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Freelance Writing: A Career From Anywhere

By Gary McLaren

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An island in the Mediterranean. A beach in Africa. The east coast of New Zealand. What do all these locations have in common? A recent call for assistance from freelance writers elicited replies from every one of these locations. In each of these and in many other remote places, I know of writers who are freelancing with a fair degree of success. Indeed it is possible for freelance writers to work from anywhere.

Consider my own recent experience. As the editor of the Worldwide Freelance Writer web site, I publish a newsletter that goes out to thousands of freelance writers around the world. I can recall one particular issue in the middle of 2002. I started planning the newsletter in the heat and humidity of Hong Kong. When the first draft came together I was in Indianapolis, in the United States. And by the time I completed the final copy and pushed the send button I was at a lakeside cottage in Ontario, Canada, with snow lightly falling outside.

Maybe you are interested in a freelance writing career but you worry about whether you live in a suitable location. Well, think again. Freelance writing is a job you can do from anywhere. It is true that if your home is near New York's editorial offices you may be able to use your proximity to some advantage. But many, many freelance writers are working successfully from more distant locations, and in many cases enjoying a better lifestyle in the places where they live.

Take Ron Irwin, for example. An American, Ron freelances from a small house on the beach in Cape Town, South Africa. The majority of his work is still for North American markets. Consider Vella Corinne, a native of Malta in the center of the Mediterranean Sea. From this island steeped in history – the Order of St John was based here and the temples are thought to be older than the pyramids – she writes travel and lifestyle features.

Writers in locations such as these, far from being at a serious disadvantage, can actually enjoy a number of benefits. For a start, these writers are in an excellent position to write about their own

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locations, the people and the culture. Also, the living costs are often less expensive than for writers in major cities. And if that is not enough, how about fresh, clean air?

Writers working from remote locations usually live in a cleaner, more peaceful environment, and may live closer to outdoor and recreational activities. Vella reveals how she enjoys the warmer days: "Once I pack up my computer, I just head to the beach. Distances are short and, the island being small, I'm always close to the center of whatever's happening here. I can control my own time in a way that I could not if I lived in a busy city."

Twenty years ago writers in remote locations were often frustrated by the slowness of communicating with editors on the other side of the world. It would always take months to receive a reply from an editor. Waiting for a response to a query was about as exciting as watching grass grow!

In recent years the availability of the Internet has made it easier than ever before for freelancers to

communicate almost instantly with anyone, anywhere in the world. In my own example above I traveled through a few countries over a three-week period and managed to conduct my freelance work at the same time. Many of my clients didn't even know I was 'on the move'. Little did they know that between receiving and replying to their messages, I was fishing in the lake and hiking through the woods I could easily keep in touch with important contacts, as well as write and send out my newsletter.

But do you know what was even more exciting? While I was traveling my web site was hard at work, the entire time, 'day and night'. Even while I was flying at thirty thousand feet, taking a nap, I was effectively selling a bunch of writing-related books and products. Now if that isn't a freelancer's dream becoming reality, I don't know what is! Such accomplishments were definitely not so attainable before the advent of email and the World Wide Web.

Kathy Crockett freelances from Gisborne, New Zealand, on the east coast of the North Island. She commented to me on the difference technology makes when working from such a location. "It's a city of 35,000", she explains, "the closest to the international dateline, and the first city in the world to see the sun each day. Its closest city-size neighbors are three hours drive on windy roads...the internet, mobile phones...technology lets me be wherever I want to be... and fool others into thinking I'm where they'd like me to be!"

Of course working remotely is not always easy and there are a number of challenges that writers typically face. Isolation is a common issue. Vella explained to me she has a way of dealing with it. "At times it feels like I have a totally atomized existence. I balance that by scheduling some 'face time' each day", she explains. I agree with her. Sometimes you must make a conscious effort to spend time with family, friends, or other writers.

Another challenge may be difficulties with technology. Finding a PC repair shop may be next to impossible. Internet access may be unavailable or unreliable. There are many, many places in the world that don't even have telephone lines yet, not to mention email access. You can still work as a freelance writer from these locations, but it will not be as convenient. If you have any choice where you live, always try to choose a town that has telephone lines with reliable Internet access.

And that goes for working while you are on holiday too. Check the available technology in advance. In the example of my trip above, I received a surprise. There was no telephone line or email access in the cottage. My initial panic subsided when I discovered a telephone not too far away. In freezing temperatures, I trudged up the road. When I pushed the button to send out my newsletter my notebook computer was plugged into a payphone.

Are writers in remote locations at a serious disadvantage? No way! I am sold on the concept that you can work as a freelance writer from anywhere. And while you will face some challenges, none of them will be insurmountable.

So if you're looking for a career you can do from anywhere, look no further. The writers I referred to and many others are working successfully right where they are. And so can you. Open up your notebook. Start writing. You can begin to build a rewarding career as a freelance writer today.

Gary McLaren is editor of *Worldwide Freelance Writer*, a leading source of information on freelance writing markets around the world. His new book, *1001 Writer's Guidelines Online*, is available at:

Rome Wasn't Built in a Day

By Mary Anne Hahn

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One of the characteristics that I am **not** known for, and which I have spent a lifetime trying to develop, is patience. I'm an "instant gratification" kind of girl when it comes to most things.

Obviously, building a freelance writing career does not exactly cater to that aspect of my personality. The reality of waiting four to twelve weeks for a response to a queried article idea drives me to distraction. The thought that it can take nearly a year between having a book accepted by a publisher and having it actually published boggles my mind. And how many hands do you have to shake, how many business cards do you have to distribute, and how many cold calls do you have to make, before you can drum up even an erratic flow of local business writing projects?

That's probably why I so enjoy the Internet. Query responses sometimes return in a matter of days, or even hours. Ebook publishing is almost instantaneous. An article submitted to an online publication one day can appear on the Web the next. You can bid on writing projects a half a world away without having to shake one hand or make one cold call.

But even in this amazing time for writers, it takes patience and perseverance to build one's career, reputation and income. Sure, we might have the capability to whip up a meal in minutes, travel to different time zones in hours, or get published by the end of this week. But to create for ourselves a fulfilling freelance career calls for tapping those same virtues that our ancestors survived on long before the advent of microwaves, airplanes and email.

That's not such a bad thing, though. Homecooked meals still taste better than six-minute frozen entrees. You see much more of the world when you walk, or through the windows of an automobile, than you do from a height of 20,000 feet. Similarly, the satisfaction you will derive from a career cultivated on patience and perseverance will run much deeper and last much longer than if you could just add water and become an overnight success.

No, Rome wasn't built in a day, thank goodness—look at how long it has survived. Keep that in mind as you work

to establish your own writing foundation, one building block at a time.

Here's to your writing success!

Mary Anne Hahn is editor and publisher of WriteSuccess, the free biweekly ezine of ideas, information and inspiration for writers. To subscribe, <mailto:writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>.

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