

From Page 1C Road

"You're not going to get an agent until you've been published."

When a writer does land an agent, a fee of 10 percent to 20 percent of the publisher's deal is common, depending on the advance and the royalty agreements.

If the writer is talented and lucky, a publisher will accept the book, agree to publish, promote and distribute it, and pay the author a royalty, usually ranging from 8 percent to 15 percent, based on sales. A book accepted for publication then must compete with 50,000 or 60,000 other titles that flood the market every year.

"Preference is probably the watchword," Kromberg said. "First of all, not to take rejection personally because there are a lot of very subjective reasons we'll reject a manuscript, and it may not be because of the quality of the work."

A reputable vanity press may be the answer for writers who can afford to pay the cost of printing their own books. For example, an author might pay \$1.50 each for 1,000 copies of a 200-page paperback, Kromberg said.

"Then the question is how do you sell it," he said. "We don't often recommend a vanity operation to an author unless the author has a way of selling the

books."

Technical or scholarly writers may be able to market the books on the lecture and workshop circuit.

County, county and family histories often are vanity or subsidy publications. Some worthwhile poetry and feminist literature first was distributed by vanity presses, Kromberg said. Even Benjamin Franklin paid to publish some of his books.

Desktop publishing is the latest breakthrough in efficient composition, editing, typesetting and camera-ready preparation. Several Lincoln firms offer the service, and a writer who invests several thousand dollars in computer equipment can practically assemble a book at home.

Media Productions spent about \$14,000 on desktop publishing equipment and trained two computer operators for six months.

"It's been a boon to us because it's cut our production costs considerably, but it's not the kind of thing that the average person would put into their home," Kromberg said.

Wordworks Desktop Publishing of Lincoln is one of the firms that has taken advantage of the new technology to serve local writers.

A writer with a personal computer and word-processing software that has

been imbedded with special publishing codes can simply run the finished product through the company's page-layout software. The style sheet that holds the codes costs \$35, and computer time is \$12 an hour. About 50 pages can be done in an hour.

"They are able to almost prepare the publishing on their own," Wordworks co-owner Mary Schwaber said. "We can take it at any stage."

Completed pages are ready for printing and binding.

One book prepared by the company at the writer's expense has attracted the attention of a paying publisher. Another client, a former internationally known magician, has written a book that he will market through professional magicians' organizations.

In Lincoln since June, Schwaber formerly operated a desktop publishing service in California.

"This is an unusual city," she said. "There are a lot of people putting out some high-quality work. Research is solicited here from other places in the country, and those people are publishing their work. I think it's excellent whereas in California you would have everybody who couldn't even put a sentence together trying to publish, and it was really sad."

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considered hiring an agent to help him sell his work.

"Agents are difficult to get unless you have a track record," he said. As an alternative, Kubicek is forming his own company, D.C. Kubicek Publications.

"I thought it would be a lot more expedient than sending novels off to New York," he said. "Sometimes they take eight months to report, and then it's a turnaround."

Kubicek will publish other authors' works as well as his own. His first publication is a collection of 13 short stories and one poem by Midwestern writers. Called "The Pelican in the Desert and Other Stories of the Family Farm," the book is scheduled for publication in October.

"I think there's a lot more publishable material out here than we get credit for in the publishing centers like New York," Kubicek said. "They tend to form opinions before they really get into it. They don't give it the consideration it should receive."

Kubicek believes the axiom that writing is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration. He jokingly advises the aspiring author to consult a psychiatrist to figure out why he has this masochistic urge.

"Writing has got to be something that you do for love," he said. "It's easier to go out and be a plumber or something if you want to make money."

Rosowski, a professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, relies on friends and colleagues to critique her work and give her guidance.

"There are lots of people who are willing to give feedback, to provide assistance, to suggest places that someone might send a piece of work," she said. "There's also the intermediate step of presenting work at professional conferences."

Rosowski has published more than 30 scholarly essays during the past decade, including articles in Great Plains Quarterly, Prairie Schooner and Western American Literature. Her most recent

publication is "The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism."

A personal computer is helpful for making revisions and manipulating the copy without introducing new errors, always a danger when retyping a manuscript, Rosowski said.

The inevitable rejection slip must be taken in stride, she said.

"I advise my students that if you get a good reading, if your essay has come back, even if it is a rejection but you have solid suggestions, you are very fortunate," she said. "If it's just a straight form-letter rejection, reread the essay and see if it still strikes you as solid. If it does, just send it out again."