



Paying Your Dues

By Donna Collins Tinsley

Are you a lone-ranger writer? I was, and for quite a few years.

I'm not someone who dreamed about writing, and I surely wasn't one of those people who kept a journal since they were very young. I entered into this field much later in life and quickly learned that on the way to becoming a writer, I had to pay my dues.

At first, I thought surely I could bypass the hard stuff. I picked up a *Writer's Market* magazine, saw the contests and the markets and thought, *Great! I'm going to be a stay-at-home mom/writer and make some income to help my husband and my family.* Wrong!

Hadn't I already gone to a writing strategies class? I most certainly did, and I procrastinated on all of my assignments. Did I really need to do all that work before I could attend Critiqueshop—a small local writers' group in my area—and find out how much I really needed to learn? Right! And did I really need a copy of *Strunk and White's The Element of Styles*? Yes!

To make that transition from lone-ranger writing to being diligent about seeking publication, I had to set goals. My first goal was to go to Critiqueshop one night a month, but almost immediately after making that commitment, my mother's diabetes went out of control. So that goal was put on hold. Then she had an accident, followed by congestive heart problems, bypass surgery and numerous doctor visits. Six months later, my mother passed away unexpectedly. Looking back, I realized I never would've been able to replace the time we had together, so being on hold from my writing turned out to be a blessing.

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When I finally did attend Critiqueshop, I wondered if I had anything to contribute to this amazing group. Can any of you relate to how hard it is to go to a writing group meeting where everyone was either a published professional writer, editor, retired missionary doctor, college professor or a minister/writer with a genius IQ?

I instantly second-guessed myself: *Are my simple offerings compared to their work even worth critiquing?* At times, I would weep; even though it was hard to hear their critiques of my work, the meetings were an outlet for my soul, and I learned to be among and learn from these beautiful writers. Over the years, many people who could not handle having their work critiqued dropped out of this group, but my perseverance was what helped me to press on and realize publication. I will be forever grateful to Critiqueshop.

I believe that most people romanticize the writer's life, assuming writers love to write. For me, it is pure torture at times. I submitted stories numerous times to many submission call-outs, yet nothing followed. Nada. And I wasn't able to win any of those contests that seemed so easy to enter, regretting having paid the submission fees to enter and receiving nothing in return.

During my journey toward becoming a published writer, procrastination became my middle name for a while. There was always something I had to do first: organize at home, clean the garage, become computer savvy. I couldn't write unless all things in my world were perfect, but I did manage to write this prayer to start the day with:

“God, you know I'm not like others who love to write. But because of You and what You're doing in my life, I am compelled to write. Deliver me from procrastination. Also could You give me early morning quiet all day long, please? Could there be no phone interruptions today? Add to my prayer requests, no typos, no dogs barking, no cats wanting food and no kids fighting over the computer and arguing over who gets a turn next? In the midst of all this, can you give me inspiration and use me like Mother Teresa said as a pencil in Your hand? And please, no hot flashes! I can't take the challenge of hormones and write, too. Please write through me and I promise I will get those submissions in the email... first thing tomorrow. Amen.

How can we ditch the lone-ranger writing club? Look for writer events and workshops—they are usually given free at local public libraries. Google “story contests” and enter any free contests you can find. Or Google “writer's guidelines” and search for those editors who need magazine articles, anthology submissions and book manuscripts. By doing so, you will create new writing goals that will, in turn, help you hone your creative writing skills. And if you win

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one of those contests—even if there is no monetary gain—you will earn a writing credit for your author platform/bio. I also recommend joining a national writer’s group; I did so as to have more accountability for my writing and writing goals in my life.

What I love most are writing conferences and was thrilled to attend my first when my husband decided to sponsor what he called his wife’s “little hobby.” That little hobby has turned into pure bliss! I have won numerous scholarships by entering competitions and have had the time of my life on my mini-vacations away from home. One conference was three nights and four days surrounded by my writing heroes, all-you-can-eat buffets and the beauty of Lake Yale in sunny Florida. Yes, send those contest entries out now!

My small goals have led to being published thus far in 17 book compilations and several magazines. I’ve found the encouragement within myself to press on and am finding my voice, as well. I have been exposed to greatness and authors like Cecil Murphey (www.cecilmurphey.com), Dr. Calvin Miller (www.christianbook.com), Eva Marie Everson (www.evamarieeverson.com), Dan Walsh (www.danwalshbooks.com) and Jerry Jenkins (www.jerryjenkins.com), and yet, I am open to learning from novice writers at conferences. I have come to enjoy the journey and find pleasure in making acquaintances of all types of writers. When I am amidst writers at conferences, I realize that I am heading on the right path. Not to mention that there is a big smile on my face the entire time!

To this day, I continue to write, rewrite, edit, submit and everything else that comes into play as a writer. Most importantly, I have learned that when I give my writings away to those who are grieving or having pains in their lives, the rewards received are worth more than the dues I’m paying.



Donna Collins Tinsley is a sister among you who wants to bring a word of comfort and hope to your day. She is a sometimes hormonally-challenged wife, mother and grandmother who lives in Port Orange, Florida, and has been published in several newspapers, magazines and book compilations including *Guideposts*; the *Orlando Sentinel*; *The Christian Communicator*; the *Daytona Beach News Journal*; *Not Your Mother’s Book... On Being a Woman*; *Not Your Mother’s Book... On Being a Parent*; *A Cup of Comfort Devotional for Mothers and Daughters*; and *A Cup of Comfort Book of Christmas Prayer*.

As a devotion contributor, Donna’s work has also been featured on [CBN.com/Overcoming Addictions](http://CBN.com/OvercomingAddictions), *Christian Devotions Ministries* and *Thriving Family*. She is a lover of the Lord Jesus Christ. Find Donna on Facebook or at <http://thornrose7.blogspot.com>.



Get Published!

Publishing Syndicate has a hot tip for you (and we were not paid to post this)!

Go to www.FreedomWithWriting.com and subscribe to their free newsletter. This is a must for novice and serious writers. Some recent postings include “Earn as much as

\$1,260 for writing about writing: 10 publishers that accept submissions” and “6 Anthologies that Pay \$100+ for Short Stories.”

Here are their writing leads for this week:

The Amy Lowell Traveling Poet Scholarship: \$54,000 for Poets

<http://www.amylowell.org/Application2016.pdf>

\$450 for Stories about Knights and Castles

<http://www.cricketmagkids.com/files/cricket/CallforSubs24AUG2015final.pdf>

Fiction Vortex Submissions: \$300 for Short Stories

<http://www.fictionvortex.com/submissions/submit-a-short-story>



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