

Freedom With Writing

# The Paid & Published Writer

13 Stories of  
Publishing Success

Jacob Jans, Editor

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13 Stories of Paid Publishing Success

Presented by Freedom With Writing

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## Introduction

“How can I possibly earn money as a writer?”

As someone who has successfully earned a significant amount of money with my writing, I often don't know how to answer this question.

I often tell people that you can submit your writing to a variety of publications, or sign up for a “content mill,” or network until you've found the right clients.

But that kind of advice is often not enough. It is incomplete.

It is disconnected from the real world challenges and situations that every writer will face. This book dives straight into those real world challenges, so you can learn by example.

You won't get vague advice from this book. You'll get the truth: Real stories of how writers got published and paid for their writing.

Many of the individuals in this book have built successful careers as writers. Others have leveraged their publishing to establish success in other fields. One of them just needed money for groceries.

After reading these stories, I'll hope you'll feel as I did. Success might not be easy, but the path is clear.

– *Jacob Jans, Editor*

Paul A. Kimpel

## All the Reporters Were On Christmas Vacation

As I turned 37 in 1997, my wife and I ran a successful business in the merchant credit card industry and residual income was good, but I saw the end coming.

Both of us had a bit of junior college under our belts from our late teens, but still wanted to obtain our degrees. In the fall of 1997 I entered the bachelor's program in Journalism, while still running my company.

Near the end of my first semester I thought it was time to test the waters. Seeking a good first article, I was listening to talk-radio in my car a few days before Christmas and heard a piece about protesters burning American flags.

I had my topic. I went home and fired up my monolithic, monochrome IBM computer. For three hours, I refined my article on flag-burning until it was 700 words.

I printed it up and the next day I faxed it to the newsroom at The Gainesville Sun, which is owned by The New York Times and has a daily circulation of about 50K. I sent it to the Metro Editor, not really knowing what a Metro Editor did. What she did was take off early for Christmas vacation, as had numerous other veteran Editors and Reporters.

My article found its way to the desk of the Business Section Editor, who was corralled into covering Christmas vacation for the others. His name was Chip, and he needed some copy to fill the thin holiday issues of the newspaper. The next day was Christmas Eve, and I opened The Gainesville Sun to see my entire article published in the Nation section! The article took up almost the entire back page, and had an image of an American flag on the left bar.

I ran out and bought about 20 copies of the day's newspaper to send to friends and family. When I returned home, my wife said that Chip had called and left his direct number at the newspaper with a request that I call him as soon as I got home; yes, on Christmas Eve day. I called Chip at 10:30 a.m. on December 24, 1997, and was sitting at a desk in The Gainesville Sun, working on a new story by noon. (Fortunately, ultra-security and background checks were not in vogue yet). I worked every day through Christmas vacation and had published about a dozen articles by the time school resumed. I was suddenly a local hero – my classmates and professors had seen some of the work and gave me props – particularly that I was a (non-



traditional) freshman and many seniors were not published. It was a blast.

The newspaper officially hired me the next week, where I worked as a business and general reporter for almost two years, and then I took a job in UF's media division, writing science and medical articles, which was more my forte. Within three months, I won first place in the annual contest for writing from the Agricultural Communicators in Education, beating 459 international entries.

Since then, I have worked for several magazines and newspapers, some as an employee, some as a freelance contractor. These days, I freelance full-time. In 2013, I obtained an A.A. in Web Design, which helps me get work providing content for websites. I don't do much design work, but it helps get a foot in the door when you can work the front and back ends of a website.

I get work from client referrals and ads I put on websites and listing services. I do anything, from resume repair to ghost-writing. It is fairly steady work, but as with anything it has ups-and-downs. But at least I'm doing what I enjoy.

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Paul A. Kimpel is a professional journalist / editor  
who works on a freelance basis. He has almost

twenty years of experience as a paid professional in the publishing industry. His work ranges from pulp content to web design, and many things in-between.

He would like to see America return to the days when men wore hats other than baseball caps and cowboy hats.

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Caitlin Elizabeth Thomson

## The Poet and the In-Law

“How much money do you make from poetry?”

My brother-in-law Tony, an engineer, asked me this question in 2011. My work had just started to be widely published and very recently several poems of mine had appeared in an anthology published by Knopf.

I asked Tony to clarify his question. I was a little confused by how broad it was.

“I mean how much do you get paid when a poem gets published?”

When I still looked confused, he asked an even more specific question “How much did you get paid for the anthology poems.”

I answered that I received a contributor’s copy and he looked at me, a little appalled. I had sometimes received token payments outside of that, but most literary journals don’t pay, and I had been concentrating on building a record of publication. This record of publication had already managed to get me a job as an adjunct professor.

My boss directly cited the name of the publications that convinced him that I was worth hiring. None of them paid. However, because of those publications I made five more dollars per hour than my friend who had worked at the college for a few years. Sometimes even if the publications themselves don't pay, you can turn them into a career.

However what Tony said got me thinking, what if I tried to make money from my poetry? Was it possible? The next month all the journals I submitted to were paying journals. I didn't count contributor copies and I didn't submit it to any journal because I liked their aesthetics, I just focused on journals that paid.

That is how, two months later I managed to make \$300 in one month (not counting complimentary copies and complimentary subscriptions). First an Australian journal bought two reprints of mine for over \$120. Another journal paid me 80 dollars for three new poems.

Also, my chapbook had just been released and the way that publisher worked was that they gave me 250 copies to sell myself while they sold the other 250 copies. I sold \$100 worth of chapbooks that first month.

This was not easy. At any given time I try to have at least 40 submissions out. That does not mean 40 unique pieces, I simultaneously submit 4-7 packets of poems to these various publications. However, this strategy pays off and not just for me. One

very famous poet and one successful fiction writer both follow this strategy, and they both told me about it.

I was so impressed and happy with the amount of paid publications I had in such a short amount of time that I told Tony. He was not very impressed. However, I also told a friend of mine who was an editor at Poets & Writers. Being a poet she was impressed, and she was interested in publishing an article in Poets & Writers based on my experience. I never did write that essay. I wonder if I would have been paid for it.

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Caitlin Thomson has an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies including: The Moth, The Adroit Journal, and Eleven Eleven. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net Anthology. Territory Prayer, her third chapbook was just published by Maverick Duck Press. You can learn more about her writing at [www.caitlinthomson.com](http://www.caitlinthomson.com).

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Ian Chandler

## The College Student Hustle

There are two things most writers desire: to get published and to get paid for it. The former is easy; the latter, not so much.

But contrary to what content mills would have you believe, it's entirely possible to make good money with your writing.

I'm a professional writer, but I'm also currently a senior at Kent State University in Ohio pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English. Even though I haven't graduated yet, I've been widely published and have been paid thousands of dollars for my writing. How? I look in the right places.

I started writing professionally during my sophomore year of college. The idea fell into my lap when I saw an acquaintance post about Fiverr. He offered writing services for \$5 each, and I figured I'd do the same. Fiverr wasn't a gold mine, but it gave me some nice pocket change for a while. And it got my work out there; after several months on Fiverr, my writing was on sites all over the world.

Right before my junior year, I transferred schools and got an apartment. Thankfully, loans helped to pay for the rent, but I needed a

way to make a living. Writing \$5 biographies on Fiverr wasn't going to put food in my mouth, and I knew my writing was worth more than \$.02 a word.

And so I asked the question thousands of writers ask every day: How can I get paid well for my work?

I asked Google the same question. Over and over, I saw the same answer: guest posting. Everywhere I looked, it popped up. Site after site touted guest posting as a simple antidote to starving writer syndrome, but it seemed like nothing more than a buzzword to me.

In spite of my doubts, I did some research. As a writer without a degree, official credentials, or published work, there was little I could provide in the way of writing samples. I had written a biography for a musician's site, and that was basically my entire portfolio, since my Fiverr work wasn't published under my name. And most of the blogs and sites I looked at fell into two categories: either they weren't in my area of expertise, or they didn't pay. This whole "guest posting" idea was looking like a dead end, but I changed my research tactics and moved on with it.

Eventually, I sniffed out a few blogs and sites that paid well for guest posts. Their content wasn't ghastly or (too) clickbait-y, and I felt that I could offer a worthwhile perspective. I sent a few pitches out and waited to hear back.

One of the first sites I contacted was Nukeblogger, an online resource that helps bloggers and freelancers make more money. Since my portfolio was so lacking, I sent a few articles on a subject I knew well—how to make good money on Fiverr. The owner of the site responded with the green light, and I had my first paid guest post.

Over the next several months, I submitted pitches to several other blogs. Some got back to me, others didn't. I learned how to talk to editors and deliver a pitch with a high chance of success. And sure enough, as time went on, more and more of my pitches got accepted.

With each pitch, I got better at communicating with editors. Each editor I've talked with has a different style and methodology, and I've worked with editors of all sorts. Of course, they all share one characteristic: the appreciation for brief queries. I caught on quickly and learned the skill of succinct pitching.

Most of my best guest posts came from my interests. I'm a playing card aficionado, for instance, and I wanted to write about cards because of my familiarity with them. Old or rare playing cards can fetch high prices on the market, so I wrote an article on selling old cards. It was my first guest post on The Penny Hoarder, a site dedicated to, well, hoarding pennies and finding all kinds of ways to earn, save, and grow money.

My first guest post had been a success, so I tried guest posting again. I wanted to write more about cards, so I found another way to get paid



for a card-centric article. I sent the editors of HowlRound, a journal about theatre, a pitch about the connection between theatre and cardistry, which is the artistic manipulation of playing cards. They also accepted my post.

I learned a lot about the publication process from guest posting. For almost all of my guest posts, I spent time revising my articles as per the editors' specifications. I had developed the knack for succinct pitching, and during the revisions, I developed the knack for succinct wording. I gained experience in cutting words and rephrasing sentences for maximum clarity and directness.

Generally, my guest posts were up within a week of the final edits. I was paid quickly, mostly by PayPal, though HowlRound paid by check—the first time I received a check for my writing. And while none of my posts got widespread attention, they added to my portfolio (and my bank account).

Along the way, I developed important connections that helped establish my credibility. Getting my name out there and familiarizing myself with different publications helped me become more successful. As of this writing, I've written a total of five guest posts for The Penny Hoarder, and I'll likely write more in the future. (They're not all about cards, however.) I regularly reference the sites I've written for in applications and portfolios, and the editors can vouch for me if need be.

I'm now Editor at Nukeblogger, where I continue to publish articles for bloggers and freelancers. I'm also a regular contributor to several great sites, including Freedom With Writing. In addition, I've guest posted on several blogs, such as WritersWeekly and TechGyo. By looking in the right places, I've found wonderful long-term writing jobs that I'm blessed to have.

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*Ian Chandler is a professional writer based in Kent, Ohio, currently studying English at Kent State University. He serves as Editor at Nukeblogger, contributes to Freedom With Writing, and writes for Haircut Inspiration.*

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Yael Unterman

“I’d recommend myself, but I have no experience.”

Allow me to share two different stories for two different books.

In 1998, I published an article on Jewish text, in a new volume promoting female Jewish text teachers. The publisher, who I did not know before, began networking with me about this and that, and then one day asked me who I would recommend to pen the biography of a recently deceased famous Israeli Bible teacher.

I sent along a few names, and at the bottom of my email hesitantly wrote, “I’d recommend myself but I have no experience.”

“Try it out,” he wrote back; and thus to my astonishment there I was, in my late twenties, with only a BA and a bit of published writing under my belt at the time, commencing the biography of a legendary figure.

A mere ten years and six-hundred-odd pages later, *Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar* was published and on the shelves, and then nominated a finalist in the 2009 National Jewish

Book Awards. No great bestseller, it has nonetheless taken its place in history and people are still buying and reading it. I sold copies at a slight profit, and earned money lecturing on the subject. Most of all, I felt I would leave something significant behind when I was gone.

Second story, rather different.

My Creative Writing Masters Program at Bar-Ilan University spawned a collection of short stories. I took them, spat and polished, added a few more and looked for an agent. (I did not publish the stories in any magazine – I felt that that would not make all that much difference to the chances for the collection as a whole, though perhaps in other cases it might. Can't hurt.)

I approached a local agent I knew from the program and she immediately accepted me.

I was over the moon.

A few attempts later, after letters from publishing houses came in with encouraging feedback such as “Nice stories but who will read them?” she dumped me – so I dumped her back and set out on my own.

All the publishers I thought would be interested, including that of my first book, were not interested. I googled and searched further afield, approached a few more small publishing companies. No luck.

Two years passed. Then, one day, I was manically searching again, feeling strongly that these stories were of high quality and needed to be out there, when I stumbled across the site of Yotzeret, a company specializing in Jewish women writers. *Hello, Jewish woman writer over here!*

I sent an introductory email with my book – and did not hear back for around eight months.

By now, I had reached the point where I was seriously considering self-publishing. Then an email arrived from Sheyna, Yotzeret's founder. She actually loved my stories, but said that my tales – about singles seeking love and spirituality – all “ended in a downer.” The girl never got the guy.

I examined my stories and saw that she was correct. But I did not want to give my perfect endings a kitschy Hollywood varnish. So instead I wrote a brand new story, locating (and inventing) available men in my book and matching my lonely female protagonists with them. Voila!

Truth be told, this new story came out in the form of play, with an ending in which one of my characters, fed up with the plot, rushes at me, the author, with the aim of destroying my laptop (but I finish the story before she can do this – haha!). Afterwards it came to me that perhaps I was, in this way, hinting to the reader that I was writing under duress, manipulating my characters like puppets instead of

allowing them to dictate their unfoldings to me, as they did in the other stories.

In any event, my publisher got her happy endings, and I got my book deal. The editing was a protracted process, and it was three years before the book came out; but I'm delighted and grateful to say that by December 2013 the first copies were being circulated and I had my world premiere launch in London.

Since then I've organized book launches and events to sell the book and create buzz, and have used my book as a platform to lecture on topics of interest, such as single life. Though the book did not quite take off as I might have hoped, I have had quite a few marvelous experiences and conversations as a result of it.

In November 2015, right before publication of this essay, I was nominated a finalist in the USA Best Book Awards, Religious Fiction category. Although I did organize all my PR events myself, having a publisher who knows the turf is useful in finding these kind of awards, which I wouldn't have thought of on my own, though I am fairly resourceful.

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Yael Unterman is an author, international lecturer and creative educator. Her first book, [\*Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar\*](#) (Urim

Publications), was nominated National Jewish Book Awards finalist in 2009. Her second book, *[The Hidden of Things: Twelve Stories of Love and Longing](#)* (Yotzeret Publishing), a work of fiction, was published in 2014. She also has published articles, stories, blog posts, book reviews and poems in various print and virtual media. Additionally, she wrote and starred in her own solo show, *After Eden: The First Family Conflict*, appearing in various countries worldwide between 2004 and 2010. Learn more at [www.yaelunterman.com/hidden-of-things](http://www.yaelunterman.com/hidden-of-things)

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Anna Marco

## One word: Determination.

In the beginning, I submitted worldwide for free to any online magazine that would listen to me (Google is my resource). I built my portfolio while I held a job and went to school. For me, I decided getting published is more important than getting paid. I was humble and started at the bottom. I let editors and publishers know I existed. I learned with every rejection and every success what works and what doesn't and persevered.

I am a writer. I write no matter what. I write angst poetry about not getting writing jobs in my private journal that you will never read.

I marketed myself, built my self-esteem and my writers muscle. I attended writer's workshops and open mic night at poetry readings. I got a mentor. If I didn't know the topic, I researched it until I became knowledgeable then formulated my idea from there. This led to submission opportunities because I broadened my horizons. Never stop learning. I let my mom criticize my work. She was always right about sentence structure and less is more.



People noticed stating, “You’re a writer, and can you help me with this? I replied, “OK, it will cost you (fill in the blank) ...” I bartered for any job opportunity on a sliding scale. I got paid which gave me courage to submit to publications. The first check I received for an automotive piece was \$200 from a small magazine. The lead came from a friend who said, “You’re a good writer, you like cars. There’s a car magazine that needs help.” I contacted the publisher who said, “What have you done before?” I said, “I write for (name)” (I had written articles for a German online magazine for free just to get published on the Internet.)

Now I am Senior Feature Editor for an international automotive magazine. I started with a disposable camera from Rite Aid because I didn’t have a photographer to help me with the stories. My portfolio contains 700 published articles and I supervise a staff of 3. I turned into a photojournalist, took photography classes and got a professional camera to supplement my written work. The world needs content. Show up, be of service and learn. The Universe will reward you for your efforts in ways that will surprise you.

Writing hand is connected to heart. Express yourself with the written word; the voice needs to be heard. Someone will listen. It might get published. I hope my journey inspires. Meanwhile, I may become an English teacher one day. I don’t need the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature. I just need to do what I love.

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Anna Marco has worked in the entertainment industry for over 27 years as a stylist/makeup artist, writer and photographer. Her main passion is writing for the automotive industry. Her work has appeared in 6 published books on automotive culture such as Larry Watson's "Custom Car Confessions," Alan Mayes' "[Old School Customs: Top Traditional Custom Car Builders](#)" and Herb Martinez's "The Pinstripe Planet." She is a historian for The Society of Land Speed Racing. Contact: [www.facebook.com/anna.marco.5](http://www.facebook.com/anna.marco.5)

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Jessica Dionne

## Life on the Road

My husband and I have been full time RVers for over a year now. We live in our 24 foot fifth-wheel and travel around the country. We sold our house and our business and everything we owned to pursue this enticing lifestyle.

We are not retired like most people who attempt to do this, far from it. We are both in our thirties and everyone we know thinks we are the perfect blend of nuts and brilliant.

Before I started my writing career, people pestered me. Everywhere we went, I was told I should write about our experiences because people would want to read about a lifestyle so out of the ordinary.

There was one major problem with that. I am not a writer. Aside from the creative writing classes I took in college, for fun, I had never written anything. But I really started to think seriously about it. If I could make a living from the road, we could be a lot more mobile, which is what I was really hoping to achieve.

I wanted to travel more than we were able to because we had to stop for months at a time to find jobs. Then I met Pam, a freelance writer

who made her living writing magazine articles. That was all I needed to hear.

I began researching magazines and going to their websites to learn more about what they published. That research led me to Trailer Life, the number one magazine for people with RVs.

Their submission guidelines were out in the open on the contact us page and after reading through them, I was convinced this was something I could do. Having never put together a pitch before, I just asked the editor if my story sounded interesting via email and she said yes.

Since I had no writing samples to send her, she just asked for a portion of the story I wanted to tell. That seemed easy enough. At that time we were working on a llama farm in Northern Georgia. For twenty hours of work a week, we got a place to park our fifth wheel that included, electricity, Wi-Fi, sewer hookup and laundry facilities. That made a fascinating start to the story.

After I submitted the sample and she approved it, the real work began. Apparently, Northern Georgia is a bit off the beaten path for travelers, so the editor decided she wanted part of the article to be about the area as well. So a 1,600 to 1,800 word article about our “work camping” experience and the attractions of Northern Georgia was decided on.

When the article was finally finished and I chose my favorite of the eight full length drafts I had, I put the article and all of the photos into Dropbox and hoped for the best. They really enjoyed the article and after a small revision and a couple added sentences, it was officially approved. I filled out my tax forms and the check was in the mail three weeks later. I was officially a paid writer.

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Jessica Dionne and her husband have been full time RVing for almost 2 years and are having a ball with it. It allows them exposure to many subjects for great writing. She is currently writing a book about their adventures. Since being published in Trailer Life she has been doing mostly freelance writing through Textbroker and iWriter.

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Vanessa Houk

## Aftermath

While I was lying in a hospital bed, trying to figure out what happened to my son, there was a part of me that was silently collecting details so that later on, I could write it all down. I noticed that the ceiling was white and that several nurses were bustling in and out of the room and nobody would make eye contact with me when I asked them about my baby. “Write about what you know,” is solid advice given in writing workshops and creative writing classrooms, probably because it works.

I didn’t set out to become an authority on the loss of a child, no one does, but here I am. That enormous grief threatened to envelop me, but I slowly wrote my way out. Describing the numbing pain of holding the body of a ten pound baby and having to say goodbye before you get a chance to say hello, is something I can do that helps heal my own heart. In the process I began to feel a sense of peace in knowing that my words help other mothers and their families as they experience similar losses. Healing crept in after I found ways that I could share my story.

My first published piece appeared in Joy Magazine, a regional publication I often read and liked, that featured “The Power of Love,” a 500 word essay about the aftermath of stillbirth. It paid a princely sum of \$150 and led to many other paid writing gigs for the same publication. I started out writing about grief, but went on to cover many sensitive human interest stories-- a woman’s 300 pound weight loss journey, an 83 year old woman’s life after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's and dementia, a trio of women who hiked the Pacific Crest Trail together after facing personal challenges and more.

Later, as I began to build an audience, another editor reached out and hired me to write a bi-monthly column featuring local businesses. For me, breaking into a regional publication gave me an opportunity to build my resume. One writing job led into another.

“Meet our business” was a challenge for me on a number of fronts. Suddenly this introvert had to find a way to talk to business owners about subjects that I found tedious and then I had to spin each of those columns into something that was interesting and exciting, so that my readers would follow along. The upside was that I grew comfortable with my own writing voice and I began to trust my abilities as a young writer. I learned a few tricks too, including that the truth is that most people like to talk about themselves, and what they do for a living and that an easy way to end an article is with a strong quote. Every single one of those business owners had a unique story and once I found out what it was, I had my angle. There was a dentist who

played guitar in a rock ‘n roll band in the evenings, an architect who volunteered to design low income housing, and a soft-hearted restaurant owner who served leftover food to the homeless. My readers wanted to connect with the story in some way and it was my job, as a writer to find a bridge that would help make that happen.

What started out as a dull writing job, wound up teaching me how to reel in the most unlikely readers. Sometimes the most painful writing, whether that be due to emotions or tedium, has lessons that we carry across the decades and into other areas of our lives. That's true for me, as it's a practice I go back to again and again.

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Passionate about social and economic justice, Vanessa Houk is dedicated to chronicling the struggles of labor and civil rights. Based in Ashland, Oregon, she is the editor-in-chief of the Rogue Valley Community Press.

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Janet Ruhe-Schoen

## Starting off Wrong-Footed on the Right Track

With four books of biography to my credit plus newspaper and magazine articles in the U.S. and Chile, I'm a proud nonfiction writer, but it wasn't my dream. I was going to write bestselling novels that would be made into movies in which I would star. It's a long road from there to here.

I took my first steps down that road as a newlywed in Rhinebeck, New York. My husband and I, driving up country from Manhattan in search of refuge, had lucked out. We'd been able to rent a gingerbread cottage in one afternoon. It was autumn, leaf-peeping season. We moved in with our sons — one from my first liaison, the other from his — and, what with the multi-colored leaves and the nip of frost in the air, I felt like a Beatrix Potter critter in a picture book.

Everything was so cute. And I got a cute part-time job as the clerk in the Rhinebeck Gazette newspaper office, a short walk from my house. I'd spend mornings at my sunny desk by the big window and be home to meet the boys when they got off the school bus.

During my interview, the Gazette's owner explained, "We've got a staff of two: the editor does the writing, and the clerk takes in the classifieds and keeps the books."

The books consisted of a ledger for recording small amounts of payments for classified ads. People paid in cash and the clerk put the cash in a moneybag, stuck it in a lovely antique safe, and counted it at the end of each week, making sure the sum of cash equaled the total payments in the ledger.

"I have to admit, I'm not great at math," I said.

But she hired me, saying she was sure I could manage the math. "Any fool could do it," she said.

Well. I am not just any fool.

Jonathan, the editor, quickly became a pal. And I quickly got the knack of taking down classifieds during phone calls or office visits. I had plenty of time to chat with Jonathan, and he heard all about my fiction writing plans. He thought I should practice by writing about local characters.

Before the first week ended he assigned me a feature on a charming elder known for her apple strudel. He didn't want to do it. He wanted to move on to a big city paper and write hard news.

And so he did. But not before I, too, had moved on. The boss liked my story about Mrs. Apfelstrudel, but when I added up the ledger it was one-cent off from the cashbag sum. “That can’t happen,” she told me. “It’s got to come out perfectly.”

Subsequently, I wrote up the town historian who was training a Fife and Drum Corps for the Bicentennial, and the hundred-year old Rhinebeck denizen I met in the General Store. I got \$10.00 per story, added to my regular pay check.

But ledger and cash sums never jibed. The boss forbade Jonathan to give me more stories until I got my classifieds under control. The harder I tried, the more mistakes I made. Weeks passed, and the boss became more and more nettled by my continued fallibility. Then came the week I was off by \$5.00.

The boss stormed into office. “It’s impossible for you to really be so stupid,” she said. “You act so cute, but I’m onto you. You’re an embezzler.” She fired me.

So my first fling as a published writer ended ignominiously: I was a suspected felon. But I’d found out that I could produce pretty good features, and my appetite was whetted to try more reportage. I had three articles to start a portfolio, and I was \$30.00 ahead. It could’ve been worse.

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Janet Ruhe-Schoen is a journalist, biographer, and collagist. She has worked as a journalist in Chile, where she lived for 11 years, and in the U.S. She has published four books of biography, most recently [Rejoice in My Gladness: The Life of Tahirih](#), and [Champions of Oneness: Louis Gregory and His Shining Circle](#).

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Joni M. Fisher

## Call Me

I love it when editors call. Some editors call because they want a woman's perspective on my hobby—aviation. Only six percent of pilots are women, so I'm kind of a novelty. Some editors call for reprints of essays or articles that made them laugh. Some editors call because they want an article on a topic a staffer doesn't have time to write. One call came from an editor representing a magazine that I'd never written for, nor queried. He explained that he was preparing the special annual edition of *WaterFlying* magazine for the spring and would I consider writing an article on Jack Brown's Seaplane Base in Winter Haven, Florida? The edition would feature seaplane bases and schools around the world.

Okay, so this editor called because he needed a writer in Winter Haven. When asked how he learned about me, he said he'd picked up my business card from a writing colleague who could not accept the assignment. Okay, so I'm the SECOND choice, but not too proud to accept a hand-me-down. He offered \$500.

I knew the place well enough to avoid the second pot of coffee of the day. I knew the people, like the Japanese pilots who gathered on the

back porch to photograph alligators, and the instructor Rennie who wrote THE book on seaplane training. The owner, Jon Brown, lived on my block. I knew the myths and legends and history of the base that was, coincidentally, celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> year of operation.

Familiar and newsworthy, this place taught stick and rudder flying in cloth-covered, slow-moving aircraft. This place humbled Air Force fighter pilots and thrilled private pilots. Brown's Seaplane Base sat on the lakeside edge of the Winter Haven airport. It was where I learned to fly. As one of the few, the cheap and the brave who learned to fly a land plane at a seaplane base, this story felt like mine to tell.

The editor didn't care that I had never taken a lesson in a seaplane. He wanted me to capture the people and the place.

Astronauts, celebrities and foreign pilots learned to fly seaplanes at Brown's. Commander Kenneth Bowersox emailed from the International Space Station to his favorite instructor—at Brown's. The fraternity of instructors at Brown's connected seaplane pilots from around the globe and many dropped in for coffee and storytelling. Brown's appeared in the credits of movies. On a trip to Alaska, my husband and I signed up for a seaplane ride over a glacier. The pilot had taught at Brown's.

Who could call such a fun assignment work?

The gang gave an odd mix of reactions when interviewed since they knew me as a pilot and friend instead of as a writer. Somewhere

between “spell my name right” and “is this on the record?” they shared their passion for the base. The instructors described the “Armstrong” starter on the J3-Cub as I dutifully jotted notes. It was only later when I saw them hand-prop the cub that I knew I’d been had. The dears. These are the same guys who tried to explain to me the tradition of cutting out the back of a shirt when someone solos. For women, they said straight-faced, they cut out the front.

After the article appeared in *WaterFlying* magazine the gang at Brown’s gave me their sign of approval—they asked when the next article would be published. They, too, liked seeing their names in print. I queried *Pipers* magazine because the seaplane base relied on Piper aircraft for 40 years of training. *Pipers* gladly bought the reprint. With guilty pleasure, I cashed the checks.

Since these articles were published, hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne all passed within fifteen miles of Brown’s Seaplane Base. Frances took off the roof. Frances is also the name of the owner’s wife. Do you think I’ll let this aviation news pass without reporting on it? I’ve done the background research; I have the clips to show about the base. Lemme see. Now which aviation magazine would pay the best for such a story? Call me shameless, call me published. Call me if you’re an editor.

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Joni M. Fisher is a writer and an instrument-rated private pilot who lives in Central Florida and North Carolina. She is a stringer for *General Aviation News* when she isn't working on her soon-to-be-released suspense trilogy. See her website: [www.jonimfisher.com](http://www.jonimfisher.com).

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Tammy Littlejohn

## Money for Groceries

I used to dream of making my living as a writer. But never did anything about it. I wrote and talked about writing. I bought writer's market every year. Mostly I dreamt of being published.

Then came the year that I became a single mom of two. We were hungry and there was no money. I could not find a job. I must say that I believe the biggest incentive for getting published is the need for money to buy groceries.

I've been writing and thinking up stories since I was a child. But when I needed groceries, I needed to step up and sell some writing. So I wrote a three page essay. It was easy. I wrote about my son tying his shoe for the first time. I also wrote about my feelings. About how I was having to learn to let go and let him learn to be independent. It took me a half hour to write the essay. I didn't even change a word before I sent it out. The hard part was the next step.

I researched Writer's Market and found 27 magazines I thought might purchase my writing. Next, I made copies and stuffed envelopes with the essay and my address and phone number. All 27. Then, I wrote

addresses on the envelopes. I put stamps on the envelopes and mailed them. I also sent postcards for them to tell me yes or no that they could return to me. I figured this was cheaper than paying for envelopes. Then I prayed. I prayed hard.

Very soon, I received a phone call from Woman's World. I was so happy they wanted to publish my article. But because I was desperate for money, I immediately asked them how much they would pay me. I also asked for the check to be sent to me right away. I felt rude, but they didn't seem phased by what I asked.

They sent out a photographer to take pictures of my children and me.

They sent me \$50. They shortened the article tremendously. I decided not to be upset about that. After all, they paid me. That is what I sent the article out for in the first place. This was about 16 years ago. I had to tell another magazine that my essay had already been purchased. I always wondered what the second magazine would have paid me.

The best news is: I happily spent the money at the grocery store.

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Tammy Littlejohn is a freelance writer based in Topeka, Kansas. Farming, teaching, music, speaking, and writing are all things Tammy Littlejohn truly enjoys. She has spent most of her life

as an educator. Lately, she enjoys spending time with family, her farm, and writing. The internet is a blessing to her as it gives her access to the publishing world.

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Neesha Hosein

## The Newbie, Pessimist, Professional

It was 2007, and I was nearing the end of my Communication-BA program at age 31. I had many pieces published in the school newspaper as a student journalist and editor of the paper, but I was craving a paid byline about as much as I crave chocolate cake on stressful days.

Seeking to score a byline in the “real” world, I wrote articles about things of interest, current events, and hot-button topics. I submitted them to news publications, just as my professor had advised. No bites. As a newbie, I was extra disappointed since I didn’t yet realize how large was the world of writing. As a pessimist, I took it personally and blamed the universe and relentless bad luck. As an ambitious professional, though, I kept writing.

I researched the art of getting published. I was most focused on my trade, journalism. When I stumbled upon a book by writer Jenna Glatzer titled “How to Make a Real Living as a Freelance Writer,” I had a profound “Duhhh!” moment. I wasn’t trying to make a living as a freelancer. I simply wanted some legit writing creds. Her book showed me pathways I had never thought about. I eighty-sixed my

tunnel vision and explored the other worlds of non-fiction writing like magazines, online publications, newsletters, blogs, and more.

I searched these outer realms, and Glatzer also taught me to step outside of my journalist shell and make a list of things in which I, personally, have mastery. This baffled me at first, but then came the “Yes! That’s it!” moment. My jotted list consisted of: 1. Motherhood; 2. Quick dinner ideas; 3. Autism (my youngest son is autistic); 4. Writing; 5. Reading; 6. Frugal living (single motherhood taught me well); 7. How to be non-religious in a religious family (the self-proclaimed black sheep); and 8. Staying stress-free.

After perusing lengthy lists of magazines and submission guidelines, one stood out. *Azizah Magazine* was all about the contemporary Muslim woman. I saw photos of ballet dancers, suit-wearing entrepreneurs, singers, politicians, writers, teachers, stories I could relate to. A world of black sheep like me co-existing with the traditional sheep. Of my list, numbers 1, 3, and 7 became the winning combination. I wrote an article about raising an autistic child and not fitting in with the traditional mosque atmosphere. I wrote about how I never found religious teachers who knew how to teach a child with autism. I conducted nationwide research, collected many quotes from credible sources about the lack of special education in religious institutions. I pitched the story to the editor and heard back within one week. She loved my idea! My article was published in their fall 2007 edition, making me a published writer and \$50 richer.

In going through the steps that landed me my first paid byline, I learned many lessons that have proven valuable. I read and respect submission guidelines like some handle religious scripture. I make sure there are no typos in my query letters. I write what I know, and I learn more stuff, which expands my options. I take lots of writing classes to learn from seasoned professionals. Reading is a key to my success. I find that the more I read, the more I learn, and the sharper I become. All my quirky, scary, happy, and awkward life experiences are writing material. Most importantly, I found my niche in essay writing. Once I made that discovery, a whole new genre and playing field opened up for me.

Since then, I've written numerous articles for NASA's Johnson Space Center publications, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, as well as local newspapers and online publications. I've even begun to delve into the fascinating world of fiction writing, namely sci-fi and thrillers (yet another niche), a new arena to explore.

I love my career, especially the getting-paid-to-write part. There's nothing else like it.

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Neesha Hosein is a journalist, technical writer/editor, and essayist in the Houston area. She has a BA in Communication from the University of Houston-Clear Lake. She is an avid reader, mostly indulging

in sci-fi and thriller stories when her busy work and parenting schedules permit. Aside from her fascination with the written word, she loves to make giant paper flowers and browse Pinterest.

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Roz Warren

## Canadian Government Surprise

I recently received an intriguing e-mail message from a Canadian college professor.

“The Quebec Ministry of Education,” she wrote, “chose your short story *Magic Jane* for inclusion on a standardized test of literary analysis and written expression.”

She was writing, she said, to tell me how much she’d enjoyed my story, even though, as a result of its being on the test, she’d had to read and evaluate hundreds of student-written essays about it.

Wait a minute. One of my stories was being used to evaluate Canadians?

I hadn’t submitted this story to the Quebec Ministry of Education. I’d never even heard of the Quebec Ministry of Education!

On the Ministry’s website, I learned that, indeed, it administers a standardized test to college English majors three times a year, and that *Magic Jane* had been included on the last test.



**Raymond Carver, too**

I'd published *Magic Jane* years ago, in the *Puckerbrush Review*, a lovely Maine-based literary mag with a tiny circulation. I was “paid” two copies. A year ago, I'd posted it on a website called Fictionaut, to make it available to online readers. (To read *Magic Jane*, click [here](#).)

Including, apparently, the Quebec Ministry of Education, which decided *Magic Jane* was just the thing for assessing the reading skills of Canadian college students, thus, unbeknownst to me, bringing thousands of new readers to my work. Not only that, but I was in excellent company. That same test had included a story by the major poet and short story writer Raymond Carver.

Thousands of readers! Ray Carver and me! Wow!

Of course, it wasn't as if thousands of readers had flocked to *Magic Jane* of their own accord. Rather, it had been inflicted on them under test conditions.

Did I really want folks to read my work not for pleasure but while undergoing a standardized test?

**An ‘unknown author’**

There was also the troubling fact that the folks at the Quebec Ministry of Education had neither asked my permission to use the story nor

paid me a cent for it. (I presume they paid Ray Carver's estate for using *his*.)

I e-mailed the contact person listed on the website. "I'm thrilled and grateful that you've brought my work to so many new readers," I gushed. "But alarmed by the fact that you did this without asking me first. Or paying me."

She wrote back promptly to tell me that because the Ministry considered me an "unknown author," the royalties they owed me were sitting in a Canadian bank account, waiting for me to contact them.

Unknown author? There was a blow to my ego.

"I may not be Raymond Carver," I shot back, "But I do write for the New York Times, the Huffington Post and the Broad Street Review. Sure, I've been published in *Beatniks from Space*. But I've also been published in *Good Housekeeping*."

(I refrained from pointing out that since the prof who'd first told me about the story had located me with a quick Google search. The Quebec Ministry, rather than sitting on my money, could have done the same.)

**And now, the money**

Still, I had to admire the Ministry's business plan: You pay the big guns. But when it comes to small fry like me, you grab a story, make no effort to find the author, then wait for her to turn up clamoring to be paid.

Or not.

It was very efficient.

"I'm not an unknown writer," I huffed. "I have a Facebook page. And a website! I'm easy to find if you take the trouble to look for me."

"We've done the math and determined that we owe you \$2,000," she replied. "Do you want it or not?"

Two grand!

"Yes, please," I said, backpedaling quickly. "And for that kind of dough, please help yourself to my writing whenever you want."

### **Canadian kindness**

When I posted this little back-and-forth on my Facebook page, several Canadian students who'd taken that test turned up to comment that they'd enjoyed reading *Magic Jane*, even under test conditions.

Which means either that I'd written a really wonderful story, or that Canadians are very kind.

When the check arrived, the cover letter said that 48,000 copies of the test had been administered.

Amazing. 48,000 readers!

So. You can publish a story in a literary mag, get paid two copies and reach a thousand people. But fling it into cyberspace and you could end up with 48,000 Canadian readers and a check for \$2,000.

Or, if a kind Canadian fan of your work doesn't take the trouble to reach out to you, 48,000 Canadian readers and no check at all.

### **Then and now**

I began writing in the 1980s, when publishing meant getting into "print." If I was lucky enough to get a story into a literary magazine, or even into *Seventeen*, it lived for just a month. Then it was gone.

Now everything I write lives forever on the web. I never know who is reading my work, where it might turn up next, and whether (or not) I'll get paid for it.

The Canadian prof who'd first told me about *Magic Jane* and the Quebec Ministry of Education got in touch one more time. She'd forgotten to tell me that, given a choice between my story and Carver's, most of her students had chosen to write about mine.

Knowing that? Priceless!

I cashed the check anyway.

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*Roz Warren (www.Rosalindwarren.com) writes for the New York Times, the Funny Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Christian Science Monitor, the Jewish Forward and the Huffington Post. And she's been featured on the Today Show. (Twice!) Roz is the author of OUR BODIES, OUR SHELVES: A COLLECTION OF LIBRARY HUMOR. <http://ow.ly/LpFgE>) Connect with Roz on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/writerrozwarren](http://www.facebook.com/writerrozwarren) and follow her on Twitter @WriterRozWarren*

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Carolyn Roy-Bornstein

## Drunk Dialing for Agents

Writing memoir is hard. When it is a trauma memoir, it's even harder. You sit at the page day after day, revisiting painful memories, picking at scabs you thought had long-healed.

Over ten years ago, my then teenage son Neil suffered a traumatic brain injury at the hands of a drunk driver in a crash that killed his girlfriend. For years I had all I could do to get through the day: administering anti-seizure medications and anti-depressants, taking Neil to physical therapy and counseling, advocating for academic accommodations at his high school. But eventually, after Neil was well into his recovery, I did pause to reflect on the larger meaning of what had happened to our family. For me, finding meaning meant writing, first in my journal, then later in published essays. Medical journals. Mothers' magazines.

Eventually I wrote a memoir *Crash: A Mother, a Son, and the Journey from Grief to Gratitude*. I workshopped it in my writing group, revised it many times, until finally I felt I had a book worth publishing. I carefully researched agents, sending queries, then full

manuscripts when asked, to agents whose interests closely matched my work.

To no avail.

When rejection after rejection filled my in-box, I began to question my validity as a writer and the worth of my story. Anyone who has written memoir understands that vacillation between ‘I have something important to say about what I’ve learned from this experience,’ to ‘Who am I to think anyone would ever want to read a word I wrote?’

After months of rejections, I put my querying aside. I retired my book proposal alongside dozens of unpublished works.

Until one night.

I was home alone, sitting on the couch with a glass of Merlot when I suddenly started thinking about all we had been through as a family since Neil’s accident. Neil had read every word of my memoir. It served as his memory when he read about events he could not remember. It opened up a conversation ten years out about a subject long gone cold. It became shorthand for Neil to tell his friends: ‘this is who I am. This is what happened to me.’ Sitting there with that glass of wine, I convinced myself that my story was important and deserved to be out there in the world.

I set down my wine, marched upstairs to my computer and opened my copy of the *Writer's Digest Guide to Literary Agents* and read. Alphabetically. Meticulously.

That's how I found Dan Bial. On his web site, he promised that if an author had a platform, he could find a publisher for her work. In my query letter I boldly wrote, "You want platform? I got platform," then went on to describe my publications, columns and speaking engagements.

"Give me 24 hours with your manuscript," Dan replied the next day.

We signed a contract and Dan received requests for my manuscript from many large publishing houses including Algonquin, Simon and Schuster and Random House. *Crash* was published in 2012 by Globe Pequot Press. I worked with many talented acquisitions editors and copy editors, cover designers and publicists. I've done book readings at medical schools, brain injury conferences, libraries and book stores.

My friends tease me about my experience getting published, calling it my "drunk-dialing for agents" technique. But in all seriousness, I know that it wasn't the wine that emboldened me and got the attention of an agent. It was passion. It was a belief in myself as a writer and my story as an inspiring tale that deserved to be told. And it is this passion that all writers need; amidst the flickers of self-doubt we all go through, if a steadfast belief in ourselves and our work shines



through, it will get noticed. It will guide us and see us through to our dreams.

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Carolyn Roy-Bornstein is the author of the memoir [Crash, a Mother, a Son and the Journey from Grief to Gratitude](#) and co-author of [Chicken Soup for the Soul: Recovering from Traumatic Brain Injuries](#). Her essays and book excerpts have been published in the Boston Globe, The Writer magazine, Poets & Writers, JAMA and many other venues.

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