

NEW MAN AT THE HELM

DENNIS NORMILE ELECTED FCCJ PRESIDENT

FCCJ Election Result 2006

	25%	50%	75%	Total
<i>Kanji</i>				
	28	27	22	77
<i>President</i>				
Dennis Normile	35	40	35	154
Pio d'Emilia	24	20	21	79
<i>For 1st Vice President</i>				
Bradley Martin	35	37	32	141
Khaldon Azhari	23	21	23	88
<i>For 2nd Vice President</i>				
Richard Hanson	27	23	23	99
Miki Tanikawa	32	34	31	129
<i>For Secretary</i>				
Nobuko Hara	30	25	28	101
Jim Treece	28	32	27	125
<i>For Treasurer</i>				
Yoshisuke Inuma	50	48	48	191
Per Bodner	5	9	7	32
<i>Director at Large</i>				
Martyn Williams	33	35	36	145
James Simms	27	22	23	103
Anthony Rowley	25	19	22	98
Tim Kelly	23	39	31	124
Benjamin Fulford	13	9	22	60
Sandra Mori	35	32	37	132
Androniki Christodoulou	22	19	10	70
Nicole Bastian	32	37	35	137



BOOK PUBLISHING SPECIAL: WHITING, STANLEY, POVER TELL THEIR TALES

Advertising Special:
South Africa

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You've Gotta Have Wa If You Want to Get Published

ROBERT WHITING reveals his rocky road to fame as a writer on Japan



FCCJ member Robert Whiting is one of the best-known writers on Japan, with a string of bestsellers from *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat* (*Time* magazine's best sports book of the year in 1977) to *Tokyo Underworld* and *The Meaning of Ichiro*. But even a best-selling author has to get published and is forced to confront the hard reality involved in being published. In this interview with the *Number One Shimbun*, Whiting details the ups and downs of writing and publishing.

Q: How did you get into book writing?

RW: It was in 1973. I had just moved to New York City after living in Tokyo for several years — first in military intelligence, then as a student of Japanese politics at Sophia University and finally for a stretch in the editorial department of a Japanese publishing company. I was 30 years old, living on savings in a fourth-floor studio walkup on West 82nd Street and Central Park West, and looking for a job. The idea for a book came from conversations with friends at assorted Upper West Side water-

ing holes, among them Teachers, Marvin Gardens and McClade's. I had tried to tell people about my experiences in Japan — the life of the salaryman, how the political power structure worked, how labor unions operated and what Kabukicho bars were like — but no one was really interested until I started talking about baseball in Japan, one thing Japanese and Americans do have in common. Baseball was something I had become addicted to in Japan, along with 60 million Japanese, because of the nightly nationwide telecasts of Yomiuri Giants games. I would tell Americans about militaristic dawn-to-dusk spring training camps that started in the middle of the winter, the 1,000-fungo drill, players who wore themselves out for their teams but refused to hold out for more money, superstars like Sadaharu Oh who honed his batting form in late-night *ryokan* sessions swinging a samurai longsword under the tutelage of a martial arts instructor, Shinto priests that blessed players and stadiums, unions that loathe to strike and the custom of tied games. These were new wrinkles the Japanese

had added to their imported game that fascinated and perplexed Americans. By looking at the different ways Japanese and Americans approached the same game, I kept saying, you could see clearly cultural differences between the two countries, i.e., the *ganbaru seishin* and *shudanshugi* versus *kojinshuji*. That usually got a conversation going. Friends told me I had story-telling ability and urged me to write a book about the subject. And so, after much prompting, I overcame my initial reluctance to attempt what seemed a daunting endeavor and I gave it a shot. One incentive was a \$500 bet with a friend who wagered I was too lazy to see it all the way through.

Did you finish writing your book before you started approaching publishers and agents?

Once I got started writing the manuscript, I actually found I couldn't stop. I worked night and day, and six months later, I had a full 90,000-word draft, which I had done partly from memory and partly from copies of Japanese sports dailies an acquaintance in Tokyo sent me. When it was fin-

ished, my friends in Manhattan looked it over and helped me polish it.

Did you get an agent before a publisher? Explain the benefits of either route.

Since I had a number of friends and friends of friends who worked at lower-level jobs in publishing, I decided to use them for introductions and approach editors directly rather than going through an agent. I had talked to a couple of agents initially and their interest was lukewarm, to say the least. First of all, I was an unknown and the subject matter of my book was not something that North America was clamoring to read about. It was obvious I'd be low priority on any agent's list... and most agents' client lists are very long. If my book had really been something special, perhaps going with an agent would have been the wisest course because of all the doors they can open up if they are really motivated to do so, not to mention their skills at negotiating good advances. But that wasn't the case, so I used the contacts that the above-mentioned editorial and admin assistants at the various houses had arranged for me through personal relationships and started from there. At first, I took it to a sports editor at Random House who said he'd publish it if the sales department gave the OK, which he said would be just a formality. He kept me waiting for three months for an answer, while my bank account slowly dissipated. Then finally he called and said the sales people had decided against my manuscript, "at this point in time," because of the economic recession that was then hitting the country and the resulting negative sales environment.

So, then I broke a cardinal rule of publishing, which says that an author should never show a manuscript to more than one publishing house at a time and Xeroxed 10 copies that I hand-delivered to 10 different editors. But that didn't work either. Over a period of four weeks, all 10 came back with answers of "no." So I changed my strategy again. And this time I got lucky. I took the manuscript to a young editor at *Sports Illustrated* (SI) named Pat Ryan and asked about doing an excerpt. She read it and called me back in a week and said that SI would like to publish Chapter Two. And she did something incredibly kind. She said that since I was having a difficult time finding a publisher, she offered to hold back on running the excerpt in SI until I got a book deal. "Tell the next editor you meet that SI is buying first serialization rights," she

said. "That should get them to pay attention to you." She was right. Soon after, I went to see an editor named Peter Weed at Dodd & Mead. It was on a Friday and the following Monday he called me and offered to take the book, for an advance of \$2,000. "Getting SI was quite a coup" he said. "Do you know how difficult that is?" So I got my book published and perhaps none of it would have happened without Patricia Ryan, who, by the way, left SI and went to found a new national magazine for Time-Life called *People*. It was not the last time that the kindness of strangers played an important role in my life. Pat Ryan was under no obligation to help me get published, but she did it anyway out of the kindness of her heart. It was a lesson I did not forget and since then have always gone out of my way to help other struggling young writers.

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Tell us of your initial expectations and experiences of publishers.

After getting the contract, I had expected a lot in the way of editorial help and sales promotion, but that wasn't what happened. The Dodd-Mead editor said to me, "Mr. Whiting, 60 percent of the books that I do here at Dodd-Mead, which include the Agatha Christie novels, make money. The other 40 percent don't make a profit, but I put them out anyway because I believe they deserve to be published. Make no mistake, your book is in the 40 percent."

Moreover, when I submitted the manuscript, which was essentially still the work of an amateur despite all the help from my friends, I expected the professional editors at Dodd-Mead to wield their expert pens and elevate it to a higher level — the way William Faulkner's editor turned his unreadable manuscripts into literary masterpieces. This was New York publishing after all, I thought. But that proved not to be the case. The editing was perfunctory, with the exception of the chapter SI ran, and to this day I still cringe upon reading certain passages. From that experience, I learned the importance of hiring your own professional editor.

Also, there was the matter of the title. Initially, I'd suggested *Baseball Samurai Style*, which, at the time, had yet to become a cliché. But this brought about an-

other lesson in publishing. "Mr. Whiting," said Editor Weed, "There are two kinds of books that don't sell in the US these days: One are books about baseball; the other are books about Japan. So you've got to come up with another title." I jokingly suggested "The Chrysanthemum and the Bat" over lunch and the editor immediately seized on it. "But won't people think it's a gardening book?" I asked. "Better than than a book on baseball in Japan," he replied.

First book published, advances/royalties promised. How did sales go initially and in the longer term?

The standard deal in hardcover is 10 percent of the retail price on the first 5,000 copies sold, 12.5 percent of the next 10,000 and 15 percent thereafter. Dodd-Mead ran off 5,000, then another 1,000. So I got the royalties from that, plus 80 percent of the \$900 SI paid for first serialization rights, plus 80 percent of \$500 that *Sport Magazine* paid for second serialization rights and 80 percent of \$1,000 that a Japanese publisher named Simul paid for Japanese language rights. Big names like Steven King and David Halberstam can get better deals, but my royalty percentage was average. Avon later put out a paperback edition for \$4, selling 25,000 copies, of which Dodd-Mead and I split a 7 percent royalty on sales. So I wasn't able to buy an island in the South Pacific.

After you became successful, how did the game change in relation to agents and publishers?

It became easier. A lot easier. I went back to Tokyo to work for Time-Life for a while. But *The Chrysanthemum and Bat* (C&B) had gotten me a lot of attention. There was a nice story in *Time* about it. And I started doing some more writing for SI and other periodicals in the States. Also, the Japanese edition hit the best-seller list — selling, I was told, around 80,000 copies. I got seriously short-changed on the royalties, as they only paid me for sales on 10,000 copies, which is a practice that Simul became quite famous for. But Simul, now out of business, was an exception; most of the other big Japanese publishers are honest. As a result of C&B in Japanese, I got a huge number of offers to write for Japanese publications. I did columns for *The Daily Sports*, *Number Magazine* and the *Shukan Asashi* among others. Then, in 1987, I wrote a long piece for the *Smithsonian* on baseball in Japan. An editor named Rick

Wolff at MacMillan saw it and asked me to write a book for him and offered me a \$15,000 advance. The result was *You Gotta Have Wa*, about cultural differences through baseball. It became a big hit: 25,000 copies. First serial rights were sold to *SI* for \$7,500, Book Tape and Book of the Month Club rights were sold for several thousand each and I got a healthy advance of \$25,000 from Vintage Departures of Random House for trade paperback rights, which would go on to be reprinted 18 times and sell about 80,000 copies. I was lucky again, because *Wa* came out at just the right time (1989), just as interest in Japan and its new economic power was hitting its peak. As a result, I got an inordinate amount of publicity. *Time* and *The New York Times* did big spreads on it. I went on "Larry King" and other big TV shows. Universal and a couple of other groups called about movie rights and I actually sat down and bashed out a film treatment. I was getting in over my head, so that's when I turned to David Halberstam, whom I'd gotten to know when he was in Japan researching *The Reckoning*, and he introduced me to Binky Urban at ICM, who was one of the top literary agents in the world.

The movie deal went down the tubes when Matsushita bought Universal and hired a whole new crew for what turned out to be *Mr. Baseball*. So Binky advised me to focus on writing another book. "Everybody knows your name now," she said, "but six months from now, everyone will have forgotten about you. So come up with a book proposal right now and do not write about baseball anymore. You've done it to death." The result was a proposal for what turned out to be *Tokyo Underworld*. She held an auction involving several New York publishers, got me a six-figure advance for that with Panteon, plus a movie deal. *Tokyo Underworld* came out in 1999. It sold 15,000 in hard cover and, thus far, about 30,000 in trade paperback. The Japanese rights sold for six figures, and sold about 180,000 hardcover and 100,000 in paperback in translation. I was approached by *Comic Morning* to do a *manga* version. I gave them the film treatment I'd originally done for Universal and they turned it into a 135-chapter weekly series, with several book versions being published. The *manga* version alone earned me over a million dollars. In addition to the big screen version being planned in the States, there are also TV versions in the

works in Japan. In 2002, Rick Wolff, who had since moved to Time-Warner, asked me to write a book about Japanese players in the States. The result was *The Meaning of Ichiro*, which got me my biggest advance to date at \$150,000.

What can an agent do? When should you get one?

An agent can easily open doors and dramatically increase your earnings. You still have to do the work, but if you're the type that is bashful about demanding a lot of money, than having an agent is imperative. If you're a first time author and you've written a book or are in the process of writing one and you're really confident in its quality and potential appeal, then, by all means, get an agent. And try to get one in New York, because that is where 95 percent of the publishers are based. I was able to do what I did in the beginning because I lived in Manhattan, was able to get personal introductions and meet editors face to face. All I had to do was pick up the phone and then hop on the subway. It's difficult to do that long-distance. So ask

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around. Ask for introductions to agents in New York. Look them up in the *Literary Market Place*. If you live in Tokyo, talk to Junzo Sawa at the English Agency. They have represented lots of successful Japan-based authors in the States, like Karel van Wolferen. U.S. agents these days take a 15 percent commission. It's risen almost everywhere in recent years from the traditional 10 percent because the publishing business has fallen on hard times. People don't buy and read books the way they did when I was a young man.

What about the side benefits of successful books (giving speeches, film rights, book advances)?

The more successful a book you have, the better deal you'll get on your next one. I went from four figures to six-figure advances in the span of three books. Also, if you have a track record, publishers are more likely to take you on, even if all you have is a proposal. Starting authors usually need to show a proposal, an outline and a finished first chapter in addition to

showing a CV. Film rights are the most lucrative side benefit of the book business, even if the film never gets made. I know a lot of writers who make a decent living just on their annual option checks. *Tokyo Underworld*, for example, has gone through six treatments and eight different screenplays over the past six years. If and when a film does get made, the author stands to get a purchase fee of several hundred thousand dollars and a royalty. My film contract says I get 2.5 percent of the Adjusted Gross. I asked my agent what Adjusted Gross meant. And she said it means that the gross will be adjusted so that I don't see any of it.

Speeches are an iffy proposition. I know people who make \$4,000–5,000 a speech and others who make ten times that. It depends on how famous you are and how important your message is. You can make a lot of money as a lecturer if you're an expert on business, finance and investing, I've discovered. If you know a lot about Iraq, you can make a nice income giving lectures about it. If your subject is Japan, then maybe you should find something else to talk about.

One negative thing about writing a book is that you also have to promote it. You pour your heart out researching and writing a book, and then, just when you reach the point of exhaustion after poring over the final, invariably error-laden galleys, you have to go around and perform the humiliating task of getting people to pay attention to it when it hits the book stores. If you're in journalism, you find yourself in the humiliating position of begging your friends in the media to review it or otherwise give it some exposure — which, of course, in most cases, they are loathe to do because their editors will suspect them of favoritism. If you go on a book tour, as I did for the *Ichiro* book (22 cities in 51 days), you find yourself giving the same speech night after night, and answering the same questions until it becomes a real chore.

Moreover, you are often interviewed by TV hosts who haven't read your book and don't have a clue as to what it's about. It's an exhausting, demeaning process (and one in which you invariably gain about 20 pounds from all the luncheons, dinners and receptions you attend), but you have to do it. At the same time, publishers only do nationwide tours for a handful of books. It's too costly and too much of a gamble. So you often wind up having to drum up your own publicity. I did a six-

city tour for *Tokyo Underworld*, a two-city tour for *Wa* and a no-city tour for *C&B*.

However, the biggest side benefit of any book is simply having done it. Putting three or four years of your life into a project and seeing it come to fruition brings a tremendous feeling of accomplishment. It's a great feeling to go into a bookstore or a library and see your work on the shelves. That alone is reward enough.

Has the internet affected publishing in any way?

It certainly brings you and your readers closer together. Sites like Amazon.com, with their reader comments section, give your enemies an easy venue to rip your work to shreds. Also, with bookstore sales declining steadily in recent years, I'm sure the internet has something to do with that, because almost anything you want to know about, you can find via the internet. Also, it's cheaper to publish a book on the internet and sell a download than it is to publish traditional hardcovers and store them in a warehouse. Still, there is something special about holding a printed volume in your hands — the look, the feel, the smell of the paper and the ink. It's hard to curl up in an easy chair with a laptop. Also, publishing houses are still better at marketing and advertising a book than internet publishers. When was the last time you saw an ad for an internet book or a review of one in the MSM. I'm sure some combination of the two is inevitable down the road.

What about self-publishing? Did you ever consider that way?

Not yet. Too many headaches.

How would you sum up the business of book writing today?

I would say that success in this field is mostly luck and timing. Of course, you have to do the work, but there are plenty of writers around with superior talent and brains, who have worked hard and produced quality but have been unable to crack the market in a meaningful way, if they are lucky enough to get published. You can write the "Great American Novel" and see your book hidden away on the back shelves of a bookstore, while some aging actress writes an inane book about her dog that is displayed in the window of Barnes and Noble on 5th Avenue and tops the best-seller list. It's an unfair business in many ways.

Writing a book is a big crap-shoot. It's a lot of work and there's no guarantee of any reward. So if you do it, you



Whiting discussed his most recent book, *The Meaning of Ichiro* at the FCCJ on July 6, 2004.

have to do it as a labor of love. And then be pleasantly surprised at anything else that comes your way. I usually take anywhere from five to 10 drafts to write a book. I write long, then wind up tightening so that I lose a good third of the original material or more. I have always tried to make it simpler, but alas, can't do it. The problem with writing is just that it's too damn hard. The rest can be fun though — meeting new people, learning new things, having that sense of accomplishment.

Generally speaking, it's much easier to sell non-fiction these days than fiction. But books on Japan are extremely hard to get published after the 90s blitz on the subject. If you can work in North Korea or China somehow, you've got a better shot. But books on Japan have been done to death.

A few facts. There are some 50,000 books published in the U.S. each year. Approximately 1 percent, I'm told, are ever reprinted and an even smaller percentage ever make it into paperback.

In Japan, there are 25,000 books with the same percentage of reprints and paperback editions. In the U.S., the system is to pay advances to the author when he or she signs the contract to do a book and then repay the publisher through royalty sales and subsidiary rights. If a book doesn't sell at all, the author still keeps the money. The good thing about this system is that the author has money to live on and do research while he's writing his book. In Japan, the system is for the publisher to ask a writer to do a

book without a contract or an advance. Then, when the book is finished, the author gets paid on books printed, not sold, which is the good part of the Japanese system, especially if there is a good initial print run of 10,000 to 30,000, which is not unusual. In the States, you have to wait a year or more until the sales and accounting departments do their semi-annual or bi-annual reports. Royalties on Japanese language books, vary. In my case, I got 7 percent for a hardcover up to 20,000, 8 percent on the next 10,000 and 9 percent on everything after that. If you don't have a name, don't be surprised if the translator gets more than you do. That's quite common.

One depressing thing to keep in mind. Newspapers and magazines in the U.S. do far more fact-checking and editing than book publishers do. Book publishers are usually understaffed. A typical editor at a big publishing house will edit several books at a time and he doesn't have the wherewithal to do a decent job. Also, because of the computerized nature of book publishing these days and the potential for glitches, mistakes will often appear in the second draft that weren't in the first. This is why the average first editions of most books are riddled with typos and other errors, which some reviewers are all too eager to pounce upon.

Finally, it used to be that a book on Japan published in the U.S. would automatically get published in Japanese and get some attention. But there have been so many books on the subject that that's not true anymore.