

18. Go Public (1)

So, you've done it! Sit back and take a deep breath, and let it sink in. You've written the novel, allowed it to be critiqued, and you've edited it to the best of your ability. That's no mean feat. In fact, it's a huge achievement, and before you take the next step, allow yourself to embrace that. Take pride in the achievement.

The book is written. And no matter what happens, that cannot be taken away from you. What is most important now, even more important than publication, is to reflect on what writing the book has done for you. There is no denying the fact that writing a book will change the writer. Looking back on all the steps taken to produce this book, all the hurdles both actual and emotional that were overcome, then it is inevitable that you, the writer have evolved and most likely become a more complete person. You have had to face your demons by journaling and by recognising the voices that played in your head, preventing the flow of emotion needed to develop characters, and deal with issues. You will have managed a new level of empathy, one that embraces not only likeable but also less palatable characters. You will have taken a step back from life, and its patterns and learned how to analyse and put into words, things that some people never even think about. All of this will have added to you as a person.

It is essential to take this on board, because this is the intrinsic value of writing. This is the reward that counts most because it is permanent and irreversible. Anything else, is dependant on the outside world and the whims and opinions of others. And by others I mean the publishing world and, if you're lucky your reading public.

I emphasise this so that, if you choose to publish and submit your work to publishing houses and agents, you will need to remember these aspects of your writing to keep you motivated when the rejection slips roll in, as they inevitably will.

So, what next? In this, part 1 of Going Public, what we will do is write the synopsis – not as easy as it sounds. The synopsis a publisher wants to read, is not comparable to the 'blurb' on the back of the dustcover. That is usually a teaser, ending on a cliffhanger that will entice the reader in the store to purchase and read on. No, the publisher wants a detailed synopsis, one that will describe the build up of the plot, the character motivations, the setting, and the conclusion.

Writing the synopsis for the publisher is not the same as writing the synopsis that gets the novel started either. That synopsis is written BEFORE the characters come to life and the plot takes the winding instead of the

straight path that you imagined it would. You are now writing the synopsis in hindsight, with the novel finished in front of you.

To write the synopsis, begin by writing a chapter breakdown, highlighting the main event in each chapter. Then make one or two notes about the main characters, how they grew and deepened throughout the course of the novel, again highlighting the events that had the strongest influence on their development.

If the novel is character driven, then the final synopsis should describe the natural unfolding of the character, and the events within the plot that brought about the different stages in the character development. If the novel is plot driven, then describing the plot in detail should take priority, with the characters taking a secondary position. In both cases, the conclusion can and should be included – the publisher or agent does not need to be ‘kept in the dark’. This is a different type of sales pitch.

Also, when writing the synopsis reflect on what you learned and how your own view of the world deepened through writing this novel; this is what makes your novel different from those that are already on the market, and this is what the publisher needs to hear. What does your book offer the reader, that is not already available.

When writing *The Cloths of Heaven* my own views on beauty, talent and success were changed radically. The two main characters in *The Cloths of Heaven* are absolute opposites. Sheila, the narrator, is physically disabled, has learning difficulties because of her physical and communicative disadvantages. Maud, her best friend, is beautiful, intelligent, sexually attractive and sociable. Yet, in the end, it is Sheila who ultimately builds a life for herself, and finds her niche in society. All Maud’s apparent assets did not help her in the end. When writing the synopsis, this element was essential. This was the lesson I learned in writing the novel, and to me it was a profound insight. So this is what readers learn too; this was the value of what I had written. Some readers have written reviews and posted them on Amazon and other online stores, and most of them mention this in their reviews; this is the chord that struck home.

So, look for that message, that one thread that caused you to adapt and revise your vision. This is why you wrote the book!

