IWOSC OC Satellite Meeting Notes February 3, 2016

Independent Writers of Southern California (IWOSC) [www.iwosc.org](http://www.iwosc.org)

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EVENTS/NEWS

1. IWOSC Saturday Seminar: Word Processing Prowess; February 20, 10:30-1 PM
2. IWOSC Monthly Meeting: Tricks of the Trade – Writing Prompts from the Experts, Monday Feb 29, 7:30 – 9:15 PM
3. WriteGirl is seeking mentors and volunteers: http://www.writegirl.org/.
4. 2016 AWP Conference and Book Fair March 30-April 2; <https://www.awpwriter.org/awp_conference/overview/#LARB>
5. The Digital Author and Indie Publishing Conference, Feb 26-28, <http://www.wcwriters.com/special/index.html>
6. Amazon changes KENPC to better normalize them and caps payouts at 3,000 pages per title per reader.
7. Amazon to open 300-400 B&M stores.

ACCOUNTABILITY

1. William H. Murray: “Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.”
2. What is personal accountability?
	1. A habitual commitment to yourself and what is important to you by
		1. Continually choosing consciously to take ownership and responsibility for your life (BEFORE);
		2. Taking action and removing obstacles (including delusional thinking and excuses) (DURING); and
		3. Holding yourself accountable (AFTER).
	2. Are you indispensible? Keeping some commitments can actually undermine your accountability.
	3. The CPA Approach
		1. Create: something you overtly did to cause the event
		2. Promote: something you did to provoke the event
		3. Allow: something you saw coming and simply did nothing to get out of the way

CRAFT

1. Character Development: The Tiny Details
	1. The goal is to create memorable, relatable, consistent characters.
	2. Real people have flaws.
	3. Real people have quirks.
		1. Phobias
		2. Addictions
		3. Allergies/health issues
		4. Spiritual beliefs, superstitions
		5. Trust issues
		6. Pet peeves
		7. Food/music/entertainment preferences
		8. Sleep schedule/routine habits
		9. Habits for idle hands
		10. Hang-ups
2. Filter Words
	1. From <http://thewritepractice.com>
	2. Filter words put distance between the reader and the characters.
	3. I/He saw, I/He heard, I/He watched
	4. Examples
		1. He watched the gray cat leap. The gray cat leapt.
		2. I heard the microphone whine feedback, and I saw everyone cringe. The microphone whined feedback, and everyone cringed.
		3. He saw the snow-capped mountains rising above the valley. The snow-capped mountains rose above the valley.

EBOOK PROMOTION

1. Determine promotion goals (reviews, sales, mailing list sign-ups, hit a list).
2. Budget and ROI.
	1. Free books: 100 downloads per $10 spent; Paid books: 1 sale per $10 spent
	2. Reviews: 1 per 1000 free books; 1 per 100 paid books
	3. Mailing list sign-ups “stick” better from paid sales than giveaways.
3. Prepare!
	1. To Do list in spreadsheet.
	2. Update back matter and files.
4. VENUES
	1. Stacking vs. Individual
	2. BOOKBUB <https://www.bookbub.com/partners/>
		1. Author Profiles
			1. Set up a profile for free. Readers can follow you.
		2. New Release Feature
			1. BookBub will automatically send out a new release email to your followers for free.
		3. Put sub dates on your calendar. Apply every 30 days.
	3. ENT, Robin Reads, OHFB, Book Barbarian (SFF), BKnights on Fiverr
	4. Facebook Ads (Mark Dawson’s free videos & paid course)

OTHER

1. Meredith Wild article in NYT
	1. Borrowed $70K and used movie ads at 50SofG showings. Made $500K/month.
	2. Recently acquired Carlan’s Calendar girl series (all are on the USA Today Bestseller’s list). Paid a few thousand per book in a 27-book deal. Contract calls for a book every 2 months. Carlan recently made $20K/month in royalties.

*Meredith Wild, a Self-Publisher Making an Imprint*

By ALEXANDRA ALTERJAN. 30, 2016

One chilly morning this month, Meredith Wild, the best-selling romance novelist, was sitting in her library in Destin, Fla., wrapped in a loose black sweater in front of a crackling fire. Most mornings, Ms. Wild writes her novels in this spot after her children leave for school, but that day she had other business to attend to. She had a call with a reality TV production company that is developing a show about her, and later, a conference call with a team at Waterhouse Press, the small imprint that is publishing her new novel in June.

Ms. Wild has an unusual amount of sway for an author, owing to her high-profile position at Waterhouse: She founded the company. After sales of her self-published erotic novels took off on Amazon and other sites, Ms. Wild created the press partly as a way to get print versions into bookstore chains and big-box stores.

“I wanted something that sounded like it was a real imprint, because nobody takes you seriously as an independent author,” she said. “I felt I was being discriminated against as an indie.”

Her marketing abilities proved so effective — she sold 1.4 million print and digital copies — that she decided to expand her business by taking on other authors, in essence becoming a publisher herself.

Last year, Ms. Wild began quietly acquiring works by other self-published romance writers, including Helen Hardt and Audrey Carlan, and publishing their books under her Waterhouse imprint. The press will release at least nine novels this year, including two in Ms. Wild’s current series. She’s become a kind of value investor in erotic prose, pinpointing undervalued writers and backing their brands.

“We’re hoping to discover the next big person and replicate some of the success we had building the visibility of my books,” Ms. Wild said. “We’re interested in taking these diamond-in-the-rough type people and building their brands.”

The fledgling imprint is already off to a promising start. One of the series it acquired, Ms. Carlan’s “Calendar Girl,” has sold more than a million copies since Waterhouse rereleased it last summer, and it recently appeared on the USA Today and New York Times best-seller lists.

Ms. Wild’s path from becoming a self-publishing star to operating her own small imprint is the latest sign that independent authors are catching up to publishers in the sophistication of their marketing and the scope of their ambitions. Self-published authors can negotiate foreign-rights deals and produce audiobooks. A handful of the most successful independent writers sell print copies of their books in physical retail stores like Barnes & Noble, Walmart and Target, giving them access to a market that traditional publishers have long dominated.

Now enterprising authors like Ms. Wild are forming their own small publishing houses. Just like the old-guard editors and publishing companies that they once defined themselves against, these new imprints promise to anoint fledgling authors with legitimacy and give them an edge in a flooded and cutthroat marketplace.

In a sense, these authors-turned-publishers are thriving because the self-publishing ecosystem has become oversaturated. Amazon has more than four million e-books in its Kindle store, up from 600,000 six years ago, making it harder for new authors to find an audience. Building your own brand may sound appealing and empowering, but only a small fraction of self-published authors sell enough books to make a living, and many are put off by the drudge work and endless self-promotion involved.

“Authors are hungry to try to find new methods to crack the market, and if someone is saying, ‘I did it, come work with me, and I’ll teach you the secret sauce,’ that sounds like an interesting proposition,” said Peter Hildick-Smith, founder of the Codex Group, which analyzes the book industry.

Standing in front of a bookcase in her library, where she has prominently displayed books by Ms. Hardt and Ms. Carlan, Ms. Wild seemed to derive equal satisfaction from the books of others she has published as from those she has written herself. The bottom shelves remained empty, reserved for future acquisitions.

“I’m looking forward to filling them up,” she said.

Once Disdained, Now Courted

Later that morning, Ms. Wild and her husband, Jonathan, sat on the couch in front of the fireplace, each holding a printed agenda. It was time for the conference call with David Grishman, Waterhouse’s chief executive, and three other Waterhouse employees. A former firefighter, her husband now works at Waterhouse on the marketing team. Floor-to-ceiling windows looked out onto a swimming pool and beyond it, the choppy, blue-gray water of Choctawhatchee Bay.

They discussed Ms. Wild’s writing schedule and the marketing strategy for Ms. Hardt’s next novel, an erotic romance set in the Victorian era. Then the conversation shifted to Ms. Carlan. Barnes & Noble had just placed a paperback order for her “Calendar Girl’’ series, about a young woman who becomes a high-priced escort to settle her father’s gambling debts.

“We’re at the top of Nook, iBooks and Kindle,” Mr. Grishman said. “We’re selling a lot. We should look at another print run.” He suggested printing an additional 30,000 books of the first two volumes.

When the call ended, the mood was giddy.

For decades, the literary world dismissed self-published authors as amateurs and hacks who lacked the talent to land a book deal. But that attitude gradually began to change with the rise of e-books and the arrival of Kindle from Amazon, which gave authors direct access to millions of readers. Over the last five years, close to 40 independent authors have sold more than a million copies of their e-books on Amazon, the company said.

Publishers and literary agents who once overlooked self-published authors began courting them with staggering book advances. The self-published fantasy writer Amanda Hocking [sold a four-book series to St. Martin’s Press for $2 million](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/books/amanda-hocking-sells-book-series-to-st-martins-press.html) in 2011. Last year the independent romance novelist Jasinda Wilder sold a trilogy to Berkley Books for seven figures.

After Ms. Wild’s self-published “Hacker” series took off in 2014, she was bombarded with offers from publishers, agents and film producers. She was earning so much by then that she told her agent she would entertain only eight-figure offers. She eventually settled for a bit less, agreeing to a $6.25 million advance from Forever, a Grand Central Publishing imprint, for five books.

Forever has sold nearly 500,000 digital and print copies of the “Hacker” series — a healthy sum, but far less than the 1.4 million digital and print books Ms. Wild had sold on her own, without any of the editorial guidance, marketing muscle or sales and distribution channels of an established publisher.

Perhaps that’s why Ms. Wild opted not to sell the rights to her other books. Instead, she’s publishing her current series through her own imprint.

“I’m more comfortable being in control of my successes and failures,” she said. “It’s kind of hard to be on the sidelines.”

Editors and publishers are adjusting to a new power dynamic, one in which even multimillion-dollar advances aren’t enough to ensure an author’s loyalty.

“It’s a challenge, because a lot of the ones who are very successful at it are making a lot of money, which in all honesty can be hard to match with the traditional publishing royalty structure,” said Leah Hultenschmidt, the Forever editor who acquired the Hacker series from Ms. Wild.

Publishers fighting to recruit top-selling authors have other reasons to be alarmed by the growth of self-publishing. As independent authors grab a bigger slice of the e-book market, digital sales by traditional publishers fell by 11 percent in the first nine months of 2015, according to data gathered from more than 1,200 publishers by the Association of American Publishers.

Last year, a third of the 100 best-selling Kindle books were self-published titles on average each week, an Amazon representative said. Some analysts attribute the dip in publishers’ e-book revenue in part to the glut of cheap self-published books, which often sell for as little as $1.

Independent authors are now moving beyond e-books and making inroads into the physical retail market. A handful of the top-selling self-published authors, among them Ms. Wild, Barbara Freethy, H.M. Ward, C J Lyons and Bella Andre, have struck distribution deals with Ingram Content Group, a major book printer and distributor, allowing them to sell their novels in bookstore chains, big-box stores and airports. Thirty-six percent of book buyers read only print books, according to a 2015 survey conducted by the Codex Group.

“I can sell my books exactly as if I was Random House or Simon & Schuster,” said Ms. Freethy, who started self-publishing romance novels in 2011 and said she had sold more than five million copies. “There’s been no pushback from booksellers.”

With all the tools of a publisher at their disposal, it’s no surprise that a few of the most ambitious authors — among them the paranormal suspense writer J.R. Rain and the mystery writer Gemma Halliday — are forming their own imprints and recruiting other writers. The business models for author-led imprints vary, but most of them buy publication rights to the books and take a cut of royalties in exchange for editing, formatting, packaging and marketing the books, much like a traditional publisher. Some offer a modest advance. The biggest draw for struggling authors, though, is the chance to be associated with a more successful author’s brand.

After selling three million copies of her own books, Liliana Hart, a high school band teacher turned mystery writer, started her own imprint, SilverHart last year and acquired works by four other authors.

“They don’t want the headache of being their own publisher,” Ms. Hart said.

The Entrepreneurial Urge

When Ms. Wild started writing several years ago, it was mainly to escape the pressures of a day job running her own web design and software development company. She never intended to become a publisher, but seemed unable to resist the entrepreneurial urge. “I can’t do anything without turning it into a business,” said Ms. Wild, 33, who is blond with icy blue eyes and sharp, pixielike features.

As a girl growing up in Fulton, Ill., a small town of about 3,500 people, Ms. Wild was a voracious reader. She was the only child of free-spirited, hippie parents — her mother and stepfather ran an auction company — and entertained herself with paperback bodice-rippers she bought at the grocery store. She started writing her own elaborate stories on her mother’s computer.

She moved east to attend Smith College, where she majored in English and met her husband at a fraternity party at a nearby university. They married when she was 20 and moved to Destin, where he was stationed in the Air Force. Ms. Wild had studied graphic design, so she decided to start her own company. Within a few years, it had 10 employees.

The experience of starting and running a business gave Ms. Wild the idea for her first novel in the “Hacker” series, “Hardwired,” which is about a young Harvard graduate, Erica Hathaway, who is raising money from investors for her start-up. During a pitch meeting to a group of angel investors, she meets Blake Landon, a handsome billionaire, who later seduces her at a tech conference. Erica’s focus on building her company, a fashion-themed social networking site, is occasionally derailed by her torrid relationship with Blake, who introduces her to an array of sexual kinks.

Ms. Wild never bothered trying to find a traditional publisher.

“I came from such an entrepreneurial background,” Ms. Wild said. “I knew I could market them myself.”

She chose Meredith Wild as a pen name. (She asked that her real name and her husband’s last name not be used to protect their children’s privacy, citing the news coverage of her multimillion-dollar book deal.) She hired an editor to help shape the story and clean up the prose, and published the first novel in September 2013.

Ms. Wild’s success wasn’t accidental, but grew out of a meticulously planned marketing campaign. Before the book was even released, she began buying online ads targeting erotic romance readers. Her husband took out 10 credit cards and a personal loan to pay for advertising. They borrowed $70,000 from Mr. Grishman, a former banker who is Ms. Wild’s brother-in-law. They eventually raised enough to fund a six-figure national marketing campaign, which included paid posts on social media and movie theater ads promoting “Hardwired” that played before the “Fifty Shades of Grey” movie.

 “Hardwired” took off instantly, and sales snowballed when the second and third novels were released.

By that summer, Ms. Wild was making $500,000 a month in royalties. Her books were selling briskly through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. She arranged her own audiobook deal with Audible, forgoing an advance in exchange for higher royalties. She sold translation rights to publishers in several countries.

Ms. Wild sold her web design company. She hired Mr. Grishman to run Waterhouse, so that she could focus on writing. As the company grew and her sales surged, she realized she already had the infrastructure for a publishing house of her own. She just needed more authors.

The first author she signed was Ms. Hardt, who had been writing romance novels for a decade but never did much to market them. Waterhouse is acquiring all her books — more than 30 titles. “I thought it could get my name out there better than I had been able to do for myself,” she said, “and it certainly has.”

A few months later, Waterhouse discovered Ms. Carlan. “We found her through her Amazon ranking, not because she was doing well but because she wasn’t doing very well,” Ms. Wild said. Ms. Carlan had great reviews but low Amazon sales rankings, suggesting that she was talented but lacked marketing skills.

Ms. Carlan, a mother of two who lives in Northern California, had been self-publishing romance novels for about a year, charging 99 cents and selling about 1,000 copies a month. She was dubious at first when she got an email from a marketing manager, who asked her if she wanted to publish her books with Meredith Wild’s imprint.

“When she said ‘Meredith Wild’ I thought, ‘You’re full of it,’” Ms. Carlan said. “I’d read all her books.”

Waterhouse bought all of Ms. Carlan’s existing books and signed her to a 27-book deal. Ms. Carlan said she was paid a few thousand dollars per book, plus a percentage of royalties. Waterhouse raised the price of her novellas to $2.99 and toned down the sexy covers on her “Calendar Girl” series so that it could be marketed to mainstream retailers. It promoted the books through paid web advertising, and Ms. Wild endorsed them on her Facebook and Twitter feeds.

In December and January, the first book in the series shot up the USA Today and New York Times best-seller lists. The novellas have sold more than 800,000 copies in January. In December, Ms. Carlan says, she made about $20,000 in royalties.

Ms. Carlan, whose contract calls for a book every two months, said it was a relief to be able to focus on writing sex scenes.

“I’m not interested in designing websites and formatting my books,” she said. “I just want to write wicked hot books.”