

Friday March 03, 2006
(edited for continuity and clarity)

Birol

Chris, it looks like Spring Fever has struck AW and we have a slightly smaller crowd than normal, so we thought we'd keep it informal. We'll just sit back and let you tell us what you have to tell us about your children's books, the best way to promote--

Chris

Should I take my shoes off--wait, that wouldn't be a good idea.

Birol

--and we'll pester you with all kinds of questions. Oh, are you one of those people who make the new airport security lines a biohazardous area?

Chris

No but I always set off the detector. I have a metal hip. Really. Hip replacement.

Would you like me to start my intro?

Birol

Yes. Why don't you?

Chris

Hi. It's a privilege to be here. Before we continue, I think everyone needs to know that I don't type very well. And speed? Forget it! I've come up with a variation of the old "hunt and peck" method (I sort of know the keyboard) that works when I do manuscripts. I'm afraid going is going to be a little slow in this format.

Also, I've never been in a chat room before! I am comfortable surfing the Internet; as-a-matter-of-fact, I use it extensively when I market my books. For whatever reason, I've never been active in the "chat room thing."

I began writing to get published back in 1988. As a kid, I always enjoyed reading and writing and did well in my English classes but didn't consider going "pro" until I was about 30.

The first piece I ever had published was an essay on the old ballpark used by the Phillies during my childhood. It appeared in the GETTYSBURG TIMES and I didn't receive a penny for my efforts. (I was working as an announcer at a radio station owned by the TIMES and I guess they figured as an employee I owed them a bit of pro bono work!) I didn't mind; it was a published clip in a reputable newspaper. I was a PUBLISHED writer!

About a year later, I landed my first paid piece in PHILLIES REPORT (are you starting to get the idea who my favorite team is?). Then it was another 5 years before I had anything else published. Things have been on the upswing since 1994 and I've been fortunate enough to have numerous short stories, 5 e-books, and two (soon-to-be

three) traditional paper and ink books published. But to this day, even with some decent publishing credits, I'm still get the privilege of hearing "Thanks but no thanks!" from publishers.

Moo Press, publisher of my ONE INCREDIBLE DOG! series is a smaller press with limited money for promotion. One successful strategy that I've employed to compensate for lack of resources is to electronically contact public and school libraries all over the country (and England) about my books. I send a short, non-pushy email query that invites the librarian to visit the Moo Press website if the books sound like something they might want in their collections. I don't just blast out hundreds of queries at a time; painstakingly, I go to library websites, find out contact names and email addresses and one-by-one, send that one person a query. It takes time and although I do use a form query, adding the name avoids much of the stigma of it being considered SPAM. If a name is not on the site, I will often direct the email to the Library Director or some specific title mentioned but never "To Whom It May Concern." That's too impersonal and screams "SPAM!"

Now, I can almost hear some of you asking, "But ISN'T what you're doing "Spamming'?" My answer is "No" and the reasons are:

1) Any email address that appears on the Internet is considered public domain. Most libraries are run by governmental agencies and if you hold an office or position, such as Library Director or Public Librarian, you're right to privacy disappears whenever you function in that capacity. No, we don't have the right to contact these folks at home, using their personal email addresses but when they are at the Library, it's completely acceptable for them to be contacted via a publicly posted email address regarding the availability of a book. In the past three years, I've contacted over 1,000 libraries. Only 2 or 3 have complained and asked for me to take their names off my mailing list. Out of courtesy, I oblige. But technically and legally speaking, if I'm not soliciting them about pornography or other objectionable material, it's not necessary.

2) More importantly, I am a professional contacting another professional about a service (my books) that can enhance and improve their business (library). I am not contacting complete strangers cold, at home, in an aggressive manner. I've talked to several librarians about this practice and they've told that they have no problem with it and couldn't see their colleagues being bothered by an occasional email query about new titles. Most understand that conglomerates have taken over the publishing industry and the little guys (like Moo Press) need to do what they can do (legally and ethically) to stay in business. Left up to people like RANDOM HOUSE (who turned down the manuscript), these books about these wonderful dogs would have never been published. Most librarians want their collections to be as good as possible and an email tip leading them to a good book or two doesn't bother them at all!

Well, that's the main tip about marketing I wanted to share tonight-use email! But use it carefully, respectfully, and in moderation. It's worked for the ONE INCREDIBLE DOG! Series and I think it can work for you.

Now I guess it's time for me to take some questions*

MacAllister/Birol

Thanks, Chris

Chris

You're welcome*

JuliaTemlyn

I have several questions. Unless someone else wants to jump in first.

Birol

One sec, Julia. To keep everyone from flooding Chris with questions, let's keep to the protocol of PMing you with questions, if that's alright with everyone? Just double click on Julia's id and your questions to her for Chris.

MacAllister

sounds fine

Chris

I don't know... kidding

Birol

LOL. I'd tell you to be quiet and behave, but you ARE our guest. ;) Okay, Julia, I'll retire back behind the curtain*

JuliaTemlyn

All right. First, Jenna Glatzer couldn't be here with us tonight. But she wanted to ask Chris something. What type of publicity (newspaper articles, reviews, radio, Internet, etc.) has shown him the biggest results in terms of book sales?

Chris

TV. Without a doubt. We've done several interviews and sales on Amazon have always spiked. After that--Internet. Radio is OK.

JuliaTemlyn

Hmmm.

Chris

I could change my answer.

JuliaTemlyn

TV is an interesting answer, especially with the internet being the big thing. No, lol. I was just surprised!

Chris

TV has tremendous power. I never realized. You still have to think when you use the Internet.

JuliaTemlyn

It really is interesting to me. I was struggling with what I wanted to say, when I said "hmm."

Chris

Getting on TV is the hard part. Oprah never returns my calls.

JuliaTemlyn

The internet seems so "right there," but you're exactly right. Television is like the medium of media. People who aren't online watch TV. So, may I ask...how did you go about getting on TV?

Chris

We've been on local and regional TV, which is easier to crack. Getting on TV? Let me answer... You need to contact the news department and present a local or regional angle. In our case, we pushed the fact that these books were about real, live dogs from central PA. Phone calls are best but be patient--those folks are busy! A nice press release helps too. And I know it might sound like a contradiction but i wouldn't send them an email. I use email for remote locations--in my own backyard, I try to use the personal touch.

Kage

Chris: Do you find when you are writing that you have to catch yourself and say, this is a Childrens book, that word or idea is to much?

Chris

Yes, I do all the time. And if I don't pick it up, my wife does.

JuliaTemlyn

We wives are good for that, eh?

Chris

Yes! My wife is my greatest asset. She actually knows how to type! Among other things, she's a lot more patient than me. I want to get things done and move on--sometimes at the cost of quality.

JuliaTemlyn

Sounds like me. My husband calls me his "built-in spell-checker."

Okay, William wanted to ask: what are your insights into the children's publishing industry's receptiveness to verse? in what vein does verse perform best in today's

market? Humor? Fantasy? Absurdism?

Chris

Hi William. Good questions and I'll try to answer. In my opinion, the children's publishing industry seems to be most interested in things that are SAFE. Tried and true. Established. The "Money Boys" have taken over and their tolerance for risk is almost zero.

MacAllister

Hmm. it would sort of seem like there's a long tradition of verse in childrens lit though.

Chris

Yes there is. But how much "new stuff" is being published? I think they're afraid to stick their necks out.

JuliaTemlyn

Considering Robert Louis Stevenson and poetry of times past. Even poetry in general seemed to be more accepted years ago, and not so much now.

MacAllister

Right--I wasn't contradicting you at all. It just seems like an market that produced Dr. Suess and Maurice Sendak should be a little more experimental *sigh*

Chris

It's sad. May I tell a somewhat lengthy story?

MacAllister

Do you ever chafe at those restrictions? -- please.

JuliaTemlyn

Sure you can, Chris.

Chris

Five years ago, I sent a manuscript to Water Brook Press, a subsidiary of Random House. The children's editor loved it--we worked on putting together a proposal. She took it to her sales team and they loved it, thought it hilarious but...turned it down because I DIDN'T HAVE A NAME IN THE MARKETPLACE! That was their stated reason. They even said they wanted to put me on retainer to keep them amused. Honestly.

JuliaTemlyn

Truly? I wonder what they'd think now? Let me know when you're ready for another question, Chris. I wasn't sure if you're finished with your story.

Chris

Yes. I would NEVER lie to YOU. Hey--I apologize if this sounds like a bitter tirade. I'm generally positive about my prospects and have decided to keep plugging despite the odds.

JuliaTemlyn

No, it doesn't sound like a tirade at all. It's very realistic, and disheartening.

Chris

Don't be disheartened! But I would shoot for medium and small publishers first. The big boys are tough to crack. To say the least.

MacAllister

It seems pretty natural to chafe at those restrictions.

JuliaTemlyn

Thanks for the encouraging words! Okay, let's see... dahmnait wanted to ask: what is considered tried and true? Verse seems to be used in many ways within the children's market.

Chris

Tried and true, to me, means something that has been published before, or is the continuation of a long running series, or was written by someone with a name. Things that almost guarantee a return on their investment. Hey--I might be wrong. It's just my opinion.

MacAllister> ahh, Clifford the Big Red Dog.

Birol

Or the Berenstain Bears and fill in the blank....

JuliaTemlyn

Exactly.

Yall

Dr. Suess

Chris

Good stuff. But who knows what new Clifford-type book languishes in some slush pile out there. Dr. Suess? I wonder if he'd have a chance today. Perhaps, his stuff was THAT good.

JuliaTemlyn

Okay, we have one more question, I think. Let me know when you're ready, Chris. And MacAllister, did you have another question?

MacAllister

It sort of seems like that leads to a horrible and boring homogeny I'd think, is that ever discouraging?

Chris

Ready. And please forgive the tone. I'm not really a negative person, you know.

JuliaTemlyn

Chris, like you just said, it really makes you wonder how many good books are being passed over.

MacAllister

You don't sound negative, Chris. A certain amount of realism is awfully important--

Birol

Realistic, I'd say.

MacAllister

--and few enough would-be authors can bring that to the table.

Chris

Discouraged? Yes. I think my best stuff has yet to be published. But my stories are quirky and not so mainstream. A publisher would be taking a chance.

JuliaTemlyn

Feel free to continue chatting on this subject. I just want to get the last question out there in the open. (and sometimes a chance is a good thing to take, right?) Dawno asks: Have you ever considered writing for an older audience and if not, why?

Chris

Yes, and I have. Short stories. feature articles.

MacAllister

What do you most like about writing for kids? (I've actually never considered it)

Chris

It's fun. Plus I have this "thing" about literacy--I want to see kid's develop a love for books and reading. It's empowering!

Birol

As a writer for adults, I really appreciate that. Let them read your things when they're young and maybe they'll want to read mine when they're older.

Chris

I also like to hear kids laugh. That's why I'd love to see some of my children's fiction published.

JuliaTemlyn

That's always a great reason!

Chris

Money and fame are secondary.

Birol

Chris, I see the time I promised to keep you captive has nearly expired.

Chris

I'll stay longer if you need me.

JuliaTemlyn

Oh, we have another question...

Chris

OK

Birol

Cool. What is it, Julia?

JuliaTemlyn

dahmnait wants to know briefly how you first broke into the children's market.

Chris

Bribes.

Yall

lol that works

dahmnait

lol...thanks.

Chris

I'll be serious. I contacted a few small publishers--queried them about LADY, the first book in the ONE INCREDIBLE DOG! Series. Moo Press was first to offer a contract but two others contacted us after we had signed.

Birol

Chris, we do thank you for your time and all the answers to your questions.

JuliaTemlyn

Thank you, Chris!

Dahmnait

Thank you Chris, I have hungry children to feed. I really appreciate your time and answers. Gives me reason to keep at it.

Dawno

::applaudes::

yall

Thanks, Chris.

Birol

When we first talked, I believe there was mention of a trivia question with one of your books as the prize?

Chris

Yes. A signed copy of BOONE.

Birol

Why don't we see how well everyone's done their homework then?

Chris

OK.

Birol

The answer to the trivia question can be found at either <http://www.keenebooks.com/Lady/ChrisBio.pdf> or <http://www.keenebooks.com/dog.asp>.

Chris

Am I eligible?

Birol

If everyone's ready, you can PM me (not Julia or Chris) with your answers.

Yall

You can whisper the answer to me :) lol

Birol

Sure. ;)

Chris

The answer is---George Bush.

Birol

The question is

Chris

Ooops.

Dahmnait

LOL

Birol

Wow!

Yall

lol

Birol

See Mac, GW does have some talent.

Robeiae

I'm gonna bust some heads...

Dawno

rofl

Birol

Sorry, Rob. Just poking at Mac, not you.

MacAllister

lol

JuliaTemlyn

roflol

MacAllister

It's okay, poke Rob, too.

Chris

What was the question?

Birol

(Politics is a full contact sport among this crowd, Chris.) The question is: Who is the illustrator of the One Incredible Dog! series? Remember PM ME with the answer.

Nope, nope. Chris is a very talented individual, but he did not illustrate his own books.

Chris

Include a name and I'll write a dedication too! It's been fun! Thanks!

Birol

And, Rob, Picasso is long since dead.

Chris

I have trouble with stick people.

MacAllister

Chris, you've been really terrific. :) Thanks so very much.

Chris

Later you all!

MacAllister

I suspect Birol is sorting Pms just now.

* **Chris** has quit IRC (Quit: Leaving✕)

Birol

On the plus side, if you can't draw stick people, you can never lose at hangman.

MacAllister

oops we lost him

Yall

Good thinking, Birol

robeiae

Thanks, Chris!...Chris?... ...Chris?

Birol

Anyway, Dahmnait has the right answer. It was Judith Friedman.

Yall

Wtg

JuliaTemlyn

Yay dahmnait!!!

MacAllister

Remember to send Birol your name, and Chris said he'd write a dedication

robeiae

Didn't she call herself "picasso" in her early years?

Birol

I'll track Chris down Dahmnait and you can send me your mailing info. And thank you all for attending.

Dahmnait

Wow, I was off feeding the kids. Cool.

Birol

They must've brought you luck. Night, All. And thank you for attending.