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Interview with Brette Sember

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Interview by Alyce Edrich

When did you begin your writing career and what inspires you to write?

Writing runs in my family. My mother writes college textbooks and I began working for her when I was in high school. I also was the editor of my high school paper and co-editor of the school literary magazine. I majored in English in college and then went on to law school. After practicing law, I decided I wanted to be able to stay home with my children. In a serendipitous twist of fate, I got a phone call from an editor who asked me to write a book about how to file for divorce in NY. This was how my writing career began.

I am inspired to write by many things. My self-help law books are inspired by the obvious need I see to make the law more understandable and accessible to the people it is for. My children, my hobbies, and my desire to reach out to other writers inspire my other writing.

What was the first market you queried and why did you choose that market?

The first market I queried was a national parenting magazine. I wrote an essay about how I wanted to leave my law practice and stay home with my children. At first, I was writing simply to try to understand my own feelings. Then I realized I could sell the essay. I got an acceptance from *At Home Mother*, which was my first sale.

When did you decide to start writing for parenting publications?

Writing for parenting publications seemed a no-brainer for me, since I was committed to being an at-home parent and my children were (and are) an important part of my life. I had (and have!) lots to say about families, parenting, children, and family life. I wrote for parenting publications from the get go. I became a regular writer for my local regional parenting publication and soon had a column there. I began exploring how to reach other regional parenting publications.

What have you found the most difficult about writing for parenting publications?

I think it is difficult to break into national parenting publications. I found that it was more efficient for me to focus on regional magazines, where I could re-sell a piece to many magazines, than to spend all my time querying nationals.

In your experience, what are the best articles to submit to these publications and how far in advance should you query them?

There is no reason to query regional parenting publications. The editors prefer to receive written pieces so they can toss it or add it to their file for a specific month. They don't really have the time or interest to deal with queries. It is best to send a piece to regional magazines three months before it would need to run—for example, articles about Christmas should be sent no later than September to appear in the December issue. Pieces that are not tied to an event, holiday or season can be sent as soon as you write them.

Regional parenting publications are always looking for articles that tie into seasons or holidays. Craft articles, family activity articles, and parenting advice pieces are well received. There is also a growing emphasis on articles that deal with pre-teens and teens. Magazines are finding that their readers want information and suggestions about parenting these age groups.

What do you find the hardest about writing with children underfoot and how do you compensate?

The hardest thing is always feeling as if I should be doing something else. When I am working, I feel as if I should be spending time with my kids or doing some household task. When I am with my kids, a part of my mind is always worrying about the work I need to get done.

Most writers want that steady income level that says, "I made it." What would be your income level that says, "You made it"?

I think for me, success is measured more in terms of satisfaction with my work and achieving my

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I think for me, success is reaching goals in terms of substance with my work and achieving my goals. I feel that in that sense, I have "made it." Of course, the problem with this is that I always have more ideas and more goals to pursue, so in that sense I am forever working towards bigger and better things!

Let's say you were a new writer and you decided that was your figure, what would you do to reach that level of "success"?

I don't think it is helpful for a new writer to set a monetary goal. I think that new writers are often unrealistic about their monetary goals. To create a decent income as a writer, it is very important to be versatile. Write about a lot of different things and write for print as well as online magazines. Write book proposals as well as articles. Try a lot of things. You will find some things that simply are not a good fit for you, but you will also find some things you are quite good at that you never would have imagined. It is also important to be able to find a niche for yourself. I was able to do a lot of legal writing since I was an attorney. Being able to use a specialized skill or knowledge you have that will set you apart from other writers will give you the opportunity to find work.

When the writer's life is such a competitive market, why did you decide to share your parenting list with others?

I felt it was an important tool that many people could benefit from. I'm not afraid of other writers infringing on my territory, if that's what you mean. There's room for other writers in this market and magazines will buy those pieces that are good. I enjoy writing about writing. Being able to help other writers find success gives me great satisfaction.

You mention in your e-book the possibility of using a pen name; do you ever use one and why or why not?

Yes, I do use a pen name. There are a few magazines that I do extensive work for and the editors feel uncomfortable having a lot of pieces in the same issue appear with the same byline. So, some of the pieces appear under my pen name and others appear under my real name.

Although you are not a tax advisor, hypothetically speaking, what kinds of things have you been able to write-off at tax time?

Writers should always consult with their own tax advisors about their own expenses and deductions. I deduct office supplies; postage; long distance calls; books and magazines that are related to my writing; mileage to the library, bookstore or my book signings, professional organization memberships; home office square footage; and purchases of computer equipment or office furniture.

What brings you the greatest satisfaction in your writing career?

When I get positive feedback from readers, I truly feel as if I have touched someone or made a difference in their lives.

Visit Brette Sember's BretteSember.com

Alyce Edrich is the author of several work-from-home e-books, including *Tid-Bits for Making Money With E-books*—where parents earn hundreds of dollars selling information they already possess. She blogs at The Dabbling Mum Speaks.

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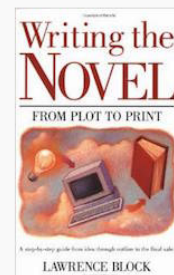
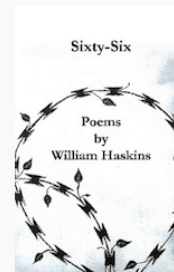


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