



Author walks a lonely road

Self-promotion not easy, but necessary for budding writers

By ELIZABETH KALFSBEEK

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Author Tyler Oaks appeared at the Borders Bookstore in Davis Saturday in an effort to drum up interest for her debut novel, "Ruby Rest," (Sterling House Publisher, Inc., 2007, \$14.95). Oaks signed books throughout the day as part of her own publicity campaign.

"Authors have had to become as skilled in business as they are in the art of writing," Oaks said. "It's funny now that an author has to self-promote. Has to. The words 'self' and 'promotion' don't go together. So to learn how to do that without being tacky is hard. But I understand the importance of it on the business side."

Large publishing houses often buy shelf space at bookstores to promote their product, along with the in-house publicists working on an author's behalf. For a book by a new author through an independent publisher, people have to hear about the book somehow, and the work has to stand out to find space on a shelf.

In Oaks' case, she decided to hit the pavement herself and promote her book throughout California.

"I loved getting a hands-on, emergency education about publishing and bookstores by book people themselves," Oaks said. "I've gone to so many bookstores in California, called everyone I can, just



Author Tyler Oaks signed copies of her book, "Ruby West," in Davis on Saturday. Davis is self-publishing the book, and believe her when she says it's no easy task. (Elizabeth

to let them know (my book) is out there. You can tell I'm not a sales girl, and it's hard. I'm shy. I feel weird trying to make a 'hard sale. '"

"Hard sale" or not, Oaks knows writers must possess determination and a willingness to keep trying and trying.

"There's a fine balance between the art and the business," she said. "Keep your art, but don't be discouraged by the business."

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The business of print is in decline across the board, be it newspapers, books or magazines. As society spends more time on the Internet, and other types of media, such as video games, music and movies, the whole industry is experiencing a tidal wave of change.

"As a young author I'm finding people are really interested in the near impossibility of a first-time author getting published anymore," Oaks said. "When I finished my manuscript I was told that less than one percent of writers could even find an agent and that it's easier to break into television than publishing. A lot of agents only take on clients who have sold books before, but you can't sell books to a publisher if you don't have an agent."

As the chicken-and-the-egg scenario becomes apparent to a new writer, hope lingers in the form of the small, independent publisher and agents who have an eye for talent and the potential of a newcomer. There are still those willing to take risks on "unknowns."

"We don't want literature to become authors writing to a formula for what sells," Oaks said. "Then there's no heart in literature anymore."

Oaks met her agent at a writers conference. At first glance, the agent declined to take her on as a client. Undeterred, she cleaned up her prose, changed things around and resubmitted her manuscript to the agent, who ended up taking her on as a client.

The writing process was short, Oaks said. Finding an agent took about a year, and finding a publisher took another year.

"For me, I feel that each step I accomplish is a miracle. Each step is so difficult. It seems like an impossible business, but then again, anything is

possible," Oaks said.

Amazon.com has come out with downloading books to read on-screen. With the way the print industry is

Tips for writers Three bits of advice for writers from a debut author: 1. Focus on the writing first. Get the manuscript right and edit it to the best of your ability before you look for an agent. 2. Definitely do the research and learn the business aspect of how agents and publishers work. I think everyone has to make compromises in order to get published. It doesn't mean your story has to become the worse for it. Keep your writing style and story in tact. 3. Like any business, it helps to have connections. Agents and publishers are just inundated with piles of paper. You have to make your work stand out.

changing, it seems like more people may head down such a road. Oaks, a traditionalist herself, says she doesn't plan on giving up on the business.

"There's something about being able to hold a

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book in your hands, flipping back pages, dog-earring and underlining," she said. "There's also something about the touch and feel of the paper. It's just not the same looking cross-eyed at a computer screen."

Oaks lives in Napa with her husband and twin daughters. She received her master's degree in Spanish from Sacramento State University and teaches college-level Spanish as well as being a professional writer. The author will be signing copies of "Ruby West" at Borders in Roseville at 2 p. m. Sunday, Dec. 9. For more information, visit <http://www.tyleroaks.com>.

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