

# COMPOSITE RESULTS: 2006 Survey on Self-Publishing



Since 1997, Wordrunner Press has worked with over 80 authors to self-publish chapbooks of poetry and fiction in small, inexpensive editions of 50 to 100, as well as perfect-bound books in editions small and large. The purpose of the survey was to find out what happened to the books once published and how the experience of self-publishing was perceived, in the process collecting advice for other writers who are considering such a venture.

Twenty-seven authors whose books are self-published or who have started their own press responded to this survey, conducted in summer 2006. A few have published more than one book (two to four). Below is a summary of their thoughtful answers to the questions posed. (Note: Not all respondents answered all questions.)

Overall, responses were positive, even though only about one-third of those surveyed actually realized a profit from self-publishing. Some never intended to sell the books. Others were disappointed their books did not immediately sell out. But all were pleased to have their work in print and all but one said they would do it again. It's a given that marketing books entails a great deal of time, effort and often expense. What works and what doesn't? The most successful, in terms of sales, were authors whose books were targeted to a "niche" market and also those who persistently and patiently got out in public to hustle their books.

Many thanks to all who took the time to participate in this survey. Their names and books are listed at the end of this document.

Jo-Anne Rosen  
Wordrunner Press

## What convinced you to self-publish your book/?

- Lower cost, more control and ability to experiment.
- Basically, I wanted to gain entry to publishing; and, after a long hiatus, a "dry spell" of failing to write, I needed to build my confidence. Before seeking your services, I had surveyed the self-publishing market. It seemed as though [WR] had the highest quality and personable services around.
- I was cultured by the mimeo revolution in American during the Sixties. I like self-publishing because I have control over my work. Some editors go beyond "helping" a writer. I have found.
- I just wanted to get my work out there and couldn't wait to be "discovered." Also, I had the InterPlay community behind the work and knew they would act as a distributor.
- I wanted to have more of my poems in print than those that were occasionally published and I wanted a *legacy* for my family.
- The 4th Street Writers decided to self-publish when none of its members could find an agent for their novel. We decided to do a book of short stories and do some readings in the Bay Area to get our name before the public and the publishing world.
- In the world of poetry today, you have to be an academic or a sycophant at the literary journals to get a book published. I was neither.
- Several things convinced me to self-publish. First, I had a friend who did it and I liked his book. Second, I was going to a lot of poetry readings and wanted to have something to offer anyone who was interested in my work. Third, in the case of self-publishing my short stories and my Mom's memorial book I wanted to have something to leave behind for posterity.
- The area in Canada where I live has a flourishing self-publishing industry. Several friends have self-published books so I was familiar with the process, it was the perfect vehicle for my needs — the chapbook project was my senior BA project at New College of California. I was able to write the copy, develop the format, create the cover art and have complete control over the project, without having to do the printing, etc. I found Wordrunner Chapbooks through the website, received printed materials promptly, and felt comfortable in moving ahead with the project immediately.
- The affordability, and the freedom it allowed me in pursuing outlets for my writing.
- Creative control over the process, primarily. Added to that, lack of quality production of chapbooks by small

presses, long waiting lists and generally poor or inadequate marketing. Mostly cost—publishing companies don't like to publish a small amount of books.

- The unavailability of outlets.
- The low cost and the convenience of doing it from my computer; being solely responsible for how it was formatted.
- It wasn't just that no one was breaking down the door for my manuscripts. It was also on account of a kind of distaste for what is no doubt an almost essential requirement in poetry book publishing — I was mortified to contemplate paying people to read my work. Even more pathologically, I didn't fancy receiving rejections. Not did I like the look of many “commercial” small press products. And yet, as a literary artist, it is important to “take a stand” and exhibit a public face; self-publishing allowed me to achieve this.
- 50 years of no other results or prospects.
- Less expensive and less hassle.
- I've written hundred of poems, more than 150 have been published, but the literary magazines are ephemeral. I wanted to collect some in an artistic chapbook of my own design. Hence, *Variations on a Theme* came into being.
- I've published several books with several publishers (a history of photography in Louisiana, a collection of folktales, a work of literary criticism, a reference book, others), but I was pretty sure no one was going to want to publish my poetry. Not that I think it's not good; I am well aware of how hard it is to find a publisher for anything and for poetry in particular. I simply did not want to get involved in what was likely to be a fruitless search for a long period of time.
- I belong to an Irish band called “Kith & Kin.” The Irish have a tradition of storytelling and poetry that we incorporate along with songs into our performances. I am the group “Shawnakee” or storyteller. One day I realized that I had enough material that I had written for our Irish band to put together a chapbook and sell it at our gigs just like we do CDs.
- My first completed manuscript was a guitar instruction book which made the rounds of the music instruction publishers with some nice feedback, most of it positive, but no nibbles. It has yet to see print, almost 20 years later. But it was not a complete loss. For one thing, I learned I could see a rather large writing project through to the end. Second, I used the approach and materials to teach a lot of people to play guitar, including one guy in prison who had only my manuscript and our letter exchange. Third, I got so damned

angry and frustrated with the process of submitting the manuscript that in an afternoon I pulled together a little chapbook of poems I had written over the previous few years. I gave it the title *20*, because it had twenty poems. At about the same time I came into a bunch of free (or perhaps it was discount) photocopy coupons from Kinko's as a result of having done some volunteer work at a local festival. And the guy who happened to be working the counter at Kinko's the day I went in was really taken with my little handmade project, cut me a lot of slack, and gave me a lot of help doing the two-sided copying. So I ended up with 55 copies of a little chapbook for less than \$15.00! They were given away, sent to family members, friends, former teachers, and handed out to anyone who expressed anything closely resembling interest. It was a dot matrix, transfer-letter affair, with a fair number of mistakes (and an errata sheet) but was kindly treated by those who received it.

My next little chapbook was a single poem of thirteen stanzas, each illustrated with a found image or simple collage. This chapbook, *A Year of Moons*, looked a lot better, because the text was done on an Apple computer with an ink jet printer, then photo copied. However, it was laid out using scissors and a glue stick. I think I made about fifty and again they were mostly given away, although I did sell a few of them.

The third one, a collection of eight haiku, was done on some lovely Japanese washi paper. All the copies were printed on an ink jet printer and I figured out a way to fold a single sheet into a little flipbook and stitched it by hand. I also used a little rubber stamp of a sea shell next to the title, *Unplanned* on the cover. I probably made forty of those, a few at a time, over a two year period and gave them all away.

The next one was *Umbrella Bones*, my Wordrunner chapbook. Again a collection of poems, it is a selection from my MFA thesis manuscript and had only poems written while I was in the MFA For Writers program at Warren Wilson College. This one has a price on it, though no ISBN. Most were given away (75%), but some were sold at readings, or from casual contacts, and a few copies were sold on consignment through an English language bookstore here in Tokyo. It was even reviewed favorably in *The Japan Times*.

My most recent book is *Another Wrong Fedora*, published through Printed Matter Press in Tokyo. This one looks like a real book, with prices (US and Japanese) ISBN, and barcode. But it is self-published. I paid for it all and own the books. I decided to self-publish the manuscript after submitting it to more contests than I like to think about (and writing dozens of \$20.00 entry fee checks), getting short-listed but no nibbles, and be-

ing told by several commercial publishers that it was a fine book, but they weren't doing poetry any more. I knew the work was strong: over half of it had been published in various magazines and one had even been nominated for the Pushcart Prize by a "name" American poet. What pushed me over into considering self-publishing this one was a comment my wife made one morning when we were talking about a friend of ours' new book of essays. She said, "You should have a book out!" Right then I had the permission I needed. I went with Printed Matter Press because it is local, had some distribution connections, some very good people were publishing there (Donald Richie, Liza Lowitz), and the press had put out some very good-looking books.

- I was looking for a way to make a more finished, coherent, and complete statement with some of my poetry, as well as to sum up, in a way, where I'd been as an artist for a given period of time. Finally, I wanted to create a document that I could sell, give, donate, or barter away which would furnish a nicely packaged statement or volume with which people could see who I was as a poet for a given period of time. Another factor was that I was consciously creating work at the time outside the degree granting community (MA, MFA etc.) yet wanted to have the same sorts of feelings of accomplishments in publishing finished works as a published thesis might give to an MFA candidate. In addition, to publishing poetry with Wordrunner, I have self-published a novel with iUniverse. While none of these efforts have been shortcuts to fame and fortune in and of themselves, they have allowed me to exist as I wished to for a time: as a somewhat "underground" type of author who was carving a history for himself in articulate ways as a published writer, taking advantage of some quite sophisticated resources along the way.
- Difficulty in finding a publisher.
- It seemed the easiest way.
- As writers, wanting to be read.
- Being rejected by publishers, especially in the case of *Orchid Territory* (OT) by a mingy little press that shall remain nameless— but in all these answers, the big difference between myself and a lot of authors, I had a viable business behind me (i.e., enough money) and in the case of OT (as opposed to *Kosova Kosovo* the (orchid) business in itself was a vehicle for selling the book. [These are both perfect bound books. The author established her own press.]
- Quite frankly, the idea came up out of nowhere and I didn't think about it again until I had some money and could begin. [The author established her own press.]

### What did you like about the process of self-publishing?

- Working one-on-one with someone.
- I felt as if I had an active voice in the entire process, from beginning to end. Furthermore, it was non-competitive, a total work of love.
- The freedom.
- I liked the complete creative freedom and involving people of my own choosing in the process.
- I learned so much about the process and felt fully engaged and committed. I liked that I was willing to take the risk and I loved the *organic* nature of the project, like the involvement of many creative friends.
- Self-publishing gives the writer a great deal of self-autonomy regarding the look of the book, e.g., cover, font, etc. The writer has a lot of control over the details of the book.
- The total control over every last element. The self-discipline. The self-editing.
- I like the control I had over content and design of the book. I understand that when a publisher takes you on you relinquish control over these things.
- The control over the entire project — from layout to fonts to paper choices, the comfortable working relationship with Wordrunner — very responsive to my needs and deadlines
- Jo (the owner) is incredibly easy to work with.
- Creative control is primary. Having a book that looks and feels the way I want it to look and feel. You're more involved with the process.
- Working with Jo-Anne and having a hands-on say about the final product.
- The low cost and the convenience of doing it from my computer; being solely responsible for how it was formatted. Plus the immediacy of it—not having to wait a considerably long time to see my work in print. The sense of aesthetic control and involvement; the pleasure of working with a skilled and congenial design-partner, the fact that, basically, I owed nothing to anyone. The process of publication was part of my creative profile.
- Not an overly expensive way of actually getting a work out on the market with potential buyers, readers, since the chances of a "regular house" ever accepting are astronomically hopeless—or poor—or both.
- I felt I had more control over the process. I went at my own speed without having to meet some else's deadlines. I had a sense of freedom.
- Having complete artistic and editorial control...and working with a pro named Jo-Anne Rosen who helped

make the finished product perfect.

- The ease of just doing it.
- I enjoyed the whole process but especially selecting the material and figuring out the layout.
- I like the creative control over the contents and the way the books look. I also enjoyed working with Jo-Anne at Wordrunner and Joe Zanghi at Printed Matter on the book designs. They are both real artists. Both entered deeply into the manuscripts, listened to my ideas, then ran with it. I'm very proud of both those books.
- The finished volume gave me a great sense of accomplishment. Since I am also a visual artist, I enjoyed playing a role in how the book appeared. So in the end the book appeared, both visually and textually, as a complete accomplishment and statement of who I was as an artist at the time it was published. I also liked the fact that I was given an ISBN number so that my book was officially a member of the community of published literary documents. I'm in control.
- I could rely on the expertise of Jo-Anne
- This for me is multi-layered, I think the way you've phrased the question is leading and important and something missed in the beginning, that it is in fact a process and as complicated and arduous if magical as writing itself, it is an unfolding and like water color or oil painting you need to wait for the layers to set and dry before you can move on to the next phase, so part of what I like is appreciating that, and of course I like the creative process the amalgamating of a piece of work to create and fashion a whole and to see a book come out of it.
- Not much in the case of the first book *Kosova Kosovo*: too overwhelmed and shy: i.e., was talked out of the kind of cover I wanted because the person doing it had to be artistic and proper.. was scared. With the second — like having the second child; doesn't overwhelm you and I had the right person to work with! And knowing that paperback is the way to go (so hard to get shelf space in a store anyway, just do it.) Who needs hard covers? Who wants to shove a hard cover into their holiday gear?
- The book itself is art to me and so I have the same satisfactions as I would writing or doing visual art.
- You are alone unless you have a network of readers and writers. People will ignore each other if they can't "see" each other. We are very social. The Internet, although connecting to many people,
- did not help. A low price for the chapbook did not help either.
- I still feel uncomfortable saying that I am a published poet.
- There was truly no part of it that I disliked. It was a challenge that expanded my life.
- It can be a lot of work. For example, we did about five proofreading edits.
- I don't know if I disliked it but one assumes a great deal of responsibility in self-publishing. If something is wrong it is your fault. Of course if something is right it is also your fault.
- Nothing (5)
- Having to foot the bill! No, actually, Wordrunner is quite affordable especially considering the quality and the ease of publication.
- I was happy with the whole process.
- The aggravation of corrections.
- There was no part of the self-publishing process I disliked.
- Nothing. No dislikes, except perhaps my own inability to promote, get reviews, notice, coverage. Wordrunner Press of Petaluma, California, served me superbly and dealt with me superbly and I could not be more pleased with the products, which could not be more professional or more attractive.
- I did not dislike anything about the process.
- That it wasn't published by a major publisher and reviewed in *The New York Times Book Review*, but that wasn't a realistic goal, as I was 60 when I published it.
- Not much. Probably only the waiting to see the finished product.
- I would have rather had someone else pay for them. And selling them is a bit of a chore. I need to work harder at that.
- At first, I knew very little about computers and computer culture so I required assistance in developing the text and the cover design to the specifications necessary for dispatch to the publisher. But going through the process was educational in the end I learned a lot about the self-publishing process.
- No wide promotion.
- I disliked in the beginning having been so naive it led to a lot of frustration because I had no idea how

### What did you dislike?

- Nothing...The experience helped me to improve my writing, produce two subsequent books [with traditional publishers], and gain entry into the university teaching realm.

complicated it is, worse or as bad as remodeling a house you know, or building one from scratch, at times I was overwhelmed by the so many decisions to make, in all the phases. [Editor of a collection of writing by several authors]

- Feelings of shame and lack of self worth! Shouldn't really—so much Internet and different stuff going on, CDs from the basement, indie movies made by juggling credit cards, etc, the old stigma of vanity press hardly applies. But the biggest burden is feeling you must do all the PR yourself but you are exactly the person who shouldn't be doing it A friend of mine in publishing said "Don't tell them its you!" (we started a press) And I think the biggest drawback when you aren't legit in that way; you cannot be reviewed. My two great reviews for *Kosova Kosova* came from UK and one from a German academic magazine They didn't know The Truth. When a friend asked the *Miami Herald* lit crit why she wouldn't look at KK, he was told they don't review self-published books. Can't blame them. They are inundated with stuff anyway and yet one more account of Uncle Fred's Funny Fishing stories would sink them entirely.

**How have you advertised or marketed your book/s?**

email announcements	16
book signing parties, readings at cafes and book stores	13
flyers, mailers	12
newspapers, magazines, press releases	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Classified Ads in <i>Rolling Stone &amp; Utne Reader</i>).</li> <li>• Both books have had newspaper reviews. I plug <i>Fedora</i> in my author's bio.</li> </ul>	
web site or page for the book (other than WR page)	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.christopherketchum.com">www.christopherketchum.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.dirtyredkiss.com">www.dirtyredkiss.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.musesreview.org/josephpowell">www.musesreview.org/josephpowell</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/NCW/hoffman.htm">http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/NCW/hoffman.htm</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://yagrowsoryadies.blogspot.com">http://yagrowsoryadies.blogspot.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.GloriaNorth.com">www.GloriaNorth.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.penhouseink.com">www.penhouseink.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.philospress.org">www.philospress.org</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://amazon.com">amazon.com</a>, <a href="http://barnesandnoble.com">barnesandnoble.com</a></li> </ul>	
speaking engagements	8

local radio or television	3
at book clubs	2
did not intend to sell books	2
word of mouth	2
donated books to libraries and bookstores	1

Other/Comments:

- I sold chapbooks privately to friends and colleagues, but ended up not selling them as widely as originally planned. Next time, I would probably host a book signing party or do more with local poetry community.
- Announcements to high school grad. class, Xmas list
- I have asked for reviews by reputable people and organizations.
- As a project for university, the books were not created for the purpose of being marketed to the general public; they were handed out to contributors, professors, friends, family and colleagues.
- Austin Poetry Festival
- Speaking to fellow writers, it was easy to compile a short list (30 or so) of small independent bookstores in North America and the United Kingdom and then mail or donate in person, copies of my books. Everyone was very welcoming (but note: no one has ever asked me for a re-stock.) As a librarian-cataloger, it was very easy for me to make my books seem attractive as donated acquisitions by libraries and so my books are held by over 38 major academic libraries in both rare and circulating collections.
- Mainly I sold some to acquaintances and gave some to friends. My goal wasn't to market it extensively.
- I've sent out copies for review to six or seven places.
- I sell exclusively at our [Irish band] gigs since I perform material from the book.
- I have been a featured reader quite often in the Philadelphia area. I bring copies of my chapbooks to sell at my events. Also when published in a print journal, or on the web, I will make sure to mention my chapbooks in the bio sections of such websites or publications.
- Book stores.

**How successful was each of these methods? Or unsuccessful?**

- Email notification has proven my most effective method.
- Not successful [local newspaper ad].
- Quite successful [book signing parties, email, flyers, local radio/TV].

- Not very successful. Readings and festivals would have helped, but I cannot travel. And I no longer have a group which was a support in my youth. People value “face to face” contact very much and are sometimes more interested in the writer than they are in the writing: however, this will sell a book.
- Speaking engagements where I could meet people personally [most successful of several].
- The books do fairly well, though not as well as our CDs [books are sold where band performs music].
- Fairly successful [bookstores]
- Not very successful [email, flyers, newspapers, website]. Very few people bought my book. I believe I published a run of about 200 of them. Perhaps 20 sold. I gave away many others to friends, family, girls.
- I have not sold a great number of books. All of these methods [newspapers, website, speaking engagements] are worthwhile. It takes a lot of focus and attention to sell anything including books. Ideally, one would get good reviews in reputable publications and then create a buzz by creating press releases to generate newspaper articles, and appear on radio and talk shows. The best way to start this is locally. You can then branch out once you have saturated your local market. Public readings at bookstores are also good. You need to do and keep doing all these things for a long period of time in order to generate sales. Remember publishers have the money and contacts to overwhelm the market because they are already in the business of marketing books. You are starting from scratch. It takes a long time. Don't give up!
- The classified ad in *The Utne Reader* generated some additional traffic to my website. The *Rolling Stone* ad, surprisingly did not generate much traffic to my website.
- The few sales that I've had have been by word of mouth to friends and emails; the websites haven't helped in terms of sales, though I have some good reviews, but unfortunately that hasn't led to any further sales.
- Unsuccessful [email announcements only]: almost impossible, I've found, to get any notice or attention to a published work. Too many “knowns” in the crowd waving their “established” names around, getting the attention repeatedly. People won't give any heed to an UNKNOWN, which is in turn a Catch-22.
- I didn't spend a lot of time marketing. Most are sold at my speeches.
- Email announcements: Very big. Motes Orchids has an email list of customers and orchid lovers who receive a monthly newsletter, hovering well over 5,000.  
Flyers/mailers: I got excited over an offer: PMA flyers for distribution, a package deal, for forty colleges and universities! paid my money sent along my flyer for Kosova Kosovo. When they sent their package

back, the thirty or so other flyers and mine—mine the only one plausibly had anything to do with college—there were ads for business opportunities, copper bracelets, total waste.

Newspapers, magazines: Advertised *Kosova Kosovo* (KK) once in *The Nation* (expensive) As far as I could tell no response. Maybe a stray one. Advertised in *New York Review of Books* twice—again, have no idea if the stray request came from there. BUT rates were very good. They have a special charity rate for independent presses- back then a few years ago it was about \$125 with colors and very young people to talk to. Advertised in *American Orchid Bulletin* and that produced customers thro US. (Still, not much more than about 20, but being in print is good “Oh, I saw the ad... that adds legit.”)

Web site or page for the book: Amazon.com is our website. Had two great reviews posted there — a long time ago! (KK) Caught on to the idea of reviews with *Orchid Territory* (OT) and asked people when they bought it at Orchid societies if they'd post a review if they liked it. Have quite a few glowing reviews. Told them can just be one word (i.e., I have “A hoot! A stitch! Absolutely hilarious! etc.)

Book signing parties: Had a great launching party- nearly 60 people came friends and everyone bless them, bought at least one.

Speaking engagements: My husband Dr. Motes is a noted speaker on orchids and I have been tagging along and taking the first five minutes to introduce the book. (Have learned to raise a quick laugh and flash to the cover — \$12.50! As he speaks all over the country and out of it, that's the base of my far flung sales. (Sometimes I go other times he introduces the book and tells everyone how funny it is, etc.)

## Where are your books sold?

In independent bookstores	13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East-West University; The University of Chicago</li> <li>• We placed books in the following book stores: City Lights in SF, Alexander's Books in SF, Depot in Mill Valley, Cody's in Berkeley, North Lights in Cotati</li> <li>• Bookstores related to orchids/horticulture- Fairchild Tropical Garden, Marie Selby Botanical Garden, Fruit and Spice Park. Nature's Niche (Singapore)</li> </ul>	
At readings (bookstores, poetry/writing groups, galleries)	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Oak, Poetry and Spirituality Speakers Series at First Congregational Church of Berkeley</li> <li>• Santa Cruz Public Library, Art League Broadway Playhouse, Asilimar Robert Bly Workshop, Sunset Center</li> </ul>	

Carmel, Loudon Nelson Publishing Party, KSCO radio interview.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We also did numerous readings in Bay Area: Lark Creek Inn in Larkspur, Zebulon's Lounge in Petaluma, Alexander's Books in SF, Monticello Inn Hotel in Santa Rosa Literary Salon, a restaurant in Novato, North Light Books in Cotati.</li> <li>• In and around the Hartford area</li> <li>• Zebulons in Petaluma [Live Wire Literary Salon]</li> <li>• Had a "Launch Party," I go to open mikes pretty frequently [author lives in Japan]</li> <li>• Orchid societies</li> </ul>	
On the Internet or by email	13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amazon.com; Barnes and Noble; Waldenbooks; a host of others</li> <li>• Personal websites, blogs (see above)</li> <li>• Amazon.com, Barnesandnoble.com, Xlibris.com</li> <li>• Powells.com (Powells books in Portland as being available on demand)</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.musesreview.org/josephpowell">www.musesreview.org/josephpowell</a></li> <li>• <i>Fedora's</i> on Amazon, Printed Matter Press's website, ICM website</li> <li>• Having my book info. published at the Wordrunner site has been helpful to me in at least a couple of specific instances.</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.GloriaNorth.com">www.GloriaNorth.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.penhouseink.com">www.penhouseink.com</a></li> <li>• I sent out a mass e-mail and received orders that way as well. Checks came in the mail. I footed cost of postage.</li> </ul>	
At book fairs	4
In community groups or special interest clubs	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orchid societies, woman's group was great. East Ridge Nursing Home was not. Will be doing Dade Pioneers in December (these tied in with orchid talks by husband).</li> </ul>	
Through a distributor (how did this work?)	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't really know how this worked. After my book of short stories was published through Xlibris (perfect bound much larger than a chapbook) it began appearing on the Internet through various distributors. I have no idea how they got it except from Xlibris.</li> <li>• InterPlay offers workshops in improvisational dance worldwide and has offered my book(s) for sale.</li> <li>• This was a connection through Printed Matter Press. But distributors aren't willing to pay enough to cover my costs. It is window dressing but a way to have the book out there.</li> <li>• Have jumped through Baker and Taylor hoops and</li> </ul>	

have them officially as a distributor. They only respond to requests from stores, etc., but they lend legitimacy. Couldn't be at Miami Book Fair "without a distributor"; i.e., I had to send books to B and T, then they'd send them back to me to sell at the Fair. The fact that the books never turned up seems par for the course. (Luckily I took some along).

- SPD. We did not sell enough books to pay their fees. They also did not send reports on a regular basis.

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Through a print-on-demand publisher	1
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- [www.instantpublisher.com](http://www.instantpublisher.com)

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NOT sold	3
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#### Other methods

- I carried them around with me and whenever it was applicable showed and shared. I sold many in that manner. Also word of mouth from friends and people who heard me read.
- Word of mouth; saloons.
- All sales were to friends. I just asked people and it was put in my local paper and people came to me.
- Through my newspaper column.
- In effect, they are not. I'll be happy to sell one to anybody who wants to buy one, but I early on decided that I did not want to worry about distribution. In addition to sending out the review copies, I sent some to notable library poetry collections, gave some away, have kept some in reserve for whatever.
- Out of my backpack.
- Poetry Center
- Sell them ourselves to friends, family and by word of mouth—at parties, family gatherings, to local business contacts.
- Have persuaded some orchid people to take five or ten books to sell at their establishments. As we are open to sell orchids retail I can have my books on display and sell that way. That works best: especially when someone pleads for us to be open then they are persuaded to buy a book and have a hard time resisting. In this way OT has gone to towns in Israel, South Africa, various European countries, Peru etc. Will be contacting local book clubs with the new season approaching.

#### Which of these worked best for you (or didn't work at all)?

- The Internet and book readings were the most successful.
- Public readings.
- Sold most through InterPlay [distributor]
- They were all successful to some degree. The publishing

party and my one on one sales have been the most successful.

- We had limited sales at book stores (about 12 books). Most sold by group members to family and friends.
- None of them worked in the end. Few people want to pay for poetry. So, as noted above, I ended up giving a lot of the books away.
- Very successful! [all sales to friends]
- Internet — and this has to do with the wide availability of direct marketing via the Internet, either through websites or email notifications.
- Contact with people in general.
- Readings worked best.
- Haven't worked out at all [print on demand, web site].
- Results [from independent bookstores] have been poor. I never was given any graphic advertising or promotion, never given permission to create any of my own to be used by a store or school, etc., and was never "gone to bat" for by a store, never given a notice of a book in a newspaper, etc., and have found these benefits almost impossible to get. Through newspaper column and blogsite
- Launch parties and readings are best. Bookstores and Internet haven't done much.
- I have been a featured reader at a number of events (at bookstores and other venues in the Philadelphia area. I will sell my chapbooks at such reading events.
- Bookstores
- Back of room sales at speeches.
- It is important to realize that especially in the beginning patrons will be family and friends. People generally don't buy poetry books so we have only a few at the bookstores and that mostly for visibility and to be able to use the venue to read. We have only outlaid our own money to print the first book, we make runs of no more than a hundred at a time. [PenhouseInk has produced four volumes of writings by several authors, each.] Orchid societies but even better, I think, would be ladies who lunch and read, God bless them.

### How many copies did you have printed or reprinted? How many did you sell?

- 200. Sold 150.
- The book that I had published by you [WR] was NOT sold; rather it was used as a sample of my work, to gain entry into other projects (successfully so).
- 150. Sold 50. The rest I donated to an environmental group.
- I don't remember. 200-250? Sold most all of them.
- 125. Sold 121.
- 200. Sold 160.
- 200. Sold 20.
- 100 of *Threshbold*. 100 of *Memorial*, Under 100 *Afterlife and Other Stories*. Sold under 50.
- 100. N/A. Sold or gave away 90.
- 50. Sold 2.
- A quite small but effective quantity of fifty copies. Thus far roughly 20, nearly half of run within 3 months of publication,
- 50. Sold 15.
- 100. All of first printing.
- 100 copies of 2 different books. Sold approx. 20 copies of each book.
- Four titles, each 100 copies. No idea how many sold.
- 100 of 2 books.
- No record, but an educated guess is about 5% to 10% of the number placed in stores; in other words, poor.
- Three books: 1,000 copies (perfect bound). Sold 700; 200 copies (perfect bound). Sold 150; 200 copies (chapbook). Sold 160.
- 100. Sold 30.
- 50. None. [Not for sale]
- 100. Sold 90.
- *Umbrella Bones*, 100, and a reprint of 50; *Fedora*, 500 copies. *Umbrella Bones*, I'm out. I sold probably 30 percent, gave the rest away; *Fedora*, 200 copies out there, 300 remain. Of those out there, probably 40 percent were sold directly by me or consigned to sellers (book stores and distributors), the rest were given away.
- 100 copies each of three different volumes (*Mounds of Sounds*, *Sessions*, and *Ski Oklaboma*). So far, sold probably a third to a half of what I've had published 50. Sold 10.
- 100. Sold 75.
- Mostly as many as we print, though not always when and where we think we will [100 each run; some have been reprinted.]
- Too many. *Kosova Kosovo* (printing in Singapore—more means less freight cost, so 2000 hard cover, 3000 soft cover), sold under 200, gave many away; *Orchid Territory*, 2000. Am inching my way into the second thousand [OT], have about 800 plus left.
- I have no idea. I rely on the authors to sell books as well. [Author started her own press and publishes only her friends.]

**Did you recoup your monetary investment in the books?**

Yes           8  
No            17

- HAHHAHAHAHAHA!!
- No. I don't think that that is the point of self-publishing. Particularly poetry. No one, not even the poet laureate makes money with poetry.
- No, this was not the intention of the project.
- No, but the copies I have not sold are valuable to me, because it allows me to give a sample of my work to people who are interested.
- Yes, awhile back.
- Nope. It's a cheaper pastime than golf, at least here in Japan.
- It is important to keep the printing and selling costs reasonable [Yes, investment recouped.]
- Not as of yet, no. I have managed to gain back roughly 53% of my initial investment through mark-up of sale price.
- No (er—not yet)
- No; probably the opposite, went into the red.
- No, but I didn't expect to.
- That was never the point.
- Yes, but it's the NYT review we want (as long as its a good one). NB we always dream of the great review. Friend had her book reviewed in *Miami Herald* I was so jealous till I read it. She was crucified.

**What kind of feedback have you gotten from readers?**

- Great feedback, positive about both the content and design. people have asked if I would be publishing more.
- Excellent...I have been invited to submit to various journals.
- Very little, but what I received was positive.
- My poems have been included on unrelated web sites (one for a group—Capacitor—offering healing from trauma) and anthologies of poems
- Very positive and have been encouraged to have more printed for bookstores.
- Very positive. The cover (red and white and black with nude female figure) was quite an eye catcher They loved the poems, loved the cover design.
- People who don't like the work keep their mouths shut I think.
- Well, one of my colleagues loved my chapbook so much that he has decided to choose the same format/publisher for his BA project! I received an A for the project from my professor, all contributors loved it and

were proud to have been included in the publication, all other readers loved it as well — the chapbook format, the quality of the finished product, the quality of the content.

- Occasionally I get email from people who have visited my website, and read the entire novel. [The chapbook] “Chapped” was a condensed version.
- Very good feedback, thank you
- Not much.
- Extraordinary.
- Mostly positive.
- Two emails from readers (who got the books at bookstores) who wanted to say how interesting they found the work (and printed object). Friends and associates, of course, only have good to say.
- None. People DON'T feedback. NOBODY sees anything, tells anybody else, NOTHING is ever printed as notice in papers, and NO INPUT or reaction or opinion (by mail, etc.) comes back to me in any way, shape or form at any time. My alma-mater university, nor its newspapers, accept or grant one word of notice, ever, let alone review or critique. They never do one word of MENTION, refuse to. My city newspapers—ditto. I'm not a “name” and I have no book out by a “reputed firm,” etc.
- Very good feedback
- Many compliments.
- No reviews as yet. People who have read it like it. Of course these have mostly been people I know, so there is the grain of salt factor. But I've gotten positive feedback from people who really know poetry and who really didn't have to bother to say anything. Those libraries I've heard from seem grateful to have gotten it, for what that's worth.
- Very positive. I've been asked to autograph copies, which is very flattering.
- Mostly wonderful. Honest.
- Coordinaters of reading events have given me good feedback and have scheduled me as a featured reader based on the quality and content of my chapbooks. In one case, someone became so enamored of my books (which they found advertised at the Wordrunner website) that they traveled all the way from central Ohio to visit me after buying all of my chapbooks. So, I guess I could say that I have gained at least one “groupie” and, more appropriately I think, good friend in the process of self-publishing. I have also gotten an admiring letter from an “established” East Coast poet to whom I sent a copy of my chapbook.

- Positive.
- Excellent.
- Good, the perfect binding debate withstanding people like the feel of our books in their hands
- WONDERFUL for OT. All positive and from guys too — mostly orchid people, but anyone who reads it likes it and orchid people tend to love it. For KK, some find it hard to follow—too many characters but again, great response from people really touched by it and finding it funny. too.
- For the most part, very good.

### Was self-publishing worth the investment of time and money?

Yes	22
No	2
Yes and No	3

- Always.
- An emphatic—YES!
- It would have been if I had been able to attend readings and festivals.
- YES!!!!!!
- Absolutely. But it is not an endeavor in which you are seeking remuneration. It is purely for the pleasure and operable only at a fiscal loss.
- Totally! I plan to do so again soon.
- Yes, I highly recommend self-publishing, if it is through a reliable and professional company such as Wordrunner. But you must know who you are dealing with!
- Monetarily, no—personally, yes.
- Yes and no—yes, for the reasons stated above [positive feedback, affordability]; no, for the fact that I haven't been successful in selling as many books as I had hoped. Yes, absolutely. The price was right and I am proud of the product, both as poetry and “press”. I also quite enjoyed working with the designer who ran the press.
- Yes, I know as yet no other way to get the works before the public, and it has not “cost an arm and a leg”—if it did, I wouldn't be able to afford the luxury. Try it, but follow the rules, be a better businessman than I, and try to find help, people in your camp who believe in your cause and can “do” something or “go to bat” for you. Trying to swim alone is a sinking proposition, generally. I know a few people who COULD help— but most people—nearly everybody—are concerned with notice for THEIR project, not yours, and that's a hard priority to fight.
- Yes, I think so,

- Definitely.
- Absolutely. I expect to do it again and also to publish the work of others under my imprint.
- I think the process is very gratifying and there is a sense of fulfillment to say nothing of immortality and permanence. It's kind of like sending a child out into the world.
- To get it to the reading public, yes.
- Oh yes, we sort of evolved into a press, whatever that means
- Yes especially as increasingly it seems there's not much of any other way.

### What is your advice to writers who are considering self-publishing as an option?

- I think it depends on your project. For something like a chapbook, self-publishing is fairly straightforward and cost is fairly low. For longer works, and more involved projects, the costs are greater and require more of a commitment.
- Do it! It is a superior way to help individuals gain familiarity with your work and to network with other writers.
- Get a good printer or publisher. Promotion must come in the form of “hitting the road” for readings and festivals.
- I would recommend it, but also engage with a group that knows you to distribute it.
- Go for it. It is a very rewarding experience. Be willing to take a *risk* for your art. Find a publisher that is willing to work with you (as in patience) is committed to quality without breaking the bank, has extensive experience and the interest of the writer at heart. I found all of these qualities in Jo-Anne Rosen and Wordrunner .
- Do it. Get someone with experience to guide you. Go with Wordrunner.com! You go Jo-Anne!
- Do it because you want to and feel you have something to say NOT to make money.
- Find a publisher whose work you like, create a personal relationship with them, and go for it!
- Do it!
- Get to know the company that will be printing and preparing the book for you. Order sample chapbooks and be sure to review the materials, terms and conditions of your agreement in full. Only work with companies with a proven, reliable track record and be sure to keep the lines of communication open at all times.
- You really have to get out there and sell, sell, sell!
- Pay more attention to the writing than the publishing.

- In the words of Nike, just do it—it's affordable, relatively uncomplicated, especially if you have a computer, and it provides some instant gratification in terms of the immediate results of seeing your work in print.
- If you work with a designer or printer, see samples of their work beforehand. Get a feel for their congeniality and honesty before you commit. Will they let you work with them on design issues or is it an out-of-the-box product? And, as in any contract, make sure you understand the terms.
- If you do it for your own satisfaction, or as something to leave to your family, you'll be satisfied. If you want to market the book extensively, you must expend a great deal of time and money.
- Minimize the trouble. For example, by finding an experienced designer/printer like Wordrunner.
- It's very worthwhile. It helps you see your work in a different light: not as a manuscript but as something of permanence. It allows you to be critical and appreciative at the same time. There is a sense of accomplishment that comes from putting the work between two covers that is absent when it is just 8.5 x 11 in. 22 wt. bond.
- Make sure you really do have a book. If you're a poet or fiction writer, get your work out there to the small magazines. See what editors who don't know you think. When you've published a few things, then it's time to start thinking about a nicely-done chapbook. Having an acknowledgments page, even if there are only a few credits, will go a long way towards giving your collection credibility.
- Wait until you have a good body of work to choose from. Try to think in terms of a theme or at least a broad concept when choosing the poems for your publication. Go to many events in your area (open readings etc.). Take a few copies of your chapbook to sell and read from your book at the open mic. Search out target markets. Forget about making a profit.
- The way to go.
- It is an important responsibility, not "anyone can do it" well, take it as seriously as you would submitting your work and having it published by a bigname publisher; know it takes time and that there are a thousand decisions that at times will send you into decision fatigue, have someone you can consult with, find someone you can work with, thought it may be tempting don't necessarily "print" it yourself just because your wordprocessor has a publishing program. Be as wacky and individual as possible; i.e., in your voice/ in the cover. If you are going to have all the slog and expense, then please yourself. Remember though, no one is going to want to read anything just because

its sensitive or brilliant. Only if they want to turn the page. Be prepared to be totally crushed. But see yourself as part of the whole lot of actors waiting tables, groups (music) waiting for the big time; all those bios of stars who've been through the same stuff. Its neat to know what they've been through—we are a part of a great fraternity and will starve in great company. AND its all wide open and crazy now—blogging, God knows what. If I were not in my rocking chair...And remember how it used to be—or rather imagine how it was. The fact you can decide I'm going to cut out chapter 4 and shove half of 6 into 8—I'm old enough to have started pecking away on a Smith Corona manual with carbons, where if you made a mistake halfway down the page you started again. The difference now is unbelievable; then it was like having to plant your wheat if you wanted to make a cake; now you just make the damn cake.

- Selling books on the Internet is over-rated. People think it's the golden goose and do not realize all the work it takes

#### Would you do it again?

Yes	26
No	0
Maybe	1

- Of course I would!
- Yes. Only because I feel my work is important.
- Because of the quality of the work from Wordrunner I am seriously thinking of publishing a book with Gorham [i.e., perfect bound book].
- Would and will (2)
- Yes and I plan to.
- Yes, have already started!
- For my own personal satisfaction yes, and to give away as gifts, which is what I do also.
- Possibly, though I would hope to take advantage of better marketing strategies.
- Yes, and I AM doing it again as we speak.
- Yes, I am planning another book.
- I have been considering another self-pub project, a desk calendar, but distribution is an issue. I'm going to share load with a partner, too, who will handle design. we are just trying to find the time to do it. when I inquired with a pub house about such a project, they were interested but wouldn't be able to print it for minimum of 2 years after submission. that's not what I wanted to hear, so self-pub is what I'd still do.

### Other comments?

- Just that using your services was a gigantic first step for me and I remain deeply appreciative of your expertise.
- Just received a check from a bookstore and request for more chapbooks. This is their second request. They must be doing something right because they have sold over twenty chaps. I always felt if a bookstore wanted to sell a certain book, it could be done with placement, suggestions, etc.

JR: *Is there something special about this bookstore that makes it the best venue for your books?*

Maybe. First, they like me. Second, southern Maine has many people very concerned about the environment. It is the strongest area in the state. So those two factors might be the key. With the concern about the environment, you have targeting at work here although it was not purposeful.

- It's been a pleasure!
- I am seriously considering a third run for book stores for *Behind the Fog*.
- I am a regular reading of articles about self-publishing and also *Poet and Writers* magazine. It seems there are more people now wanting to write and fewer people wanting to read for recreation. Remember, if you are planning to sell a book to read for recreation you are not only competing with other books but with TV, movies, radio, CDs and any other pastime that takes people away from reading. I understand how-to books and cook books sell well. If you want to self-publish a book that details a particular area of expertise you have (e.g., self-publishing), it is possible to sell a number of those because people buy that kind of book. If you are thinking about self-publishing and want to make some assessment of whether or not your books will sell, go to a bookstore and look on the shelves. These people are professional booksellers. They stock things they think they can and which do sell. See where your book might fit in with the inventory that is there.

Also you have to have some way for the bookstores to return your book for credit or to buy on consignment. No one will buy take the financial risk to buy books they will be stuck with and cannot sell. All the trade paperbacks can be returned to the publishers for credit. Infinity Publishing in Haverford PA has a program that allows this to happen. None of the other name self-publishers do this to my knowledge. Of course they have a minimum number of pages to publish. They are all perfect bound and do not really lend themselves to poetry or chapbook publishing.

- Thank you again, Jo, it was a wonderful learning ex-

perience for me, your high quality services and your personal attention were much appreciated!

- Word Runner is an excellent resource, and Jo-Anne is a pleasure to work with.
- I think it's like everything else—money is the name of the game and you have to have contacts. I was happy with the product and your work, but you have to reach that one special group of people who are interested in poetry, which I feel is becoming a smaller number each day.
- The chapbooks helped primarily as an attractive way of getting attention for my work, which led to the publication of my first collection of poems by an established publishing house [www.howlingdogpress.com/toxicity.htm](http://www.howlingdogpress.com/toxicity.htm) it is important to be able to display and distribute fine work even if you lose money on the venture.
- I would probably discourage anyone from self-publishing anything except poetry. There is a tradition of self-publishing poetry, especially in chapbook form, and hence an acceptance of the idea. People will not automatically ignore it. Self-published fiction (though there are a few notable success stories here) tends to be ignored and to sink into immediate obscurity unless the author is exceptionally good at self-promotion. I do, however, think that self-publishing can work well for things like family and local histories, where there is a limited but well-defined market.

JR: *Yet there are numerous college programs churning out MFAs who write fiction short and long. This is a relatively recent development and the tradition of poetry chapbooks is long standing. So perhaps it's just an idea whose time has not yet come?*

I do think that there's something of a stigma attached to self-published fiction that is not the case for poetry, that readers of poetry are accepting of self-publishing, readers of fiction more suspicious. As to why that should be the case, I'm not sure. It may just be (in addition to the more established tradition for poetry) that fiction and poetry function rather differently for readers, who have different expectations for each.

I appreciate people who can sell/promote their writing; I just can't get into that mindset. Years ago I was a salesman in a department store and, even with customers coming in specifically to buy stuff, I was not a resounding success. At a library book fair once I was sitting next to a guy who had self-published something, humorous memoirs I think, and he went around selling it to people, speaking at Rotary clubs and such, and he evidently actually supported himself doing this, but he was obviously one of those "born salesmen." I did once speak to a group of retirees about a book I'd just published and brought some copies along and offered

them a discount and, much to my surprise, they bought every copy I had. If you can do that constantly, I guess you can sell books. But in general selling books (whether to a publisher or to the public) is tricky.

- Joanne is a pleasure to work with.
- Never forget to value the accomplishment of creating a chapbook for publication. Perhaps the worst thing that can happen to a writer is to be ignored and having a publication of your own can help fight this. Poetry is a very important and valuable art in our civilization and sometimes gets the short shrift. The worst thing that I have done regarding my chapbooks has been to forget what an important accomplishment and contribution a volume of poetry can be amidst all the other so-called “important” events of the day like fighting wars or closing billion-dollar business deals. Poets are important and what they have to say can change lives and the course of cultures for the better.
- Cover design and good printing help sales. Wordrunner can be depended upon for quality.
- I prefer Wordrunner to Xlibris, who published my children’s book. Too many people and departments involved. It got confusing. The advantage was being listed on amazon.com.

- The big shock is to realise that the actual reading of books is becoming a niche market— It seems to be something like quilting or painting— not an automatic, mainstream thing for everyone like watching TV. Orchid people, our people i.e., customers, friends, who have laughed at the back cover of OT, laughed as they talked to me, who KNOW me, who love orchids, will say firmly I don’t read, just as much as the more usual OH I have no time! (One trick, apart from lowering the price, is to say, well, give it as a present. Or, I won’t write your name in it and you can re-gift it! Ha Ha!)

Given the tough market, you might as well try publishing yourself. You can now sell new books via Amazon Marketplace, just as used book dealers do. Amazon takes the order but you ship books directly to the buyers. Amazon reimburses you for postage and pays you more than for books they retail directly (where there’s a large markup). I just had my first order and Amazon paid over \$9.00, as opposed to (after mailing costs) \$4 something. [The book retails for \$14.95.]

**NOTE (9/18/08):** Books can be sold on Amazon Marketplace only if they are already listed in the Amazon catalog. The way around this (aside from paying \$40 a month for “Pro Merchant Program”) is to sign up for the “Advantage” program (\$30/year) and get the book listed, then switch to the Marketplace. See [www.wordrunner.com/publish/pb-marketing.html](http://www.wordrunner.com/publish/pb-marketing.html) for details and links.

## Respondents

The authors who participated in this survey and their books are listed below along with press names and websites, where applicable. Samples of their work may also be found at [www.wordrunner.com/chapbook/booklist.htm](http://www.wordrunner.com/chapbook/booklist.htm).

### **Peter Baroth**

*Mounds of Sounds*  
*Sessions*  
*Ski Oklahoma*

### **Linda Bielowski**

*Spirit Echoes*

### **Frank de Caro**

*Ballad Girls and Other Poems*

### **Tom Fallon**

*In the First Place*

### **Romana E. Frey**

*In Our Own Words*

### **judi goldberg** (PenHouseInk Press)

*Naked Writings*  
*June Bugs Out of Season*  
*Remembering Our Future*  
*Refractions*  
[www.penhouseink.com](http://www.penhouseink.com)

### **John Gribble**

*Umbrella Bones*

### **Jim Gunshinan**

*What the Body Wants*

### **Ellen Hart**

*Miles to Go*  
*Behind the Fog*

### **Derek Henkel**

*Chapped*  
[www.dirtyredkiss.com](http://www.dirtyredkiss.com)

### **Eric Hoffman**

*Threnody*  
<http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/NCW/hoffman.htm>

### **Ronald Jones**

*Twelve Love Poems*

### **Christopher Ketcham**

*Notes from September 11*  
[www.christopherketchum.com](http://www.christopherketchum.com)

**Ed Krizek**

*In Memory of Virginia Ruth Cook Krizek*  
*Threshold*

**James Heller Levinson**

*Alameda Street*  
*Because You Wanted A Wedding Ring*  
*See-saw* (with Anthony Seidman)

**Arlene L. Mandell**

*Variations on a Theme*

**Hank Mattimore**

*Legacy of the Heart: Writing Your Own Spiritual Will*  
*Life's a Growin' Thing: Ya Grows or Ya Dies*  
<http://yagrowsoryadies.blogharbor.com>

**Keith Moore**

*Big Bruce Baddley*  
*What They Mean by America*  
*(and Other Poems)*

**Mary Motes**

Redland Press  
*Kosova Kosovo*  
*Orchid Territory*  
[www.orchidmall.com/misc/motesbook.htm](http://www.orchidmall.com/misc/motesbook.htm)

**Page Nelson-Saginor**

*Apex*  
*Case Studies*  
*Gallery Effects*  
*Stern Ornaments*

**Gloria North**

*The Long Ritard*  
[www.glorianorth.com](http://www.glorianorth.com)

**Kim O'Donnel**

*Search Party*

**Joseph Powell**

*Blood on the Page*  
[www.musesreview.org/josephpowell](http://www.musesreview.org/josephpowell)

**Barbara Toohey**

(The Fourth Street Writers)  
*Nearly Naked*

**Michael Waterson**

*The Book of Kith & Kin*

**Dianna Wilder**

*America Under Attack!*

Special thanks to **Laura Beausoleil** of Philos Press for her input into this survey. Laura doesn't self-publish; she started her own press to publish her friends, notably books by George Hitchcock, Susan Kennedy, G.P. Skratz, Wilma Stegmuller, Michael Tuggle and Nanos Valaoritis. Available at [www.philospress.org](http://www.philospress.org).