

## ***WRITE FOR YOUR LIFE, Part IV.***

**By**

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***First published by THE EDGE, Boerne, TX.***

*Jo-Ann Power debuts her newest novel September 2006 when MISSING MEMBER hits the stands. Visit her new website: [www.jo-annpower.com](http://www.jo-annpower.com) for excerpts and contests. Also visit her company's site, Power Promotions website: [www.powerontheweb.com](http://www.powerontheweb.com) for more on publishing and promoting books and authors.*

Learning the business of publishing can become the most exciting portion of becoming a professional author. Discovering who does what and how a work goes from manuscript to book, and then, learning the specific editors and agents who can jump-start your career are the exciting, human elements of the solitary business of writing and publishing.

Once you have begun to write regularly and joined a writers group, you are well on the way to discovering the network of professionals, world-wide, who can buy your work, represent it and publicize it. Your writer friends will know a few and introduce you; others will do the same. And over time, you will learn which houses and editors are buying what you write. Like any networking activity in your current 9-5 position, networking among the pros in the publishing industry can significantly contribute to your career.

Who are these people and what precisely do they do?

Editors are those staff in publishing houses who read and buy manuscripts. These are the people who read the query letters and the partials or proposals. These are the people who will take those pages, present them to the other editors (also known as the editorial board) and ask that they comment and approve of their decision to purchase your work. With so many eyes on your manuscript—and so much money invested in creating any book, the editors at a publishing house are dedicated to that initial decision-making process.

Why? Because the investment to purchase and publish a book is one that requires the expertise, time and resources of (are you ready for this?): an editor, her assistant, a copy editor, her assistant, a publisher, one or two designers, a proof reader, a printer and his staff, and the legal departments plus the accounting and royalty departments. Then in addition, outside the house, to move the book from printing house to point of sale, we need at the very least a distributor, a packager, many shipping companies, accounting professionals, store managers, accountants and finally the salespeople whom you see selling your book in the store.

The editor and her associates have statistics that tell them how many copies of a certain type of book a first-time author can sell. They know what sells well with what type of cover. What colors attract certain types of buyers. What kinds of stories or subjects appeal to certain demographic audiences—and why. In other words, when an editor begins to read your manuscript, automatically he or she is weighing the dynamics of how well her house has published such a book in the past—and how well they can publish this one to make a profit.

Note those last three words. To make a profit is the reason any publisher remains in business. If, perchance, your manuscript is accepted by a publisher it is not only because they love your work but because they know they can make money from its publication.

This means that when an editor reads your manuscript, she or he is looking for a work that has all the trappings of a finished, perfected story. The spelling is correct. (You've hit the spell check.) The grammar and syntax are correct. (You know proper English—and where you use jargon or regionalisms, it is only for effect or authenticity of characterization.) You have presented the work in the right format. (This means 25 lines per typed page of 12 point type with header including name of work, your name and consecutive numbers of pages.)

Ah, you ask, "Isn't it an editor's job to correct all that for me?" The answer is an adamant NO. An editor's job is to find the most thrilling, compelling poetry, cookbook, craft book, fiction or non, and to buy it. In that alone, she aids her house to profit from it by putting it on the stands in the most dynamic, salable packaging they can, in their wisdom, produce. In fact, those who fail to hit the spell check and produce the correct format, are often rejected immediately. Rationale for this is simple: It is hard work reading thousands of words of type every day. (We in publishing always joke about how we all wear glasses. You can imagine why.) To read text that is incorrect delays discovering the next Hemingway or the next Grisham. And time in publishing, as in any other industry, is money.

Discovering the next best selling author is time-consuming. How do they do it? They meet authors at writers' conferences and speaking engagements, regularly traveling the country. But they also have allies in their never-ending search for the next Great American Novel. Their allies are agents.

Literary agents are professionals whose occupation—and passion—is to read the works of writers who wish to be published and earn money from an established house. Agents are seasoned professionals many of whom have been editors themselves. They, too, read thousands of submissions every year from seasoned as well as new writers. Deciding if they wish to represent, i.e. market or sell, the work to an editor at a publishing house, they will offer an author a contract to represent their work(s) and for this, they earn a commission of 15%. This representation often comes with a contract—and like any other such document, it behooves you to understand the lingo of it. (This, too, is where your association with other authors will be helpful as you learn what should be in that contract—and how to negotiate for other terms, if you wish.)

The agent takes or sends your manuscript to one—or ten or twenty!—editors and invites them to purchase the work. He or she follows up with phone calls, and lunch, lots of schmoozing, and hopefully, walks away with an offer he negotiated and one you will be happy with. He is the liaison with your editor on all business matters, including but not limited to, how much your royalty percentage is, when your advance checks arrive, what your pub date is and what the cover looks like.

And once you have a finished book, you have a relationship with another pro in the publishing house. She is the publicist. Depending on how much money the house has allocated to the promotion of your book, you may or may not ever speak with the house publicist. If you are fortunate to have the PR department revved about your work, then she may come to you with a press release geared to your home town, a set of bound galleys (or the text only for your use to send to media you may know), and they may do some advertising.

In the past two decades as Americans buy fewer books and the cost of paper has risen, the profit margins of publishing companies has declined. This means that not only are they more careful about buying the very best work to publish, but also they are very prudent about what they promote and how many dollars they will devote to each one.

There has been in the industry a growth of public relations firms specializing in book and author promotion. In fact, the company I own is one of those, serving clients who are authors and publishers world-wide. This is a niche specialty that few know how to do, given the complexity of the publishing industry. But it is also one that many take advantage of because the publishers do not have the resources to devote to every author.

Over the past four months, I hope I have given you a sneak peak into the publishing industry. My summary was just that. If you decide that writing is work you would love to do—and be paid to do it—then learning more about publishing will be your journey.

I encourage you to write to your heart's content. What you do, you will become better at. I also invite you to join a local writers group where you will meet like-minded artists who wish to create with the English language. I encourage you to read in your chosen type of work—and beyond into others. Good writing looks easy, but it is isn't easy to do. It takes time, patience, and understanding of the self.

Novels I wrote years ago I sometimes pick off the shelf and read a passage or two, marveling that what I said I still believe or know or understand more of. There was the novel I wrote whose theme was: *Life is not fair—and what do you do about that once you believe it, too?* I wrote another about a female sculptor who lost her desire to create because she lost faith that love could save someone from poor choices. I wrote another in which I wrote that marriage is continually re-built on two people's devotion to solving life's problems together.

I re-read those and I say to myself, these are stories that Jo-Ann understands, themes she has lived, challenges she has solved for herself...and re-created them for others to read as stories. I have enjoyed my work as an author of fiction. I have also had frustrations within that work. And many joys. Then, too, I have derived great pleasure from writing non-fiction as well. With these four columns, many have written to say they enjoyed them, learned from them and were inspired by them.

Good. That was the intention. To lead you to what you can do. What you should do with the desire to write.

Far too few of us in today's world communicate regularly, completely or precisely. We need to do more of that to educate and to eradicate the challenges to our planet. And we need to encourage our children and our friends to read, learn and tell us their impressions—and their stories.

I leave you with a saying I have posted on my bulletin board in my office where I can read it often. From the German poet, Goethe: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

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