

Notes from BWA Meeting, July 25, 2006

Speaker: *Bob Castellino, photographer, writer, and president of Whispering River, talked about many challenges encountered during the self-publishing process in the digital age: developing and authoring your body of work and getting it into its final form to sell, as well as producing, promoting, selling, and distributing it. For more information, see www.whisperingriver.com.*

Bob presented a wonderful talk, both motivational and practical at the same time.

Bob said he was first a photographer, but truly wanted to find happiness and decided he didn't want to fit into the corporate world. He was most interested in collaboration and cooperation, which he thinks is hard for artists. He found *The Artist's Way* helpful and was fascinated with the idea of creating your own pod—three to five professional people and friends you can share with and get unconditional support. This is where artists develop collaboration and cooperation to help each other with the challenges of the creative life.

Self-publishing is different than getting published by a publishing house, which requires delivering a prospectus to publishers. Before Bob sold his first self-published product, he was rejected over 100 times, a very painful experience. He said he was at first too afraid to ask who the buyer of a bookstore was. He was certain he didn't have the skills he needed and was insecure. Slowly, it got better and he found a hole he could fit. He found that listening to the audience is a big part of being an artist—we need feedback or we are stuck (just like relationships!)

He developed an interest in business and entrepreneurial activities, especially if it could make a positive change. He went to the Sante Fe workshops and was encouraged to develop extraordinary photographs. A great influence on him was Wallace Stegner, partly because they were both not native to America.

He showed us a beautiful slide show of his nature photography and then talked about his right-brain, creative technology (Mac) and left-brain, operations technology (PCs). He shared that clutter takes up our creative energy, creating a block. He had to find how to get beyond the blocks that kept him from doing what he wanted. He showed us his mission statement for his business (without his business, he cannot do his creative work). Between 10 and 15% of his time is spent on his art; the rest is spent on doing his business delivering, which is to deliver his art to the world.

When working on a project, he said he becomes detached from the world around him, but he has to come back to business eventually. He shared a step-by-step process for self-publishing. One advantage of self-publishing is editorial control.

1. Write a prospectus (what the project is, who the audience is, what is the potential for profit, financing, production schedule) all on one page. He showed us a prospectus for one of his books (description, design and treatment, production schedule, financing).
2. Develop a project timeline and a team to help you with the project.
3. Develop a chapter outline.
4. Develop treatment: how will you treat your topic; number of pages; a vision of the cover; where is it going to fit on the bookshelf.
5. Write the foreword. Just get going.
6. Figure out how to print this thing.
7. Take idea to buyers at bookstores and ask for a meeting (15 minutes). Don't be afraid; ask for

- help. You'll have some fans to help you. Find out what book clubs the bookstores know about. There are talented Community Relationship Managers at Barnes and Noble. They can help.
8. Finish your manuscript. Find an editor, maybe one in your pod or one of your friends.
 9. Get an ISBN (10 for \$500) and learn about UPC codes and barcode software. Everything you need to know is online. If you don't understand something, ask someone.
 10. Print it.
 11. Promote and publicize it. You might find how strong your voice is after you've had to promote your own work. Write a media and press release. Make phone calls. Get a signing schedule. Book publicity and promotion are vital to your success. The average book in America sells less than 3000 books.

He asked the buyer of the Tattered Cover, "Where is there a hole in your shelves?" They said, "A book about Denver." So he did a book on Denver, which was to be released on September 11, 2001. This became a crisis, financially, which he shared with us. He relied on his mission statement and his core of support. He had learned to ask the question: "How can I see this differently?" His advice is that when you face a crisis, go for a long walk in nature, with yourself, and feel yourself in reference to the Universe and nature. Then bare your soul to your friends.

He shared about his book, *Boulder Yesterday and Today* and told us a lot of fascinating history of Boulder (fires and floods). To get immersed in a project and lose yourself is the best thing on earth, but then there is always the challenge of the business side. He pointed out that in order to survive, he had to do things beyond what he thought he could do. His only other option was to go get a job, so he hung on to self-publishing, even though he failed three times. He suggested that we don't know the depths of our skills until we test them (we use only 3% of our brain, he said).

He doesn't think his accomplishments or skills are abnormal or extraordinary—he implied that we all could do this. When you are facing a crisis, stop what you are doing and go help someone else. Then you come back to your project and you will realize you have no problems!

To create positive change in five spheres, start at the personal level (choose to make the change in yourself); change our homes; change relationship to neighborhood, community, and region. Try to make three of these changes in 90 days. Then say, I'm going to be an artist two hours a day, 730 hours a year! This is simple practical stuff, to find the sustenance to give you two hours a day. He said he'd do anything to keep this 730 hours a year.

It's totally imperfect but it's absolutely wonderful, he said. Apply yourself and amazing things begin to happen. You'll get connected with the mystery of creation. Give into this, and we might find out how much we can achieve. It's the fear that we live in that keeps us from doing what we want. There's a lot of art in each of us, if we only will let ourselves go. He reminded us of the great Helen Keller quote: "Life is either a great adventure, or it is nothing."

He recommended *Book Publicity* by Jodee Blanco. This contains all the secrets on delivering your product so it succeeds. It's really good, vital information.

Booksense.com is the independent booksellers' Bible for launching your book. Amazon is an option, of course, but it took him until last year to understand how to sell through Amazon. It seems cumbersome when you get started, but it will pay off. You also have to have your own website, but keep it simple.

He recommended Book Publisher's Association of the West, which will be in Denver in November.

It does seem to get easier, he said. The further you get down the road, the less effort it seems to take.