



Realizing a Dream

by Katie O'Sullivan

In the beginning, it was Charlie's fault. He knew I'd always wanted to be an author.

That I kept at it was due to my own stubborn nature, and the fact that I've wanted to write a book since I read my first Bobbsey Twin mystery.

Charlie, my husband's best friend, former roommate, and godfather to my kids, was the guy who, twenty years ago, tried (unsuccessfully) to recover my half-finished novel (50,000 words!) from a broken floppy disc after the metal stapler crushed it and corrupted most of the files. When I moved to Cape Cod in 2006, I wasn't surprised that he wanted me to try out his writing class, ambitiously entitled "Complete Your Manuscript."

He had just returned from a year-long cross-country bicycle journey, where he'd visited every major ballpark and raised money and awareness for Dana Farber's Jimmy Fund, the official charity of the Boston Red Sox. Charlie was attending the writing class, taught by CapeWomenOnline Publisher Nicola Burnell, to reshape his humorous en-route blog into a memoir.

I accepted Charlie's invitation, and with encouragement from fellow students, I became obsessed with finishing the novel I started that January afternoon. I typed the words "the end" eight months later. I printed out my manuscript, emailed a friend in publishing, and sat back to wait for The Call.

If only publishing a novel was that easy.

I was unprepared for the flood of rejections I received from both agents and editors. I was totally unaware of the myriad and obvious rookie mistakes I'd made in both my manuscript and my query letters.

I didn't know what I didn't know.

I started to learn. I joined a writing association, the Romance Writers of America, and went to local chapter meetings. I started to read online blogs written by agents, authors, and aspiring writers, which gave helpful advice both on writing and on the publishing process. I read nonfiction books on the subject of writing. I read fiction books similar to mine. I revised my manuscript and honed my query letter.

And still I collected rejection after rejection.

Frustrated, I began to write a second novel in between revising the first manuscript. I began to read this second novel out loud in class. After a particularly bad day in which I received three different form letter rejections, with no explanations whatsoever, I decided to write a query letter for my unfinished novel instead.

In a moment of hubris I sent that query off to Trident Media and received an immediate positive response. Great news...except that I hadn't finished the book, and had, oh, 20,000 words left to write. I sat down at my computer and wrote for three days straight. I sent off the completed full manuscript, as requested, sure that this was my big break.

It wasn't. Not yet.

I collected several rejections from agents, including Trident, on this second story before deciding to send it directly to a publisher.

Several of the authors in my RWA chapter worked with a small publishing house in Ohio, and had great things to say about them. To my surprise, they offered me a contract and signed me up.



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katie@capewomenonline.com is the Editor and a contributing writer of this magazine. She lives in Harwich with her husband, three children and two large dogs.

In addition to reporting and editing, she writes contemporary fiction. Her first suspense novel, "Unfolding the Shadows", will be released October 1, 2009 from Cerridwen Press.

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<http://www.nlapw.org>





Unfolding the Shadows is available from Cerridwen Press on October 1, 2009"

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The publishing process didn't end with the contract. Once I was assigned an editor, she and I went through a round of general rewrites, followed by three rounds of more specific revisions before she sent it on to the line editing department.

There were forms to fill out for the art department (cover art!), trademarks to research and footnotes (does your character drink Coke or eat Cheerios? TM!) There was also my author bio and acknowledgement forms to turn in. In all this process took about a year, give or take a few months. Only then was my book finally added to the queue to receive a release date.

The official release date for my novel, *Unfolding the Shadows*, is October 1st, 2009. This is a year after I signed my contract with the publisher and two years after I typed "the end" for the first time on the original manuscript. Many things about the story have changed over the year, including the title, but the bones of my novel are still the same ones I discussed with my fellow classmates a few summers ago.

What advice would I give to my fellow writers, aspiring to be published authors? First and foremost, don't give up. Keep writing. Write every day. And then write some more.

When you type the words "the end" for the first time, it is really a fabulous feeling. A real moment to savor. But it is not yet time to get out the manila envelopes and postage stamps. You don't want to mail your baby off into the big, bad world too soon. You want to make sure it is ready. Polished. Revised. Edited.

After you feel your manuscript is perfect, go through it again and edit some more. I almost cried when my editor told me she wanted to trim my story by about 10,000 words. I thought I'd already done that in my myriad rounds of rewrites. She was right. And it's a better story now.

Join a writing group, a critique group, or an online group. You need a forum where you can share and commiserate, and where you can turn for advice, support and a critical appraisal of your writing. Your best friend, husband, or neighbor won't tell you if your baby is ugly. Your critique partners will.

When you think you are ready to write your query letter, asking an agent or publisher if they want to take a closer look at your manuscript, start with research.

Sites like www.agentquery.com and www.querytracker.net give great advice and examples of good query letters, up-to-the-minute listings of literary agents, including their areas of interest, what types of books they represent and the best method to reach them.

And after you've done your writing, your revisions, and your research, and you've written the best query letter you can possibly write (and rewritten it another dozen times while eating as many chocolates as you can without feeling too guilty,) and sent it to your top ten dream agents, you may think it's time to sit back and relax, put your feet on the desk and eat those chocolates guilt-free.

But it's not.

While you're waiting for "the call" (and/or the rejections) it's time to start writing your next book! You never know - it just may be the second book that is the winner!

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