

*The Writer
Southern Booktrade*

The Writing Life

Imagine that you wake early, go to your computer, work a couple of hours in sunlight streaming through silent windows. Imagine that your editor calls around nine and says he will buy your latest novel-- "It's a step above anything you've written." That bright voice softened by morning.

Imagine that only one year ago you have worked with this same editor on another novel, and a few months before on another novel, and he has demanded nothing--"I suggest..., but you're the writer." "I try to read a work in a couple of days as a courtesy to my writers."

Imagine that it took you ten years to meet this dream editor-- "You've got it in your heart, in your head, in your hands. Now go for it."

I want you to meet my editor, Larry Ashmead, Vice President and Executive Editor of Adult Trade at HarperCollins, who by rights belongs first to Celestine Sibley, Anne Rivers Siddons, Tony Hillerman, Susan Isaacs and Stuart Woods. They've been with him forever, it seems, and I'm just starting. These are the big dogs I'm running with. These are the writers who make the money to publish and promote my starter books--these writers sell, really sell! I'm

the new writer. Ten years of wrenching stories from the gut that nobody wanted, ten years in search of an editor (any editor would do!) and now Larry Ashmead.

Lawrence Peel Ashmead, from Rochester, New York, holds a Masters Degree in Geology, and one can only wonder how his interest in the scientific study of the origin, history and structure of the earth evolved into the realm of literary art. This enigmatic editor began his career with Doubleday, moved to Simon & Schuster a decade later, then on to Lippincott, and finally homesteaded with HarperCollins--Harper & Roe in those days--where he has stayed for eighteen years. In 1994, he was LMP's pick for Editor of the Year in Adult Trade.

But that doesn't tell you who Larry Ashmead is, only what he has done. Larry is the one who sends the gift books and magazine clippings I find on my front porch periodically. Larry is the one who calls with news of good book reviews (he hides the bad ones, and God help the person who finds and delivers them to me). Larry is the voice that calls from New York to South Georgia, maybe once a month, to say my novels are selling well (no matter that at my last book signing only two people showed). Larry is the hefty blonde fellow with the brisk stride, the energetic one everybody is gravitating around at a party, and Larry is that solitary figure bent over his prize tomato plants at his home on the Hudson. No dresser, my editor, but the light of intelligence in his blue eyes would make him shine in a stadium full of people. That straight gaze. When he speaks, everybody listens. Everybody loves Larry. But none so much as this grateful writer, who can write now without anguishing over what will happen to her next book.