

Encouragement for the writing journey—Insights from my own experience

Introduction

(Re my own journey, I have written 7 novels and 2 non-fiction books, as well as various short stories, and I also write a weekly blog. For more info, please see www.jo-anneberthelsen.com. Also explain re link in 'chat' for hidden page on my website with notes from today's discussion.)

- Whatever you have written or are writing now, you have something to offer than no one else can offer in quite the same way, so we don't need to compare ourselves with others. Yes, it's important to learn all we can from others and it's important to know what is already out there in the market, but if you feel God has given you something to write about and motivated you to start, then it's important you do it.

Verse on my website that reminds me my writing (and speaking) is to honour God:

Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

Psalm 115:1

- You don't know how God will use what you write and who will be blessed through it. It may be just you. It may be only family members. It may go wider than that. But each person is important to God—both those present now and those yet to be born.

"Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord."

Psalm 102:18—Tassie Omega Writers' Facebook page verse

Personal realisation that my books are a kind of legacy I will leave behind. Experience of a lady buying one of my books ten years after she first saw it and also people have found them in second-hand bookshops!

- We all have to start somewhere—and we are all still learning, however much we have written. I am not the same writer I was in 2004 when I started. Also, writing styles change, so we need to be aware of this and continue to grow, if we are to reach a present-day—or future—audience.

Things that helped me in my writing journey

- **A clear call from God to write, which may increase over time and take different forms for each of us.** (Personal example of God speaking clearly to me while overseas **when 56** to go home and start writing, although this had been a desire of mine for many years.)
- **A strong sense of God's presence with me as I write.** Personal example of asking God out loud early on, 'Is this how you write, God?'
- **People who believed in me and supported me**—my older 'soul friend' Joy, daughter Jane, later my prayer team
- **People willing to read and give feedback on my early manuscripts**—but I had to learn what feedback to take on board and what to leave and also who and how many to ask to do this.
- **My previous experience as a language teacher and as an editor**, requiring me to study our language carefully.
- **When it comes to book promotion, previous experience as a teacher and at speaking publicly, plus a wide network of people and churches within and outside our own denomination.** Please see pdf re this in the 'Chat' section here on Zoom tonight.
- **Two traditional Christian publishers, giving me a platform and the confidence to publish my own (with help!).** Some difficulties with my first publisher, but I am still grateful for them.
- **People who helped with computer and online aspects of writing/promoting**—husband and daughter. My website has been **crucial** in my writing journey, not only in selling my books directly to readers but also in providing a way people could contact me to speak somewhere. **Business cards** have also helped with this.

- **NSW Writers' Centre courses/festivals (now Writing NSW)**, although some things I saw and learnt there were quite overwhelming for a new author.
- **Later in my journey, organisations like Omega Writers and online groups such as Christian Writers Downunder and Australasian Christian Writers** provided encouragement.
- **Support from Koorong Bookstore**, particular in recent years—using bookmarks as giveaways at instore book signings, plus walking around, engaging with customers!

Things that didn't

- **Self-doubt**—we need to know who we are in God and not be destroyed if our books don't get published or people don't like what we write. (NB my book *Becoming Me: Finding my true self in God*). This can also lead at times to envying other authors for their successes and thinking we should perhaps copy them or that something was wrong about the way we write (see chapter on 'Jealousy' in *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott).
Also, personal illustration from the beginning of my writing journey of the enemy suggesting no one would read my books and that I should be doing something much more useful.
- **Perhaps being too serious and 'preachy' in my novels**, but my focus is more 'pastoral' than some other writers and I also believe this is the type of novel (and non-fiction) God has called and equipped me to write. I am a trained pastor and my husband has been a pastor and Bible college lecturer for over fifty years.
- **Sending off manuscripts to publishers far too early**. While my manuscript readers helped me greatly and also my own experience as an editor, I think my early novels in particular would have been greatly improved and thus my chances of being published, had I been able to employ a good editor.
- **Very few Christian authors around whom I knew and could go to for help** in the early years of my writing (started in 2004), except for Mary Hawkins. I became involved in Omega Writers after my first couple of novels were published.
- **Lack of funds** to attend overseas Christian writers' conferences such as American Christian Fiction Writers' Conference
- **Lack of interest/expertise in online platforms** other than Facebook, Amazon promotions, sales algorithms etc
- **Perhaps not aiming more for the US market**, but I sensed my ministry through my books was to be more 'local'

Conclusion

If God has called you to write, then trust God to show you the next step and to bring you to the right people to help you on your journey. Write with God! Write for God, whatever the genre!