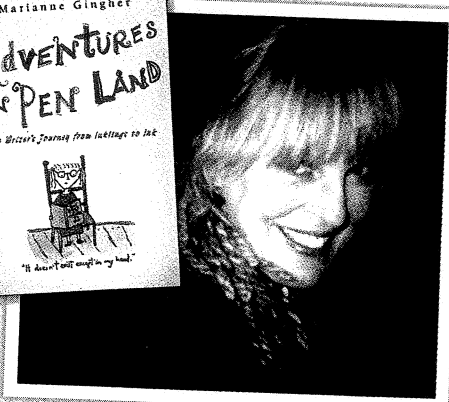
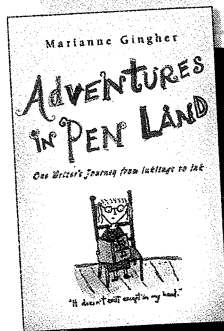


There's nothing like the first novel, but then you keep on.

Remembering Your First



BY MARIANNE GINGHER

If they're honest, most novelists will admit that despite any struggles, there's more ecstasy than agony involved in producing a first book. First novels tend to get written by voluntary, irrational submission to an

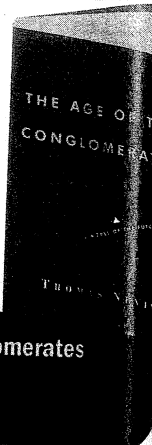
urgency that seems beyond a writer's control. If a person is determined to write a first book, she will do so, no matter what, and the effort derives from a lifetime's worth of collusion between her reality, imagination, resilience, self-delusion, hubris, luck, and hope that's as fragile as Cinderella's slipper.

I had wanted to be a novelist since I was six years old. Decades later, when my agent called to tell me she'd sold my first novel, it felt like a shooting star had landed in my yard. My editor loved my book as much as I did or she could have never taught me how to make it better. That novel was about a small-town Southern girl in the 1950s whose secret high school crush, Bobby Rex Moseley, became a rock star and wrote a scandalous hit song about her. On publication day, my editor and I sent each other flowers and telegrams and signed our names "Bobby Rex." I got wonderful reviews in major periodicals, including *Publishers Weekly* and the *New York Times*. I couldn't pass a newsstand without genuflecting in gratitude. There were book signings, interviews and a sock hop given in my honor. I went as the Prom Queen, of course.

But sooner or later, you hang up your dancing shoes and start writing that sec-

ond book, a third, a fourth, and so on. By the time I sat down to write *Adventures in Pen Land*, a comic memoir about the dogged thrill of writing my first book, I wanted simply to repeat the fun, to recapture that blend of innocence, fierce dedication and joy I took in crossing this most magical of literary finish lines. Sure, I recalled hefting that finished first book and detecting all sorts of fallout nobody else could see: the afterimages of trial and error, ghosts of Wite-Out, self-doubt as snappish as mousetraps. Yet floating over all, my muse sang hallelujahs at the top of her lungs.

Gingher's first novel, Bobby Rex's Greatest Hit, was published by in hardcover by Scribner in 1986 and in paperback by LSU Press in 1998. She traces that process in Adventures in Pen Land: One Writer's Journey from Inkland to Ink, coming in October from the University of Missouri Press.



The Age of the Conglomerates
Thomas Nevins, 55
(Ballantine, Sept.)

Born: Brooklyn, N.Y.; still lives there.

Favorite authors: Herman Hesse, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson.

Career arc: From bookseller to buyer to bookstore manager to Random House representative to novelist.

Plot: The novel follows four family members torn apart by a dystopian futuristic America under a political and cultural dictatorship. The Conglomerates, a political party controlled by an Oz-like chairman, have transformed national law. Elderly people have been shipped off to a government-run community.

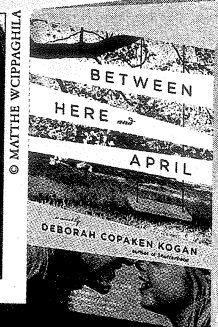
Author's toughest challenge: "Like any job, as in life, the biggest struggle has been the clock. My family let me write the book at all hours of the day and night. Therefore, I think the real challenges belong to my wife and kids."

Publisher's pitch: "Nevins is a longtime sales rep here at Random House," says Ballantine publicity director Brian McClendon. "He had been quietly working for many years on the manuscript with Kate Medina. When we learned about his novel, we felt a little bit like Jimmy Olson working beside Clark Kent every day and not knowing his secret identity."

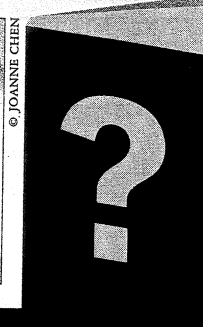
Opening lines: "The Social Security Administration failed. So did the massive bailout waged by the government to save it. Medicaid and Medicare fell next, and then the insurance companies and the health care industry soon followed. As investments evaporated, the stock markets collapsed. Company after company went bankrupt, as did the pension plans promised to employees."

—Juan Martinez

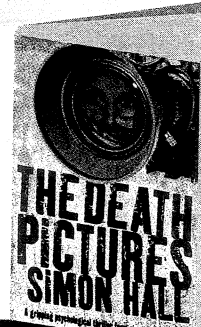
Fall '08 Fiction Debuts



Between Here and April
Deborah Copaken Kogan, 42
(Algonquin, Oct.)



Cutting for Stone
Abraham Verghese, 53
(Knopf, Feb.)



The Death Pictures
Simon Hall, 39
(Accent Press, Oct.)

Born: Boston, Mass.; now lives in New York City.

Favorite authors: Ian McEwan, Philip Roth, Stendahl, Leo Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf.

Career arc: From war photographer to network news producer to writer who shoots photographs or photographer who writes, depending on the contract.

Plot: Elizabeth Burns becomes obsessed with the long-ago disappearance of her childhood friend April Cassidy, and uncovers shocking revelations about April's mother, who has committed an inconceivable crime.

Author's toughest challenge: "Staying sane and engaged as a parent while writing about the reverse. Sticking to the allegorical structure of Dante's *Inferno* I'd outlined, in a fit of hubris, prior to writing. Soldiering through the novel's 39 rejections."

Publisher's pitch: "This is an unflinchingly honest rendering of the conflicted feelings at the heart of motherhood," says editor Kathy Pories. "Deborah tells this frightening story so confidently that you're well down the path before you realize where you're headed."

Opening lines: "April Cassidy was my best friend from the first day of first grade in September of 1972, until a couple of months later, when she failed to show up for school. During the weeks following her disappearance... I rubbed a pink eraser over the memory of my friend and wiped the loose leaf clean. So clean, it took thirty-five years and a production of *Medea* to unleash her. And when she emerged, thus began my descent."

—George Spelvin

Born: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; now lives in Palo Alto, Calif.

Favorite authors: Gabriel García Márquez, Charles Dickens, John Irving, Günther Grass.

Career arc: Hospital orderly to medical student to resident intern to Iowa Writers Workshop graduate, to full-time academic and tenured professor.

Plot: This is a story about twin brothers, born in Ethiopia of a secret union between a beautiful nun from India and a British doctor, and the choices they must make as they grow to manhood.

Author's toughest challenge: "Medicine is an unforgiving mistress, and I felt as if I had two mistresses. When I was at work I was thinking of the novel—which is completely about the medical world, and when I was with the novel, I was wondering if I was neglecting my work. Yet my day job informed my night job, and if I were given the choice of being at some tropical resort to write, I'm not sure I would be able to produce anything."

Publisher's pitch: Knopf senior editor Robin Desser says, "This is an intimate epic that spans five decades and three continents, combining the narrative power of *The Thorn Birds* with the international scope of *The Kite Runner*. Abraham infuses his writing with this combination of real humor and compassion."

Opening lines: "After eight months spent in the obscurity of our mother's womb, my brother Shiva and I came into the world in the late afternoon of the twentieth of September in the year of grace 1954. We took our first breaths ... in the thin air of Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia." —Hilary S. Kayle

Born: Bedford, England; now lives in Exeter, Devon.

Favorite authors: George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.

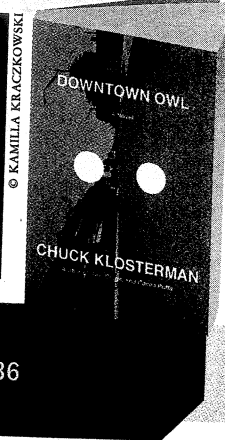
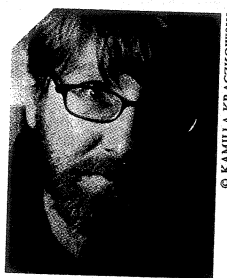
Career arc: From BBC environment correspondent to BBC TV crime correspondent to crime writer.

Plot: A dying artist creates a series of 10 paintings containing a mysterious riddle. But before the answer can be revealed, the painter is murdered. TV crime reporter Dan Groves is drawn into the case and forced to turn detective to help solve the murder and crack the riddle.

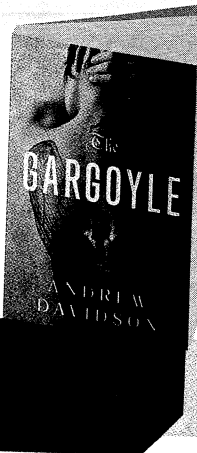
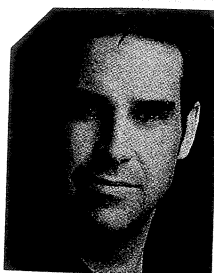
Author's toughest challenge: "Intertwining the dark inspiration that comes from TV crime reporting with a detective's shady arts to create a compelling murder mystery."

Publisher's pitch: "Thought there was nothing new in crime writing? Think again!" says Kim Clougherty, director of North American operations. "Real-life BBC-TV crime correspondent Simon Hall blurs the lines between fact and fiction in this complex, modern, cunning murder mystery with a behind-the-scenes taste of the life of a TV news reporter following a criminal investigation."

Opening lines: "He was amazed at his calm. After so many long weeks of painstaking research and careful planning, it was finally his moment. He'd come to think of himself as the star of a show he was about to launch. He'd expected to shake with nerves, find his mouth dry, his body rigid and breathless, like an actor on the opening night of a show. But no nerves had bitten. There was just control, a vacant calm." —J.M.



Downtown Owl
Chuck Klosterman, 36
(Scribner, Sept.)



The Gargoyle
Andrew Davidson, 39
(Doubleday, Sept.)



The Heretic's Daughter
Kathleen Kent, 54
(Little, Brown, Sept.)

Born: Breckenridge, Minn.; now lives in New York City.

Favorite authors: George Orwell, David Halberstam, Larry McMurtry, H.G. Wells, Bret Easton Ellis.

Career arc: From newspaper journalist to magazine writer to author of four non-fiction books and quasi-novelist.

Plot: This character-driven book, set in the fictional town of Owl, N.Dak., in 1983, is told in alternating chapters by three normal people trying to understand their weird lives—Mitch, a 16-year-old high school football player; Julia, who's new to town and to teaching; and Horace, an elderly widower. What brings it all together is a deadly blizzard.

Author's toughest challenge: "It was difficult to move from the reactive process of nonfiction to the creative process of fiction. The hardest part of fiction is making everything up."

Publisher's pitch: "This is a huge departure for Chuck and it took a lot of guts," says senior editor Brant Rumble. "The novel is a chance for him to reach a wider audience. He's really good at capturing the everyday minutia of life and making it entertaining. What attracted me... is the sense of humor."

Opening lines: "When Mitch Hrlicka heard that his high school football coach had gotten another teenage girl pregnant, he was forty bushels beyond bamboozled. He could not understand what so many females saw in Mr. Laidlaw... Whenever Mitch made the slightest mental error, Laidlaw would rhetorically scream, 'Vanna? Vanna? Are you drowsy, Vanna? Wake up! You can sleep when you are dead, Vanna!'"

—Judith Rosen

Born: Pinawa, Canada; now lives in Winnipeg.

Favorite authors: Thomas Hardy, Patrick Süskind, Tom Robbins, Keri Hulme, Vladimir Nabokov, Charlotte Brontë.

Career arc: From poet to playwright to screenwriter to novelist.

Plot: As the narrator lies in a hospital bed, a beautiful sculptress of gargoyles appears in his room and claims they were lovers in the 14th century. The tale of their ill-fated love affair echoes and reverberates throughout the novel as both the narrator and the sculptress experience love's transformative powers.

Author's toughest challenge: "The hardest challenge has been letting go of my writing and realizing that *The Gargoyle* is actually finished. All the words have been put into place, and now the book has to go into the world without me."

Publisher's pitch: "An epic love story that spans 700 years, *The Gargoyle* is a debut novel that will appeal to readers of *Perfume*, *The Historian* and *The Time Traveler's Wife*," says executive publicity director Alison Rich. "Sold in over 26 countries to date, *The Gargoyle* is an exotic, hypnotic novel that reads like a contemporary version of *The Inferno*."

Opening lines: "Accidents ambush the unsuspecting, often violently, just like love. It was Good Friday and the stars were just starting to dissolve into the dawn. As I drove, I stroked the scar on my chest, by habit. My eyes were heavy and my vision unfocused, not surprising given that I'd spent the night hunched over a mirror snorting away the bars of white powder that kept my face trapped in the glass."

—J.M.

Born: Meadville, Pa.; now lives in Dallas.

Favorite authors: Anita Shreve, Annie Dillard, Cormac McCarthy, Charles Palliser.

Career arc: From working for a commodities company to converting military properties and installations in the former Soviet Union for civilian use to writer.

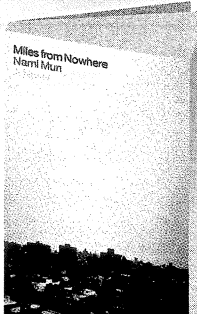
Plot: This fictionalized tale about Martha Carrier, one of the first women to be hanged as a witch in Salem, Mass., and of whom the author is a 10th-generation descendant, is, at heart, the story of love and sacrifice in one family.

Author's toughest challenge: "My biggest challenge was a physical one because I was diagnosed with a rare auto-immune disease called Relapsing Polychondritis, which primarily affected my respiratory system and is degenerative. Writing the book kept me going. I grew up hearing about Martha Carrier, and there were times when writing [her story] felt like going into a fugue state, and some of it just wrote itself."

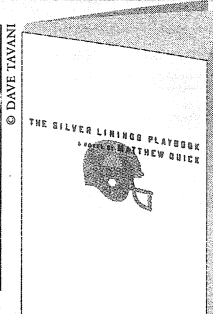
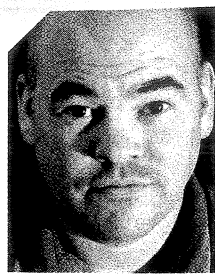
Publisher's pitch: "What makes Kathleen and her book unique is her personal connection with the story," notes executive editor Reagan Arthur. "She's personalized this stark period in history with a deep understanding of how families relate to one another in what is essentially a profound mother-daughter story."

Opening lines: "Massachusetts, December 1690. The distance by wagon from Billerica to neighboring Andover is but nine miles. For myself it was more than a journey away from the only home I had ever known. It was the ending of a passage from the dark fog of infancy to the sharp remembrances of childhood."

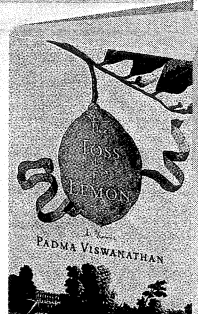
—H.S.K.



Miles from Nowhere
Nami Mun, 40
(Riverhead, Dec.)



The Silver Linings Playbook
Matthew Quick, 34
(Sarah Crichton Books, Sept.)



The Toss of a Lemon
Padma Viswanathan, 40
(Harcourt, Sept.)

Born: Seoul, South Korea; raised there and in the Bronx; just moved to Chicago.

Favorite authors: Chekhov, Paul Bowles, Hubert Selby Jr., Robert Stone, Lydia Davis, Denis Johnson, Jayne Anne Phillips, James Ellroy, Richard Price.

Career arc: "My 'arc' doesn't seem like an arc at all, rather a bunch of scattered dots—secretary, waitress, criminal investigator, copywriter—that somehow led me to fiction."

Plot: Narrator Joon, a young Korean-American girl, navigates homelessness, physical abuse and drug addiction as a runaway teen in New York. The book follows her for five years as she tries to eke out a life for herself that doesn't involve shelters, drug dens, violence, prostitution, petty crimes or addiction.

Author's toughest challenge: "I loved every minute of writing this novel, even though it took me eight years. The most difficult part was letting go of it so Riverhead could print the galleys."

Publisher's pitch: Senior editor Megan Lynch describes Mun's book as a profoundly moving and unexpectedly beautiful novel that is all about voice. "Joon is a kind of offhand poet, at once touching and naïve. You just don't want to let go of her."

Opening lines: "I'd been at the shelter for two weeks and there was nothing to do but go to counseling or lie on my cot and count the rows of empty cots... or watch TV in the rec room, where the girls cornrowed each other's hair and went on about pulling a date with Reggie the counselor because he looked like Billy Dee Williams and had a rump-roast ass."
—Suzanne Mantell

Born: Philadelphia; now lives in suburban Philadelphia.

Favorite authors: Kurt Vonnegut, Gao Xingjian, Albert Camus, Haruki Murakami, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Mark Twain, Ralph Ellison, Hunter S. Thompson.

Career arc: From high school English teacher living in a house to full-time writer living in an apartment.

Plot: Pat Peoples, fresh out of a neural health facility, has lost his wife, job, house, memory, sanity and identity. But by clinging to hope, by concocting and living out a somewhat delusional life philosophy, he becomes a better man, earning a new beginning and another shot at love.

Author's toughest challenge: "Battling self-doubt. Believing that there really will be readers if I write well enough."

Publisher's pitch: "Quick has this buoyant, one-of-a-kind voice that is unlike any voice I've read," says publisher Sarah Crichton. "I just kept thinking 'Nick Hornby.' Pat Peoples reminds me of the boy in *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Quick takes you inside his head so you understand what he's going through. It is heartbreaking and funny and kind and moving. And it appeals to both men and women."

Opening lines: "I don't have to look up to know Mom is making another surprise visit. Her toenails are always pink during the summer months, and I recognize the flower design imprinted on her leather sandals; it's what Mom purchased the last time she signed me out of the bad place and took me to the mall."
—S.M.

Born: Nelson, B.C., Canada; now lives in Fayetteville, Ark.

Favorite authors: Salman Rushdie, Ann-Marie MacDonald, William Faulkner, Jorge Luis Borges, Caryl Churchill.

Career arc: From student to actor to activist to playwright to novelist.

Plot: Married at 10, widowed at 18, Sivakami is not allowed to remarry. In the next 60 years she ventures outside her family compound only three times. However, her one defiant act sets the course of her children's and grandchildren's lives, twisting their fates in surprising, sometimes heartbreaking ways.

Author's toughest challenge: "Staying focused while staying open. I don't want to be so immersed in my fiction that I cannot be affected by the outside world. In early drafts, I try to be open to taking unexpected turns."

Publisher's pitch: According to editor Ann Patty, "The book is a sweeping novel in the vein of Roy, Rushdie, Chandra and Lahiri. In a society where women are repressed, it is women who hold the family together. The novel grew out of 150 hours of interviews conducted with the author's grandmother."

Opening lines: "The year of the marriage proposal, Sivakami is ten. She is neither tall nor short for her age, but she will not grow much more. Her shoulders are narrow but appear solid, as though the blades are fused to protect her heart from the back. She carries herself with an attractive stiffness: her shoulders straight and always aligned. She looks capable of bearing great burdens, not as though born to a yoke but perhaps as though born with a yoke within her."
—J.M.