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Can An Old Indian Engineer Write Fiction?

By Michael LaRocca

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CAN AN OLD INDIAN ENGINEER WRITE FICTION?

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An author emailed me three "disadvantages" to her decision to become a writer. Let me answer them one by one.

"1. I'm seventy now and retired."

You are seventy years old. Do NOT list this as a drawback. I'm almost 30 years younger than you but I'm gonna harp on you like your grandmother. NEVER call your age a drawback. I started writing when I was 17. I was terrible. Do you know why? I think you do. I don't even have to quote the old cliché. "First you live it, then you write it." Everybody says that. There's a reason they say it.

By that, I don't mean to literally write about your life. I don't even do that when I'm writing autobiography. I mean that you can't write about real people in real life until you've seen them and it for yourself. Imagination is a wonderful thing, but it takes more than that to write convincingly. You know that. Why are you even asking a kid like me?

"2. Being an engineer, I lack a literary background."

There are several ways to tackle this one, depending on what it means. If "literary background" means reading, that's a problem. I assumed it didn't mean that. If it means some sort of schooling in the art of writing, I wrote a lengthy article about that

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recently. (School sux.)

If it refers to some deep-seated fear that you lack the magical mystical gift that makes us writers, that's BS. You know I swear by the power of rewriting, and I think the logical mind of an engineer may be better suited for it.

We're not beatnik poets who don't know what their own words mean but just say, "Feel the heaviness, man." Writing isn't a sprint. It's a marathon. You have to write and rewrite and polish your gem more times than any non-writer will ever realize.

The words DO matter. You have to say what you mean, as opposed to making the reader guess, and I can think of many good things to say about approaching the task with a left-brained sensibility. Bring all the right-brain you can, of course. Just don't forget that's only part of the process.

"3. English is my second language, and I live in India, so naturally the feel and nuances of the language are absent."

Before I answer this one, I have to push aside some personal prejudices. Namely, my love of what Indians do with English. Read their authors. Eat at their restaurants. Drink deep. Then go home and decompress for a few days. They'll pop your fuses.

Writing in a second language. I accept that as a valid drawback. I've been saying for many years that I admire anyone who writes in a second language. I've spent over 30 years trying to write in my first language, and I may never "master" this. Can anyone except Shakespeare claim to master it? Without lying, I mean. But how much of this is "language" and how much is "writing?" I don't know, and we can't ask Shakespeare.

(Well, we can, but I don't believe he'll answer. If you do, that's definitely beyond the scope of this article.)

As an editor, I've worked with a wide variety of second-language authors. Turkish, German, Dutch, ethnic Chinese from all over the globe. They do things with English that I would never think to do. Often, they make me wonder I didn't think to do them.

Let me turn this around. Who decided only Americans, Aussies and Brits could decide how English is written? Why is every list of "100 greatest authors" populated with only dead white guys? I

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mean, I know some live white guys who write pretty well. One day Canada or New Zealand might even produce an English speaker.

Okay, I'll be serious. Briefly. I realize that many of my sentiments absolutely will not get you published in the Western mainstream. But you need to ask yourself how important that is to you.

I've spent much of 2004 writing "Madness And Bombast" columns for my newsletter that are 100% unpublishable by any mainstream standards. I've enjoyed writing every word. It beats swimming with the salmon. Over 1500 subscribers have read those words. Why did you they that? Is it because they know the mainstream isn't the only stream?

Michael LaRocca's website at <http://freereads.topcities.com> was chosen by WRITER'S DIGEST as one of The 101 Best Websites For Writers in 2001 and 2002. He published four novels in 2002 and has two more scheduled for publication in 2004. He also works as an editor for an e-publisher. He teaches English at a university in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, China, and publishes the free weekly newsletter Mad About Books.

The Road To Becoming A Licensed Engineer

By John Daye

Licensing is necessary for an engineer to prove they maintain the expected level of professional competency. A degree alone is not enough. Practicing as an engineer involves important safety and public health issues. For this reason, licensing is required as proof that the individual understands the concepts, their applications and the code of ethics behind working as an engineer.

The National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) governs the licensure of engineers. They prepare all the engineering licensing exams, regardless of the state the exam is taken in.

There are many advantages to becoming a licensed engineer. For one, only a licensed engineer may use the initials P.E. after their name (Professional Engineer). In addition, only a licensed engineer may use the title "engineer" to the public and become a private practitioner.

As you probably already recognize, with the uncertainties in this day and age, the more credentials you have, the better your chances of finding employment are. Therefore, becoming a licensed engineer only makes sense.

To summarize the steps to gaining your Professional Engineers License, most states require the completion of an engineering degree and the passing of an 8-hour Fundamentals of Engineering exam.

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Upon completion of the degree and the passing of the FE Exam, you will qualify for the EIT certificate.

Once you complete the engineering experience requirements (usually 4 years of experience is required) and an 8-hour Principles and Practice of Engineering Exam in the your specialty, you will qualify for official certification as a Professional Engineer and may use the initials P.E. after your name.

So once you graduate, make sure you start the licensing process (if you have not already done so) by gaining the pre-license certificate known as the Engineers in Training (EIT) certificate. Then begin gaining your experience. Be sure to tell your employer that you plan to become a licensed engineer. They will usually be happy to ensure that your work experience meets the criteria for licensing.

To learn more about getting your engineering license, please visit

or



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