



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 23, Spring 2005

Top Freelancers Give Advice...

I had a pen but no paper on which to record their advice. "Quick! This is great stuff!!" I had to find something, anything.... I faced this dilemma eighteen months ago as I was listening to four well known freelancers talking about why they were so successful. Today the only paper available sits to the left of my keyboard; it was a greasy brown paper bag that had held a muffin five minutes before....

Unanimously, the foursome agreed that a good freelancer has "To live hard, write free." They were referring to experiencing life to the fullest before you can write about it with passion. "Get into situations," they said, "Live on the edge." Hmm!

Starting out, each wrote prolifically with high aspirations and for little or no fees. Three said that they analyzed the publications they yearned to sell to for 'gaps.' All said that they quickly evolved into experts in a key area of interest. "Write, write, write for that 'killer clip' that will launch your career." Hmm!

The query letters that worked best were "lively and spoke with their own unique voice." The freelancers talked about grabbing the editor by the throat and not letting go. All agreed that each query had to have a unique slant on a story. "Remember," they said, "local events have international impact." Europeans had a surprising appetite for stories about the wildfires that threatened the city of Kelowna in 2003. Hmm!

These writers discussed the art/science of research and advised that writers must know what they are looking for in a story: weirdness, conflict, universal appeal, melancholy, irony, truth, to name a few angles to follow. Then when a writer writes the piece, the freelancers insisted that you must "storytell it." The article must have people in it to give human interest and perspective. After all the elephants you may be writing about are not going to be reading the article! Hmm!!2

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From the editor's desk

When I was madly jotting the notes on a paper bag that resulted in this month's lead article, I had an epiphany. The inspiration for a biography smacked me between the eyes so hard I actually yelled, "I've got it!" I wrote down the idea on the bag. Today the name (surrounded by a box) is peeking out at me, squeezed amongst words like 'freelancing,' 'Live hard,' and 'storytell." A month later I pitched the idea over breakfast to my publisher at the Surrey International Writers' Conference. Kirk Howard of Dundurn Press nearly fell off his chair with excitement and the contract followed in short order.

I offer many congratulations to Shirley Walker, one of my coaching clients, who also secured a contract. Borealis Press of Ottawa accepted her first book last fall for release this spring. *From Sailing Ships to Spitfires* explores the world and the experiences of a Norwegian family who immigrated to the USA, and then to Canada, at the turn of the last century.

Who's next, I wonder?

Julie H. Ferguson

Some interesting info for writers....

USA: How to Get Published Day – from writing-world.com.
March is Small Press Month in the USA. Across the country publishers and small press writers will team up with their local bookstores and libraries to present seminars on the publishing process. New this year, the Small Press Center (SPC) compiled its own ten notable small press titles after canvassing independent booksellers. The list of titles is available on the SPC web site: www.smallpress.org. (Ed: never underestimate small presses.)

Canada: Vancouver hosts a major conference - the **Association of Writers and Writing Programs** on March 30-April 2, 2005, at both the Hyatt Regency and the Hotel Vancouver. If the program (116 pages) is anything to go by, this international conference has a abundance of workshops and a huge trade fair. The investment for the whole event, as a non-member, is \$195.00 USD. Details at: www.awpwriter.org/conference/2005awpconf.htm. I think I have to go just to see a really big writers' conference....

Reflection: I have a writing friend who has a special 'reflecting chair' and another who goes walking to reflect on what he is writing. What do the rest of you do to reflect, visualize, or simply open your doorway to creativity before you put your paws to keyboard? If you haven't found the way that works for you, the next two *Beacon Flashes* will focus on this essential writers' ritual that is so intensely personal.

Forthcoming events

(for details, see www.beaconlit.com
and click on "Schedule 2005")

- Mar 2 – *Bright...but Can't Write!* for teachers of Langley SD 35.
- Mar 8 - *Writing with Power!!* for students of Abbotsford Middle School.
- Mar 12 – *Writing with Power!!* for Surrey's Creative Writing Program.
- Mar 12 – *Writing Online* for Surrey's Creative Writing Program, 1-4pm.
- Apr 14 – *Bright...but Can't Write* for teachers of SD 38, Richmond.
- Apr 16 – *How to Craft Irresistible Query Letters* at VCC, 9am-4pm.
- Apr 27 – *Crack Open Your Creative Channel!* at VCC, 6:30-9:30pm
- May 4 – *Getting Published in Canada 101* at VCC, 6:30-9:30pm
- May 11 – *How to Write for Online Markets* at VCC, 6:30-9:30pm
- May 14 – *How to Craft Irresistible Query Letters*, for Surrey's Creative Writing Program, 9am-4pm.
- May 18 – *Brainstorming Brilliant Bios!* at VCC, 6:30-9:30pm
- Sep 10 – *Getting Published in the New E-ra* and *Speaking and Writing: A Guide to Promotional Writing for Professional Writers* for the Edmonton chapter of CAPS.

Tips.....

Most importantly, the advice that many writers minimize, revolves around the editing of the piece. Every one of these successful, international writers said that we must make it easy for editors to buy our work, i.e. nothing less than perfect manuscripts. Also, never pester a magazine editor, either by phone or email, and submit your articles with three to six month lead times for the top publications. Hmm!

Lastly, the 'killer clip'. It must be from a big name magazine, be outstanding in every way, and be published within the year. Hmm!

Since that salutary experience, I now carry a small notebook with me everywhere I go – no more scabbling for used paper bags, which moulder in my 'morgue.'

Previous issues of *The Beacon* are archived at <http://www.beaconlit.com/newsletter.htm>



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