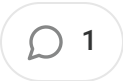
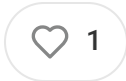


Your Byline is Lying About What You're Worth



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OCT 09, 2026



Per-word pricing wasn’t built for writers. It was built for newspaper column inches — a unit invented to measure how much physical space a piece of copy would occupy on a page, not how much thought went into it. A century later, most freelancers and their clients are still pricing their work by that same leftover metric, while the consultant in the next Zoom square over on the same client call is pricing the exact same expertise by outcomes. That gap — between charging for space and charging for value — can help explain why so many talented writers are scrambling.

Here’s the thing: the per-word, high-volume content model is unlikely to make a comeback. [Sniff, sniff, here’s me a little teary-eyed.] The writers who may survive and thrive are those who reposition from *producer of words* to *strategic communication professional who happens to write* — moving upstream into the thinking, the strategy, and the relationships that AI can’t replicate.

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The good news is that a writer with years of experience, real subject matter expertise, and an established network has assets that an AI model doesn’t. The challenge is convincing themselves — and their clients — to price those assets accordingly rather than competing on volume with machines.

But I digress, since writers and creators need practical survival strategies, not just commiseration.

Here’s the reframe that could change it: stop thinking “*I am a writer who covers [beat].*” Start thinking “*I am a [beat] communications expert who writes.*”

It sounds like a small swap. It isn’t. It’s the difference between being a vendor and being an advisor.

A health writer pitches editors, competes for assignments, and — if they’re lucky — lands \$1 to \$2 a word. A health communications expert pitches hospital systems, health-tech startups, and medical associations, among others, and charges \$150 to \$250 an hour for the same underlying knowledge: how to translate clinical complexity into language a specific audience trusts. Same brain. Same years of expertise. Two completely different markets, because one version of that person is selling a commodity (words, by the unit) and the other is selling judgment (a problem, solved).

This isn’t really about money, though it’s the part people notice first. It’s about who you’re allowed to talk to. “Writer” puts you in an editor’s inbox, with a content calendar and a fixed rate card. “Expert who writes” puts you in the room with a VP of

communications who has a budget line for “strategic consulting” and often, no idea what that should cost — which means you get to tell them.

The identity you assign yourself isn’t a personality quirk. It’s a pricing decision you make before any client ever sees your invoice.

Where This Gets Dicey

Notice what’s actually being claimed. You’re not inventing expertise you don’t have. You’ve already spent years learning how a specific industry talks, what its compliance risks are, what its audience needs to hear vs what they say they want. That’s not a writing skill. That’s a strategic one. The byline was just the delivery mechanism you happened to use to develop it.

The discomfort is the tell. If the new label feels like an overreach, it’s usually because the old label was an underreach, and you’ve been living in it long enough to mistake it for the truth. Me too!

The Practical Test

Here’s a fast way to check which version of yourself you’re currently operating as: look at your last five outreach emails. Were you pitching a story, or pitching a problem you could solve? If it’s the former, you’re still quoting yourself in column inches — even if nobody’s printing on paper anymore. If it’s the latter, you’re on the right track.

Send out an LOI next week that offers your expertise in solving a problem, rather than pitching a story. Let me know how it feels.

Interview of the Week

Introducing Brette McWhorter Sember

I wanted to take a few minutes to share how my long-time Facebook friend and fellow freelance writer, Brette McWhorter Sember, has morphed her career into something more, and how it’s going.

Like so, so many journalists, writers, and editors, Brette, a long-time legal content writer and editor, lost her regular content gigs in 2024-2025 due to AI. “It was devastating to our family finances and to me personally to find that the skills I have spent almost 30 years building were suddenly unmarketable because of automation (which is a poor, poor substitute!).”

“My book coaching, editing, and book proposal work remains steady, thankfully, and as always, it brings me incredible joy to help authors bring their books to fruition. That part of my professional world remains strong, and I have a roster of amazing clients. First and foremost, I will always be a writer, editor, and book coach,” says Brette.

But the loss of her content work left Brette with a lot of time. She decided to see it as an opportunity rather than a loss. “I come from a long line of entrepreneurs who didn’t give up.”

Get Fluent in AI

First, Brette spent months becoming fluent in AI. She created an online class for writers about how to use AI without it using you. Check out her [class](#) for writers about using AI as a book proposal coach.

Figure Out What You're Good At

Brette then started to think about what else she's good at and what she enjoys doing. "I'm a creative person who loves to decorate, arrange things, shop, and create visual experiences."

"When I let myself just do what I love, things exploded for me."

Brette embraced her artistic side and started making mixed-media collages. She created unique, highly curated themed junk journal and scrapbook kits, as well as bookmarks. "I began to make some of the decor items that I've made for myself over the years, which people always gush over, specifically popcorn and nut trees and jeweled trees made with vintage jewelry. I leaned into my love of nature and obsession with trees, using driftwood from our family's Finger Lakes cottage to make freshwater driftwood gardens (dried flowers) and candle holders. I find such pleasure in creating these things, and they are all available on my Etsy stores."

I'll include links below.

Brette then took her 25+ years of experience as a writer and a book coach and began creating inspirational and motivating products for writers, including a writer's charm jar, a query success box, aromatherapy bottles for stages of the writing process, a jar of inspirational quotes for those stuck moments, and other things designed to support and inspire writers. Then she turned her attention to creating witty, unique shirts and sweatshirts for readers and writers, which she introduced this fall. Check them out [here](#).

Going Vintage and Antique Shopping

"I have always loved to shop, and from an early age I was taught the value and meaning of vintage and antique items. My grandmother was a collector (of glass, china, silver, linens, pottery, and more), as is my mom. I also have a witchy shopping skill. I never thought that skill would do anything but make my credit card bills high, but it turns out it's a skill that translates to thrift shopping, rummage sales, estate sales, and anywhere people are selling vintage items."

"I also seem to see things other people overlook or don't understand, which means I bring home a lot of really beautiful, unique pieces. My eye for home decorating and arranging means I can display items and imagine uses for them."

Brette started [Ruth and Olive Home](#), a vintage Etsy home decor shop, which is booming. She also sells her handmade home decor items there. And she recently opened a booth at a vintage and handmade co-op in her area.

She then leaned into her love of books and her publishing experience and created an Etsy store that sells vintage books, as well as her writer's products, literary-themed collages, and bookmarks. [The Book Foundry](#) is the result (also the name of her

[Substack](#) for writers where you can get advice and tips for bringing your book from idea to publication).

You can also follow Brette's shops on Instagram: [@ruthandolivehome](#) and [@thebookfoundrycreative](#).

How Has She Accomplished This?

Brette says it has been fun and challenging all at the same time. Her vintage business has taken over her garage. She shops weekly for her stores and spends a lot of time cleaning, refurbishing, and sprucing things up, researching, identifying, and then photographing and listing items for sale.

“I’ve learned so much. I had to learn how to use Etsy and eBay effectively, how to manage inventory (and make room for storage), how to handle shipping and fulfillment, and how to think about my hobbies as a business. I had to get better at photography and invest in a little photo studio area. And then I had to learn how to translate all of that to a physical space in a shop.”

Brette says she didn't plan any of this. “It just happened organically, and it's still growing and expanding. “I'm thinking about maybe someday opening my own store, exhibiting my art, and offering decorating services and custom art. I have no plan, and following my interests has served me well, so I'll keep doing that.”

What's Next for the Successful Entrepreneur?

Brette also obtained a cottage baking license from the state, so she can make and sell baked goods from home. She hasn't started this endeavor yet, but she may lean into her local gluten-free community with some baked offerings in the future.

“I never thought this would be where my life would go. I'm grateful to still have writing, editing, and coaching work, which is a key part of my income, identity, and heart, but I'm also thrilled to find that just being myself and doing what I love is financially productive.”

Brette says her writing work still makes up about 70% of her income, and her creative arts and shops make up the other 30%.

Her Advice for Those in Similar Situations?

“If you build it, they will come. If you do what you love, success will follow. Those are the lessons I've learned from the path I'm on. Thanks for letting me share. ❤️

You can find Brette on [LinkedIn](#) and learn more about her writing and coaching on her [website](#).

GIVEAWAY!

We love a good giveaway here at Beyond the Byline and because Brette is so generous, she offered to give away a Boo(k)ed Basket in time for Halloween reading! It's a boo basket—with a bookish plot twist!

This fun and festive “[You've Been Boo\(k\)ed](#)” [Boo\(k\) Basket](#) is a Halloween surprise

created especially for readers. Keep it for yourself or leave it on a friend’s doorstep in the true boo basket tradition. The basket contains:

- * One paperback copy of *Murder at the Pumpkin Pageant* by Darci Hannah
- * One two-sided fall paper bookmark
- * One pumpkin-themed pen
- * One Yogi Pumpkin Spice caffeine-free herbal tea bag
- * Three individually wrapped milk chocolate leaf candies
- * One Ghirardelli Jack O’Lanterns Milk Chocolate Caramel candy

Comment with the word **Boo** by midnight tomorrow, October 10th, and one lucky winner, chosen randomly, will receive the Boo(k) Basket. Retail value: \$39.95. Thank you, Brette!

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Boo!

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