



## When Small Works

I'm surprised at how much good writing there is out there that never gets published," says Barbara Phillips, co-publisher of Bridge Works Publishing in Bridgehampton, New York. "We must have seen a thousand manuscripts in our first year. So many of them have merit."

Bridge Works is a small press, but one that's having quite a run. Founded in the summer of 1992, it published its first list in 1993. Now, just two years later, Warren Phillips, co-publisher with his wife Barbara, says the business will end the year profitably.

The Phillipses have a clear idea of their house's identity. "We're concentrating on literary fiction and literate nonfiction." Says Warren. "About 60 percent of our list is fiction."

For a house that's averaged only five titles a year, Bridge Works has had more than its share of winners. Consider, for example, the 1994 first novel *The Prince of West End Avenue* by Alan Isler. It's a story about Jewish immigrants coming to New York that reviewers praise as a blending of comedy with serious undertones. *Prince* was a nominee for the National Book Critics Circle Award and for the National Jewish Book Award. Bridge Works sold UK rights to Jonathan Cape in January 1995 and U.S. paperback rights to Penguin in August 1995. Additional rights have been sold to companies in Germany, Holland, France, and Finland.

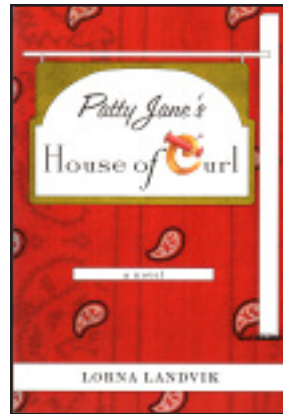
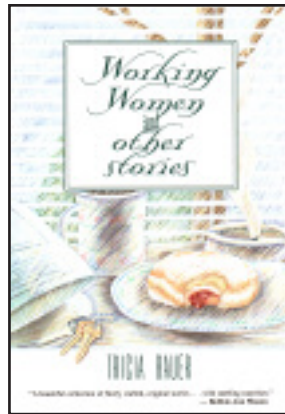
Another winner is *Patty Jane's House of Curl*, a novel by Lorna Landvik published in September of this year, which Bridge Works is positioning as a Northern *Fried Green Tomatoes*. U.S. paperback rights were sold for \$47,000, and a German company bought paperback and hardcover rights for the princely sum of \$67,500. An additional \$22,000 came from the Quality Paperback Book Club. All told, Bridge Works sold over \$135,000 worth of subsidiary rights before the book was even published.

A third strong title is *Working Women and Other Stories*, by Tricia Bauer, a book of stories about women and their struggles to keep job and family together. The book has received fine reviews from a number of newspapers including *the Sunday Boston Globe*.

*The Woman Who Ran for President: The Many Lives of Victoria Woodhull*, by Lois Beachy Underhill, is the story of the first woman to run for President of the U.S. This is a fascinating biography of a little-known-woman who defied all the odds and ran for the highest office in the land way back in 1872.

Still another highly acclaimed title is *Bad Haircut: Stories of the Seventies*, by Tom Perrotta. The list of favorably reviewed books goes on—an amazing record for a three-year-old small press.

According to Warren Phillips, the formula for editorial success is simple. "My wife has the good eye. She's selected every title we've published." The eye of Barbara Phillips for



Titles that have done wonders for Bridge Works.

good writing is a trained one. She's a writer herself, having written nonfiction pieces for such respected publications as *New York* magazine and . She's also reviewed books for other publications, and at one time she taught English literature.

Part of her track record for picking winners comes, no doubt, from Barbara's attitude towards submission. According to her, a lot of very good manuscripts have great potential but need work. "I suppose big houses would turn some good manuscripts down because they need heavy editing," she says. "I have been able to resuscitate some things

that have real merit. *The Prince of West End Avenue*" is a case in point. "With some work, we got it out." She notes that they get of their manuscripts from agents, but "we see things over the transom as well."

Warren Phillips hasn't always operated on a small scale, however. In 1991 he retired at age 65 from the Dow Jones Company, where he was CEO and publisher. Prior to that he'd been, for 13 years, first managing editor and then executive editor of the *Wall Street Journal*. Eschewing retirement, he's working harder now, he says, that he did when he was CEO of Dow Jones. "We are not people to take it easy," says Barbara Phillips. "We've both been involved with words all our lives. We thought, why not start a small publishing company and publish the kinds of things we like, and we said, why not? Besides, it seemed like a worthy thing to do."

There's a division of labor between the Phillipses that seems to work. Barbara handles editorial and Warren, marking and publicity. It's a typical arrangement for small presses, but it seems to work particularly well at Bridge Works. The only other employee is a part-time office manager. Production is done by a freelance editor in Boston.

Naturally, before they launched into the new business, they tried to anticipate problems. The first one they thought of was how they would get decent distribution as a small, unknown start-up. They proceeded to work out a relationship with National Book Network, says Warren, and they're quite pleased with the distribution they're getting from NBN. The second concern was whether they'd get noticed or have any credibility in the trade. Happily for the Phillipses, they've achieved good recognition for their titles, due in no small measure, apparently, to the quality of the books themselves. One thing they didn't anticipate, according to Warren Phillips, was the importance of selling subrights in order to bolster revenues. Fortunately, that, too, is working out well, thanks to the efforts of Warren himself and an agent they now use.

But where'd they get the name? "We live on Bridge Lane, and our office is on Bridge Lane. Near us, too, is the Sag Bridge. We fought the Feds, who were going to tear it down." Hence the name.—**R.T.S.**