



Karl Whitney

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## Publication Day

**A** WRITER, FULL OF anticipation for the night to come, enters an empty room. Having spent years working on a book – in this case the writer's second – the writer is keen to mark publication day with some manner of event.

Publication, after all, is the act of making something publicly known, making something that has hitherto been private into public property. It marks the point at which the book is no longer wholly the author's own. The crossing of a threshold.

To celebrate the publication of my first book, my publisher held a book launch in a bookshop in the centre of Dublin. But for my second, I organised a book launch myself, in a nightclub in Newcastle upon Tyne.

It had become clear that either I had to organise a launch myself or it wouldn't happen at all. A little while before publication I learned that, as part of a restructure at the publisher, the editor who had commissioned my book was leaving. I'm not saying I was on my own — I had an agent and a couple of contacts at the publisher. But when you lose your main supporter at a large publisher, and your main point of contact, you can lose heart.

When I heard of the changes at the publisher, I thought of the stories I had heard from a couple of other writers about circumstances they had encountered that were similar but not identical to my own. In both



cases, their second book of a two-book deal had been, they felt, neglected because of a change of editor.

With those cautionary tales in mind, I decided to throw myself into doing as much promotion of the book as I could. It was partially distraction, I suppose. But I also felt it was something I could exercise a degree of control over. I drew up lists of journalists I could contact directly to promote the book in regional cities; there had been no talk of a book launch, so I took it into my own hands.

‘Remember your training,’ I told myself.

But what training?

I *had* organised events before. In fact, unlikely as it seems, I’m an accredited music manager, and I have the diploma – gained from a course I took after my formal schooling had ended – to prove it. One of our assignments was to hold a music night in a city-centre venue. We had booked the venue, the acts – a soul band and DJ – and promoted it. It was a strange version of an exam: on the night of the event, lecturers sat in the audience to observe.

My second book was about music scenes in the UK. *Maybe I could treat my book launch like a gig*, I thought. I could find a suitable venue, have posters and flyers, and perhaps even badges, printed, and advertise the launch (and, by extension, the book) around Newcastle. I could get local media interested, and then build up a bit of a momentum that might allow me to promote the book to a wider audience, perhaps to local radio stations elsewhere in the UK.

From then on, my focus was less on the book – how it would be received, if it would be received at all – than on putting together the launch. I had talked to a nightclub owner in Newcastle as part of the research for the book, and I was able to hire his club for a few hours on the date of publication. I had posters printed of the bright yellow cover, and designed



flyers that I left around record shops in the city centre. I talked to record store owners who I had previously merely nodded at. I made sure that there would be two working microphones at the venue. I compiled two playlists of music from the book that would blare from the PA system on either side of my discussion with the writer Harry Pearson.

Publication day came, and I received messages of goodwill by email. A jiffy bag full of promotional badges, which would be handed out at the launch, arrived. I made my way to the venue and stepped inside, crossing the threshold.