

Against the Grain

Volume 30 | Issue 4

Article 73

2018

The Scholarly Publishing Scene – Publishing Memories

Myer Kutz

Myer Kutz Assoc., Inc., myerkutz@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kutz, Myer (2018) "The Scholarly Publishing Scene – Publishing Memories," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 30: Iss. 4, Article 73.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.8302>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Publishing Memories

Column Editor: **Myer Kutz** (President, Myer Kutz Associates, Inc.) <myerkutz@aol.com>

I first met **Sarah Greene** around 1986 while I was running scientific and technical publishing at **Wiley**. She'd been an acquisitions editor in biological sciences at **Macmillan**. A pleasant Nebraska native, **Sarah** struck me as an open and honest person, one you could do business with without having to invite a lawyer to attend your conversations. She was married to a journalist named **William Tucker**, who wrote newspaper columns decrying New York City's rent control laws. Fortunately, they lived in a nice Brooklyn brownstone. **Sarah** mentioned that she was friends with **Janet Maslin**, who wrote movie and, later, book reviews for *The New York Times*.

Sarah had found a group of researchers, led by molecular biologist **Fred Ausubel**, with joint appointments at **Massachusetts General Hospital** and **Harvard Medical School**, who wanted to publish a collection of molecular biology protocols. Because the protocols were continually being updated, and because new ones were continually being added to the collection, the researchers thought a bound book was an inappropriate publication vehicle. They wanted a looseleaf format that could be updated, say, quarterly. This was before CD-ROMs were available. Back then, organizations actually had looseleaf repositories where clerks inserted updates into looseleaf binders and tossed outdated pages. It was a labor-intensive business, from start to finish, including the publishing process, and **Sarah's** boss at **Macmillan** wanted no part of it. I, on the other hand, was on the lookout for subscription-based services (I preferred the term "service" to "product"), and, together with my then admirable boss, **Bob Douglas**, who turned out to be an incredibly hard-nosed negotiator — so much of one that I had to stifle a laugh at his antics — **Sarah** and I worked out a joint-venture deal. She was treated as a separate company, in essence.

Molecular biology protocols were a hot topic, the update features of our service fit the needs of the market, and we garnered an astounding number of subscriptions in the first year of publication. Our success didn't gain company-wide admiration. Everyone hated looseleaf services. I can recall a large meeting where only one or two colleagues, for whom I was extremely grateful, were in my corner when the protocols product was being slammed around. And, truth be told, fulfillment operations were a horror show. But, in the end, no one could argue with the revenues being generated. **Sarah** and I went on to establish more protocols services. Editors in **Wiley's** Chichester, England office signed up their own protocols services, even though my deal with **Sarah** was exclusive. You couldn't keep busy bees away from the honey.

Sarah's relationship with **Wiley** soured after I left the company in January, 1990 and started a consulting business. According to **Sarah's** account to me some time later, **Wiley** unilaterally changed the relationship from a

joint venture between two companies to the conventional one of an outside editor providing manuscripts to a publisher. I was in no position to become involved in any such dispute, so I let it slip away from me. In any case the protocols publications appear to me to be chugging along quite nicely, as is **Sarah**, who went on to other ventures. You can google her to see what a fine run she's had in publishing.

One of my clients in the latter 1990s was an older gent named **Bob Noyes**, who owned some choice real estate in Hillsdale, New Jersey. He also ran a small sci-tech publishing company, called **Noyes Publications**; he asked me to sell it for him. Unfortunately, by that time, **Bob** had given up reprinting government publications, and sales had shrunk by half. I wasn't able to get any large sci-tech publisher interested in even taking a peak at the list of current and prospective titles (the latter group is what's most valuable). So on Fridays, I'd stop off on my way from my New York City home to a weekend house in Columbia County (just west of the Berkshires) that I owned back then, and report a lack of progress to **Bob** while we had lunch at a local watering hole.

This situation changed when I went to the **Frankfurt Book Fair** and came across a little publishing company that I'd never heard of. It was **William Andrew**, which are the first and middle names of the company's founder — **Bill Woishnis**. A graduate of **Worcester Polytechnic Institute**, **Bill**, who was a tall man with a resonant deep baritone, had flirted with an acting career. More lucrative was a stint in the early 1980s as a **Hewlett-Packard** plastics engineer. In 1990, he founded his publishing company with technical data books that he put together for the plastics industry. By the time I met **Bill**, the company occupied space in a repurposed building in Norwich, New York, which is about two hours drive west from my current home near Albany. He had a partner, **Chris Forbes**, from a Canadian branch of that well-known family. **Noyes Publications'** titles list looked to **Bill** and **Chris** like an efficient way to expand their own list of titles. In 1999, the same year the partners started **Knovel**, the online technical books service that **Elsevier** now owns, they bought **Bob Noyes's** publishing assets. Just before the closing, **Bob** got cold feet, but after a short period when I thought a nice payday was about to evaporate, the sale went through.

Afterwards, I helped with **William Andrew's** marketing and later published two engineering handbooks, one on environmental degradation of materials and the other on farm, dairy, and food machinery with them. **Elsevier** bought the company in 2008 after an 18-month shared distribution agreement, and subsequent editions of those two handbooks (in addition to another one on plastics engineering) have been published by **Elsevier's William Andrew** im-

print. Along the way, **Bill** and **Chris** had a falling out, and **Bill** left **Knovel**. I never learned exactly what went wrong. In the summer of 2009, **Bill** collapsed in an Oneonta park, while waiting for his young son, and died of a heart attack. He was just 50. I'd seen him for the last time when we'd had lunch not far from Norwich — just two friends shooting the breeze and, for the most part, steering clear of any serious issues. My sense of him was that he was grieving, but I also had a sense that he was making it difficult to read him. Not that he owed me any explanations, of course. I saw **Chris** once more, in sleek new **Knovel** offices in a building across Fifth Avenue from the **New York Public Library**. I don't remember exactly when my visit took place. I did learn that it was **Chris** who'd suggested to publishers that they should cut authors' royalties for sales through **Knovel** and other electronic aggregators from 50% — the traditional cut for subsidiary rights sales — down to 10%, which, as far as I know, they've all done. (This alteration in contract terms for my many engineering handbooks has cost me a lot of money over the years, although now that **Elsevier** owns **Knovel**, the change doesn't affect the three handbooks I publish with them. The change, on the other hand, might have saved **Knovel** until **Elsevier** scooped it up.) That revelation aside, **Chris** and I had a pleasant time together. I don't remember that **Bill's** name came up in any way. Since that meeting, I've received emails from time to time asking for support for **Chris's** and his wife's philanthropic activities.

The **Elsevier** acquisition of **William Andrew** was an asset sale. That meant that **Martin Scrivener**, an experienced publisher there, whom I'd met on one of my trips to the Norwich offices, was "out of a job," as he put it on the phone to me not long ago. But it wasn't as if **Martin**, a Brit in his sixties now, was without resources and prospects. He already had his own list of ten humanities titles while he was at **William Andrew**, including conference papers on business and religion, whose organizer funded their publication. **Martin** was able to convert his imprint into a co-publishing deal with **Wiley**, which produced immediate cash flow, so there was no need to go to a bank for a start-up loan. He has a partner, **Phillip Carmical**, with whom he shares editorial work on about 50 books a year in a wide variety of science and engineering disciplines with the **Wiley-Scrivener** imprint. They use freelance copyeditors and they have "a very productive relationship with their typesetters." **Wiley's** role is to take care of the printing, marketing, and distribution. **Martin** maintains a modest but effective web presence which announces the firm's core value: *Putting Authors (and Users) First*. As long as your books are meeting the needs of the market, it's a slogan that touches the right nerve, in my view. 🐘

