

NOT SO STRANGE BEDFELLOWS as you might think. Red Smith, one of the most widely read sports columnists in the middle of the last century, once wrote that writing is easy. Just open a vein and bleed. I've been writing for nearly twenty years. Short stories, memoirs, op-ed pieces, sports articles and novels. None of it is easy, although it's much easier today than it was at the beginning. Practice makes perfect. Except where art is concerned, where today's nuance can be improved upon tomorrow—and changed back the day after that. But it shouldn't be easy. Little of any real value comes easily.

Enter faith. Most of us write largely on faith. We start with an idea, sometimes just a crumb of an idea, and go with it. On faith. I once wrote a short story as a birthday gift for a friend, and halfway through it I began to envision the short as a novel; the result was *January's Paradigm*, my first published novel. Contrary to public belief, most of us don't get large advances for our work. Unlike the giants in the industry, we don't submit to a publisher or an agent our idea, or an outline or synopsis for a novel and receive a six-figure advance. We must submit a query letter based on a completed manuscript that is ready to submit upon request.

It takes me a year to complete a novel—sometimes longer. I wrote *Backstop: A Baseball Love Story in Nine Innings* in eight months. I have a day job and write mostly on weekends and a couple nights during the week. I write on faith. Faith in my abilities, in my story, in my characters. I've learned to enjoy the process of creation without letting publication—fear of the rejection letter—block me, as it often did when I started writing. But make no mistake, I write with publication in mind. I don't get paid for the hundreds of hours I invest in writing a novel; not until I sell it—which is often a crapshoot, which means the writing of the novel is the easiest part. For me, it's also the most enjoyable part.

Which brings us to Religion. I don't consider myself religious. When I think of religion, I think of organizations and conspiracies; the Crusades and jihad; people who attend Sunday service, but who don't walk the talk during the week; tithing; Catholic nuns breaking rulers across knuckles; and worse. I believe in intelligent design behind the universe. After all, it didn't just will itself into existence. So I'm spiritual. To say we manifest our own destiny and can get what we want just by visualizing it, putting it out there and then reaching for it is at best, a Dr. Phil-ism; at worst, New Age BS. Being a glass seven-eighths empty type of guy, I've lived most my life not expecting much; that way I'll never be disappointed—which I've learned is in itself a sort of manifesting of destiny.

But I'm getting better at focusing on the good in my life. I have much for which to be thankful, and I appreciate what I have. I acknowledge my talents and work to improve, both my talents as well as myself as a man. I'm growing in ways I never dreamed possible. And good things are starting to happen, in my career, my avocation, and in my personal life.

Now the politics. Because, trust me, politics abounds in the publishing industry. A best seller isn't always the best literature. I

recently exchanged email with a fellow writer who put forth the notion that agents are an arrogant lot; after all, they work for the publishing industry and so they think they know what the public wants based on what the industry tells them. An industry that's been losing money for decades. A good agent (who wants a bad one?) already has a list of clients. They don't need me. They can afford to be selective. They also make the rules: content, word count and format of the query letter; that a synopsis be written in present tense. "We don't accept simultaneous submissions." However, "It may take us six months to respond to your query; if you don't hear from us by then, assume you have been turned down."

I'll be 54 next month. I can't afford to send two queries annually. Like sales, publishing is a numbers game. The more query letters one sends, the better one's chances of getting an acceptance. It's arrogant of them to think any writer abides by that rule—but then, they *are* called guidelines, aren't they? I received last month a rejection letter from an agent that went something like this: "I really liked your voice, and your opening was gripping; however, your use of back story in the first twenty pages didn't engage me."

I didn't know whether I should be encouraged by her praise or disappointed, even angry, that she so easily discounted the whole on the premise of twenty pages. I know, she wades through hundreds of queries each month looking for that one gem. But sometimes arrogance can get in your way, prevent you from seeing the forest for the trees. I know this to be true, from those times in my life when my own arrogance resulted in my missing the mark. I have faith in my writerly abilities, and I never feel closer to my higher self than during the creative process; however, it's politics, plain and simple, with which I struggle the most.



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