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*A newsletter especially for parents who are striving to become professional writers.*

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# THE WRITING PARENT

## A Day in the Life of Brette Sember

**Thank you for taking the time out of your very busy schedule, Brette. Let's begin at the beginning with your family. How many children do you have and what are their ages?**

I have two children, ages 9 and 3.

**How do they feel about their mom, the writer?**

My nine year old is happy that I am a writer because she remembers when I used to practice law and is happy to have mom at home now. She thinks it is

"cool" that I am published. She is also excited that I am going to be teaching writing in our community education program. My three year old doesn't

realize much about what I do. One day we were reading a book and the mom in

the book was dressed up and carrying a briefcase. He asked what she was doing and I explained she was getting ready to go to work. My son said "But

mommies don't go to work! Only daddies do." I was completely floored by this since I work so hard to keep gender stereotypes out of my kids' lives.

But I realized that in his experience, that is the case. So, I explained that I do work, but I work in my office at home. I explained that some moms

work away from home and so do some dads while others work at home. I explained that this is what I am doing when I am on the computer. Now he likes to talk about how I work at home and asks "mom are you working?".

He also knows that I need him to take a nap because that is when I work.

**Are you presently only writing, or do you have another job, too?**

I work only as a writer, although I am also a non-practicing attorney.

**When did you become interested in writing?**

I have been writing all my life. As a child I wrote stories and stapled them into books. As a teen I wrote poetry and journals. I was the editor of my high school newspaper and co-editor of the literary magazine. I majored in English in college and then went to law school, mostly I think

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because my parents pressured me to do something other than writing. My mother is a retired college professor who writes college textbooks. In high school and college I used to work for her, writing exercises, answer keys and proofreading.

I was very unhappy practicing law and when our second child was born and I took an indefinite leave. During this time I realized I didn't ever want to go back and what I really wanted to do was write. My husband was the one who helped me realize this. I remember lying in bed at night being too stressed out over my job to sleep and he would ask me "if you could do anything in the world, what would it be?" and the answer of course, was to write.

#### **What was your first success?**

I had two successes that came at the same time. My son was six weeks old and I was feeling a lot of pressure to go back to work. Being a writer wasn't really something that I believed I could be. I wrote about my feelings about not wanting to go back to work in a personal essay and decided to see if I could sell it. I sent it out to a bunch of places and At Home Mother bought it. I couldn't believe it. At the same time, I got a phone call out of the blue from a publishing company. A few years earlier I had answered a classified ad in the bar journal that they had placed, looking for attorneys willing to write self-help law books. I never heard anything from them and just forgot about it. Suddenly, the editor called me and asked me to write a book about how to file for divorce in New York. I accepted and became a published author.

#### **And how many books do you have out now?**

I have 5 self-help law books, one of which is in its second edition. They are: **How to File for Divorce in New York, Landlords' Rights and Duties in New York, How to Form a Corporation in New York, Tenant's Rights in New York** and the newly released **Repair Your Own Credit and Deal With Debt**, which is my first national book. All are published by **Sourcebooks**. I'm going to be doing publicity for it at the end of July and beginning of August - radio and TV interviews. I am also a contributor to **How to Do Everything**, published by Simon and Schuster and **Family Fun Activities**, soon to be released by Publications International. I am currently writing two more books for **Sourcebooks**.

#### **Which type of writing do you do most often?**

Right now, most of what I am doing is law related, because I am writing two books about it and am also working on a local magazine supplement about law as well as contributing to a book of judge profiles. I also do monthly columns about family activities and children's book reviews.

**And which type is your "guilty pleasure" (poetry, children's, etc...)?**

I like to write poetry even though I usually feel it is not profitable. I also am working on a children's book and have a few novel ideas brewing. When I do find the time to work on them I feel as if I should be working on something that will bring cash in now.

**Didn't you recently land an agent? Can you tell us more about this and how others might be able to do the same?**

Yes, I did recently sign with an agent. I did not approach it in the usual way. I was offered a book contract by my publisher, and was tired of negotiating them myself and always feeling as if I could have gotten a better deal. I joined the IWWG and sent letters out to the agents on their list explaining that I had already sold the book and wanted someone to negotiate it for me. My agent agreed and did so for less than the standard rate since I had done the hard work of selling the proposal myself. This is an unorthodox approach, but it worked for me.

**How do you feel right now about your career?**

I feel very proud of all that I have accomplished in the past three years, especially since I put my children first and my writing second. I always feel like I could do bigger and better things and don't think I will ever feel satisfied with where I am.

**Would you change anything?**

I don't think I would change anything that I have done (except maybe be tougher about negotiating my contracts), but I am reaching for the stars for the future.

**When you began, did you ever expect to be where you are today, or do you always think positively and aim high?**

When I began, it felt like a foolish venture. But as I made more sales and landed more regular work, it began to feel more like a career than a hobby. It was hard for me in the beginning because although my husband was 100% behind me, no one else in my family supported what I was doing and my parents in particular were quite difficult about it. I didn't know where I would end up and I still don't. I always was positive and I am always determined so that hasn't changed. What I don't know is where this path will lead me, but boy, am I looking forward to finding out!

**How can other writing parents reach your level of success -- any tips?**

You have to be flexible about when and how you work. I wrote one book with one hand while entertaining my son with the other hand playing computer games on the computer next to me. You have to be able to do several things at once without losing your concentration. I think that you cannot support yourself as a writer when you are just starting out and you need either a spouse with a decent income or a second job yourself. I also think that you should rely on help from family members. My parents take my son one day a week when they are in town and that helps immensely. You have to be able to work nonstop when you get the time. I also think it is important to remember that your children are of primary importance in your life and that sometimes you have to walk away from the computer.

**I have to ask -- Where in the world did you come up with the name of your web site and why?**

I wanted to put up a site, but needed a good name. When my husband and I were trying to conceive our first child, I had a doctor appointment for a pregnancy test. He was going to have to leave for work before I would make it home. So we agreed that I would call the store he was managing and have him paged when I knew the results. We joked that we should have some code words that I could have announced over the PA so he would know and somehow jokingly agreed that I would say there was a moose in the birdbath in the backyard. Of course I didn't really do that, but it is just one of our family jokes and somehow it just seemed right for the web site because it had meaning to us and was memorable.

**Finally, describe a typical day in your life when deadlines loom and the world doesn't stop to let you write.**

First of all, there are no typical days here! Most mornings I race upstairs to shower and dress while the kids are having breakfast. Then I check my email and try to squeeze in a little work. I try to get an hour to myself at this time, but there is usually someone screaming "MOM!" Two days a week my three year old goes to preschool in the morning for 3 hours and my 9 year old goes to school daily during the school year. While the little one is at preschool, I work. If he is not at preschool I spend the morning with him, shopping, playing, cleaning, etc. I always work during his naptime - about an hour in the afternoon. Sometimes I can sneak up here if he is watching a video or playing with his sister late in the afternoon. Other times I get a computer game going for him while I am working. None of this lasts long and I usually only get a few minutes to work. If I have something really pressing, I work after dinner or on weekends when my husband is home. I

always work at full speed if my son is at my parents' house for the day.

**Thank you so much, Brette. Don't forget us when you get to the top, okay?**

Don't worry!!

**Brette Adds:**

I got a job writing for eHow.com back when I was starting out, and the regular income from that really helped bring up my income as a writer. They are since bankrupt, but while it lasted it was a great gig. I also have found that to be successful, it is important to have a niche. My niche is law and family life topics. My work has appeared in over 95 publications, including Pregnancy, Mary Engelbreit's Home Companion Leading the Artful Life, Placement Magazine, Voir Dire and many, many regional parenting publications. I write a column called TogetherTime for Western NY Family Magazine and a book review column for Northwest Baby and Child Magazine. I also write pretty regularly for Big Apple Parent Magazine. I am going to be teaching a class called **Get Published** this fall in our school district's community education program. I'm going to be appearing in a few upcoming anthologies. I also frequently write about travel, food, business and parenting issues. I think it is hard to juggle a family and writing, because my ambitious nature would have me up here writing day and night. I try very hard to remember that someday this house will be empty and I will be able to write all the time if I want to. For now, I have to temper my ambition and make sure I spend enough time with my children.

**Visit Brette online at <http://mooseinthebirdbath.com/>**

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