



# LAUGHING BEAR 100 NEWSLETTER

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## The Surviving Small Press: 100th Issue

I finished completely re-doing the Laughing Bear web site September 10. It now has a small press photo album and wedding photos, the library mailing list, some recent articles, a bear that laughs when you click it, a form you can use to renew your subscription or order a sample for a friend, links to small press resources, and other cool web stuff.

Anyway, I finished up-loading all the site files and was checking it out to make sure everything linked together all right, and I found I got the same sort of rush seeing it show up on my computer screen working correctly as I did 20 years ago when an issue of *Laughing Bear* magazine came back from the printer.

No matter the medium, there is an indescribable feeling of accomplishment from taking words, pictures, and ideas, bringing them together into a cohesive whole, and putting it into print. And that feeling, that rush, is what has kept me going to 100 issues of this newsletter.

My intention eight years ago when the newsletter became a monthly was to take one last shot at small press. I had tried to do the magazine, poetry chapbooks, and the newsletter all at once and

couldn't keep up. By 1989 I was spreading myself too thin. I was playing in a band and had a challenging full time job. I was about to get married for the first time and was deeply in debt.

I should take a step back in this story and admit that had I not been laid up with my second hernia operation of 1989, I would probably still be putting off confronting the inevitable. Up until then, I had done a pretty good job of convincing myself that is was only a matter of time before some miracle would happen and I could make a living publishing full time.

Five weeks of immobility and pain pills gave me more than enough time alone with my head to dissect my life up to that point. It was sort of a concentrated mid-life crisis at age 37.

I came to some tough conclusions. First, odds were I would never be in a position to publish the magazine or books the way I knew I would have to for them to pay for themselves.

I wasn't 23 anymore, and didn't have the passion and optimism it takes to follow through on major projects. After 14 years in publishing, I was burned out.

Second, I really didn't care. I had a box in my office

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## MAPA Merges With PMA

MidAmerica Publishers Association merged with Publisher Marketing Association as of September 26.

MAPA members will be provided with full PMA membership through their anniversary date. Members of both organizations will have their PMA membership extended.

MAPA served and represented more than 250 publishers for 10 years. Its successful workshops and active regional and local groups will become the regional prototype for developing PMA chapters nationwide.

The MAPA Board of Directors issued this statement to express MAPA's reasons for the merger:

"We feel the diverse needs of a rapidly growing independent publishing industry can best be served in the millennium by the broad range of national and international marketing programs offered by PMA and the unsurpassed PMA university."

I can't make out much from that statement, but hope it means PMA intends to grow by letting regional groups address regional concerns while the national organization offers services only a national organization can afford to provide.

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## 100<sup>th</sup> Issue *(continued)*

brimming with years of unanswered mail. I was holding off on responding until I had some idea when projects were coming out. That box sat in the corner festering, consuming me with guilt.

I started publishing in 1976 because I had a passion for poetry and believed I was doing something worthwhile with my life publishing it.

At that time in my life, I didn't have much family, I was stuck in an uninteresting job, and I was on my own.

Publishing gave me a purpose. It was like an adventure.

I had grandiose dreams since high school that I would do something important, but had no idea what.

I studied music and English in college. I wrote constantly for years. I read voraciously. And that led me to small press and publishing.

I discovered, as you have, that I could publish anything I wanted myself. It was that freedom to conceive of and produce a book or magazine without having to get permission or approval from anyone else that was exciting at first.

Then, of course, I got the magazine out and learned this isn't such a solitary business after all. I found that I enjoyed dealing with reviewers and booksellers and selling subscriptions.

Then I started falling behind. I had taken on more material than I could handle, and there was less money coming in from sales than I had counted on. I couldn't afford printing.

By 1989, and even earlier though I didn't know it, publishing had turned into a

nightmare. It was like the recurring dream I had in college about a tank of fish I has forgotten to feed for several months. Then I'd go into a room and there would be the tank, overflowing with black slime, dead fish, and always one or two survivors gasping and staring at me.

After a couple weeks of wallowing in this self-pity, and coincidentally about the time the pills ran out, I decided to write off the past commitments and start over.

I looked at the assets I'd accumulated through small press. I'd published 18 books, 6 magazine issues, and 18 newsletter issues.

I had participated in all the book fairs I could get into and worked numerous ABA conventions for COSMEP.

I knew the writers' perspective, as I had numerous poems published in literary magazines.

Aside from *Laughing Bear*, I had guest edited *Western Edge* magazine, and organized and participated in readings. And I taught a community college class in literary magazine publishing from 1977 to 1979.

Even when it seemed like I was doing nothing, I published an average of one book a year.

After years of beating myself up for not doing more, I looked around and found I was one of the last of my contemporaries still active, and what I had to offer to the new generation of small press was experience.

The obvious next step was to revive the newsletter to share that experience. The newsletter could be printed as needed, masters could be produced on my little Commodore 64, and it would

give me something to do I could feel good about.

I set about publishing the newsletter with the understanding that if it didn't work, if people didn't respond to it, that would be it. I'd retire from small press once and for all.

Well, you all screwed up that plan for escape. The past eight years have been the most productive and satisfying of my life.

When I started publishing the newsletter monthly, I thought I could maybe get up to issue 50 before running out of ideas. Then I could compile the newsletter and magazine issues into a book on small press. But, while ideas can be hard to come by some months, by and large there's more to write about than I can fit into these pages.

The demise of COSMEP, the decline and sales of the ABA book fair, the dubious trend toward publishers setting up their own writing "awards" with reading fees, and of course the emergence of publisher organizations set up by publishing consultants have given me months of topics. As well as developments like CCLM's split with the NEA and re-emergence as CLAMP and new frontiers for small press in the internet and world wide web.

There have been periods when I've drifted in directions you may have found dry, like marketing plans, quality and customer awareness, and mission statements. But those were issues I was dealing with in my own growth as a publisher at the time. And I was always willing to drop

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## 100th Issue (continued)

them at the hint of a more timely story.

I guess the question at this point is, if I could relive my life from the time I first discovered and fell in love with small press at age 18, would I change anything.

I'd have to answer with an emphatic no.

If anything had gone differently, if I had taken a job teaching high school English, if I had taken a permanent college position, or even if I had been successful as a writer or publisher, I wouldn't be the same person I am today. And I'm happy today.

For the future, well, I went through so much redoing the masthead to accept a three digit issue number it'd be a shame to let that go to waste when I can do 899 more issues without having to change it again. Besides the 25th anniversary is just around the corner.

In the meantime, I'm behind schedule on doing a guest editorial for *Small Press Review* based on the "Paradigm" article in issue #98. And now that I have the hang of web site maintenance, I'd like to start posting reviews from the newsletter with color covers and links to the publishers' web sites.

I'd still like to do a compilation of either the first 100 issues or the first 25 years. I'd like to have a book of my poems over the past 20+ years published. And I'm sure there'll be more interesting stories in small press that no one else will want to cover.

I'm sure there'll be plenty to do. So long as there's someone out there who's willing to go along for the ride.

## Announcements

● **Directory of Literary Magazines 1997-1998** (CLP, 154 Christopher St., Ste 3C, New York, NY 10014-2839). I mentioned this last month, but gave the price as \$12.95 (the regular cover price). The postpaid price for mail orders is \$16.00.

● **In the Lion's Mouth** (The University of Montana, English Dept., Missoula, MT 59812-1013; \$2.99), a collection of stories by Stephen Morison, Jr., has been selected for the Merriam-Frontier Award for 1997. The award recognizes outstanding your writers enrolled at UM.

● **The Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry** (PO Box 10169, Santa Fe, NM 87504) provides grants for programs that develop the poetry audience, use poetry, and support translation and the process of translation. For the next five years no applications will be accepted for grants to individual poets. Instead the foundation will be supporting Witter Bynner Fellowships at the Library of Congress selected by the Poet Laureate.

● **Small Press Center** (Karin Taylor, dir; 20 W 44<sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10036; 212-764-7021, [www.booknotes.com/spc](http://www.booknotes.com/spc)), founded in 1985, offers publisher members exhibit space and facilities for book parties and press receptions. 900 members, \$50 per year. Over the years, SPC has worked diligently for the promotion of small press.

● **The Write News** (<http://writenews.com>) features news on the arts, writing and publishing, and world news. Updated daily (on business days), and soon to include links to local, college, and world newspapers.

● **Leaning House Poetry, Vol. 1** (Leaning House Press, Box 720665, Dallas, TX 75372; \$23.95) is a new poetry anthology published as a clothbound book/CD combination set with seven poets reading their won work.

● **HotDog Web Editor** ([www.sausage.com](http://www.sausage.com)). If you are going to do your own web site, I'd recommend trying this. HotDog is what I used to do Laughing Bear's site, and it was much easier to user and understand than programs I tried before.

● **KSB Promotions** (Kate and Doug Bandos; 55 Honey Creek NE, Ada, MI 49301-9768; 800-304-3269; [KSBPromo@aol.com](mailto:KSBPromo@aol.com)) provides publicity and promotion services for book publishers. They publish *KSB Links*, a newsletter sent to reviewers describing clients' books. Reviewers can request books that interest them. This helps publishers send copies only to reviewers most likely to review them.

● **New England Publishers Association** (David McEwen, exec. Dir.; PO Box 2061, Natick, MA 01760) offers free membership for 1997. Write for a sample newsletter.

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