

### 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 and Susan Isaacs. 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 fifteen years later, then on to Lippincott, and finally homesteaded with HarperCollins--Harper & Row 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 robust blonde fellow with the brisk stride, the energetic one everybody is gravitating round 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.

Imagine that I've just read your book and I've loved it. I've loved it so much that I've decided to order a copy for my library and a few more for my friends. I've also decided to suggest that you write another book. 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 write this great work. You've got it in your hands, in your hands. Now it's yours.

I want you to meet my editor, Larry Weinstein, Vice President and Executive Editor of Adult Trade at Harcourt Brace, who by rights belongs first to Catherine Sibley, Five Rivers District, Ray Kullgren and Susan Isaacs. They've been with me for a long time, and it's just starting. These are the big boys I'm running with. These are the writers who make the money to publish and write to