

Promoting Western Progeny

When I was interviewed on *Off the Page*, a Denver television program about local authors and their books, I had a list of interesting things about publishing that I wanted to share with the viewing audience. The audience included hopeful authors who would have benefited from what I had to share, it would have been new information for most of them however, the interview, like so many things, was a half-assed, rush job. During the 13-minute interview I didn't get to talk about what I wanted to talk about so I'm putting it here.

The interviewer, Stacy McKinzie, obviously hadn't read *Western Progeny* although she knew a month in advance that she would be interviewing me. For example, she said one of the stories in the book involved time travel. No! She tried to put words in my mouth by asking me repeatedly if I was going to write another book. I was evasive because an honest answer would have been, "Hardly anyone bought the first book why should I write another one?"

I wanted to let first-time authors know that if they want to sell books they need to have money set aside to promote the book. For example, and with made up numbers, if an author has \$5,000 for promoting his book he might sell 5,000 copies, and if he has \$10,000 for promotion he might sell 50,000 copies. I wish I had known that before I self-published my book.

When my book became available, had a website, and was listed at Amazon I bought 30 copies with my author's discount and mailed them to 30 different newspapers and magazines that sometimes review books. I included a personalized cover letter with each book and was sometimes able to say that one of the stories in

the book takes place in their town. A few days later those books started showing up on eBay. Not one of the 30 recipients replied with a, “Thanks for the book”, or “We’ll consider your book for review”, or with any sort of acknowledgement.

Later someone told me that no one is going to review your book, you have to get someone, or maybe pay someone, to write a review (perhaps a local English professor) and then send the book along with the review to the publication.

There are a couple of stories in the book about prospectors, gold prospectors and uranium prospectors, that I felt sure would be of interest to some of the 60,000 plus members of the Gold Prospectors Association of America. The GPAA has a monthly magazine that often includes book reviews so I joined the association (\$65) and sent a copy of *Western Progeny* to the right person, Celeste Bivin. I followed up with monthly phone calls, and she was always very nice and willing to talk as long as I wanted to talk, but she never reviewed the book. This went on for so long that she got a new supervisor, so I sent him a copy, and later I sent a copy to the main guy. All this time they are reviewing other books in their magazine. I finally gave up.

I paid hundreds of dollars to place a six inch by two-inch, one-time ad in *True West* magazine. It didn’t result in one sale. Later, I was told that for those kinds of ads to work they have to be in the magazine continuously.

The oldest, biggest and most historic bookstore in Denver is The Tattered Cover Bookstore so I went downtown and saw that the store had a whole big section of Western books. While there I got the name of the person I could send my book to for them to consider putting it in their store. I sent her a copy and she never replied.

I went to the local branch of the Denver Public Library about 3 blocks from where I lived several times and talked to different librarians about getting my book in the library. I finally got a kind of snarky email saying they would not put my book in their library unless I donated copies to them.

In case you're starting to think that it's a terrible book, it's not. It's 379 pages of short stories set in the Southwest mostly in the first half of the 20th Century. The 1900's, *Western Progeny*, the offspring of the earlier Western stories. It does not include any drugs, sex or gratuitous violence. When it first became available we were living in Taos, New Mexico and I gave a copy to Dean Koop, owner of the Kachina Lodge in Taos. He loved the book, and bought a dozen copies to give to friends and relatives, and another dozen copies to put under the glass counter where guests check in. The books sold even though he put a price of \$20 on them. It can be bought online for about \$12.00. When Mr. Koop asked one of his friends if he had finished reading the book his friend replied yes, that he loved it and couldn't put it down until he had finished it. This was someone I didn't even know.

A couple of years ago when Michelle and I were vacationing in Tucson we went to Old Tucson Studios where I asked for the person in charge. When we met I gave Karen Morrow a copy of the book and told her I'd like to get copies of it in the gift shop, The Last Outpost. One of the stories concerns Old Tucson when it first opened in 1938. She said it would take her a couple of weeks to read it and that she would get back with me. Four months later she emailed me and said Old Tucson was having a special Art and Music Festival and that I was the only author she was inviting to do a book signing.

When I got to Old Tucson she told me she loved the book and then she started naming the stories and characters and talking about them. That was very nice. She put ten copies of the book in the gift shop on consignment. I stood on the porch of McClintock's Store with copies of my book and talked to some of the thousands of people who passed by that weekend. Not one person bought a book.

A few months later while in Tucson, I stopped by the gift shop and saw that all of the books had sold so I tried to get in touch with Karen but suddenly she was unavailable. After several weeks of unanswered phone messages, unanswered emails, and an unanswered invoice, my wife, a litigation paralegal, sent an email pointing out that she didn't want to take legal action against Old Tucson so it would be best to pay me what was owed me. A few days later the check arrived. So... consignment – never again.

A friend who works in the Bureau of Land Management store in Santa Fe read the book and told me I should contact the Western National Parks Association the organization that runs the gift shops in National Parks and BLM offices. I sent several emails with links to the book website and left several phone messages. They never replied.

Another thing I tried was google ads where you make a list of search terms and when people use those terms an ad for your book pops up. I chose the \$5.00 a day for 30 days plan, and it resulted in... not one book being sold.

The television interviewer, Stacy, told me the *Off the Page* interview would be shown in 14 area markets, twice a week, for a month, and there would be a

YouTube video. The interview resulted in... you guessed it, not one book being sold.

Most people will probably find it more rewarding to read a book than to write one.