



Starting a Writing Career (or Thoughts About Taking the Plunge)

by Michele R. Acosta

Nike's ad has taken on new meaning for me of late; "Just do it!" runs through my mind like a mantra. Although my dreams have nothing to do with athletic shoes and little to do with athletics (unless you count the long list of ideas I have developed which revolve around my sons and their activities), I have spent a long time avoiding the one thing I've always wanted to do - write.

Writing has actually been a part of my work life for a very long time. I've written and edited in the business world. I've taught writing to high school students. I've written countless lesson plans, activities, etc. I have never tried to get any of my work published, until now.

Making the decision to write for a living was actually one of the most difficult obstacles I needed to overcome. ("Overcome" is probably too strong. I am still scared to death that I won't be able to pay my mortgage.) I never doubted my ability to write, but I did doubt my ability to write for a living. My former employer helped me make the decision by firing me. (They actually called it a reduction in force, or RIF for short.) After avoiding the application process for weeks, then staring at an online application for close to an hour, I finally had to come to terms with myself and my goals for the future.

While I love teaching, I am tired of the politics that accompany teaching. I can't face it any more. I need to pay my bills and be financially responsible, but part of raising my children involves being a role model. I don't want them to be afraid to take a risk that could help them realize their dreams because they watched their mother play it safe.

Having said that, I must admit that my new found bravery faltered when I wrote two checks totaling \$1100.00 for two children to play travel soccer next year. Nevertheless, I developed a game face and hid my fears from everyone. I even fooled myself for a while. As the school year ended, my colleagues began asking me about my plans for the fall. I answered - with confidence that I only partially felt - that I planned to write. After repeating this statement to the tenth person, I began to feel somewhat guilty. After all, I was making it sound as if it were a done deal, when I really had barely started. I had a bunch of "how to" articles stacked in my home office that were conflicting and sometimes confusing. I had not even read some of the articles yet.

Many of my well wishers countered with questions that unintentionally poked holes in my game face. "Write what?" they asked. "For whom?" they asked. The answers to their questions involved explaining the vast quantities of research through which I had only recently begun to sift. I felt my courage failing because I could not adequately explain the process I was only beginning to understand myself. That insidious self-doubt began to erode my courage.

But I persevered. As I plodded through articles about query letters, marketing skills, and copyright I began to see opportunity in the mountains of material.

That opportunity belongs to the writer who can stick it out. As I delve into some of the markets listed online and read about their requirements, I now think: "I can do that!" A torrent of ideas spouts out of me as I work, as I sleep, as I drive car pool. I have several pieces started, a myriad of sticky notes

hanging from shelves in my office, and a legal pad with several pages of notes. My game face is back and for the first time it is supported with real confidence.

Looking back on the those first weeks and months, I realize what I have accomplished. I have taken the first step - I made the decision to write for a living. I have learned that writing query letters is the standard and expected practice for pitching ideas to potential markets. I have learned what information should be included in a query letter. I have learned that Writer's Market is the best place to find those markets.

I am now taking the next step: I'm looking for appropriate markets and writing query letters to pitch my ideas. We'll see...

About the author:

The author is a writer, a former English teacher, and the mother of three boys. She spends her time writing and teaching others to write. Visit articles.TheWritingTutor.biz for more articles or TheWritingTutor.biz for other writing and educational resources for young authors, teachers, and parents.