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What Award-Winning Storytellers Say About Writing

I just returned from a conference put on by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard. It was two-and-a-half exhilarating days of re-learning the craft of writing and researching from prize-winning newspaper editors and writers.

Listening to these ferociously talented people got me back in touch with the thrill of my early days as a newspaper reporter and editor, chasing down people for stories and writing under pressure to meet deadlines. There's no such thing as writer's block in a newsroom.

They talked about their passion for narrative writing and research, and shared insights that helped immediately in my writing, coaching and teaching. Here are just a few tips from two rock stars of the conference: Jacqui Banaszynski, who holds the Knight Chain in Editing at the Missouri School of Journalism; and Thomas French, a Pulitzer-prize winning reporter at the St. Petersburg Times.

In a class on interviewing, Banaszynski advised us to "peel the onion." That means for every question, ask five more on the same subject. She also cracked up the audience by insisting on the value of "Really!" and "Uh huh" to keep interviewees talking.

Interview subjects in their "native habitat:" in their homes, in their cars on the way to pick up a kid from school, in their kitchens, and at the grocery store. At home, ask to see a photo album to prompt stories.

French said he uses “sequencing” to order stories, no matter what size. He starts strong, with a line of action, and builds energy to a powerful end. He employs the same structure for paragraphs and sentences. I dare you to write one sentence that reads this well.

Let me try it: Suzi dumped (action) the shrimp cocktail into the sink and turned to face the caterer (builds energy?), believing she had saved her own birthday party from disaster (powerful end). Improve this sentence or write your own, and send it to me. I’ll put whatever I receive into the next newsletter.

Read more on French’s writing and reporting philosophy at http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=74111

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Self-Publishing, Part II: Cookbooks for Home Cooks

After I published my investigation of whether the time has come for a hardcover, all color self-published cookbook (See <http://www.diannej.com/SelfpublishingArticle1.shtml>), people asked why I didn’t include Tastebook.com, <http://www.tastebook.com>, and Allrecipes.com, <http://allrecipes.com>.

At Tastebook, you insert your own recipes and photos into software templates and receive a published full color, hardbound cookbook in the mail. If all you want is a few copies of your cookbook, this method is reasonably priced. It produces a professionally designed product that looks like a cookbook you might peruse on the shelves at Williams-Sonoma.

In the spirit of service journalism, I tested out the sites to see if making a cookbook is as easy as it looks.

Tastebook: Spiral bound, holds up to 100 recipes

Tastebook emerged from a partnership with Epicurious.com, the site that aggregates recipes from *Bon Appetit* and *Gourmet*.

You can use up to 100 of your own recipes. Tastebook publishes them in a spiral-bound cookbook for \$34.95. If you don’t have 100, you send the remaining recipes later. Tastebook prints the pages and mails them to you. Since the book is spiral bound, it’s easy to add more pages. See <http://www.tastebook.com/recipes/new>.

Tastebook's templates are easy to use. I cut and pasted a pre-existing recipe into the template boxes and downloaded an accompanying photo. Nothing to it. There's even a box to add a sidebar. I previewed the page to see how it would look when published. It looked great, just like the pages in a modern cookbook. Tastebook uses a professionally designed template, and you get a professionally designed book.

Minor limitations seem limited to structure. Recipes must fit into one of ten color-tabbed chapters pre-named by subject, such as "Vegetables" and "Meat+Poultry." If you'd like to use a different structure, or include a glossary, techniques section or equipment section, you're stuck.

Covers feature innocuous photos of food and flowers, with a white box in which to type a title and byline. I choose my cover and previewed it and the recipe. I found a bug: I had inserted one recipe, yet the program added 9 *Bon Appetit* recipes from its database.

Once I was done making my book, I added it to my grocery cart and checked out, just like ordering any online product. Processing and printing takes only 5 business days.

Allrecipes: Lots more expensive, harder to use

Allrecipes, <http://allrecipes.com/features/more/createacookbook.aspx> operates much the same way. It has partnerships with *Taste of Home* and *Everyday with Rachel Ray*.

After an endless series of steps to sign in, I created my book by selecting a cover (choice of four designs) and a dedication line. The dedication line is so important to Allrecipes that it lists samples, such as "Keeping it in the family never tasted so good!" Yuck.

I found the software confusing and hard to use. It was difficult to navigate the site, particularly to view finished recipes. Page design is simple but serviceable, with a colored bar running along the bottom and the recipe title in the same color. Allrecipes includes a Notes section and a metric equivalents table.

For the same number of pages as Tastebook, it's a more expensive endeavor. The 8 ½ x 11-inch book comes in hardcover for \$34.99, or softcover for \$24.99. But it's only 20 pages and holds only 16 to 18

recipes. Cost seems the same at first, but a comparable 100-page cookbook costs an extra \$40, making the total \$74.99. With standard free delivery, the book arrives in 10-14 business days.

If you'd love to publish just a few copies of your own cookbook, my money's on Tastebook.

P.S. For a profile of a novice author who self-published a cookbook on lulu.com, see

http://www.usatoday.com/tech/products/2008-01-02-300991490_x.htm

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My Cookbook Saga: Arrived but Not For Sale

As you know from reading these newsletters, I've written a cookbook, *Grilled Pizza and Piadina*, with my collaborator, Chef Craig Priebe. It arrived in the mail in February, a beautiful full-color hardbound book. Williams-Sonoma put in a huge order for the upcoming barbeque season, which made our editor happy.

But only a few of people, such as reviewers, received the book in February. The rest of the books are not here. They are on the slow boat from China (literally), and will go on sale April 21. When they arrive, I am off the hook for promotion. Since it's Craig's book, he will do demos, interviews, signings, etc.

My only event will be in April, where I'll be co-signing copies at the International Association of Culinary Professionals' Annual Conference, <http://www.iacp.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=325>. If you'll be there, please come to the Cookbook Expo so I can show you the book you've read about for so many months.

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News from Clients and Students

Ten Speed publishing purchased **Mary Karlin's** book on wood-fired cooking.

Andrews MacMeel purchased **Romney Steele's** book, *My Nepenthe*.

Faith Kramer's article for BBC's *Olive* magazine came about because the editor was a regular reader of Faith's blog, Blog Appetit, <http://www.clickblogappetit.blogspot.com/>. Called "Eat Like a Local - San Francisco," it included Faith's recipe for cioppino and photos of Fisherman's Wharf.

Tracey Ceurvel's article on bouillabaisse appeared in the *Boston Globe*, http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/food/articles/2008/03/12/a_comforting_stew_of_creativity_and_tradition/

The Santa Cruz Sentinel published **Nancy Weimer's** second feature article. She sent a note saying "Thank you! I took a class from you a few years back on food writing. This is my second article in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. You helped me make a dream come true. I wanted to let you know and thank you." That made my day.

Unfortunately, the article is no longer available online.

Susan Ytterberg started a blog on culinary activities in the San Francisco Bay Area. See <http://appetiteatbay.blogspot.com/>

Erin Laverty is working with Cricket Azima of the Creative Kitchen, <http://www.thecreativekitchen.com> on a cookbook, and interning with *Gambero Rosso* magazine.

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Resources

-- If you enjoyed the **writing tips** from the Neiman Conference, you'll find lots more online, particularly on the craft of writing, at <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative/digest/essays/index.htm>

-- As we know, it's hard to make decent money as a food writer. **If you've started a blog, can you make money from that?** Read these pieces on direct and indirect sales methods from ProBlogger to find out: <http://www.problogger.net/archives/2007/12/04/6-steps-to-making-money-because-of-your-blog/>

He'll also teach you how to blog effectively in an online class: <http://www.problogger.net/archives/2008/03/05/six-figure-blogging-20/>

-- If you are a published author, **are your books listed on Google.com?** You might want to check. *Will Write for Food* is there, with lots of free pages, all the way to the index. My publisher owns the electronic rights, so the decision was up to them. On the other hand, the page lists my website, so it's not all bad.

http://books.google.com/books?id=CzNpaY_J8YcC

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News You Can Use

-- *Business Week* uncovers **trends at recipe-driven websites:**

http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/dec2007/tc20071220_491660.htm

-- Look up this year's **fine examples of food writing** as nominated by the James Beard Awards, <http://jbfawards.com/content/2008-nominees>, and the IACP finalists:

<http://www.iacp.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=500>

for books; and

<http://www.iacp.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=501>

for journalism awards.

I was a judge for Beard this year, for the first time. Previously, I judged the IACP awards several times. Criteria are remarkably similar. The main difference is that with Beard judges identify the top 5 books. With IACP judges rank all books in their categories. If a category has 23 books, for example, all must be ranked.

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Just for Fun

Read this juicy piece in *Harper's* about **the relationship between the Food Network and pornography:**

<http://www.barbaranitke.com/harpersmag.html>

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Classes and Appearances

May 7-June 4, 2008

The Art of Cookbook Writing

Six Wednesday nights, 7-9 p.m.

Book Passage Bookstore

http://www.bookpassage.com/class_detailed.php?id=257

Corte Madera, CA

\$240

This course introduces you to the pleasures of cookbook writing, whether for yourself, your family, or publication. Over the course of five weeks, you will develop your cookbook idea, focusing on shape and structure, how to write with a distinct voice, and how to write headnotes and successful recipes.

Each class begins with a short workshop, where students review homework assignments, such as writing a recipe. The atmosphere is supportive and encourages creativity. I will provide detailed feedback on all writing assignments.

Other topics covered are food photography and styling; whether to self-publish or traditionally publish, and how to market the cookbook.

May 20 - June 17, 2008

Write the Darn Book Proposal!

Five Tuesday nights, 7-9 p.m.

The Writing Salon

Berkeley, CA

<http://www.writingsalons.com/classes/index.php?p=102>

\$195 members/\$235 non-members

If you have written a memoir, or started a non-fiction book, you need a solid book proposal to excite agents and editors. The best book proposal reads like a business plan, telling them about you, about the book, who will read it, which books compete, and how you plan to promote it.

I'll give you tips and insider information on each section, focusing on what excites agents and editors in a proposal. At the beginning of each class, we'll discuss the homework assignments of each student in a constructive manner. You'll receive valuable and detailed feedback. As you read the work of other students, you'll get ideas that strengthen your own work.

You'll even pitch your idea to a respected agent, Ted Weinstein of Ted Weinstein Literary Management. Before he arrives, we'll hone your book idea together, to give you the best possible advantage.

June 30, 2008

How to Write a Cookbook

7 p.m.

Burlingame Public Library

<https://www.burlingame.org/Index.aspx?page=1089>

480 Primrose Road

Burlingame, CA 94010

Free

Coming up: In the fall, I'm planning to teach an **online food writing class** for UCLA Extension. I'll have more information as we get closer to the date.

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Please forward this email to anyone you think might be interested in this newsletter. All previous issues are now archived on my website, www.diannej.com. There's a place to sign up there as well.

To change your email address or unsubscribe, please email me:

dj@diannej.com

I will not rent, trade or sell my email list to anyone for any reason.

Happy Spring,

Dianne

Dianne Jacob

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Website: <http://www.diannej.com>

Author of *Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Restaurant Reviews, Articles, Memoir, Fiction, and More*, and co-author of the forthcoming *Grilled Pizzas and Piadinas* (Spring 2008)