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Writer School?

By Michael LaRocca

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WRITER SCHOOL?

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Here's something from my mailbag. "Dear Michael, do you need to do good in school if you want to be a writer? I stink at school and all my friends laugh at me when I tell them I want to write, but I'm serious." Followed by a sentence or two of "I need your words to encourage me" or some such nonsense.

Fortunately, a writing sample is rarely attached. If it is, either it's excellent or it stinks like rancid yak butter. There's a lot of middle ground in the writing world, of course, but for some reason it never seems to accompany these emails.

The message is usually (but not always) so filled with errors that I'm not gonna reprint them here or correct them when I reply lest I destroy some sensitive soul like a jackhammer to an eggshell. (It's ridiculous that I should even have such power, being a stranger and all.) Let's move on to the relevant part, the question, which actually contains several. This writer gets bonus points for brevity.

Do you have to be good in school? Given what's passing for English in some places, I'd certainly like to see more effort given to school. If you're a student reading this, please try to learn something while you can.

If you aspire to be an author and you did poorly in school, or if you're just plain uneducated, don't let it stop you. What we do

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as authors isn't taught in school. They teach grammar, and bless them. I can't teach that subject. If you're very fortunate, as I was, you'll stumble across some teachers who teach you how to think. But thinking is the beginning of writing, not the end, and grammar can be fixed later if you find some long-suffering editor (like me) willing to do it.

In other words, school can help you with the first step or two of your journey to be an author. Considering how many steps come after those, don't be discouraged by test results and report cards.

To distill what you think, feel and believe from all the trash floating around in your head, and then to actually put that on paper the way you mean to put it, is a skill that only comes from years of practice. They don't teach it in school. At least, no school I've ever attended. I struggled at this for 20 years or so after I graduated from college. That's where I learned to write. Not in a classroom.

In my travels through the Matrix, I've met blind authors, deaf authors, dyslexic authors, authors writing in a second or third language, authors suffering partial paralysis, authors with various psychoses, authors who deal with more than one of these obstacles. What they overcome makes my complaint, that I'm too left-brained to be in this business, seem absolutely pathetic. And yours, about doing poorly in school.

I could cite you a VERY long list of authors who did poorly in school. If I did my job as an editor, you'll never know who they are unless I call them out by name. And I won't. Probably because I can't remember them all.

(I'm joking. Editor/author confidentiality protects them, even if it exists only in my imagination.)

Our emailer then mentions that her friends laugh at her when she tells them she intends to write. Why does she care? I've lost count of how many projects I've undertaken despite criticism. Not just writing, either. Life. But let me narrow my focus just so I can end this rant.

You have a reason for writing. You know what it is, even if you can't put it into words. I can't put it into words. ("It" can mean your reason OR mine in that sentence.) But it's there. Why

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do you give a rat's backside how many people tell you not to even try? People who I doubt have even read your writing, I might add.

Your classmates won't understand why you write. Nor your friends. Nor your family. You're lucky if you find ten non-writers in your lifetime who have a clue. And you don't care. You just write.

If you're ever lucky enough to "arrive," then all the doubters will claim to understand why you write. And they'll all be wrong.

Also, by the time someone out there is embracing your work, you'll already be three books beyond it and sick of hearing about your old trash. No, it won't be trash, but you'll think of it that way. There's a big time lapse between creation and that Oprah interview.

What I never write to those emailers is this. I shouldn't have to tell you why you write. You don't need my vindication or anyone else's. If those who haven't even read your work can discourage you, maybe you should give up. Or do an Emily Dickinson and leave it all for people to find after you die.

But I can tell you this. If you'll let something as silly as your grades back in school stop you from even beginning to write in the first place, nothing you have to write is worth finding after you die. And if you're angry at me for saying it, good. Prove me wrong. Write a book.

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.

Thoughts On A Challenging Custom Car Audio Job

By Sebastian Schneider

Could a car owner have custom car audio added to a vehicle with "lambo doors"? That question has popped into the head of a freelance writer in California. The writer has previously witnessed all of the operations involved in the process of adding custom car audio to a Jeep Cherokee. Now she has learned that car owners are being encouraged to get Lamborghini-like doors.

That freelance writer hesitates to imagine what she may next find in her driveway. In November of

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2005 the writer found two young adult males using her driveway as the site for the addition of custom car audio. One of those two lads had taken a course on auto mechanics with the former instructor at Culver City High School, a school close to Sony studios. He had agreed to share his knowledge with the writer's son. Hence, the two of them had commenced the long process required to complete a custom car audio job.

At one point the writer's son called to his mother and invited her to come outside and to see for herself what her son and his friend were doing. What that writer saw was two car doors with the "stuffing" pulled out of them. The quest for a custom car audio system had led those two young men to place speakers in the doors of the Jeep Cherokee.

The two "stereo specialists" did not show the writer how they had wired the speakers to the power source and to the amplifier. Their failure to grant the writer a look at their wiring operations has caused that writer to now ponder on a particular question: Could a vehicle with car speakers in the doors also have "lambo doors"? In other words, could a car owner who enjoyed the sound delivered by custom car audio logically expect to add "lambo doors" to that same car?

The writer has seen pictures that show how the "lambo doors" swing upward, instead of swinging out. Wiring speakers into such doors would seem to present a real challenge. Could one have custom car audio in a car with such doors? One writer in California wants to know.

If you want to know more about anything related to car audio, visit

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have a blog and want to promote it, go to

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