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ATG Interviews Marcia Bartusiak

Katina Strauch
Against the Grain, kstrauch@comcast.net

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ATG: I heard that good things were mentioned about BookSurge at the recent “Future of the Book” Conference in Cairns Australia, and I saw in the press that author Paul Evans, who has published with BookSurge, received an IPPY award for his work on the 2003 Book Expo. Now the Frankfort Book Fair and other events are coming up. Will we see increased visibility from BookSurge?

The Frankfort Book Fair is the premiere book event in the world of publishing. This year we had our first booth there, and I think we had about 50 appointments with international publishers to explain our products and to increase the number of titles within our global distribution system. At the Frankfort Book Fair we’re supported by all of our organizations, so not only will there be a contingency from Charleston but from our partner relationships from BookSurge in Spain, the U.K., and the Netherlands. We were there in force to bring our services to the world of publishing through this historic event. We led two educational seminars at the Frankfort Book Fair on global, inventory-free distribution and we held an educational seminar at ALA Midwinter in San Diego on a Sunday afternoon.

To promote our Spanish titles, we attended the Guadalajara Book Fair and will continue to participate globally and are planning more events for 2004.

ATG: You have come a very long way in a very short time since May 2000. Any plans for staff expansion? Like many young Internet companies, BookSurge relies on venture capital. Since you are privately held, who are your investors? How much money did you raise to get started? Do you plan to sell or go public in the near future?

BOOKSURGE: BookSurge is internally funded. Our growth has been due to the company’s success in creating an ongoing revenue stream. We are profitable because we live within our means. Because of the increase in our business to business market and addition of new products and services, we are increasing our B2B Sales operations.

The company is growing quickly because it is well managed and we have no loss leading products. In the world of global business, our type of company is often attractive to larger conglomerates but our mission from day to day is always to provide affordable cutting edge services to authors and publishers wherever we can and so that’s our mission and we are sticking to it.

ATG: Thank you.
verse, in 1986. It was a layman’s guide to the frontiers of astrophysics and cosmology. This was followed in 1993 with Through a Universe Darkly, a history of astronomers’ centuries-long quest to discover the universe’s composition. My latest book, published in 2000, is Einstein’s Unfinished Symphony, about the on-going attempt to detect gravity waves, the last experimental test of Einstein’s theory of general relativity. It was my most enjoyable book to research and write, because I was able to capture the excitement of a field just as it is emerging.

Einstein’s Unfinished Symphony is a sneak preview of the first new astronomy of the twenty-first century. New observatories have just been built, in both the United States and Europe, which promise to provide a whole new sense of what to explore the heavens. Instead of collecting light waves, these novel instruments will allow astronomers to detect vibrations in the fabric of space-time, literally cosmic spacequakes created by the universe’s most violent events, such as stars exploding or black holes and neutron stars colliding. Since gravity waves share the same frequencies as sound waves, when they are recorded they will be played back as sound waves. Hence, the title of my book: capturing these waves will complete Einstein’s unfinished symphony.

Detection is important to astronomy because gravity waves are the only means to obtain the first direct evidence that black holes exist and will eventually allow us to eavesdrop on the remnant echo of the Big Bang itself. My book chronicles the forty-year quest to reach this moment when observations are beginning.

**ATG:** You have been published by big commercial trade presses and by lesser presses. Tell us about your publishing experience with these various presses.

**MB:** My first two books were with two well-established New York publishers: First, Times Books, an imprint of Random House, and then HarperCollins. Big trade presses do have certain benefits for an author starting out. Their far-flung distribution networks get your book into the major outlets, and their connections help you get reviewed in major newspapers and magazines. But, unless you win the “book lottery” and get on the best-seller list, they don’t provide much support for marketing and publicity. First-authors are often on their own in getting the word out and setting up lectures and signings through their own networking. This situation has only magnified in recent years as publishing houses merge and focus more attention on selected blockbuster projects, which have higher potential for big profits. But I have discovered recently that there are alternate paths. Several academic and university presses are now broadening their mission to include works for the general public. Within the last few years the National Academies Press, for example, established the Joseph Henry Press (JHP) to publish books on science, technology, and health that are aimed for a wider audience. Stephen Mautner, the executive editor of Joseph Henry and an artful persuader, convinced me to sign on with them for Einstein’s Unfinished Symphony. It turned out to be my most delightful publishing experience. Since they bring out fewer books each publishing season than the larger presses, I became the bigger fish in the smaller pond. Joseph Henry not only sent me on book tours on both the East and West Coasts, they also ran advertisements in major media outlets, publicity that ultimately led to book sales that surpassed my numbers with the bigger trade presses. My experience with JHP was also a return to the publishing days of old, where the author knows everyone on staff personally. There was a “let’s-put-on-a-show” atmosphere within the JHP offices that was exhilarating. Although I continue to work with commercial publishers (Pantheon/Vintage approached me to compile an anthology of the major discovery papers in astronomy, a book that will be out next year), I hope to maintain my relationship with JHP as well.

**ATG:** You have worked with libraries the span of your twenty-year career. How have libraries changed? How much do librarians and librarians and librarians as much as you used to? What has changed for the good? And for the bad?

**MB:** I grew up in an era—the fifties and sixties—when there was little education about library resources. In high school and college, I thought of librarians as the people who primarily rubber-stamped your books at the checkout. I had no idea the wealth of knowledge at their fingertips. I stumbled about the stacks learning about abstracts, indexes, and such on my own. This changed during my employment at Discover magazine, which was then part of the Time-Life magazine empire. There was an extensive library covering a whole floor of the Time-Life building in New York, and when getting background information on various stories I quickly learned how valuable it was to ask the librarians where to find the answers. After that, I never hesitated to seek out new “tricks of the trade” when visiting other archives and libraries. If only they told me back in high school! With these added skills, I probably use the library more now than in the past. Granted, today I download more journals and magazine articles right from the Internet (I’m in love with JSTOR for looking up old science papers), but nothing as yet has replaced the ability to spend all day in the library perusing the books. Until books, old and new, are completely digitized, I’ll be a regular library visitor. The one thing I do miss is the old card catalog; a computerized index doesn’t feel quite the same. I recall always finding something interesting by taking out one of the books and spending some time flipping through the cards in and around my topic of concern.

**ATG:** Do you publish in electronic format? In print? Can you tell us the pros and cons of each one from your standpoint as an author?

**MB:** Up to this point, I have always published the old-fashioned way: in print, although some of my articles have been posted on magazine Websites. Primarily, that’s because of finances: a successful business model has not yet been established for freelance writers to receive as much compensation for an electronic article as one published the traditional way. If that ever changes, I would be eager to disseminate my writing more widely on the Web. Einstein’s Unfinished Symphony is available free to read on the Web, a situation that disconcerted me when first informed of this fact. The National Academies Press has a policy that most of their works be freely available to the public electronically. You can try for yourself at http://books.nap.edu/catalog/9821.html. Over time, I’ve come around to the NAP viewpoint: you see this service as equivalent to someone going into a bookstore and casually picking up a book to see if they want to buy it. The Web book cannot be downloaded in its entirety but only read one page at a time. So, it offers the public the opportunity to take a book out for a test-drive, viewing the pages exactly as they appear in print. Since it didn’t seem to affect my book sales in any negative way (it may actually have helped), I’m now very supportive of this idea.

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From the Reference Desk

by Tom Gilson  (Head, Reference Services, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Protestantism, a dominant force in Western development since the early 1500’s, has grown and spread worldwide. Now there is a comprehensive four-volume reference set that examines and informs its historic diversity and major traditions. Published by Routledge and edited by noted scholar Hans J. Hillerbrand, the Encyclopedia of Protestantism (2004, 0-415-92473-3, $495) contains over 1,000 entries written by a team of international scholars.

As Mr. Hillerbrand notes in his introduction, “the historical dimension dominates” this encyclopedia. However, its coverage is rich and complex. There are entries on Protestant development in places as different as Estonia and Zimbabwe, and Ulster and the Philippines. Specific movements are discussed ranging from the Awakenings in America and England to the Mass Movements, or conversions of the lower classes, in India. Theological issues from the hallmark teaching of justification to toleration and the acceptance of pluralism to the millennial notion of rapture are given equal consideration. There are also articles on particular creeds and individual religious works, as well as those on specific institutions and organizations. Darker