**INDEPENDENCE DAY!**

**WHY I’VE PROUDLY CHOSEN TO BE A SO-CALLED INDEPENDENT**

`Listen carefully as our publishing options have recently changed.’ I hate this widely used expression since it ignorantly and annoyingly presupposes that the caller is familiar with whatever their previous `options’ may have been, but it seems appropriate here.

I’ve been reviewed by pretty much every major newspaper nationally, been on `Entertainment Tonight’, PBS Word on Words, the Joan Rivers Show, etc., and done literally dozens of on air radio interviews, as well as been reviewed by *Kirkus, Literati,* Society of the Cincinnati, *Publishers Weekly*, etc. After having 15 books published by so-called mainstream or `real’, that is, `legitimate’ publishers I decided to go out on my own for the following reasons:

**SELF PUBLISHING?** Not really, I happen to own a publishing company which publishes my books, and if desired, those of other authors. The term self-published, in the past meant that an author paid a `vanity press’ to publish his or her book. There was always a negative connotation associated with the term `self-published,’ and it still exists to some extent even now. The general perception was that no `real’ author would have to pay somebody to publish his or her book in the first place unless it really wasn’t that good to begin with. Not necessarily. History is replete with author’s who were subsequently signed to so-called `real’ publishers after paying to have their earlier works published. You can look this up for yourself if you’re interested. The same has always existed with record companies. Billy Ray Cyrus paid some independent record company $5,000 (as I recollect) to record `All Night Love’ before he got famous. Country Singer Randy Travis had an independent record under the name Randy Traywick (my spelling may be wrong here) before he became successful. Perhaps in the case of so-called self-published authors, they were unable to find an agent, or had no idea how to go about contacting a publisher. I consider publishing conglomerates, just like record companies to be an old model which has become largely irrelevant. Today, it’s about controlling your own destiny.

**AGENTS:** I was unable to find a literary agent, and would probably never have been published at all if I’d waited on one of those lazy louts. First of all, in the case of nonfiction, the average literary agent knows less than nothing about the subject matter you submit, and is likely to pass on your representation, based mainly upon his or her own ignorance. In fiction, the same applies to a lesser extent, but still exists. So how could any agent possibly adequately represent my book (or yours) if they’re not interested and have no affinity for the subject matter? After I began representing myself, I got published, and one book led to another. I’d previously made record deals with MCA, Sony, music publishing deals, and product endorsements for my clients. I’d personally done more business than most literary agents in New York or anywhere else. I wasn’t lazy and worked all the time.

In my opinion, and based upon my own experience as an entertainment agent for twenty years representing some of the most significant singers in 20th Century music, literary agents are the laziest bunch of deadbeats I’ve ever encountered. For example, I got country singer Barbara Mandrel $100,000 from Marlboro for one night’s performance in the early 1980s. It was the highest amount any country singer had ever been paid at that time. I subsequently got her $75,000 a night for the extensive tour dates with Marlboro, which lasted several years. I regularly grossed singer Ronnie Milsap over $1,000,000 a year. We took singer Merle Haggard from $12,000 a performance up to $40,000 a night regularly, and this in the early 1980s. The list goes on and on. My point is that there was and is now a constant revenue stream for any top level music agent or agency. Any successful music agency has acts in all price ranges that play every night of the week, and the agents who represent them work 24/7. They are salesmen. That’s their job. Literary agents are supposed to sell, but that might entail making some cold calls, and that’s a bit too close to actually doing something like `work.’

Literary agents basically sit on their asses and may or may not deign to look at whatever comes through the door, provided they don’t have to expend too much effort. Who needs them?

**Now to the matter at hand.**

**CONTENT:** Apart from any political considerations, I, as an author, always know exactly what I want to and mean to say. This applies both to fiction and nonfiction. In fiction, I don’t wish to be censored by any editor because someone, somewhere, might possibly be offended by something I might write. In nonfiction, I as the author, obviously know a great deal more about the subject than any editor. If something didn’t belong in the text, I wouldn’t have placed it there to begin with. While my experiences with editors have been overwhelmingly positive, I prefer to bypass the editorial oversight process altogether, apart from grammatical or punctuation considerations. As a so-called independent I am free to write whatever I want without censorship, explanation, or apology.

**ROYALTIES**: The highest royalty percentage I’ve ever received is 15 to 20% with several books at even 10%, and of course these are based upon the publisher’s sales figures. As is generally considered, there are three sets of books maintained unofficially by the publisher: one for the publisher, one for the IRS, and one for the author. I deserve to be paid for my work and accept the responsibility for doing so based upon my own efforts.

**PAYMENT**: Every publisher I’ve ever dealt with pays royalties twice a year, not twice a month. By operating as an independent I get paid monthly, in addition to books I sell directly to stores or other outlets. Also, with major publishers, the three previous months’ royalties are withheld until the next pay period six months in the future, allegedly in case of returns. I don’t do returns.

**ADVANCES**: I decide to pay myself whatever advance I want, and don’t have to pay it back at 5% of some publisher’s wholesale price. In fact, I don’t ever have to pay it back.

**MARKET ACCESS:** Given the attempted murder of bookstores in general, and the subsequent slow but steady rise of independent book sellers, (readers prefer physical brick & mortar bookstores and the bookstore experience) and the advent of the internet and everything associated with it, I now have the same access to the marketplace that any so-called major publisher has. I prefer to keep the 80 or 90% of my work that the publisher takes off the top, and use that money to promote my own products, rather than let them control and own my work for the increasingly dubious honor of saying I have been published by a so-called `mainstream publisher.’

**OVERSTOCK AND CUTOUTS:** The publisher in most cases has the option to dispose of remainders at a bargain basement price to bookstores and other outlets after it has been determined (by the publisher) that the book has stopped selling due to dwindling sales. In other words, at this point, the publisher sells the unwanted copies in bulk to other outlets beyond the reach of the author’s original agreement. These books are essentially dumped to third party outlets for whatever money the publisher can get. The publisher gets paid, but the author does not. The author doesn’t even get any monetary credit toward repaying his or her royalty advance.

**MONOPOLIES AND CONGLOMERATES:** The large number of successful publishers that once existed have gradually been absorbed into a few giant companies with more imprints than any of their employees can likely name. As this malaise grows, authors become less and less connected to people and processes within.

**OWNERSHIP:** Some time ago, I began regularly receiving letters from a Federal Bankruptcy Court in New York regarding bankruptcy proceedings concerning Carol Publishing Group, which had published my first four books. This was a major New York publisher with headquarters at 600 Madison Avenue in Manhattan. Among their imprints were Birch Lane, University Books, Citadel, and other well-known names. Basically, my copyrights as well as those belonging to their other authors, had been used as collateral by the publisher to secure loans for whatever purpose or purposes they were obtained. This was done without my knowledge or permission. If I wanted to possibly get my own copyrights back, I would have had to jump through a bunch of hoops, hire a New York attorney or attorneys, and ultimately buy back my own copyrights at public auction. My own copyrights to my own books! I’d been well paid, for the most part, recouped my advances, and subsequently paid royalties. I had nothing to complain about. Three of these four books were obsolete, having run their respective courses. I think they were subsequently bought at auction by New York publisher Kensington. I didn’t pursue the matter.

A couple of years ago, I received similar letters from a Bankruptcy court in Wisconsin concerning another book I’d done for another major publisher. Same thing. The people I’d worked with at the publisher had been nice. I’d received a nice advance, recouped it, and received royalties. Once again, I let it go.

Around Christmas 2020, I received a card from some company I’d never heard of offering me copies of my own books at a discounted price. Apparently they’d absorbed, acquired, or in some manner become involved with Hal Leonard, one of, if not the largest producer of sheet music and music related books in the US, and possibly the world. I also received an unexpected royalty check about three weeks later. Hal Leonard had done this incredible job with my book on the Hammond Organ. I’d received a nice advance as well as expenses (for the first time), had been treated well and paid well. Again, no complaints, and I still get royalty checks twice a year for that book.

**AFTER ALL, THEY’RE MY BOOKS:** My company, Deathcat Media, now owns the ISBNs and copyrights of everything I write. I might consider leasing something to a major so-called publisher in the future, but if so, it will be for a specific time, and on my terms so that’s unlikely. And again, given today’s market access, what’s the point?

I’ve always had the option of a so-called real publisher and do now, but given the reasons I’ve mentioned, why would I? And as I’ve sometimes heard it said, I still have much to accomplish, but nothing left to prove.

New York is no longer the center of the world, and for decades now, so-called `major’ publishers have been located in other places. For the reasons I’ve mentioned, I have chosen to be a so-called independent, and proudly consider myself and my company as legitimate as any publisher anywhere, only better for me as an author. I remember in the 1960s when `major’ record companies like Columbia, Capitol, RCA, and others, along with publications of the era such as *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, and *Record World* used to refer to Detroit based Motown Records derogatively as `an independent record company’ while that so-called independent was in many cases regularly outperforming them in the charts. The dinosaurs have had their day. Let the dead bury their dead.

Again, I own a publishing company and do not consider myself a so-called independent or any books this company may publish to be `independent.’ And one more thing, I often have aspiring authors say to me `I’m not in it for the money,’ as if there was some latent virtue in poverty. Invariably, those who say such foolish things are the very people who never seem to have any. They are possessed of what, in medical circles, is universally diagnosed, clinically speaking, as a Money Rejection Complex.

To quote the late D.R. Twine, MD, conductor emeritus of the Southwind:

“I used to see upon occasion, a bumper sticker proudly and blatantly proclaiming the ignorance of the automobile’s owner, which read: **“Live Simply So That Others May Simply Live.”** I advise you to immediately counter this absurd statement in your own mind with its opposite: **“Live Richly So That Others May Richly Live.’** Failure to heed this warning can often allow this deadly poverty consciousness to unknowingly enter and infect the subconscious mind of its reader, and is often a precursor to what subsequently, and if I may observe, frequently, evolves into a full blown case of Money Rejection Complex, which sadly at this stage is almost incurable.”

I can only concur. Best wishes to all, and set your own course!

Scott Faragher, President of DeathCatMedia