

Write Your Novel! Success Stories from Published Authors

Maggie James

INTRODUCTION



HELLO, AND THANK YOU for downloading this book! My aim in writing/compiling it is to inspire potential authors, especially those people who'd love to write a novel but lack confidence. My other non-fiction book, *Write Your Novel! From Getting Started to First Draft*¹, delves deeper into how to overcome doubt and procrastination, but in this book I'd like to focus on SUCCESS. Why? Because if you tell people you want to become a published novelist, you're likely to be met with a mixed response. Some people will be supportive, but others won't. Maybe they claim to be acting in your best interests, by being 'realistic' in shooting down your ambitions. Why would someone behave this way? Perhaps they harbour unfulfilled writing dreams of their own, so they're jealous of anyone who attempt what they haven't. Others might tend towards negativity in their outlook, finding it hard to understand why anyone would want something which they themselves don't. If you allow these people to influence you, chances are you're be deterred from pursuing your dream of writing a novel. How sad would that be?

With that in mind, I've compiled this book of success stories, designed to enthuse and inspire you. You'll find published novelists sharing their tips on what works and what doesn't, along with the challenges they faced and how they overcame them. My hope is that you'll draw inspiration from them. I also hope you'll realise that, if you want to become a published novelist and are prepared to put in the time and effort, then success can arrive at your doorstep too.

A little about me and my background. Ever since I was a little girl, all I've ever wanted to do was to write novels. My love of books has been

1. <http://smarturl.it/writeyournovel>

with me ever since I can remember, fostered by my father, who would read stories from Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm to me at bedtime. I can't recall ever learning to read, and have always been fascinated by language and the written word. There was never any doubt in my mind that I'd grow up to be a novelist. When the time came to seek my first job, however, I went into accountancy. Not the most obvious choice, you might think! As a young adult, though, I lacked confidence and the idea of earning my living through writing fiction seemed impossible. I had to do something to earn money, and accountancy was a secure, well-paid profession. It didn't appeal greatly, but I'm comfortable working with figures and so I entered the world of finance and stayed for nearly three decades. Somehow my writing ambitions got buried under the realities of life: relationships, a mortgage and the like. I'd not written anything since my teenage years.

The dream never left me, though. I still intended to write a novel - someday. That day kept moving forward, always on the horizon but just out of reach. At one stage I even questioned whether it remained something I wanted - had it been just a childish notion? One I should forget about pursuing? With hindsight, I believe such self-questioned arose from fear. It seemed an insurmountable task to write a novel, despite the fact so many people did so successfully. I didn't know where to start! What should I write about? Which genre? How on earth could I write 80,000+ words? Should I forget the whole idea?

My answer always came back to one thing. On my deathbed, would I regret not having pursued my dream? The answer was always a resounding YES. My dream of becoming a novelist clung tightly, refused to let go. I dipped a toe in the water by penning a short fanfic story and was encouraged by the very positive response it received. I wrote more stories, each one longer than the one before, until my final effort was 27,000 words in length. I then decided I'd written enough fan fiction

and that it was time to move on to novels. I was still stumped, though, about what to write.

Round about this time I had a falling-out with my employers; it soon became obvious that matters wouldn't get resolved to my satisfaction. For a few weeks, I stewed in my anger, until a notion clicked into place in my brain. I had somewhat of an epiphany, realising it could be one of the best things ever to happen to me. My novel-writing dreams had been on hold since my childhood - wasn't this the perfect time to put them into action? As well as further indulge my lifelong passion for travel? With that in mind, I laid plans. I'd bite my tongue at work, pretend all was well, and save as much money as I could. Then I'd hand in my notice, go travelling for a year, and come back with a finished novel. After that, my vision for my future grew hazy. I knew I'd attempt to get the book published and that I'd need some form of income in the meantime, but I wasn't sure what. Whatever it was, I knew I was finished for good with accountancy.

And that's more or less what happened, with a few hiccups along the way. Once abroad, my procrastination over writing my first novel continued. Three months into my trip, and I'd not written a word. However, while in Vietnam I engaged in a conversation that sowed the seed of the idea for *His Kidnapper's Shoes*. We were discussing what happens to children who go missing, and I said that, sadly, I thought such events rarely had a happy ending. 'Not so,' said another traveller. 'Sometimes kids are stolen to order for people who can't have their own.' That got me thinking. How would it feel to discover, as an adult, that you'd been kidnapped as a child? What emotions would it stir up? I was fascinated, and knew I'd found the story I had to write. If only I could procrastinating...

Matters eventually came to a head in December 2010 in a small town in northern Chile, called Arica. My frustration was growing that de-

spite all my plans, I still hadn't written anything. One evening I was browsing the website of an author I very much admired. The quality of her writing is superb, but I had no idea about the quantity of her output. When I checked her website, I discovered she was a prolific writer, despite holding down a job. I felt ashamed. Here was I, complaining about how impossible it was to write while getting on and off buses, planes, etc., and yet this woman was churning out huge amounts of excellent fiction while working. No excuses, just action. I felt ashamed, and resolved to change. Time to throw procrastination out of the window, and get to grips with writing a novel.

I accepted that I couldn't do so while travelling at such a fast pace. I'd heard about a city in Bolivia called Sucre; other travellers were raving about this place. By all accounts it was beautiful and a great place to stay. I made a decision. I'd go there and remain as long until I'd completed my first novel. I'd write every day, without exception, until the first draft was done. The next day I booked a bus ticket to La Paz, my resolve strong. Something inside me had changed, and this was crunch time. The fact a milestone birthday was approaching held strengthen my decision. In four months' time, I would turn fifty; I couldn't bear the thought I'd reach that marker without having written a novel.

In hindsight, travelling overland from Arica, a coastal town, to La Paz, the world's highest capital, wasn't a good idea. Altitude sickness hit me hard, turning me into a grumpy, dry-mouthed monster who'd have killed anyone who crossed her. Nobody did, thank goodness, and after a good night's sleep I caught a bus to Sucre. My dream was about to begin!

Sucre turned out to be every bit as lovely as I'd heard. Surrounded by rolling hills and graced with beautiful colonial architecture, its streets filled with locals in colourful attire, I immediately felt at home. I found

a cheap hotel and booked myself some Spanish lessons to improve my grasp of the language; I was all set to go.

Except that I didn't have a clue how to write a novel. With my new-found resolve, however, I didn't let that stop me. I made some rough notes in an Excel spreadsheet about each chapter, roughed out some character sketches, opened Microsoft Word, and set to work. I made good on my promise. I wrote every day, even when I was unwell, and kept a tally of my word count. It was both exciting and motivating to see the numbers quickly build up, and chapter after chapter get completed. The result was a mammoth 147,000 words, but eventually *His Kidnapper's Shoes* got written. I began the novel at the end of December 2010 and finished it towards the end of February 2011. Writing the last sentence proved hugely emotional for me; I burst into tears, then went to a local cafe to celebrate, posting on Facebook about how happy I was. I didn't say why, because I'd not told anyone I planned to become a novelist. So many people are what I dub 'negative nellies' and I could just imagine the rolled eyes, the sarcastic jibes, had I told certain individuals. It was a wonderful golden secret I kept all to myself.

Well, almost. While in Sucre I met Molly, an American woman travelling with her teenage son and two dogs. Being the animal lover that I am, I'd gravitated to the dogs and struck up a friendship with Molly. During one of our chats I told her I'd written a novel, and intending submitting it to publishing houses upon my return to the UK. She encouraged me to consider self-publishing instead. At the time, Amazon's Kindle programme was in its infancy, and wasn't something I knew much about. When I looked into it, however, I liked what I read. Self-publishing appeared to have huge advantages over the traditional route to publication, with no downsides. I was ecstatic, and decided this was the path I'd take.

Before my return to the UK, I worked on polishing *His Kidnapper's Shoes*, without any real idea of what editing and revising a novel entailed. I simply read through it over and over, tweaking things as I went along. Why on earth had I made my protagonist phobic about sunflowers? Did the character of Sally really need to be in the book? The answers came back: God only knows, and no she doesn't. I axed huge swathes of narrative too. *His Kidnapper's Shoes* today is a sleek 82,000 words as opposed to the 147,000 it once was. These days I'm far more organised about the plotting, writing and editing processes, but I was still such a newbie back then.

Upon my return to the UK, other matters claimed my attention; I moved home and set up a dog-walking business to earn some money, all of which ate into the time I had available for writing. Nevertheless, I entered the annual NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) competition in 2012, which saw me complete the first draft of my second novel, *Sister, Psychopath*. I still had no author website or social media presence and no idea of how to promote a book. In short, I was as green round the gills as it's possible to be.

Somewhere along the way I kept tweaking and refining my books, adding *Guilty Innocence* to my portfolio in 2013, again for NaNoWriMo. I set up a website and social media accounts, and ended up publishing *His Kidnapper's Shoes* in March 2013. I was on my way! *Sister, Psychopath* and *Guilty Innocence* followed in due course.

Since then I've written two more novels, *The Second Captive* and *After She's Gone*. I've also written my novella *Blackwater Lake*, which I made free on all major sales platforms as an introduction to my writing. Non-fiction has had a look-in too, with the publication in 2014 of *Write Your Novel! From Getting Started to First Draft*.

My writing career took a major upturn in February 2016 when I received a phone call from one of the acquisitions editors at Lake Union,

one of Amazon's publishing imprints. She told me how much she'd loved *His Kidnapper's Shoes*, and that she wanted to discuss how Lake Union and I could work together. After a couple of weeks of emails and phone calls, she offered me a publishing contract for *His Kidnapper's Shoes* and *After She's Gone*. After much deliberation, I signed the contract. This was a big step as I'd previously sworn I'd never sign a publishing contract, being too happy with how self-publishing was going. It's hard to ignore the huge marketing muscle that Amazon wields, however, and if I'm honest marketing and promotion have never been my forte. A little over three years later, I have no regrets over my decision.

Things got even better in February 2017 when Bloodhound Books offered me a publishing contract for *Guilty Innocence* and *The Second Captive*. Later, in May of that year, they offered me a contract for *Sister, Psychopath* as well. I accepted both contracts, and later they published my sixth novel, *Deception Wears Many Faces*. Since then I have parted company very amicably with Bloodhound Books, but I remain grateful to them for the opportunity they offered me. Over eight years have passed since I quit my accountancy role and flew to Thailand to begin a new life, and I'm very happy at how things have turned out. I still view myself very much as a newbie when it comes to writing and publishing, although the learning curve is less steep now than how it was a few years back. I'm learning loads, though, and I don't imagine that'll stop anytime soon.

So what tips can I offer as a result of my road to being a published novelist? How about these?

1. Never give up on your dream of writing if it's what you want to do. There will always be those pesky 'negative nellys' who will tell you it's impossible or too difficult. Ignore them. As my story, along with those of the other authors in this book, shows, it can be done. With the advent of Amazon's self-publishing platform, along with iBooks, Kobo,

Nook and Google, it's never been easier to be a novelist. If I can do it, why shouldn't you?

2. If you're intending to publish your novel and earn money from it, get your online presence set up sooner rather than later. Many authors, myself included, concentrate so much on the writing side that we forget the other dimensions to being a published author. Start early by setting up your author website and social media accounts, so that when your eager readers search for information about your books, it's easy to find.

3. Play the long game. Success for most authors builds slowly, compounding with every book you publish. Don't expect to write one novel and rake in the cash for the rest of your life. For most of us, it takes years to get established as an author, and if you're looking for instant success, you've probably chosen the wrong profession. Sure, it happens, but it's rare, and you can't count on it. To achieve success, you'll need to be focused, dedicated and prepared to work hard. Even if the rewards seem elusive at first.

4. Plan your writing - that way you'll avoid the dreaded 'writer's block'. Many authors dislike feeling constrained by a detailed novel outline, and I get that. I'm a planner when it comes to writing novels, and outlines work for me. They don't for everyone, though, and if you dislike them then avoid the detailed variety. I do believe it's helpful to sketch out the plot, even if it's just one line per chapter. That way, you'll never sit at your computer wondering what to write next.

5. Read in your chosen genre as much as you can. Think about what works in the novels you like, and what doesn't in those you hate. Check what the top-selling authors in your genre are doing and learn from them. What sort of covers do their books have? What Amazon categories are the books featured in? Have a look at their author websites to pick up pointers. Do they offer a free book as an opt-in incentive for

their newsletter? No need to reinvent the wheel - find out what the top authors are doing, and emulate them.

6. If you want to be a professional novelist, then act like one. Have high standards for everything. Get the best covers you can afford; it really is true that readers judge books by their covers. And why shouldn't they? Your book cover will be their first impression of your work, so make sure it's a good one. There are some truly terrible examples of home-made covers on Amazon, as well as websites dedicated to ridiculing them. Make sure yours doesn't end up as one of them! If you can afford it, always get your manuscript professionally edited and proof-read before publication. I'm aware the cost of editing is prohibitive for many, but it's money well spent. A good editor can help shape your book into the best it can be. He or she will spot flaws that you can't. Check out prospective editors carefully, and get recommendations from successful novelists. Some people call themselves editors without any training or experience; I've read novels that have supposedly been edited and yet have glaring errors. The same goes for proof-reading. I believe all authors should have a sound grasp of spelling, grammar and punctuation, but if such things aren't your forte, then engage a competent proof-reader. As with editors, it pays to get recommendations. Typos, errors and missing words distract from the reader's experience of a novel, and are the mark of an amateur.

7. Learn as much as you can about book marketing and promotion. Several good books are available from Amazon on this subject, and other authors can also be a mine of information. I'll readily admit this isn't my forte, which is partly why I decided to accept the Lake Union and Bloodhound contracts, but other authors, including ones in this book, have achieved great results through canny marketing. The bonus in doing your own promotion is not having to share your royalties with a publisher, so if you have a marketing background, you're all set!

8. Develop a thick skin, something that's not always easy for novelists. Our books are important to us - they're part of who we are, so receiving unfavourable reviews can be crushing. Far better not to read your reviews than to allow them to tear your writing dreams to shreds. The internet can be an unfriendly place and trolls abound who love nothing better than to wound with words.

9. Lastly, please don't procrastinate the way I did. Why did I waste so many years before I eventually got going? Don't let that happen to you. If you want to write a novel, do it! No ifs, buts and maybes. The reward of finishing your first draft will far outweigh any struggle you may have to get started, I promise you. So why not start today?

Find out more about Maggie and her books here: www.maggiejames-fiction.com²

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2. <http://www.maggiejamesfiction.com>

ANDY BARRETT



SO HOW DO I DO IT?

We're talking here about writing, so all you smutty heads will be disappointed.

First of all, let's start by injecting a little sobering and thought-provoking pep talk.

I have no more qualifications in creative writing than I do in Quantum Mechanics. This is all my opinion; it's how I work, and the methods in this piece are those I've learned or have tried for myself. If you follow my advice and end up a penniless bum with nothing to your name other than a dream to write, then don't try to sue me, for I too am a penniless bum with nothing more than a dream to write. If however, my advice leads you to great wealth and fame, please pop by for tea and biscuits. You'll need to bring some tea. Oh, and some biscuits.

And for all you penniless bums out there clutching at your pencil and your writing pad – welcome brother; let us dream together.

Ideas

Usually a scene will occur to me first and then I'll grow a story onto it. It's very organic, but a little scary as the end result can be monstrous. I think people call this technique and this style of writer, a 'pantser'. I'm one of the few authors I know of who generally struggle to come up with ideas though. I suspect that's because I like to have an idea plopped into my head that's fully formed – a whole story, in other words. And I'll often dismiss ideas that do show themselves simply because they've

been written about before, even if I know I could give the tale an original slant.

A lot of authors seem to have ideas occur to them all the time, even bits of ideas. That doesn't often happen to me. If nothing plops into my mind, I begin prodding and poking at the box inside my head labelled *Novel Ideas*, but that never works out right. I can see the box closing tighter and tighter the more I growl at it. Only when I chuck away my prodding stick and walk off does it seem to relax and maybe open of its own accord.

But for me, coming up with a plausible idea is very difficult and often tedious. And I cry a lot in frustration. Sometimes I have moments of exceptional clarity where a very appealing idea will arrive, smartly dressed, and with a smile on its face. And each time this happens, something distracts me, and I turn away for a second or two and when I look again, it's gone, a small cloud of dust where it once stood. Infuriating doesn't cover it.

Planning

I am the worst planner in the world. I don't plan. For *Black by Rose*, I formed the story around a robbery scene I had in mind, and then promptly got stuck. So I made a flowchart on a sheet of A3 I had kicking about. It had all kinds of ideas branching off in all kinds of directions. There was a whole spectrum of ideas coming from that thing that ranged from impossible to improbable, and I basically drew a route through the whole page. That got me going again, but mostly I was winging it.

In *The Third Rule* I did do some planning, but only the background. I planned it in minute detail so I knew exactly what I was talking about. All the laws and policies I'd created regarding The Rules were fixed in place in my head and I could just get along and write the story (I

learned a lot about British law, the judiciary, and politicians along the way). I kept an A4 bound book of all my notes too so I could refer back to it when I needed to, and it helped me eke the story forward too, letting me know what scene should come next. But there was still no forward planning.

In *Stealing Elgar*, I also kept a note book. It all happened a long time ago, but I do recall simply going down a list of the scenes I needed to write and ticking them off. I look back on that book with envy, wishing I could do that these days. This made for some really quick writing, and it's a technique I'd like to employ again.

But in every modern book that I've written on my computer, I create a file which I call the Chapter Profile. It's headed with a chapter number, page count, word count, one-sentence heading, and day/time the scene takes place. Below this heading I write a brief summary of what occurred in this scene, who was present, what the important aspects of it were so I can refer to it any time. Keeping this up to date is vital. In *Sword of Damocles*, I used this extensively to help me rearrange all the chapters and all the scenes within the chapters to make sure it was chronologically correct. It helped me find inconsistencies and continuity errors – well, some of them. And then, it also helped me equalise the chapter lengths and so avoid some 50-page chapters.

Alongside the active document, I like to use the navigation tool on Word. It's invaluable and I cannot now write without it being there. It's another chapter marker. The text box though is very short but I like to get as much information into it as I can. Then swapping chapters or scenes around is a doddle: drag and drop.

All of these aids are great to refer to when making up the story, propelling forward, or correcting it afterward, but they're all retrospective aids. I still don't know how to actually plan out a story.

Writing

At the beginning of my career (I'm allowed to call it that, right?), I panicked a lot. After reading a book, I wrote like the author had. For example, when I finished *The Stand*, my authorial voice grew an easy American twang that I simply couldn't break free from. Same with Bernard Cornwell's books – I developed a rich English slant that really wasn't 'me' at all. On occasion though, especially with the American twang, it had the effect of catapulting my writing forward at great speed, and I soon realised why. I was trying too hard to sound authorly, and using someone else's voice allowed me to break away from my own inhibitions and just write – and just enjoy writing. It was faster, flowed better, read easier, and made more sense.

This realisation hit me half way through the second book of the first trilogy: *Stealing Elgar*. You won't know it because it's been edited a thousand times since, but *A Long Time Dead* was stifled, it read like a series of bullet points; it had no flow. In *Elgar*, I made the conscious connection between my mind and my writing voice – it was almost something physical, something I could feel happening.

So the greatest thing to happen to me was being able to let go of those silly self-doubts and artificial constraints that I'd chained myself up with. The style you read in today's Eddie Collins books is my style. It isn't copied from anyone. It's mine. And it comes to me as easily as breathing; I wrote *Black by Rose* in about five months. Its only edit was correction of typos, and a quick polish or two – aside from making sure there were no chronological or continuity errors of course. What you read there is almost precisely how it came out the first time round.

And here's a little tip that might actually help! I believe there are four levels of thinking, and when you're immersed in Level 3 thought as you construct your story, have a go at listening to music that best reflects the mood of the scene you're writing. I promise, it really does work. If

I want Eddie to be downright nasty, rude, or even if I just want him in a strop, I listen to a bit of Ozzy Osbourne, or AC/DC, or Halestorm. If on the other hand, I'm writing a thoughtful, emotional scene, maybe one where – if this was a film you were watching – you'd shed a tear or two, play something mellow, something 'deep' (we're in Level 3 thinking mode here – 'deep' is a pre-requisite!), which for me includes Enya (laugh and I'll poke you in the eye!), some old Queen (no, not some old queen, read it again), a little Taylor Swift (just discovered her, some good stuff in there)... you get the idea.

I tried once listening to some classical music for the triumphant and uplifting feeling it can generate, but I failed to get hooked on it. That's perhaps because I spent most of the evening listening to five-second samples of it, searching for the one that would carry me away. They all sound the same in five-second sound bites so I gave up.

So that's the theory of my writing. What about the logistics? What happens when I get stuck?

I only need ask myself one question: what would the character do in this situation? Okay, scratch that – I ask myself this one too: what would be the most realistic way that this crisis would end? Occam's razor: "Entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity." In other words, choose the simplest path.

In this instance, I outline the problem, and from it draw a series of lines radiating from its centre. At the end of each line, I summarise what could happen. From this summary I extend the line to include whatever knock-on effect that particular action would initiate.

Eventually, I'd arrive at two possible paths in which to proceed (I suppose this section harks back to the Planning section), and I'd choose the one that I felt most attracted to emotionally, rather than the one that appealed to me through practicality. Emotion is the driving force

of you and me, of your character and ultimately of your story. This then becomes what would happen, which in the final draft, becomes what did happen.

Okay, the logistics of my writing. I use a Logitech solar keyboard. I've been through a dozen or so keyboards since I began this writing lark, and this one is by far the best. It has a very short keystroke, a pleasing 'tink' when the key bottoms out, and is very attractive to the eye. I'm not one of those writers who trained to use a keyboard. I can type while not looking at the keys, but there's a lot of red on the screen when I do, which doesn't bother me.

Instead, I look at the keyboard while I'm smashing the keys, glancing to the screen only occasionally when in full flow (but obviously reading what I've written when I come to a natural pause). As I'm typing this now, I realise that I don't actually look at the keys at all; I look through them. I'm staring right now at the 't' and 'y' keys and my fingers are just a raggedy blur to each side. This is me sinking into my story, looking at my character's face, hearing his thoughts, and shrieking at what comes out of his foul mouth.

I find that if I watch the words appearing on the screen, then that's what I'm doing: watching the screen. I should be observing my main man, and disappearing through the keyboard and absorbing the crisis he's engaged with, helps me a lot. It especially helps me with the character's mood. I try to gauge the mood he's in as a result of whatever crisis he's lumbered with, and if I keep myself away from physical things by staring through the keyboard, I can maintain that mood or move it along to the next natural mood he'd encounter in a much smoother fashion.

As I mentioned above, when I do sit back and study what I've written, I can see the flow of words, and I can hear them. Do they sound right? Is that sentence clumsy? Is it really what I was thinking when I wrote it? I also see other things too, like a word I've used too often (okay, I'm

a guilty of this – I’m not perfect!), or the very real fact that I’ve skirted around what I meant to say and have not made the point at all.

I try to keep myself away from the physical world around me while I type. I have two screens – one has the story I’m writing on it (always on the right hand screen), the other has the Chapter Profile. I have a keyboard that I feel comfortable with (if you wear your favourite slippers, they eventually disappear from your conscious mind, and that’s where I am with this keyboard), and I have a sheet of red velvet across the desk (thanks Kath!) that stops my arms sticking to the wood when it’s hot in summer, and stops my arms feeling the coldness of it in winter.

I have a lamp nailed to the wall above me. Its light shines at the ceiling and is diffused enough to cast an even pool of light over my desk. All around me doesn’t exist. My desk faces a wall where I have a few choice pictures pinned – but I rarely look at them. The blind over the window to my left is never open; I like the consistency of my artificial pool of light, and get quite cross when the sun comes through it, especially on a windy and cloudy day when the sunlight is weak then strong then weak... I have a footstool under my desk for those moments of contemplation where I sit back in my chair and read the screen or immerse myself in deep thought – I want no pinprick of discomfort to pull me out of the story, I want no distractions.

When the neighbours are being noisy, cutting grass or whatever, they’re pulling me away from the story. I counter this not with music (or automatic gunfire from my roof-mounted sniper’s nest), but with a rainfall soundtrack turned up high enough to obliterate them. Sharp intermittent noises play havoc with my thoughts, but a constant drone, a washing machine for example, or my rainfall track, soothes me, and allows me a swift exit from those around me.

On my desk I have a 1966 sixpence (my birth year) which is the first coin I ever remember holding. I have a few spent 9mm shell casings,

some heavily distorted lead from a shotgun slug, and a few rifle rounds alongside some gifts from special people – oddments to carry me away somewhere new.

As an aside, I hate new pages. I used to write my books longhand in an A4 flip writing pad. And I would cram words onto each page simply because I hated turning over and starting on a new blank page. I could fit something like 800 words onto one single page. And it's the same now that I use a computer. I'll often continue on the same page when I begin a new chapter, just so I don't have to see a blank page with the words Chapter Six (or whatever) waiting patiently for me to crack my knuckles and begin punching the keys. Maybe a psychologist could shed light on that one.

Writer's block

I suppose since so much has been written about writer's block, it must exist. I've been stuck several times. Most notably in my recent past, I was stuck on how to end *The Third Rule*. I wrote no less than six endings for that book until I chose the one that felt right. I followed the little rule above, where I selected what was emotionally right for the character as well as the story and eventually it fell out of the keyboard by itself, quite satisfactorily.

You have to know about the scene you're trying to write, you have to know where you want it to end – by that I mean that each related scene must logically follow on to the next in a chronologically and emotionally accurate manner – not necessarily how it appears in the book, there might be another half dozen scenes featuring different characters in between them – but you have to know what job the scene you're stuck on is there to perform and work towards it. If you don't know what its job is, then how can you write it? This is where the flow chart might come in handy for you: it'll help determine where in the story this particular

scene fits, give it a purpose, and give you the tools to crack on and write it.

You only have writer's block when you don't know what you're trying to achieve.

Sadly, I too suffer from this; but my own version of writer's block is determining what story to write. Now, for instance, I've finished *Sword of Damocles*, and have a few hours to myself. I could slap myself for not using this time more wisely to get on with writing the next Eddie Collins story. Instead, I'm sitting here writing about how I write. Der!

Editing

I have several failings as an editor. Firstly, I don't let the book cool down enough after I've finished it. I consider the length of time it took to write the damned thing enough of a time gap in order to go back to the beginning and start editing. I am so very wrong. In almost every case where I've read a piece of my 'edited' work months after I published it, I have been able to make it better or spot the errors I was blind to back then.

I do not like this. But I justify it to myself thus: Improving a manuscript over time is easy because you are an improved reader and so, an improved writer. And if I were to live by this philosophy, I would never publish anything. I accept that there will always be areas in which a story can be improved, but you have to stop somewhere, don't you?

I find it easiest to spot the typos and inconsistencies from a printed version rather than on screen. I've pondered this anomaly and cannot think of why it should be so. But it is, I recognise it as a fact, and I always do it this way.

Also, I'm not actually very good at reading. I mean I read like most people do, in that I see what I want to see so am rubbish at spotting omis-

sions and general errors. I'm extremely lucky in that I have some good friends who not only love reading but who have the eyes of a shithouse rat and excellent mindsight. I am in awe of them.

And there's another reason why I'm not especially gifted when it comes to editing: when I've finished with something, I like to move right along to the next project. This is a failing of mine since a work in progress is not actually finished until it's actually finished. You get the idea; I'll resist the urge to waffle on this one further.

But before I leave the Editing section, I let you into a secret foible of mine. I can only edit with a red Bic pen. It also has to have a fine tip, not medium. And if I make notes about the story as I'm reading through it, (and I also do this during the story's construction) I use a 0.5mm mechanical (Staedtler) pencil fitted with HB lead, writing on an A5 spiral bound pad. I hate using pen because it looks messy, and I love how the pencil feels in my hand and I adore how it writes, so free and easy. I know, I know, crazy bird!

Writing rules

By now you know what I'm like for following rules. Not too keen – unless they're necessary. Too many of today's rules in all aspects of life are there just to confound us, or to delay us, or impede us. Most rules are created by buffoons in their plush offices, so far removed from everyday life that they might actually come from another planet. But some rules are good, right?

When I write, there are some rules I actually try to follow. The Anti-Repetition Rule of 1968 is quite a good one to be aware of. How often, when reading through a first draft, have you seen the same thing twice on a page, sometimes twice in the same paragraph? In a first draft, it's acceptable – you're in 'stream-of-thought' mode, and everything is acceptable. What's not acceptable is seeing it in a finished work. The same

point made more than once is an indication that the author felt he didn't quite make the point with sufficient force the first time around so he gives it another shot. If you notice this, then the author did make his point the first time around!

Another reason for this kind of repetition is that he thought of a better/more clever way of putting it across – this tells me that the author couldn't choose which one to use! Come on guys, sharpen up your act, or you'll find your book in the 'Shit' file on someone's Kindle.

You want more repetition stuff? Clause 2 in the above Rule states that authors must keep the use of name tags to a minimum. How often have you seen a character's name appear after every sentence they speak? Does it get on your pip? Yeah, me too. Name tags like this should be used sparingly; in fact, you should be able to write a complete page of dialogue and get away with just two tags – one for each of the two characters involved in the exchange. Okay, you could throw in an extra couple just to make sure the reader stays on track, but your characters and their situation should provide sufficient information for the reader to instinctively know who is talking at any one time.

Even now in my own writing I can see repetition, not usually on the same page, but certainly across several chapters where one character is feeling the pain I gave him and simply won't shut up about it. To those who've read it and noticed it, I apologise, and I constantly strive to do better.

The Passive Sentence Act of 1976 states that using passive sentences can seriously weaken one's prose and should be avoided if at all possible.

Check this out: Most rules are created by buffoons in their plush offices... This would read much better if the author had said: Buffoons in their plush offices create most rules... It's better isn't it? Well, I think so. That's not to say I don't still use them; sometimes they're necessary,

or they actually read better, or make the meaning you're trying to get across clearer. All I'm saying is be aware of them.

Fragments are great.

I like them because they break up swathes of text, and they have the power to shock if used right; they certainly have the power to amplify a point. So when the wiggly line beneath your fragment warns you of a rule infringement, don't ask yourself if that frag is absolutely necessary, ask yourself if the writing would suffer without it!

Cliché is always the bearer of bad news. I've never known a cliché add something positive to a piece of exposition – except one about the weakness of using clichés perhaps. The only time I will knowingly use a cliché is when it falls from a character's mouth – and even then it's there to demonstrate that he's intellectually challenged and can't think of anything better all by himself. If I spot a cliché in a sentence, I kill it dead. If I can't think of a better way to illustrate the point other than use a cliché, I elect not to illustrate the point.

The same goes for originality. Okay, it's on a much larger scale, but if I can't find a way to tell a story without using a way that's already been used, I'll move along to the next story idea. In the past I've come up with a wonderful idea only to learn afterwards that some bastard already wrote it. Nothing I can do about that – no one can ever accuse me of plagiarism.

Simile and metaphor. How I adore these two things. They are nearly the same thing – just that metaphor is the big brother of simile. Both can only enhance a story (if used sparingly – come on, not every sentence has to be illustrated with a simile, and not every theme or object has to be broadened or compared by using a metaphor) and draw a reader deeper in to where you lie in wait with your fragment! Seriously, use a metaphor to expand the theme of your scene and it comes alive; it

makes showing rather than telling become your natural way of writing. Use a simile to inject a bit of colour in what might otherwise be a dull but necessary sentence too. When searching for them, be very careful not to fall through the trap door into Clichéland.

Find out more about Andy and his books here: <http://andrew-barrett.co.uk>

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ROBERT BIDINOTTO

I THINK I WAS BORN to do this.

For decades, “Write a novel” stood atop my bucket list, like some unforgiving ghost from Dickens—an accuser I could neither appease nor ignore. Over the years, I toyed and dabbled with story and character ideas in fits and starts, just scribbling notes. But I never got serious about it until 2008, during the recession, when I lost my job as editor of a magazine. After a subsequent project fell through late in 2009, I found myself age 60, out of job opportunities, and running out of money.

So my first novel was a Hail Mary Pass. I simply had no other good options, and nothing to lose.

I admit that I was lucky, because when I published *Hunter* in 2011, the chances of success were vanishingly small. For one thing, I had no prior experience or reputation as a fiction-writer. Second, because I was short on time and savings, I decided to self-publish rather than seek an agent or publisher. Back then, self-publishing was still regarded with skepticism if not contempt, and ebooks were a novelty just catching on. Third, I was 62 years old. I mean, who starts writing fiction that late in life? Usually, it takes years of practice and false starts to become proficient enough in the art of storytelling to attract readers and good reviews.

Yet unlikely as it was, *Hunter* became a big bestseller. As I say, I’ve been lucky.

That’s not to say that things have been easy, then or since. I want fellow writers to know about the biggest challenge I faced, because many of you may confront it, too.

Fortunately, my challenge wasn't poor health, or lack of time, or skepticism and mockery from family and friends. Because I've written controversial nonfiction all my life, I am not concerned about criticism. Nor do I have trouble coming up with story ideas and characters. And before setting out to write my first novel, I thoroughly researched the process of self-publishing, so I wasn't worried about that, either.

No, my major challenge has been dealing with fear—mostly the fear of failing to meet my own lofty self-expectations. That fear led to years of procrastination. Years I wish I could have back, now.

I want to talk to you about beating fear.

To those who know a bit about me, it probably seems strange that I would begin to write fiction filled with gnawing self-doubts. After all, I'd written award-winning nonfiction all my adult life and even edited some fiction, so I was pretty solid in basic writing skills. Also, I'd devoured countless thrillers as an avid fan, absorbing the conventions and tropes of the genre by osmosis. In addition, I'd studied many books on fiction writing, learning a lot about plot structure, pacing, and the other elements of crafting a novel.

But studying an art is one thing. It's quite another to actually practice it. Writing fiction draws upon imaginative capacities and skills different than those employed in writing analytical nonfiction. There are scant analogs in nonfiction to creating compelling dialogue, conjuring full-blooded characters, or concocting a devious plot structure.

I knew that—which is why, for nearly sixty years, self-doubt prevented me from even trying to write or publish fiction. Then, even after I published my bestseller, *Hunter*—hitting a grand slam home run the first time at bat—I was intimidated by the prospect of writing the sequel. I wondered if I had only that single, first story in me. I worried that my

next book would be mediocre, a disappointment to me and a let-down for fans who had been eagerly, impatiently awaiting its release.

So after *Hunter*, I procrastinated for a year, promoting and squeezing it for all its marketing value. But then came the inevitable time of declining sales, when I knew I had to stop stalling and get moving on the second book, *Bad Deeds*. To do that, I had to beat my personal doubts and demons into submission. And I still do, because old mental habits die hard.

Fear can have many sources, of course. Fear of failure—either generally, or fear of your ability to master specific elements of the writing craft. Fear of success—perhaps of disruptive changes that success might bring into your comfort zone, and of the career responsibilities that success might impose on you. Fear of the opinions of others—such as fear of making a public fool of oneself, of disappointing one’s friends, family, and fans, or of pursuing an “artsy” career that your parents may think is “irresponsible.” Fear of the sheer effort that writing a novel demands—fear of the long, lonely hours, of the brain-wringing, problem-solving work. Fear of not being able to be consistently creative (“writer’s block”). Or, like me, fear of not being able to live up to one’s high—perhaps too high, even platonically high—standards of what constitutes a good novel.

While fear has many sources, it leads to familiar, self-sabotaging consequences in authors. One of the biggest is procrastination. Its most common symptoms are indulgence in avoidance mechanisms—in time-killing distractions and diversions of all kinds, all to avoid the intimidating sight of that forbidding, demanding adversary: The Blank Page.

Today, smart phones, the internet, and social media afford endless escape routes from the fear of confronting The Blank Page. That’s because they provide pages and pages already filled with interesting information that can be rationalized as “research,” while correspondence and

texting with friends offers the feeling of “writing”—even if both have little or nothing to do with your actual writing project. And if that isn’t enough to interrupt your work, there’s always the latest episode of your favorite show on Netflix, an unplanned shopping expedition for (cough, ahem) “necessities,” the Siren summons of yard work, cleaning, household maintenance, catching up with friends and family on the phone or at the local bar, or just getting drunk at home.

Writers, including wannabe writers, demonstrate constant, boundless creativity in the pursuits and excuses they invent to avoid writing.

So, how do you overcome the fear of The Blank Page? Here are some things that work for me to reduce the emotional pressure and make the writing process less intimidating and more productive—in fact, downright pleasurable.

1. Establish a specific time for your writing. Pick a block of time each day when you won’t be interrupted. Treat that time as sacred. (It is.)
2. Eliminate distractions. Close your web browser, turn off your phone and leave it in another room, shut the door to block out the sounds of your family.
3. Enlist your family. Let them know that you aren’t to be disturbed during your writing time, because “It’s my job.” Get them to intercept phone calls and ringing doorbells. In exchange for your absence, promise them that you’ll devote specific time exclusively to them “after work.” Then keep your promises to them.
4. Set a specific goal, with a deadline. If you set a goal to finish one scene or a certain word count during a specific period of time, you are much more likely to make progress than if you leave your goals and deadlines vague.

5. Establish pleasurable rewards for hitting your goals. You should make your work sessions something to look forward to, not a duty or drudgery. A good way is to tie the “work” to “play,” by promising yourself something truly enjoyable for hitting various short- and long-term goals. (You can tie family time into these rewards.)

6. Get down into the core feeling that motivates you to tell your story. Every story has a big emotional component for its author. You initially had some personal motive for wanting to tell the tale. So before each writing session—and before bed each night—dive down into that motivation and recapture the exciting feeling that lies at the center of the story for you. Go into the heads of your main characters; experience their challenges and conflicts and passions. Visualize the climax and resolution—and also the happy career consequences when your book is published. The more real and appealing that you make your Story World for yourself, the less appealing and distracting the world around you will feel.

7. Break up big, intimidating tasks into tiny, bite-sized pieces. Okay, so you are having trouble with a complicated plot structure, and you’re overwhelmed. Pull back from the big picture and think of the situation of a single character instead. What is her problem or challenge? What complications does she face? How can she confront them? What is her story arc? Take any similar big challenge you face and fragment it into small components—then tackle each of those in turn, in any order. You’ll feel great as more and more pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

8. If you are having “writer’s block,” try this trick. In a how-to writing book, I read that a famous author, when stuck for ideas, opened a “conversation” with his keyboard. He would start typing in the form of a stream-of-consciousness dialogue, something like this (I’m making this up on the fly):

Keyboard: Hi, Joe. Glad to see you. What seems to be the problem today?

Joe: Hi.... Oh, I don't know. I'm guess I'm stuck about where to go with the story after the mid-point disaster.

Keyboard: Sure, I understand. Well, where did you leave your main characters yesterday?

Joe: Adam and Mary split up, and I can't figure out what to do with them now. Whether to have them get back together or not.

Keyboard: Are they still in love?

Joe: Mary is, for sure. But I'm not sure about Adam.

Keyboard: What's Adam's problem? Why do you think he's uncertain?

Joe: Hmm.... I guess he wonders if she's the right one for him.

Keyboard: What does he think is missing in their relationship?

Joe: The early spark is gone. And he's getting attracted to his secretary.

Keyboard: Well, couldn't that lead to an interesting romantic triangle?

You proceed like this, page after page if necessary. The "dialogue" gimmick compels you to focus on raising and answering questions, formulating and refining creative solutions to problems, then capturing them in writing rather than forgetting them. I've used this device in my previous books, and it helps me brainstorm productively and pleasurable for hours on end.

9. Print out and stack your completed manuscript pages as you go. The sight of the ever-growing stack of pages encourages me to work even harder and faster.

10. Keep your readers informed about your writing progress and publishing goals. Letting your fans know how things are going will enlist them as cheerleaders for your efforts.

Let me close by mentioning a specific fear I had to deal with when I first began to write fiction. I was particularly intimidated by the prospect of presenting the ongoing love story that lies at the heart of my thriller series. Not only is it unusual for a male author to bring a passionate romance into violent, action-suspense thrillers, I was also scared about whether my love scenes would be ludicrous.

So how did I beat that fear? Ultimately, I just had to ignore the nagging naysayer in my head, and just write those scenes from my heart, drawing introspectively upon my own feelings and past experiences, trying to present them as authentically as possible. I had to trust that if those scenes moved me, they would touch others, too.

The courage to be honest apparently worked. I was astounded—and relieved—when out of millions of titles, *Hunter* hit #2 on the Kindle “Romance” list, and #1 in “Romantic Suspense.” Women, it turns out, loved the love story and thought it rang true.

The moral?

Don't be afraid to expose your values and feelings, honestly and candidly. Ultimately, readers fall in love with a writer's work mainly because they believe and feel the way the author does. You have nothing to fear in revealing your true self. And when you do, you may be amazed by the response.

I was.

Find out more about Robert and his books here: <http://www.bidinotto.com/>

**WRITE YOUR NOVEL! SUCCESS STORIES FROM
PUBLISHED AUTHORS**

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LARY CREWS

TODAY IS THE BEST TIME to be an author.

When I began writing novels in 1986, it was 2 years and 8 months before I saw my first mystery novel, *Kill Cue*, in a bookstore. Today, things happen more quickly because self-publishing replaced agents and traditional publishers.

Print on demand has made it possible to scale down the cost of publishing. No huge print runs for books, which might possibly sell, and no more remainders when they didn't. Best of all, readers are finally comfortable with buying their books on the Internet.

Amazon gave power to authors.

Today, many writers are publishing books on their own through Amazon's CreateSpace and Kindle programs at little or no cost because they want a greater share of the pie than traditional publishers offer.

In 1990, Bantam-Lynx gave me a 7% royalty or \$00.31 on the \$3.50 cover price of my first novels; today with the right pricing, you can get 70% royalty on your published eBook.

(My newest book, *Novel Secrets*, scored royalties of \$4.98 royalty on the \$6.98 paperback and \$2.09 on the \$2.99 Kindle.)

Self-publishing gave us control over our own books. I self-published through Amazon, and gained global distribution to major eBook stores, which means millions of readers without a New York publisher. My book got into the hands of my readers quickly, with the advantages of low-cost delivery, global scale and no upfront costs for me.

In fact, my published book cost me a total of \$0.00.

It's a great time to be writing a novel. Back in the old days, you wrote a manuscript and sent it to agents or publishers who would decide if you deserved to be published. If they bought your manuscript (and only about 10% of all manuscripts were purchased by New York publishers back then), it was out of your hands.

You no longer need an agent or an editor. You can run your own self-publishing firm.

Digital has democratized the publishing industry. Today, you can write and publish your book in paperback and eBook for almost no money and reap the rewards. No agent. No publisher other than you. Your book remains in print for as long as you want.

I published my latest book, *Novel Secrets*, first in paperback and then 24-hours later, for Kindle. There's something cool about holding your paperback book in your hands. It also makes it easier to sell your books in bookstores and to libraries. Plus, I discovered it was much easier to get reviews when I offered to send them the paperback edition of the book.

Kindle e-Books now have a warning message if they have spelling mistakes or bad formatting. There are thousands of e-books in the Amazon Kindle Store that have content errors, as simple as a series of spelling mistakes or formatting issues.

As of February 3, 2016, Amazon has begun showing customers a warning message on the Kindle store detail pages of books that contain several validated quality issues. The warning message will be removed as soon as Amazon received an updated file from self-published authors or publishing companies.

"This book is currently unavailable because there are significant quality issues with the source file supplied by the publisher. The publisher has been notified and we will make the book available as soon as we receive a corrected file. As always, we value customer feedback."

That's why I wrote a book called *Novel Secrets: how to write a GOOD self-published book*. There are no hard and fast rules for writing fiction, or if there are some, nobody knows what they are. However, there are many precedents, created by the millions of writers who went before you. We no longer call them rules for writing fiction. Instead, I share with you the methods other writers have discovered, by trial and error, successful methods which have resulted in well-written novels by those writers.

Can I really write and sell a self-published book?

Yes, of course, you can. If you strive to write the best novel you can and rewrite it carefully, you can make lots of money with a good book. The market needs your well-written novel. Quality rises to the top in publishing.

When I began writing my eighth book, *Novel Secrets*, I was 68. Granted, I had been writing on computers since 1985 but self-publishing was completely new to me.

With the long-distance guidance of London self-publishing guru Rick Smith, I managed to get my book published in November 2015 in less than two weeks.

I write because it is my favorite job, ever.

I have been writing for 25 years in great measure because I enjoy being alone (I'm an only child with no sisters, brothers or even a dad). I'm a loner, but I'm fine with that. I also love to type and have since I was 18 and took an adult education typing course.

When I begin each morning, five days a week, I eat breakfast, cruise Facebook and Twitter, check my email and start writing by 10 a.m.

I reread what I wrote the day before, just to get my motor running. I get my coffee, open the blinds onto the courtyard and set my timer for 90 minutes. Total writing time: about six hours a day, five days a week. Over a three-month span, my daily word counts amount to 90,000 words, a good secret draft for a novel.

I am able to devote nearly all my time to writing because my dear wife, Lori, has worked so hard for us through the years. From middle school English teacher, to public relations director for an organ donor group to the nanny work she loves, she has helped supplement our Social Security so that we can have a better standard of living. She gently cares for babies while their parents are away working to pay the bills. Without her work, I would not be able to write all day. (Thanks, Lori.)

I've had a dozen writing offices since 1984, always on a Windows computer.

These days, my writing office is an HP Pavilion 17 Notebook PC running Windows 10 and MS Office 2016 on a laptop desk with a comfortable chair and a pillow for lumbar support. The HP printer is a foot away. There are two clocks immediately in front of me, and a framed cover of my first book and my storyboard bulletin board on the wall. A Chinese Zen lamp with a paper shade illuminates my keyboard. A window into the apartment complex courtyard is two feet to my right.

I usually listen to music as I write. I play Pandora One Radio (available for \$5 a month) through the speakers I affixed to the bottom of the laptop table or on the TV. I tune Pandora to jazz (Hammond B3, Cool or Smooth). When trying to intensely concentrate, I play Classical Relaxation radio. No vocals. I can't write with words being sung at me.

One thing I have learned since I joined the Internet in 1989 is there are about 256,000 writers at any given time in America. Luckily, only about 300 to 500 are published each year. Where so many unpublished writers make a mistake is joining a critique group of unpublished writers. The opinions of other unpublished writers are simply the visually impaired leading the visually impaired.

Critiques from family and friends are even more insidious because they have an extra agenda. Your mom will love anything you write because you wrote it. (That's what makes so many people think they can sing in karaoke clubs.)

Although family members love you, they are unqualified to tell you if your writing is any good, and they have a stake in not telling you the truth, so you won't be upset.

Writers on Facebook writer's groups will often be jealous of you for being able to write, and they will give you so-called constructive criticism in hopes you will screw up your work even more. It's amazing how much misinformation exists on the Internet.

Dependency on critique groups stunts your growth as a writer. It keeps you from learning to recognize what works on your own. In fact, there is an infamous Facebook group who pride themselves in tearing apart fledgling writers.

You can't write a book by committee. Every time you change something to please others, you water down your own unique voice. Somewhere along the line you simply have to gain the ability to tell bad writing from good writing without help from others.

Writer's groups are complicated.

Beneath the noble intentions of writer's groups there are serious dangers lying in wait. As an editor, I have seen firsthand the damage writing

groups can do to fledgling writers. Writing groups often cause fatal obstruction, profound self-doubt and sometimes years of wasted effort.

In most writer's groups, on or offline, no one wants to tell the truth, and no one wants to hear it. Most writing groups ignore obvious weaknesses in the writing being shared and tell lies about its quality, because they don't want to hurt the writer's feelings.

All the writers hear is praise or vague criticism, which does not help them improve. The writers whose work was critiqued assume their writing is solid or maybe even great, and they keep on creating fundamentally flawed work because they are told lies.

Of course it feels good to hear praise, but it is certainly not helpful for the writer who is trying to write a good self-published novel. If you follow advice from other unpublished writers the chances are good you will remain unpublished.

If you are going to let someone read your writing, it should be someone who can help you. An editor, a published writer in your genre or a died-in-the-wool reader who does not bullshit you.

About social media for promotion.

Online, I see hundreds of messages like this, every day: "Check out my great book," or "Download my book for free." My reaction to these messages is to ignore them completely, as most people do.

Readers behave badly when they see sales words like these: "Check out my book." "Get my book for free. Today only." "Check out my five star reviews." Those 'call to action' phrases work if you're selling dog food but not for books.

Because no one taught them anything better, writers go on social media, posting their book's cover and a link and typing something like

“Clarisse waits for love to find her on the cruise ship of her dreams. Buy Now! Romance On the High Seas!”

Believing that you need to SELL your book is a common mistake most self-published authors make. While SUVs and houses need to be sold by sales people, books are a totally different animal. Books are bought by readers who refuse to be pushed to buy by a sales person, even an on-line sale person.

Social media sites like Facebook cannot help you directly sell books.

Social media works best for building an interested following for you as the author. But you need to position yourself as an interesting or informative person in order to gain followers and friends. Readers want interaction, entertainment or information on social media, not book covers and Amazon links. Not only does this approach not work, it marks you as an amateur.

With my experience on the Internet, which dates back to 1989, I can honestly tell you that sending out hundreds of messages with an Amazon buy link to your book is a complete waste of time. In fact, it's a guaranteed way to create a negative image of yourself, which results in annoying people and losing followers.

What does work is the methodical process of building your own name recognition and your reputation for relevant, useful and entertaining information. The logical means to do this is a well-written blog. Like mine: <http://novel-secrets.blogspot.com/>

If you interest people, they will discover your book, and discovery is by far the most powerful book selling tool in your bag of tricks. Readers often buy books that they have heard about. As an author, you need to make your book known to potentially interested readers but not through direct selling.

However, Facebook does not work for trying to directly sell your book.

Social media is predominantly about “soft” marketing when it comes to authors and books. Social media is about reputation building rather than direct selling.

Do not make a habit of spreading wide-ranging, unlimited appeals for attention to complete strangers. Asking for attention on social media is an almost foolproof way of not getting any attention.

My advice is to be patient with social media. As your reputation and name become better known, people will find your books when they are ready to buy. Focus on ways you can help others. Social media helps you make a series of impressions over the long term as it builds trust and awareness. Share information and entertainment. If you gain a reputation as an author with something to say, and one who supports other writers, it will help with sales of your books.

Above all, to write a novel, you should really want to do it. More than the desire to be published, rich, famous or enjoy a writer's life-style, the desire to write is the most important requirement for a beginning novelist.

If your desire to write is great enough, you'll make the sacrifices necessary to finish your book, and finishing your book is the first step to publication. Set definite goals and visualize reaching them. Most writers are kept from writing a book because they don't really believe they can do it.

Believe you can! Commit yourself totally. Don't put it off any longer. Start first thing tomorrow. If you really want to write a novel, don't just talk about it. As the Greek goddess, Nike says, **JUST DO IT!**

Find out more about Lary and his books here:
<http://crewslary.blogspot.ca/>

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DEE ERNST

I WAS IN MY FORTIES when I sat down and wrote my first book. I had decided I wanted to be an author when I was around ten years old, and the dreams I had then were pretty much the same dreams I had when I finally got around to doing the actual writing. I wanted to be a *New York Times* bestselling author. I wanted to go on talk shows and travel across country on a signing tour. I wanted interviews in a few choice magazines, and, of course, a beach house. All I had to do was write a great book.

Easy.

I wrote the kind of book I thought I'd enjoy reading. It was a romance between a forty-something English professor and a hot young rock musician, except that my heroine was the older character. Why? Because I was tired of reading all about dim virgins who couldn't figure out what they wanted out of life, who got rescued and found true love with The One Great Guy. I wanted to write about The One Great Woman, who had a real, adult relationship with a man who just happened to be almost twenty years her junior.

The manuscript was good enough for me to get an agent, but as she shopped it around, we discovered that older heroines were not in fashion. This was before the term 'cougar' began to work its way into the daily lexicon, so I put my dreams back on the shelf and went on with my life.

A few years later, I read *The Devil Wears Prada*, and I had a very mixed reaction to the book. I loved the premise of a newbie at odds with a tough, demanding boss, but couldn't help thinking that the book would have been so much more interesting if the newbie was a mature

woman, with a lifetime of experience and confidence behind her, who could give as good as she got out of life. I wanted chick lit, but with more meat and less fluff.

So I wrote *Better Off Without Him*, with a forty-something protagonist who got dumped by her husband but managed to find real happiness because she was smart and self-sufficient, with good friends who had her back. Sure, she got the guy in the end, but he was the icing on the cake, not the real prize.

My agent loved it, and it went through many rewrites before it was sent out. Sadly, it went out into the publishing arena in September of 2008, which was not a good time for a debut author with a book that didn't fit into any conventional slots.

In the two years that it made the rounds, I got lots of feedback. Some of it was very good. Most of it was very frustrating.

The book was about a divorced woman's journey, but it was too funny for woman's fiction. There was a love story, but not the expected formula for Romance. The main character had a few relationships, but there was not enough sex. It was funny, but how could anyone sell a funny book if the main character was an over-forty woman?

When I finally told my agent I wanted to self-publish, she gave me her blessing.

The first thing I had to get past was the idea that several highly respected editors had said that my book would never find an audience. Who was I to disagree? I know that writers often talk about how they always think that everything they write is crap, and even after having a bestseller, they're afraid they've written the worst book ever. I never thought that way about what I'd written. I'd been reading for a very long time, and I knew a good book from bad. I'd written a good book.

My next major obstacle was ignorance of the publishing world. My agent had spent years in the industry, and it was she who suggested, very early in the rewrite process, that I hire a line editor. I did, so I thought that my book was in perfect shape as far as grammar, spelling, etc. But I'd rewritten the manuscript many times since that original edit, and there were all sorts of mistakes, mainly typos, but mistakes nonetheless.

I didn't know the difference between a content editor and a copyeditor, and how important both of those roles were. I never even thought about a proofreader. After all, I'd gone over it myself several times. Surely, it was perfect.

Then, I had the technological hurdle to get over. That was huge.

I needed a cover. My cousin is an artist, so I called her and told her my idea and she took a series of beautiful photographs of exactly what I wanted, then got her son, the graphic artist, to put the title and my name on the print, and — ta-dah! I had a cover. But it didn't meet the Smashwords size requirements, so I had to bungle my way through Paint Pad just to crop the image to the right size. It literally took me days.

I knew nothing about formatting. I did not know how to get my manuscript from Word to mobi. or epub. I'd read an article by Mark Coker, and he made it sound so easy, but getting through the Smashwords meatgrinder took weeks. I kept getting rejected and would scour the Internet for advice, fix what I thought I needed to fix, then try again. And again. And again.

Then there was Lulu for the paperback version, which required a whole new set of requirements as far as cover and text, not to mention a *back cover*. I would end the day in tears from the frustration of not knowing what I was doing, and not knowing how to get help.

But finally...I was published.

I immediately went onto Realtor.com and started looking at ocean-front property on Cape Cod.

My book sold a few copies. Friends and family. I was thrilled. Then I joined a group that critiqued covers, and when my cover came up, I got slammed. My beautiful picture! Everyone hated it. It didn't tell a story. It was too dark. It was a little depressing. It didn't read chick-lit, romantic comedy, or romance.

The idea of doing another cover made me sick to my stomach, but I did what I should have done in the first place. I looked at similar books, saw what they had in common, and went out in search of a new image.

I found a winner. Hot pink, with a tall martini glass and the black silhouette of a woman. It popped off the page, and fit my story perfectly. All I had to do was resize it and find a new font that screamed, "Yes! This book is fun!! READ ME!!!"

I republished, and more people read it, and I started getting reviews. The one thing they had in common was the mention of all the typos and spelling errors.

By then I'd found out a few more things about this whole self-publishing process, and sent the manuscript out to be proofread by someone who actually knew what they were doing. I also went out and self-pubbed that very first book of mine. By then, I had discovered Calibre, which meant I could do my own formatting, and upload directly to the different sights rather than going through Smashwords. But it was still a grueling ordeal, simply because I was unfamiliar with the process. Once again, I picked the wrong cover, but at least I now I knew how to change it without tearing my hair out by the roots.

I now had two books out. I was lucky to have started the self-publishing journey when a free giveaway really meant something. In six months. I had three giveaways, for *Better Off Without Him*, and the book was downloaded 80K times. That was enough for Amazon to pay attention, and they asked me if they could include it in a month-long promotion.

I said yes, and in the fall of 2012, sold almost 70K copies.

Were the sales great? You bet. Was the money even greater? Oh yeah! But I also got reviews and emails from women who all thanked me for writing about a woman like them — older, wiser, with real kids and good friends, who didn't look like a model or have an impossibly glamorous job that required designer shoes.

I had found my audience, and from what they told me, they wanted more.

I did not self-publish my next book. Montlake Romance took *A Slight Change of Plan*. Again, a woman's journey, with love, adversity and plenty of humor. Again with a main character in her 'Second Act' of life, dealing with adult children, an aging parent and good friends. And again, it was a success.

I wrote a sequel to *Better Off Without Him* and self-pubbed it. It's doing very well, thank you very much.

I also wrote and published a YA under a pen name, and a series of self-help spoofs under another pen name. Each time, the process got shorter and smoother. I was learning.

Then came a book about a group of over-forty friends on a girl's week away in the Hamptons that went terribly — and hysterically — awry. My agent once again shopped it, and we got all sorts of great reactions. Editors loved it, but when it got into the Marketing meeting, it was politely turned down. My agent and I were frustrated and confused until

one editor asked a question that put all those rejections into clear focus: could I make the main character younger?

No, I couldn't. Why should I? I had my audience, they loved my characters, and if it's not broke...

This time, Lake Union Publishing said they wanted it. My editor there said she knew how to market to my audience, so I signed on the dotted line. I know that anything Amazon touches turns to gold, so I was happy. But I will probably never again try for a traditional publishing contract, not when an entire segment of the reading population—readers over forty—are given such short shrift.

I am now self-publishing a series of cozy mysteries. My main character is a woman over fifty, in a small community, with an ex-husband, kids, good friends and a sexy boyfriend. Did I give them to my agent? No. I was pretty certain that I couldn't get a traditional contract, but more importantly, I wanted to get all six novellas out within a year, something that would never happen with a traditional publisher.

I now have a plan to release one full-length novel a year, and one series a year. Would I like to have my full-length published by Lake Union or Montlake again? You bet. They do a great job. But I will never again stress over NOT getting a contract, because I now have this whole self-publishing thing down pat.

And it only took me five years.

I still do my own covers, but I've graduated from Paint Pad to Gimp, and I even kind of know what I'm doing. I do, however, use a few artists from Fiverr when I need help, and I'm not afraid to ask for it.

I have a few people I trust for content edits, copyediting and proofreading. I still do my own formatting, but now through Vellum, which

is worth every single penny. I still pay someone to format for Create-Space, and she's brilliant.

Because I'm an indie author, chances are I will never make it to the *New York Times* bestseller list. I also probably won't get on any talk shows, go on a book tour, or make the cover of *People* magazine. The beach house, however, is getting closer, and I'm pretty happy with that.

If I had to do it all over again, I would read and learn everything I could *before* I hit 'Publish.' Self-publishing has a very steep learning curve, and making all those mistakes as you go is a painful process. The world of the indie author has changed a lot since I started, some things for better, some for worse, but it remains my first and most viable option.

Find out more about Dee and her books at www.deernst.com¹

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1. <http://www.deernst.com>

AMY FITZJOHN

IT WAS IN 2012 WHEN I finished the first draft of *The Bronze Box* that I realised a career in writing could be a reality for me.

I've always written, ever since I was a kid, writing stories is always something I've enjoyed. As a teenager I wrote bad poetry - more angst than anger - and started writing a novel when I was 15.

Then life got in the way; I got a job, went to night school to get a better job, learned to drive, met a boy, got married, got a mortgage...

It was when my husband and I emigrated to Bulgaria in 2008, that I was released from the shackles of the life I was expected to lead by polite society in the UK. Only then did I find the space I needed to rediscover my love of writing.

I finally finished that book I started when I was fifteen (*Running Free* – currently unpublished). I wrote 3 more books during our time developing property in Bulgaria – hard, physical and satisfying building work in the day, taking to my notebooks in the evening (often by candlelight because of the frequent power cuts).

The Bronze Box was novel number four. I had to write three books to learn how to write a book.

To succeed as a writer, you don't have to do something as dramatic as drop everything and move abroad; for me, that was the catalyst. The books I've published since were all written after we came back to the UK, having run out of money, and while working full time.

The journey into successfully publishing a book is rarely a smooth one, my challenges were many and varied.

Here are some of the lessons I've learned in the process and some words of encouragement for other 'aspiring writers'...

...Firstly: there's no such thing as an 'aspiring writer'.

If you write, you're a writer - whether you're published or not. An 'aspiring' writer is someone who has never put pen to paper for their own pleasure. Don't go around calling yourself aspiring, all you're doing is knocking your self-confidence and creating blocks...

...Secondly: the moment you call it a 'block' you've made it tangible.

Shake off the idea of 'writer's block'. The worst thing you've written is better than the thing you never wrote all - and so what if it's rubbish? No one needs to see it and at least you got it out of your system, clearing space to let the words flow.

Thirdly: no writing is ever wasted.

Even if you think it's rubbish, you could still use it somewhere. There will be an idea amongst that clumsy lexicon that you can use in a future work. Always keep your writing, you never know when it might come in handy... if only to look back on and congratulate yourself on having improved since you wrote it!

I intend to revisit the three unpublished books I wrote in Bulgaria and repurpose them into a new project.

I would never advocate cynically publishing substandard work, but remind yourself; good enough is good enough.

Never aim for perfection, all you'll do is set yourself up for failure. Perfection is a fallacy, there is no such thing. Perfection is so subjective, it's impossible to define and if you can't define a goal, how can you possibly aim for it?

There is no perfection, only progress. The only way you'll progress and improve your work is to put it out there and get feedback. Get some social proof and get some constructive criticism.

Be brave, be proud. You're doing something that most people only dream of – you're writing a book – that's awesome, don't let anyone tell you differently.

Always get at least three people to beta read your work before you publish. Be prepared to pay for support and learn to accept that you can't do everything yourself, and that's okay.

You can't be an expert at everything and shouldn't try to be. Grow your strengths, work on your weaknesses but accept that some people will just do it better than you and sometimes you need to pay for their support. For example, never design your own book cover, unless you're a graphic designer or have that particular skill. I'm lucky that my husband, even though he is not a professional graphic designer, is skilled at designing and he creates my book covers for me. People do judge a book by its cover. Have you ever noticed on social media when you follow other authors, how quickly you can spot the self-published ones, when they've done it themselves? Often the graphics are pretty poor, they haven't thought about the commercial impact of that book cover and it screams out at you.

Remind yourself: Every single book in print will have at least one mistake in it.

There will always be a perfectionist out there who will make it their business to point out your failings, no matter how many times you edit your manuscript. There will still be things that people will pick fault with, and that's okay too. In fact, the beauty of technology today is that you can correct any genuine mistakes. Thank the contributor for their

vigilance, change the file and upload it again – got to love eBooks and print on demand for that.

I must admit; my spelling, grammar and punctuation needs improvement. As a mildly dyslexic writer, this has always been a challenge for me. It's improving with time and practice.

My first step in overcoming this was to join a critique group to get some honest feedback and constructive criticism from other writers. This was invaluable and helped me to see the regular mistakes I was making. I got some honest feedback without taking the risk of publishing.

Be fearless, ask critique partners to tell you what's wrong with it rather than what they like about it.

Critique is not about ego massaging - never take it personally, we all make mistakes in order to learn and that's the point of asking for feedback.

Ultimately, at some stage, you have to put the red pen down. You can edit and re-edit to your heart's content, but remember 'perfection is a fallacy'.

I made the mistake of going it alone with *The Bronze Box* and got some bad reviews because of spelling and grammar problems. I take it on the chin, I deserved it. I published a second edition and it was a valuable (slightly embarrassing) lesson for me.

I didn't take enough care with the editing and proofreading of *The Bronze Box* and published it too soon. I was happy with the content, structure and the story but there were mistakes that I hadn't spotted.

When you write, you'll never spot the mistakes you make in your own manuscript, because once you've written something and read it back, your brain reads what it thinks it's written. You need to step away, reset

and look again - even then you can't do all the checking yourself, you need extra pairs of eyes to point out the things that you wouldn't know to look for.

Those original versions of the book will be worth a fortune one day when I'm the next JK Rowling!

Having to republish *The Bronze Box* taught me the importance of not trying to do everything myself and having a team around me of people that I trust. I accept that if I want to build a good team I need to pay people, I can't rely on favours. It might work in the short term, but longer term this is not sustainable.

Define your goals. Be specific. Define what success means for you – but be realistic, we can't all be millionaire best sellers – however, it is possible to make a living through self-publishing books, and many people do.

My goal for *The Bronze Box* was to sell 1,000 copies in three years. I doubled this in half the time and it was enough to convince me I did want to be a writer and I was capable of doing it.

Perhaps one of the most famous self-published writers is E. L. James, author of *50 Shades of Grey*. She went from writing *Twilight* fan fiction to the rich list in a few years by believing in herself, by keeping going and being effective at marketing and business. Love or hate her books, there's no denying her success.

Gone are the days when self-publishing was the last resort of vain writers who weren't good enough to attract a traditional publisher.

I self-published *The Bronze Box* for business reasons: I wanted to see if I could do it – a personal challenge is a strong motivator. I wanted validation, social proof and feedback on my work and I wanted to test whether I wanted to 'be a writer'.

I knew approaching publishers and agents would be a waste of time and money as I had no credentials as a writer. I've never won any competitions and at that time I'd never published anything I could put my name to, only commercial content written while I was employed. I knew I was high risk for a publisher and I wasn't convinced there were any advantages of going the traditional route, other than the financial advantage of someone else paying for the cover design etc. If I was going to have to do all my own publicity and marketing (which is a reality for all but the most famous of traditionally published writers) I wanted to reap the rewards of the work I was putting in, rather than get the dribbling royalty dregs after a publisher had creamed off the profits from my book sales.

I can now say to publishers, should I choose to, that in under three years I've published three novels, a non-fiction title (with more on the way of both) and at the time of writing have sold over 5,000 copies across my titles, and counting.

When I came to publish the second book in the Sheridan and Blake Adventure Series in 2014, *Solomon's Secrets*, I took a different approach, I conducted a crowdfund - eliminating the one advantage of a traditional publisher; the upfront costs.

Crowd-funding essentially allowed me to sell advance copies of the book in order to pay for professional help. However, it wasn't so much about the money as it was about publicity opportunities.

Creating a good book is not just about having a team to help with the editing, proofreading, structure and cover design - it's also about building a team around you who can help your business.

Publishing a book with the intention of selling it, makes it a business. You are a 'brand' you are a 'business' and until you approach your writing career in a more business-like fashion you'll never recoup the costs

of 'bringing a book to market' let alone making a living from your writing.

Again, you can't operate in isolation. The 'team' for your business will probably include other experts such as; a web designer, accountant, perhaps a marketer or publicist too. It's your business, you build the team you need to sell your books. The business end of being a writer is a whole other challenge...

I'm now fully self-employed, writing for a living and providing business support to other people in the process of turning their passion into a business.

The book business is changing and digital marketplaces and platforms such as CreateSpace and KDP with Amazon, have made publishing more open than ever before.

There's never been a time in history of greater freedom for writers, whether it's the immediacy of publishing through blogging and creating web content or whether it's being able to self-publish and put your work out there for feedback and profit.

Forgive the cliché, but there's no time like the present, as with any big decision in your life, the perfect time is now because you don't know where you'll be tomorrow. If you want to leave a legacy, you need to start creating it today.

Find out more about Amy and her books here: www.AmyMorse.co.uk¹

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1. <http://www.AmyMorse.co.uk>

JEANETTE HEWITT

WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS old I declared that I wanted to be a published author. To me, it seemed like a natural progression from being an avid reader. But it would be another twenty years before I managed it.

I began writing novels when I was around sixteen. They were not good; they were reflections of whichever author I happened to be reading at the time. I didn't have the life experience to write my own work. This came in time, after I'd discovered the feelings associated with love, death, tragedy, illness.

They were tools necessary, and by this point I felt a strange pull towards writing fiction featuring real historic events. I began with what would become my first published novel, *Freedom First Peace Later*. It explored life for a group of young people living in Northern Ireland at the height of 'The Troubles'. Of course, I didn't experience this first hand, so I had to learn what it was all about. And I think it is very important to learn all the sides of the story, because regardless of how they are perceived by the public or the media, there are usually reasons for why something (such as war) is happening.

So above are two necessities; emotion and knowledge. If only it was that easy! But other little things always tend to creep in, and I'll address some of these below.

1. Procrastination; to delay or avoid doing something. Yeah, don't do this. The beauty of writing, especially on something like MS Word – you can always change it! But if you don't get any words on the page to begin with you won't have anything to change! There are some things you can help to get you started. Personally, I take a large A4 envelope and write a timeline on it, a brief synopsis if you will. I highlight parts,

stick post-it notes to it and try to write down the skeleton of the story from start to end. This will change, things will be added or deleted, but if you've got an outline, you've made a start.

2. Finding the time. This is a good one, and it's actually very easy. I work another job 45 hours a week. I have a home to maintain and family and friends to see and a dog to walk and a husband to feed. Organisation is key, my home needs to be in order before I can relax enough to write, so I keep on top of it all the time. On a Wednesday I finish work early, at 2pm. Everyone knows that Wednesday afternoons are my writing time, so nobody invites me to do anything on a Wednesday afternoon. The same goes for weekends, if I can put aside four hours or more on a Saturday or Sunday (or both) then that's enough hours to get a lot of words down. When I'm not bashing away at the computer I'm jotting notes and ideas in a notebook. It's all about putting aside blocks of time, even just half an hour. Do you watch a soap opera in the evening? Give it up and write instead. Do you manage to go to the pub on a weekly basis? Go once a fortnight. Get up an hour earlier than usual, just a couple of times a week. If you really want to write, you will find a way.

3. Fear of Criticism / failure. There will always be criticism, and for the most part, it's constructive feedback which you can use. You will most likely face many rejections, and these will probably come in a standardised, impersonalised form. But, on occasion, you may receive little nuggets of advice and these are priceless. Take them and run with them. Don't get offended and say that the publisher or agent doesn't know what they're talking about. They do.

4. Grammar / punctuation worries. There are rules and there is an art to writing. You'll probably know the basics regarding spelling etc, if not – brush up on them! Typos will always occur and all of us have particular words we cannot spell. Mine is the word 'necessary', every single time

I write it I know it's not right. But - I work on MS Word, and I know that it's going to be underlined in red, telling me that it's misspelt. And I can spell check it and select the correct spelling. Re-read your work many times and get someone else to as well, because chances are they will see an error which you skipped over. Words like 'from' can be easily mistyped as 'form' and the spell checker won't pick this up because they are both actual words.

5. Sundry stuff. If you are submitting to agents and publishers, check their websites for what they want and stick to their instructions regarding font type and size, line spacing. Indent new paragraphs except the first one or when changing point of view and try to get to grips with 'show, don't tell'.

Use people around you. If they offer their support, take it. Tell your family / housemates what you need for your writing time. Surround yourself with likeminded people. Join a writing group, or a reading group – that's another thing; read, read, read! Read the genre that you're writing in, know who your contemporaries are. Connect with them on Twitter and Facebook, go to events – book signings and readings and festivals. Check out your local library, there are often events going on that could prove to be useful and if you turn up at enough of them, your face will become known.

Build up your biography. I started by writing for an online fashion magazine, just submitting one or two articles a week soon built up my C.V. Write a blog. Enter competitions, especially ones that take you out of your comfort zone. If you aspire to be a novelist, try writing short stories. The shortened word count will test your editing skills no end.

Finally, and most importantly, don't give up. You are never too old to become a writer, indeed if anything, age and experience can only help you. It took me twenty years to become a published author, and almost

another decade on top of that to feel like I might actually be on the verge of cracking the industry.

Find out more about Jeanette and her books here: <http://www.jmhewitt.com/>

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Ever since I was a little girl, all I've ever wanted to do was to write novels. My love of books has been with me ever since I can remember, fostered by my father, who would read stories from Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm to me at bedtime. I can't recall ever learning to read, and have always been fascinated by language and the written word. There was never any doubt in my mind that I'd grow up to be a novelist. When the time came to seek my first job, however, I went into accountancy. Not the most obvious choice, you might think! As a young adult, though, I lacked confidence and the idea of earning my living through writing fiction seemed impossible. I had to do something to earn money, and accountancy was a secure and well-paid profession. It didn't appeal greatly, but I'm someone comfortable working with figures and so I entered the world of finance, where I stayed for nearly three decades. I'd not written anything since my teenage years and somehow my writing ambitions got buried under the realities of life: relationships, a mortgage and the like.

The dream never left me, though. I still intended to write a novel - someday. That day kept moving forward, always on the horizon but just out of reach. At one stage I even questioned whether it remained something I really wanted - had it been perhaps just a childish notion? One I should forget about pursuing? With hindsight, I believe such self-questioned arose from fear. It seemed such an insurmountable task to write a novel, despite the fact so many people had already done just that. I didn't know where to start! What should I write about? Which genre? How on earth could I write 80,000+ words? Should I forget the whole idea?

My answer always came back to one thing. On my deathbed, would I regret not ever having pursued my dream? The answer was always a resounding YES. Something about my dream of becoming a novelist clung tightly, refused to let go. I dipped a toe in the water by penning

a short fanfic story and was encouraged by the very positive response it received. I wrote more stories, each one longer than the one before, until my final one was 27,000 words in length. Something inside me told me that I'd written enough fan fiction and that it was time to kove on to novels. I was still stumped, though, about what to write.

Round about this time I had a falling -out with my employers. It soon became obvious that matters wouldn't get resolved to my satisfaction. For a few weeks, I stewed in my anger, until something clicked into place in my brain. I had somewhat of an epiphany about the situation, realising it could be one of the best things ever to happen to me. My novel-writing dreams had been on hold since my childhood - wasn't this the perfect time to put them into action? As well as further indulge my lifelong passion for travel? With that in mind, I laid plans. I'd bite my tongue at work, pretend all was well, and save as much money as I could over the coming year or so. Then I'd hand in my notice, go travelling for a year, and come back with a finished novel. After that, my vision for my future grew hazy. I knew I'd attempt to get the book published and that I'd need some form of income in the meantime, but I wasn't sure what. Whatever it was, I knew I was finished for good with accountancy.

And that's more of less what happened, with a few hiccups along the way. The first was when I wrote a message concerning my plans to a colleague who knew about them, but whom I trusted to keep quiet. She did, but I sent the message by mistake to one of my bosses. Oops! He sat on it for a couple of weeks, then approached me. I had no option but to tell him, but everything went well. He accepted there would be a parting of the ways and we have stayed on good terms ever since. He even bought me a laptop to go travelling with!

Once abroad, though, to my frustration my procrastination over writing my first novel continued. Three months into my trp, and I'd not

written a word. However, while in Vietnam I engaged in a conversation that sowed the seed of the idea for *His Kidnapper's Shoes*. We were discussing what happens to children who go missing, and I said That ,sadly, I thought such events rarely had a happy ending. 'Not so,' said another traveller. 'Sometimes kids are stolen to order for people who can't have their own.' That got me thinking. How would it feel to discover, as an adult, that you'd been kidnapped as a child? How would that feel? What emotions would it stir up? I was fascinated, and knew I'd found the story I had to write. If only I could procrastinating...

Matters eventually came to a head in December 2010, at which point I'd reached a small town in northern Chile, called Arica. My frustration was growing that despite all my plans, I still hadn't written anything. One evening I was browsing the website of an author whom I very much admired. The quality of her writing is superb, but I had no idea just how much she'd written. When I checked her website, it became obvious that she was a prolific writer, despite holding down a job. I felt ashamed. Here was I, whinging about how hard it was to attempt to write while getting on and off buses, planes, etc., and yet this woman was churning out huge amounts of excellent fiction while working. No excuses, just action. I felt ashamed, and resolved to change. Time to throw procrastination out of the window, and get to grips with writing a novel at long last.

I accepted that I couldn't do so while travelling at such a fast pace. I'd heard about a city in Bolivia, about which other travellers were raving. Sucre was its name and by accounts it was beautiful and a great place to say. I made a decision. I'd go there and stay as long as it took me to write my first novel. I'd write every day, without exception, until the first draft was done. The next day I booked a bus ticket to La Paz, my resolve strong. I knew something inside me had changed, and this was it. The fact a milestone birthday was approaching held strengthen my

decision. In four months' time, I would turn fifty and I couldn't bear the thought I'd reach that marker without having written a novel.

In hindsight, travelling overland from Arica, a coastal town, to La Paz, the world's highest capital, wasn't a good idea. Altitude sickness hit me, turning me into a grumpy, dry-mouthed monster who'd have killed anyone who crossed her. Nobody did, thank goodness, and after a good night's sleep I caught a bus to Sucre. My dream was about to begin!

Sucre turned out to be every bit as lovely as I'd heard. Surrounded by rolling hills and graced with beautiful colonial architecture, its streets filled with locals in colourful attire, I immediately felt at home. I found a cheap hotel, booked myself some Spanish lessons to improve my grasp of the language; I was all set to go.

Except that I didn't have a clue how to write a novel. With my new-found resolve, however, I didn't let that stop me. I made some rough notes in an Excel spreadsheet about what would happen in each chapter, roughed out some character sketches, opening Microsoft Word, and set to work. I made good on my promise. I wrote every day, even when I was unwell at one point, and kept a tally of my word count. It was both exciting and motivating to see the count quickly build up, and chapter after chapter get completed. The result was a mammoth 147,000 words, but eventually *His Kidnapper's Shoes* got written. I began writing at the end of December 2010 and wrote the last word towards the end of February 2011, about seven weeks in all. That was a hugely emotional moment for me; I burst into tears upon finishing the book, then went to a local cafe to celebrate, posting on Facebook about how happy I was. I didn't say why, though. I'd not told anyone about my plans to become a novelist. So many people are what I dub 'negative nellies' and I could just imagine the rolled eyes, the sarcastic jibes, had I told certain individuals of my plans. It was a secret, a wonderful golden secret I kept all to myself.

Well, almost. While in Sucre I met Molly, an American woman travelling with her teenage son and two dogs. Being the animal lover that I am, I'd gravitated to the dogs and struck up a friendship with Molly. During one of our chats I told her I'd written a novel, and intending submitting it to agents and publishing houses upon my return to the UK. At the time, self-publishing via Amazon's Kindle programme was in its infancy, and wasn't something I'd considered. When I looked into it, however, I liked what I was reading. It appeared to have huge advantages over the traditional route to publication, with no downsides. I was ecstatic, and decided this was the route I'd take.

Before my return to the UK, I working on polishing His Kidnapper's Shoes, without any real idea of what editing and revising a novel entailed. I simply read through it over and over, tweaking things as I went along. Why on earth had I made my protagonist be phobic about sunflowers? Did the character of Sally really need to be in the book? The answers came back: God only knows, and no she doesn't. I axed huge swathes of narrative' His Kidnapper's Shoes today is a sleek 82,000 words as opposed to the 147,000 it once was. These days I'm far more organised about the plotting, writing and editing processes, but I was still such a newbie back then.

Upon my return to the UK, other matters claimed my attention; I decided to sell my house and move somewhere smaller, full of no doubt by my loathing of housework. I loved my spacious 3-bedroom Victorian terrace but for a single person it was much too large, and required constant maintenance. I ended up buying a modern two-bedroom flat, all of which ate into the time I had available for writing. Nevertheless, I entered the annual NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) competition in 2012, which saw me complete the first draft of my second novel, Sister, Psychopath. I still had no author website or social media presence, no idea of how to promote a book. In short, I was about as green round the gills as it's possible to be.

Somewhere along the way I kept tweaking and refining my books, adding *Guilty Innocence* to my portfolio in 2012, again for NaNoWriMo. I set up a website and social media accounts, and ended up publishing *His Kidnapper's Shoes* in March 2013. I was on my way! *Sister, Psychopath* and *Guilty Innocence* followed in due course.

Since then I've written two more novels, *The Second Captive* and *After She's Gone*. I've also written my novella *Blackwater Lake*, which I made free on all major sales platforms as an introduction to my writing. Non-fiction has had a look-in too, with the publication in 2014 of *Write Your Novel! From Getting Started to First Draft*.

My writing career took a major turn upwards in February 2016 when I received a phone call from one of the acquisitions editors at Lake Union, one of Amazon's publishing imprints. She told me how much she'd loved *His Kidnapper's Shoes*, and that she wanted to discuss how Lake Union and I could work together. After a couple of weeks of emails and phone calls, Lake Union offered me a publishing contract for *His Kidnapper's Shoes* and *After She's Gone*. After much deliberation, I signed the contract. This was a big step for me as I'd previously sworn I wouldn't be interested in signing a publishing contract, being too happy with how self-publishing was going for me. It's hard to ignore the huge marketing muscle that Amazon wields, however, and if I'm honest marketing and promotion have never been my forte. A little over a year later, I have no regrets over my decision.

Things got even better in February 2017 when Bloodhound Books offered me a publishing contract for *Guilty Innocence* and *The Second Captive*. Later, in May of that year, they offered me a contract for *Sister, Psychopath* as well. I accepted both contracts and I'm delighted to be working with a fast-growing and innovative publisher like Bloodhound. My Bloodhound contracts complement my Lake Union one perfectly. Nearly seven years have passed since I quit my accountancy

role and flew to Thailand to begin a new life, and I'm very happy at how things that turned out. I still view myself very much as a newbie when it comes to writing and publishing, although the learning curve is less steep now that how it was a few years back. I'm still learning loads, though, and I don't imagine that'll stop anytime soon.

So what tips can I offer as a result of my road to being a published novelist? How about these?

1. Never give up on your dream of writing if it's what you want to do. There will always be those pesky 'negative nellies' who will tell you it's impossible or too difficult. Ignore them. As my story, along with those of the other authors in this book, shows, it can be done. With the advent of Amazon's self-publishing platform, along with iBooks, Kobo, Nook and Google, it's never been easier to be a novelist. If I can do it, why shouldn't you?
2. If you're intending to publish your novel and earn money from it, get your online presence set up sooner rather than latter. Many authors, myself included, concentrate so much on the writing side that we forget the other dimensions to being a published author. Start early by setting up your author website and social media accounts, so that when your eager readers search for information about you and your books, it's easy for them to find.
3. Play the long game. Success for most authors builds slowly and compounds with every new book you write. Don't expect to write one novel and rake in the cash for the rest of your life. For most of us, it takes years to get established and to build a name as an author, and if you're looking for instant success, you've probably chosen the wrong profession. Sure, it happens, but it's rare, and you can't count on it happening. To achieve success, you'll need to be focused, dedicated and prepared to work hard even if the rewards don't seem to be coming your way.

4. Plan your writing - that way you'll avoid the dreaded 'writer's block'. OK, so many authors dislike feeling constrained by a detailed novel outline, and I get that. I'm a planner when it comes to writing novels, and outlines work for me. They don't for everyone, though, and if you dislike them then by all means avoid the detailed variety. I don't believe, however, that it's helpful to have a rough sketch of the plot, even if it's just one line per chapter. That way, you'll never sit at your computer wondering what to write next and feeling blocked.

5. Read in your chosen genre as much as you can. Think about what works in the novels you like and what doesn't in those you hate. Check what the top-selling authors in that genre are doing and learn from them. What sort of covers do their books have? What Amazon categories are the books featured in? Have a look at their author websites to pick up pointers. Do they offer a free book as an opt-in incentive to sign up for their newsletter? No need to reinvent the wheel - find out what the top authors are doing, and emulate them.

6. If you want to be a professional novelist, then act like one. Have high standards for everything. Get the best covers you can afford; it really is true that readers judge books by their covers. And why shouldn't they? Your book cover will be their first impression of your work, so make sure it's a good one. There are some truly terrible examples of home-made covers on Amazon, as well as websites dedicated to ridiculing them. Make sure yours doesn't end up as one of them! If you can afford it, always get your manuscript professionally edited and proof-read before publication. I'm aware that the cost of editing is prohibitive for many, but it's money well spent. A good editor can help shape your book into the best it can be. He or she will spot flaws that you can't, because you're too close to the narrative to be able to see them. Check out prospective editors carefully, and get recommendations from successful novelists. Some people call themselves book editors without any training or experience, and I've read novels that have supposedly

been through an editor and yet have glaring errors. The same goes for proof-reading. I believe that all authors should have a sound grasp of spelling, grammar and punctuation, but if such things aren't your forte, then engage the services of a competent proof-reader. As with editors, it pays to get recommendations. Typos, errors and missing words distract from the reader's experience of a novel, and are the mark of an amateur.

7. Learn as much as you can about book marketing and promotion. Several good books are available from Amazon on this subject, and other authors can also be a mine of great information. I'll readily admit this isn't my forte, which is partly why I decided to accept the Lake Union and Bloodhound contracts, but other authors, including ones in this book, have achieved great results through canny marketing. The bonus in doing your own promotion is not having to share your royalties with a publisher, so if you have a marketing background or bent, you're all set!

8. Develop a thick skin, something that's not always easy for novelists. Our books are important to us - they're part of who we are, so receiving unfavourable reviews can be crushing. Far better not to read your reviews than to allow them to tear your writing dreams to shreds. The internet can be an unfriendly place and trolls abound who love nothing better than to wound with words.

9. Lastly, please don't procrastinate the way I did. I find it hard to believe that I nearly set aside my cherished dream or that I wasted so many years before I eventually got going. Don't let that happen to you. If you want to write a novel, do it. No ifs, buts and maybes. The reward of finishing your first draft will far outweigh any struggle you may have to get started, I promise you. So why not start today?

Find out more about Maggie and her books here: www.maggiejames-fiction.com¹

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KATH MIDDLETON

CAN YOU WRITE A BOOK? They say everyone has a novel inside them but how do you let it out? Nobody can tell you how to write. You need to find your own method and style of writing. You don't want to be the second Somebody Else. You want to be the first, the unique, You. Nevertheless, there are certain things you need to know and some conventions you have to stick to, if you're to produce a book you're proud of and that others enjoy.

Most people who decide they want to write a novel are great readers and may have tried their hand at smaller works. I have always written bits and bobs of poetry but that's not a popular genre. I'd become aware of the drabble – a precisely one-hundred-word story. It's got to have a beginning and a real end. Not just a bit of descriptive prose, for example. I wrote one or two and contributed them to a daily newsletter which features a drabble each day. It became addictive. With the encouragement of an author friend, Jonathan Hill, a great drabblist in his own right, I contributed to his second book of drabbles. My first 'name in lights' moment! Drabbles are a great way to try out ideas and also to learn discipline. It's not just about putting words on paper; it's about making each word work for a living.

You learn to write by writing.

My next leap came when, after writing a competition story, five hundred words maximum, I asked a couple of author friends to comment. One, Andy Barrett, suggested that I had more to say about this. The word count was constraining me. I withdrew it from the competition, started again and it became my first solo publication, a 40,000 word novella, Ravenfold. Andy was right!

What should you write? Write something that's important to you. If you're not interested in what you write, why should a reader be? The great advantage of self-publishing is that you don't need to stick to a single genre. I read widely, and while I enjoy science fiction, I don't think I could carry off the technical side of it, even to my own satisfaction, let alone to a techy nerd's. I love crime novels, but again, I don't have the technical knowledge to write one with confidence. I love the freedom to change direction; to wonder what would happen if... in several different genres. If you self-publish, you can do this, too.

I think writers have to read a lot, but reading and writing aren't the same skill. You can often read by skimming over and getting the sense out of a piece of writing but as the author you have to put the sense in there in the first place. You need to be aware of the technicalities of the language. I don't think it should put you off if you haven't got a qualification in English but you do need to know how to construct a sentence. There are a few pitfalls to avoid here. Check on Google for things like comma splices, run-on sentences and dangling participles. They make your writing weak.

You probably can't justify the cost of an editor, at least initially. This is where friendships are golden. If you have a reader friend with good language skills, you have a treasure you should value. I proofread for a number of friends. I've done a little professional work in the field and I confess that I don't read like the average reader. I pick holes. You need someone who will do that for you and my friends do it for me. A decent proofreader, whether professional or amateur, will not simply tell you you're wrong, but will explain why. They should leave you in a position to check what they've said. You don't need to take their word but you need to be aware there's a potential problem to check up on.

Be careful of homophones, the downfall of the new writer. Discrete and discreet mean very different things. Lead and led are different,

though you can pronounce them the same way. Compliment and complement have different meanings. Waste and waist, rein and reign; there are lots of them. Don't be scared of them. You can find lists on the internet and arm yourself. If you're writing a word which sounds like another, take the time to check. You'll look like a professional, not an amateur, if you have them correct.

Don't be precious about what you write. Welcome somebody who takes the time to correct your work or help you to strengthen it. The internet connects us with others. Join groups on Goodreads, Facebook, other Kindle user forums, and take the time to make friends. Yes, it eats into writing time but if you find friends who will read for you while you read for them, you aren't wasting your time by writing badly.

If you can't take the criticism of friends, you will wilt under the criticism of strangers, which isn't necessarily going to be constructive. You will be putting your precious book before the world and the world will not totally embrace it. Look at your favourite book on Amazon. You'll no doubt find that someone has declared it 'absolute rubbish' or advised potential readers not to waste their money. This can happen to your book, too. Brace yourself!

If you fear failing, you will do nothing worthwhile in life. It's exactly the same with writing a book. You can help yourself, though, by ensuring that it's as good as you can make it. Ernest Hemingway famously said that the first draft of anything is shit. While that might be a little harsh, you will certainly need to go over your work several times. If you can bear to leave a couple of months after writing THE END, you'll surprise yourself. You'll wonder where some of those ideas came from, which flew out as your characters interacted with one another. You'll also wonder why on earth you wrote that clumsy sentence, and what the hell you meant by it. Some authors go through many drafts, using the first to get the ideas and the shape of the story down. Others polish as

they go and only need another work-through. There are as many ways of doing this as there are novelists. Find your way.

Giving your work a fighting chance includes having someone, preferably several someones, reading it through before you publish. Ask if the plot makes sense. Are there unexplained 'plot holes'? Are your spelling and punctuation up to standard? Are there sentences which your reader had to go over two or three times to make sense of them? If so, you need to go back and rework these parts.

Many writers have found their confidence boosted by joining a writing group or a writing class. It works for some, but not for all. You will get the chance to read or hear other people's work, to comment upon it, and to have them do the same for you. If people enjoy what you've written, you have something to build on. You can enjoy a book which has a great story, engaging characters and a brilliant ending even if it's got errors of grammar in. They can be fixed. You can have a grammatically perfect, soulless, boring work. That can't be so easily mended. Don't take this as an excuse not to make your work the best you can, though. Even if you don't notice your mistakes, somebody will.

The technical side of self-publishing is easy to some but a great deterrent to others. I'm in the latter camp here. I have very little expertise in computing. I was at school when an abacus was thought to be quite a swishy bit of kit. I know how fortunate I am that one of the author friends who encouraged me from the start, my friend Jonathan, not only formats and publishes my work, but acts as proofreader/editor for me. I return the favour for proofreading but he has the bigger workload here. He designs my covers too, or they would look very amateur indeed. If you have a friend capable of doing this, treasure him.

If you Google self-publishing there are no end of little companies who will offer to take this burden off your hands, to the tune of up to a thousand pounds. They'll baffle you with technicalities in order to justify

what they're doing for that amount of money, but don't be taken in. They are exploiting your lack of understanding, in my view. If I didn't have Jonathan, I might, by now, have struggled through the instructions on Kindle Direct Publishing (Amazon's method of allowing you to publish your own books) and got there by myself but I appreciate the finesse he adds.

If you're lucky, your family and close friends will be excited at the idea that you're writing for publication. My husband and sister read through my work before it's published. They help with spotting typos. I can often see other people's but not my own. I know what I meant to write so I read what I meant, not what I actually wrote. This is a big point. You can't have too many readers before you go to Kindle, or even more so, to print. However, some people's families are very blasé about their writing. It's a little hobby and everyone else's needs and desires must come first. I have friends who give their work to close family members who don't even read it. It's depressing.

I began writing for publication after I'd retired. I don't know if I could have fitted it in if I were working. You need a special kind of dedication for that and my hat comes off to all authors who write while they have a full-time job. Do try to ensure you have some dedicated writing time. If you're going to make it Saturday morning, stick to it. Don't be persuaded into going shopping, picking people up from sports fixtures or visiting Aunty Jane. Make this your time. You are entitled to time for your writing. Make sure, in the same way, that other family members are allowed time for their own interests. Some interest you'll share but writing is a solitary business. Be fair with others and expect them to be fair with you. I can still recommend retirement, though!

So how do you write a novel? There are probably as many answers as there are novelists. Some people are plotters, some are pantsers. Plotters work out what will happen, sometimes even chapter by chapter, and be-

fore they begin to write in earnest, they know the ending. Pantsers start out and write by the seat of their pants. They may not even know what happens at the end when they begin to write. For successful pantsers, this works itself out. The characters and the plot evolve to bring it all into line and they suddenly realise what's going on. Sometimes, a second draft has to change so as to take into account what the authors knows now, as against when the story started. Both methods have produced great books. Only you know what will work for you. But if you get halfway through and you don't care what happens to your character, be sure the reader won't care either.

Can you write a novel?

Do you have a story you want to tell?

Does it have a structure – a clear beginning; a clear and satisfying ending?

Do you know what will happen in the middle?

Is your written English generally good – OR – do you have friends whose English is good and will read your work and help?

Are you sufficiently technically minded to upload a book with a good cover – OR – do you have a friend who can?

If you can answer yes to all the above, then go for it!

Find out more about Kath and her books here:
http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5359603.Kath_Middleton

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WILL PATCHING



THINGS I WISH I HAD known about self-publishing

We are going through a revolution in publishing as the power of the internet creates new opportunities while destroying old models, and in many ways we are still in unexplored territory, pioneers in a wild west of book-selling. For indie authors, this demands that we open our minds to an entirely different way of thinking. No longer are we merely creative individuals banging away on keyboards in the hope the words we craft will bring the rewards they richly deserve. We now have to assume other roles, in addition to just writing, and it is this paradigm shift that I wish I had understood sooner.

When I look back at the traditional model of publishing and compare where we are today I cannot but wonder at the upheavals and shifts in attitude that are creating a new world for authors. If you had asked me just a few years ago whether I'd like an agent to pursue a traditional publishing deal with one of the big book imprints I'd have leapt at the opportunity. Now, I look at the old guard of publishing and see nothing for them but terminal decline.

The good news is that anyone can now get published – no gatekeepers deciding for us whether our words are worthy of an audience, instead we can launch a book with the click of a button and sit back in amazement as the sales roll in...

I did that, thinking that my fledgling websites would provide plenty of new readers, funnelling them to my Amazon page, masses of eager readers with open wallets, determined to purchase my works of sheer, dazzling brilliance. How could it not work? Amazon reaches into every home in the known universe... Of course it would work!

Er, maybe not!

Yes, anyone can publish an ebook on Amazon but that has created some problems in itself, specifically quality and quantity.

Quality and Quantity

The problem with being able to publish at the click of a button leads some authors to rush their work into the public space so willingly and uncritically offered by Amazon. Many books that would – probably quite rightly – have remained on publishers' or agents' slush piles, rejected for a myriad reasons, are now being promoted by the goliath of book sales. Every day, new offerings arrive online, thousands of them, all competing for space in Amazon's worldwide shop window.

One of the ways to stand out in this crowd is to ensure you have a professional looking book cover (not something you amateurishly knocked up with MS Paint), a well edited interior, free of typos and clumsy writing, and a cracking description that entices new readers.

Even with all of these things you won't immediately see a surge in new readers, but without them you are unlikely to ever see significant sales. Getting the basics right is essential – and I am still learning how best to present my novels, especially the 'blurb' and advertising copy, but also the mysterious meta-tags and keywords that play an essential role in helping people find my work.

Amazon is not a bookstore, it is a search engine

When I first decided to 'launch' my two novels on Amazon, I didn't. There was no launch – I just uploaded them and expected things to happen. Wonderful things. It took a while for me to realise my books were lost in the mass of written works already available, with dozens of new novels flooding into Amazon's store for every minute mine were online.

My problem was that I was thinking like a traditional author in a real world bookstore: I'm published, look at my lovely covers, look inside my books and read my fabulous words, look at my author pics, look at meeeeee! But very few people did. Even fewer bought my books.

Building an author platform

At the time, mid 2012, I had decided I needed to create websites for each of my novels and a third related to the characters that I find most fascinating, and hence feature so prominently in my writing: psychopaths. I was not familiar with the term 'author platform' but became aware of it as I built my new sites. I spent a fair bit of time creating interesting content, all the while thinking the visitors to the sites would follow the links to my books on Amazon and buy them.

They failed to do so – in droves.

Until then, I really believed my two novels, advertised just on my websites garnering a couple of hundred visitors a month, would be enough to generate plenty of sales within a year or so... I sold just one book through my shiny new author platform.

So I gave up.

I was half way through my third novel too, but I was so disheartened I went off writing completely, focussing instead on other business interests and hobbies (I taught myself to play electric blues guitar) having decided there was no chance for me to achieve any worthwhile readership through Amazon, and even less chance of gaining one of the relatively few publishing deals being offered to unknown authors these days.

That third novel is still unfinished but I plan to complete it in the coming months, along with a sequel to my other thriller, and I have a true

crime book due to hit the stores by the end of March. So what has changed?

A break can be good for you

After licking my wounds for nearly three years I started to wonder about creating an audiobook for my British crime thriller, *Remorseless*. I'd heard many books, stories and podcasts over the years and had often wondered about narrating my own works, though had no idea where to start.

I also knew that downloaded audiobooks have been touted as the next 'big thing' in the publishing business, but unlike ebooks there is a much greater barrier to entry for independent authors.

Cost.

You can write and launch an ebook for next to nothing but to create an audiobook you will need to employ a professional narrator and audio engineer, or spend a lot of time learning to be both yourself. Most authors won't bother as the effort would probably be more profitably spent on writing another great book. The idea of paying professionals several thousand dollars for an unknown level of return is also a big factor that deters most indie authors. The big names in the business can attract narrators on a shared royalty basis but there is no chance for an indie author unless you are already selling thousands of copies of the ebook edition.

I had not been selling well, but during my writing hiatus I spent a lot of time learning to record and edit guitar tracks in my own home, using nothing more sophisticated than free software I'd found and downloaded onto my computer. Somewhere at the back of my mind a spark of an idea prompted me to test out voice recording, narrating the opening pages of one of my novels, and I liked the result. My enthusiasm for writing suddenly had new impetus.

I'd learnt some basic audio editing skills, and I had a sound engineer friend I'd 'met' online through the music sharing website where my tracks are stored – a chap I've never physically met, who, despite living half a world away, collaborated with me on a reggae-blues-rock number last year. He was willing to help and advise me with my first audiobook for no fee. Quite a result!

Now I had the basis to record one of my novels, something I'd wanted to do for years, but I knew that the big question was the same as with books. How do you attract new listeners and readers? Admittedly the audiobook market is less crowded with fewer competitors, but even so, how could I use my ebooks and websites to generate interest?

Being an entrepreneurial author is the new route to success

My failure to attract people to my websites in the early days had left me downcast, but when I checked the stats after three years of doing nothing on the sites, I discovered I was getting several hundred unique visitors every week! Most were interested in psychopaths, not so much my novels, and not one of them had bought a book through my sites, but hey ho, it was a major boost. If I can generate that interest while doing nothing, imagine what could be achieved if I reinvigorated the sites with some cool new content.

I decided I needed to think more like an entrepreneur and less like a disgruntled author. I searched around and found Joanna Penn's excellent website with a wealth of information for indie authors, and from there I discovered Nick Stephenson and Mark Dawson – two super successful independent authors who also happen to be British. They both offer online video tuition, sharing their methods but without the usual overenthusiastic hype that some of our US cousins employ in their online marketing – something I find very off-putting.

Both gurus enthuse about entrepreneurial authorship, and both insist it is the only way for indie authors to achieve success. That gave me a reality check and I decided to stump up the several hundred dollars course fees for both as an initial investment in my writing career. As a result I belatedly learnt that there are ways to generate interest in my self-published novels and, although it is early days, on implementing just some of the basics I immediately gained around ten thousand new readers. That was in my first month using this 'authorpreneurial' approach...

The power of 'free'

If you had said to me a year ago that I would be giving away one of the novels I had sweated blood to produce, I'd have laughed in your face. If you had also told me I would spend some of my hard earned cash on promoting said giveaway, I would have recommended you see a psychiatrist!

The truth is, my ten thousand new readers have come about from an audience building exercise, one based on giving away my 'best' novel of the two – the one with the most reviews and best star ratings on Amazon. I agonised over this for months, but Nick-the-guru recommended exactly this, all with the sole aim of getting my words into readers' hands. The first step in being an entrepreneurial author is to accept that offering a free sample is just another marketing ploy.

I hated the idea. I thought at first it would devalue my work, labelling my brand as worthless. I also hated the thought that I'd worked hard and felt I did not deserve to receive nothing in return. It took me a while to come to terms with the fact that an audience is not 'nothing', and building a readership in the modern environment demands this radically different approach to marketing.

Early results

By gifting my book to willing readers who had never heard of me before I have already started to see some additional reviews and ratings, while my other novel has seen a small but significant boost in sales as a consequence of my raised profile. I sold dozens of books in that first month – not fantastic, but still more than I had sold in the previous year.

I also uploaded my newly completed audiobook (it took me more than three hundred concentrated man hours and over three months to produce), timing the launch to hit the online stores as the ebook version of the novel became free. I have yet to see the financial impact but both editions achieved placings in Amazon's best sellers lists in such categories as British Detective, Noir and Serial Killers.

My total spend on marketing: \$55 to date – less than a penny a book to create an audience of thousands. Sales of my other book and my audiobook will more than cover those costs. I plan to use more advanced methods from Nick and Mark's excellent courses as this year progresses, and now have complete confidence that I can make a decent income from writing.

Next steps

I have big plans for my websites, my author platform, and I've already seen a surge in visitors just from spending some time on design and content. I have a way to go but I am now seeing over one thousand new visitors and well over one hundred re-visitors each week. I am reaching out to other authors with psychopathic or sociopathic characters to feature their free ebooks on a soon-to-be created section of the website, and I am writing a true crime book about psychopaths that will hit the stores just as I launch the new platform content.

My target is to achieve a fivefold increase in my website users in the coming months, and to generate more interest in my own writing as a result. My original plan was to build an audience for my ebooks, there-

by achieving ten thousand readers in 2016. I smashed that target when I hit 10,000 readers in my first month – now I am shooting for the stars!

And for other authors?

You may be wondering whether you too need to spend money on these courses. No, you do not, although they do make life easier. You can find similar information regarding online marketing techniques – specifically for indie authors – simply by searching YouTube and Google.

Regardless, my one piece of advice to any aspiring author: you must spend time learning how to market your books in this crazy wild west of the internet. Think of yourself not just as a writer but as an author-preneur: a genuinely independent, self-sufficient scribe, able and willing to invest in creating your own audience, and determined to develop a band of loyal readers who really do look forward to your next release.

I generally don't do regrets, but I seriously regret not realising the importance of this sooner.

Good luck!

Find out more about Will and his books here: <http://www.remorselessthriller.com/>¹

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1. <http://www.remorselessthriller.com/>

CANDI SILK

BEFORE I HIT THE FIRST letter on my computer keyboard, I was faced with some basic decisions regarding writing. For several years I had carried in my thoughts the rough idea for a novel. Like many new writers, I did my share of reading a few articles and books about writing and publishing in general. Initially everything sounded good and exciting, and then I came across a number of articles by authors and others in the publishing industry that raised some red flags for me and my notion of writing a book.

Among those red flags of warning that flapped wildly in my thoughts were:

Writing, publishing, and marketing were going to be expensive.

The chances of being a successful writer were slim, nil or none. Rejection was a certainty.

Self-publishing might be a short-lived trend or flash in the pan.

Self-publishing had too many moving parts, therefore impossible for a lone writer to manage.

Failure lurked around every corner.

And just like a jack-in-the-box other key questions popped up in my mind. Could I afford (financially) to write and publish a novel? Was I willing to spend the time querying multiple agents for the purpose of representing me? I quickly decided I couldn't afford the costs of publishing the traditional route. I knew I didn't have the funds to pay for professional editing which can be expensive. And I didn't want to take months and years querying literary agents to represent me. As a first-

time writer, taking the traditional route to publishing seemed unaffordable and too time consuming for me. On the other hand, self-publishing could be as fast as I wanted it to be while keeping costs at a minimum. Both approaches to publishing have the same goal: to get your book in the hands of readers. As a writer you can choose the path that works best for you and your circumstances.

But there was something else for me to consider. Although I graduated from college, writing was not my major or my strong point. A college degree is as good as the day you received it, and then it begins to age. Some of my skills were rusty; I would have to brush up on them and to this day I continue. I soon discovered that writing is not a one-shot event. It's a delightful ongoing adventure.

So what's the difference between traditional publishing and self-publishing? Is one better than the other? I think of it in this analogous way. One could spend between one and two million dollars to open a McDonald's Restaurant in order to cook hamburgers and sell them. On the other hand one could spend five dollars, cook hamburgers in one's kitchen, and start selling them to one's neighbors. Both approaches offer the potential for expanding and building toward business success. As with most endeavors, we begin with what we have to work with whether that is a lot or little. The important thing is to begin. Now.

What finally pushed me in the direction of self-publishing? A major eye-opener for me was reading in industry publications of many authors who recounted how difficult their writing journey had been and the number of rejection letters they had received from literary agents and publishers. As I continued to read the experiences of other writers, some were discouraging. I was puzzled by the authors who proclaimed the exact number of rejection letters they still had stuffed away somewhere as if they were a proud badge of honor. My impression was that one must be prepared for many letters of rejection over a number of

years before one could hope to get published through the traditional path. I had an important decision to make. Was I willing to follow that same writing route? I wasn't. I decided not to participate in rejection or failure of any kind. To me that would be a waste of valuable time. I decided to forget about literary agents and traditional publishers and turn to self-publishing. I resolved in my mind that I was more than willing to write books and let the market place of readers accept or reject them. After all, it is the reader who is the end user of your novel and not layers of third parties in the publishing industry. My decision to decide upon self-publishing in no way is meant to take away from the value of traditional publishing. Both approaches are important and both can lead to success for a writer.

Of course being a flat-broke, first-time writer helped me choose the do-it-yourself model, self-publishing. I enjoy each step of writing, publishing, and marketing. Like other new authors, I sold about ten or twenty dollars' worth of books the first year after publishing my first novel. Gradually I've achieved a consistent income stream of three figures per month. As my writing and marketing improve and sharpen I anticipate reaching a level of four figures per month within the coming year. I'm confident that will happen.

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords, and other online channels of distribution offer flexible opportunities for almost anyone to enter the market place of publishing at almost no cost and great possibilities for profit. The traditional route to publishing a book with paper and ink is well documented and layered with many people who must accept your manuscript before it ever sees a bucket of ink and a ream of paper. Digital publishing or e-book publishing is easily accomplished with an inexpensive computer and a basic software program (word processor). The Internet provides an abundance of free platforms that the start-up writer can use to create an online presence, to establish a brand, and to launch a marketing plan for selling books. It's like having your own per-

sonal bookstore online 24/7 where you can sell your books to readers who frequent online book retailers.

And now for the exciting parts. Keep in mind that there is plenty of encouragement and information available in the world for a person contemplating almost any human endeavor. However, there is no silver bullet or secret formula available to make it happen. And that applies to writing, publishing, and marketing. If one looks at the most successful products and/or companies in the world today one will find they are all engaged in the same basic principles of developing and promoting their products/services just as you will be.

You can receive lots of valuable information from books, instructions, and industry/craft experts, but ultimately you will have the exciting task of making final decisions regarding your future in writing. You can get encouragement and discouragement from the world, but the world will not decide for you. Key decisions regarding your writing journey must be made by you and you alone. And I have found that to be one of the most exciting aspects of writing and self-publishing. I believe you will too.

Generally speaking, I believe almost every human being has interesting stories to tell, and I believe there is a market of other human beings around the world who would enjoy reading those stories.

The human imagination goes far beyond an individual's limited experiences in life. That means your story-telling ability is virtually limitless (unlimited). So, what are you going to write about? What kind of stories? Mystery thrillers, historical romance, horror, erotica, police procedurals or another genres? Oh, you were thinking of writing the perfect novel, something for everyone, the universal book of all ages? Not a good idea. Decide what genre you're going to write your story in and stick with that. Make it the best in that genre and then it might become a bestseller across a broad spectrum of readers. The reading public tends

to select books on what I think of as an interest-specific or (sub)genre basis and they enjoy their books on that basis. If a reader selects a book expecting an international espionage/spy thriller action story, they will be disappointed to discover instead a contemporary teenage romance between the pages. Most writers agree that trying to write a one-size-fits-all novel is futile. In your own mind decide and describe in detail what your typical reader is like. Who is she? What is her age? Where does he live? Does he read other authors in your genre? People generally read fiction/novels for entertainment. Focus on how your story will entertain your typical reader.

I speak from personal experience. After writing four “mild” contemporary romance novels, I decided to increase the sexual (physical) emphasis and explicit language in the fifth novel. I put greater emphasis on the physical relationship of the hero and the heroine. The novel fell flat among the readers I had attracted with the first four novels. I knew then that I had over reached the interest level of my current readers, and had pushed beyond their tolerance for erotica in their preferred reading. I had some important decisions to make. I unpublished the fifth novel, did a major edit, clearly making it erotica. I changed the category and book description to erotica and republished. As a convenience to readers, I separated my work under two genres by writing contemporary romance and erotica under two different names. Other authors have done the same.

Decide your genre and make your writing even more specific by defining and writing to a particular reader. Nicholas Sparks, one of my favorite, and highly popular, contemporary romance authors refined/narrowed his writing to: settings in eastern North Carolina, small towns, love interest/angles, themes and plots from mainstream American society, and with strong emotional tugs at the heart of readers. Sparks indicated in an interview that he tried to write stories that would make grandmothers cry. And that's what he does. Any reader fa-

miliar with his writings knows what to expect from his next book. The importance of writing to your specific audience should be underscored by you.

Keep in mind that you're not competing with any other author. You're competing with the last book you wrote and you're constantly looking for more readers to enjoy your books. There are enough readers around the world for every author to build a comfortable, enjoyable, and profitable career. I mention this to encourage you to reach out to the writing community. Be helpful to other writers just because you want to help. Helping and supporting others is an investment that will usually pay big dividends over time.

Give honor and respect to the stories you write, but do not fall in love with your work. If you do, you will blind yourself to the stark reality of your writing. Let others enjoy and love your work, but as its creator always view your work realistically, warts and all. Falling in love with your work usually means you think it's perfect, and it won't be. It can always be better. Constantly look for ways to improve your writing. Polish your writing skills. Look and listen for ideas or ways to improve each sentence, paragraph, and story you write. That might mean retooling or sharpening some of your basic skills. If someone reads one page, selected at random, from your novel will it motivate the reader to read the next page, and the next, and the next? Remember, we're in the entertainment business.

Writing, self-publishing, and marketing are truly creative endeavors in which you can be in control. Because of the responsibility to entertain your readers, you'll learn a great deal and you'll grow as a person as you travel your writing journey. There are many tools, bells and whistles (Internet, computers, writing programs, marketing approaches, and other gimmicks and gadgets) available to apply to your craft, but remember they are just that: tools. The creative element resides within you and

you alone. Your creativity is unique. Don't you think it's time you unleash it? Your readers are waiting to read your next novel!

Find out more about Candi and her books here: <https://candisilk.com>¹

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1. <https://candisilk.com/author/candisilk1/>

MICHAEL SMART

MAGGIE JAMES HAS MINED her personal experience as an author to provide inspirational advice and encouragement to would be authors facing the difficulties of starting, writing, completing, and publishing that novel they've always dreamt of writing. Her previous book: "*Write Your Novel - From Getting Started to First Draft*"¹ which I reviewed on my blog, is an exceptional guide to taking the critical first step, and forging ahead to the finish line.

When Maggie invited me to contribute to a follow up book, I was at a loss concerning what to write, since I never experienced the type of road blocks Maggie wished to cover. I am contrarian by nature. I am reluctant to join groups. I shun trendy bandwagons and instead head in the other direction. I defy convention and would rather seek out the outlier. I put no stock in what others think of me, my opinion of who I am and what I am capable of is the only opinion which matters. As such, my experience as an author may be atypical.

While my nature perhaps eliminates many of the issues a newbie author may face, the process of constructing a plot and characters, and using written language to tell a captivating story, does not come easy to me by any means. I still must practice the commitment, discipline, and craft, to actually sit down to write and complete a manuscript. And then to painstakingly edit and revise it, eliminating spelling and grammatical errors, replacing weak and wishy-washy words with vibrant words and imagery, eliminating plot holes and discontinuities, and polishing the language. Here then, are a few lessons I've learned along the way which may help would be authors over the following hurdles.

1. <http://smarturl.it/writeyournovel>

Procrastination and finding time:

A regular routine is the best cure for procrastinating and finding time. If you are employed in a job, you already practice this. You dress according to a specified dress code, you arrive at a specified time, sit at a specified desk, in a specified office, and perform specified tasks for a specified amount of time. Writing is also a job, requiring you to be at a specific place, at a specific time, for a specific amount of time. It may be in the morning before the hubby and kids awake. It may be at night, after the dishes and laundry are done and before you climb into bed. It may be during your lunch break at your job, or an hour after work sitting at a back table in a favorite watering hole. The task may be to write a specific number of words, complete a chapter, develop an outline, conduct research, compile notes, or just free write whatever pops into your mind whether or not it has anything to do with your novel. Or just read. Preferably in the genre you want to write in. The point is to develop a routine, and to follow it without fail. If you don't show up you won't get paid. Once you've followed the routine long enough for it to become habitual, you'll soon enough find yourself writing the first words, and the first chapter, to that long dreamt of novel.

Lack of self-confidence, and fear of criticism/what others might think:

This one has never applied to me, and here's why. If you want to write, if you feel the urgent need to get that story inside you out, if wanting to write feels like an unbearable itch, then scratch that itch and write. Not for an audience, not to make the bestseller list, perhaps not even to publish - you can decide that later. Write just for yourself, because you need to, because you want to. This is not the time to be considering what anyone else thinks. That too is for later, if and when you decide to share your writing with an audience. This is how I started, writing for the sheer joy of concocting a unique story from my own imagination. And you need the time, as I did, to develop your craft, your style,

your unique voice, and improve your writing in the absence of anyone else's validation, but simply for your own personal satisfaction and fulfillment. There are far better sources than I for advice on building your self-confidence when you're ready for that step. You may rely on a trusted friend who will be honest with you. You may request critiques from beta-readers, or a writers' group. You may attend a writer's workshop. The point is, your confidence level, or the opinion of others, is irrelevant to putting on paper that first word, that first sentence, that first paragraph. That is just you, for you.

Grammar/spelling/punctuation in need of improvement:

I began writing in my early teens, and now when I read my early writing, it's like rubbernecking a train wreck you want to look away from, but can't. But the stories, characters, and themes were there. The writing simply required improvement, utilizing the vocabulary and storytelling craft I'd developed over a lifetime of reading and absorbing the techniques of successful authors. Needing improvement should not be viewed as a stumbling block, but something any author, whether newbie or award winning bestseller, should aspire to. To continually learn, practice, and improve their craft.

Lack of money for editors, cover art, etc.:

Deciding to indie-publish doesn't mean discarding the hard learned and time tested lessons of traditional publishers. Traditional publishers know what they're doing when they hire editors, cover artists, and marketers. For any author, newbie or award winning bestseller, an editor is an imperative. A would be author's lack of money to hire an editor should never be an impediment or excuse. It just means you need to get creative, think outside the box, find the outlier, someone who can provide what you need, at a price you can afford, even free of charge if that is what you need. They are out there. You just have to put in the time and determination to find them. After weeks or months staring at

the same words, same sentences, same paragraphs, any author will inevitably miss errors. Not to mention holes in continuity, and in plot and character development. This is when a knowledgeable, attentive, detail oriented editor will be an invaluable asset for improving your manuscript.

The same is true for hiring a cover designer. You may be an amazing writer. Doesn't mean you're also an amazing artist or designer. And just because you know your way around Photoshop, doesn't mean you've mastered the intricacies of graphic design, or the artistic elements on a cover which will attract the eye of a prospective buyer.

Even with a limited budget, there are professionals out there to help you polish, produce, and publish that simmering novel. Don't short change yourself, or your novel, by not seeking them out due to an erroneous notion of affordability, or worse, thinking you don't really need them.

Not knowing how to self-publish:

Publishing your novel, whether indie, or traditional, is a learned process. Do not expect a traditional publisher to hold your hand through the entire process. And ignorance of the process may result in a publisher taking advantage, or making unrealistic promises. The same is true for indie-publishing. There are many scammers out there waiting to take advantage, and your money. And many indie authors, for whatever reason, forgo the best practices of traditional publishers. Perhaps due to the ease of uploading a manuscript, skipping important aspects of interior design such as formatting headers, footers, gutters, and chapters. So the more informed you are regarding the publishing process, and the publishing business in general, the better your decision on which publishing avenue to take, and how to best present your novel. I spent a bit more than a year learning about book publishing, traditional and indie, before making a decision. And I haven't ruled out a

traditional publisher for my novels, but true to my contrarian nature, I'm striking a path around the conventional Query letter route. My best advice regarding the indie-publishing issue, is to learn as much as possible about book publishing, indie-publishing in particular, and the best practices of both. There is abundant information out there to help any newbie author get over the 'I don't know how to indie-publish' hurdle, resulting in informed decisions on the best manner, method, and place to indie-publish your novel.

Find out more about Michael and his books here:
<http://www.michaelwsmartauthor.com/>

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MARK TILBURY

THE BIGGEST DIFFICULTY for me when writing a book is discipline. Finding the strength to resist distractions and allocate the time to sit down and get on with it. Writing a book is a big commitment, and one thing is for absolute certain: it will not write itself. For me, it's not just about finding the time – it's about finding the right time. The premium time. When I am most productive. I'm not much use in the morning. I can write if I need to get something finished, but generally I'm not very productive. My brain is like lumpy porridge. I can plan and skirt around the peripheral of writing, but sitting down and hoping a novel will flow is a pointless exercise for me. It's far better not to force it. The best stuff comes naturally. So, no good in the mornings? Try the evenings instead. Nope. Brain wants to settle down to watch telly and get ready for bed. That's not to say I haven't written in the mornings or the evenings, but on the whole, I found it a pretty frustrating experience.

So, after much experimenting, I found the afternoon to be my most productive time. One to five. Set the clock and let no one come between me and my novel. That's not to say I suggest letting someone bleed to death in pursuit of creative endeavour, but just instil a little discipline and, yes, selfishness. Like I said before, no one else will write it for you, so it cuts both ways. If the neighbour wants a favour, sure, so long as it isn't between one and five in the afternoon. Teatime falls at five? Then move it to six. I appreciate that these things are much harder to do around work commitments and the demands of children. Sometimes you just have to select a time that fits around these things, but if you want to do it, you will. The most important thing to keep in mind, is that writing is a job. Well, it is if you want to publish your work and

offer it up for critique. You don't say to your boss, 'oh, I'll turn up later when I can be bothered', do you? Unless you want the sack! So, as a writer, you have to be as dedicated to your work as anyone else. Develop a mean-streak. Shut yourself away from the real world, close the curtains, turn up the music and let yourself get lost in that magic place called creation. I think that's a Stephen King quote, and if it's good enough for him...

When the words won't come – Okay. So you've found that magic writing time. The kids are at school. You've closed the curtains and cranked up the music. The computer is ready to take your orders. Your fingers hover above the keyboard. And then you realise that the connection between your fingers and brain has been severed. You stare at the screen. Maybe the words will just magic their way there if you sit long enough in the land of wishful thinking. After all, this is the special time. Optimum writing time. Three... two... one... Blast off! And then the rocket blasts off – and nosedives in a puff of smoke. You stare at the screen, willing your fingers to write.

The clock ticks. And boy, does it tick fast when the words won't come. Now you've been sitting there half an hour. And all for three lousy words. Even then, you don't know in which order to put them! Here you have two choices: give up and go home – well, you're probably at home already, but you know what I mean. But giving up will only lead to that nasty feeling of failure. It will carry on nagging away at you for the rest of the day. It can even follow you to bed and keep you awake half the night if you're unlucky. That's what has happened to me on many occasions. And then I think the story's not good enough. The characters are rubbish. The computer doesn't understand my needs. It's turned its back on me when I needed it most.

Or – you can try something more positive. This might not work for everyone, but it works for me when the muse goes missing. I found this

piece of advice in an old, brilliant book by Dorothea Brande which is still available in print on Amazon. It's called *Becoming a Writer*. And it's simple: Just write.

Huh? That's what I've been trying to do!

I know. But you've been trying to write your masterpiece. Bring forth all those wonderful characters and drop a bombshell on them. This advice concerns letting go and writing anything. It might be writing the first thing that comes into your head. Last night's dream, perhaps. Or nightmare. A poem. What you'd like to do with your unresponsive muse. Maybe you could even write an open letter to him/her, talking of your need to write at all allotted times. The idea is to get the creative juices flowing. Let it all out. See what transpires. You might even get a story idea or solve a problem in the plot of your novel without even thinking about it. And, for me, that's the key: without thinking about it. You need to wake up that part of the brain that creates and doesn't think. Anyway, it works for me. I spend about ten to fifteen minutes doing this exercise every time before I write. It helps save me from the dreaded writer's block.

Fear of failure – The novel's finished. A fantastic achievement. All those endless hours spent locked away in a room with a computer have paid off. Now what? It's your baby. You've conceived the idea, given birth to it and now you're ready to show it to the world. Well – not the whole world, but enough of it to scratch a living, hopefully. But what if someone thinks the baby's ugly? Worse still, it's got a nasty defect? All that hard work scythed down with a dozen derogatory comments.

The first piece of advice I can think of is don't show it to the world. Not yet. Even if you've been through it and edited it to death by a thousand cuts. You will miss things. Especially the bits the literary world call 'your darlings'. The clever bits that give you such a gee, shucks, did I write that, feeling. These are my own worst enemies. I have a tenden-

cy to run off at the simile, trying to cook up new and fanciful turns of phrase. I've also got a nasty habit of interspersing too many beats in my writing. As for that tricky customer, punctuation, let's just say I'm still learning. You might think a dash here and a comma there will do, but let me tell you, it won't. They've got to be in the right place if you want to impress a world of highly educated readers.

That's where you need to ask for help. For me, copy editors are too pricey. That's not to say they don't do a good job, but it's all about budget. Pays your money and takes your choice. For me, beta readers and a good writing tool like *ProWritingAid* can do an invaluable job. It's vital to have someone run a cold eye over your work and give you an honest appraisal.

Right, so you've got your manuscript polished and shining like a diamond. Now for the hard bit: coping with negative comments. No one wants to be told their masterpiece is rubbish. Too long, too short, too descriptive, not enough description, too slow to get going etc. For me, constructive criticism is a fantastic tool. Learn from it. Take on board the criticism and use it to improve your writing. As for the rest of it, well, you can't please all the people all the time.

The other thing I want to talk about is failure. The book hasn't done what you'd hoped it would. I would urge people not to have unrealistic expectations about the impact their first born will have on the world. Don't expect an avalanche of praise and a million sales. For most of us mortals, we have to settle for far less. But it's important to stress that success or failure is linked to expectation. If you hope for two thousand sales and twenty reviews, and you get somewhere near that, then that is success, right? But if you hope for five hundred reviews and fifty thousand sales, then you've failed. All I'm saying is, lower your expectations, and you are more likely to succeed. And if you end up with fifty thou-

sand sales and hundreds of reviews, then you're going to be dancing in Wonderland.

Book cover – For me, the book cover is one of the most important parts of the book. It's the one shot you have to attract a reader to your book. People often overlook this. But don't. And unless you are a gifted artist with an eye for detail, don't try doing it yourself. You wouldn't present yourself for a dream job dressed in your scruffiest clothes and dirtiest shoes, would you? So don't treat your novel that way. You want it dressed in its best Sunday suit, shoes polished to a shine and... well, you get my drift. You want your cover to say to a potential reader 'hey, look, I've made a bloody big effort here. At least come and have a look at what's inside.'

I've found it works well to come up with a basic idea of what you want. What you want the cover to say about your story. And then hand it over to a professional. With *The Revelation Room*, I wanted a cross on the front to symbolise religion. I also wanted a door opening in the body of that cross to symbolise my protagonist stepping into the unknown. I then handed it over to *The Cover Collection* and they did the rest. Four different drafts of the same theme. The results were amazing. Well worth the money.

Publishing and promoting – Oh, God, how daunting is all that stuff. Luckily for me, I had a girlfriend willing to help. Big time. I didn't know the first thing about Twitter and Facebook. As well as her invaluable help, I found there were many good people on the internet willing to offer advice. For me, the biggest surprise has been the generosity of others, both with their time and their knowledge. There are also hundreds of great, free resources out there to guide you through the pitfalls. Blogs can be a fantastic source of information. I also found that writing a blog and involving other people in what you do helps to get you connected. It also lets people have a look at you, see what lies behind the author

and have a sneak preview of your work here and there. It's all out there. Seek and you shall find as they say. Good luck.

Find out more about Mark and his books here: <http://marktilbury.com/>¹

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1. <http://marktilbury.com/>

JILL COX VOGT



THINK ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL story behind the decision to write and indie publish. You believe readers might laugh over a scene, or cry, or connect with a subject because something inside you prods you to believe this. Yes? Then why choose indie publishing as the route to go, like I did?

A writer might choose to self-publish because the polished, agonized-over query letter that receives agents' requests for sample chapters or the whole manuscript ends up with rejections – sometimes in spite of an agent's high praise. Weeks and weeks of time spent waiting for the glorious news of acceptance and success go down the drain. That is, until the light bulb comes on: *You want someone to read your book, and there's a way to make it happen.*

An indie-published author might not be looking to sell a bazillion copies (although wouldn't that be nice)? Selling hundreds each month – and as a bonus building a fan base for even better sales – seems like an awesome deal for someone who's as anonymous in the writing world as J. K. Rowling is famous. The book is out of the computer or off the page where it's accurate to say it hasn't sold at all. *People have the opportunity to buy it and read it.*

The traditional way to publish has changed. No longer is it narrow and exclusive; indeed the digital world has cracked publishing wide open. The dreadful reputation attached to self-publishing in past years has, in large part, become one of solid approval.

Procrastination

You'd like to write a book, compelled to cover a niche, explore a subject, and attract readers, but procrastination keeps you away from the keyboard or blank page. I have an author friend, Rebecca Warner, with whom I share my writing drama, including the procrastinations that stall my magic moments or my utter garbage, depending, and vice versa. Rebecca and her husband stroll down to the river with glasses of wine and watch the sun set behind the mountains because *that's what she wants to do*. No stress, no worries. She'll buckle down later.

I seem to embrace good procrastination, like the sunset jaunt, and bad procrastination. I can't bear the thought of sitting at the computer and thinking of what to say. This has never been truer than with my second novel, *Dancing with Armando*. Why am I flitting from the kitchen sink to the yard, or preparing dinner from scratch, or flipping through *Vogue* when I've told myself that I need to write? Honestly, I'm amazed sometimes at how adept I am at putting it off. Is it because I don't like my own book? How can that be?

Are expectations unrealistic? Adjust them to better suit your reality. Is doing busy-work instead of writing a way to protect yourself from failure? Don't insist on perfection.

Give yourself a pep talk, maybe along the lines of: *I could be a biological engineer spending hours in a lab watching e. coli grow, or a writer who summons the muse and creates characters, scenes, dilemmas and resolutions— anything I want!* Personally, I'd rather be writing, which is why this particular pep talk works for me. Recognize that five pages won't grow to twenty and twenty to fifty, on and on, unless you make them.

Besides pep talks, discipline conquers procrastination. It's *hard* to write a book, but delaying its completion isn't making it any easier. How can you feel unaccomplished when you dream your world, word by word, paragraph by paragraph, page by page?

Organize your surroundings and schedule and stay on course. Accomplishing these goals is its own reward, but feel free to supplement the pages you create with bonuses like, say, chocolate, for a job well done.

Finding the Time

Working full time for a steady paycheck takes a big bite out of writing, as does running a household, taking care of children, or any facet of day-to-day living.

I was asked to include my novel *The Fizgig* in a limited-time-only anthology, *Peace, Love and Romance*, with nine bestselling authors, including my friend, award-winning author Rebecca Warner. Suddenly, there really wasn't enough time in the day to write. I had to learn much more than I knew about marketing and promote the anthology on websites, social media, blogs, and online book groups. We communicated with one another through Facebook, but social media is banned from my workplace. I used my phone and squeezed in time for brief participation in any conversation among us. I couldn't post everything I would've posted had I been logged in throughout the day.

You must take the time to find the time. This was brought home when we were all interviewed by a popular blogger. My fellow authors responded right and left, seriously and hilariously, and here I was sneaking random peeks at the questions and answers. One thread got off on drinking wine and margaritas and then tequila was singled out and I managed to type, *Tequila makes my clothes fall off*. This thought sprang to mind, based on the Joe Nichols' song, *Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off*, and because back in the day it was true. The interview was published a couple of months later, after so much else had happened. When I read it, I thought I must not have contributed, but I kept scrolling down and finally, surprisingly, saw my name beside the tequila comment. I was mortified. This was my one and only statement? I hadn't taken the time to find the time.

Prioritize. Choose time wisely. Discover when you do your best writing and are most productive and try to stick to it, whether it begins at 5:00 am or 7:00 pm. Write on weekends. Write on your lunch hour. Skip television. Jot down electronically or on paper thoughts that spring to mind. Seeing the book grow exceeds seeing it at a halt, because you found no time for it. You might miss going out on Saturday or watching sitcoms, but progress makes you *feel good*.

Don't fret if you aren't going at it every minute. Accumulate enough minutes to know that, in spite of hurdles, you managed to find the *right* time.

Health Issues

It's difficult enough to write without health issues, but when your head aches or your back hurts, it's near impossible. In my case, it was my head and neck. I was stressed to the max, writing another book, marketing *The Fizgig*, trying to accomplish my share of promoting the anthology, and drying my tears. I came home from work days at a computer to evenings at a computer until my head and neck hurt so much I thought I had a brain tumor. X-rays ruled that out, and yet the pain didn't diminish until I determined that my poor neck couldn't stand the position it was in all day.

Emotional health issues can rear their heads, too. As I write this at 9:00 pm, I'm absorbing a text that said my friend's father died. His passing didn't happen out of the blue, and yet my heart breaks for her. We are texting one another, and I hope she feels like talking tomorrow. I want to help. Sadness is distracting, and rightfully so.

Take breaks. Walk around, check Facebook, tweet. Recharge your creative energy. Just breathe. Enjoy the sound of rain, the smell of pine trees. Writing isn't worth stress and pain. Write because you want to

and you must. And it's okay to depend on others to steer you through the darkest obstacles.

Lack of Self-Confidence

Now there's a topic, right? Except for a family member who behaves like a self-confident, I'm-a-rock-star young woman (which I both applaud and find curious), I don't believe that's the norm; it isn't for me.

"If we don't risk anything, we risk even more," said Erica Jong.

Letting my co-workers, friends, and family know that I'd self-published my novel proved nerve racking. One coworker printed a large sign and tacked it up on the bulletin board after she got wind of it, which pretty much meant that the news was out. But wasn't that the point? Even though it was easy to transform from a happy author who'd sold *five books* right off the bat, to an insecure author with a book no one I knew would possibly like, much less bother to finish, I needed to roll with the publicity. Fake it and make it. *Showing* a lack of confidence is of no benefit. Indeed, *having* a lack of confidence isn't, either.

Writing, like playing the piano, takes practice. My first novel was so dreadful that, when it burned in a fire, I applauded its fate. But I wrote it, I began. The more you write, the better it gets. You may find that the story takes on life; it almost writes itself. Words pour out.

To boost confidence, think of positives and things you do well. You have them. You do. Read. Read more. Notice writing styles and what appeals to you. You can write *whatever you want to*. Creativity needs your self-confidence, not your self-doubt.

Draw on strengths. Draw on reasons why you want to write in the first place. Have you shared your writing with anyone? Members of a writing group, either in person or online? Online resources such as Absolute Write and YouWriteOn are excellent. Do you have a friend who

will be *honest*? I've benefited from friends and attending writing groups and joining groups online. Also, I'm a poet, so I draw on the strength of that vital part of who I am.

Lack of Support from Family and Friends

Indie authors need the support of family and friends – or acquaintances, coworkers. If loved ones won't encourage your writing, who will? They should be the first to want your success and to buy your book.

This is true except when it isn't. One day my mission was to ask coworkers to buy my book. Disaster ensued. I sent an email to my friend Rebecca:

I approached a young woman named JILL with whom I thought I might have success based on our name alone. She said she hasn't read a book in her life. In school she just watched the movies, and if a test question wasn't in the movie, she got it wrong. When I could speak, I said, "Surely you read some little book when you learned to read." She couldn't remember any and confessed to no attention span and the inability to read even a magazine. Wondering how she was employable, I sputtered, "Boy, I've come to the wrong person! You haven't found the right book."

From that, I cut to the chase and prefaced my mission with, "Do you read?" I may have found success. Running to hope.

If at first you don't succeed, try again.

How lovely it is to be able to slip away and write because your family is supportive and understanding. When my husband cooks dinner, I relax and write instead of "wasting" time in the kitchen.

How important and often necessary it is to be able to say, “I’m sorry. I can’t make it. I absolutely must write while I’ve found the time to do it.”

Stephen King said, “Writing is a lonely job. Having someone who believes in you makes a lot of difference.” A friend, significant other or writing partner’s support defines *immeasurable*.

Not Knowing What to Write

A blank page, either literally or on the computer screen, can seem more daunting than a bird flying into the room. This happened to me – the flying bird – and here I am facing a blank page and choosing a daunting bird to begin the topic of not knowing what to write. Writers cull from their own experiences but also from their imaginations. Nuggets of real-life truth may give wings to a story, along with courage, empathy, and pure creativity.

Look at favorite books, articles or poetry for inspiration. Something clicks to make them favorites. Something about the words sing and zing and do your soul good. Soak up the inspiration. It will offer encouragement to your own writing dreams. *You can produce, too*. Pinpoint which genres attract you and which ones hold little interest.

Reboot – not your computer, but yourself. Go look at the sky. Then think of what matters to you and your targeted readers. Write. Write anything just to get started. Now, through the French door, I see a pot of striking red geraniums. Could I write a paragraph about them, a paragraph that leads to a woman bending to touch and admire them, and then leads to a voice calling out to her . . . ?

Each word, intention and idea comes from the writer’s head; the writer unavoidably has a piece of herself included. Yet a writer also culls from society or her imagination, capable of stories about kidnapping, for example, when she’s never hurt a fly. Imagination is endless.

The poet William Stafford wrote: *So, receptive, careless of failure, I spin out things on the page. And a wonderful freedom comes. If something occurs to me, it is all right to accept it. It has one justification: it occurs to me. No one else can guide me. I must follow my own weak, wandering, diffident impulses.*

Write something, even if all you can muster is a couple of sentences. You might toss it, but you might actually be onto something and generate a gem. Make something from your “flying birds.”

Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation in Need of Improvement

Agatha Christie admitted that “writing and spelling were always terribly difficult for me.” Misspelled words riddled F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, including *yatch* for *yacht* and *apon* for *upon*. Ernest Hemingway wrote *loveing* or *moveing*, instead of omitting the *e*.

If you aren’t an ace at grammar, spelling or punctuation, you can still write a book – a polished one. Readers need not know your weak spots. Resources abound.

Sure, steadfast rules apply to writing. Omit needless words. Use active voice. Use parallel construction on parallel concepts. Avoid battalions of exclamation points. Know the difference between *it’s* and *its*, *lie* and *lay*, and *there* and *their*.

An excellent source is the tried and true *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. If you have a question, it will provide the answer. *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook* by Glenn and Gray offers comprehensive coverage of grammar, style, punctuation, mechanics, writing and research. These two books are both informative and easy to understand.

Writers worldwide have read and recommended Stephen King’s *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Google it for a taste of his advice.

Search for “advice about writing” and you’ll find many sources to help with grammar, spelling and punctuation.

I adore the website *Flogging the Quill* by Ray Rhamey. Note his first page checklist. A writer sends the first page, and he offers feedback in positive, supportive ways. He provides editing and cover design information.

If you use a computer, you know that spellcheck indicates spelling errors and grammar issues also pop up. Numerous online resources, such as *The Punctuation Guide*, provide lessons on colons, semi-colons, hyphens and parentheses.

Webster’s New World Speller/Divider, a helpful book to have at your fingertips, lists thousands of the most needed words in a convenient format.

Never let weak spots deter you. Imagine what might have happened if Christie, Fitzgerald or Hemingway had.

Not Knowing How to Self-publish

If a person lives back on a hill in a “holler” (as is found in my home state of Tennessee) or inhabits a remote jungle village, she probably has never heard of Amazon.com, Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), CreateSpace, and BookBaby. To many others, these are well known wonders of the modern world. KDP and competitors Kobo, Nook, iTunes and Smashwords enable writers to release their books to a global public. These self-publishing sites require proper formatting that will suit various electronic devices.

KDP gives an easy-to-follow guide to proper formatting. It can be done; I did it myself, and that alone is all the proof you need for its simplicity. Countless professionals can format for a fee. If you lack the patience or computer skills to take a stab at it, this is the path to fol-

low. Google is a writer's friend, and Google is a vast resource for finding professionals more than willing to work for you: CompletelyNovel is one example. Fiverr is another. The library is a great resource. Perhaps you can bribe a familiar teenager, a.k.a. computer genius, to help. If you know even a modest network of fellow writers, don't be afraid to ask them for assistance.

The manuscript is formatted, the cover designed. Clicking the *Publish* button awaits, and it will elicit emotions from exhilaration to second-guessing to outright fear. That's natural. You did it. You knew how. It's all good.

Fear of Criticism

A writer mustn't be afraid of criticism. Writing is subjective. What floats one reader's boat might sink another's. We are only human, with feelings, but don't fear feedback because it might hurt. Develop a thick skin.

I belonged to an online writers' community with a few steady members who gave honest opinions and the reasons why. They were spot on, whether positive or negative.

Some writers fired back when criticism stung their egos. Oh, they didn't want to hear about run-on sentences or repetition or the value of pronouns. They took no delight in posts that asked if English was their second language. (I guess not.) As was often pointed out, they were brave enough to post writing samples, despite fear of criticism. They wanted praise, when their submissions "weren't ready for prime time." I heard that one from a member myself. Criticism is a way for a writer to improve. It isn't a direct attack.

The author Laura Van Den Berg wrote: *I remind myself that no one ever died getting a 1 star-er on Goodreads . . . it is not a national tragedy.* Your

book won't define *you*; if readers dislike it, they aren't disliking you. Instead of getting depressed or angry about criticism, learn from it.

Celebrate positive feedback. Why let a negative comment ruin the celebratory ones? Continue to read and write. Recognize that you are in the company of countless writers who have tackled their fear of criticism and moved on.

I wrote this piece about criticism on my lunch hour. When I finished, I received a text from a coworker who writes articles and interviews published in local magazines. It was a picture of a T-shirt that reads: 99 compliments, I'm a rock star. 1 negative review, Kill Me Now. She had no idea I was writing about this. Crazy, huh? That's a fun side to writing, and the T-shirt proves that we are indeed human, with feelings. We are not alone

Fear of Failure

I love this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt: *I believe that anyone can conquer fear by doing the things he fears to do, provided he keeps doing them until he gets a record of successful experience behind him.* This is perfect for writers.

Three signs of fearing failure are:

You don't set goals. (*I will write 2,000 words this week.*)

You want to stay cozy and comfortable, refusing to take risks. (*Oh, no, I could never write about that.*)

You are terrible at finishing projects. (*Gee, that would've made a good story.*)

A lack of motivation is sometimes a thinly veiled fear of failure. Anything you write today will be atrocious, so why bother? You'll never string sentences together as well as your favorite authors. So, adjust

your expectations. Pessimistic thinking protects you from perceived failure, just as much as busy-work does. Being a perfectionist with impracticable expectations is the problem – not failing to meet them. Don't tell yourself you aren't good enough. Don't believe that you tried your best and it's just not working. Successful people risk failure every day.

Don't try, don't fail. This is the wrong way to think. Try in order to succeed is the right way to think. Everyone makes mistakes and suffers setbacks, even acclaimed authors. Successful people are successful because they kept at it, often after many failed attempts.

Fear of Success

What if your book is successful? Awesome, right?

But, wait. Shouldn't you write something else? What if it isn't as good? You may fear living up to your achievement, that you aren't ambitious or smart enough to meet the next challenge. You might fear success because it brings feelings of vulnerability or imperfection. Success means change that intimidates and adds responsibility.

None of these feelings is uncommon. They are often part of the writing journey. Don't succumb to an inner voice that nags you with self-doubt. You *can* handle success.

Believe in yourself. Be brave. Recognize the fear and continue writing anyway!

In my novel, *Dancing with Armando*, a character has his father's pen on which is printed the slogan: *Never Quit. Make a Difference*. Turns out, these are words to live by while you conquer a fear of success.

Lack of Money for Editors, Cover Art, etc.

Many books give tips about common mistakes, show versus tell, or tightening sentences. Two examples are *Edit Your Book in a Month* by Eliza Knight and *You Can Write a Novel* by James V. Smith. I'd include *Write Your Novel - From Getting Started to First Draft* by Maggie James.

Join a writing group that meets at the library or on a website's forum. Find a beta reader and reciprocate. Have your work proofread. Read it aloud to "hear" typos and rhythms.

As you research helpful resources, you'll discover indisputable advice. Replace two words with one. *Very pretty – beautiful. Was digging – dug.* If you find many adverbs, kill them. *They applauded* means the same as *They clapped their hands.*

ProWriting Aid is an affordable online editing source. Find someone through social media; what a fantastic tool.

Cover art need not cost an arm and a leg. Create graphics with the website Canva, which is fun, free, and remarkably simple. Numerous graphic design sites offer affordable covers. Prices I'm familiar with range from \$45 to \$130. Take a look online at Book Cover by Design; I recommend Kellie Dennis. Explore The Graphics Shed; JC Clarke is a whiz. I know authors who've used Fiverr. Peruse covers of books in your genre and books you've purchased. This guarantees inspiration.

Do you know the movie *Field of Dreams*' famous line? *If you build it, they will come.* Unfortunately, *If you write it, they will read* is more complicated. No one will buy your book if they don't know it exists. Promote it before you release it. Promote it afterward. Numerous websites fit the bill. Reasonably priced and easy to use are The Fussy Librarian, Reading Deals, and The Choosy Bookworm. Facebook groups abound. Market on Twitter, Instagram, About Me, Google +, Pinterest – all social media. These sites are free. Study what your favorite authors do to

market their books. Spread the word. Then, *If you write it, they will read.*

Find out more about Jill and her books here: w¹www.jillcoxvogt.com

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1. <http://www.jillcoxvogt.com>

NOREEN WAINWRIGHT

IF YOU'RE READING THIS book it's a fair bet that you're fascinated by writing. You might have already finished your book or maybe not. Instead, you might feel like a person standing at the bottom of a mountain, wondering how the heck you are ever going to get to the top. I know what the mountain looks like because I've been there.

You will have read and been told that the world of publishing is changing dramatically and drastically. It's impossible to keep up with the pace of change. I'm speaking from a writer's viewpoint, goodness knows how much more the ongoing change impacts on those involved in traditional publishing. They must feel that they are standing on shaky ground and before they've had a chance to get their bearings yet more change has happened. Digital publishing is here to stay. Some writers who would have, not too long ago, jumped for joy and cracked open the champagne at the idea of a publishing contract are saying, actually, no. I'll go it alone. That would once have been unthinkable. A few years ago, self-publishing was considered second-rate and the term "vanity publishing" was a derogatory one.

Readers, too, are forming on-line book groups and reviewing at a rate a Sunday newspaper cannot even contemplate. So, success stories are being created by popular consensus and many writers are struggling with the reality of ongoing promotion – more of this, later.

My own writing story started many years ago. Well, I suppose I've always had the little fantasy of becoming a writer. It takes a while to recognise that there is no such thing as becoming a writer. You have to work very hard and discipline and determination are mandatory. It's more about the process of writing rather than being a writer and as you

probably know, the process of writing can be – well, the word tortuous springs to mind.

My first article was published in the *Countryman* magazine and they sent me the proofs – definitely one of the high spots in my life, opening that envelope and seeing my words in print. However, it's a long way from that to writing crime novels. But, as is usually the case, several factors came together to make that happen. First of all was the love of reading. I have only ever met one writer who claimed not to really enjoy reading – to most of us the two are completely entwined.

From a young age, I read everything and anything. Any readers will know that it is almost impossible to explain the pleasure you get from a book. In my case, libraries and familiar authors provided solace and stimulation and there was something in the process that spoke just to me – that was the recognition, I suppose that I wanted to write. I loved detective novels of the Golden Age of crime writing, the inter-war period. I'm not sure why but maybe there's something particularly fascinating about the period of history that's just about in living memory. Certainly, all my grandparents were around in the 1930s.

What's not so clear to me – yet, is the form of writing I'm best at. My most successful writing projects have been my articles, certainly from a monetary viewpoint. I'm not sure how many others jump from one type of writing to another. This spills over to the process of writing itself; I jump from one project to another also. If I'm writing a crime novel and the idea for an article, or the urge to write a story comes along, I put the crime novel away for a while. I know this would drive a lot of writers mad and it drives me mad at times but I've learned to live with it rather than fighting it.

The following are some of the main things I've learned along the way on my writing journey.

1. The importance of finishing. Though I may jump from one project to another, I do finish writing my books. This has not always been the case but I had a few lightbulb moments, which led to my tenacity. The first was when I finished an online writing job which I really wasn't enjoying and which wasn't paying well. I gave myself a talking to – along the lines of, if you can finish this, why on earth can't you finish what is important to you. The second change in thinking came one day when I was busy looking for a reason why I just didn't have time to write. Again I asked myself, why, if this was so important to me, was I not making it a priority? Sometimes a fairly small mind shift is all you need.
2. I have already alluded to this but it is so important, it bears saying again, or expounding upon. There is no magic leap from wish to reality. Wanting to be a writer should be replaced with a practical step – for instance, writing 500 words a day of your novel, or sending out a couple of articles or short stories a week. If you have any flair for writing and you send enough stuff out there, you will be published. This is a wonderful feeling and the validation it brings, spurs you onto further effort and success.
3. Rejection is part of the process and I think, inevitable. The more you send out the higher the chance of success but also you will get your share of rejections. The trick is, to take the personal out of it. Rejections hurt at first but I can honestly say now that apart from a momentary pang I take them in my stride and focus on the stories I've had published and the times I've been contacted by editors to write a piece.
4. I've learned that editing is so crucial and though my own editing skills have improved with each of my crime novels, on their own they aren't enough. You may have experienced this – you read and reread something and it is only when someone else reads it, or maybe you read it aloud that the mistake jumps out at you. I think this happens to everyone. They first time the edits for *Treated as Murder* came back I

was dismayed, honestly wondering if I was up to the job of bringing the book up to scratch. Once I'd got a handle on it though I began to find it fascinating – the things I found out about my writing...I repeated certain words and phrases a lot. I didn't make my writing active enough, at times. Descriptions, even dialogue needed to be broken up by someone walking to the window or something physical. I slightly over-used dialect. I'm sure there were other sins. On the whole, these are mistakes I don't make any more. I almost forgot the big one – my use of POV (point of view), jumped about. I honestly didn't know what this meant. I do now and I am very aware of it when I read other people's work. I've also chatted to my publisher and she told me that is one of her main reasons to reject manuscripts. If the reader is on John's head, one minute and then, in the policeman's head, she will be pulled out of the story and you've lost her,

5. To follow on from the POV issue, anything that pulls the reader out of the story is bad. Not too long ago, I was reading and enjoying a novel set in the early years of the 20th century. Then I read that the maid got up in the morning and pulled on her tights. Instantly, my belief in the story was ruined. Now, this may seem pedantic, even ridiculous, but I started thinking that tights weren't around, then and it's was though the writer appeared before me. No writer can guarantee veracity in everything, especially when you're writing about a different era. I bet some of my own mistakes have slipped through. But, I urge you to check your work as thoroughly as you can before sending it out, to minimise this sort of error and remember, you can't beat a fresh pair of eyes to look it through for you.

6. The days of the solitary writer, in his garret have well gone – if they ever existed. Promotion and an online presence are a given. It doesn't have to be hell on wheels. There are a whole load of interested and interesting people out there. Writing can be a lonely job – interacting with others can lift this. I also have a writing buddy, though we write

very different things, we support each other and read each other's work – usually before anybody else. I also think we genuinely celebrate the other's successes. It's been a wonderful experience and I hope we continue to be friends.

7. If any opportunities arise to speak to writers' groups, book clubs or any other interested parties, grab them. I was nervous the first time I spoke to a book club (suggested by my friend who belonged to the group), but it was ultimately rewarding. It's more than strange to hear people speak about your characters as though they were real people, but it was fun, too and I did ask for and receive some constructive criticism.

8. I'd advise any aspiring writer to buy several copies of one of the popular writing magazines. This is your passion; your subject. Immerse yourself in it. Guides such as *The Artists and Writers Yearbook* are also invaluable.

9. One of the most important pieces of advice I received is about the nature of writing. It is a craft. You may have a flair, a gift, a way with words. But, it is practice that hones and improves that skill. Finally, enjoy the trip. It's great fun and now, I can't imagine life without it.

Find out more about Noreen and her books here: https://www.facebook.com/noreenwainwrightauthor/?ref=py_c

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DAVID WIND

YOU'VE WRITTEN A NOVEL, or a novella, or a short story or a non-fiction book. You know it is damn good and you want to publish it. Then you ask, "What's next?"

In today's publishing world, with traditional publishers almost exclusively accepting books only via agent submissions, there are still several opportunities for publishing your novel. There are small independent presses who accept submissions from unknown and untested writers, but these are very difficult to gain acceptance from; there are publishers known as vanity presses whom you pay (sometimes ridiculous amounts) to publish your book; and, there is the (new) world of Independent (Indie) publishing—Self-Publishing.

In recent years, self-publishing has gained a huge share of the publishing market; the largest publishers are Amazon.com, Apple, Barnes & Noble, with Kobo growing into this market. At this point, and of all the large online publishers, only Amazon offers Print books as well as eBooks; however, several smaller online publishers offering Print-On-Demand books. Lulu (lulu.com) is one that many writers I know use.

How do you determine which publisher to use? How do you decide if you want both eBook and Print book versions of your novel? The answer is to research the market and listen to your gut.

I stepped into this market in 2008, after twenty-seven years of traditional publishing, and it took a while to settle myself into this new method of publishing. To date, I have six independently published novels, (2 thrillers and 4 sci-fi/fantasy novels, three of which comprise one series and three short stories)

I am not one of those writers who puts out a book every two or three months; rather, I take my time and bring out what I believe in...what I want to write, and hope that the readers out there will like what I produce as well. So far, it is going nicely.

However, to get that first book published I found myself treading a rocky road. I started in 2008 with a POD of a mystery novel. The Print-On-Demand publisher was Amazon's BookSurge, which a year or so later, became CreateSpace. Shortly after I published *Angels In Mourning*, I decided to venture into the new and growing eBook market and signed up with Amazon's Kindle publishing, known as KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing.)

Back then, the process wasn't easy, for either type of publishing, but after a few weeks of wrestling through it all, I published the book. The Print-On-Demand is a more difficult road, because of the detailing and setting up of a print book; however, if you follow the directions, and are careful, it will go smoothly. Today's CreateSpace is much easier, but still not simple.

Publishing an eBook is easier than a Print-On-Demand set-up, but still has some tough navigation to get from start to finish. Because Amazon1 is the giant in the world of self-publishing, I would suggest you start there. The start-up is not difficult, even when facing the 900-pound gorilla that is Amazon.

Many first time self-publishers believe they can do the publishing from A to Z themselves. While some fortunate souls can do so, experience has taught me that for a successful publication, doing it the 'right way' is the best way.

What is the right way? Well, if you have dual degrees in Literature and computer science (or are just a great IT person) then it should be a snap. If not, take my experience and use it. I tried doing it by myself

and succeeded, to a degree. The time I spent on publishing the first of my Indie books was a hundred times more than it should have been. I learned my lesson. I use professionals to make sure my manuscript is not just perfect, but ready to go the moment I decide to publish it.

My suggestion, unless you are dead-set on having a print version of your book out first, is to do the eBook, publish it, and then publish the Print version. What you've learned in the initial publishing process for an eBook will help you cut the time needed to publish the print version.

How do you accomplish all of this? There are two steps. 1: finish the book, 2: publish the book. The breakdown follows.

STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INDIE PUBLISHING OF AN eBook

STEP ONE: Finishing your book

1-Finish your last draft. After the last draft, I and many writers I know, send our manuscript out for BETA reading: if you are fortunate enough to have a few literate friends and/or colleagues, (avoid family when possible for the obvious reasons) have them BETA read your book so you get feedback. Make certain that you tell them to keep it real. Then you...

2: Find a competent cover artist and have a cover created. If you are a talented graphic artist, go for it, but remember, in Indie publishing, especially for eBooks, a professional cover is your BEST SALESPERSON, as it is in traditional publishing as well. There are many talented artists available online, both inexpensive and good. While the cover is being done, you should....

2- Find an editor and have your manuscript edited (an entire industry has developed for the independent publishing process) After the editor

finishes, and you've done any necessary revisions, send your final copy to...

3- The Proofreader to scour the book for any mistakes, dropped words or typos that the editor missed. (Yes, even pros miss this stuff) Then send the book to...

4-The Formatter. Having a professional formatting done, for eBooks and P.O.Ds is important. You can do it yourself, but having a professional do so, increases the chances of the book going through the entire process without a hitch.

(All of the above save you a ton of time, and time, is money)

STEP TWO: Publishing (Using Amazon as the example)

1: Get your ISBN. I believe in having my own ISBN, rather than the Publisher's ISBN, because with your own, you can use the same ISBN with every ePublisher, rather than have one for each. (Bowker sells the ISBNs)

2: Copyright your book. In the U.S., you do so with the Copyright office of the U.S. Government. Outside the U.S. check with your local government.

3: Sign up for an Amazon author account if you haven't done so already: follow every single step in the process. Do not skip any. Once set up, you begin the actual process...

4: On the initial set-up screen, make sure you enter the book's information exactly the way you want it. (Title, author, subtitle, etc.) Then...

5: Select your CATEGORIES. This is where your book will show up on the website. BE VERY CAREFUL. To be successful, research this out by checking the categories where you find similar books to yours. Then...

6: Select the keyword phrases that readers will enter to search for books like yours.

7- UPLOAD your cover

8-UPLOAD your Edited and Formatted manuscript

9- Follow whatever instructions you are given and...

Voila, your book is ready for people... ALMOST.

Before you release the book for sale, download the .mobi version of the book, load it into your Kindle, and go through it page by page by page, checking each page, visually, to be certain the formatting is correct and every page appears properly. I'm not talking about editing, it's about how the pages present to the reader. These little things, while seemingly unimportant, play a strong part in an eBook's success. If the formatting is sloppy, then the reading experience is as well, and you can expect review comments to point out flaws. Trust me: the readers WILL DO THAT!

If there are issues with the formatting, let your formatter know and have the book reformatted. There should be no charge for correcting their own mistakes. Once you have the corrected manuscript back, re-upload the book, and get going!

The Print Version: Print-On-Demand (POD)

The print version of your book differs from the eBook in several ways. The most noticeable is in the formatting, which is why I always use (and suggest) a formatter. The page margins are set so when the book is bound, the text is in the same position on every page, which means each page's margin is offset, left and right.

The headers are specific for left and right as well, and one page should have the author's name, while the other page has the book title. Page

numbers are in the Print version, while they usually do not appear on the eBook version. The uploaded manuscript is done in a PDF format.

The cover needs to be full, and of high quality, with the spine set to exact proportions as is the front cover and back cover and needs to be in a PDF format. The book size can be whatever standard size you select, from that of a regular paperback, to a trade publication size of 6 x 9, to several other sizes. I always use the 6 x 9. It's a nice size, which looks almost like a hardcover edition, and gives the reader something to hold on to—the feel of a real book. For the Print version, you will need a back cover blurb. Make it a good one. It is part of what helps make you and your book a success.

The process of setting this up is similar to the eBook.

A: On the initial set-up screen, make sure you enter the book's information exactly the way you want it. (Title, author, subtitle, etc.) Then...

B: Select your BISAC CATEGORY as CreateSpace only allows only 1 category while KDP permits 2. Remember, this is where your book will show up on the website so BE VERY CAREFUL. To be successful, research this out by checking the categories where you find similar books to yours. Then...

C: Select the keyword phrases that readers will enter to search for books like yours. (Print allows 5 keywords / eBooks 7)

D: **UPLOAD** your cover

E: **UPLOAD** your Edited and Formatted manuscript

F: Decide on the selling price of your book

G: Select the sales channels you want to use to sell (Amazon, Book Stores, Libraries, Etc.)

H: Once you hit the submit button, it will go through the Create-Space/Amazon review. If the cover and the manuscript pass the reviews then it will be...published.

I: There are also several distributors to use when creating an eBook, these follow a similar process to Amazon; however, with the distributors, after you complete the process of uploading and setting up your eBook, they will distribute your book to almost all the eBook sales websites around the world. From my own experiences, here are two I've found easy to work with and both reputable and dependable:

DRAFT2DIGITAL: <http://www.draft2digital.com>¹

SMASHWORDS: <http://www.smashwords.com>

Now you are ALMOST ready to be a successful author. All that remains is the marketing and, I'll leave that to someone else to guide you.

Please remember, the most important things you can do when publishing your book, are to be professional in your manuscript and your cover. Reviews are the lifeblood of an Indie writer. When readers find mistakes or a hint of unprofessionalism in the book, and as I said before, they WILL NOT HESITATE to tell the world about it, right on the publisher's product page for your book.

Success is a little luck, aided by doing things the right way.

Good luck!

Find out more about David and his books here: <http://david-wind.com/>

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1. <http://www.draft2digital.com>

IAIN ROB WRIGHT

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE me to understand self-publishing? Well, the honest answer is that I have been at this for five years now and am still learning to do things properly. Just recently I changed the way I format my ebooks for publication (I use Vellum). Last year I learned how to build a website from the ground up (I use Wordpress). I am always learning and building on what I have in place, because it's just me on my own. I don't have ten employees. It's impossible for a self-published author today to know everything there is from the get go. It's impossible to have everything in place from day one. Understanding (and accepting) that fact is key to retaining your sanity as an 'Indy Author'. It takes a lot of hard work, but also involves knowing when to just 'relax'.

If you've written a book and Googled 'self-publishing' for the first time today, then you are truly at the beginning of a long and winding journey. You will no doubt be overwhelmed. You should be. Self-publishing a book successfully requires you to create and build a business, and running a business has never been easy. This new business is 'you' and its product are your books. Luckily, it's a very scalable business with manageable overheads. You start off small, concentrating only on the basics, and then can gradually increase the complexity of your business over time. Early returns should go straight back into building on what you have. Only ever do things one step at a time. Only focus on what is most important. Don't neglect your family!

The first thing you should of course focus on is your book. It is your launch product (if it's your first) and so should be as strong as it can be before you get it to market. Do what you can to get someone to edit it, even if it's just a handful of bookish friends. Ideally, spend some money

and hire a professional, but I understand that with book 1 this might be a stretch. You then might also want to complicate matters by swatting up on how KDP keywords work. It's worthwhile getting your meta tags correct right now, as having people find your books will always be of vital importance.

Second thing to concentrate on is presentation. Your book's artwork should not be DIY. Hire an artist, or google 'buy ebook covers.' There are plenty of websites that sell cheap, yet professional covers. Your artwork is an investment that will pay for itself, so don't worry about the money you're spending too much. Next, read a couple of articles on writing a good product description and then get yours as crisp as you can. Your book cover attracts leads to your product page, but it is the job of your product description to close the deal. Imagine the reader is sat in front of you and you have 30 seconds to convince them to buy your book. Go!

So, now you have a well-presented, well-edited book on sale via Amazon and Co. That's it! That is the foundation of your business forever in place, so feel good about it. It's now possible for you to make money from your writing. Everything you do going forward will contribute to you making money. This is the point where most authors get overwhelmed, as it dawns on them that writing the book was the easy part.

You need to spend your time wisely, because you are just one person. Writing the next book is one of your biggest priorities — never lose sight of that! Your next priorities should be the things with the greatest return on time investment. An example of a poor time investment is social media. While Facebook, Twitter, et al, are great for staying in touch with your readers and colleagues, they are not great at generating sales (and constantly posting about your book doesn't work, so save yourself the effort). What does work well is: building an email list (that offers people an incentive for joining), setting up a basic website (you can

get something more advanced later), asking other authors for advice (or reading the blog posts of authors in the know), and trying to run promotions (Bookbub might not accept you, but others will). Early on, your focus should be on getting people to discover your books, and retaining those who do (your website can work well to achieve both these goals). Free promotions, giveaways, and guest blog posts where people will expect you to plug your book are all good uses of your time. Eventually, you should get a trickle of readers coming through, most of them from freebies, but some from actual sales. You will not get rich overnight. There were a few of us who did, but self-publishing is a lot tougher now. It takes time. Sorry about that.

That's why you should concentrate on writing new books, and not let all the other stuff worry you too much. Cover the very basics to begin with. Don't try to build a complex website from day 1. Don't try to master Facebook Advertising until you are established enough to spend the time and money. Don't try to add complex formatting to your ebooks when it's not vital. Get the meat and bones in place before you add gravy. Don't let your own mind overwhelm you.

Once you have a couple of books available and are making a little money, perhaps then look at upgrading your website or rejigging your formatting, but not before. That stuff is all part of the scalability of your business, and as long as your sales are growing (however slowly) then you are doing what needs to be done. Do the things that will directly help you make money now and in the future: new books, newsletters, promotions, (getting reviews?).

So, in summary, when you are just starting out, learn about KDP and little else. Just get your ebook done and out there. Make it good (editing, artwork, product description, keywords). Make your man hours count. Begin at the beginning.

Find out more about Iain and his books here: ww.iainrobwright.com¹

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THANK YOU!



THANK YOU FOR DOWNLOADING and reading this book! I hope you have found the stories interesting and motivational, and have found some of the tips useful. Wherever you are on your writing journey, I wish you every success.

Please feel free to share and distribute this book however you wish.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAGGIE JAMES IS A BRITISH author who lives near Newcastle. She writes psychological suspense novels.

Before turning her hand to writing, Maggie worked mainly as an accountant, with a diversion into practising as a nutritional therapist. Diet and health remain high on her list of interests, along with travel. Accountancy does not, but then it never did. The urge to pack a bag and go off travelling is always lurking in the background! When not writing, going to the gym, practising yoga or travelling, Maggie can be found seeking new four-legged friends to pet; animals are a lifelong love!

Visit Maggie James's website and sign up for her Special Readers' Group¹! Her newsletter is sent very other month and when a new title is released, so you won't get bombarded with emails. The newsletter includes book recommendations, news about Maggie's latest books along with discounts, and snippets about her life.

Maggie James's blog is also on her website - she posts regularly on all topics of interest to readers, including author interviews and book reviews. You can find it here:

www.maggiejamesfiction.com²

Follow Maggie James on Facebook: Maggie James Fiction³

And on Twitter: @mjamesfiction⁴

1. <http://eepurl.com/bzW8ZP>

2. <http://www.maggiejamesfiction.com>

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And finally on Pinterest.⁷

4. <https://twitter.com/mjamesfiction>

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