Alacrity House Publishing was founded in answer to a desire to showcase the tremendous talent of people living in the San Luis Valley in Colorado. In the spring of 2010, my husband and I retired and moved to a small (population 750) town in the San Luis Valley. I grew up in Sanford, Colorado, couldn’t wait to leave, was reluctant to think of returning to the small-town atmosphere, but decided to take a chance on it anyway. Our daughter, Linda, and her three children joined the adventure and moved to Sanford from Eugene, Oregon.

Linda and I wanted to join a writing group. We inquired at libraries, Adams State University, and other places we hoped might know about such a group, but found nothing. We decided to start our own. We hung up flyers in libraries, in the post office window, and at grocery stores in each of the small towns nearby. Our first meeting was held around the dining room table at our home. Five or six people attended our twice monthly meetings, although one time nobody came. Meetings featured presentations devoted to improving writing skills and preparing for publication. We shared our writing and discussed ways to improve it.

So what, you ask, does this have to do with a publishing business? As the months passed, I was impressed with the talent of members of the slowly growing group of writers. On the first of December 2011, during our meeting, I said: “One of these days we need to publish a collection of our writing. And today is the day to start. Send me a couple of your favorite pieces of writing by January 15, 2012, and we’ll see about getting it published.”
BEGINNINGS

That was the beginning of Alacrity House Publishing. As Terry, Linda, and I discussed the project, we considered the publishing options available to us. Realizing that the anthology we were planning to publish was of a limited, regional appeal, we began to research the possibilities. Linda had experience working with Lulu and Memory Press in her personal history business. We talked to the one local printer, who would print our book from the electronic file we would furnish, but who offered no editorial or design services. We investigated many online publishing companies for both traditional publishing and self-publishing. We considered what services we needed and what the cost would be.

By December 21, 2011, we had decided to form our own publishing company and completed the paperwork to get started as Alacrity House Publishing. The name Alacrity House Publishing was chosen because alacrity means cheerful readiness, promptness, liveliness—qualities we desired for our company. We were ready to begin our business as publishers. We would publish the anthology for our writing group, books written by local authors, as well as our own books.

Alacrity’s mission is to offer superior service and quality products to southern Colorado authors and artists seeking publication. The San Luis Valley, average elevation 7,600 feet, is a large alpine valley in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. In this rural area, potatoes, alfalfa, and barley are important crops. The Valley is home to two of the poorest counties in Colorado but is rich in heritage and cultural traditions from the original Ute Indian inhabitants; to settlers from Mexico; to Mormons, miners, and others who came here to live. Talent abounds in the San Luis Valley, but low incomes and lack of information keep many from trying to publish their work. Preserving the heritage of the Valley and helping writers and artists to publish their work is a primary focus for Alacrity House Publishing.

We were in need of something of a crash course in publishing since I had set the deadline for publication of our first book ridiculously soon. In order to learn more about the publishing business, we joined the Colorado Independent Publishers Association (CIPA), the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA), and the Association of Publishers for Special Sales (APSS). Being book people and researchers by nature and experience, we invested in a basic collection of books for reference and information. Some of these are listed in the References section of this chapter.
PUBLISHING

With the legalities and organization completed, it was time to prepare our first book for publication. For the first volume of *The Circle Book: A Conejos County Anthology 2012*, we used everything that was submitted and edited rather freely (with the permission of the writers). Submissions of both written and art entries were accepted and organized into a preliminary order by Frankie Colton. Book design and layout were done by Linda Anderson Smith, using Microsoft Word. Research about printers, both local and online, was done by Terry Colton. Quotes for the print job were compared, along with formatting requirements and time required to submit the electronic files and receive the books. Editing and proofreading were done by everyone—Frankie, Linda, and Terry. We learned a lot about the possibility for errors during that process. We read, read, and reread the draft, and still found little errors—typos, widows and orphans, misalignment of pages. We went through the draft time after time to make sure the page numbers were correct, that the facing pages were correct, that the fonts were correct. When the manuscript was ready, Terry Colton converted the files to a PDF for submission to the printer, and the proofreading began again to make sure nothing had fallen out of place during the PDF conversion. One of the biggest challenges was making the table of contents useful and look right. Titles and page numbers were listed. When we were finished, we realized that people wanted to look for the names of the writers and artists rather than looking for the title of the piece. The book was already printed, so we created a bookmark to place in each book that listed the author or artist with page numbers.

We published two books during that first rush from December 2011 to February 2012. We did everything from selection of material, to typing some submissions that were submitted in handwritten rather than electronic form, to book layout, to cover design, and to preparation of the files for submission to an online printer. Book release parties were planned and advertised in the local newspapers with flyers placed in libraries, post office windows (these are small communities, remember), and grocery store bulletin boards. Two books were released in March 2012: *The Circle Book: A Conejos County Anthology 2012* and *Pickin’ and Pannin’: Poems of Creede and Thereabouts*.

Preparing to print a quality book was not the hardest part for Alacrity House Publishing. We already had some of the necessary skills and learned others. As a former librarian, Frankie had experience with cataloging and
bibliographic information as well as with acquisitions in a public school library setting. Terry had technical experience helpful in preparing e-books for varying platforms. Linda had worked with book layout and cover design. All were proficient at editing and proofreading.

Marketing processes, including getting books reviewed and securing testimonials to inform and attract those purchasing books for libraries and for personal reading, were new territory for us. We need to develop this area of expertise. In conversations with Colorado Independent Publisher Association members and self-published authors, we found that understanding what constitutes a reputable review that will carry weight with those purchasing books for libraries, schools, and personal use appears to be a source of concern, as well as how to go about getting such a review. Anyone planning to publish would be wise to learn about the process and implement it as part of the marketing plan.

Alacrity House Publishing uses a traditional publishing format with Alacrity House offering a contract to authors. Alacrity House pays all expenses. Authors receive royalties after initial publishing expenses are recovered. Alacrity House also offers consulting services to authors who wish to self-publish but who need help with specific aspects of preparing their books for publication. Editing, book layout, cover design, and proofreading are available at a reasonable hourly rate as well as a preliminary consultation about the steps involved in preparing a book for publication.

During the preliminary consultation, authors who inquire about our publishing services are introduced to the Alacrity House philosophy and the contract and royalty arrangements. We answer questions about traditional vs. self-publishing and encourage authors to choose a reputable publisher that they can afford and that will provide the services they need as well as helping them determine what services they actually will need.

After this initial consultation, two authors chose to have their books published by Alacrity House Publishing; and two authors chose to use self-publishing companies and to purchase packages of services varying from basic printing to packages that include marketing materials and other services. Those who have utilized other companies have not purchased the editing services and have chosen to do their own editing or to use friends and family to help with editing and proofreading. Two authors are waiting to make a decision about publishing.
One author who contacted Alacrity House Publishing chose to self-publish using Author House. She purchased a package that included marketing materials such as posters, bookmarks, postcards, and listings on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Her cover was designed by Author House, using some of her photos and ideas. She did not purchase editing services but used friends and family to do editing and proofreading. She is now working on her second book.

Phil Ray Jack, who consulted with Alacrity House Publishing about things to look for in a publisher, has written a short summary of his experience in self-publishing with Abbott Press that is included at the end of this chapter. He is releasing his second book soon.

**BOOKS**

Alacrity House Publishing has published six books, listed below, since 2012.

*The Circle Book: A Conejos County Anthology 2012.* Compiled by the Conejos Writers Circle. This compilation includes the work of writers and artists who live, work, and find inspiration in Conejos County. Included are poetry, essays, short stories, photos, and original art work. This book was awarded Second Place for Anthology in the Colorado Independent Publishers Association EVVY Award competition.

*The Circle Book: A Conejos County Anthology 2013.* Compiled by the Conejos Writers Circle. In addition to poetry, essays, short stories, photos, and sayings submitted by adults, writing and artwork from students in the local schools are included.

*The Circle Book: A Conejos County Anthology 2014.* Compiled by the Conejos Writers Circle. In addition to poetry, essays, short stories, photos, and sayings submitted by adults, writing and artwork from students in the local schools are included. This book is a finalist in the Anthology division of the Colorado Book Awards.

*The Circle Book: A Conejos County Anthology 2015.* Compiled by the Conejos Writers Circle. In addition to poetry, essays, short stories, photos, and sayings submitted by adults, writing and artwork from students in the local schools are included.

Cisneros, Lucy and Chris. *The Tale of Honest Henrietta: La Historia de Enriqueta la Honesta.* A tale about friendship and honesty, this children’s bilingual storybook about a chicken was written by Lucy and illustrated
by Chris. It includes a short section of chicken facts and is available with a companion coloring book and small stuffed chicken toys.

Miller, Mary June. *Pickin’ and Pannin’: Poems of Creede and Thereabouts*. This delightful, down-to-earth peek at the West of yesteryear uses historical tidbits and tales about Creede and neighboring places to bring back characters like Nicholas Creede, Jesse James, Bob Ford, Poker Alice, and Soapy Smith. Both soft- and hardcover versions were produced.

*Steppingstones of Our Lives*, by Frankie Colton, will be published in 2015.

Dr. Terry Colton is preparing to publish a series of how-to books. Linda Anderson Smith’s contemporary fiction novel will be published in late 2015.

**LIBRARIES AND ALACRITY**

We love libraries. We use libraries. We want our books to be in libraries. In an effort to make our books useful for libraries, we have focused first on quality—quality content, presentation, and binding.

Quality content is of utmost importance. People want to borrow library books that will educate them and entertain them. Writing that is well organized and grammatically correct is essential as is documentation of reliable, up-to-date sources for nonfiction. Other aspects of quality writing such as illustration and photography are considered. During the selection process for books we publish and for the contents of the anthology we publish yearly, we look for ideas that reflect the heritage of the San Luis Valley and that have a degree of universal appeal as well. As we branch out and publish books intended for a broader audience, we will continue to look for authentic, reliable, well-documented content in nonfiction and for fiction that is suitable for a larger target audience.

Presentation is key in getting readers to look beyond the cover. Good cover design, including the spine, will catch a librarian’s eye in the catalog or online and a reader’s eye on the library or bookstore shelf. Once the book is opened, the interior should be pleasing to the eye, easy to use, and give authentic, reliable content.

Books in public, school, academic, or specialized libraries are subjected to frequent (we hope) and sometimes hard use. Because our books thus far have been short runs of rather specialized interest, we have not provided a library binding option. Rather, we sought good-quality bindings in both
softcover and hardcover books. Perfect-bound softcover books with covers that do not curl or develop loose pages were our goal as we selected a printer. Hardcover books that are sturdy and have a dust cover are our choice.

Once a quality book suitable for library use has been produced, the next step is to get the book into the appropriate libraries. Because our first books are of regional appeal, Alacrity House Publishing has worked with libraries only in the San Luis Valley. Librarians at public libraries have purchased books. We donated a copy of each book to school libraries in Conejos County where students from the schools have contributed writing or artwork. Books were also donated to the Adams State University Library. We plan in the future to utilize IBPA’s library listings and other methods of advertising books to libraries.

Alacrity House Publishing has been invited to participate in author events at the Alamosa Public Library, the Conejos County Library, and the Adams State University library. These events have provided good opportunities for publicity in the local newspapers as well as for word-of-mouth communication with readers.

PRINTERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

After considering the local printer, printers in China and Korea, and many online printers, we chose to use DiggyPod (www.diggypod.com) to print and bind our first books. Our books featured both black-and-white and color pages. We needed only 200 copies to start with, due to the regional nature of the books. DiggyPod’s prices for printing were competitive. The service was good. They were helpful and on time. Both electronic and print proofs were available. Corrections were costly but possible. There was a person, not an answering machine, on the end of the line any time we had questions. Our experience with DiggyPod was positive, and we have continued to use them for printing softcover books.

Lulu (www.lulu.com) was selected as the printer for the hardcover edition of Pickin’ and Pannin’. The books are good quality, and the price was reasonable. Linda Anderson Smith was familiar with their work from having used Lulu in printing memoirs for clients in her personal history business.

Alacrity House Publishing (www.alacrityhousepublishing.com) did all the editing, book layout, cover design, bar codes and ISBNs, proofreading and e-book creation. We investigated the possibility of consulting editors
and book designers who were members of CIPA and whose businesses provided those services; but, with their prices of $125 per hour, we chose to do our own work. Alacrity House Publishing now offers editing plus book layout and cover design services at an affordable hourly rate.

**CHALLENGES**

We learned a lot from that first, intense push to get two books ready on schedule. Submissions for *The Circle Book* now go through a selection process rather than our using everything submitted. Since that time, we have streamlined the book production process by creating a flowchart for the procedures and responsibilities. We now use Adobe’s InDesign to create the layout for book interiors and covers.

Marketing remains a challenge for Alacrity House Publishing. We recognize the need to make our books available in markets beyond the local bookstores, arts and crafts events, library book signings, and limited online avenues for sales. We need to make greater use of libraries and book signings to promote our books. We need to go beyond newspaper and word of mouth and to include reviews and testimonials to help promote our books. IBPA can be a help in getting library listings and book show opportunities. We are preparing media kits that include bookmarks, postcards, and posters to help with marketing.

**PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

As we expand from our initial publication of the *Anthology* for the Conejos Writers Circle, we are publishing children’s books, poetry, and self-help/how-to books, including more universal topics along with our regional focus. E-books and online marketing are areas we plan to expand and improve. We will be investigating the use of IBPA library lists and book shows.

**ORGANIZATIONS**

The following are lists of organizations that have been helpful to us:

Association of Publishers for Special Sales (APSS) (http://www.spanpro.org/). APSS is a nonprofit trade association of authors and independent publishers with the mission of building successful writing and publishing businesses. APSS provides educational webinars, along with other services.
Colorado Independent Publishers Association (CIPA) (http://www.cipa catalog.com). CIPA’s mission is to encourage cooperative efforts and the free exchange of information, experience, and expertise to help members achieve and prosper while also assisting the writing and marketing of their books through cooperative ventures, education, and networking. Monthly meetings feature guest presenters on topics such as marketing and copyright. CIPA also sponsors the EVVY awards each year for books published by independent publishers.

Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) (http://www.ibpa online .org/). IBPA’s mission is to lead and serve the independent publishing community by providing advocacy, education, and tools for success. IBPA’s magazine, Independent, has articles about all aspects of publishing including book layout, editing, and marketing to libraries, chain stores, and online. The advertising serves as a resource for finding publishing services as well as for information about what other publishers are doing and charging. IBPA sponsors a yearly Publishing University. IBPA membership and resources are a valuable tool.

REFERENCE SOURCES

The following are some reference sources that have been helpful. There are many more on my shelf. This list is a beginning that gives some of the most useful.

Chicago Manual of Style (16th ed.). (2010). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. This is an essential tool for answering technical questions about punctuation, grammar, format, and so on.


**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Since our first venture into the world of publishing, prompted by our desire to help preserve the rich cultural heritage of the unique San Luis Valley where we live, we at Alacrity House Publishing have learned many valuable lessons. We know our strengths and weaknesses and have a goal of improving as we produce and promote quality books.

**APPENDIX**

“Self-Publishing and Self-Promoting” by Phil Ray Jack, self-published author:

When I gave in to that inner voice that demanded I express myself through the written word, I didn’t realize I had a choice, but since I’ve become a “real author,” I often ask myself why I do it. Sometimes I ask other writers the same question. One of the most powerful responses I received was, “I write so that I don’t feel alone.”

I think any discussion about the benefits and challenges of self-publishing should begin right there.

Most of us are introverts. We simply enjoy being alone, and we are at our best when we are in solitude. It’s not that we can’t handle social gatherings, but we tend to want to sit in the back row and observe rather than taking a place on the stage. The thought of being the center of attention is terrifying for many of us. For others, it’s simply exhausting. We may endure it, but we are anxious to return to the peace of our work areas and lose ourselves in the world of words.

So, once we finish capturing that little piece of our souls in words, we would like to turn them over to someone who will treasure them as much as we do and present them to the world in all their glory and majesty.
Unfortunately, the traditional publishers I approached with my first book were not nearly as thrilled with my work as I was. It’s hard to not take rejection personally—in fact, I still haven’t figured out how to do so. It was discouraging, and I would have given up if I knew how to.

Eventually I realized that I was putting too much control of my happiness in the hands of faceless strangers, and I began looking into self-publishing. I was shopping around in almost complete ignorance, but fortunately I found a publisher that offered support services and enlisted their help. The lessons I’ve learned have been worth every penny.

I discovered that no one—not even my publisher—will ever have the same love for my work or believe in it nearly as much as I do. There’s nothing wrong with that. Our roles are simply different. And even though I self-published, I finally realized I was still putting my dream in the hands of faceless strangers as long as I waited for them to market my work.

But I also discovered I had a lot to learn about publishing and marketing, and while some of the services offered didn’t seem to accomplish much, I learned from the experience. Other services were extremely valuable. Quite frankly, not having to deal with the process of getting an ISBN number for my book made the whole experience worthwhile.