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Tuesday, September 6, 2011

Part I Question 6 of Interview Series on Non-Fiction Markets With Writer Noelle Sterne, Ph.D.

6. *Talk to us about finding the right markets for our work and developing a niche.*

Writing, or learning to be a writer, is like growing up. From babyhood, we must learn to crawl (= write junk), wobble half-upright (= write a little less junk), walk in spurts (= write much less junk), run a little (= write more of what really is us), and finally gain balance to walk and run at will (= write in our true voice). If we could jump into adulthood from childhood or even early adolescence without living through each previous stage, we'd save much time and angst. In writing too, imagine learning enough from watching, reading, and hearing about others' experiences, mistakes, unfortunate decisions, and failings to avoid them entirely. But no go. We have to experience it all.

What Kind of Writer Are You?

So, following from the discussion on submitting your work in Question 1 in this series, finding the right markets and developing a niche require, first, the same kind of trial-and-error learning and perseverance as crawling, walking, and running. The learning means continuous self-exploration, risk-taking, and careful attention toward discovering your true preferences and passions as a writer.

The writer James Scott Bell tells of another very successful author who said to David Morrell, the bestselling intrigue/thriller novelist, "that he chose his genre by pure market calculation. And it worked for him."

But, Bell comments, Morrell is "not constituted to be that kind of writer. He can write only when there is something (an 'inner ferret,' he calls it) gnawing at him, something that needs expression from the deepest part of himself" (James Scott Bell, *The Art of War for Writers*, Writer's Digest Press, 2009, p. 62).

Which type of writer are you?

The Passionate Inward Writer: Are you a writer who, like Morrell, must write what you are led to and fervent about? What swells up from inside and cannot be denied, even through years of distractions? Does the unwritten essay, article, poem positively call to you? Are you feeling what Julia Cameron describes?

If I have a poem [or story, essay, or novel] to write, I need to write that poem . . . I need to create what wants to be created. I cannot plan a career to unfold in a sensible directions dictated by cash flow and marketing strategies. (The Artist's Way, Tarcher/Putnam, 1992, p. 180)

If you are this type, you write, write, write, and then look for markets. You may make money, often don't, and generally engage in other income-producing work.

The Practical Outward Writer: Or do you love to write anything, and will—from corporate newsletters to trade manuals to news stories to profiles and even to short stories? Are you turned on by matching your talent to the paychecks, the bigger the better? Do you crave to get into *Woman's Day*, *GQ*, *Scientific American*, *Esquire*, *Huffington Post*, *Technorati*, with whatever subjects are trending now? And you look forward to plunging into planning, researching, and interviewing as much as required?

If you are this type, look for markets that need writers. Study the articles in magazines and entries in blogs and write to these. They may or may not overlap with your general interests. But as long as you're writing, you don't mind. With practice and diligence, you'll become a proficient and reliable freelancer, often make good money, gain a reputation as reliable, and attract invitations to write more.

The Two Sides, Not Necessarily Warring: Although I am the passionate inward type, as I've written more I've become familiar with various markets for my types of writing. And I sometimes write queries or pieces with these markets in mind. I've also branched out to others, such as the more "practical" book reviews and interviews.

Sometimes too, if you discover, as I have, that you also take to the "other" type of writing, your creativity is additionally sparked in both. And taking breaks from one type to the other fuels and refreshes you further.

So, reflect on the predominant kind of writer you are. Especially with limited time to write, what gives you the greatest glow? The kind of writer you are or want to become dictates your major market searches.

Mine the Markets

Sorry, nothing can substitute for homework. Like crawling to walking to running—and skipping—we learn by taking the steps.

Markets for the Markets: Study the compendia. Get the current *Writer's Market* and subscribe to its online market service or those of *The Writer* or *Writing for Dollars*. Also look for listings in your favored genres. One of mine, for spiritually-based essays, is *Writing Spirit Resources* (<http://www.writingspiritresources.com/magazines/>).

Buy writers' magazines and routinely check the market listings. Subscribe to writers' newsletters that always list several markets (*Funds for Writers*, *Worldwide Freelancer*, *Writing for Dollars*, *Writers Weekly*, *Writing World*). Such publications often include notices of new magazines, which could add perfect new markets for your interests.

The following sites offer excellent online collections of markets:

All You Can Read (<http://www.allyoucanread.com/>).

Mags Direct (<http://www.magsdirect.com/login.html>)

New Pages (<http://www.newpages.com/literary-magazines/>),

Wooden Horse (<http://www.woodenhorsepub.com/default.htm>)

If your zeal centers on highly specific subjects, seek out those sections in the market collections and online trade sites. Send for or access sample issues online (e.g., *Equipment Journal*, *Military History*, *Sew What?*, *Living the Country Life*, *Golf Traps*, *Sump Pump Passions*).

Hands-On Markets: Go out. Step into a shelves-and-mortar establishment—bookstore, supermarket, convenience shop, airline terminal. Scan the magazine section and keep an eye out for your genre(s)—travel, fashion, cooking, video games, business, literature. Pick them up. Flip through. Even buy a few.

Learn how to study the magazines for content and features. I've found excellent Jenna Glatzer's *Make a Real Living as a Freelance Writer* (Nomad Press, 2004), especially Chapter 4, "Study Your Market," and the *Handbook of Magazine Article Writing*, edited by Michelle Ruberg (Writer's Digest Books, 2005). Keep an eye out too for articles in the writing magazines and blogs on dissecting the magazines you drool to get published in.

Research the blogs in your subjects (with, for example, Technorati or Google Blog Search). Read a couple of weeks' worth of entries on the blogs you yearn to become part of, and go back to the first posts. This is generally where the originator speaks about purposes and hopes for the blog, important information to know as you think about writing for it. For ProBlogger (<http://www.problogger.net/>)

Notice the styles, word counts, and comments. Write a few blogs for yourself and send in one or two. You may be surprised at how quickly the blogmaster welcomes your contribution. See ProBlogger (<http://www.problogger.net/>) for a huge collection of both subjects and wisdom on many aspects of blogging. Additional excellent blogging tips, whether you are new or experienced, can be found in Monica Bhide's "10 Ways Writers Lose Blog Traffic and Alienate Readers" (<http://www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/10-ways-writers-lose-blog-traffic-and-alienate-readers>).

All these suggestions take research and time. But they're necessary to increase your chances of success. Eventually you'll become familiar with the most appropriate markets, scan newsletters faster, and develop a sense for additional markets in your favorite topics and areas.

Uncover Your Niche

The same touchstone applies to your niche-uncovering as your market-mining: What are you passionate about? What must you write about? What writing project makes you so excited that even though you're bone-weary you can hardly fall asleep and awake spontaneously at first light, rarin' to commune with your mouse?

Of course, writers of the two types we just talked about, and many variations along the continuum, find their niche(s) based on their likes and passions. Longtime freelancer Kelly James-Enger, a personal trainer herself, specializes in subjects involving health, fitness, wellness, and nutrition, as well as writing craft and informational articles. Christina Hamlett, playwright, columnist, and consultant, concentrates on writing and producing plays and helping screenwriters with wise how-tos. Jennifer Brown Banks writes in a wide range of subjects for many blogs and newsletters. Jane McBride Choate publishes adult romances, stories for adults and children, and writing craft pieces.

Follow the Signs to Your Niche

You discover and develop your niche(s) through your writing. Here's some help:

1. Who and what did you read, wallow in, escape to, as a kid?
2. When you have time to read (sure), do you choose these same or other authors, works, genres?
3. Do you feel an aching admiration for the authors you read and wish beyond all to write like them?
4. Do you get a special kick out of writing on certain subjects and genres?
5. Do other people compliment your writing in certain subjects and genres?
6. Are you getting accepted, more and more, in certain subjects and genres?
7. Do you want to write more in these?

Your answers are all clues and signs to your beckoning niche. Heed them.

A caution: Once you find your niche(s), don't use the old excuse that the field is too crowded. This kind of "Yes, but . . ." dampens your new found ardor and shuts down your motivation. Instead, look at all the successful people in every field and others coming up. Look at all the writers on writers' craft, on fashion, fitness, and fad diets. All the novelists, columnists, and poets. All the new actors, singers, and reality stars. What does this tell us? That there's always room for someone good. Remember and repeat this to yourself.

And who knows—you may invent a new niche. Who ever heard of chicklit until a few years ago? Or paranormal romance? Or nanny tell-alls? Or fashionista fantasies? Or spy chefs and secret-ingredient agents? Or nuns with guns? Or Caribbean time-sharing vampires? (Sorry, I got carried away.)

Above all, I implore you: Write what you love and feel passionate about, whether of the passionate or practical variety. Don't write what you think you should write, what's selling, or what another author is writing and selling. If you don't follow your writing bliss, your lukewarmness will come through, despite your most dazzling wordplay.

As you persist, allow out more of your passion. Maybe your chosen niche will be shared with others, and maybe they'll be successful. Fine. But no one else can or will write like you.

Whatever your subject and genre, write in your most honest and open self. As you crawl, walk, and run, with pen to paper and fingers to keyboard, you'll find, develop, master, and command your niche.

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Bio:

Author, editor, writing coach, and spiritual counselor, Noelle Sterne has published over 250 articles, essays, stories, and poems in print and online venues, including *The Writer*, *Writer's Digest*, *Writers' Journal*, *11.11*, *Soulful Living*, & *Unity Magazine*. Articles this autumn appear in *Children's Book Insider*, *Going Bonkers*, *The Writer*, and *Writers' Journal*.

With a Ph.D. from Columbia University, for over 28 years Noelle has helped doctoral candidates complete their dissertations (finally). She is completing a psychological-spiritual-pragmatic handbook based on her dissertation consulting, *Grad U: How to Survive and Succeed in Graduate School, Get Your Degree, and Ease the Trip for Yourself and Everyone Who Has to Live with You*.

In Noelle's new book, *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams* (Unity Books, 2011), she uses "practical spirituality" and examples from her consulting practice and other aspects of life to help readers let go of regrets, relabel their past, and reach their lifelong yearnings. Her radio interview on Unity Online Radio's Village Events and Voices, hosted by Dean Ted Collins, is available for free download at

http://www.unity.fm/showdownload/UnityVillage_081511/unityvillage_081511.mp3

Visit Noelle's website at www.trustyourlifenow.com

An essay on Noelle's own reframing of the past appears in *The Moment I Knew: Reflections from Women on Life's Defining Moments* (Sugati Publications, September 2011). In August 2011, she hosted a national book salon of authors in this volume discussing their work, writing, and women's special issues in writing. The transcript is available at <http://firedoglake.com/tag/noelle-sterne/>.

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