



# Write ON!

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE  
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

*Summer 2018*

## THE REALITIES OF PUBLISHING

*Plus*

**GUIDING SCRIBE - EIGHT TRUTHS ABOUT  
PUBLISHING YOU CAN ONLY LEARN IN THE  
TRENCHES**

**WHY DO YOU WRITE?**

**FOLLOWING YOUR DREAMS TO  
TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING**

**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A QUERY LETTER**

**WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU WORK WITH A  
SMALL PRESS**

**MY HUMBLING SELF-PUBLISHING  
EXPERIENCE AND WHAT I LEARNED**

**GRAMMAR LIGHT- LOGICAL FALLACIES**

**THE NOT-SO-LONELY REJECT**





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## President's Note

Since setting out to be an author, I've learned that my expectations at every phase of the process were wrong. Do all aspiring authors romanticize the writing life as I did? Pen your story, send it to your agent, then get to work on the next book. After all, a writer's job is to write, the agent's job is to sell the book, and the publisher's marketing department handles promotion. Right?

Sadly, no.

Perhaps that's how the industry once worked, but those days are long gone. Honing your craft is no longer enough. Now, authors must also have knowledge of marketing, law, and technology. But each of these new hats brings with it a wealth of questions. What's the best way to get published? Do I need an agent? How do I approach a small press? What's a business plan and do I need one? How can I garner more sales for my book? What should (and shouldn't) be in my contract?

In short, writers must understand and handle much more of the publishing process than ever before. It can be overwhelming. In the past, the writer's life was a solitary one. Today, we need each other, not just for encouragement and support, but also for education.

Here are some realities of publishing, and ways WFWA can help you navigate them:

- **We can write only as well as we read.** WFWA's [Goodreads Shelf](#) showcases over 300 members' books of women's fiction to read for entertainment as well as comp titles and analysis.
- **There are more options for getting published than ever.** No one way is right for everyone. Our [toolboxes](#) have lots of information about [indie](#) publishing as well as for those pursuing a [traditional](#) path.
- **You have to embrace change and technology.** Social media is the modern author's best friend. Use it well, and you can deliver your message to thousands of people without leaving your desk. Our [webinars](#) can show you how to make the most of the tech platforms out there.
- **No matter how you publish, you will be the promoter-in-chief.** Understand what branding is, how to build a fan base, and make the most of your website with these [marketing](#) resources.

Part of me looks back on the early days of my journey and longs for the dreamy-eyed naïveté that kept me from giving up. *This query will get me lots of requests. Once an agent reads the full, she'll make an offer. Once I land an agent, it will sell quickly.* (Spoiler: none of those things happened.) But learning many lessons the hard, slow way took time that would have been better spent writing. The closer we set our expectations to the realities of the process, the better prepared we'll be to navigate them.

Being an author today is challenging. But writing is a labor of love—we can't *not* do it. Arm yourself with information and tools up front, and you'll have more time left to do what you love.

Write on!

*Christine Adler*

WFWA PRESIDENT



# Editors

## MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

Stephanie Knipper is the author of *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and six children, where she is currently at work on her second novel.

## FEATURES EDITOR

Cara Sue Achterberg is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, will be released August 7, 2018 from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com).

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Patricia Friedrich is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

## COPY EDITOR

Sara Dahmen is a metalsmith of vintage and modern cookware and manufactures pure metal kitchenware in tin, copper, and iron. Her debut novel, *Widow 1881*, inspired her company, House Copper & Cookware. The cookware is manufactured entirely in America, with most of the copperware made by Sara in her garage in Port Washington. She has published over 100 articles as a contributing editor, has written for *Edible* and *Root + Bone*, among others, and spoke at TEDx Rapid City. When not sewing authentic clothing for 1830's reenactments, she can be found hitting tin and copper at her apprenticeship with a master smith, reading the Economist and reference books, brainstorming with her husband, or playing with her three young children.

## LAYOUT EDITOR

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.

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## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining Women's Fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we prefer. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive:

Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey.

Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.

*Write on!*



## FACEBOOK

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:

[membership@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

## READER LETTERS

Like what you've read in *Write ON!*? Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

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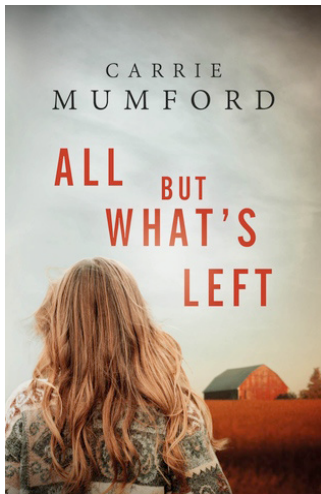
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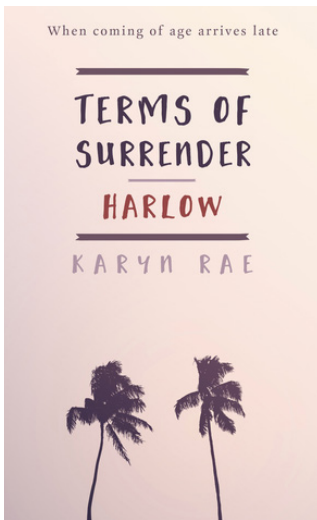


**Carrie Mumford**  
**All But What's Left**  
**06/02/18**

After losing her mother in a tragic accident, Hannah Tatum grows up wanting nothing more than to be a good girl. At twenty-one, she has her whole future planned out. She'll help her dad with their ranch until her childhood sweetheart finishes university. They'll get married, take over the ranch, and live happily ever after. But since when do perfect plans ever work out?

At the beginning of the summer, Hannah's father decides to sell the ranch. He hires Will Ludlow, travelling ranch hand and rodeo star, to help get the property ready. Hannah is determined to stop her dad, keep the ranch, and stay far away from Will and his mysterious past.

But, as new memories of her mother surface, Hannah doubts her mother's death was purely accidental. With summer coming to an end and everything falling apart around her, can Hannah hold on to the things that matter the most?



**Karyn Morrow**  
**Harlow (Terms of Surrender Series, Book 1)**  
**6/19/18**

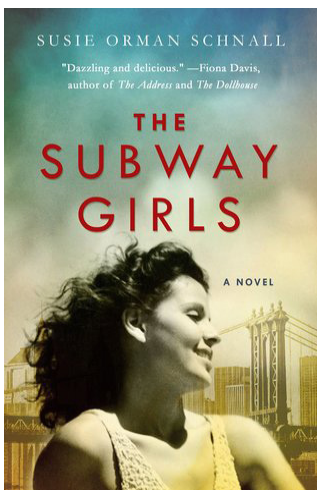
*Terms of Surrender* is a story about when coming of age arrives late.

On Harlow Ausby's fortieth birthday, she still feels as out of place in polished Charleston as the moon in a midday sky. From her strawberry-red hair to the matching birthmark that seems to swallow her left leg, Harlow's uncommon looks have always made her feel less than worthy of the image-conscious Ausby name. As her often cruel and critical mother, Vivian, lies dying in a hospital bed, Harlow reexamines the choices—or lack thereof—that have brought her to a crossroads in her life. She is freshly divorced from a social climber she never loved, nursing a newly empty nest, and shocked to run into the love of her life—a man whose heart she broke twenty years earlier—and his wife, her former best friend.

What she doesn't realize is that everything is about to change.

Over the course of one monumental day, a secret as old as Harlow surfaces. Moving from the present to the past and then back again, Harlow's story explores rich female friendships, deep rifts between mothers and daughters, and simmering under-the-surface social scandal.

*Terms of Surrender* is a novel that women will want to discover, because it's a story they may already know. They just haven't read it yet.

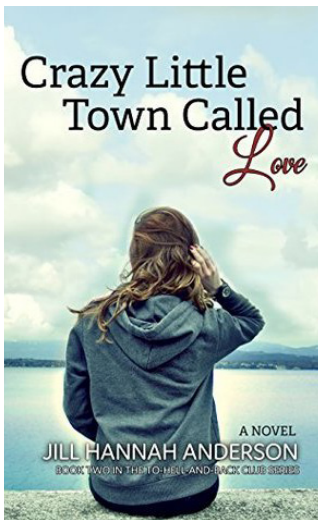


**Susie Orman Schnall**  
**The Subway Girls**  
**07/10/18**

In 1949, dutiful and ambitious Charlotte's dream of a career in advertising is shattered when her father demands she help out with the family business. Meanwhile, Charlotte is swept into the glamorous world of the Miss Subways beauty contest, which promises irresistible opportunities with its Park Avenue luster and local fame status. But when her new friend—the intriguing and gorgeous fellow-participant Rose—does something unforgivable, Charlotte must make a heart-wrenching decision that will change the lives of those around her forever.

Nearly 70 years later, outspoken advertising executive Olivia is pitching the NYC subways account in a last ditch effort to save her job at an advertising agency. When the charismatic boss she's secretly in love with pits her against her misogynistic nemesis, Olivia's urgent search for the winning strategy leads her to the historic Miss Subways campaign. As the pitch date closes in on her, Olivia finds herself dealing with a broken heart, an unlikely new love interest, and an unexpected personal connection to Miss Subways that could save her job—and her future.

*The Subway Girls* is the charming story of two strong women, a generation apart, who find themselves up against the same eternal struggle to find an impossible balance between love, happiness, and ambition.



**Jill Hannah Anderson**  
**Crazy Little Town Called Love**  
**07/11/18**

Thirty-two-year-old Molly's cushy life in Minneapolis tanks when her long-time boyfriend bails on her and their underwater-mortgaged home.

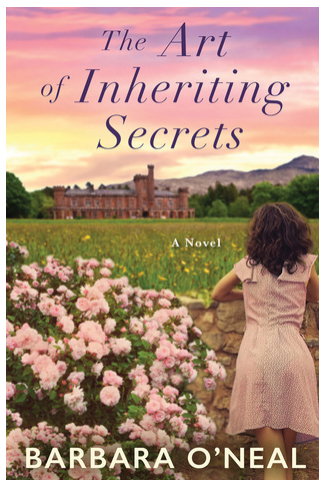
She needs a place to live and a new job—and the answer to both may be in a quaint town called Love. The town where her deceased mother grew up, a town where an old General Store and home have been willed to Molly's family...a town with secrets and people with long memories.

Can she trade her acrylic nails for pounding nails to revive a fixer-upper store? Molly is ready for a do-over and a chance to prove to herself that she can make it on her own.

She puts elbow grease, heart, and half her savings, into giving the old place a facelift. As her business grows, so does her relationship with Jackson—the owner of the hardware store—and great-nephew to the woman who willed her business to Molly's family.

The tourist town of Love brims with quirky townspeople and fun events. And it is at one of these events that Molly is first threatened.

Apparently, not everyone is happy to have her in town. As threats against her escalate, Molly has to decide if she'd be better off leaving Love or staying to fight for the life she's created in the town that has stolen her heart.



**Barbara O'Neal**  
**The Art of Inheriting Secrets**  
**07/17/18**

When Olivia Shaw's mother dies, the sophisticated food editor is astonished to learn she's inherited a centuries-old English estate—and a title to go with it. Raw with grief and reeling from the knowledge that her reserved mother hid something so momentous, Olivia leaves San Francisco and crosses the pond to unravel the mystery of a lifetime.

One glance at the breathtaking Rosemere Priory and Olivia understands why the manor, magnificent even in disrepair, was the subject of her mother's exquisite paintings. What she doesn't understand is why her mother never mentioned it to her. As Olivia begins digging into her mother's past, she discovers that the peeling wallpaper, debris-laden halls, and ceiling-high Elizabethan windows covered in lush green vines hide unimaginable secrets.

Although personal problems and her life back home beckon, Olivia finds herself falling for the charming English village and its residents. But before she can decide what Rosemere's and her own future hold, Olivia must first untangle the secrets of her past.



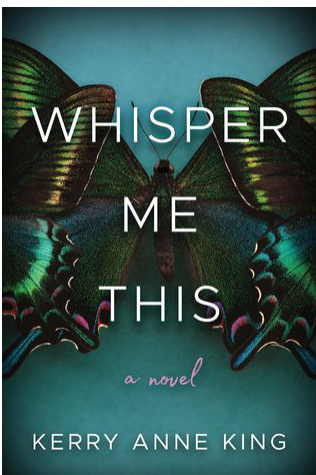
**Lily Iona MacKenzie**  
**Freefall: A Divine Comedy**  
**08/01/18**

*Freefall: a Divine Comedy* introduces Tillie Bloom, a wacky installation artist, who reconnects with three former friends—women she had hung out with in the late '50s and early '60s—in a four-day reunion at Whistler, B.C. The new intimacy they experience prompts them to celebrate their approaching sixtieth birthdays together, as well as the millennium, in Venice, Italy, where two thirds of the book take place. During this time, secrets surface, their stories binding them closer together.

As we come to know them better, the women's identities shift, enlarging, becoming more complex. Each one's life has taken a different direction. Tillie and Daddy have both moved to the States from Canada, where Tillie has given herself over to art. Daddy—once a radical feminist/hippie and now a lesbian—has turned into a successful real estate saleswoman. Moll, *tres sportif*, a housewife and mother of three, spends her free time exploring the Canadian outdoors. Sibyl—also married and a shrewd bookkeeper addicted to 4000-piece jigsaw puzzles, cigarettes, and wine—has a cabin in Whistler, a home in Vancouver, and a flat in Venice.

While Sibyl, Moll, and Daddy assume they're in Venice to vacation and deepen their relationships, Tillie has a hidden agenda: she intends to crash the Biennale, an art extravaganza scheduled every other year, hoping to find a larger audience for her art. But first she must find the ideal place to construct her installation that features casts she made of her three friends' bodies as well as other zany pieces.

A humorous yet serious meditation on the relationship between art and mortality, *Freefall: a Divine Comedy* taps into the rich underground springs that feed all of our lives, suggesting that death is more complex than we normally believe—darkness and death being the source of life and not just the end. It also celebrates the imagination.

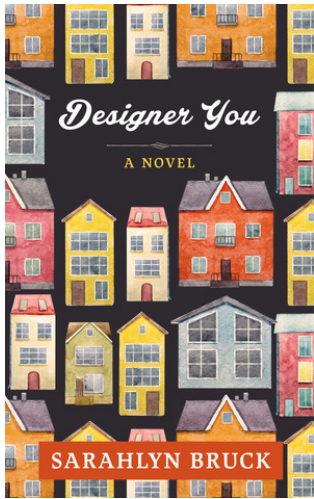


**Kerry Anne King**  
**Whisper Me This**  
**08/01/18**

Single mother Maisey Addington has always fallen short of her own mother's expectations—never married, a bit adrift, wasting her high IQ on dead-end jobs. The only thing Maisey's sure she's gotten right is her relationship with her twelve-year-old daughter, Elle...until a phone call blows apart the precarious balance of their lives. Maisey's mother is in a coma, and her aging father faces charges of abuse and neglect.

Back at her childhood home, Maisey must make a heartrending life-or-death decision. Her confused father has destroyed family records, including her mother's final wishes. Searching for answers, Maisey uncovers one unspeakable secret after another when she stumbles upon a shattering truth: a twin sister named Marley.

Maisey's obsession with solving the mystery of her sister forces her to examine her darkest memories and triggers a custody battle with Elle's father. Will Maisey's love for her daughter be strong enough to break a cycle of abuse and create a new beginning for them all?



**Sarahlyn Bruck**  
**Designer You**  
**08/31/18**

Pam and Nate were a couple who just couldn't get away from each other, sharing not only their bed, but also a successful lifestyle empire as DIY home renovators, bloggers, podcasters, and co-authors.

When Nate dies in a freak accident, Pam becomes a 44-year-old widow, at once too young and too old—too young to be thrust into widowhood and too old to rejoin the dating pool.

Now the single mother of a headstrong and grief-stricken teenager, Pam's life becomes a juggling act between dealing with her loss and learning how to parent by herself. On top of all that she also must reinvent herself or lose the empire that she and Nate had built so carefully.

It is time for Pam to seize the opportunity to step up as a mother, come out from behind Nate's shadow, and rise as the sole face of the Designer You brand, and maybe, possibly, hopefully, find love again.

If you have a Women's Fiction novel being published in the next quarter (October, November, and December) and would like *Write On!* to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).

# Eight Truths About Publishing You Can Only Learn *In the Trenches*

by Heather Webb

In this issue of *Write On!*, there's a ton of great advice being shared from "all walks of publishing life". But I'd like to focus on the most important things I've learned as a published writer—regardless of the path you choose to take. The only logical place to start is at the beginning.

### Professional behavior

It should go without saying, but I can't underscore enough how often I have witnessed very poor, unprofessional behavior. Just remember, people perceive who you are as a person as well as a writer by your behavior.

- **Make your deadlines.** When a production schedule must be adjusted, it affects many other projects in the publishing line up, and it really ticks them off. If you absolutely cannot make the date because something has happened in your personal life or because you're juggling multiple projects for your publisher, give your agent plenty of notice so she can request more time from your editor. They will be a lot more flexible this way.
- **Reply to important emails and other requests.** If you're a freelancer of some sort or replying to booksellers, book clubs, or other events (also to other writers), a week is a reasonable amount of time to reply to emails. Inversely, this means, you should hold your horses and

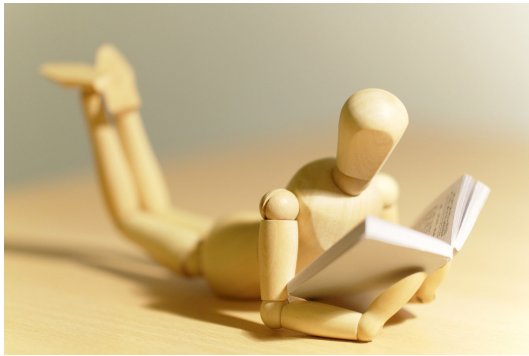


allow up to a week for people to respond to your messages. There's nothing more irritating than having someone send another email when it's been only two or three days, or worse, bombard you from multiple social media platforms. Gah! It's true that we've all grown very impatient these days with our cell phones and instant gratification, but we aren't robots with unlimited time. Respect both your personal workday hours as well as those of others. Boundaries are what keep us sane in a difficult business that often feels like a rat race.

- **If you don't have something nice to say, don't say it at all.** Do not bash your fellow writers, don't give them poor book reviews, and do not show your envy of their successes—in public. Sure, we're all human and will need to blow off

steam sometimes, but that's what your critique partners and writer friends are for, to help you wade through the negative feelings that crop up and to keep you grounded and focused on what matters: the writing.

- **Always respond to blurb requests with grace.** Ignoring them is not an option. You would be surprised how often this happens, EVEN FROM FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES. Don't be that person. We all have long memories when it comes to a slight, or what feels like one. Sad but true. The golden rule applies here. If you don't think the work is for you or you are simply too busy to spend the time on it, tell them you'd like to help but simply can't this time around and wish them luck. Simple, short, polite.



### **Writing what you want versus writing what will sell.**

We all have at least one idea—well, let's be honest, we likely have many ideas—that aren't all that viable for the marketplace for a variety of reasons. The reality is, a working writer who becomes a part of the "publishing machine" very often must limit their scope to the brand they are establishing. Narrowing our scope isn't something we like to do as creatives, but it's an essential part of reaching your developing fan base. This is what concerns publishers. If we reach our fan base with a reliable brand, we all make money. If you want to go outside of that brand and you're anything less than bestselling, opt for a pen name.

The other thing worth mentioning is that publishers have loads of data at their disposal and usually can gauge how well a particular topic will sell, at least within a reasonable guessti-

mate. When they believe they have a product (I know, cringe, but yes, books are products) that can sell quite well, they put all of their marketing power behind it. This, however, is becoming rarer by the minute these days. Which leads me to my next topic.

### **Accept the realities of marketing and publicity**

Budgets are being slashed across the board. It's a sad fact, but it is what it is, and the sooner the writer understands this, the sooner they can adjust and find creative ways to make the most of their platforms and their budgets. A few words of wisdom:

- **High Turn-over Rates:** In publishing, there is an enormously high turn-over rate, in particular in the areas of publicity and marketing. It's a difficult and demanding job and can often prove to be unrewarding. Publicists are harassed by constant emails and phone calls, and have a tremendous amount of work for editors, agents, and authors to juggle. Because there's a high turn-over rate, it may also mean you'll get a brand new publicist who doesn't have a lot of experience or connections assigned to your book. This can be quite disheartening. Your best bet is to split the work with your publicist and try to be as flexible as possible. Also, be a polite pit bull. Persistence and follow up are key, but keep it brief and professional—and don't overdo it. Do your best to keep your emotions out of things.
- **Set Aside Money in Advance:** You have to spend money to make money. This is the most basic marketing manifesto. It's also the truest. If you aren't willing to shell out some dough to give your book a push, chances are it won't go anywhere. If you're one of the lucky lotto winners at your publishing house, more power to you, but there are so few of these—even for many big, established authors. It's best to look at your market placement realistically so you can give your book its best chance in the saturated readersphere.
- **Devise a Plan:** What will you need all

that money for? Ads in papers, magazines, bookish websites, and also for blog tours. Seek out a professional to help you with this. There are some very knowledgeable and reputable organizations that help promote writers. **BUT BE CAREFUL.** Do your research. Ask for final numbers, click-throughs, impressions, and also take a look at their client lists. There are loads of Mickey Mouse operations out there robbing authors of funds. Also, I'd recommend not going overboard with in-person tours. They're expensive, rarely covered by your publisher, and hardly ever sell enough books to make it worthwhile. Plus it can be truly humiliating sitting there all afternoon with a stack of books, only to have people walk by you all day and avoid your gaze. I say this with four-books-under-my-belt worth of experience.



- **Hiring Personal Publicists, yay or nay:** If you can pull out *at least* one major hook—and I don't mean a cliffhanger style pitch, and I don't mean the themes in your book—but one major idea that will resonate strongly with media outlets, it may be worthwhile to hire a publicist. Then again, you may be better off just buying up ad space to advertise the book. Most seasoned authors I know swear by the ads-only approach. That said, most of them have also tried working with publicists. The difficulty is, neither of these options can truly be measured. Publicity, in particular, is difficult to gauge. Publicists spend a ton of time researching and pitching articles, interviews, and other projects, and then they have to sit by and

“wait and see” if the book they're working with will be chosen by the media outlets. It's a BIG FAT “maybe”. But hey, all of publishing is a risky business. On this point, I think trial and error and going with your gut are the way to go. I have one book that wouldn't have benefited from a publicist, and two that could have. Like everything in publishing, it just depends.

### **You will change agents or editors, or both, at one point**

This is a sad inevitability of the business, but one we must embrace if we want to get our books out there. Publishers merge, close, or begin (!). Editors retire or move to a new publishing house. The same goes for agents. Sometimes, you aren't being treated particularly well by an agent or editor, and it's time to take matters into your own hands and make a move. One or both of these things have happened to 99.99% of all authors I've ever met. Embrace the inevitability. It allows you to keep your focus where it should be—on the writing.

### **Celebrate every milestone**

Despite all the pressure, despite things not going exactly as you imagined, despite the many balls dropped along the way on your end and/or your team's, remember that you're **LIVING THE DREAM!** You're published! People are reading **YOUR** stories and loving them. Also, you've worked your tail off to create something meaningful or entertaining. Bask in the excitement and be proud of yourself. There are so, so many people who wish they could have the successes you've had, even if that means just having a completed manuscript or an encouraging rejection letter, or maybe just heartening feedback from a beta reader.

### **The post-partum blues**

Launch day arrives to lots of fanfare, and you're excited as hell! You check your stats obsessively and bask in the great reviews and publicity, the sheer joy of having your story join the canon that is our great big world out there. It's truly wonderful. But there's an aspect few discuss to book publishing, and one worth

mentioning both for debut novelists and those of us with several under our belts. It's the post-partum blues.

The excitement wears off in a few days, or a few weeks and suddenly, there's nothing but:

**\*crickets\***



That's when the blues set in. The ol' crash after the high. All of the bustle and excitement felt overblown and silly, and you have to remember why you put yourself through the hopes and dreams, the stress and anxiety. You wonder if you can put yourself through the rat race of writing and editing for years, the months of promotion and strain, just to have your book release to crickets.

We feel so utterly changed by our works that when the world continues on in the same way it always has, it's a letdown. But days go by and you get drawn into your next story, relish your writing routine, and something miraculous happens. You realize something you knew before you signed with your agent, or sold a book, or went into a frenzy over which font to use on your promotional bookmarks.

YOU LOVE TO WRITE. And that, is most important. Which brings me to my next point.

**It must ALWAYS be about the writing. Really, it must.**

Words are beautiful and gritty and life-changing. They paint pictures, build empires, and ignite love stories that destroy us and make us. For all of the songs and slogans that say actions speak louder than words, IT JUST ISN'T TRUE. Words eternalize those actions. And you—this one little drop of water in this great big

ocean of novelists, have added story to the fabric of human history and they're beautiful—to you—and THAT is what matters. And if they impart hours of entertainment, joy, inspiration to even one reader, you have done what you set out to do, and that is enough. And by God, you want to do it all over again.

**And finally, a few thoughts to live by:**

- Establish balance in your life. Obsession, possession, and anxiety are lethal.
- Keep fighting the good fight. Keep putting those stories on paper.
- Remember you're already living the dream. You're doing what you love. Many never do.
- Discover what it means to be successful to YOU, no one else, just you. Believe in it.



**Heather Webb** is the author of historical novels *Becoming Josephine* and *Rodin's Lover*, which have sold in six countries and have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *France Magazine*, and more, as well as received national starred reviews. *Rodin's Lover* was a Goodreads Pick of the month in 2015. *Last Christmas in Paris*, an epistolary love story set during WWI, was released October 15, 2017, from HarperCollins. Heather is also a professional freelance editor with more than two dozen clients placed with agents and publishers, an amateur foodie, and a travel fiend. Find out more at her website, [www.heatherwebb.net](http://www.heatherwebb.net), and on Twitter @msheatherwebb.



# Why Do You Write?

by Cara Sue Achterberg

## *Why Do You Write?*

This is a question I always pose to my creative writing students. Many are earnest, excited, anxious adults who hope to write a novel. They arrive in the classroom with crisp blank notebooks and their favorite pen (as instructed), but what they really bring are their dreams. They set them down gently in the scarred chairs of the high school geography classroom where we meet.

It is big, this responsibility I feel each semester when I get the list of my students. I try very hard to tread the thin line between hope and reality. Beyond instructing them on story structure, editing tips, and writing exercises, I want most of all to encourage them. But as a published writer who spent ten years toiling before finally seeing my name on the spine of a real book, I know the road they are embarking on is long and painful and frustrating.

For the ones who dream of publishing, at some point in our eight weeks together, I ask them: *how bad do you want it?* Because I know the answer to this question is important.

Elizabeth Gilbert, in her book, *Big Magic*, has a chapter called ‘The Shit Sandwich’ in which she basically says, you have to love what you’re doing enough to eat a lot of shit. Crude, but so very accurate. It was a chapter that spoke to my soul because I have lived that question. In fact, my running playlist from fifteen years ago had two versions of the classic “How Bad Do You Want It?” on it. When the song would come up in the rotation, no matter where I was in my

daily run, I sang that song out loud.

I wanted it. Bad.

I think all of us who are pursuing a writing career need to come to terms with our personal answer to that question. The odds are certainly stacked against us. There’s nothing special about me, I tell my students; I’ve received hundreds of rejection letters. Many of you probably have as well.

But it doesn’t mean I can’t write.



My daughter, Addie, is pursuing a degree in Musical Theater. She hopes to spend her lifetime in the limelight. Recently, after several callbacks, she didn’t get a part she had her heart set on. In fact, it went to a young woman whose singing voice can veer towards flat and who does not tap dance (a requirement for this role). What she has that my daughter doesn’t is the classic ‘leading girl’ look and connections with the theater. And so she got the part. Even though Addie can sing and dance circles around her.

I sat with my daughter when she received

the news. She was devastated. She said, “It’s so unfair.”

I agreed.

“I’m just not that good.”

I disagreed.

Finally, I told her a version of what I tell my creative writing students. “There is a lot involved here that you cannot control. You can only study and work and practice and put your best effort forward. After that, you have to let it go—it’s out of your hands. You’ll never know why someone is chosen over you. And you can’t waste energy being angry. What you have to do is ask yourself: *how bad do you want it?* Enough to endure disappointment and rejection and endless frustration? What is it worth to you? Why do you do it?”

“Because I love to,” was her answer.

And it’s the only answer for those of us willing to swallow any number of shit sandwiches in pursuit of our dream.

*Why do you write?*

Because you want to be published? If that is your only reason for writing, I would challenge you to dig deeper. Being published does not make you a writer. It’s one kind of validation, but it’s not the only one. And it may not be worth the shit sandwiches that accompany it.

Getting published does not live up to the impossible expectations we layer upon it. I won’t lie and tell you it doesn’t feel good—it certainly does. But you know what happens the day after your first book is published?

Everyone asks what you’re writing next. And it does not get easier. There is not a point where you no longer deal with shit sandwiches. So, my friends, I must ask—*why do you write?*



**Cara Sue Achterberg** is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I’m Not Her*, *Girls’ Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, will be released August 7, 2018 from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com).



# Following Your Dreams to *Traditional Publishing*

by Orly Konig

The beauty of today's publishing market is that we have choices—traditional/big publishers, small press, and self-publishing. Depending on what your goal is for your career, there's a way to get there. For me, there was only one path to take . . . sign with an agent and contract with a big New York publisher. That was my dream and I never lost sight of it.

The longer I'm part of the publishing world, the more I realize publishing journeys are as varied as the books being released. You won't find two authors with similar experiences or even one author with the same experience on subsequent books. But at the same time, the ups and downs, glitches and successes, are—ready for it?—quite similar.

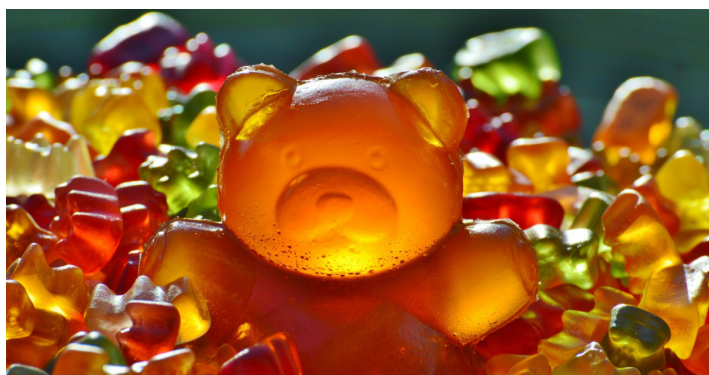
See for yourself . . .

## **On the submission process**

Believing my time would come, I paid careful attention to what other writers said about their submission process. When it was my turn, I was “ready.” Except it didn't turn out as I expected.

For example, my agent asked for very few changes. I had mentally prepared myself for a massive rewrite. Then I hunkered down for what I anticipated would be a long, multi-wave submission process. Wrong again. It took a couple of months for an editor to express interest. She asked for a call prior to offering. I fell in love with her vision and barely contained my nerves for the few days until the offer came in. I'd bought a huge supply of gummy bears, antici-

pating a long, stressful process. I was extremely lucky. It was quick and only a few gummies were consumed.



In my case, my editor was able to offer directly on a manuscript she fell in love with. That's not always the case, though. Often, editors take a manuscript they're interested in acquiring to an editorial board that discusses which manuscripts they feel would be strongest for their list.

Amy Nathan spent a year working with her agent on revisions before her debut was sent out to publishers. Here's what she said about her process: “The editor went to the editorial board twice to convince them. She told me, ‘the good news was that no one hated it.’ I suspect though that they let her offer to stop her from badgering them. She believed in me and in the book. It only takes one.”

Amy Reichert's agent submitted her manuscript in waves to publishers and her book was also taken to a review board. In her case, the call with her editor didn't happen until after she accepted the offer.



Sandra Block had a rather different experience on her first book, *Little Black Lies*. The editor worked with her on full edits, including an in-depth conversation, before acquiring the book.

I'm not alone in the pre-offer call category. Susan Meissner transitioned from a smaller, independently-owned press to a subsidiary of Random House to an imprint of Penguin and in all cases had a call with an editor before a deal was made.

### **After the offer**

I come from the corporate world, so in my mind, until the ink is dry, it's not complete. Publishing is a slightly different world. The sale was announced within days of the offer, but it was another two months before I received the contract.

It was also counter-intuitive for me to start working on revisions for a manuscript that wasn't "officially" under contract yet. Luckily, it was only a couple of days between when I received the edits and when I signed the contract, so my itchy, orderly brain was put at ease quickly.

Kelly Simmons had varying experiences with her books. On her last book, the contract took so long she was already done with revisions when it came in.

### **The editorial process**

Please don't vote me off the writer island for saying this, but I could barely wait for my editorial letter. I love the revision process and was so enamored with my editor's vision that I could hardly wait to dive in.

The process across publishing houses is pretty much standard and most authors I know have had some variation on this theme: editorial letter, markups in the actual manuscript using track changes, and a conference call to clarify and/or brainstorm.

My second novel had significantly more changes than the first. I actually ended up re-writing about two-thirds of the book. My editor and I had a brainstorming session that lasted over an hour and half, feeding off of each other with "oh, what about this" and "oh, how about if ...". It was a revision-nerd's dream!

I'd heard horror stories of revisions that authors didn't care to use. My editor always prefaced our editorial calls with "this is your story, you have to like the changes we're making." The one change I didn't agree with, I offered an alternative that she loved.

The authors I spoke to for this article all had similar experiences. This from Susan Meissner: "I've never felt coerced or powerless to make or not make a change. When I get the revision letter, I assume my editor is right on all counts, even if deep down there are two or three things I think she's wrong about. I set out to make every change and nine times out of ten, she's right, even about the things I thought she was wrong about. But that one time where I believe my way is better, I explain the reasons that change doesn't work and I'm never asked to back down. At the end, it's always about what the story wants, not what the editor wants or what I want."

Eileen Goudge echoed that last thought, too. "I always pay close attention to my editor's comments. If I don't agree with their ideas for possible fixes, I recognize that there is a problem and come up with my own fix."

### **Judging a book by its cover design**

I still laugh that the first thing that came to mind when my agent emailed that we had an offer was: *My book is going to have a cover*. Well, duh. And yes, I'd had plenty of fantasies about what the cover could look like. But now it would be in the hands of professionals.



Like most authors, I submitted a questionnaire that included thoughts on covers as well as comp titles that I particularly liked or didn't. And while it's common to provide input, it's just as common not to have much control of the final. One author commented that she'd rejected several versions for a cover but got the sense that at some point she had to say yes even though she still didn't particularly like the design.

Kelly Simmons added, "My observation is that cover design is getting stronger and all publishers are getting better at this than they were ten years or even five years ago."

I'll add that the discussions I had with my editor and agent on the cover for Book Two turned me around on a design I wasn't originally sold on using. In the end, the marketing thought that went into the cover was far stronger than my gut reaction.

### **Change happens**

There are several authors I spoke to who've worked with more than one publisher. One author mentioned a revolving door of editors at one of the houses she was with, having worked with six different editors over the course of two books.

Susan Meissner has experience with different publishers. "At each turn, everyone I worked with loved books. We always had that in common. We wanted the books to do well. Smaller houses have smaller budgets. Bigger houses have bigger budgets but also bigger name authors. There's a lot about the industry you can't control. You can't make the consumer buy the book, you can only do whatever you can to make sure that they see it, and that when they do, it looks good, grabs their interest, motivates them to buy."

Asked about changes she's seen, Eileen Goudge said, "For me, the changes have been primarily from one year to the next, having less to do with individual publishers than seismic changes within the industry, driven by the economy and the advent of e-readers."

### **The business side of publishing**

I'll admit to holding onto that naïve dream of writing a book then handing it off to my publisher for their brilliant marketing and publicity team to work their magic. I've been around long enough to know that's not reality, and though I wasn't surprised at how much work I had to put in, I was surprised at how much of the work fell on my shoulders.

Most of the authors I compared notes with for this article had similar experiences. We were asked for marketing input early on, such as names of bloggers/reviewers we're familiar with, and unique publicity avenues (if there's a niche market that would open a new marketing opportunity. With my debut, for example, one of those ideas was tack stores, since the majority of the book takes place in a stable and revolves heavily around horses and therapeutic riding).

Amy Reichert added, "I was given my marketing and publicity plan and I did ask a lot of questions and gave input on where I'd like to see more or where I thought a connection could be made that they might not be aware of. For example, I'm on my library board, so they used that as a launching point to market me to libraries."



Everyone who provided input also mentioned the amount of effort authors are expected to invest in the marketing of their books. Ranging from writing articles and guest posts that the

publisher's team can place (or you place yourself through your own connections), to creating memes and spreading the word through every social media outlet, doing giveaways, and reaching out to reviewers and early readers; authors can easily get sucked into an almost full-time marketing job.

Several authors agreed that the burden of promotion has changed over time. Eileen Goudge commented that when she started in publishing in the 1980s, there was no internet and marketing and publicity was done by mail, press interviews, and personal appearances. "These days," she says, "it's a shared effort with my publisher in terms of marketing, which is pretty much exclusively online."

Part of the marketing and publicity debate many authors struggle with is whether or not to hire outside help. Outside PR can range from \$10,000 to \$20,000 or more. One author responded that she couldn't see much, if any, return for the money invested and has opted not to hire out again. Another commented that while hiring a publicist didn't necessarily affect sales, she would absolutely hire out again.

Am I sorry I didn't hire an outside publicist? Yes and no. Yes because it would have been comforting to have a partner in the marketing and promotion (I may have been a PR person in my corporate life but I do not enjoy doing it for myself). Yes because professional PR people have connections that I as the author don't have; yes because there's always the second guessing about what more you could have/should have done. But then I consider the money that isn't lounging in my bank account, and I look at the years I've invested building relationships with other authors and readers and I can be proud of what I was able to accomplish.

### **The five-letter word we all want to know about**

And now we've reached the part of our program where the lights dim, the crowd hushes, and everyone begins to whisper.

The only common theme among the responses to the money question is that most

authors these days won't be getting rich from their writing. Scrolling through the Publishers Marketplace deals will give you a good sense of what's selling and for what. There are, of course, the deals that give most of us heart palpitations, but it seems that the norm is in what Publisher's Marketplace classifies as a "nice deal" which falls between \$1 and \$49,000. From those I polled for this article, most are on the lower to mid-point within that range.



Advances with large publishers are pretty much standard and all the authors I spoke to for this article received advances. Single book deals seem to be more common lately although there are certainly authors who are still getting multi-book deals.

Each of my sales was for one book with an advance and an option for the next. One author who responded for this article had a three-book deal with an advance at a digital imprint.

On the topic of advances, one author commented that some of her books earned out and provided (and are still providing) royalties while others may never earn out. All the authors who responded, though, agree that foreign sales, large print, audio, and film options have helped the income on each sale significantly.

### **Never lose sight of your dream**

It was surreal walking into Barnes & Noble and seeing my book on the shelf. Was it worth all the years of rejection? Absolutely. Would I do it the same way again? Absolutely. I've learned a lot working with my agent and editor over the last couple of years, and while there have certainly been frustrations along the way, it's

an experience I wouldn't trade. I've learned to question, I've learned to stretch my creativity, and I've learned to push myself out of my comfort zone. I'm also getting better at being patient. If you go traditional like me, you'll learn to be patient (or even more patient) than you are now, too.



Orly Konig is an escapee from the corporate world where she spent roughly sixteen years working in the space industry. She is the founding president of the Women's Fiction Writers Association, a member of the [Tall Poppy Writers](#), and a quarterly contributor to the [Writers In The Storm](#) blog.

She's the author of *Carousel Beach* (May 2018) and *The Distance Home* (May 2017).

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# The Life and Times of a *Query Letter*

by Cara Sue Achterberg

You've primed and polished your query letter to perfection. You've chosen the perfect agent. You've studied the guidelines and followed them exactly. It's ready. You're ready. It's time.

*"Send."*

I don't know about yours, but my computer gives off a little satisfying "Whoosh!" sound.

*What happens next?*

I checked in with a young woman I've known since she was a child kicking around the barn where I taught riding. Not only is Tracy a new mom to an adorable little princess, she has an MFA in creative writing and is also an assistant to a literary agent for a pretty big agency. She knows both sides of the coin. I then pumped my agent, Carly Watters of P.S. Literary Agency, for information. Here's what I discovered.

Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't matter what day of the week your query lands in an agent's inbox. Both Carly and Tracy said queries are handled chronologically, although sometimes a contest or a conference query might jump the line. You may find slower response times in the weeks preceding or following a holiday, and Tracy told me that major contests like #DVPit and #PitchWars can result in a frenzied time for agents, which could mean slower response times.

Carly sends an 'I got your query' auto response immediately. Back when I was querying, I found that type of action comforting. It kept me from obsessing over my emails getting lost, especially since so many agencies have a 'no response means no' policy.

*And then what?*



For Carly, the queries pile up in her inbox, but she reads all queries herself, usually in batches of 50-100. At other agencies, like the one Tracy works for, the queries go to a general inbox and the agents and assistants have access to them. The assistants (and sometimes the agents) comb through the queries, delete those that aren't a good fit, and forward others on to the agents.

Tracy says that when writers include a log-line (quick pitch to sum up their whole book) that it makes her life a lot easier because when she

thinks a book might be a good fit for the agent, she can just copy and paste the logline and forward the query.

As a writer, Tracy knows how hard it is to break in. “I always try to err on the side of sending on more rather than less, so that writers aren’t getting rejected because my taste is different than the agent’s.”

*What could get a query bounced immediately?*

“Sometimes it was clear that authors didn’t understand the fundamentals of what a query is supposed to be, and didn’t describe their book in the query. That’s an automatic no... also if the query is confusing or has an arrogant tone (“This book will make you ten million dollars!”), that’s an automatic no as well.”

Carly cited a meandering or absent hook, word count way off base, query not personalized, or not a genre she represents as immediate rejections.

Both Tracy and Carly said that follow up phone calls are a big no-no.

*So how can a writer increase their odds of a positive and timely response?*

Largely, it’s out of your control. Sometimes luck and timing play a role in response rate. For example, if an agent has just signed a client with a very similar book, she’s going to pass on yours even if it’s fabulous.

Here are Tracy’s thoughts on it: “The biggest factor is the quality of your concept and writing, and how your query communicates that concept. It’s hard to write a great query if there’s something not working about the concept of your book, which is a lesson I’ve learned with my own writing. Sometimes people drive themselves to the brink rewriting their query ten million times, when they have a concept problem, not a query problem...”

That darned condensed form of a query absolutely kills a writer, but once they get the knack of writing queries, their response rate will increase. Market conditions also play a role. For example, dystopian fiction is still a pretty hard

sell, so you could write the world’s best query about your dystopian novel, but probably still get a poor response.



I asked both Carly and Tracy about the weirdest queries they’d seen, and Carly said there were too many to list. Tracy politely didn’t want to call out particular writers but said she was amused by people who cite random compliments about their book, like ‘an architect said this was good’ for a book that didn’t have anything to do with architecture or ‘my grandmother told me I should be a writer.’

“Writers need confidence boosts even more than the next person, but that’s not something agents particularly care about,” Tracy said.

Finally, I asked if either had any advice to writers in the querying process.

Tracy: Writers are innately creative people who think outside the box. Sometimes that means we’re not the best with sticking to rules and set processes. However, agents have processes and rules set up for a reason—they get thousands of queries and need an organized way to find the projects that speak to them. Let your creativity shine in your concept and voice, and don’t reinvent the wheel for writing and sending queries.

Carly: Talent, persistence, and timing are all it takes to be successful.

Simple, right?

Query on, my friends!

[Tracy Gold](#) is a writer, teacher, and editor living in Baltimore, Maryland. She writes young adult novels, and short stories and poems for all ages. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in [YARN](#), [Youth Imagination](#), [The Stoneslide Corrective](#), two feminist anthologies, and several other magazines. Tracy cofounded [Sounding Sea Writers' Workshop](#) and is a composition instructor at the University of Baltimore. When Tracy's not working or writing, she's hanging out with her family, which includes a baby girl and a rescue dog and horse. You can follow her on [Twitter](#).

[Carly Watters](#) is a Vice-President, Senior Literary Agent and Director of Literary Branding at P.S. Literary Agency. Representing debuts and bestsellers, Carly is drawn to emotional, well-paced fiction with a great voice and characters that readers can get invested in, and platform-driven non-fiction. You can catch up with her on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).



**Cara Sue Achterberg** is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, will be released August 7, 2018 from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com).



# What to Expect When You *Work With a Small Press*

by Sweta Srivastava Vikram

Anyone who has ever finished a manuscript and sent out query letters knows what that does to our frail writerly egos. After swimming through the dreaded waters of rejection, when an agent says, “I love your work,” and signs you up...it feels like a dream come true.

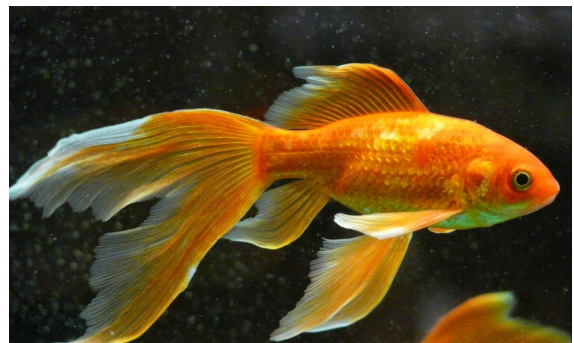


Hold on. Then after two years of editing the novel to meet the agent’s requirements and premature champagne celebrations (because the agent promised that a few of the top five publishing houses wanted the book), your agent disappears on you. You sit with a manuscript gathering dust, your hopes covered with cobwebs, and a few extra pounds on your butt because wine seems to offer solace...only to find out from someone else that your agent had a mid-life crisis, quit, and changed professions. Back to the drawing board and back to blank pages all over again.

This is a true story and one of the reasons I consciously chose to go the small press route for my debut U.S. novel, *Louisiana Catch*. Honestly, most of us don’t get to choose who will publish our book. But I was determined and hopeful to work with a press that supported diverse, strong, multicultural voices and didn’t want to change my writing to meet some “hot trends.” Just as an FYI, working with a small press doesn’t mean that I don’t like the agent route or working with a bigger publishing house. My choices were specific to this book.

## **Tips and tricks to publishing via a small press**

**Let the weigh-in begin.** The brand value and the doors that open with a big publishing house backing you might be numerous, but there are advantages to working with a small press. You’re a big fish in a small pond. Your publisher and you are a team, and your vision for publicity and marketing might be welcomed with open arms because creativity isn’t stifled by bureaucracy or red tape.



**Have an attitude of gratitude.** The fact that someone wants to publish your work is pretty awesome. Be grateful for the opportunity. Acknowledge the efforts of your small press. You might be at the forefront of every decision from editing to publishing to promoting. Constantly comparing yourself to what others get from their publisher, or what other publishing houses do for their authors can be toxic. I was out of ARCs and an opportunity arose to send a few copies of *Louisiana Catch* to Hollywood. My publisher—Modern History Press—sent me the copies overnight (not cheap for a small press), and I made the drop at the crack-of-dawn. It was like a relay race where we kept an eye on the goal and made it happen as a team.

**Believe in yourself.** Some small press authors are self-conscious about their association with a small press, believing it to be a judgment of their abilities or talent. The fact is that you have probably read a few crappy books published by large publishers and some beautiful books published by small presses. According to a [study](#), there were 45,300 writers in 2017 in the United States. Those are big numbers and I can't imagine all the books were par excellence. The size of the press doesn't guarantee quality or success. What can make a difference is believing in yourself and your story.



I was part of a round-table conversation at Twitter, Inc. in NYC because my book also focuses on catfishing and women's safety on social media. While the opportunity came about because of my social media posts, my publisher suggested that I give away free copies of the ARC to the other women leaders in that room. He even asked me to bring a copy with me everywhere I went should an

opportunity present itself.

**Know your goals.** No matter what the self-help gurus tell you, no one can have it all. No one is a winner all the way, no matter who publishes them. With a small press, you have to be organized, focused, and optimistic while being realistic. Often times, there are no agents or in-house publishing team involved to help fight your battles or brainstorm. A lot of the work is on you alone and the press. Knowing what you want helps you channel your energy and remain focused. It leads to best use of the limited budget. It's easy to get distracted in the world of social media and ape what others are doing, even if it's of no use to you.

**Your books can still be seen.** It's always a joy to see copies of your books at Barnes & Noble, and at a national level—at airports and giant stores like Target or Walmart. A small press has a smaller distribution system and less clout, so you might have to shelve this dream or choose local author spaces in these big stores. But not all is lost; a small press allows you to build relationships with indie bookstores. I have been doing readings and signings at indie bookstores across the United States. Because wellness is a big element in *Louisiana Catch*, I even partnered up with yoga studios and organizations working on women's empowerment.

**Don't be shy about asking for help.** With a small press, you have leverage but you may also have limitations of budget and reach. Reach out to your networks and expand your thinking. We assume that people will say NO. Work from a place of conviction that people are generous and like to help. But if they say NO, don't personalize a refusal/rejection. There are a million reasons that lead to a YES or a NO. Trust me, you are not at the center of it. Look at your connections. I suggest coming up with a list of people you have worked with or come across or helped or have shared a glass of wine with, and reaching out to a few. Be upfront and offer to buy them a cup of tea or a glass of wine or lunch in exchange for picking their brains. Many times, people who aren't from the industry can come up with extremely creative ideas.

**Innovation is the name of the game.** With a small press, you might not have connections at big bookstores for a massive book launch. Or your publisher might not be able to put you in touch with the best-selling author in your genre for an in-author conversation. But who says your community needs to be made up of only writers? Who says you have to launch your book at a bookstore? The female protagonist in *Louisiana Catch* is a sexual assault survivor, and yoga is part of her healing. She happens to wear Lululemon, the yoga-inspired athletic apparel company for women and men. Guess what? Lululemon hosted my book launch in NYC and the event was spectacular, with a senior official from the mayor's office, leading psychotherapist, meditation teacher, and the founder of Exhale to Inhale (amongst others) participating in an all-female panel.



**Make a priority list.** You can't control the outcome of your book or do it all. You have no say in who reads it, who likes it, or whether they post a review. Will it be optioned for a movie? Will it be on the NYT bestsellers list? Not up to you. But you can make a list of everything you want to do with the book in terms of promotions, and highlight what's most important to you. If anything, a small press will work more closely with you. My publisher has been flexible with the number of review copies we mail out and as a result, *Louisiana Catch* has over 77 reviews on Amazon just two months after the book's release.

Ultimately, no matter who publishes you, you must be your own stalwart supporter. I, for one,

appreciate my small press's efforts, partnership, and enthusiasm. I know there are no guarantees for all this hard work, but I also know that they have my back.

Working with a small press has given me courage and made me both fearless and self-reliant. Had I not worked with a small press, I'm not sure how many of these opportunities I might have pursued because I would have waited for someone else (an in-house publicist or agent or someone on the marketing team) to figure prospects for me and my book. Last week, I was invited to do a reading for This Alien Nation—a storytelling series in New York hosted at the coveted Joe's Pub at Public Theater—where my other co-performers included an award-winning author, an actress from the hit TV series “Gossip Girl,” and a writer from Saturday Night Live. As Anais Nin eloquently reminds us, “Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.”



Sweta Srivastava Vikram ([www.swetavikram.com](http://www.swetavikram.com)) is a best-selling author of 12 books, five-time Pushcart Prize nominee, mindfulness writing coach, social issues advocate, and certified yoga & Ayurveda counselor who helps people lead creative, productive, and healthier lives. She writes hopeful stories about multiculturalism and women's issues with a spicy sprinkle of suspense, reflection, wellness, and food. Sweta lives in New York City with her husband and, in her spare time, teaches yoga to female survivors of rape and domestic violence.



# My Humbling *Self-Publishing Experience* And What I Learned

by K. L. Romo

So, you're thinking about self-publishing your masterpiece? Hoping to hit the self-pub sales jackpot, just like Hugh Howey's dystopian *Wool* series, E. L. James' *Fifty Shades* series, and Andy Weir's sci-fi *The Martian*? The idea sounds fantastic, the opportunity open with endless possibilities. I'm sure there are many, many authors who have had great success with self-publishing.

Unfortunately, I am not one of them. So...I will take a deep breath, swallow my pride yet again (gulp—a big lump is stuck in my throat!), and share my experience with you.

During the query process, I was industrious and paid close attention to the rules of query-letter-writing and pitching agents. I did my research, spent lots of time writing the letter, and followed all the suggested dos and don'ts. I researched every agency that represented my genre and then each of their agents, ultimately sending out about 150 query letters (original and revised) to agents who seemed to be a good fit.

But... no cigar. I wallowed in my extreme disappointment for a bit, ate lots of chocolate, and then put my big-girl-panties back on. I would not accept defeat.

On to Plan B.



A new energy filled me—I would take my manuscript into my own capable hands and self-publish. *I can do this!* I would do it and do it right.

At least, that was my intention. But you know what they say about best-laid plans. Here's what really happened:

First, I had my beta readers (two, to be exact) give me the all-clear that the novel was just right. Cool. It was ready. And I'd used the spell-check in my Word software, so I was good to go. I'd gone through it so many times, it had to be perfect. Right?

No. Not right.

**What I did wrong:** I didn't have my manu-

script critiqued by other writers. I didn't have it professionally edited (neither developmentally nor editorially).

I'd read that my manuscript needed formatting for various ebook-reading devices. After buying a "how-to" book and studying this process, I tried to format it on my own using html coding, but I quickly learned that I am html-challenged.

**What I did right:** I hired a professional to format the manuscript for the ebook.

I love dabbling in graphic design, so who better to create the perfect cover than me? After all, I knew more about my book than anyone else, so creating my own cover would best convey the essence of the book. I got this!

Or so I believed.

**What I did right:** I produced what I thought was a good cover with just the right image that I had found myself.

**What I did wrong:** I didn't hire a professional. True, the cover is okay and the printed version is pretty cool, but... it could have been so much better had I let a professional graphic designer do their job.

Next, I loaded my manuscript into Amazon's CreateSpace software. It was easy!

That is, until it wasn't. I had trouble getting the margins just right, I couldn't get the page numbers to display the way I wanted, and the software wouldn't allow me to show the title on the spine in a large-enough font.

**What I did right:** I learned a lot using CreateSpace.

**What I did wrong:** I should have researched more of the self-publishing outlets available (such as IngramSpark). CreateSpace limited my formatting options; I should have found a service that had greater flexibility.

My final product (or what was *supposed* to be the final product) was a book that somehow included a passage that was repeated verbatim in two different chapters (an error I hadn't

caught when I'd made changes during the formatting process). Although I fixed the issue in CreateSpace, and had my format-guy make the digital changes, some ebooks were sent out before the corrections were made. The mistake was embarrassingly obvious.

The final version of my novel has a nice cover (although one with an understated title on the spine), but I noticed that somehow I'd included a space between all the paragraphs in the book. (What the he#!?)

Once I had my book published, it was time to market. I'd followed all suggested guidelines—using giveaways on Amazon and Goodreads, using services to promote reviews, giving my book away for free, and swapping a "read and review" with other authors. But...

I haven't been able to shed the invisibility cloak that shrink-wrapped itself around my novel.



### **To have the best self-published book possible, here's what I should have done:**

Had my manuscript critiqued by other writers; included it in workshops; used multiple sets of other eyes;

Had my manuscript edited by a professional, for both developmental and copy issues;

Hired a graphic designer to create a kick-a#! cover;

Used a self-publishing service that provided more flexibility and more creative and formatting choices in the layout; and

Hired a publicist to help market the book and

spread the word.

**So, a word of warning:** if you know for a fact you want to self-publish for total control, you're confident you can overcome the mistakes I made and produce a high-quality book that lures readers in, go for it. Just get ready to spend some money to do it right and jump over hurdles that traditional publishing houses generally coordinate.

Otherwise, keep sending out those query letters.



K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.



## Grammar Light

# Logical Fallacies

by Patricia Friedrich

All right this is not, strictly speaking, a grammar lesson. It is more a lesson in rhetoric and logic. I am choosing to write about logical fallacies because the world of the Internet and the hurried argumentation it often contains seem to have increased the number of fallacies we come across.

A logical fallacy is a faulty reasoning construction that, on the surface, seems to follow a logical development but, in the end, results in an invalid argument.

Here are a few common fallacies with examples:

### **Ad Hominem**

This fallacy relies on an attack on the character of a counterpart instead of on the merit of their arguments.

e.g. Only a person who does not care about the environment would be in favor of a new building in this area.

Why it is a problem: Instead of discussing the merit of building something new in the area, the interlocutor goes for an unsubstantiated claim on the other party's beliefs.

### **Slippery Slope**

This fallacy presents a series of escalating issues that seem to derive from one another but for which a connection is tenuous at best and not causal at all.



e.g. If I don't get this job, I will be unemployed, I will never find a good position, and I will never have any success.

Why it is a problem: There is a great distance between not getting a particular job and never being successful, but this logical fallacy makes them seem, on the surface, closely connected.

### **Either/or**

This fallacy falsely presents two options as the only ones.

e.g. Either I get this job or I will never be happy.

Why it is a problem: There are many other possibilities besides getting a job or never being happy, but this fallacy makes it seem like these are the only things that could possibly happen.



## Straw Man

This fallacy is a distortion of an argument followed by an attack on the made-up component.

e.g. Proponents of anti-pollution laws want the economy to fail.

Why it is a problem: There is nothing in the first part of the statement that leads one to logically conclude that a failing economy is part of the deal.

Many other logical fallacies exist. They weaken the arguments being made and often lead to discord rather than a productive exchange.

Maybe one of your characters can soon point out the faulty logic of another's argument in a smart dialogue exchange?



**Patricia Friedrich** is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



# The Not-So-Lonely Reject

## HOW TO MASTER THE *Art of Rejection*

by K. L. ROMO

Before we can be accepted or rejected, we've got to send our work out to the world. To critique partners, beta readers, your mom, your best friend, and yes, (if you want to be traditionally published) to literary agents and/or editors. As anyone who has walked to the end of the plank and jumped into the water full of sharks knows, IT IS SCARY.

Preparing your query letter and pitch is almost harder than writing the manuscript. With just a few short lines, you must hook an agent or editor's interest enough to make them yearn to read your book (or article, story, etc.). There are lots of books on how to write an awesome query letter, and there are classes that teach what to do and what not to do. But there are also a myriad of opinions as well.

How do you know if your query or pitch is good enough? How do you know if you're grabbing the agent's/editor's attention from the very first words?

Now, you might say you'll find out when you receive a rejection. But what about the agents/editors who never reply? How do you know if you should keep sending the same letter, or if you should revise it? How many letters should you send out at one time, and how do you know when to stop?

These are hard questions to answer, but ones all of us have asked at one time or another. That's why I've asked MM Finck, "Query Quill" query letter coach and freelance editor, to share her wealth of expertise and give us the low-down.

**K.L.**—How do writers know how many agents to query before they decide it's not working? Should you keep going after sending, let's say, 50 letters with no success?



**MM**— You should keep going, even after sending 50 letters without success. Believe it or not, 50 letters is very much on the low end. Let's look at the numbers. Most mid-career agents take on only about half a dozen clients a year, with some as few as three or four and some more like a dozen. New agents who are building their lists av-

erage higher. There are new agents every month. New and veteran. Many editors leave publishing houses to become agents. It's a great job that gives them more autonomy over their choice of projects and control over their pay. Casting a wide net is necessary for the faaaaaaar majority of novelists. Keep the faith and keep querying!!!

**BUT**, do it well. Every letter should be reshaped for that particular agent. This is especially true for the comparative titles. Know what they like, want, and represent. I advise my clients to sign up for Publishers Marketplace while they are querying.

**AND** - *Seriously* consider all feedback. Agents frequently give only three or four words of reason for why they are passing, i.e., not enough forward momentum; didn't connect with the character; started too early. It's easy to ask a friend, and that friend says they disagree, and you feel better, and you move on. I suggest that you don't ask anyone. I suggest that you sit with it for a couple of days. Then go back to your manuscript and **look for support** for the agent's impression. This is hard to do because you are positioning yourself as opposition to yourself. But it's important. Then decide if you want to do anything about what you found. You may not. Seven times out of ten, you probably will. Remember not all changes are big. Sometimes a few tweaks are all you need.

**AND** - Make sure the hook and pitch of your query letter are stellar.

**AND** - Make sure your opening page, as well as the next few, are extremely compelling. The first page needs to set the tone, have tension, introduce an interesting character, and set up an enticing goal/story question.

**K.L.**—How many queries should a writer send at a time, and how often (especially considering that it may take quite a while for an agent to respond, or they may never respond at all)?

**MM**— Both of these are very personal decisions. It's a matter of confidence, time, experience, personality, opportunities, connections, and more. For most people, I recommend keeping 10 live ones. After a certain period of time (two to three weeks), I suggest keeping the no-response

query on your tracking spreadsheet but sending out another query in its place.

There is no answer as to when to stop. When your next novel is ready to be queried is the best answer I know. Eleanor Brown shared with me that she queried close to 200 agents before she found one who wanted to represent *The Weird Sisters*, and then it got acquired by a top editor (Amy Einhorn) and became a bestseller.

**K.L.**—How do you know if you should keep sending the same letter, or if it's not working?

**MM**—How to judge if a query doesn't work is tricky.

I *really* hate to give numbers on this. In fact, I can't. But, in the spirit of transparency and a helping hand, I'll try. If you've sent 25 queries and there's no personalized reply or request, you may want to double check your letter. If you've sent 40 to 50, same situation, I recommend double checking your letter.

Research how-to articles online to make sure you are presenting all the elements: high-concept question/premise/plot, character, stakes, ticking clock, etc. Compare yours with successful query letters. Compare yours with the back-cover copy of your favorite books. (Back cover copy is not exactly a pitch though, so use it, but don't copy it.)



The pitch paragraph is the most important part, perhaps tied with the hook-line. Then the comps. When a letter doesn't work, it's usually the author bogs down the pitch with too many story details and buries or misses the elements that compel readers most—high concept premise and stakes. Stakes are hard, I know, especially, in women's fiction. But they need to be high and clear in the letter. Another

common flaw is keeping the pitch too high-level, almost philosophical, without gripping details.

Taking pitch workshops, having it reviewed by a query letter coach, or asking non-writer friends who read your kind of book if they are hooked by it are all options. Ask your friends—this is crucial—who read your kind of book to be *REALLY*, *really* honest. Tell them (to imagine) that they are in Target looking to choose ONE book. Would this be it? If not, why not? What's missing? What parts don't excite them?

There's a point that no one wants to hear, but, sometimes, it's not the letter. Sometimes, it's the story.

Even after you're published, some books don't sell. Even if you've already been a bestseller, i.e., Sarah Dessen, Allison Winn Scotch, etc.

So never let querying be the whole of your writing time. Keep your focus on your career and your faith in you, not exclusively one book. It's healthier for you, and it's what agents want, too. No agent wants a one-book client.

Keep querying, keep writing.

\* \* \*

If you want assistance, WFWA has a wealth of knowledge about writing pitches, hooks, and query letters available in their author toolboxes, pitch workshops and webinars, the WFWA Critique Group, critique partners, and on the WFWA Community Facebook page. If you'd like additional help from an expert, consider hiring a query letter coach. If you'd like to get in touch with MM, you can find her at <https://www.mmfinck.com/queryquill>.

So, put on your body armor and forge ahead!

Please send me a line at [klromo@klromo.com](mailto:klromo@klromo.com). We can share our misery (I mean our educational experiences).

And remember—you are definitely not alone!



This edition includes rejection experience from WFWA's own Orly Konig, whose has just published her new novel *Carousel Beach* with Forge Books. Thank you for sharing your story Orly!

Rejections come in two flavors: those that seriously stink and those that have a hint of perfume. Go with me on this!



### **The nothing but stinky**

These are the ones that claim your writing is fabulous, but the agent just didn't fall in love.

I can't tell you how many arguments I had with my computer over those. Seriously? You love my writing, the story is interesting, but ... BUT???? But nothing. Give me a chance, I'd plead with my screen. I'll do anything! You won't regret it!! Whine, whimper.

The problem with those kinds of rejections is that you can't do anything with them (except maybe send that agent a magic love-my-book potion). There's no take-away on what you can improve and, for me at least, they stung more than the form rejections.

I have enough of those stinkers to make the local dump smell like a rose garden.

But every rejection is also an opportunity. My take-away from each of those rejections was that I was on the right track and I'd promptly

send out another query.

### **The rose-scented rejections**

I didn't say rose-tinted! These rejections will make you work and make you even crazier than you already are.

Personalized rejections that highlight what worked or didn't work for that agent are full-blossom amazing. I won't lie, there were a few that broke my heart. But once I got past the disappointment, I was able to see the gift these agents had given me. With the manuscript that became *Carousel Beach*, for example, I was able to find enough commonality in the first batch of personalized rejections that I rewrote parts of the story before sending the second wave of queries.

When rejections for *The Distance Home* came back with wildly differing feedback, I knew I was close. And sure enough, there was an agent who loved everything about it.

- Orly Konig



K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.



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