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Why Do We Publish?

By Michael LaRocca

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A major "character" in Mark Salzman's first autobiography is his father. Sometimes his father paints. But his father hates painting. He likes it when his painting is done. He likes having painted. But the act of painting itself is, in his opinion, a big pain in the backside.

Nobody reading this approaches writing like that, do they? I know I don't. Of all my experiences as an author, whacking those words down onto the paper is the best of the best. Always has been, always will be. Even though I cut most of them. I like creating.

I've quoted Hemingway before. Long periods of thinking, short periods of writing. These days, my thinking's taking longer and my periods of writing are getting less frequent, but both still happen, and I still love creating something from nothing.

If it weren't for me, you would never read the words you're reading right now. Nobody else would ever write them. And they contain my thoughts. Through time and space, better than telepathy, you hear what I'm saying.

So, there's one reason to write, isn't it? The biggie, if you ask me. I write what I do because I can't NOT write it. I may be clarifying my thoughts in my own head. But, most certainly, I'm just so moved by those thoughts that I must put them on paper. They're in me and they have to get out, kinda like those critters in the ALIEN movies.

(If we want to extend this sick analogy even farther beyond the pale, self-editing is the process of cleaning the blood and guts from the sucking chest wound. Then we work with editors because we miss a few spots and perhaps have trouble stitching up our very own guts and... I should shut up!)

Is this the only reason to write? Because I want to zap my thoughts into your heads? I don't know. But let me change the question. Is this a reason to publish? Why not write your books and stick them in a

Why Do We Publish?

filing cabinet like Sean Connery did in the film FINDING FORRESTER? Every fraggin guru on the circuit talks about self-expression. Write it, express it, file it away. Why publish it?

(It's okay if you haven't seen this obscure little gem. I will explain all.)

In fact, there are writers who do exactly that. Some fear rejection or criticism. We hear about them whenever we pop into a writing workshop. But, I don't think there are very many of them. I have trouble picturing someone who can spend months (years?) doing something as essentially egotistical as writing a novel, but who is fundamentally lacking in any sort of self-confidence. Naw, they're thinking posterity but lack the stones to admit it.

At times I've got an inferiority complex I wouldn't dream of whacking onto your shoulders, but it was absent when I wrote my books. During the act of writing itself, you think, "My words are better than your words." You do. You feel that you must record your thoughts because they're that much better

than most. That's what writing is. So, I would say that by definition the author isn't ALWAYS plagued by self-doubt.

In FINDING FORRESTER, the Sean Connery character won the Pulitzer with his first book, saw that every reviewer misunderstood him, and decided they could all get stuffed. This is a movie, a work of fiction, but I understand the attitude. I once wrote a true story, where the main character was Michael LaRocca, only to have a critic slam the main character as "unbelievable." Apparently I don't act like real people.

I could never shove all my writing in a filing cabinet, unpub-lished, and tell the establishment to get stuffed. But yep, there are stupid people in the world, and some of them review books.

So, we've identified two groups who won't be seeking publication. Hopelessly insecure and hopelessly arrogant. But, like Aristotle, I prefer moderation. You still may be wondering why I seek publication. So do I. Let my exploration of this question continue.

I've hit best-seller status for two different e-publishers with three different books. Minor thrills at the time, but there's no way I could call them enough of a reward for what I put into writing.

You're an author. You know what I'm talking about. We all but kill ourselves to make our books. So, let's be blunt here. Unless you're going to throw Rowling/King/Clancy/Grisham money at me -- and you are NOT -- money isn't sufficient reason to publish. Nobody reading this article has quit his/her "real job" to be a full-time writer.

Publishing isn't just a case of sending it to a publisher, signing a contract, and being done.

Next up is editing, which is a blast. Not at the time, perhaps. Any editor worth a damn will beat you over the head with every bad word choice you ever made. And you made hundreds! But at the end of that gauntlet, you know you are da bomb.

Why Do We Publish?

Seeing my cover art is almost always awesome. Yes, I did say "almost." One bad experience among seven. It happens. But, if you've worked with a publisher, you know what I mean. You log onto the old Internet one day, not fully conscious, amazed that you poured that first cup of coffee without burning off your naughty bits. You pop open an email and see cover art that almost makes your head explode. You get this big rush, thinking, "Someone understands my writing!" What you don't realize, naive little author, is that some artists don't even read the books they do the art for. But still. The art rocks your world. Feel that. I always enjoy clicking those email attachments and seeing MY book covers.

But, then comes marketing. Biggest pain in the... Well, let's just say it makes me want to not publish sometimes. So, why publish?

I've entered the EPPIES twice, and been a finalist both times. Off the top of my head, I can think of no other ebook award that gets my attention. The second time one of my books was an EPPIE finalist, I made some wisecrack in an author's egroup about how "finalist" is a synonym for "loser" and was raked over the coals.

Oops!

(Maybe I annoyed entrants who weren't finalists. I'd always wondered if they existed...)

So, let's say I'm not publishing for money or awards. They sing a siren song to new authors which this jaded old bastard quit hearing long ago. Really, I got all that mess out of my system in the previous millenium. So, why do I still publish? What are my rewards? Let me mention a few.

A psychologist turned English teacher formed a women's reading group at the university where we once worked together in China. Her concept was women readers, women writers. But the first book the group ever discussed was my very own *RISING FROM THE ASHES*, which is about Mom. My only foray into "women's literature." I couldn't attend the reading group, since I'm a guy, but my wife was there. What I learned about my book is priceless, as is knowing what those young students discussed because of my writing. Issues of such depth that I'd be proud to inspire any student, in any country, in any language, to tackle them.

I used to work on North Carolina hog farms. I enjoyed the company of some damn fine people at every one of them. Hog farming is hard work. This isn't the backyard family farm, folks, this is 13 people with 98 boars, 3500 sows, and all the babies they can make. One of my toughest coworkers was a lesbian who could break Xena in half, and my one foray into writing horror gave her nightmares.

I don't consider myself a poet, and I believe most of the reading world agrees with me. But, I have published 6 poems. There is one that a hog farm coworker insists will be read at his funeral. Don't ask me why he was planning his funeral during our lunch break because I have no idea. But, well, I guess I'm invited, in a manner of speaking. Back when I was young enough to plan my own funeral, it involved a friend playing Elton John's *FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND*. So, compared to Sir Elton John, I know a guy who would prefer that somebody read MY poetry. Freaky.

Master Pizza, 30th Street, Tampa, Florida. A bunch of drunken Italian relatives reading one of my

Why Do We Publish?

less-than-serious poems ALOUD between pitchers of beer. It was like a Joe Dolce moment.

I was working as a security guard in a particularly unpleasant place. This was 17 years ago, I think. A fellow guard read one of my short stories. It is, by far, the most allegorical thing I've ever written. I can't tell you how many times I've thought about throwing it out. But then, I remember Bob's words. "This is me. This is my life." Me too, old pal, and I don't care if you and I are the only two readers to have any idea what I'm talking about. {Scapegoat Bob!}

I've written some pretty heady volumes, but I've also written quite a few short works. I've heard from numerous students here in China that, "This is the first book in English I've ever finished reading." When I write, I certainly never set out to help anyone learn English. (Some of my editors may claim I never learned the language.) And, students will LIE to teachers. But I've decided that at least one was telling the truth.

When I left the US, I embarked on several journeys. Learning to live in China. Learning to love again. Taking another shot at the writer dream. And, eventually, teaching. After all that, I tried my hand at writing humor for the first time. Every time I hear my wife laugh at something I've written, I file it away as a reason to keep writing.

I've written one play in my life. I was young, and quite hooked on the album (pre-CD days) JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR. So, you guessed it, I tackled JC. I wrote something that nobody can read without having a powerful reaction. Readers love it or they hate it. I'm proud of that. And hey, it's only one act long. I have a short attention span.

I loaned Clint "Two Dawgs" Hill my very first book. My cousin. He took it to Durham (North Carolina) and loaned it to a bunch of hippie buddies. He asked for another, because the first one fell apart from overuse. That's why we publish. People all but fighting for the chance to read my words. And heck, the book wasn't even good yet. It's 20 years older now.

I mention all this for the jaded old bastards who have a few novels and bit of minor success under their belts. Nobody else is reading this anymore, are they?

So, maybe this is why we don't just stop when the book is written, stick it in a drawer, and uncork the champagne. Although I do hope you uncorked the champagne. This planet contains far too many people who "want to be authors" but who haven't written a book. Never have, never will. Meanwhile, you and I are sitting here knowing we had no choice. We had to write.

And now, I guess it's time to publish. WHO MOVED MY RICE? is available from Books Unbound.

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Michael LaRocca's website at

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 another 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.

10 Easy Ways To Create Traffic Pulling Content!

By Larry Dotson

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1. Publish your visitor's comments or questions that you receive via e-mail. Include your response for each comment. Just get their legal permission first.
2. Interview experts or famous people your visitors would recognize. All you have to do is write out the questions. Just publish the interview on your site.
3. Place a discussion board on your web site. Your visitors would create the content for you, but don't forget to participate on the board too.
4. Accept guest articles related to the theme of your web site. You could publish them when needed or combine them in a huge article directory.
5. Review products and services that your visitors might be interested in buying. Publish your opinions about them right on your web site.
6. Create a recommend links directory that includes your own personal summary of the sites. This'll help your visitors decide if they want to visit the site.
7. Trade content with similar web sites and e-zines. You would both benefit from the new content and could also cross promote each others web site.
8. Publish your own personal diary about things that relate to running and promoting your web site. You could publish it daily or weekly.
9. Create a free ebook directory. You could accept submissions from your visitors and publish your own free ebooks.

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