



Getting Published — What No One Tells You

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I WAS ABOUT ELEVEN WHEN I decided that I was going to be a writer. It was a rather pragmatic decision: I had no skills, was categorically unfit for physical work, and had absolutely no agency over where in the world I found myself. Writing appeared to be all that I could reliably do, and I resolved to begin seriously studying the craft so as to be ready for when I was cut adrift in the wide world, which I anticipated happening far sooner than it actually did.

Despite my resolution, my teachers from the age of eleven right through graduate school, when asked for advice on getting published, consistently replied, ‘you don’t need to know about that yet.’ Which is how I found myself, thirteen years later, with a contract for the novel I’d written and not a single clue what was going on.

Here are some things they didn’t tell me:

The writing is the good part. The time alone in the world you’ve created, playing with the words, is the best part of the whole process. Enjoy it. Let yourself have fun. Let yourself play.

The business side of things – knowing how to file your taxes, claim back your expenses, or manage your income – is more important than you think. Writing is a craft and an art, but being a writer is a job. The high-minded artist isn’t supposed to worry about bank balances, but the worker needs to eat.



For some of us, there's a bogeyman worse than the tax collector: I knew a writer who sold his first book while he was also in grad school, only to find out that doing so had violated the terms of his student visa. He was deported back to Canada. I myself very narrowly avoided the same error, and then only because I knew that unfortunate writer.

Talk to an accountant. Talk to a lawyer. Talk to someone who's been there. And then when you have, seek a second opinion.

Feeling like an imposter is fairly normal.

Feeling disappointed is also fairly normal — you've worked on a book for months, more often for years, and when it is published it is out of your hands.

Holding the finished book for the first time, you may find yourself thinking: *I could do this better now.*

Reading the book aloud for the first time, you may find yourself thinking: *I have no memory of this place.*

Books must be sold, and for them to be sold they must be marketed, and part of marketing often involves the commodification of the author, a rendering of their journey into mythic but relatable terms. When questions are asked about the process of writing the book, the actual act of writing the book may be so far behind you that you have to flat-out invent satisfactory answers.

Meeting someone who has been touched by your work, for whom what you've written is something that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives, makes it all worthwhile.