



# Literati Zine

Or

How to Stop Worrying and Learn  
to Love the Publishing Industry.

**Issue 1: 05/15/2010**  
**Take Me, I'm Free**

**Welcome** to the first issue of the *Literati Zine*! What follows is a short collection of articles, essays and diatribes from those that have been slaving away in the small press world and have hard-earned wisdom to impart. So, sit back, open your mind and ingest these tips of the trade.

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## Publishing Poetry

**Building a name before approaching a publisher.**

### By Dorothy Alexander

As the publisher of a small poetry press, I get inquiries every week from authors who want their poetry published, and some, without advance inquiry or introduction, just send a whole manuscript with a request that it be published. Most of these people are unknown to me, I have never seen their



work anywhere, never seen them at poetry readings around the state, nor ever heard them read at the many open mike opportunities available in Oklahoma. Because I attend poetry "gatherings" several times a month, and am in contact with the people who conduct the readings, I know who is showing up and sharing their work, and who is not.

I want to ask these "unknowns" who they think would buy their book if it was published. If no one has heard of them, no one has heard their poetry, and their work unknown to anyone outside their family or small circle of friends (if even that) who would buy the

book? And if no one is interested in buying the book, why go to the trouble to publish it.

I suspect that most of them just want to be "published," and have not thought through what that

means. Perhaps they think that if they just had a book published, they would somehow become famous, or their poetry admired, or whatever it is that their ego thinks it wants.

They have the proverbial cart before the

proverbial horse.

The reality is that poetry has a limited audience in this country, and the vast majority of poets must start like a pebble thrown into a pond: making, first, a small circle and then ever larger concentric circles radiating out from the center where the poet stands. There the poet creates her work, revises it over and over and over, showing up wherever poets gather, reading the poems aloud to anyone and everyone who will listen. It may mean finding and joining a writing group or a critique group and meeting with the group as often as they can get together

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## Letter Bag

### Surviving slow starts and dead ends in the creative process.

**By Jana Hausburg**

My publisher, Forty-Sixth Star Press, has me working on another volume in the Oklahoma Portraits series.

With two historical figures researched and written about, I finally put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) and wrote the biography for the third the other day.

For me, the most difficult part of writing is the first paragraph. I'd written an outline and toyed with an opening sentence, but couldn't get anything going. And then out it came. I wrote from 1:30 to 5:00 and it hardly seemed as if any time had passed.

The creative process strikes everyone in a different way. I get hit with great ideas when I'm most relaxed. A "brilliant" idea ruins any chance for rest because my heart will start racing and I've got to get up and write the idea down or lose it. The key to inspiration, at least in my case, is to capture the essence of that person.



When I'm writing nonfiction for children, I want to grab hold of a kid and yank her into the story. The pace has to be quick, and the historical figure has to come to life fairly quickly. Until I'm able to think of that first sentence, or identify the key moment in that person's life that gives me some insight, it's a nightmare.

The creative process is like trying to teach Scrabble to my sons. I have no memory of my own parents teaching me to play. Perhaps I sprung from my mother's body clutching a dictionary in one hand and a Scrabble rack in the other. Regardless, no matter how hard I try, I can't remember any lessons. It's as if I've always known how to play. Trying to teach the art of Scrabble strategy, however, doesn't come naturally to me at all. I'm not a patient person at all, and it shows.

After my oldest drew 5 E's from the bag, he was ready to throw in

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## On The Prowl

### Avoiding pitfalls on your quest to riches and glory!

#### By Jackson Compton

You've just finished writing "The Great American Novel." So what do you do now? Find a publisher who will rocket the book to the Bestseller's List? This is a quandary most novice writers will face. Ideally, our hopes and dreams are a bestselling novel, but the reality is that the writer's market is a hard nut to crack.

The best way into the writer's market is thorough RESEARCH. I cannot stress this enough. Do your homework and find out what publishers expect. I highly suggest buying the current edition of the Writer's Market Guide and to visit publisher's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and Submission Guidelines available on their respective websites. I also suggest spending money on professional editorial services before submitting to a publisher.

The Writer's Market Guide contains Literary Agents and Publisher's mailing information, story genres, department heads, and



so forth. Main-stream publishers will not give the time of day to fledgling writers without an intermediary literary agent. Literary agents are used by publishers to weed-out unworthy submissions in an otherwise gluttonous market. If you insist on going this

route, know that Literary Agents take commissions on your book sales, usually ten to fifteen percent. Never give them money up front! A good agent will not ask for money

until after a sale. Bad agents will take your money and run with it. Consider yourself warned! Literary agents act as your editor before the submission process to a publisher.

One may continue to pursue a publisher, sans literary agent, but there are the same protocols that literary agents must follow.

First of all, if a site is not taking submissions, do not send manuscripts to them. You could have written the best story ever, but it will do no good in a wastepaper basket meant for the recycler.

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This is what happens to unsolicited materials; it's thrown away! A query letter is the best way to keep this from happening, even if a publisher is not accepting solicitation. A short letter of inquiry will usually garner a response, whether it is yay or nay. Be sure to research **WHOM** you are sending the query. By titling your letter "To Whom It May Concern:" is another guaranteed way to end up in a trash can. Publishers and editors like seeing their name on letterhead. This also shows that you took the time to research who they are.

Secondly, expect a poorly xeroxed rejection notice to be returned

sometime in the following months. It happens, even to the best of writers. An author must be thick-skinned and persistent. Perseverance is the key. What may be rejected as tripe by one publisher could be accepted as gold by another one.

Another route is the small press. With the advent of Print-On-

Demand (POD), small presses have popped up, filling a niche otherwise vacant ten years ago. However, the same rules apply. Research your contacts, understand their market, and make professional inquiries.

Avoid vanity presses at all cost. These companies charge an exorbitant amount of money to print books with little or no promotion. Most authors will never make back the difference in cost.

Self-publishing is another alter-

native. I would only suggest doing this if you know the market inside and out, which includes all aspects of publishing, printing and promoting.

### **“Tainted World” and “Nadir's Zenith” Graphic Novels Coming Soon!**



Whatever direction your writing takes you, just know that it pays to learn as much about the market as possible. Educated decisions are the difference between making or breaking you as an author.

*Jackson of all trades, master of none.*

*Don't repeat my mistakes.*



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the towel.

"I give up! This is a sucky hand!"

"You can't give up in the middle of a game just because you don't like your letters. That's rude. You can pass and get a new hand if you want."

"A-N-N-E." My second child put down his letters.

"You can't use proper names, remember? I've told you this before."

"BEANYZOO."

"Honey, that's not even a word. You can't put a Y

at the end of BEAN; it runs into ZOO. We've gone over this a hundred times."

He giggled.

"Trade you a D for a U," the youngest whispered to his brother, tiles sliding across the table in a careful exchange.

"Doesn't work that way." I warned.

"I've got nothing." The oldest tilted his letters toward me. DEEFERA.

"Move the letters around until you see something."

"I did. There's nothing."

Quickly, I switched the D for the F.

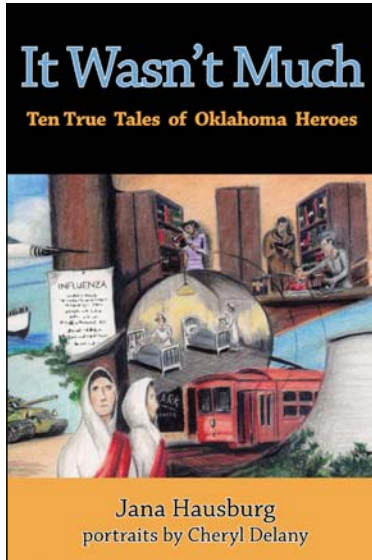
"It's right there. FEEDER. See it? You've got to keep moving the tiles around until you see something. Or try to play off the end or the beginning of a word that's already in play."

The little one throws a fit after he can't find anyplace to go.

"That's it! Game over." I put the game back in the box. The boys opened their mouths to protest, but know by the expression on my face that resistance is futile.

The creative process is much like teaching Scrabble to children. Often, you want to give up. But ultimately, you'll get that box out and try again. It's impossible to resist those letters, calling to you from their velvet bag.

*Jana Hausburg is a cataloger for the Metropolitan Library System of Oklahoma City. Always fascinated by stories, she first picked up a pen and started writing at the age of 3 1/2. Unfortunately she could not yet spell, so the manuscript remains unpublished.*





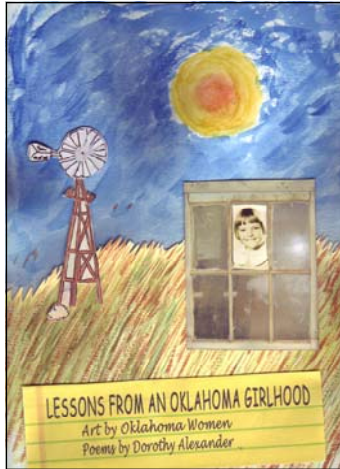
## Continued from Page 2

to share their work with each other, and to help each other get better. It may mean starting a group yourself; finding some like minded people who have a burning desire to make poems, to become poets.

It certainly means that an aspiring poet must create good poetry, “show up” wherever poetry is happening and read at every opportunity, must learn how to “perform” poetry to make an audience want to hear the work. It may take years to build an audience, a “following,”

depending on how much time and effort is expended and how good one’s work is and how effective one is at finding opportunities.

Because it costs money to build, print and bind a book of individual poems, there must be a market for such a book. Only the poet can create the market for his/her work that will justify the expense of publishing the book. Of course, a market might be created with an ambitious promotional campaign, but that is unlikely to happen because it would require even more expenditure than the publishing



process. There are some good small (privately funded non-subsidy) presses in Oklahoma who publish poetry, but their budgets are necessarily limited, so there must be more inducement to get a book of poetry published than the author’s desire to see the work in a printed and bound form. The author seeking publication must show the publisher there is a demand for his/her work. If I am not familiar with the poet seeking publication or am convinced of a substantial following, we ask the poet to furnish a marketing and pro-

motional plan that supports publication of a book. This is the equivalent of a “business plan” and a necessary step in getting published by a privately funded press.

*Dorothy Alexander is a poet, as well as publisher and editor of Village Books Press of Cheyenne, Oklahoma. Her poetry books include “Lessons From an Oklahoma Girlhood,” which includes poetry and the work of twenty Oklahoma women artists responding to the poetry.*



## DIY or DIE!

If you aren't shouting, than you are wasting your time.

### By Charles Martin

No one cares about your book. This is very good news.

There is no mystical figure waiting to snatch you out of obscurity and thrust you into the literary world.

This is also very good news.

No matter how much your friends and family love you, they secretly believe you will fail.

This is the best news of all.

You are all truly alone with your writing and once you come to terms with the fact that you are the only person you can count on, then you are free. You are no longer reliant on luck, you will no longer waste your life waiting on fate. Your writing career starts at the very moment you give up hope on the world and decide that it is time to fight for your career.

So stop sending out query letters, stop shelving projects because you can't get a publisher or financing. Stop going to conferences just to beg editors to look at your manuscript and stop buying into an industry which exists only to perpetuate the myth that you are only one stroke of luck away from fame.

Here is what you can learn from

conferences:

1. How to market your work to readers.

2. Tips and tricks to being a better writer.

3. Who else is out there struggling to establish their career and might be willing to team up to take on the industry together.

Everything else, in my opinion, is worthless for a beginning writer. If you are an emerging author, your job is to prove your ability to score readers on your own. If you can do that, then publishers will start taking you seriously and that's the news you've been waiting on.

*Charles Martin, Literati Press.*

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