record it for other people to read. In determining and illustrating what happens to autobiographers when they embark on that specific task, writer and teacher Melanie Brooks sought guidance from the memoirists who most moved her to answer these questions. An essentially informed and informative read for creative writers "Writing Hard Stories: Celebrated Memoirists Who Shaped Art from Trauma" is a unique compilation of authentic stories about the death of a partner, parent, or child; about violence and shunning; and about the process of writing. It will serve as a tool for teachers of writing and give readers an intimate look into the lives of the authors they love. The authors profiled in "Writing Hard Stories" include: Andre Dubus III, Sue William Silverman, Michael Patrick MacDonald, Joan Wickersham, Kyoko Mori, Richard Hoffman, Suzanne Strempek Shea, Abigail Thomas, Monica Wood, Mark Doty, Edwidge Danticat, Marianne Leone, Jerald Walker, Kate

Bornstein, Jessica Handler, Richard Blanco, Alysia Abbott, and Kim Stafford. An extraordinary and instructive read from cover to cover, "Writing Hard Stories" is a very highly recommended addition to community and academic library Writing/Publishing collections in general, and the supplemental studies reading lists for any and all aspiring writers of memoirs and autobiographies in particular. It should be noted that "Writing Hard Stories" is also available in a Kindle format (\$15.99).

Writing Subtext, revised edition

Dr. Linda Seger

Michael Wiese Productions

12400 Ventura Blvd., #1111, Studio City, CA 91604

www.mwp.com

9781615932580 \$18.95 pbk / \$10.99 Kindle amazon.com

Now in a revised and expanded edition for both screenwriters and novel writers, Writing Subtext: What Lies Beneath is a guide to the intricate yet ultimately rewarding art of crafting works with rich subtext. Case studies from popular media including "The Big Short" and the "Abnormal Psychology" episode of "Cheers" help illustrate concepts such as playing with analogies, showing evidence of human love beneath the literal text, how to smoothly incorporate gestures and action, and much more. Writing Subtext is a superb resource for authors, especially professionals in the field seeking to refine their narrative polish! Highly recommended.

When Writers Drive the Workshop

Brian Kessel

Stenhouse Publishers

480 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101-3451

www.stenhouse.com

9781625310736, \$28.00, PB, 186pp, www.amazon.com

"When Writers Drive the Workshop: Honoring Young Voices and Bold Choices " by Brian Kessel (an educator for more than twenty years, and a Professor of Literacy and Elementary Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte) is practical, engaging instructional study that asks classroom teachers to go back to the roots of a writing workshop asking what happens when students, not planned teaching points, lead writing conferences? What happens when students, not tests, determine what they learned through reflection and self-evaluation? Writing instruction has shifted in recent years to more accountability, taking the focus away from the writer. "When Writers Drive the Workshop" explores what happens when empowered writers direct the writing workshop. Through stories from real classrooms, Professor Kessel reveals that no matter where children come from, they all have the powerful, shared need to be heard. And when children choose their writing topics, their lives unfold onto the page and teachers are educated by the young voices and bold choices of these writers. Written in an engaging, teacher-to-teacher style, "When Writers Drive the Workshop" focuses on four key components of writing workshop, with an eye on what happens when teachers step back and allow students to drive the instruction: Conferencing sessions where students lead and teachers listen; Author's Chair where students set the agenda and ask for feedback; Reflection time and structures for students to set goals and expectations for themselves; Mini-lessons that allow for detours based on students' needs, not teacher or curricular goals. Each of the five chapters comprising "When Writers Drive the Workshop" includes practical ideas, a section of Guiding Beliefs, a list of Frequently Asked Questions, and some Digital Diversions to help teachers see the digital possibilities in their classrooms. Impressively comprehensive, informative, and thoroughly 'reader friendly' in organization and presentation, "When Writers Drive the Workshop" is an extraordinary and highly recommended addition to personal, professional, college, and university library Teacher Education instructional reference collections and supplemental studies reading lists.

Understanding Biographies

Birgitte Possing, author

Gaye Kynoch, translator

University Press of Southern Denmark

c/o International Specialized Book Services

920 Northeast 58th Avenue, Suite 300, Portland, OR, 97213

www.isbs.com

9788776749927, \$32.00, PB, 232pp, www.amazon.com

Synopsis: In modern and postmodern times, biography is one of the most popular genres of the day. The Western world is engaged in the lives of ordinary and well-known people, causing biographies to fly off the shelves. In "Understanding Biographies: On Biographies in History and Stories in Biography", the Danish historian and biographer Birgitte Possing (who is also a professor at Rigsarkivet [Danish National Archives] in Copenhagen, Denmark) is a study of the essence of biography as a genre, spanning a number of radically different types of life-storytelling. Professor Possing defines biography as a genre, a narrative form and an analytic field, providing guidelines to an understanding of gender, archetypes, narrative traditions, critique and ethics of the field.

"Understanding Biographies" is restricting to a single form or format for understanding 'how to write a biography'. It does not provide simple answers to questions on how, why or upon which sources biographies should be written or read. On the contrary, "Understanding Biographies" shows the numerous styles and wide-ranging conventions around the Western world in which biographies are accomplished.

Professor Possing interprets the biographical renaissance during the last thirty years as completely in keeping with the individualizing zeitgeist around the millennium shift. She identifies and reflects on the traditions that have been applied in international writing and reading of biographies, with examples from a wide range of Western and Nordic countries.

Critique: A model of seminal of erudite scholarship, "Understanding Biographies: On Biographies in History and Stories in Biography" is a deftly written and thoroughly 'reader friendly' study that is as informed and informative as it is thoughtful and thought-provoking. Ably translated into English for an American readership by Gaye Kynoch, "Understanding Biographies" is unreservedly recommended, especially for college and university library Literature, Literary Criticism, Biography, and Writing collections and supplemental studies reading lists.

Finally -- Here is "The Midwest Book Review Postage Stamp Hall Of Fame & Appreciation" roster of well-wishers and supporters. These are the generous folk who decided to say 'thank you' and 'support the cause' that is the Midwest Book Review by donating postage stamps this past month:

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All of the previous issues of the "Jim Cox Report" are archived on the Midwest Book Review website at www.midwestbookreview.com/bookbiz/jimcox.htm. If you'd like to receive the "Jim Cox Report" directly (and for free), just send me an email asking to be signed up for it.

So until next time -- goodbye, good luck, and good reading!

Jim Cox
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