


[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

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"Timed Exposure III" by Ken Steinkamp; <http://kensteinkamp.com/>

A veritable prophet of the higher spheres of the literary 'religion', Naomi Epel is the patron scribe of technique and psychology pertaining to the written

craft. From her work as a literary escort, host of Dreamtalk and Booktalk as well as the author of Writers Dreaming and The Observation Deck, Epel takes us on a journey through the intricate tunnels of the writer's mind by interviewing authors such as Amy Tan, Stephen King, Isabel Allende, Anne Rice, and Spalding Gray. In profound terms, we see the under layers of the creative subconscious and the dreams that foster their most significant growth. Buckle up as we traverse the fascinating terrain with Epel at the wheel...

Interview with Naomi Epel by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) Drawing on your fascination with complex facilities of the human mind, you've worked as a hypnotherapist, private investigator, dream worker, a staff member at St. George Homes (a residential treatment center for schizophrenic adolescents and one of the country's leading dream-work institutions with pioneering efforts in the use of art, drama and ritual for the treatment of mental illness) and utilized your finely-tuned interviewing skills for in-depth market research as well as your work of being a literary escort to extract gems of wisdom from the vaults of great literary minds. The synergy of these vocations isn't surprising when one contemplates the philosophy that the human brain is physiologically and theoretically dispositioned toward storytelling as a way to process the world. In tying together psychology and dream work with creativity, how did you first come to the study of the writers and the craft of writing, realizing your own capacity to tell those stories? What personal revelations led up to the phone call from Susan Page with the suggestion that you become a literary escort and then your apprenticeship with Joyce Cole? When did your radio shows DreamTalk, BookTalk and Cover to Cover begin and what were your goals behind them and consequently what emerged from them?

From my earliest years I was obsessed with the idea that I had to be famous. I didn't have any special passions but felt I urgently needed to find one. I tried many things. I became a geneticist, then a private investigator, then a market researcher and finally a therapist specializing in dreams. The one thing they all had in common was a curiosity about what makes us human. But it took me awhile to realize I didn't have to specialize in one thing to be OK.

I was not happy in 1987 when my friend Susan Page returned from her book tour and suggested I become a literary escort - taking

authors to readings & interviews. I was a dreamworker and I wanted to be the one in the passenger seat! But “you love people & you love books” said Susan, just call this woman and see if she needs help. I was afraid that escorting would be just another distraction from my goal of becoming a national dream expert. On a lark I called the escort and she gave me an occasional job. And it was fun! I soon found my authors loved talking about their dreams! I was learning about the creative process from the experts themselves. I took over the business in 1988 and built it to the point that I had 8 people working for me.

From my work as an escort I got to know most of the local radio and TV producers. I wanted my own show so I asked the producer of a college radio station for a time slot to do a call-in program to be called Dreamtalk. Amazingly, he said yes. Unfortunately the signal was so weak that I rarely got calls from anyone besides my friend Susan and so, unable to fill the time with callers, I started asking my authors to come on the show.

*It started when, sitting in the car, Clive Barker told me how a dream of rotting strawberries inspired him to write the story, *The Age of Desire*. Barker was flying out that night but agreed to call me from New York to tape an interview.*

*Soon after that my engineer heard about a local author who had written about an old Chinese man who guarded the gates of dreams. We invited her onto the show and she told us how a series of dreams gave her the courage to become a writer. When her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club* became a national best seller we realized how lucky we’d been to interview Amy Tan.*

With those two interviews on tape I was able to convince various book publicists to let me interview their authors. I had no idea that the tapes would lead me to write a book until I had the dream that changed my life.

This dream enabled me to overcome my own blocks by teaching me I could stop trying so hard to impress other people. In the dream, I was at a party and didn’t feel like talking to anyone so I went down into the basement where I found sitting alone an artist working at

a desk. I knew he didn't want to be disturbed. So I stayed very quiet. And because I was quiet he allowed me in his room.

I shared this dream with a friend who asked an excellent dreamwork question "How did this make you feel?" I was stunned by the question and began to cry. "Why are you crying?" he asked and I explained that I always feel I have to impress people when I meet them. The guy in the dream accepted me without having to prove myself. My friend suggested that I "honor" the dream by taking the next three days to do absolutely nothing but hang out with the "artist in my basement". So I stopped trying to write something great (which I'd been trying to do for years) and just sat on a stool in my living room. Within 2 days I found myself drawn to the computer to write something I called "Tapping into the Source", a guide to help people use their dreams to be more creative.

Only later, with the help of author Desmond Morris, did I learn I didn't have to make it so complicated. "Just print up the interviews" he said. "I'd love to hear what Stephen King dreams."

2) Reading about how your fascinating work, *Writers Dreaming*, actually took form from a dream, brings to mind the Edgar Allan Poe quote, "All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream." From your introductions to the authors speaking about the dreams that influenced not only their writing but also significant aspects of their lives, such as in the instance of Amy Tan, the connections between predominantly right-brained creative individuals and the subconscious are profound. Of the twenty-six prolific writers you interviewed, including Maya Angelou, Stephen King, Isabel Allende, Anne Rice, Art Spiegelman and Spalding Gray, which account resonated the most deeply with you in terms of what role the dream played in the author's life? What were some of your most important discoveries with this book as you pieced together the many lessons inherent in the language of the author's dreams- whether influencing what they wrote, how they wrote- the craft itself, and also how they viewed life through the filter of the 'dream's' eye?

I love stories, the complete ones we find in books and movies and the incomplete adventures we create while sleeping. Nightmares are stories that end before a situation is resolved – we're still running, hiding or fighting when we wake up. Nowadays in my dreamwork I help people go back into their dreams to complete

them. This way the conscious mind is working in concert with the unconscious mind in a spirit of cooperation rather than ignorance and antagonism.

The unconscious mind perceives things that our conscious minds are too busy to register. There is so much information coming in through all our senses that we need to filter it in order to survive. We use unconscious beliefs to give our lives structure and meaning. In a dream group, participants help one another become aware of the limitations of those unconscious beliefs and go beyond them. We use the dreams as metaphors and play with imagery to change our stories. We make the dream ego a hero rather than a victim, thus empowering both parts of the self.

Many writers use dream images as jumping off points for stories. They are doing their dreamwork on paper and creating art. Stephen King was blocked in the middle of writing the novel, IT, when he had a dream of a rusty abandoned refrigerator filled with quivering life forms. It was those life forms that led his characters out of the trash dump where they, and King, had gotten stuck.

I love a lot of my authors. One of my favorites was Alan Gurganus, who wrote, The Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All. He told me how he turned a dream of a falling angel into the powerful story, "It had Wings". He explained how he gave this dream experience to a character outside of himself – an old woman retired from selling formalware at Wanamakers. He asked himself what would such a woman do if an angel fell into her yard? What would she ask the angel? How might he respond?

I loved talking with Stephen King because he painted a perfect metaphor to explain why we forget our dreams (I'll let your readers find out in the book, Writers Dreaming). Isabel Allende thrilled me with the dreams that led her to her current husband. And William Styron touched my heart when he told of the dream that led him to start writing Sophie's Choice.

Would you say that dreams are essential part of a writer's life; if so, what are some methods of recalling and interpreting them?

The best way to remember dreams is keep a pen and paper by the bed. The unconscious mind loves to be acknowledged and if you give it some attention it will provide ever-richer dream experiences. Amy Tan says when she started recording her dreams they almost took over her life.

I encourage people to take an image from a dream – however vague or fragmentary – and carry the story forward. Or pretend you are one of the characters in a dream and write from his/her perspective.

3) Described by John Berendt, author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, as "...a fascinating compendium of the devices that professional writers have concocted over the years in order to trick themselves into writing better -- or writing at all. [It] is highly entertaining to read, and at the same time it is the most innovative, practical guide to writing I've ever seen," *The Observation Deck*, is one of the most fitting companions a writer can imagine. Having used it myself countless times, it not only sparks writing ideas like wild fire but provides enlightening passages on character, perception, environment and perseverance with its Jungian inspired cards and the meanings behind them in the treasure trove of the book that accompanies them. Pulling the right card at the right time is very much in keeping with our magazine's views of synchronicity when writing and many times the wisdom of the card drawn can apply to a life situation as well. Talk to us about the formation of the deck; the ideas that began the project to its extremely accessible, timeless form that can be revisited time and again. (*The deck is back in print at writers' demands; readers can check out the excerpt entitled "Write a Letter" featured on the Writers' Craft Box page*)

The Observation Deck came about because an editor wanted me to create a workbook based on writers dreaming. But I didn't want to create something linear and unusable. I had all these great exercises, gleaned from conversations with my authors that were really more about the creative process than about dreams. I always wanted to know how someone transformed a dream into fiction so that I could help my own writing. I usually kept a pack of index cards in my car so that if a writer told me some trick he used to get unstuck or to maintain discipline I'd scribble it down. And soon I had 50 techniques that were each used in different ways by different writers. Like *Take A Walk*, or *Play with Opposites*. A lot of

people – like myself - would rather keep reading a well written writing book than do the exercises. And since I am someone who wastes a lot of time trying to decide where to start I wanted to eliminate the decision process. So after several years of struggle, I came upon the idea of using cards and synchronicity. I'm now thrilled when famous authors recognize my name because they have used the Observation Deck themselves.

4) Please share a favorite recollection/anecdote from your remarkable experiences of being a literary escort; a dream come true of getting face-time from writers whose books you've adored while driving them around picturesque San Francisco on their book tours.

The writer I most adored was the naturalist filmmaker, Sir David Attenborough. He made me feel brilliant and beautiful just by the questions he asked and the laughter my answers evoked. When his wife died I flew off to England hoping to become the next Lady Attenborough. But the difference in our ages- he was 70, I was in my 30s- may have kept him from asking for my hand. Or so I'd like to imagine. His curiosity enormous, his laugh infectious, I was not alone in my crush on the man.

5) Receiving a great deal of insight and inspiration from my dreams, I'm deeply interested in the process of dream-work and how it ties into a writer's life. In *Writers Dreaming*, you discuss how you don't insert general meanings for certain symbols in your client's dreams as the symbol might have a very different meaning for one person at a particular stage in their life than for another. In addition to asking the question about the way you wisely lead creative individuals through their dreams, I'm going to volunteer and offer one of mine into your capable hands. In the Autumn 2008 issue of *The Write Place At the Write Time*, we experimented with having a Jungian Dream Corner. This was the dream I shared, entitled, "Halloween Mystery": "I have had a recurring dream ever since I was a child. In the dream, it is Halloween and I am somehow unprepared for it- either I miss the festivities of the holiday or I don't have a costume. The dream comes all throughout the year and also reflects my current age and circumstances as the years progress. There are always profound feelings associated with the dream, not wanting to have "missed anything" and that is why I feel it has a deeper or hidden meaning."

Your dream of Halloween is a wonderful variation on the classic

dream of being unprepared for a test. The fact that you can't find or choose a costume may relate to not wanting to settle on one identity because, as Whitman might say, you contain multitudes.

6) One of the cards from the *Observation Deck* councils us to "Create a Sacred Space." You discuss the evolution of your sister's office and its subsequent inspiration for her, Isabel Allende's secret of fresh flowers, Julie Smith's wall of admiration for her favorite writers... tell us all about yours and a few insights for our readers on how to create a productive one.

Find a Sacred Space is a favorite card. I recently converted my garage into an office but had to move my paperwork into another room so as not to contaminate the energy. My walls are filled with books with authors and 200 journals, kept since the age of 11, held in 50 loose-leaf binders.

On my desk is a crystal ball, a photo of my partner and a box that I found after seeing it in a dream 30 years ago. I call it my dream box and use it as an altar. When I go into the office I center myself by imagining roots reaching down into the earth and I welcome in the four directions. I've taken the phone out of the room and light a candle between I start to write. And I don't go in there for anything other than writing and contemplation.

Named in USA Today as one of the authors changing the face of the industry, H.P. Mallory weaves her words and web marketing to cast a spell over masses of readers that are enchanted by her brand of urban fantasy. Here to share with us her dynamic fairy tale, Mallory spins some of the best-seller magic that transformed her e-book sensations into Random House prime-times.

Interview with H.P. Mallory by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) You are a widely celebrated paranormal romance author with an ever-widening base of adoring fans, you've signed a book deal with Random House (Bantam) and received recognition far and wide, including in the pages of USA Today. How does this writer's Cinderella story feel and how has it changed your life- the small details to the extreme?

It literally has changed my life. Not even a full year has passed since July 7th when I uploaded the books onto Kindle. I was able to quit my job in February. It has been a Cinderella story for sure.

I had tried the traditional route four years ago. I was lucky enough to land a huge agent but publishers weren't biting. At one point I stopped hearing from the agent. Now, looking back, I'm so glad that it happened that way. Getting the agent in the first place, a third party who believed in the work, was a self-confidence booster. That confidence has helped me in marketing and publishing the books myself.

Like I said, life is completely different for me now with the success of the series. In the first month, I sold just shy of four hundred books and saw that there was definitely a market out there. I realized at some point that I had a gift, something to put out there and started receiving touching e-mails from readers (some battling cancer and chronic illness that appreciated stepping outside their emotions into the world of the books). I found the ability to touch other people's lives, to bring people happiness is one of the most amazing parts of the writing. You might be solitary in your office yet there is a multitude of people you are reaching.

Regarding the traditional route vs. self-publishing, I had heard the rumors that self-publishing was the literary "kiss of death". Yet then I read an article about the author Karren McQuestion. I had two books at the time, collecting figurative dust in my hard-drive. I felt I had nothing to lose and made a last ditch effort. I would've been happy to sell five hundred copies. I've sold over 150,000 now. If you had told me a year ago that I'd be here, I wouldn't have believed you.

2) Your two main protagonists- Jolie (a psychic witch) and Dolcie (a fairy in law enforcement) are an interesting dichotomy. How did these characters

evolve in their separate series and how do you see their chief similarities and differences?

Jolie is the first one I wrote. The heroine archetype of being so strong, so sure of themselves is firmly entrenched in today's literature, but I don't think that it's always realistic. The average woman is not super sure of herself. Jolie learns how to love herself, discovers that she's strong, that she's beautiful. Dolcie was hurt in her past and can't trust; that's something she has to overcome.

Heroines have a chink in their armor. I am in both of my characters, though more like Jolie. Dolcie's adventures in writing represent my career. I suppose you could refer to it as art imitating life.

I've always had a story in me; at any given time there are six story openings in my head. With *Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble*, I couldn't stop thinking about it until the point where my brain forced me to sit down and write it while I was in England. The story wouldn't stop rearing its head. Revisions and writers groups helped me discover my voice; I hadn't found my flow yet. By *Toil and Trouble*, I was in my groove.

3) Talk to us about living in Cambridge, England and the inspiration that came of being in a locale steeped in folklore.

I honestly think, I know, had I not lived abroad, I wouldn't have written the first book or I would at least have written it much later. Living in a place you're going to write about is key. We could see the university rowers along the river, swans in the yard, historic architecture... I had two different muses-England and Scotland. They both made lasting impressions in terms of location and the people we met. Pelham Manor, Rand's home, was inspired by a priory in Scotland (*Breadsall*

Priory) surrounded by verdant pastures. I had the luxury of time to write.

My family is about travel, living abroad, so it was a natural interest for me. My brother had gone to boarding school in England. My husband was transferred to England and wanted to receive his MBA from Edinborough. The British experience is very close to my heart- I had my son while I lived in the UK.

4) The designs for the site and cover art are smart, sassy and sexy; they reveal that darker archetype that nearly all of us seem intrigued by both in ourselves (for females the mystery, the intuition, the powerful and discerning) and in who we're drawn to (the bad boy type who deep down isn't entirely bad and we think we can influence him or enjoy trying). Why, in your opinion, is that such an embedded, timeless theme?

I think for women the idea of the unpredictable man (like a stallion- gorgeous, stunning, wild) who is not on the couch with a beer and a beer gut is intriguing if you're going to be the trainer to tame that bad boy. Containing the fear shows a woman her own power. With Sinjin- does he really love her? With Rand- he's the quintessential good guy, not making a move.

5) As a two-pronged question that our readers who are writers are eager to hear the answers to, first, how did you come to choose e-publishing over other forms of self-publishing and determine a price point? Secondly, beyond reviews of the books *Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble* as well as *To Kill a Warlock*, what was your marketing approach (did this tie in with your former online marketing experience)?

With regard to being an author in the category of marketing-websites and social media are a more direct way of marketing. I would never have done the book form of self-publishing; there is a ton of overhead, shipping costs, having to pay ahead of

time, wondering when and how you'll see them... I had been an online marketer for seven years. The planets aligned for me.

I plan on doing a self-published book on all that I did to get my work out there- how I got the word out through book bloggers, search engine optimization through Google keywords, reviewers in my genre, having a presence on the Kindle and Barnes & Noble forums... Eighty-five percent out of 500 responded to reviews on Amazon and Barnes&Noble.com.

Facebook has more of a community feel where you can include more, start online book and writer clubs. Twitter is great for updates- the comparison is like a text message to an in-depth phone call.

Marketing is about making relationships with people, allowing readers to personally have a form of contact with the writer. I found that making online profiles for the characters was a huge draw; it allows readers to be part of the book almost on the idea of a "Choose Your Adventure" book. I've also involved readers in challenges where they get a chance to be one of the characters. That tops any monetary giveaway. One reader is a character in every Jolie book. Another is responsible for a feud between two male characters- I got her voice, her personality through e-mails and questions. It's the coolest thing ever to get to be immortalized as a character in a series of stories that mean a lot to you in your life.

6) Your pen, most clearly, is your magic wand and it has already brought about great wonders. Yet if, for a-limited-time-offer-only you could use this wand to influence the fate of another, what is one of the first things that comes to mind that you'd want to do?

I feel like I'm so happy with what I'm doing- influencing people's lives through writing. I can't imagine doing anything other than living my dream. If I could duplicate myself to get

around time restraints and develop even more storylines, I would. I wake up in the morning in wonder.

My advice to other writers is to never give up on their dream; if it doesn't seem to be working in one way, try another route. Now is the most exciting time for writers- the markets, the readers, as opposed to only the editors and publishers, get to decide what is a success.

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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