



News & Views

▶ Helping authors and publishers create, market and sell more books

MARCH 2008

MARCH 12 MEMBERSHIP MEETING: Hand-Selling Your Book

FEATURED SPEAKERS:

- **Elaine Floyd, efg publishing**
- **Barbara Davis, Red Barn Presss**
- **Lynnette Schuepbach, Creative Sources Publishing**

Whether you publish with a large publisher or independently publish, you will be expected to actively promote and sell your books through personal appearances. No one knows your book or subject matter any better than you do, which makes you a natural authority. Hand-selling through personal appearances may not quite be the same as hand-to-hand combat, but through personal appearances you are expected to gain or to protect the “real estate” that your book occupies on the bookstore shelf, trade show/festival floor or in the hands of your audience. Your success in personal appearances will depend upon having promotional materials available, having a thorough knowledge of your presentation topic and a making sure you have a method to fulfill the sale.

Although Elaine, Barbara and Lynnette may present different subject matters in their titles, the same forethought is necessary before planning book signings, bookstore events, festival booths, or personal appearances for schools, organizations or any other face-to-face selling opportunity. They will give you tips from their experiences to help you beat the competition and successfully hand-sell your books at your next personal appearance.

Barbara Davis has been very successful selling her novel at dozens of festivals all across the United States. At the March meeting, Barbara will share her expertise in preparing for “combat selling.”

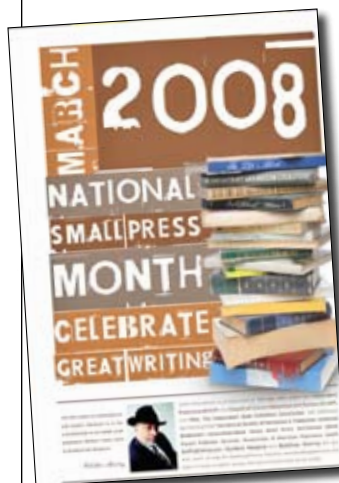
Lynnette Schuepbach, author and illustrator of children’s books, has been successful in selling through presentations at schools, art shows, and speaking for local organizations. She will give you tips for success in scheduling events as well as personalizing the topic to each audience.

Elaine Floyd maximizes value to her consulting clients through her unique experience of having been commercially published, self-published and, through her **efg** imprint, commercially publishing the works of other authors. She will talk about book store signings as well as using your book as part of a major speaking opportunity.

continued on page 2

PRESIDENT’S CORNER BY ED SYLVIA March is Small Press Month

It’s March again and that means it’s Small Press Month, when the book industry celebrates the contributions of small, independent presses everywhere. In recent years, independent publishers have become an increasingly important force in publishing. This is the fifteenth year for Small Press Month and special events take place in bookstores and libraries across the country. The graphic you see here is produced by the Small Press Center in New York, in cooperation with PMA. It is available as a large printed poster to bookstores and libraries wishing to set up special displays of independently published books. For more information on Small



Press Month, including a list of ways you can use this month to promote yourself, visit www.smallpressmonth.org.

In St. Louis, SLPA celebrates Small Press Month by holding special informational workshops titled “How to Publish Your Book” at local Borders Books & Music stores. The Borders stores have been wonderful partners for us, hosting these events for at least eight years now. New people often join our group after attending one of these sessions.

If you’re new to publishing or simply want to see “what’s new” in publishing, it’s worth attending one of these sessions. In just two hours, you can get a complete overview of the entire publishing process, from the birth of a book idea to the time a book is


continued on page 2

In This Issue

- 1 Hand-Selling Your Book
- 1 President’s Corner by Ed Sylvia
- 2 Essay: How to Sell Books by Really Trying By Henry Alford
- 4 Combat Selling by Barbara Davis
- 5 SLPA Co-Op Booth Travels to Arkansas Literary Festival
- 5 SLPA Celebrates Small Press Month at Borders

Hand-Selling Your Book... *continued*

Authoring a book helps establish you as a subject-matter expert and thought leader. Your book opens doors to media interviews and speaking opportunities that are often closed to the bookless. At the same time, your book can show your services and projects in an educational way that customers and prospects value.

Don't miss what promises to be one of our most important meetings of the year! Join us on Wednesday evening, March 12 at the Lodge at Des Peres. Doors open for networking at 6:30 pm, meeting begins at 7:00 pm. The formal meeting concludes at about 8:30 with networking continuing after the meeting. 

Essay: How to Sell Books by Really Trying

By Henry Alford

Published: May 7, 2006, *The New York Times Book Review*

(SLPA Editor's Note: My apologies. I "borrowed" this one from the NYT and don't really have repro rights to it, but it's such delightful reading that I could not resist sharing with you. Henry Alford's stuff is wonderful. Google him, read his essays, buy his books. His work is wonderful. And... in this article, you'll actually learn something very valuable about hand-selling books!)

BOOKSELLING, it's said in the publishing industry, is a matter of "hand selling." Books considered tough sells—say, a book about an obscure or overly specific topic, or a book that buyers might actually be embarrassed to be seen buying—need an extra push to be viable in the marketplace. Without that push, these books meet that most dreaded fate: the calm before the calm.

Eager to find out just how much hand selling it takes to overcome this calm, I decided to set up a table in front of my building in Greenwich Village from which I would try to peddle a collection of books that do not exactly evoke the phrase ka-ching. I spent three weeks amassing this merchandise, mostly pulling it from my own bookshelves and those of my friends. I ended up with 19 titles.

I found a few books that were seemingly useless (travel guides of 17 or more years' vintage), a few that were intellectually forbidding (like "The Importance of Scrutiny," a collection of essays from the British literary journal *Scrutiny*) and a few that I thought no one would want to be seen buying ("Impotence in the Male"). I found some books that I will describe as unsexy ("Michigan Folk Art," "Pruning Simplified," the first volume of Margaret Thatcher's memoirs, two volumes of Jeffrey Archer's prison diaries). And I found two books whose mere existence baffled me (a collection of drawings that the filmmaker and

continued on page 3

President's Corner... *continued*

bought by a reader. We will have four speakers, each talking about a different part of the process. We stay until all questions are answered, so it's a great opportunity to get the answers you need. We hope you'll support us with your attendance. Bring any interested friends, too. The sessions are free and open to the public.


The Borders Small Press Month programs we do here in St. Louis have been applauded by PMA's national leaders and the model for our program has been shared with PMA affiliates across the country. You can be proud that we've developed this successful program right here.

This year's sessions will take place on the first two Saturday evenings in March, from 7 pm to about 9 pm or until everyone's questions are answered. We invite you to attend one or both of these sessions and support our group. See the Borders article on page 5 for dates and locations.

We also applaud those working to take our co-op booth on the road to the Arkansas Book Festival next month. Bring your books and forms to this month's meeting to be included. There's an article on page 5 in this issue with more information.

We look forward to launching our new website soon. It takes awhile to complete the major overhaul we're doing, so pardon our dust while we remodel. The hardy souls who attended last month's meeting know how many great new things are coming.

Those who attended last month also know that SPAN (Small Publishers of North America) has extended an incredible membership offer to SLPA members. You can join SPAN for just \$20 for the first year. Current SPAN member can renew for just \$50 this year. Visit SPAN's website for full information on their group. www.spannet.org. This offer is available for phone orders only. You won't see it on their web site.

Our meeting this month should be a really useful one, we hope to see you at The Lodge! And remember to bring a copy of your published book with you to display in the rack on the evening of each meeting. Even though we no longer store members' books, it's great for everyone to see the range of books our members produce. (Besides, you can always hand-sell it to someone after the meeting!) 



— Ed Sylvia, President
slpa1@staircasepress.com

Essay How to Sell Books... *continued*

writer Rebecca Miller did without looking at the page, and “Hitler Laughing: Comedy in the Third Reich,” a 2005 academic title).

The shrewd salesman, I realized, can spin gold from straw, and so I thought up a talking point for each book. “This book will make you very popular at parties,” I’d say of the “Homeowner’s Guide to Fastening Anything,” an instruction manual that has a lot to say about hinges and duct tape. To anyone who gravitated to my old travel guides, I’d say, “Who needs trendy?” After visiting two local used bookstores to compare pricing, I decided to charge 50 cents for paperbacks and a dollar for hardcovers.

And so, on a lovely Saturday afternoon, I spent five hours selling books on the sidewalk. Quickly realizing that passersby were far more likely to stop and browse if I said hello, I became a veritable Chamber of Commerce of salutation. I admired babies, I recommended restaurants. At first sales were sluggish, if not nonexistent, and I found myself wishing I had some handy sales motto to hang on to, like “Look, Learn and Listen” or “Eye level is buy level.” But I soldiered on.

There were two early surprises. The first was that men were not afraid to pick up “Impotence in the Male” and browse through it. “I can give you a bag for that one,” I told one gentleman. “That’s O.K.,” he said, unruffled, putting the book back on the table. The other surprise was the number of people who commented on “The Downing Street Years.” “I think I can resist reading Margaret Thatcher,” said a bespectacled, silver-haired Briton who looked to be about 65. “It’s 914 pages, but it feels like only 814,” I said reassuringly, whereupon he responded, “I don’t think I’d get past the first 500 before throwing it out.”

My first sale occurred at 12:50 p.m. when a neighbor named Tom, a former actor in his 60’s with a mane of gray hair, sauntered over to the table and said, “You have quite a cross-section, don’t you?” He picked up a paperback of Marguerite Duras’s “Moderato Cantabile.” Given that my copy of this difficult-verging-on-incomprehensible novel was A) in French and B) badly defaced, I sensed that Tom was a man who liked a challenge. “That’s French and very enigmatic,” I said. He said, “Great.” Having earlier piqued one browser’s interest in “Hitler Laughing” by playing up its rarefied quality (“Everyone thinks ‘Weimar: funny,’ but not everyone thinks ‘Third Reich: funny’”), I now tried the same trick with the Duras book. “It’s sort of like ‘Where’s Waldo?’ for plots,” I told him. Tom handed me five dimes.

About an hour later, a 20-something Hispanic hipster in a black velvet jacket and a paint-spattered T-shirt asked me where Greenwich Avenue was. Little did I realize I was about to sell my second book. The fellow explained that he had been dancing all night at a club and couldn’t remember where he’d parked his car, and so he was going to a friend’s apartment to crash. We talked

for 10 minutes. Reaching for my 1986 “I Love New York Guide,” I drew an X on one of the book’s maps to show our location and offered my new friend the book for nothing. He politely resisted, so I suggested he give me 50 cents to assuage his guilt. “Dude, I’ll give you \$2,” he said, fumbling in his pockets. “You’ve been so good to me.” ka-ching.

Sale No. 3 occurred about an hour later. I had been talking about defaced books with a browser, prompted by my battered copy of “Michigan Folk Art.” “That book is distressed, which is kind of appropriate if you think about it,” I’d said. Just then, a preppily dressed and strikingly handsome man in his 30’s who was pushing a stroller picked up my hardcover copy of “Beginning Greek,” a 1961 textbook my boyfriend bought a few years back in an act of unchecked optimism. As with my Duras buyer, I sensed that this young, Greek-attracted father wanted a challenge, so I went into reverse-psychology mode. “It has some very heavy-going readings from the ‘Anabasis,’ ” I warned. “One chapter is called ‘The Grim Pinch of Famine.’ ” He smiled and said, “Bet that has some good vocabulary words.” After he’d paid me, I asked if he was really going to take up Greek. “Maybe with him,” he said, pointing to his infant son. “You can teach him about the grim pinch!” I gushed. “Better to read about it than experience it,” he replied.

At about 4 p.m., a young red-haired man stopped and read aloud the title of a 1982 scholarly study of aging—“Gay and Gray: The Older Homosexual Man”—to his female friend in a tone of stupefaction. I’d almost had success earlier “re-purposing” Rebecca Miller’s deeply puzzling book of drawings. “Think of it as the literary equivalent of early modeling shots,” I’d told a potential customer. “Buy it, and then in 10 years when Rebecca Miller is really famous, she’ll buy the book back from you.”

I wanted to try the same gambit with “Gay and Gray.” “That’d be a great gift for a gay friend who’s turning 30,” I said. “That, and a copy of ‘Death in Venice.’ Bam: ‘Happy Birthday!’ ” “I love it,” the man said — but apparently not enough to spend 50 cents on it. So his female friend bought it for him, saying, “That’s for you, honey.”

Next, an older gentleman walking two dogs lingered over Jeffrey Archer’s prison diaries. Earlier I’d assured browsers that the diaries “really capture the experience of being imprisoned,” to no avail. I now tried a different tack, explaining, “You learn how Marmite was outlawed in British prisons because prisoners were mixing it with water and making alcohol.” The customer said he used to work in a prison, and handed me \$1.50.

So what light do my \$5.50 in earnings shed on the bookselling experience? The factors that compel someone to buy something are, of course, varied and complicated. But my intuition tells me that while the sales of the Duras and the Archer books would have happened regardless of my presence — both of these customers,

continued on page 4

Essay How to Sell Books... *continued*

though intrigued by my comments, seemed self-motivated—the sales of the other three books were a direct consequence of my hand-selling efforts. In the case of the “I Love New York Guide,” I addressed a customer’s need very specifically, by providing a map to a man looking for his car. With “Beginning Greek,” I flattered my buyer by assuming he’d know what the “Anabasis” was and that he’d be attracted to the rigors of the grim pinch. With “Gay and Gray,” I re-purposed a searing sociological tract into a fabulous party gift.

In the end, my experience has afforded me a new vantage point on literature. What makes Iago evil? I have no idea. But what makes someone buy Iago’s guide to hot-waxing defunct sports cars? Preparation. Persistence. Psychological pimping. I think I’ll call them the Three P’s. 📖



Henry Alford is the author of several acclaimed books. He has been a regular contributor to *The New York Times* and *Vanity Fair*, and a staff writer at *Spy*. He has also written for *The New Yorker*, *GQ*, *New York, Details*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Travel & Leisure*, *The Village Voice* and *Paris Review*. Alford bears the grand title of “investigative humorist,” writing books about his gleeful one-man exploits in a number of arenas. His “antic mini-dramas” have taken him from the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and VH-1’s “Rock of Ages” to web sites devoted to glass-eaters and mullet lovers. Alford’s first book, *Municipal Bondage: One Man’s Anxiety-Producing Adventures in the Big City*, documents his efforts to navigate Manhattan life. *Big Kiss: One Actor’s Desperate Attempt to Claw His Way to the Middle* hilariously charts the potholes, broken glass, and occasional open roads he encounters on his journey as a struggling performer. In his latest work, *Out There: One Man’s Search for the Funniest Person on the Internet*, the intrepid humorist puts his “ear against the hot tar of the information superhighway” in a droll quest to identify the most entertaining person plying wares in the electronic marketplace.



**“When you sell a man a book, you don’t sell him
12 ounces of paper and ink and glue—
you sell him a whole new life.”**

— Christopher Morley
(American writer and editor 1890-1957)



Barbara Davis is “ready for action” at an event this past summer.

Combat Selling

by Barbara Davis

Combat is generally not what you think about while you are preparing for a personal appearance; but it should be. The battle for sales begins long before you place a carton of books in the trunk of your car. You should never go-after or accept personal appearances until your promotional materials are prepared to fight for you.

Do you have a battle plan that will defeat your opponents? Who is your enemy? Whose book is next to yours on Borders shelf? What other title appears next to yours on Amazon? Who is the author sitting next to you at a book festival? Those books and authors are your competition. How are you going to convince a potential buyer to spend their monies on your book rather than the one next to it? A great cover will only get you so far.

The selling goal during personal appearances is to out-promote, out-draw and out-sell your fellow authors. And to do this, you better be prepared to sell the old fashion way, face to face. This is going to be your biggest battle, learning to set the tone, the climate and raise the bar so the customer feels when they make their decision to purchase your book they will have made a perfect choice. They give you money, you feel good. They have your book, they feel good. The author in the next booth, who missed the sale, doesn’t feel so good. You just won one battle.

So how do you win the war? By being prepared for combat selling. Book festivals are a great place to showcase and sell your books. It’s also a great training ground to hone your selling skills for other personal appearances. Large festivals boast attendance up to 30,000 people in a weekend, the competition plentiful and selling is fast-paced. If you can sell in festivals well, you can sell anywhere. 📖

SLPA member Barbara Davis has been very successful selling her novel at dozens of festivals all across the United States. At the March meeting, Barbara will share her expertise in preparing for combat selling.

SLPA Celebrates Small Press Month at Borders

Our popular "How to Publish Your Book" Workshops are back!

Do you have a book inside you, waiting to be born? Join us at Borders as members of the SLPA Board share their experiences and take you step-by-step through the entire process of independent publishing from book concept to book sales in one evening. Here's what we'll cover:

- **Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing**
Which is best for you?
- **Turning Your Idea into Your Book**
How do you actually get a book printed?
- **Getting Your Book into the Marketplace**
How do you get it into the bookstores and where else can you sell it?
- **Promoting and Selling Your Book**
How do you actually convince people to buy your book?

You'll get a great overview of the publishing process and have virtually unlimited Q&A time afterward.

FREE-to-the-Public on Saturday evenings in March at these St. Louis area Borders Books & Music locations:

Saturday, March 8 at 7 PM


Borders - Creve Coeur
11745 Olive Blvd., Creve Coeur, MO 63141
Phone: 314.432.3575

Saturday, March 15 at 7 PM

Borders - Sunset Hills
10990 Sunset Hills Plaza, Sunset Hills, MO 63127
Phone: 314.909.0300

For more information on Small Press Month, visit

www.smallpressmonth.org

For more information on PMA, the Independent Publishers Association, visit **www.pma-online.org** 

Questions About SLPA?



Contact Membership Chairman:
Christine Frank at 314-205-2679 or
Assistant Membership Coordinator:
Linda Austin at 314-822-1170

SLPA Co-Op Booth Travels to Arkansas Literary Festival


Are you interested in selling more books? Getting your name and your title in front of the general public? Consider exhibiting your book in the SLPA Co-Op booth at the Arkansas Literary Festival.

For \$25.00 SLPA will exhibit and sell your title at the 5th annual Arkansas Literary Festival (\$15.00 for your second title and \$10.00 for your third or more title(s). To maximize selling and exhibiting in an inviting booth, we have a limit of the first 20 titles.

Now in its 5th year, The Arkansas Literary Festival is presented each spring in Little Rock by Arkansas Literacy Councils, Inc. Proceeds benefit adult literacy programs. The East Pavilion of Little Rock's River Market is transformed into a book lovers' paradise! Booksellers, authors and publishers will sell books and other items of interest to the book lover. Free to the public, Arkansas' largest literary event offers author sessions, book signings, children's craft & writing activities, costumed characters, street performers, and writing workshops.

This will be SLPA's first venture away from home. If well supported by members, we will seek out two more out-of-state events to show-case and sell our members' books. These would be in addition to St. Louis' Big Read and other local events which may surface.

As time is very short, SLPA Co-Op Booth forms will be available at the membership meeting on Wednesday, March 12. Specific information for book drop off, pick up and sales payments will be available in the form. If you wish to participate in the SLPA Co-Op Booth, plan now to bring 12 copies of your book, a small stack of business cards, or book marks or flyers, and payment (check, cash, Discover or VISA cards), to the general membership meeting on March 12. Unsold books will be return to you at the SLPA meeting on April 9th.

If you need more information, or need to make other drop-off arrangements for your title, please phone Barbara Davis at (636) 448-9821. For more information on the festival, visit: **www.ArkansasLiteraryFestival.org** 

Next Deadline March 21

Don't be late – no kidding!

Send us news on your new releases or upcoming appearances or anything else you wish to share.

Get your news and articles in EARLY! Send your information, articles and announcements to **newslettereditor@stlouispublishers.org**.