

# BOOKMARK



*Fiction and Nonfiction News from Janet Litherland*

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## Potpourri

**Did you know** that Dr. Seuss's first book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (I remember reading it with my two sons more than 30 years ago!), was rejected by 27 publishers and the author considered burning the manuscript? Fortunately, he did not.

**Did you know** that Jane Austen's first novel, *First Impressions*, was rejected in 1797? She revised and retitled it (*Pride and Prejudice*) and finally sold it to a publisher who printed it 16 years later, in 1813.

**Did you know** that Canfield and Hansen's *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was rejected 20 times before being noticed by a small Florida publisher? We all know what happened after that!



### The Writer's Quill

The quill came into use in the 7th century and remained our chief writing tool for 1,000+ years. Our U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence were written and signed with one.



Name the structure. (Hint: in U.S.A.) First person to respond correctly receives a signed copy of *Vanished*.

**All of Janet's books  
are available at:**

Amazon.com  
BarnesAndNoble.com  
BooksAMillion.com

## Killer Fiction

***Death of a Writer*** (Michael Collins, 2006). This is a literary novel masquerading as a murder mystery. In two previous issues of *Bookmark* (Jan. & Apr. 2007, which you can read on my website) I discussed literary novels and said that I don't generally read them. I chose to stick with this one because of its premise: a writer "done in" by his own work. Death of a writer? *Everyone* in this book dies, either literally or figuratively, and I was left with (as the old song goes) "a whiter shade of pale." I like plots that MOVE. A reviewer of my *Vanished* said, "She never uses a long word when a short one will do, nor a paragraph when a simple sentence is enough." The opposite can be said of Collins—never a short word when a long/weird one is available (indeterminacy, interiority), nor a simple sentence when a complicated one beckons: "It was something like an anti-Euclidean work arguing against the axiomatic notion of proofs, against the knowable." Interesting premise, fascinating wordplay, thoroughly depressing. Would I read it again? Not in this life.

***Death Dance*** (Linda Fairstein, 2006). If you're a fan of TV's *Law & Order*, as I am, you'll really enjoy Fairstein's "Alexandra Cooper" books. Fairstein headed the Manhattan District Attorney's Sex Crimes Unit for 25 years and has, without doubt, drawn Alex Cooper from her own experiences. *Death Dance* embraces the New York world of ballet, music, and theater. It is a first-rate police/legal thriller, and I recommend it.

***The Killer's Wife*** (Bill Floyd, 2008). A serial killer is in prison and his wife is in hiding. Did she know about his other life? Compelling and creepy.

## Self-Published Books

Does "self-publishing" mean that an author writes, designs, prints, and promotes his book all by himself? No, of course not. It means that the author *pays* a publisher to design and print his book. He writes it and must promote it himself, sometimes with the help of a "promotion package," which he can purchase from the publisher. Self-publishing is often, but not always, a last resort for authors who have had numerous rejections (see "Potpourri," adjacent column) from publishers who pay royalties. They believe their work is worthy. Many famous authors self-published their first books, including Tom Clancy, Zane Grey, D.H. Lawrence, Mark Twain, and Richard Nixon. Richard Nelson Bolles, author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?* was first a self-publisher. Vicki and Bruce Lansky submitted *Feed Me! I'm Yours* to 49 publishers who turned it down. So they self-published it and sold 300,000 comb-bound copies by themselves. Bantam Publishing—attracted by success—then bought the paperback rights and sold another 500,000 books! That book was worthy, and the authors knew it. I have never self-published, but I do believe it can be an effective and satisfying option. —Janet

## Memoir Reviews

FICTION AND NONFICTION NEWS FROM  
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I love to hear from my readers!

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*Crisis, Pursued by Disaster, Followed Closely by Catastrophe* (Mike O'Connor, 2007). A memoir of life on the run, written by a journalist who chronicles his bewildering childhood as he and his siblings were whisked from one place to another with no explanation other than, "It's an adventure. Won't it be fun?" For the children, it was not fun. Only after his parents were deceased did O'Connor pursue the "why" of their strange life. It's complicated.

*My Father's Secret War* (Lucinda Franks, 2007). This amazing memoir by a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist traces her father's military life through letters he had written to her mother during WWII. Franks found the letters 50 years later, as she sought to "know" the father who had distanced himself emotionally from his family during her growing-up years. Except for the distancing, this story is eerily similar to my own. I, too, found the same kind of letters 50 years after the fact and used them as the basis for my novel, *Vanished* (2007). From whispers of military intelligence to unsuccessful attempts at retrieving buried Army records, Franks and I walked the same ground. Her story, however, is all true; mine is fiction *inspired* by truth. There's a huge difference. When Franks thought she had lost her father to dementia, she says, "Now I've found him again [through his letters]: his real character, his words, his jokes, his worries ... a man brimming with feeling." I loved this book!

Have you been working on *your* memoirs? I've discussed this in previous issues of *Bookmark*. Remember, you're collecting *stories* from your life, not preparing a chronological timeline. If you're stuck, here are some more ideas to restart your thinking: Songs, recipes, aunts/uncles/cousins, automobiles, clothing, picnics, seasons, holidays, heirlooms, superstitions, scents/sights/sounds, moral and ethical values, church activities. Are you working on it? Let me hear from you!

## Words About Words ...

Several of you wrote to tell me you enjoyed/appreciated the *Bookmark* article, "About Language" (Jan. 2007), and two of you contributed your "pet peeves" regarding use of words. One was: "I'll *lay* down and rest a while." Should be *lie* down. Another was: "Her thoughts *centered around* children." Should be either *revolved* around or centered *on*. Here's one of mine: "I will *try and* make sense of it." Should be "I will try *to* make sense of it."

Sometimes we're tripped up by common word usage, such as:

**alot** — is not a word. Always write as two words: "I like you a lot."

**alright** — is not a word. Write as two words: "Everything is all right."

**already** — is a word. "The event already happened."

**cannot** — is a word. Incorrect usage would be: "I can not drive."

**awake** — means get yourself up.

**wake** — means get someone else up.

**bring and take** — "Please bring it to me, and I will take it to the party." Incorrect: "I will bring it to the party."

**Handy websites:** HyperDictionary.com (includes dream and medical dictionaries)    HowStuffWorks.com  
LibrarySpot.com    Thesaurus.com (includes translations for 10 languages)    SlangCity.com (sleazy, but thorough)



**Bookmark**  
Janet's Book News

**Janet's Ratings:** Scaled 1 - 5    ★=OK,    ★★★★★=Fantastic!

*Lean Mean Thirteen* (Janet Evanovich, 2007) ★★

*Daddy's Girl* (Lisa Scottoline, 2007) ★★★★★

*Dark of the Moon* (John Sandford, 2007) ★★    The "fine print" (not advertised) said it was "written with" someone else, which explains why it didn't read like Sandford. It *wasn't* Sandford!

**Janet Litherland**, author of 10 nonfiction books and three novels, also is editor emeritus and former owner of Write-Choice Services, Inc., a book-development company that aspiring authors can find at: [www.write-choiceservices.com](http://www.write-choiceservices.com).