

Deception

at a cocktail party

Trying on fantasy careers

By Robin Friedman

Have you ever been tempted at a cocktail party to start from scratch and make up a whole new persona for yourself?

You know the drill. It goes something like this:

"So, [insert your name here], what do you do?"

"Oh, I'm a [insert fantasy career here]."

George Costanza of *Seinfeld* perfected this deception, repeatedly telling strangers he was an architect. Named Art Vandelay.

"I'm a dolphin trainer," I could say.

"I'm a Cheesecake Factory taste-tester."

"I'm a wallaby breeder."

"I'm a veterinarian."

"I don't think so," my husband tells me. "You know they're going to ask you about their dog's diarrhea. What are you going to do then?"

Well. That's an excellent point.

What I usually end up doing, instead of flaunting my fantasies, is fluctuating between my true professions: writer, reporter, and author.

"Writer," the most vague of the trio, elicits the inevitable, "What do you write?"

How I answer this mostly innocuous question depends a great deal on my mood, time of day, what I'm wearing, whether I'm sitting or standing, and whether or not I'm holding a cocktail in my hands.

If I feel bubbly, I'll elaborate quite enthusiastically.

If I feel surly, I'll recite a canned speech.

"Reporter" typically elicits an entirely different reaction, a horror show of terror and awe that's as ghastly as a five-alarm fire:

"Oh! You're not going to quote me, are you?!"

"Don't worry," I say. "I'm off-duty."

"Author" produces very warm fuzzies.

And this is where it gets interesting.

That's because a whopping 95 percent of the time, I'm told:

"I've always wanted to write a book!"

I'm tempted to respond this way:

"Really? Have you always wanted to be rejected? Criticized? Publicly humiliated? Subjected to constant indifference, whim, and cruelty?"

Dr. Seuss, when asked about his profession at a cocktail party, is said to have had this exchange with a brain surgeon:

"So, what do you do?"

"I write children's books."

"I've always wanted to write a children's book in my spare time."

"I've always wanted to perform brain surgery in my spare time."

The implication, of course, is that writing a children's book is much easier than brain surgery — and maybe it is — but it's not easy by any stretch.

"Author" is a glamorous decoration, for sure, but, like all decorations, it represents my essence no more than a designer handbag would.

It's superficial, not soulful.

Truth is, it has little to do with who I am.

I don't write for glamour (there's very little) or money (ha!) or the chance to discuss my passion at cocktail parties.

I write because not writing would be the same as not breathing.

Besides, I can always fall back on the old standby:

"I'm an architect."

