



**Interview with Jessica Tribble, associate publisher
Poisoned Pen Press
Recorded at PubWest 2010**

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- Q: We're taking the mystery out of independent publishing today while attending the annual conference of PubWest in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Welcome to Beyond the Book everyone. This is Chris Kenneally, Director of Business Development for Copyright Clearance Center. And joining me today is Jessica Tribble, who is associate publisher for Poisoned Pen Press, based in Scottsdale, Arizona. Jessica, welcome.
- A: Hi, thanks for having me.
- Q: It's nice to have you join us. You've got a very interesting line of books in your publishing sites, the mystery novel. Let's talk first about what brings you to PubWest. It's a conference, quite well-attended, so it seems to me, of a lot of independent publishers, not just in the West. The joke I've told is it's not just the West, it's the Western Hemisphere. But independent publishing, covers a whole range of topics. What are you hoping to get out of a conference like this?
- A: We come to these conferences looking for different ideas, way to expand our business model, ways to go about new marketing, things to take back to our authors so that we have a fresh perspective and get an idea of what's going on with other independent publishers in the area. These sorts of conferences offer a variety of people with whom we can talk and converse and really share ideas. Publishing tends to be very quiet, by itself, solitary, and here we get a chance to be part of the larger community.
- Q: Is it hard, in independent publishing, to keep up? There seems to be so many changes. I mean before, once you knew how to print a book and get it to the store, you're pretty much done with that part of the problem. The big problem, of course, was finding stuff worth publishing in the first place. Now you're keeping up with everything Steve Jobs does and Jeff Bezos and all the others. Is it tough?
- A: It is tough. And I think, as Dominique Raccach pointed out this morning, we've increased our work exponentially. At this point, we're really looking to continue to grow our list and also to try to reach readers in new ways and to keep their interest when the book doesn't seem to be the new and best technology out there.



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- Q: Mystery readers – we’ll talk about mystery writers and mystery publishers in a minute – but mystery readers, they are pretty much addicted to the genre, right? I mean once they’ve finished one, they want to pick up another one. Does that have any kind of role in your decisions around e-publishing?
- A: Absolutely. We actually will not take authors unless they agree to do a series. Occasionally, we do a one-off or a standalone, but it’s fairly unusual. E-publishing offers us an alternative to the mass market paperback of the yesteryear. I categorize reading into three categories. You have airplane reading, bubble bath reading, and bedtime reading. Airplane reading is the mass market. That’s what you take with you. You leave it on the plane. You leave it in your hotel room. You don’t feel bad about it. Bubble bath reading is a little more fun, a little fluffier, but again, it’s not the sort of thing you revisit. And the bedtime reading can sometimes be a bit juicier. Our mystery readers run the gamut. They could – or gambit. They could be anything. They could be any of these three categories, but they’re really looking for something that continues to go forward, that continues to provide them with entertainment.
- Q: So you really want to be there wherever they want and whenever they want to have a book from your list?
- A: Exactly. So for some of our readers, I mean nobody wants to take an electronic device into the bubble bath, for instance. On the other hand, a hardcover can be really heavy to hold in bed. And these mass paperbacks, anyone who’s read them knows that they feel gross. They’re really hard to read. And so the e-reader can help us there as well. So we want to be accessible in as many ways as possible.
- Q: What about the authors? How welcoming are they to all these changes?
- A: Pretty welcoming. Our authors are generally debut authors. They have day jobs or they’re retired. These are people who really have the passion for writing. And they want to make sure that their word and their content gets out there. The book as a form is not as important to them as the book as entertainment is.
- Q: Tell us about your authors. Tell us about Poisoned Pen Press. How long have you been in business? How many books are available and maybe cite a couple of your more prominent authors.
- A: Poisoned Pen Press was founded roughly 1997 by Barbara Peters, our editor-in-chief, and Robert Rosenwald, our publisher. We’re in Scottsdale, Arizona, as you mentioned before. We started out as a reprint house. They noticed – Barbara



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Peters also owns the Poisoned Pen Bookstore, which is one of the most renowned mystery book stores in the world. And she noticed that a lot of mysteries were no longer available in their entirety – the series were not available. So we started out as a reprint house. But then it became apparent that new authors were having a hard time getting published. So we're looking for new authors. Voice is really important to us. And we have about 900 books in our backlist at this point. We publish roughly 36 new books a year at this point also. And we're just constantly looking for new ideas and new authors who come from all over the country.

Q: How do you feel about making those books in the backlist available in e-book form of one kind or another? Is that an exciting opportunity?

A: We are making them available in e-book. We also have all of them available via Lightning Source or print on demand. We'd like our books to continue to be available. We don't want to see the same thing happen or the reason that we started the press to happen again with our own books. So the e-books give us a chance to inexpensively provide those books for as many people as are willing to buy them.

Q: And one of the topics at this conference, of course, is social media. People are still talking about Facebook, although it seems like it's been around for years now and we should all be used to it. Are you engaged a lot in that kind of community building as a publisher and are your authors doing that sort of thing?

A: I am huge on social media, and I've been tweeting this entire meeting as well as using Facebook. And I was just having a discussion with our publisher and he said well, why were you tweeting during Dominique's presentation? And I said why wouldn't I be tweeting during Dominique's presentation? It's a chance to continue that conversation, to be part of a conversation, even though we're in different parts of the world or different parts of the country. And our authors, we encourage them to do that as well. Some of them are better at it than others, but it's a new means of communication. We no longer have to pick up the phone or rely on a print newsletter. We can rely on e-mail and social marketing as a way to continue talking about things that we may not be able to do otherwise, because we only see each other occasionally.

Q: Right. And I think that's the beautiful thing about it myself. People can hear you, see you, learn from you on a constant basis, even though they might only see you a couple of times a year. It's a great way to stay in touch and it's a great way to extend yourself.

A: Absolutely. And we really encourage our authors. Authors increasingly are more and more responsible for their marketing and publicity. Publishers don't have the



budgets to provide for that anymore. And social media is a cheap way to do that, to reach a lot of people, to say hey, I'm having a book signing, to say hey, I'm having this problem in writing my next book. I mean it's not just about the advertising. It's about letting people in on your weird little world, because they want to know that you're a person, too.

Q: It's all about connection, I think is the case. We've been chatting with Jessica Tribble, who is associate publisher of Poisoned Pen Press, based in Scottsdale, Arizona. Both of us are here in Santa Fe for a PubWest conference. Jessica, thanks so much for chatting with me.

A: Thank you.

Q: And for everyone at Copyright Clearance Center, this is Chris Kenneally. Thank you for listening.

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