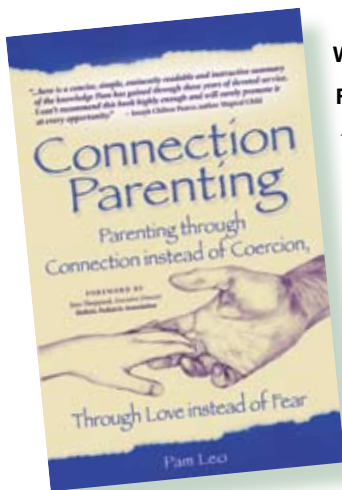


You Go, GIRL!

Strength in Numbers

There are book clubs...and then there is Nancy Cleary's book club, where mom writers get launched, published and supported



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FOLLOW A COWBOY off into the sunset? For Nancy Cleary, the answer is you get freedom and fun, lots of life lessons and an idyllic place to raise your children.

When Nancy fell in love with Joey, she left a corporate job in San Diego and headed to Oregon, where Joey's family held annual rodeos on their 100-year-old farm. The

marriage on paper, alas, didn't last long but the relationship did: it gave Nancy two beautiful children, a quiet life in the country and a friendship with her cowboy that allowed her to make a living. "Joey is always here for the kids or he takes them to the farm while I work," Nancy says. "I have always been the moneymaker."

It was Nancy's gifts as a graphic designer and natural-born promoter that gave her the ability to support herself and her two children through many difficult years. Her brochures, catalogs, logos and other marketing materials made lots of companies look good and they paid her well

Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing became devoted exclusively to helping mom authors publish, publicize and sell their books.

for it. She managed to put a down payment on a 50-year-old farmhouse and make a good living as a single mom.

Then, between the dot-com bust of the late 1990s and 9/11, her client base dried up. Though nervous, Nancy saw another opportunity on the horizon for mothers like herself. "I spent so much time creating beautiful catalogs for other people's products," she recalls. "I wanted to make a catalog with my own products."

Those products initially were "kits" designed to help mom entrepreneurs. Nancy collaborated with Lesley Spencer, who runs Home-Based Working Moms online



(www.hbwm.com), creating a keepsake box to go along with the kits' workbooks and service coupons. The elegant and generous-sized box served as a traveling "desk" for moms trying to make a park bench into an office chair.

Slowly, Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing (named after Nancy's children, Wyatt Henry and MacKenzie Jean) became devoted exclusively to helping mom authors publish, publicize and sell their books.

Hard Lessons

At first, Nancy chose just one book a year, always with the hope that she and the author would hit paydirt. In 2003, she published a promising work by Kristie Tamsevicius. Kristie, who had written the book *I Love My Life: A Mom's Guide to Working from Home*, was frustrated because a big publisher kept stalling her print date. Nancy took it on, but couldn't afford printing the 15,000 copies that one distributor demanded. So they split the deal 90:10 and Kristie paid for the printing.

They worked for months developing a cover, finalizing layout, making deals with book distributors and scheduling author interviews. The book appeared in 111 Barnes &

Noble bookstores and their hopes were high. Then, three months later, they had a huge percentage of returns. The \$35,000 check Nancy received was turned over to Kristie, who was able to cover her costs. She gave the promised 10 percent to Nancy, who used it to pay her overdue mortgage. "It saved my house, but barely," she says.

The book was in every way excellent, but Nancy had to rethink her business strategy. So much effort and money was being channeled into one book that even if it appeared on the New York Times Bestseller List, Wyatt-MacKenzie would have a hard time making a profit. This was one of the many hard lessons Nancy learned along the way to becoming a successful book publisher.

During this time, Nancy also had to deal with the well-meaning (and not-so-well-meaning) people in her life who questioned her decisions. "There were lots of 'eye-rollers' who would hear that Oprah Winfrey was interested in getting a copy of one of our books and would say, 'There's no way you're going to be on that show,'" Nancy recalls. The kids at Wyatt and MacKenzie's school considered Nancy the slightly kooky mom who donated books instead of money to every fundraiser.



Still, Nancy never wavered. She kept a journal through the hard years, digging deep within herself to find what made her happiest. It wasn't money, she kept concluding — helping authors succeed with her own creative and marketing skills was the right thing to do. Meanwhile, the payoff would come, she was sure of it.

After being “in the red” for four years, Nancy decided that there was strength in numbers

and founded a cooperative called Mom-Writers Publishing Cooperative. Her innovative concept is a co-op made up of more than a dozen authors, all women and mothers. Members not only get their books published, but they also receive a marketing program and materials, author branding, publicity and a piece of the co-op “pie.” Besides a 12.5-percent royalty on each book sold, members collectively receive 12.5 percent of the cooperative's total net profit; 25 percent of the profit is invested back into the business.

More Bang for the Book

It's the pie that catapulted Nancy into the big leagues of specialty publishing. “This year has been incredible,” says Nancy, who has watched her business add another zero to its income every month. She now has 15 authors, with another two very close to signing a deal. Revenue this year is based on seven books instead of one; currently there are 27 titles sending messages of hope and inspiration, including *S.A.H.M. I Am: Tales of a Stay-at-Home Mom in Europe* by Christine Louise Hohlbaum; *Connection Parenting: Parenting Through Connection Instead of Coercion, Through Love Instead of Fear* by Pam Leo; and *Mommyhood Diaries: Living the Chaos One Day at a Time* by Julie Watson Smith. Nancy welcomes authors who have been turned down by at least two other publishers or who have been published before. She looks for a well-developed manuscript and proof that the aspiring author knows her market and has ideas for how to publicize her work.

Printing and production costs are part of the deal. Members also get marketing help, graphic design and publicity through the company's dynamic public-relations efforts. Over the years, Wyatt-MacKenzie's authors have appeared on *CBS Early Show*, *ABC World News Now*, *CNN*

and in dozens of newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune* and the *Boston Globe*. Book excerpts have run in such magazines as *Child*, *American Baby*, *Parent* and *Parenting*. One author even landed a stint as a spokesperson for Huggies diapers.

Once Nancy decides to take on a book, the author receives an “Advance Package” worth about \$10,000. It includes professional book packaging, with a cover and interior layout; an author-branding program complete with website graphics, business-card design, promotional fliers, event signs and ads; and ongoing consulting through the production, distribution and selling time of the book. Members can buy books at 60 percent off retail and sell the book themselves on their websites, keeping 100 percent of the profit. Best of all, members work as a team so that if a TV producer is looking for an expert, everyone gets a shot at the exposure. “You can't have a big presence as a single mom (writer); but you can have it as a collaborative,” Nancy says.

Pam Leo, a work-at-home grandmother who is co-parenting her granddaughter, taught a parenting class for 17 years. Through her experiences she formed a philosophy of child-rearing that centers on behavior that encourages parents to connect, not disconnect, with their child. That philosophy became a book through the cooperative, and it sold 500 copies in the first month. The book garnered a rave review from acclaimed *The Magical Child* author Joseph Chilton Pierce. “She put her dreams on hold to help out her daughter,” Nancy says, “and now she's beaming with pride.”

While Nancy continues to help her authors make their dreams come true, she also imparts plenty of real-life wisdom. The road to publishing success isn't easy, and for the handful who make it big, thousands more languish in relative obscurity. Nancy makes sure her members understand that the success achieved as a writer is only part of the story. Enhanced recognition in their chosen field, speaking engagements, second books and other writing opportunities are just a few of the value-added benefits that make being part of Nancy's book club so exciting and full of promise.

Even in her cash-strapped days, Nancy never stopped helping others around her achieve success. Now it seems the hard work and faith have paid off. Nancy may have ridden off into the sunset with a cowboy that day many years ago, but her own sun has been rising ever since. 🌞