

In this Issue

- Writing: Ten Things I Learned at the Greenbrier
- Upcoming Classes: Online Proposal Writing with Leite's Culineria and more
- News from Clients and Alumni
- What's New in the Food Writing World
- Resources
- Just for Fun
- Events You Might Enjoy

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Ten Things I Learned at the Greenbrier

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It's been 10 years since I last attended [The Symposium for Professional Food Writers at the Greenbrier](#) in West Virginia. Back then I wanted to know if anyone was interested in a memoir of my family story and their foods. Attendees said yes, but my agent said no.

Meanwhile, I had forgotten how much fun it was to be in a room with so many smart, successful food writers, editors, and agents, many at the top of their game. The energy and enthusiasm was infectious, and stayed with me for a few weeks. Here's some of what I learned from panels and conversations:

1. **We all need blogs and Facebook and Twitter accounts to connect with readers.** I hear your groans. I groaned too. With so many writers trying to cut through the noise by making even more noise, isn't this counterproductive? No. We have to belly up to social networking and embrace it. That might also mean videos and podcasting.
2. **Cookbooks can no longer be just recipes that anyone can find online for nothing.** Buyers want more, and they want a voice they trust and enjoy, says Sydney Minor, vice president of Simon & Schuster. They want stories and lots of content, not just recipes.
3. **Despite the hand wringing about too many food memoirs, publishers are still cranking them out.** Granted, three of the most recent ones ([A Homemade Life](#), [The Sweet Life in Paris](#), and [Hungry Monkey](#)) emerged from blogs. Reread point No. 1.
4. **Magazine stories are becoming less linear.** Ann Taylor Pittman, senior food editor of *Cooking Light*, wants visually driven stories readers can "inhale." That means short attention span, little bits. When writing a pitch, describe how you would package the story in pieces that include lists, quizzes, and boxes. *Portland Oregonian's* Martha Holmberg has mastered this art of little bits with her exciting new city magazine, [Mix](#).
5. **Food network stars continue to dominate cookbook sales.** Sydney Minor said

the first printing of Paula Deen's new book was 425,000 copies.

6. **Big stores control book sales.** Borders and Barnes & Noble put 70 percent of US bookstores out of business, said Bill LeBlond, editorial director of food and drink for Chronicle Books. Barnes & Noble has one buyer for its entire chain. If the book doesn't sell in the first three months, B&N returns every copy. There's barely any time to build word-of-mouth sales.
7. **If you wonder how some writers produce so many books, it's because they have discipline.** Author Michael Rhulman aims for 1400 words per day, every day. He limits his time on social networking, including email. "Be deliberate about how you go about your day," he advised. It's good to know what you do well or what comes easily, he added, because in hard times, you can still work. He likes to write about people's oddities and traits, for example.
8. **Organizations are good sources of work.** Author David Joachim says most of his business has come through the International Association of Culinary Professionals, the Symposium, The Editorial Freelancers Association, and other groups.
9. **Having a distinctive voice is as critical as ever, says writing coach Don Fry.** He defined voice as "the author speaks through the page to me." To figure out how yours sounds, read your work aloud to someone and ask him or her to describe the person who wrote it.
10. **Writing a bigger cookbook doesn't necessarily mean a bigger advance.** Bill LeBlond said he pays the same advance of about \$20,000 for 450 recipes as he would for 60.

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Upcoming Classes

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Usually I leave these to the end but I'm so excited about teaching for David Leite at Leite's Culinaria that I had to tell you about it. We started talking about an online school two years ago at his house in Connecticut. This is my first class, on writing killer cookbook proposals, and it's coming up quickly.

The format is very accessible. On Wednesday nights, you'll call in on a conference line and listen to a lecture, then ask questions and we'll have a discussion. You'll post your homework in a discussion group and we'll have more comments there.

Best of all, if you've been procrastinating about getting your cookbook idea down on paper, at the end of class you'll have a decent draft.

July 8 - August 26, 2009

[Write a Killer Cookbook Proposal](#)

8-week online class, Wednesday night live conference call, 9 - 10:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time

Leite's Culinaria

\$425

Join this new online class and turn your book idea into a book proposal that attracts

agents and editors. I'll present the class during a weekly conference call, followed by a discussion. Upload your work and I'll give you meaningful feedback. On a private writing group, you'll gain insights and build relationships. Read the [full class description](#).

July 11, 2009

[Get Your Book Published: The Ins, Outs, Ups and Downs](#)

The Writing Salon

Berkeley, CA

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

\$55 members/ \$65 non-members

Wondering what would happen if you decided to write a book? Find out how the book industry works, including book production and marketing, and what you need to move forward on any kind of book, including cookbooks, memoirs, food history, and guidebooks.

September 22 - October 13, 2009

The Art of Cookbook Writing

Book Passage (no link yet)

Corte Madera, CA

Four Tuesday nights, 7 - 9 p.m.

Have you always wanted to write a cookbook? Here's a chance to expand, shape and structure your idea and give it your own personality. You'll learn to write mouth-watering recipes that make readers want to rush into the kitchen. In-class exercises, real-life examples and lots of support will move you a step closer to getting your cookbook published. We'll also cover how to market it.

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News from Clients and Students
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- *Saveur* magazine's July issue on Texas featured Melissa Guerra's cookbook, [Dishes from the Wild Horse Desert](#), under the heading "Food Writing with Soul," and featured a recipe from it
- Camilla Saulsbury's [Shortcut Cookie Book](#) comes out in September
- The *Berkeley Monthly* published [a feature](#) by Anna Mindess on Masse's Pastries
- *Edible East Bay* published Simona Carini's piece, "Making Cheese with Lao Tzu;" and Kristin Jackson-Ellis' "Tasting the Seasons in Cheese"
- Katie Morford launched a [blog](#) on Afghan cooking as a way of building interest in a cookbook she'd like to publish
- Kathy Ayer writes a blog about culinary travels in France and Italy, called a [Food Lover's Odyssey](#). The photos are gorgeous

- Cooking class teacher Rosetta Costantino's new [blog](#) covers her Italian kitchen garden, Calabrian recipes, and a recent tour of her native Calabria
- Cooking Teacher Judy Witts Francini self-published her cookbook, [Secrets from a Tuscan Garden](#)
- California Culinary Academy awarded **Pailin Chongchitnant** \$3000 for an essay she wrote about honey
- Craig Priebe, co-author of my book, [Grilled Pizzas & Piadinas](#), got the June [cover story](#) in *Pizza*, an online magazine. Page through on the top left arrows to get to the story.
- And as for me, I'm all over new media. I finally started a blog, [Will Write for Food](#), about food writing. I'm hoping you'll ask a question to get me started. If you're on Facebook, please "friend" me, and follow me on Twitter, as diannej.

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What's New in Food Writing

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- Frank Bruni has left *The New York Times*, and the search for a lead restaurant reviewer is on. The *New York Post* [comments](#) on the dwindling power of a star reviewer
- Congratulations to food bloggers Brooke Burton and Leah Feldstein for creating a [Food Blog Code of Ethics](#) for others to follow. Journalists have hewed to guidelines like these for decades. In fact, there's a [brouhaha](#) about wine critics paying their own way.
- Culinary travel is the fastest growing segment of the tourist industry, says [a story](#) in the *Chicago Sun Times*.
- A new website, [Foodbuzz](#), aggregates food blogs, creating a social network with possibilities for advertising.

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Resources

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Enjoy exploring new food-based websites and blogs? Sign up for a free monthly list from Gary Allen, author of *The Food Writer's Guide to Resources*. Send him an e-mail at gallen@hvi.net.

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Just for Fun

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I never thought it was possible, but Meryl Streep channels Julia Child perfectly. See the [trailer](#) for Julie & Julia, coming out in August. Nora Ephron wrote the screenplay by adapting two bestselling memoirs: Julie Powell's *The Julie/Julia Project*, and *My Life in France*, by Julia Child and Alex Prud'Homme.

Here's a [video](#) from Gourmet about how Ruth Reichl would disguise herself if she started reviewing restaurants again. Her acting is not quite as good as her writing, but it's fun.

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Events You Might Enjoy

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September 11-13

[The Oxford Food Symposium](#)

Oxford, England

October 8-10, 2009

[IACP Food History Symposium](#)

All Things Culinary Around the World in 1849

And Their Convergence Upon California

Lodi, CA

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Please forward this email to anyone you think might be interested. All previous issues are now archived on [my website](#). There's a place to sign up for this newsletter as well.

To change your email address or unsubscribe, please email me: dj@diannej.com

I will not rent, trade or sell your email address to anyone for any reason.

Happy summer,

Dianne

