

Out in Bookstores

Unprecedented Contest Sponsored by Four Authors Offers Big Break Opportunities

by Pat Patrick

When asked why sponsor a contest of this scope, Josh Kilmer-Purcell (author of *I Am Not Myself These Days*) quipped: "Why not? As with any collective, our strength is in our numbers. We have three different publishing houses behind us hoping our books do well, and they are willing to help us in any way they can. They read thousands of manuscripts a year, so if we're willing to put in the work of being first screeners, they're most than happy to abuse our labor. Wait. This doesn't sound fair at all...."

The "collective" mentioned is the Memoirist Collective, a group of four first-time memoir authors joining together to fight the forces of evil. Hhhhhmmmm. No, that's the Super Friends.

While there are no Lex Luthors or Bizarros to conquer, the collective is taking the publishing world by storm with four recently-published, larger-than-life memoirs.

In many ways, a writer's path to publication not only involves skill but also luck and connections.

Says Danielle Trussoni (author of *Falling Through the Earth*), "I went to the Iowa Writers Workshop. I met a number of agents there, and kept in contact with them. In my last year at Iowa, I won the Dana Award in the novel, and this got the attention of other agents. When I decided to write *Falling Through the Earth*, I contacted Amy Williams and she helped me turn the beginning of my book into a proposal."

Kilmer-Purcell pipes in, "I had finished the manuscript and given myself a little vacation in Southern France. On the flight home, I sat next to a man who turned out to be the executive producer for Cliver Barker's film company. Poor guy was stuck on a flight next to a first-time writer pitching a project. He agreed to read the manuscript, passed it on to Clive, and Clive called his editor at HarperCollins and told her that "she had to publish this so he could turn it into a movie."

Since their publications, the four "super friends" have offered up through their website (www.myspace.com/memoiristcollective) various blogs, tales of writing and publication, and contests. The latest contest is a doozy, unheard of in the big-time publishing world with the chance to have a manuscript read by editors from three giants in the publishing world.

And the publishing houses? HarperCollins, Henry Holt, and Hyperion. No fly-by-night, schlocky houses here. These are three of the most respected houses on the planet. The presence of three major publishers makes this contest truly unprecedented and an enormous opportunity for anyone out there who has struggled to get his or her manuscript into the right hands.

HOW TO ENTER:

1.) If you haven't linked to all four members personal myspace pages, do that first. Winners will have to be best friends of all of ours. (We're a collective, and we like to foster "collectivity".)

2.) Write about 800 words as a writing sample of a section of your memoir-to-be.

3.) Divvy those 800 words into three equal parts, and post them into the comments section of the collective's myspace page. * Remember to post them in reverse order - the last section first- so that they appear in a linear narrative form once posted in the comments section. Your sampling doesn't have to be from the opening of your memoir. It doesn't have to be the ending. It should simply be the best representation of your voice that you have.

4.) Post a three sentence SYNOPSIS of your memoir-to-be with the sample. (Read the blog entry from our first contest to learn more about what a great synopsis should be.)

"But that's not long enough to show my true genius!!!" you say. No problem. We've thought of that. After all entries have been posted by July 19th, there will be a winnowing. A culling. A brutal, weeding out until we announce our five finalists on July 20th. Four of the finalists will be chosen by us, and one will be reader's choice.

5.) Those five finalists will have a chance to add another 2000 words to their sample (by August 3rd), which will all be reposted by us in separate blog entries.

Then the four of us will go into seclusion in our secret Collective Lair for an announcement of winners on August 7th.

The collective is even willing to forgo an agent's percentage to assist writers out there (though they all will gladly accept a drink, if offered).

"We're each grateful for the opportunities we've had as authors, and since we're in a position to help others, how can we not?" says Hillary Carlip (author of *Queen of the Oddballs*). "We hope the Memoirists Collective will set an example, show that writers can work together, and support each other - well, just as long as we're all on the bestseller list at the same time!"

Now, there's no guarantee of publication or a bidding war, but writers who have been toiling in words for any length of time know just how incredible this opportunity is: three top editors, from three top houses all reading your work without any pleading on your behalf.

It's downright super. So what are you waiting for?!?

ABOUT THEIR BOOKS:

Queen of the Oddballs by Hillary Carlip (from book jacket) Forms a chronology of Hillary Carlip's habitual straying from the roads more traveled—from a wisecracking third-grader suspended from school for smoking (while imitating Holly Golightly) to headline-making teen activist, juggler, and fire eater, friend (NOT "fan") of Carly Simon and Carole King, grand-prize-winning Gong Show contestant, cult rock start, and seeker of romantic truths that definitely defy explanation.

The Year of Yes by Maria Dahvana Headley (from book jacket) The Year of Yes is the hilarious and hopeful account of one woman's quest to find a man she can stand (for longer than a couple of hours). Frustrated by her own pitiful taste, writer Maria Headley decided to leave her love life up to fate, going out with everyone who asked her: homeless men, taxi drivers and, yes, even a couple of women. Opening here heart and mind to the possibility that her perfect match might be the person she least expected, she spent twelve months dating most of New York City.

I Am Not Myself These Days by Josh Kilmer-Purcell (from book jacket) - Josh Kilmer-Purcell lived a double life. By day, he was a successful young advertising executive. But by night, he would trade in his corporate uniform for high heels and sequins, performing in downtown nightclubs as a drag queen before returning home to the uptown penthouse he shared with his crack-addicted male escort boyfriend. In his powerfully written, emotional roller coaster of a memoir, Kilmer-Purcell blends the tawdry and highly dramatic world of drag with a soulful and ironic perspective on his journey through love and life.

Falling Through the Earth by Danielle Trussoni (from Booklist) - After her parents divorced, Danielle Trussoni went to live with her father, Dan, while her siblings stayed with Mom. A hard-drinking former Vietnam tunnel rat haunted by his war experiences, Dan more or less raised Danielle in Roscoe's, the Wisconsin dive bar where he was the most regular of regulars. Danielle took to skipping school and shoplifting, but she eventually got to the University of Wisconsin and then went on to get her MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Who knows if Iowa is to credit, but Trussoni has written a hell of a good memoir. But *Falling through the Earth* is not merely tragic. It's also vicious, unsentimental, and often quite funny. One of the best portrayals in recent memory of what it's like to grow up in a screwed-up, working-class family.

For more information on the Memoirists Collective writing contest, please visit www.myspace.com/memoiristcollective.

The books of these authors are available at Davis-Kidd Booksellers in the Mall at Green Hills and OutLoud! Gay & Lesbian Department Store on Church Street.