

# AUTHORS GUILD

Winter 2010 **BULLETIN**



**State of the Industry: The Book Business Gets Even Tougher  
Guild, Publishers & Google File Amended Settlement**

**Random House Goes Retroactive**

**What's Hot and What's Not in Children's Books: A Symposium**

**Roy Blount on What a Book is Worth**

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Summer/Fall 2009 *Bulletin* reported the death of Santha Rama Rau at the age of 86. In a recent memoir published in the Cape Town literary magazine *Chimurenga* ([www.chimurenga.co.za](http://www.chimurenga.co.za)), I recalled a meeting with her father in 1941 and a long-distance telephone conversation with Santha in 2008.



One Sunday in 1941, Sir Benegal Rama Rau came to lunch at our home in Muizenberg, just over the road from the old wooden footbridge across the Vlei. He and my father sat chat-

ting on the green wicker chairs on the front step. My mother flitted in and out, from stoep (veranda) to kitchen to dining room. I looked on in awe. I was five.

The Guild encourages members to write to the *Bulletin*. Letters should be sent to "Letters to the Editor," The Authors Guild, 31 East 32nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10016. They can also be faxed to (212) 564-5363, or sent via e-mail to [staff@authorsguild.org](mailto:staff@authorsguild.org) (type "Letters to the Editor" in the subject line). Letters may be edited for length, grammar and clarity.

It was not often that a non-European sat on our front stoep, let alone joined us at the dining table for a family lunch. The non-Europeans I knew worked for us in the kitchen and the garden and lived in quarters at the back of the house.

Sir Benegal was 52, eight years older than my father.

He had been India's Deputy High Commissioner in London before arriving in South Africa in May 1938 as Agent-General. After the war he was to serve as his country's first Ambassador in Tokyo and later in Washington, D.C. He wound up his career as Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

I can no longer tap my late parents' memories and none of my siblings recalls details of this visit. In June 2008, I phoned Sir Benegal's younger daughter, Santha (b. 1923). She

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## ALONG PUBLISHERS ROW

BY CAMPBELL GEESLIN

In a Page 1 article in *The New York Times*, **Motoko Rich** wrote, "For more than 500 years the book has been a remarkably stable entity: a coherent string of connected words, printed on paper and bound between covers.

"But in the age of the iPhone, Kindle and YouTube, the notion of the book is becoming increasingly elastic as publishers mash together text, video and Web features in a scramble to keep readers interested in an archaic form of entertainment."

In October Simon & Schuster released four "vooks," which combine video and electronic text and can be read and viewed online or on an iPhone or iPod Touch.

Author **Walter Mosley** told the *Times*, "As a novelist I would never ever" allow videos to substitute for prose.

"Reading," he said, "is one of the few experiences we have outside of relationships in which our cognitive abilities grow. And our cognitive abilities actually go backwards when we're watching television or doing stuff on computers."

SLANG: Any writer today who is trying to produce dialogue for a contemporary novel is faced with a major problem. For dialogue to seem fresh and authentic, it needs to include slang.

The life span today of a slang word or phrase seems "to shorten with every click of the mouse." The quote is from an article in *The New York Times* with the headline: "Dude, You Are So (Not) Obama." Meanwhile, books still take almost a year from the time your manuscript is delivered to the publisher until it appears in a bookshop.

"What's a hipster (hepcat?) To Do?" the *Times* asks. "Keeping up with the latest slang is at once easier and harder than ever. The number of slang dictionaries is growing, both online and off, not to mention social networking media that invent and discard words, phrases and memes at the speed of broadband."

Slang dictionaries have been around for more than 200 years, but online resources such as [slangsite.com](http://slangsite.com) are updated hundreds of times daily.

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