

September 12, 2004

OUR TOWNS

Everybody's a Writer, It Seems, and Now Everybody Can Be Their Own Publisher

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WE will probably never see "Bandit's Story ... My Life as a Police Dog" on a best-seller list.

There would seem to be a limited audience for "Szilankok," written in Hungarian by Kanocz Laszlo Terezia, the many heartwarming family histories and reminiscences like "Uncle Raymond's Garden" by Rosaleen Rooney Myers or inspirational works like "A Mere Bagatelle," ruminations and essays by Frank French, a 75-year-old triathlete from Bridgman, Mich.

Still, four months and 1,500 books after a local bookstore, Bookends, became the first in the country to install a desk-size contraption that allows customers to publish their own books for as little as \$150 for the first 10, with prices dropping for reorders, a few things are clear.

First, few people may read these days, but everyone, it seems, wants to write. So just as Bill and Hillary and Paris and Katie and every politician and celebrity in America have written books by now, so have Kevin Sarnoski (scholarly musings), Robert Crooke (a novel of the McCarthy years), Nimah Ismail Nawwab (Saudi poetry) and Barbara C. Hickey (a World War II girlhood).

Second, just as the Bizarro world of Superman comics was just like the real one, only completely different, the self-publishing universe as reflected here is remarkably similar to the brand-name one, only with a completely different set of authors.

So, just as on the main floor, the self-publishing operation downstairs, BooksbyBookends, has sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll ("How Not to Make it in the Music Business" by a New Jersey big-hair rock band veteran, Nicholas Clemente); political polemics ("One Thousand Reasons: The Appalling Record of the Bush Administration" by P. M. Tate); tales of inspiration (Claude Diamond's "The Mentor: A Story of Success"); and get-rich-quick schemes ("It's a Wonderful Life: Malcolm Glazer Reveals His Secrets for Creating Wealth" by the owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers).

And third, despite their differences, the no-names and the big names probably have at least one thing in common.

"For me, I think it's all about ego," said Bonnie Bresalier, a Long Island mother married to a Nassau County police

sergeant, who channeled her retired police dog, Bandit, to write his memoir. "I don't plan to write the great American novel. I'd rather read it."

The publishing operation got its start when Timothy Harper, a local author, teacher and publishing consultant, became interested in the patented print-on-demand technology developed by a Florida inventor, Victor Celorio. Mr. Celorio had already sold his printer to a few customers in Canada. Mr. Harper persuaded Walter Boyer, co-owner of Bookends, a longtime Ridgewood institution, to add it to the store. Now their associate, Dave Logan, churns out paperbacks, usually 5½ by 8½ inches, many with sophisticated cover art not much different than what is produced by major publishers.

There was a party to unveil it in May, and the first customer was Mr. Hickey, who finally got to publish 10 copies of the memoir his wife had written about 20 years earlier but had never managed to get into print.

There are plenty of options for self-publishing, but most require a bigger print order, (BooksbyBookends does as few as 10), cost more or take longer to produce books. (Some also provide more services for the money.) So with the promise of instant gratification at a cheap price, the store's self-publishing unit has seen its business grow exponentially in its four months.

So far it has turned down only one book (with an unfortunate title and cover art of the male genitalia).

In general, its authors have one of four agendas. Some, like Mr. Crooke, are seeking a much larger audience for their books, and hope to use one that looks professionally published as an effective calling card for publishers and agents. Others are creating books for family gatherings or as business gifts. Some sell the books themselves. Some are just thrilled to see their names in print.

For most, expectations are modest. "It's not 'The Da Vinci Code,' " said Mr. Sarnoski, a 32-year-old middle school history teacher and author of "Scholarly Musings: Stories and Ruminations on History." "I printed 10 copies and gave most of them to friends and begged them to respond to it. It's not something I want reviewed or anything. I'm trying to get my training wheels on."

You usually don't get a book party for a 10-book printing, but the bookstore is considering throwing them.

"It would be like the Star Wars Cafe - serious professors next to 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show,' " Mr. Harper said.

Along with aspiring authors, the technology allows for printing on demand of classics in the public domain. The store can churn out Balzac, Dickens and Twain, along with Bresalier, Hickey and Sarnoski.

"Think of it as short-order publishing," Mr. Harper said. "You want 'Ivanhoe' over easy with ketchup, we can do that."

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